

MACMILLAN READERS

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**ELEMENTARY LEVEL**

M. R. JAMES

Room 13  
*and Other Ghost Stories*

Retold by Stephen Colbourn



**MACMILLAN**

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## ROOM 13

Viborg is a city in Denmark. It is an old city, but it has only a few old buildings. A great fire destroyed most of the old town in 1726.

Mr Anderson was writing a book on the history of Denmark. He went to Viborg in 1891. He wanted to study the history of the town.

He stayed in an old building in Viborg – The Golden Lion Inn. The inn was nearly 350 years old.

Anderson asked the landlord for a large room. The landlord of The Golden Lion showed him two rooms – room number 12 and room number 14. There were three large windows in each room. The windows looked onto the street. Anderson chose room number 12.

In the evening, Anderson went downstairs for supper. He saw a blackboard. The names of all the guests were written on the blackboard. Anderson saw that the inn was full. There were no empty rooms. Anderson noticed that there was no room number 13.

Thirteen is an unlucky number. Many people do not want to stay in a room with an unlucky number.

When Anderson went upstairs to bed, he tried to unlock his door. It did not open. Then he saw that he had made a mistake. It was the wrong room. The number on the door was number 13.

He heard someone moving inside the room.

'I'm very sorry,' he said and went to the door of room number 12.

Perhaps the servants sleep in room 13, Anderson thought. He decided to ask the landlord about it the next day.

Anderson lit the oil-lamp and looked round. Room number 12 looked smaller by lamplight. Anderson was tired. He went to bed.

In the morning, Anderson went to the Town Hall. He wanted to study the town records. Anderson read many very old papers. The oldest records were from the sixteenth century.

There were some letters from the Bishop of Viborg, dated 1560. The Bishop had owned three or four houses in the city. He had rented a house to a man called Nicolas Francken.

The townspeople of Viborg did not like Nicolas Francken. Some people wrote to the Bishop to say that Francken was a bad man. They said that Francken was a magician. They wanted Francken to leave the city.

The Bishop said that Nicolas Francken had done nothing wrong. He did not believe that Francken was a magician.

It was time for the Town Hall to close. As Anderson was leaving, the town clerk spoke to him.

‘I see you are reading about the Bishop and Nicolas Francken,’ the clerk said. ‘I am interested in them. But I do not know where Francken lived. Many of the town records were burnt in the great fire of 1726.’

Anderson thanked the clerk and went back to The Golden Lion. He wanted to ask the landlord about room number 13, but the landlord was busy.

Anderson went upstairs and stopped outside the door of number 13. He heard someone inside the room. The person was walking around and talking in a strange voice.

Anderson went to his own room. He decided that number 12 was too small. He decided to ask the landlord for a large room. Also, he was angry because his suitcase was

missing. It had been on a table beside the wall. Both the table and the suitcase had disappeared. Perhaps the landlord had moved the suitcase to a store-room. Anderson wanted it back.

It was too late to call the landlord. Anderson went to the window and lit a cigarette.

He looked out of the window. There was a tall house on the opposite side of the street. The lamp was behind him. He saw his shadow on the wall of the house opposite. The person in room 13 was also standing at the window. Anderson saw a second shadow on the wall of the house opposite.

This second shadow was strange. The person in room 13 was wearing a tall, pointed hat. Also, the light from room 13 was red. The light was the colour of blood.

Anderson opened the window and put his head outside. He tried to see the person in the next room. He saw the sleeve of a long, white coat – that was all. The person in room 13 suddenly moved away from the window. The red light went out.

Anderson finished his cigarette. He left the ashtray on the window ledge. Then he turned out the lamp and went to bed.

Next morning, the maid brought hot water to the room. Anderson woke up and remembered his suitcase.

‘Where is my suitcase, please?’ he asked.

The maid laughed and pointed. The suitcase was on the table beside the wall. It was exactly where Anderson had left it.

He noticed another strange thing. His ashtray was on the *middle* window-ledge. He clearly remembered smoking his cigarette by the end window – next to number 13.

He finished dressing and decided to visit his neighbour in



*He tried to see the person in the next room.*

room 13. He was surprised when he went to the door of the next room. The next room was number 14! Anderson was frightened. Was he going mad?

After breakfast, he went to the Town Hall and read more of the old papers. He found only one more letter from the Bishop about Nicolas Francken. A group of townspeople had tried to make Francken leave Viborg. They had gone to Francken's house, but Francken had disappeared. The Bishop wrote that no one knew where Francken had gone. That was the end of the matter.

That evening, Anderson spoke to the landlord of The Golden Lion Inn.

'Why is there no room 13 in the inn?' he asked.

'Many people won't sleep in a room number 13,' the landlord replied. 'They say it's unlucky.'

'Then who is in your room number 13?' asked Anderson.

'There isn't a room number 13,' the landlord said. 'Your room is next to room number 14.'

'Of course,' said Anderson. 'I must have made a mistake. Would you like to come up to number 12 for a glass of brandy and a cigar?'

'I'd like to very much,' said the landlord.

They went upstairs together. They went past room number 10 and room number 11 to reach number 12.

The landlord looked at the inside of number 12.

'This room looks very small,' he said.

Anderson poured two glasses of brandy. Both men lit cigars.

Anderson opened the window to let out the smoke. There was a red light and a shadow on the wall of the house opposite. The light came from number 13. The shadow was dancing wildly, but there was no noise.

Anderson sat down to drink his brandy. He wanted to tell the landlord about the strange things he had seen. Suddenly a terrible noise came from the next room.

‘Is that a cat?’ asked Anderson. ‘Or is there a madman in the room next door?’

‘It’s Mr Jensen,’ said the landlord. ‘He often stays in room 14. The poor man must be ill.’

A loud knock sounded on the door of Anderson’s room. Suddenly a man opened the door and came in.

‘Please stop that terrible noise,’ the man said.

‘Mr Jensen!’ the landlord said. ‘We thought you were making the noise!’

The three men looked at each other for a moment. Then they went out quickly into the corridor. The noise was coming from the door of room number 13!

The landlord banged on the door and turned the handle. The door was locked.

‘I’ll bring men to break the door down,’ the landlord shouted and ran down the stairs.

Jensen and Anderson stood outside number 13. The noise inside the room became louder and wilder.

‘I want to tell you something strange,’ Jensen said to Anderson. ‘My room has three windows in the day and only two at night. Perhaps you think I am mad?’

‘Good Lord! My room is the same!’ said Anderson. ‘My room looks smaller at night than during the day.’

The door of number 13 opened suddenly and an arm came out. The arm was thin and covered in grey hairs. The fingernails were long and dirty.

Anderson shouted and pulled Jensen away from the door. The arm disappeared and the door closed. The sound of mad laughter came from number 13.