MY KEY FITS EVERY DOOR

A Novel - By Dennis Louis Dyer

Five years after the Second World War, film makers have revived Hollywood's golden age. A sensational murder is committed at the Chateau Chillon, a swank, star-studded hotel.

The victim is hotel resident Mike Burton who died in the hotel lobby after exiting the elevator. The next day, hotel manager **John Chamberlin** hires private eye **Mark Taylor** to investigate and coordinate with police detective Lieutenant **Tweedie**. During most of the day, Taylor and Tweedie gather evidence and interview witnesses.

The following scene occurs near the day's end as Taylor makes a few calls and contacts. The scene introduces two key characters: **Freddie Blicks** and **Eddie Davis**.

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It was late afternoon and the lobby was livelier and seemed less depressing than it was earlier. There were people involved in typical hotel lobby activities: reading, discussing, arranging and snoozing.

I used a lobby phone to call Ruthie at my answering service. She was sore as a wet cat. She wanted to know why I hadn't called in.

"Sorry, sweetheart, there's been a lot of activity around here and I..."

"That's all swell, Sherlock, but maybe I've got some good news. This is your lucky day," she said. "Your popularity rating's gone way up."

"How's that?"

"For the first time in months your phone has had some action. More'n a half-dozen calls today."

"Really? Clients?"

"Maybe, one for sure, –a Mr. Schribner has been calling all day. He wants to see you, and he talks like the gold standard."

I jotted down his number. "Anything else?"

"Well, yes. A call from a Mrs. Morgan, one from Detective Tweedie, another from Joey Jive, and also Freddie Blicks."

Mrs. Morgan didn't leave a number and I knew the others.

I called Schribner. A lady answered and said he wasn't available. When I explained myself, she said they were expecting my call and Schribner would like to meet at four p.m. the next day, if that suited my availability. I made the appointment to see him at his home.

I called Freddie Blicks. Freddie and I go way back. We were partners fifteen years ago when we were still a couple of kids and didn't know the value of a buck. The Depression killed our investigation business before it got off to a good start. He still maintains that crime doesn't pay, especially for those who break and solve cases. So Freddie latched on to the City News and police reporting. He is a great investigative reporter. One of the best.

We insulted each other good-naturedly for a moment. Then Freddie said, "What's the dope on the Burton killing?"

"Don't have anything more than what Tweedie knows, and all that is on the level."

"That's a helluva story, Mark. I'd like to be first to sew up any new development. What's your angle?"

"I'm only loosely working for the premises."

"Don't give me that crap. You're working for Chamberlin, aren't you?"

"On an on-call retainer. That's it. He gave me a red light on Burton. Tweedie's your man."

"Burton got it in the elevator," he said. "Tweedie says one of the passengers must have done it. What do you think?"

"I agree. It looks that way. Has he nailed down how many passengers there were? Five or Six?"

"He's checking suspects now. He won't give out with anything."

"Anything you know that I don't?" I laughed.

He called me illegitimate. Then he added, "Here’s something: did you know that Burton's real surname was Morton, –Mike Morton."

The name nearly stunned me because I heard it as Morgan, and immediately connected the victim to a soft mink coat.

"No, that's news to me," I said nonchalantly. I asked and he spelled the name out – "Mike-Oscar-Romeo-Thomas-Oscar-Nancy, –Morton." I settled down.

"Does Tweedie know that?"

"He gave it to me, –off the record."

"Quite interesting." I said. "What about any background on the victim. Was he married? Where was he from? What was his job?"

"Don't know, –but good questions; I'll look into 'em."

"In the meantime, you know it's not my case."

"That's right. I understand. But if I know you, you'll keep your mittens warm and dry and ready to fly."

"Okay. Call me if you get something hot."

"Yeah, chum, don't let your nose get caught in a keyhole," he laughed and hung up.

I called Tweedie. He wanted to compare notes and asked me my thoughts regarding a couple of Chateau employees. I told him I could not talk openly at the time and made an arrangement to meet him in his office in the morning. As I headed toward the garage exit, somebody behind me called my name. I turned around. It was Eddie, the elevator boy.

"Got a minute, Mr. Taylor?" he asked.

"Yeah, what's on your mind?" I walked back toward him.

He hesitated and looked around, trying to act casual but almost afraid. We walked to a nearby men's room. It was unoccupied, so we locked the door. It was the first chance I had to get a good look at him.

The kid was twenty-one, maybe twenty-tree. He had shocking red hair and eyebrows to match. His face was even redder. His features were regular in a redhead sort of way. He was clean-cut and might've been good-looking except for a spray of freckles that studded his forehead and nose like cloves on a ham.

I appraised him rather carefully without appearing too interested. He stuck a pudgy hand into the inner breast pocket of his wine-colored uniform and pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He put one in his mouth and lit up to relieve the tension. This gave him assurance. With his other hand he unconsciously fingered a wide Windsor knot set in the middle of a wide-spread collar. He had something on his mind and I wondered how much it would cost.

"You're working here now, huh?" he asked.

"Partly, I'm on retainer."

"I could –uh –could sort of help you out."

"Speak up. I'm in a hurry."

"Well, I thought since we're both working here together I could –well, sort of give you a hand."

"Information?"

"Yeah, I've been here a long time. I know a lot of dirt. I could tell you a lot of background stuff that's plenty hot."

"I'm listening," I said. He grinned and walked to a stall, flicking his ashes into the toilet. He returned and looked at the two crushed dollar bills in my open hand. His gaze drifted up to me. He just looked. I felt like a piker. I searched around in my pockets and made it an even five.

"I don't want your dough. –I just want to tell you the dame in 408 knows something about the guy the cops want."

"You mean the mystery guest on the elevator? That's withholding information."

"Jesus, Taylor," he shrugged, "I just don't want to get mixed up in this."

"Why come to me? I'm not on the case."

"That's just it. If I told the cops, they'd twist it around and put me on the spot."

"Then you think this guy knocked off Burton?"

"I didn't say that!" He looked about the room to make sure the walls weren't closing in on him. Then he wet his lower lip and said, "I don't know who did Burton in, but I think I know why."

"Okay, why?" I bit.

He walked to the stall, tossed his cigarette in and flushed. He turned standing there for a moment and ran his hand through his wavy red locks. With all the aplomb of an actor about to deliver a well-timed punch line, he said, "You want to know what I know?"

I didn't move, didn't say a thing. He looked disappointed at my lack of concern. He started to fidget.

"Yeah, if it's worth knowing," I said.

The kid looked exasperated. "Jesus, Taylor, you're stupid." Suddenly he got excited. "There was a shakedown –a big payout. And Burton was in it up to his neck. Hell, how do you think he lives high and got that new Cadillac?"

"Who else was in on it?" But Eddie was reluctant to say more than he was sure of, and he didn't want to falsely finger anyone. I glanced at my watch. It was getting late and I craved dinner, a shower and relaxation.

"Okay, Eddie, thanks for wising me up," I said, as I walked out the bathroom doorway.