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Dark Hearts ♦ Bad People



# HOTEL CHELSEA

World's Scariest Places 6

Jeremy Bates

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# HOTEL CHELSEA





# PROLOGUE

**T**he young woman hurried along West 23rd Street, her hands gripping fistfuls of her dress so the hem didn't drag on the dirty sidewalk.

It was the spring of 1884, late evening, the air so muggy it felt like a physical force. Recently installed electric incandescent streetlights lit the New York City darkness with an artificial moonlight. Horse hooves and carriage wheels clacked against the granite-block street. Shouts and laughter floated down from the roofs of grimy tenements, competing with the boisterous sounds spilling out of gaslit saloons and restaurants. Factory workers, ditch diggers, stone cutters, and men and women from all walks of life bustled this way and that, going about their nightly business.

When the woman arrived at the newly built Chelsea Association Building between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, she released her grip on her skirt and brushed the pleats straight. Sweeping an errant lock of blonde hair away from her blue eyes, she tilted her head to look up at the mammoth Victorian Gothic building. The tallest structure in the city, its façade was an assortment of dormer windows, horizontal bands of white stone, and black iron balconies wrought into the shapes of flowers. Asymmetrical chimney stacks poked the starry sky.

Keeping her back straight and her chin lifted, the woman entered the building through the front glass doors. Well-dressed men mingled in the high-ceilinged lobby, which featured mahogany wainscoting and enormous Hudson River School landscape paintings. Through a set of arched doors to

the right, upper-class ladies socialized in a frescoed sitting room.

The woman spotted Arthur Schmid right away. He stood in front of a large carved fireplace conversing with a cranky-looking man with white hair and a thick mustache. His eyes met hers for the briefest of moments before breaking contact.

Lips tightening, the woman crossed the lobby to the elevators, pushed the bell for the one to the left of the reception desk, and waited for the terrifying machine to arrive.



Arthur Schmid was a bon vivant and womanizer par excellence. He was also the most fashionable man in New York City. Just last month, after he'd entered the luxurious Hoffman House Bar on a Saturday night clad in a cashmere dinner jacket dripping with gold ornamental braiding, tight white trousers, and thigh-high black patent leather boots, the *New York Times* had crowned him "King of the Dudes" ("dude" having recently replaced "dandy" to describe an impeccably dressed male socialite). The title was no doubt pejorative, but Schmid embraced it proudly.

Tonight he was dressed no less fashionably in a crimson tailcoat, multi-colored waistcoat, stiff shirt with a spread-eagle Byron collar, and burgundy cravat. His ever-present monocle was propped between his left cheekbone and brow, and a gray silk top hat sat importantly atop his head. This was his third outfit of the day, as he'd already changed twice. He had no qualms changing as many as six or seven times a day, depending on his mood or the social occasion. Finding interesting and new outfits was not difficult, mind you, when one owned five hundred pairs of trousers, five thousand neckties, and more than three hundred tailcoats.

Born fifty-three years ago in 1831 into a de-facto aristocratic family, Schmid had inherited two million dollars on his twenty-first birthday. This fortune had allowed him to spend

much of his adult life drinking champagne, shopping in the finest department stores, and mingling with old-money individuals, celebrities, and artists alike.

Now he was enjoying a glass of champagne—his drink of choice—in the magnificent lobby of the Chelsea Association Building with his old friend, Sam Clemens. Clemens, dressed unfortunately in a frumpy white suit and dubious bowtie, was currently on a worldwide lecture tour to pay back all the debts he had accrued by investing unwisely in unproven inventions. He'd moved into the Chelsea Association Building two days ago and had bumped into Schmid in the lobby earlier this morning. They had agreed to meet later for dinner in one of the Chelsea's dining rooms. During their meal beneath gilded fleurs-de-lis and lion-faced gargoyles, a photographer for the *Tribune* had taken a photograph of them together, which had delighted Schmid, who firmly believed one could never be a victim of too much exposure or fame.

"I wonder what page we will make in tomorrow's newspaper," Schmid remarked thoughtfully as he sipped his champagne.

"I wish you didn't give that damn weasel permission to take our photograph," Clemens griped in his slow drawl.

"Do I look like someone who would pass up the opportunity to be seen with the most popular American writer and raconteur in the world?"

"Bah," Clemens said.

"Oh, come now," Schmid said. "You like the limelight as much as I do, my dear sir. I recommend you try smiling in your next photograph, however. It's all the rage now, and your teeth aren't that bad."

"A photograph is a most important document," Clemens said with his typical composure and gravity, "and there is nothing more damning to go down to posterity than a silly, foolish smile caught and fixed forever."

Schmid sipped champagne in acquiescence to the man's cantankerous nature. "Are you enjoying your life here at the

Chelsea so far?”

“It’s an impressive building, I do say.”

“Indeed! With every modern convenience available. There’s even a long-distance telephone in the manager’s office available to all residents.”

“I particularly enjoy the elevators. I’ve been installed up on the sixth floor, and my knees are old and do not fare well with stairs.”

“You don’t find them too noisy, I hope?”

“Noisy? Hardly. You don’t have to hear noise if you don’t want to. The only time I hear the elevators is when they stop.”

“They have certainly ushered in the era of the tall building. The Chelsea itself is an astonishing twelve stories. I wonder what this city will look like in, oh, another ten years from now?”

“I would temper your optimism about what the future holds, Mr. Schmid. There has already been talk of the city banning the construction of further large residential buildings due to fire and health concerns.”

“Poppycock!” Schmid blurted. “Fire? The apartments are separated by cement-filled brick walls three feet thick, and the building’s iron girders are sheathed with fireproof plaster. It is virtually impossible for a fire to spread from one residence to the next.”

“Six hundred individuals living together under one roof does not concern you?”

“There are two million residents in this city, my dear man. If we’re on the precipice of an American Black Death, it will originate in some unsanitary tenement slum, not the Chelsea. Indeed, I suspect the fear motivating our great city leaders is neither fire nor disease but that the intimacy of Parisian-style apartment living will lead the residents to looser moral standards—and you know what I think about that? What happens in the bedroom is none of their goddamned business!”

“You seem quite worked up about this, Mr. Schmid.”

“Because ignorance bothers me greatly, Mr. Clemens, and

there seems to be more and more of it going around these days." Schmid sighed. "But yes, let's talk of something more agreeable, shall we? How fares your writing?"

"It's interesting that you ask," Clemens said. "For the last three months I haven't written anything. Not a single page. Authorship is always easy when one has something to say. When one doesn't, it can be as grueling a process as any. But then I had a dream the other night—"

"Here at the Chelsea?"

"My first night here, yes. I dreamed I was a medieval knight, severely inconvenienced by the weight and cumbersome nature of my armor. Upon waking I thought it would make for a delightful satire of feudalism and monarchy, and I've been writing prolifically since."

"I adore this march you writers are making toward socio-economic discourse! May I ask how many pages you have written?"

Clemens scratched his head. "Well, I...I can't seem to recall."

Schmid's eyebrows shot upward so far he almost lost his monocle. "You can't recall? That's the most extraordinary statement I've ever heard! How can you not recall how many pages you write if you are the man writing them?"

"It does seem rather curious, doesn't it? And what's more, I don't quite recall what exactly I have written."

"My friend, you are making no sense. Surely you have taken the time to read over what you have written?"

"Surely I have. But the details are foggy in my mind."

"This is quite remarkable!"

"It is indeed..." Clemens confessed into his mustache.

"Very well then. Can you tell me about this story in broad strokes?"

"I have tentatively titled it *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. You see, after receiving a severe blow to the head, a Yankee is mysteriously transported to England during the reign of King Arthur."

“An intriguing premise. I would like to—”

Just then Nicola Krieghoff strode through the front entrance of the Chelsea Association Building. She glanced at Arthur Schmid momentarily before continuing purposefully toward the elevators.

Schmid finished what was left of his champagne.

Clemens glanced at his own empty glass. “Where’s that damn head waiter? He hasn’t been by once to check on us.”

“I do fear, my friend, that your residence abroad in Europe has cossetted you to the ministrations of servants whose parents were servants and who will be servants themselves for the entirety of their lives. You are back in America now, you would do good to remember.”

“Yes, yes, I remember,” Clemens drawled. “I’m not senile yet. Will you join me in the basement parlor for a game of billiards?”

“As tempting as it would be to challenge and defeat the great Mark Twain in billiards, I admittedly must pass. Dinner, it seems, has reacted unfavorably with my gut, and I believe the best remedy would be to retire early this evening. But what say we meet for dinner again tomorrow? I’m positively enraptured to hear more of this book you are writing...”



When the elevator car arrived, the uniformed operator pulled back the wrought iron door, and Nicola Krieghoff stepped inside the claustrophobic box.

The operator closed the door with a loud clank and asked, “What floor, ma’am?”

“Third, please,” she said.

The young man pulled a large lever, and with a lurch and a clang the car began to rise. Nicola balled her hands into fists and held her breath. She had only experienced an elevator on three previous occasions—all here at the Chelsea Association Building—and the brief ride always scared the color out of

her. She couldn't help but think of the great chasm growing below her feet as she ascended, and the deadly plummet if the rope supporting the car frayed and snapped.

When the elevator rudely stopped, the operator pulled open the birdcage door. Nicola gratefully and quickly stepped into the landing. It was empty. She went through a door into the west wing and stopped before a door numbered 328. She glanced the way she had come. The hallway remained empty. She turned the door's handle and stepped into the apartment.

Wrapping around the west end of the building, the suite boasted six bedrooms, two salons, a library, and a large kitchen with a pantry. The furniture was an eclectic mix of Victorian and Néo-Greco pieces, including a life-sized bronze statue of a half-naked Greek god. Electric lamps cast pools of light over the hand-molded William Morris tiles, while coals smoldered warmly in the marble baroque fireplace.

Nicola Krieghoff was not used to such luxury. She was from a small Prussian village in the heart of the German Rhineland, which had been surrounded by verdant forests, rolling hills, and meandering brooks. When she arrived in New York City on a combination steamer/sailing ship at the age of sixteen, she felt as though she had stepped into a different world. The city was enormous, frightening, confusing, dirty, and overwhelming all at the same time.

And life certainly was not easy there.

In Prussia, her father had been a successful baker. But in New York City, on the Lower East Side where they lived, German-American bakers were amongst some of the lowest paid workers, and her father toiled away for seven days a week, from sunrise until sunset, for ten cents an hour. This income was not enough to support Nicola and her two younger sisters, so to help, Nicola worked as an advertisement writer for a fashion company. The job bored her senseless, but the hours were acceptable and allowed her to pursue her true passion in the evenings: acting. At first she had performed in variety shows in Little Germany's concert saloons and *biertagens* for

men of the working class, but recently she had secured minor roles and understudies in musical comedies and vaudevilles in some of the neighborhood's better music halls. It was a tough business. Stage fright caused her to sometimes rush her words, and audience members often criticized her thin figure. But she was ambitious and talented and persistent, and she knew someday she would become famous.

Last week, she was in a burlesque comedy at the newly renovated Star Theater on the northeast corner of Broadway and 13th Street. It had been one of her worst performances. She was wearing a dress with a long train and had to move about quite a bit on the crowded stage. During one scene her trailing skirts got so tangled up with a chair that upon exiting the stage, the chair went right along with her!

After the show, she had been brooding in her changing room when a man wearing the most ridiculous finery knocked on her door and praised her performance. When he introduced himself as Arthur Schmid, she could hardly believe her ears. Arthur Schmid was a source of constant gossip and scandal, and one of the city's best-known celebrities, even if his source of greatness was based on nothing at all.

They shared a bottle of wine an admirer had given Nicola after her last show, and Arthur Schmid asked her to join him for dinner the following night. He confessed he was a married man, but insisted he and his wife didn't live together and were divorced in all but name. Even so, it would not do his reputation well to be seen in public with a mistress, so if they were to meet, they would have to do it with the utmost secrecy.

Nicola didn't have any qualms with the arrangement. She was young and impressionable, but most of all, she knew an opportunity when she saw one. In the back of her mind, she was planning how a man like Arthur Schmid, with all his money and connections, could help her fledgling acting career.

Over the following two weeks they met secretly on three occasions. Tonight would mark their fourth rendezvous at his



apartment, and she'd decided it was time to request a favor.

She was pacing nervously and thinking about all of this when the door opened and Arthur Schmid entered. After closing and locking the door, he grinned widely and threw open his arms.

"Come here, dearest," he said gaily.

Nicola ran to him and wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him profusely over his freshly shaven cheeks.

"Did anybody on this floor see you?" he asked, stepping apart from her and hanging his top hat on a wall hook.

"Nobody at all. Oh! You got a haircut."

"There is a barbershop right in the basement of this building. Do you fancy it? It's in the Roman fashion. I call it 'à la Brutus.'"

"It compliments you perfectly."

Arthur Schmid admired his reflection in a large gilded mirror and sighed. "To die and live before a mirror," he said, running a hand through his hair.

"You certainly do enjoy looking at yourself."

"To paraphrase Thomas Carlyle, my dear, a dandy is a clothes-wearing man, a man whose trade, office, and existence consists in the wearing of clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically devoted to the wearing of clothes wisely and well."

"I'm most impressed by how you take infinite pains about your appearance...only to appear so indifferent about it."

"It is hard work being me, dearest. Champagne?"

"Please."

They went to the kitchen where he poured two glasses.

"I adore what you've done with your hair," he told her. "It positively bounces. When I saw you on the stage at The Star, I thought to myself, *This is the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes upon.* And I haven't changed my mind."

Blushing, Nicola said, "I was hoping I could ask you something?"

"Of course, dearest."

"It seems from the stories in the newspapers that you know everybody in this city."

"Not true at all. I only know the *important* people."

"Well, I was wondering... The first-ever revue is opening on Broadway later this year at the Casino Theater. It's called *The Passing Show*. It's a vaudeville-like collection of songs, sketches, and specialty acts. I've heard they're looking for a lead actress, and I know I'd be perfect for the part. The problem is, they won't even consider someone like me, someone who's never had a lead role before." She gripped his forearm. "But if you mentioned me to the director or producer...?"

Arthur Schmid was nodding agreeably. "I would love to help you, my dear. And I do in fact know the producer. George is his name, and he's touting *The Passing Show* as a 'tropical extravaganza.' Spoofs of theatrical productions of the last season and all that. You would be dazzling in the lead role, simply dazzling." He turned grave. "The unfortunate problem is that, outside of this room, you and I do not know each other. How could I explain my relationship to you?"

"Couldn't you just say something like, 'I saw this understudy at The Star. I think she has remarkable talent. She would be perfect for this part...' Something like that?" She realized she was squeezing his forearm with tremendous force, and she made herself relax.

Arthur Schmid smiled kindly. "Well, yes, I suppose I *could* say something like that, couldn't I? After all, I *did* see you at The Star, and you really *do* have talent."

"Oh, Arthur!" Nicola set her champagne down on the table, wrapped her arms around his neck, and once again smothered him with kisses.

"Perhaps we should take this celebration into the bedroom —"

A loud banging at the door caused them to jump apart.

"Arthur?" came a shrill voice. "Arthur? Open up. I've come all this way to see you."

"Who's *that*?" Nicola demanded.

Arthur Schmid's face turned white. "My wife," he said.



"You must hide," he told her.

"Where?" Nicola demanded.

"There," he said, pointing to what appeared to be a small rectangular cupboard built flush into the wall. He yanked open the door to reveal a small dark space half the size she was tall. There were vertical ropes on either side of the opening.

"What's *that*?"

"Never mind what it is! You must get in it! Now!"

"I'm not getting in there!"

"You must!" he insisted.

"I won't fit!" she said.

"You will!"

"Arthur?" came his wife's cold soprano voice. "Arthur, I know you're in there! Open the door!"

Knowing there was nowhere else to hide, Nicola gathered her dress above her knees and climbed headfirst into the cupboard.

She froze when it swayed slightly beneath her weight.

"It moves!" she cried, realizing at the same time what the ropes were for. "It's another one of those elevators, isn't it?"

"It's an elevator for food," Arthur Schmid said. "Now get in there!" He planted his hands on her behind and pushed firmly.

Squawking in indignation as much as surprise, she scrambled further into the space and pulled her knees up against her chest.

"There you go," Arthur Schmid said approvingly. "You fit."

Nicola felt extremely cramped and claustrophobic. "What if your wife looks in here?"

"She won't. She won't be here for long. Now you must remain absolutely silent."

Nicola nodded.

"Very good," he said. "I will be back soon to let you out."

He closed the door.



It was perfectly dark in the little box with no hint of light from the kitchen's electric fixtures.

Nicola strained to hear the conversation coming from the front of the apartment, but what she could hear most was her breathing. It sounded inappropriately loud and somehow inside her head.

The air, she realized, was stale and stuffy and hot. Perspiration beaded her forehead and the back of her neck.

*What am I doing?* she wondered. *Having an affair with a man older than my father is disgraceful in itself. Now I'm hiding in some newfangled contraption meant to transport food like some unsightly tramp?*

*Was getting a role in a Broadway revue worth all this—?*

A whiplash snap.

The box lurched.

Nicola cried out a moment before slapping her hands over her mouth.

*I'm too heavy! The rope can't support my weight! I'm going to—*

Another snap.

And then she was plummeting down the shaft.



Arthur Schmid and his cow-eyed wife (who had come by for a handout because she'd already exhausted her monthly allowance) both spun toward the kitchen.

"Who was that?" his wife demanded.

"Who was what?" Schmid asked innocently, despite having heard the brief shout. He kept a pleasant face but was inwardly fuming.

*What is that damned girl up to? How hard is it to keep her mouth shut?*

“Who’s there?” his wife said, marching toward the kitchen on her short, sturdy legs. “I heard you! Come out now, you miserable little whore!”

“Dearest!” Schmid said, chasing after her. “Stop this! There’s nobody here.”

In the kitchen his wife peeked below the oak dining table. She planted her pudgy hands on her ample hips. “Where is she?” she demanded.

“There is nobody here, darling, I insist.”

“I *heard* her, you silly fop! Don’t take me for a vapid fool!”

“What you heard was likely a neighbor. Goodness knows, they’re on every side of this apartment, above and below as well!”

His fuming wife stalked into the next room to continue her search.

Schmid hurried to the dumbwaiter and opened the door. He gasped. The small elevator car was gone. The two hand ropes used for raising or lowering the dumbwaiter remained intact, but the third one, which had connected to the top of the car and to the corresponding counterweights, was gone, the end that dangled before him frayed.

Schmid peered down the shaft but could see nothing but blackness.

“Oh my,” he said.



Nicola’s fear was so great she was unable to scream as she dropped like a stone. The impact with the ground came fast. It shattered her pelvis and several other bones. Her left knee drove into the soft flesh of the underside of her jaw, causing her to bite off the tip of her tongue. Splintered wood lacerated her face and impaled parts of her body. The second or two of pain she experienced was so powerful and inclusive her consciousness fled from it and she passed out.



When she opened her eyes, all was black, and she didn't hear anything. This confused her, because she almost always woke to dawn's anemic light coloring the sky and to the neighborhood crows cawing over their territories.

Then she recalled the food elevator, the fall.

*No, God, no. It's a dream. This must be a dream. I'm still dreaming...*

She coughed a frightening amount of blood from her mouth. She coughed again, this time more forcefully, causing her to tilt forward. Monstrous pain erupted inside of her. Out of panic, she tried standing but couldn't move her legs.

She lifted her hand, which caused a tremendous amount of pain to pulse through her arm, through her shoulder, all the way to her chest. This was immediately forgotten when she gripped her leg.

It wasn't hers.

She gasped, a wheezy, clogged sound, as her mouth was swollen, numb, and unresponsive. She touched the leg again. Her fingers followed the thigh up to the hip, where feeling returned.

The leg was hers, she realized. She simply didn't have any sensation in it.

The hope she was dreaming died then. It was real, all of it. Hiding in the food elevator. The rope snapping. The fall.

A terror the likes of which Nicola had never experienced crushed her soul, and she began to cry.



Nicola continued to pass in and out of consciousness, finding it harder and harder to distinguish one nightmarish state from the other.

At some point she found herself wondering why nobody

had come to help her. Arthur Schmid would have realized what happened when he went to check on her. Why hadn't he come to the basement, if that was where she was, to help her? Did he believe she was dead? Was he going to continue with the pretense he did not know her?

Yet even if this was the case, shouldn't someone else have discovered her by now? She didn't know how long she had been crumpled up in the bottom of the shaft, but it felt like an awfully long time. Hours, certainly. Perhaps even days.

Nicola's thoughts were fading when she heard a noise. It sounded like footsteps, or something being dragged or moved, or perhaps something else entirely.

"I'm here," she said, though she was not certain she had spoken the words out loud or not.

She heard what might have been a handle turning, then the protest of wood on wood and the squawk of old hinges as the door to the elevator car opened.

Despite it being pitch black, Nicola could see her rescuer clear as day because he glowed with a translucent phosphorescence that seemed to emanate from within him.

Then she saw his eyes, and with the last of the strength in her broken body, she screamed.





# PART 1

*2013*

*"Eyeing the traffic circulating the lobby hung with bad art. Big invasive stuff unloaded on Stanley Bard in exchange for rent. The hotel is an energetic, desperate haven for scores of gifted hustling children from every rung of the ladder. Guitar bums and stoned-out beauties in Victorian dresses. Junkie poets, playwrights, broke-down filmmakers, and French actors. Everybody passing through here is somebody, if not in the outside world."*

-PATTI SMITH, *JUST KIDS*

# CHAPTER 1

*It's going to be one of those days...*

**M**alcolm Clock was having a bad day. He didn't get up on the wrong side of the bed. His sixth-floor studio apartment in the East Village was so small the only reasonable placement of his bed was stuffed into a corner beneath a window, which meant there was only one side—the left—to get up on.

But as Malcolm made his way to the bathroom to relieve his aching bladder (too much gin the night before), he stepped in a squishy pile of feces. It wasn't his, which meant it was courtesy of the three-month-old pug he was babysitting for his brother, George, while George and his fiancé were vacationing in Paris for two weeks.

If stepping in dog shit at six-thirty in the morning wasn't disgusting enough, he then stepped in a puddle of urine, also courtesy of the puppy. His feet shot out from beneath him and he came down flat on his back, cracking his head on the linoleum.

And so the rest of the morning went. No toothpaste left in the tube; spoiled milk in the refrigerator; green fuzzy mold creeping over his only loaf of bread; missing his train by seconds, causing him to be ten minutes late for work the second time this week (and it was only Wednesday); getting locked out of his computer for failing to update his password (even though a notification had warned him several times a day, every day, for the last seven days).

Now the final insult: a taxi nearly running him over as he crossed Eighth Avenue, causing him to jump backward in alarm and spill a dollop of Starbucks coffee on his white T-shirt.

He almost yelled after the cab but couldn't be bothered. Half a block later, he arrived at the Hotel Chelsea.



Malcolm had been born in Augusta, Maine, but had lived most of his life in New York City in three of the five boroughs—his childhood in Queens, his college days in Brooklyn, and the last three years in the East Village in Manhattan. The Hotel Chelsea was one of those landmarks like the Empire State Building or Madison Square Garden that had always been there and likely will always be there, monolithic wallflowers hidden in plain sight to those who lived in the city.

Malcolm didn't know everything about the Chelsea's storied history, but he knew enough. He knew, for instance, that a hell of a lot of people had died in the building over the years, lots of drug addicts, but some famous people too, most notably Sid Vicious' girlfriend, Nancy Spungen. Andy Warhol had shot parts of *Chelsea Girls* there. Janis Joplin and Leonard Cohen met in the elevator in 1968, kicking off a one-night tryst that Cohen recorded in his song "Chelsea Hotel #2." Arthur Miller moved in after separating from Marilyn Monroe. Tennessee Williams had a room there, as did Jackson Pollock, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Stanley Kubrick, Joni Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, and a laundry list of other famous writers, filmmakers, and musicians.

In fact, if you chronicled all the art created at the Chelsea over the last century, you'd probably find yourself with a list of masterpieces to rival those created in any American artistic movement, ever.

So yeah, the hotel had a storied history, all right.

And now Malcolm had been tasked with writing its obit-

uary.

# CHAPTER 2

## *Stanley who?*

**T**he stately redbrick Hotel Chelsea rose against the dark morning sky, imprisoned in a skin of steel scaffolding and construction netting. Built in an architectural style described variously as Queen Anne Revival and Victorian Gothic, it shared elements of both, and if you didn't know better, you could be forgiven for mistaking it for a gigantic old insane asylum. The hotel had been under construction for a couple of years now to keep it in lockstep with the rapid development of its namesake neighborhood. Once the glittering gem of what Mark Twain had coined the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century, New York City had entered a socioeconomic spiral in the 1940s and 50s, reaching a low point in the 70s and 80s when it was plagued by poverty, urban blight, and soaring crime rates. This was the clichéd Manhattan you saw in the opening credits of that old sitcom, *Night Court*, a dog-eat-dog city characterized by drug addicts and alcoholics, hustlers and con artists, cops walking their beats on lonely nights, dingy subway cars rumbling through the graffitied underground, and steam rising from manhole covers on dangerous streets. However, since the dot-com bubble in the 1990s, and the corresponding influx of new money, the city had stepped back from the abyss. Trendy cafés and pubs and restaurants replaced the greasy mom-and-pop diners and dive bars, boutique shops and spas rented out the boarded-up storefronts, penthouses sprang up in abandoned lofts, the punks and degenerates went elsewhere (or perhaps simply traded in their spiked hair and leather jackets for alligator shirts and khakis), and gentrification invaded even the sketchiest neighborhoods.

To adapt to this changing reality, in 1995 the Hotel Chelsea adopted a “No Tolerance” policy to clean up its image. This was the beginning of the end of its illustrious 100-year tradition of supporting eccentric, counterculture creativity. The gritty, desperate, oftentimes crazy artists who had called the hotel home were kicked to the curb, while the ones who took their spots had already achieved success, or were born with silver spoons in their mouths.

As Malcolm approached the entrance to the hotel beneath the red-and-white awning, he glanced at the bronze plaques on the front of the building memorializing some of the celebrated former residents: Dylan Thomas, Virgil Thomson, Sir Arthur C. Clark, Thomas Wolfe, Shirley Clarke, Brendan Behan.

Malcolm’s reflection in the glass doors was of a man in his early thirties in slim-fit jeans, a white tee, and navy blazer. He’d been likened to John Cusack and a young Alec Baldwin on enough occasions to take the comparisons seriously. The flatterers were being generous, of course, but he did acknowledge some similarities to the actors, such as his dark hair, brown eyes, and the tendency of his lips to pucker when at rest. The lips would have been more at home on an art critic, but they were his, and there wasn’t much he could do about them.

He pressed a buzzer next to the entrance.

The man behind the front desk saw him and pushed his own button. The doors unlocked and Malcolm entered the hotel’s empty lobby. The white marble floor tiles were dirty and scuffed from years of neglect. All the furniture had been removed, and the ornate fireplace sat cold and empty. Unsightly discolorations on the walls indicated where artwork had once hung. Incongruously, a ghoulish papier-mâché sculpture of a child on a swing, hanging from the ceiling, had been left behind to preside over the uninviting space.

The man behind the front desk stood. He eyed Malcolm’s photography bag. “You the guy writing the story for that magazine?” he asked. His powder-blue dress shirt was unbuttoned at the throat. The rolled-up sleeves revealed muscled,

hairless forearms.

“That’s me,” Malcolm said.

“Welcome to the majestic Chelsea.” He smiled to reveal a gap between his front teeth and spread his arms in mock grandeur.

“Doesn’t look too majestic to me.”

“It’s a shithole. Have some trouble with your coffee today?”

Malcolm glanced down at the brown stain on his shirt. “Taxi nearly ran me over.”

“Taxi drivers in this city hate the world ’cause of Uber, you know?”

“I take the trains.”

“Hear ya. I’m Darnell.”

“Malcolm.”

“Okay, Malcolm,” Darnell said. “So I was told to expect you today. I was told you were writing a piece on the renovations. But that’s all I know. Anything I can do to help?”

“Mostly I’m just going to wander around the hotel, take some photos, if that’s okay? Renovations been going on for what...two years now?”

“About that. I’ve only been here since the new management took over a few months ago.”

“The previous developer didn’t have much luck with the place?”

“It’s been headaches for everyone since Stanley Bard left.”

“He was the old manager?” Malcolm had spent the first part of the morning browsing internet articles about the Hotel Chelsea.

“And part owner,” Darnell said. “The Chelsea used to be owned by three families, the Bards and two others. Stanley Bard took over the day-to-day operations from his father in the 50s. In 2007 the heirs of the other two families wanted to start turning a profit—and can you blame ’em?—and ousted Bard as manager. They sold the place a couple of years later to a real estate bigwig for a cool eighty million. Plan was to turn



it into an upmarket hotel, make it the crown jewel of New York again. But the guy didn't get too far with that. There've been issues with the long-term tenants. It's been a real shit-fest here."

Malcolm was surprised. "There are still tenants living here?"

"Most have been evicted, but some of'em banded together, got lawyered up, and got to stay in their apartments. Something about the state's tenants' rights laws. So what did the real estate bigwig do? Started renovating the hotel around them. The tenants filed more lawsuits complaining 'bout the living conditions. This caused a shitload of work stoppages, delays, cost overruns, all that. Finally the bigwig had enough and palmed off the hotel to my bosses earlier this year. They convert residential hotels into high-priced boutique ones, and they're pouring some forty million into the renovations here. Is it gonna be enough?" He shrugged. "You tell me after you've had a looksee around."

Malcolm nodded and asked, "Where can I leave this?" He raised his empty paper coffee cup.

"Give it here." Darnell tossed the cup in a bin behind him, then produced a hard hat from beneath the counter. He gave it to Malcolm. "You'll need this. Compliance with building regulations and everything. Elevators are right behind you. Stairs are through the doors if you prefer to take them."

"I think I'll take the elevator to the top floor and work my way down the stairs."

"Whatever floats your boat."

Malcolm went to the elevator to the right of the reception desk and pressed the call button.

"Yo, Malcolm?" Darnell said.

He turned around. "Yeah?"

"You run into any of the residents, take what they tell you with a grain of salt, will ya?"

"What will they tell me?"

"There's no love lost between them and my bosses. They

do their best to demonize them any chance they get. That's their right. Just a heads-up not to believe everything they say. Also, a couple of them are nuttier than a Christmas fruitcake. They've got it in their heads the Chelsea is haunted. You don't believe in ghosts, do you, Malcolm?"

"No, I don't."

"Good man." Darnell's mobile phone began to ring. He checked the number. "Gotta get this. Nice talking to you, buddy."

He turned his back to Malcolm and answered the call.

# CHAPTER 3

## *The woman on the roof*

**T**he rickety elevator groaned and creaked its way up to the tenth floor. When the car came to a stop, Malcolm stepped into a two-story atrium. The glass roof offered a view of the heavy storm clouds overhead. To his left, a door with sidelight windows led to the floor's west wing; an identical door on the right led to the east wing. In the center of the landing, an elaborate staircase with wrought-iron florid metalwork spiraled down to the lower floors. It also went up to the roof.

Malcolm decided to go up. A small alarm attached to the rooftop access door gave him pause. He pushed the door open anyway. The alarm made a faint sound like an asthmatic gasping for air. Unconcerned—nobody could hear it, and if it triggered another alarm at the front desk, Darnell would assume it was him—Malcolm stepped outside onto the roof. It was an expansive, open space littered with piles of demolished timber, upturned and broken bricks, and large garbage bags overflowing with vegetation. He withdrew his Nikon from his bag and picked his way through the debris, snapping photographs as he went.

While he was peering through the camera's viewfinder at a faded mural that had been painted on one section of brick wall, someone spoke from behind him.

Whirling around, Malcolm found a prim woman in her sixties or seventies scowling at him. She was dressed Jazz-Age chic in a cloche hat and a peacock-patterned velvet cape

shoulder-draped over a royal-blue flapper dress. From beneath the hat fell coiffed blonde curls that had to be a wig. She'd used a boatload of eyeshadow to do her eyes up like a cat's, slanted upward at the ends. Her fake eyelashes were like batwings. Malcolm suspected she had been ravishing in her youth, though age had taken its toll on her, creasing her skin in all the usual places and hardening her features.

"Uh, hi," he said, confused as to where she'd come from. "Sorry, I didn't know anybody else was up here."

"Who are you?" she demanded in a robust voice. "One of ze developer's lackeys?"

Malcolm couldn't place her accent, but it sounded Romanian, like in those old vampire movies.

"No, ma'am. I'm a magazine reporter for *City Living*. We cover pop culture, fashion, current affairs—"

"I know the magazine," she quipped. "I'm not that out of touch with the world. Why are you writing about the Chelsea?"

"It's an iconic New York City landmark, and it's been closed to guests for a couple of years now. People are curious as to how the construction is progressing."

"It's progressing at a snail's pace, I can tell you that much. It was only supposed to take a year. That's what the previous owner told us two years ago. Construction will take a year." She huffed. "Two years later and what's been accomplished? Nothing! Nothing but a whole lot of destruction, that's what! They're destroying the soul of this hotel."

He extended his hand. "I'm Malcolm Clock."

After a moment, the woman shook her hand little more than bones and skin, as fragile as a bird's wing. "I am Quinn. Zat is it. One name."

Malcolm surveyed the roof. "Are they building something up here, Quinn?"

"Building?" Quinn scoffed. "No, not building. What you see, all the debris, is the remains of the gardens. That's right, there used to be gardens up here, beautiful gardens. Honeysuckle

and Virginia Creepers and lavender cascading over trellises. Cozy spaces where you could sit with a coffee and watch the sun rise over the city. Flowers and fruit trees and a communal herb garden. A pair of hammocks used to hang right over there, between those two chimneys. I would read there on pleasant days.” Her hazel eyes darkened. “And those greedy bastards just took their chainsaws to it! Hauled it away in garbage bags! Over a century of cultivated beauty and life, gone. Not even a single planter box left behind.”

Malcolm allowed a few moments of respectful silence to pass before asking, “Why did they tear it down if they’re not building anything...?”

“Oh, they’ll build—eventually. There’s been talk of a bar. Maybe even a spa. A spa!” She pressed a trembling hand to her forehead. “Forgive me for getting so worked up. But the Chelsea isn’t just any other building. Its legacy should have been protected.”

“May I ask what you’re doing up here?”

She looked at him quizzically. “Why, I live up here.”

Malcolm wondered if she’d misunderstood his question. “Sorry?”

She pointed to a pyramidal turret jutting up from the building’s rooftop.

“You live in *there*?”

“I most certainly do. Other residents used to live up here too. Not in anything as special, mind you. They had small sheds we called bungalows. But they’ve all been evicted and their bungalows torn down. I’m the last survivor.”

“You’re a modern-day Quasimodo.”

“A deaf, hideous, deformed hunchback?”

“I didn’t mean that...” He pushed on. “How long have you lived up here?”

“I moved in on February 11, 1961,” she said without hesitation.

“You’ve been up here for over fifty years?”

“Thank you for making me feel so young.” She waved a

hand dismissively. “I’ve lived a full life. I’m proud of my age. And I’ll tell you this much: many former residents of this hotel can’t claim the same longevity. But, yes, 1961. I was a young girl then, a ballerina. I was lucky enough to have danced in one of Virgil Thomson’s operas. When I mentioned to Virgil I was looking for somewhere to live, he called up the old manager of the Chelsea—Virgil was living here then—and said, ‘Stanley, I have a lovely young dancer without a home. Can you help her out?’ I came to the hotel the next day. Stanley showed me these horrible rooms on the lower floors, though by the way he was praising them, you’d think he was showing you the Palace at Versailles! Finally we ended up here on the rooftop. A pianist had just moved out of the pyramid, and Stanley said I could have it. I was skeptical about living in a pyramid on the rooftop of a hotel...until he told me that the actress Sarah Bernhardt had had it built.”

“Sarah Bernhardt had it built?” Malcolm said skeptically.

Quinn nodded. “She used to live in one of the two-story penthouse apartments that had access to the roof, and she wanted a pyramid on the roof. She was eccentric like that. She used to sleep in a rosewood coffin. Perhaps she slept in her coffin in my pyramid? In any event, I agreed to pay Stanley two months’ rent, believing I would find more suitable accommodation in the meantime. He told me I’d likely never leave the hotel.” She smiled wistfully. “Turns out he was right, wasn’t he?”

“What was the Chelsea like in the 60s?”

“Certainly not the luxury residence it had once been. Arthur Miller probably described it best when he said, ‘No vacuum cleaners, no rules, no shame.’ After the Depression, the Chelsea went bankrupt, and throughout the 40s and 50s, the magnificent suites were chopped up into small individual rooms. The stained-glass windows, the floor-to-ceiling mirrors, and much of the intricate woodwork were torn out. The hotel became a flophouse—but also a bohemian refuge. The 60s were the Warhol years. Andy and many of his super-

stars lived in the hotel then. Nico, Viva, Brigid Berlin, Gerard Malanga. They all starred in his film, *Chelsea Girls*, the first stab at reality TV, I suppose you might say. Bob Dylan lived here for three years. Leonard Cohen and Janis Joplin, of course. You may not believe me, but I inspired Leonard to write that song about her.”

“You were friends with Leonard Cohen?”

“Friends? I suppose you’d call our relationship that. He was having a rough time then. He’d been an accomplished poet and novelist in Canada and had come to New York to join the folk singer-songwriter scene. But he was already in his thirties. That was considered by many as too old to kick off a music career. His debut record sold terribly, and he had copyright issues with some of his songs. I’d go down to his room sometimes. It was this little shoebox with a single lightbulb dangling from the ceiling, a tiny black-and-white TV, and a hot plate. That was about it. He used to sit on his bed with his guitar, and I’d sit on the floor, with my back against the wall. We’d smoke cigarettes and just talk mostly. That’s what we were doing on New Year’s Day in 1971 when he told me about meeting Janis Joplin at three in the morning in the elevator.”

“This was after she died?”

“Three months after, yes. It was the first time he’d ever spoken about her to me. He told me the full story, going back to her room, all that, and I told him he should write a song about it. A couple of weeks later he did just that, on a cocktail napkin in some restaurant, if my memory serves me right... Anyway, that was the 60s.”

“And the 70s?”

“The 70s—oh my, the 70s! That’s when the Chelsea cemented its tabloid character due to all the rock and roll people who stayed here—in large part, I should say, because no other hotels in the city would accept them. And the bands brought the roadies, who brought the drugs. Really, drug-use got out of control. People smoked weed like cigarettes. You could get high riding the elevator! I remember visiting a

Puerto Rican drug dealer on the third floor. He kept a five-foot-high pile of marijuana sitting in the middle of his living room, complete with roaches running in and out of it. That was his cheap stuff. He kept his better stuff in a back room. He had about twenty different kinds of marijuana in little file boxes in a cabinet, all the baggies labelled with colored stickers. He was quite the professional. And it wasn't only pot going around. Speed, LSD, cocaine, heroin. You could get whatever you desired here."

Malcolm had battled a soul-crushing heroin addiction for much of his adult life, and he recalled all too well the frustration and desperation of the daily hunts all over the city to find his next fix. The Hotel Chelsea that Quinn was describing—a one-stop pharmacy of illicit drugs—would have been an oasis for him and his deadbeat friends.

Ignoring a hunger in a corner in his mind to get high, a hunger he had fought every day of the last three years of his sobriety, he said, "You must have met a lot of the celebrities who'd stayed at the hotel over the years, Quinn?"

"I did indeed, Mr. Clock. But most of the famous people who stayed here didn't act like famous people, and you didn't really think of them as famous. We were all neighbors under the same roof, all part of the same coterie, which was based on talent and passion for our art rather than how much money you made, or how many fans you had. You'd walk down the hallways, and everyone would have their doors open, they'd invite you in for a drink and a smoke. Of course, you could just as easily find yourself in a pimp's room, or a prostitute's, as you could an established or up-and-coming artist's."

"Sounds like a wild time."

"Wild, seedy, scary, insane. A man on the ninth floor kept an alligator, two monkeys, and a snake in his room, and sometimes his monkeys would get out and run free rein around the hotel. I think it was Patti—that's Patti Smith, the singer-songwriter—who used to joke that the Chelsea was like a doll's house in the *Twilight Zone*. Not only because very strange



things happened here, but because every room was different than the next, each its own little world in a larger universe.”

A strong gust of wind sougged past them, sweeping Quinn’s coiffed blonde curls in front of her eyes. She glanced up at the dark sky, frowning at the storm clouds gathered there. Malcolm glanced at them as well, noting they were darker than they’d been earlier.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Clock,” she said, tugging her cape snugly at the throat. “But I catch a chill very easily these days and must return inside to warm up. If you’d like, you’re more than welcome to join me. I can put on a pot of tea?”

“I’d like that very much. Thank you.”

She cast another weary glance at the sky. “I don’t like the look of those clouds at all. It’s going to be a big storm, isn’t it?”

“It’s forecast to hit the entire northeast of the country.”

She sighed. “I used to enjoy the rain when there were gardens up here. Now...what’s the point in rain if there’s nothing for it to nourish? Come, Mr. Clock, let’s get inside.”

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Jeremy Bates



USA TODAY and #1 AMAZON bestselling author Jeremy Bates has published more than twenty novels and novellas, which have been translated into several languages, optioned for film and TV, and downloaded more than one million times. Midwest Book Review compares his work to "Stephen King, Joe Lansdale, and other masters of the art." He has won both an Australian Shadows Award and a Canadian Arthur Ellis Award. He was also a finalist in the Goodreads Choice Awards, the only major book awards decided by readers. The novels in the "World's Scariest Places" series are set in real locations and include *Suicide Forest* in Japan, *The Catacombs* in Paris, *Helltown* in Ohio, *Island of the Dolls* in Mexico, and *Mountain of the Dead* in Russia. The novels in the "World's Scariest Legends" series are based on real legends and include *Mosquito Man* and *The Sleep Experiment*. You can check out any of these places or legends on the web. Also, visit [JEREMYBATESBOOKS.COM](http://JEREMYBATESBOOKS.COM) to receive Black Canyon, WINNER of The Lou Allin Memorial Award.



# BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

## *World's Scariest Places*

### **Suicide Forest**

Just outside of Tokyo lies Aokigahara, a vast forest and one of the most beautiful wilderness areas in Japan...and also the most infamous spot to commit suicide in the world. Legend has it that the spirits of those many suicides are still roaming, haunting deep in the ancient woods.

When bad weather prevents a group of friends from climbing neighboring Mt. Fuji, they decide to spend the night camping in Aokigahara. But they get more than they bargained for when one of them is found hanged in the morning—and they realize there might be some truth to the legends after all.

### **The Catacombs**

Paris, France, is known as the City of Lights, a metropolis renowned for romance and beauty. Beneath the bustling streets and cafés, however, exists The Catacombs, a labyrinth of crumbling tunnels filled with six million dead.

When a video camera containing mysterious footage is discovered deep within their depths, a group of friends venture into the tunnels to investigate. But what starts out as a light-hearted adventure takes a turn for the worse when they reach their destination—and stumble upon the evil lurking there.

## **Helltown**

Since the 1980s there have been numerous reports of occult activity and other possibly supernatural phenomenon within certain villages and townships of Summit County, Ohio—an area collectively known as Helltown.

When a group of out-of-town friends investigating the legends are driven off the road by a mysterious hearse, their night of cheap thrills turns to chills as they begin to die one by one.

## **Island Of The Dolls**

Deep within an ancient Aztec canal system on the outskirts of Mexico City lies Isla de las Munecas...a reportedly haunted island infested with thousands of decrepit dolls.

While there to film a television documentary, several friends discover a brutal murder. Soon fear and paranoia turn them against one another—even as the unknown killer stalks them throughout the longest night of their lives.

## **Mountain Of The Dead**

The greatest unsolved mystery of the 20th century—until now.

Fact: During the night of February 1, 1959, in the remote reaches of Siberia, nine Russian hikers slash open their tent from the inside and flee into a blizzard in subpolar temperatures.

Fact: By morning all are dead, several having suffered gruesome, violent deaths. What happened to them has baffled in-

investigators and researchers to this day.

It has become known as the Dyatlov Pass Incident.

Now, an American true-crime writer seeking answers to the enduring mystery sets out to retrace the hikers' steps on their fateful expedition—though nothing can prepare him for what he is about to discover...