

ROBERT PIMM

THE TWO ROOMS

"HOTEL STORIES" NO. 2



THE TWO ROOMS

Robert Pimm

About the Author

Born in England, raised in Africa, Robert Pimm is a graduate of Cambridge University and a former writer for the Financial Times. He lives in Vienna. You can read more about him at his [writing website](#) and follow him on Twitter [@RobertPimm](#).

The *Hotel Stories* are set in luxury hotels. They feature the world's most brilliant, unpredictable and occasionally homicidal hotel manager, known as Ms N to guarantee her anonymity; and her beautiful but naïve ally, Tatiana.

"Charming, fun and fast-paced, *The Hotel Stories* bring Pimm's wit and vigour to that most difficult of literary forms, the short story" – Matthew Parris.

Edmund de Waal on Robert Pimm's [Blood Summit](#), a political thriller set in Berlin: "Utterly gripping – I devoured it".

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Author's note

The first seven *Hotel Stories* are in chronological order. *Britches*, *The Two Rooms* and *The Swedish Woman* take place in a luxury hotel in the historic capital of Tatiana's beautiful but economically not yet fully developed homeland. The fourth, *The White Blouse*, is set in another country in the same region. *Gents* takes place in a resort hotel in Florida; and *Ask for Scarlett* and *The Three Heads* in an Ultra-Platinum branded super-luxury establishment in the remotest, wildest and ruggedest corner of Tatiana's country. None of these locations, for obvious reasons, can be identified.

I apologise for the occasional grammatical errors which creep into Tatiana's narrative voice, particularly in the earlier stories. Tatiana was a keen and brilliant student in her small village far from the historic capital of her beautiful homeland; but her school was, sadly, starved of funds. As the *Hotel Stories* proceed, Tatiana's English improves, although she is hampered by the fact that few of the international staff who work in her hotel chain are native English speakers themselves.

To my parents

12.34

‘I’m not moving, Tatiana. That’s final.’

Mr Burke is a tall, dark-haired man in a designer denim jacket with subtle stubble and a deep, melodious voice. He is achingly good-looking and he knows it.

‘Unfortunately, you are booked to move out at 10 a.m. today. All our rooms are full this evening.’

‘I want to speak to the General Manager.’ That lovely voice again. I wish he would use it to say something else.

‘Yes, sir. I am afraid the General Manager is not available right now. But if you would like to speak to the Hotel Manager I will be happy to arrange that.’ I smile my thousand-watt smile.

‘Whoever. But I’m not moving out of my room.’

‘I am calling the Hotel Manager now.’ I wish I could tell Mr Burke about the imminent arrival of our morally irreproachable Prime Minister Kaya and the fact that even if Mr Burke were not being awkward, the hotel would already be one room overbooked. But of course, I cannot tell him any of this.

‘So... I don’t see this manager you promised. I don’t pay five-star rates to wait for a receptionist.’

Mr Burke sticks his hands in his pockets and turns his back on me, leaning the elbows of the denim jacket on the counter and looking out at the lobby. It’s a fine lobby, with a thirty-metre water feature and a sushi bar with a Michelin star. But I know he is turned his back to indicate his disgust with me and the service I am providing.

In fact, he is trying to humiliate me.

But this is OK. I am trained to stay calm.

I keep smiling at his back and look around for any other customers who need help. The first thing I see is two men in dark suits moving towards the counter. The second thing is the Hotel Manager gliding into view from the Business Centre on the other side of the lobby.

The two dark suits are nearly at the counter. They are walking stiffly, as though the fabric of the suits is too rigid to be able to move properly. I turn towards them and try out the smile again.

‘Yes, sir, how may I help you?’

‘It must be pork,’ the first man says. ‘Tonight. Anything else is not acceptable.’

This problem is an easy one for me because I have explained it to customers many times.

‘I understand your preference,’ I say brightly. ‘But unfortunately, the Ministry of Agriculture has banned all pork products following the health scare last month. There is no pork available in the country. If our hotel were to import or serve pork products, we would be breaking the law.’

The second man looks at me as if I am an idiot. In fact, he looks at me with such contempt that I wonder if I am, in fact, an idiot and have simply never noticed up to now.

‘You do not understand. Your hotel is arranging a banquet tonight for the birthday of our patron, Mr Dolgov. For this we are paying you eight hundred dollars a cover, excluding the drinks, which will include Chateau Petrus and Dom Perignon, all sourced from your cellars. Mr Dolgov agreed personally with the hotel owner, his friend Ms Sofia, that we would hold this event here. Ms Sofia assured Mr Dolgov that this would be the best birthday of his life. Yet you are now telling me that the pork for the main dish, which we ordered at Mr Dolgov’s express request two months ago, is not available. You will find some pork.’

Behind the two men in suits I see that the Hotel Manager, whose name is Ms N, is heading for Mr Burke. Ms N is from a large European country which is rich in talent but which has not yet provided a General Manager for any hotel in our chain, and everyone is expecting she will be promoted to GM any moment. She started off working Reception like me. She still helps out sometimes when things are busy. She

is short, even in the high heels she always wears in the hotel, and she always has an inquisitive expression, as if she is figuring out how to solve some problem. Maybe she always is. That is her job, solving problems. Ms N is the best problem-solver in the world.

I want to be like her.

Ms N has identified Mr Burke as an unhappy customer. She walks up to him and stops close enough to engage but not so close she has to peer up at him. She has amped up the inquisitive look with a hint of a smile, so that she looks as if she is fascinated to meet him. I see he has clocked that she is a person of power. Already he has taken his elbows off the counter.

‘Unfortunately,’ I begin to say to the two men in suits, ‘we cannot serve pork tonight in this hotel or else – ’

‘Girl.’ The second dark suit is shaking his head and has raised his voice. ‘Do you think I am an idiot?’

‘No sir, of course I do not.’

‘Do you think I do not know that if Mr Dolgov and the owner of this hotel wish to serve pork, there will be pork?’

I nod, distracted by a commotion at the front door. A gang of security gorillas with ear-wires and square coats has spilled in from the street and is attempting to spread out into the lobby. This means that Prime Minister Kaya is about to arrive, with his delegation of forty negotiators, note-takers and baggage-carriers.

The gorillas seem to be looking for trouble and have found it. They are trying to push out of the way a line of journalists and TV cameras whose position Ms N agreed with the journalists about one hour ago. The journalists, who include a prize-winning TV investigative hot-shot who has been making an expose of the life of our morally irreproachable Prime Minister, do not like being pushed.

‘Yes, Mr Burke, how may I help you?’ I hear Ms N say.

‘I am a Platinum Megastar member of this hotel,’ Mr Burke replies, ‘and I am not prepared to be treated like this.’

‘Pork is a must-have,’ the second dark suit says to me.

‘We have permission to stand here,’ the prize-winning journalist is shouting as a security man pushes him.

I see that a short, swarthy man wearing a black polo-neck under a formal suit has slipped between the security gorillas and is scurrying towards the counter.

A couple of bell-boys have appeared pushing two trolleys loaded with matching Louis Vuitton luggage. The owners of the luggage, a flamboyant Swiss gay couple who have been staying at the hotel for a month, have materialised at the counter ready to check out. They are chatting happily and seem oblivious to their surroundings.

Things are looking busy, I think.

Ms N is looking Mr Burke in the eye and nodding calmly. But I know for a fact that she is logging everything which is happening in the lobby because her left eyebrow is slightly raised. I see her say a few words to Mr Burke, take a deep breath and smile. Then Mr Burke is turning around and sloping off towards the lobby lounge, wiggling his fine buns in his tight chinos as if he owns the place.

Ms N turns to me.

‘Thank you, Tatiana,’ she says. ‘Please can you check out Ms Feuchtwangler and Ms Cladders?’ She smiles at the gay couple, who beam back. Then she turns to the two dark suits. ‘Let me make you an appointment with the Food and Beverages Director,’ she says. Without waiting for a response, she whips out her telephone and talks for a moment, then she pockets the phone and nods at them in a way which signals *all sorted*. ‘There,’ she says. ‘He will see you for a private meeting in the Platinum Megastar Lounge at six o’clock precisely.’

She hands each of them one of the shiny metallic vouchers which grant access to the Platinum Megastar Lounge on the 20th floor.

‘A private meeting?’ The first dark suit leers at her slyly, as if she has proposed something indecent.

‘The Platinum Megastar Lounge?’ The second dark suit is actually standing up taller at the thought of gaining access to a venue of such fabled exclusivity.

‘But you guarantee there will be pork?’ the first dark suit says.

‘The Food and Beverages Director will arrange everything to your satisfaction,’ Ms N says. She turns crisply away towards the swarthy man in the black polo-neck.

‘Theo, darling, lovely to see you, how is the Prime Minister?’ she says, and hugs him to her for a second as she brushes her cheek against his. I notice that Theo places one hairy hand on her right buttock as she does so but she seems not to notice and steps back, smiling her fascinated smile. ‘I know exactly what you need and all arrangements are made,’ she says. ‘But I think we need to discuss this in my office, no? Perhaps I could offer you a glass of wine there, in ten minutes. As soon as I have sorted out these troublesome journalists.’

Theo grins with such immense self-satisfaction that pure smugness seems to come welling out of the top of his black polo-neck. ‘Your office,’ he smiles. ‘A glass of wine. I will be there.’

I am busy adding up the astonishing list of extras on the bill of Ms Feuchtwangler and Ms Cladders, but I can see in the lobby that one of the bell-boys has summoned Nigel, the Duty Security Manager, who has arrived with two assistants to try and calm the situation between the journalists and the gorillas who are accompanying the Prime Minister. Next to me, one of the other receptionists is trying to secure my attention to deal with a call from the Canadian Embassy about a cancelled booking for the Sapphire Ballroom this evening; I tell her to say that we will call back in a few minutes.

The fact that our morally irreproachable Prime Minister himself is going to appear any moment makes sorting out the fracas a matter of urgency. In fact, I cannot see how Ms N can restore order in time. Nigel has legs like tree-trunks and a neck to match and his men have physically separated the journalists and the gorillas. But Nigel is not a diplomat, and it looks as if a fist-fight may break out at any moment. I smile to myself and wonder if Nigel has considered calling on Kyoko, our Japanese Executive Chef, who has a terrifying selection of ultra-sharp Chroma kitchen blades and a filthy temper. But clearly Nigel so far rates the potential unpredictability of engaging Kyoko as far riskier than any danger the gorillas may represent and I can see no sign of her.

While I am wondering what Ms N can possibly do, I am surprised to see her ignore all of them and walk across the lobby towards the main entrance. She stops right inside the front door, stands up straight but tiny on her high heels, and

straightens her exquisitely-pressed skirt to indicate that she is ready to meet a VVIP, or a Distinguished Visitor as we are learning to call them.

Ms N's authority and calm radiate across the hotel lobby like the shock-waves of some powerful weapon. For an instant the journalists and security gorillas forget about each other and turn, like her, to face the entrance. In that same instant, the bell-boys haul open the door and Prime Minister Kaya enters. Ms N takes a step forward and holds out her hand to greet him. From where I am standing with my hands on the computer keyboard behind the reception desk, I cannot see her face. But I know that she is looking at him inquisitively, with a hint of a smile.

I wish I could be like Ms N.

16.05

I am showing a customer on a map the way to the entertainment district of the city when I see Ms N approaching the counter. She talks to the other receptionists until I have finished my explanations and then invites me into the back office for a quiet word.

'Yes, Ms N,' I say. 'How may I help you?'

'Tatiana. As you are in charge of reception this evening, I wish you to be aware of several things. The first is that the gentleman from the Prime Minister's entourage, Theo, wished to discuss with me an issue of the utmost sensitivity.'

'Yes, Ms N,' I say.

'Strictly for your own information, the issue is that Prime Minister Kaya has a predilection for a certain type of service which this hotel does not provide, and of which I personally do not approve.' Ms N looks at me steadily, her face set.

'I understand, Ms N.'

'At 1900 a woman called Ms Gentle will arrive to check into Suite 1618. This room is of course in a different part of the hotel from the Prime Minister and his delegation. The room has been reserved, and paid for, by Theo. It is for the use of Ms Gentle. I have a copy of her ID here.' Ms N slides across the counter a photocopied page from a passport. It shows an attractive blonde woman with strong features and glasses, like a company executive. 'At 2000 the Prime Minister will visit

Suite 1618 for a period of between five minutes and one hour.’ Ms N frowns.

‘Probably closer to five minutes. It is vital for the Prime Minister to avoid any kind of publicity for this, uh, transaction. Theo tells me that a number of attempts have been made to expose the Prime Minister’s private life, including through the use of false identities. Please make sure, therefore, that the IDs match when you give Ms Gentle the room key. Everything clear?’

‘Everything clear, Ms N.’

‘Second thing. Mr Burke, the gentleman who has refused to move out of his room, is still in this hotel. I have offered to find him a room in an alternative hotel, but he has declined this. Unfortunately, he has followed up my initial goodwill gesture of a complimentary drink with several more drinks. He is now so inebriated that he is annoying the other guests.’

‘This is unfortunate,’ I say, ‘because we are already one room overbooked. If Mr Burke is refusing to move out, we are two rooms short. Our morally irreproachable Prime Minister and his party have block-booked forty rooms – ’

‘Forty-one, including their additional guest.’ Ms N’s face is impassive.

‘So we have nil flexibility. I have also received a request this afternoon from four of the TV crews who are covering the Prime Minister’s press conference at 1800 about why he supports harsher penalties for prostitution. The TV crews want a room in which to store equipment and file their stories. Also – ’ I wonder whether I should tell her this ‘ – the Canadian Embassy has phoned to say that, with regret, they must cancel the event in the Sapphire Ballroom because the guest of honour has a bereavement. They have offered to pay, but because they are good customers I have waived the cancellation fee. Unfortunately, this will hit our revenues.’

‘Yes. I know we are two rooms short.’ Ms N is wearing her inquisitive look. ‘And you made the right decision with the Canadians, although this will cost us money. But our main problem is that Mr Burke, our friend in the denim jacket, has insulted our Executive Chef, Kyoko.’

‘He insulted Kyoko?’

‘Yes. He ordered sushi from the lobby bar. This is of course Kyoko’s genius, for which we have received the Michelin star. Mr Burke placed a big, complicated order

including many speciality dishes. Kyoko, who was engaged personally in the preparation of the food, brought the order to him personally, set out the dishes, and began to explain the individual items. Unfortunately, Mr Burke told her to fuck off.'

I look at Ms N. I know my mouth is hanging open because I cannot imagine anyone telling Kyoko any unpleasant thing and surviving for more than five seconds.

'But this is only the beginning,' Ms N says. 'Kyoko was not pleased by this. But she thought perhaps she had not understood him because her English is not too good. So she continued to explain her art: the fresh ingredients we fly in from Japan, the special way she is steaming the rice, and so forth.'

Ms N falls silent.

'Then what?' I ask.

'Then the customer takes one *Norimaki*, bites into it, and tells Kyoko that her food tastes like shit. He spits out the *Norimaki* on the carpet, then turns over the tray, together with the *Nigiri*, *Temaki* and *Oshizushi*, and tells her he refuses to pay.'

'Is he still alive?' I try to smile, but actually I am worried.

'Yes. He is still in the lobby lounge, and he is still drinking. Kyoko of course has told me she is unhappy and would like to send in Nigel to throw him out. But I have told her he is a Platinum Megastar member and our options are limited. Also, I have instructed her not to kill him in the lobby lounge as this will be bad for the image of the hotel. Kyoko has told me she understands this and has reserved the Lotus Massage Room in the 10th Floor Spa to undertake some anger management meditation. I think this is a better outcome than the alternative.' Ms N smiles. 'But if you see her approaching the lobby lounge, please call me at once. Especially if she is carrying one of her Chroma knives.'

'And what about Mr Burke?' I say. 'We still need his room.'

'Yes,' Ms N says. 'But some of today's guests are not due to check in until 10 p.m. Perhaps we will have a cancellation by then.'

'Yes, Ms N.' I look at her again and admire her calm and her problem-solving abilities. But she is not finished yet.

'Unfortunately, the Dolgov banquet is still unresolved,' she says. 'Of course, my reference to the Food and Beverages Director was a delaying tactic. The Food and

Beverages Director offered our friends in the dark suits a mouth-watering selection of non-pork delicacies. But, as I feared, they are not satisfied. Now Mr Dolgov himself has spoken to the hotel owner, our own Ms Sofia, who is indeed his personal friend. Ms Sofia has spoken to the General Manager, who as you know is on holiday in Bali. The GM has spoken to me. If we do not serve pork at the banquet, the owner will ask our HQ in Atlanta for a new GM and management team.'

'I know a place where we can buy pork in this city,' I say.

'Thank you, Tatiana. But this is a question of ethics. This hotel chain does not break the law. If we break it so we can serve pork, what will we do next week? Also, and perhaps more important, I cannot allow myself to be threatened in this way. This, too, is a matter of principle. I have agreed with the GM that we shall stand firm, and the GM has explained this to Ms Sofia. Unfortunately, Mr Dolgov is not happy.'

'What will you do?' I ask.

'We will have to serve them the best meal we can,' Ms N says, 'and hope that they are satisfied.'

'And what about the camera crews?'

'Please ask them to use the Cigar Bar,' she says.

'That is very crowded,' I say. 'We have a group of Russian businessmen who are watching the ice-hockey championship on cable TV. There is no spare room at all.'

Ms N looks me in the eye. 'Tell them to use the Cigar Bar,' she says. 'If there is any problem they should come and speak to me.'

'Would you like me to speak to Kyoko?' I say. 'Perhaps I can try to calm her down.'

Ms N smiles. 'Tatiana, darling, you are wonderful. You have attention to detail. You have the personal touch. You have a grasp of strategy. Keep it up and you will have a great future in our hotel chain. But think carefully. Do you think it would be safe for you to go and see Kyoko when she has been told by a customer that her *Norimaki* taste like shit?'

I think about this for a moment. Then I slowly shake my head. 'One day, Ms N, I would like to be like you.'

'One day, Tatiana, you will be much, much better.'

Then she turns and goes click, click, click across the lobby, her high heels sending a message of power right through the hotel.

1900

Ms Gentle arrives exactly on time. My first impression is that she is quite an ordinary-looking woman compared with the ladies who are sometimes seen in the lobbies of five-star hotels. But when she comes closer I see that I am wrong. Her face is finely structured and behind the spectacles her eyes are sparkling. When she hands over her ID she looks at me in the eye as if I matter.

I am so impressed by the interpersonal skills of Ms Gentle that I want to ask her if she enjoys what she does for a living, but of course that would be unprofessional and inappropriate. Instead I check the ID carefully against the photocopy I have been given and study Ms Gentle herself. There is no doubt that she is the woman I am expecting. I hand back the ID and the card-key to Suite 1618.

‘Thank you, Ms Gentle,’ I say. Then, by accident, I add, ‘good luck.’ At once I feel awful because this, too, is unprofessional and inappropriate.

But Ms Gentle does not seem to mind. For a moment a beautiful smile appears on her face and she puts one finely-manicured hand on the counter. ‘Why, thank you Tatiana,’ she says. ‘I need all the luck I can get.’ She puts her head a little to one side and takes off her spectacles for a moment. ‘Perhaps today’s my lucky day.’ Then she puts the glasses back on, the smile disappears and she walks across the lobby towards the lifts.

For fifteen minutes after the arrival of Ms Gentle the lobby is quiet. Guests arrive and check in. I am still fretting that we are two rooms down, because some of our late-arriving guests are repeat customers who I do not want to bounce into other hotels. The Marketing Director comes over to grumble to me about letting the Canadians off too lightly, but I am able to tell him that Ms N has endorsed my decision. Everything seems quiet in the hotel. But I know that beneath the surface there is a lot of pressure waiting to explode.

At 1915 I see Ms N arrive in the lobby. She is always cruising around looking for problems to sort out, so at first I do not pay her too much attention. But then I see

that she has an unusual expression, less inquisitive than usual. More mischievous. She walks across to the reception counter.

‘Hello Tatiana, how are you?’

‘I am well, thank you Ms N. But we are still two rooms short and the Marketing Director is complaining about losing the business from the Canadians.’

‘We shall live with this. No cancellations yet?’

‘No cancellations.’

‘Well. It is time to start solving some problems. Is Mr Burke still drinking in the lobby lounge?’

‘Yes, Ms N. Shall I call Security?’

‘No, thank you, Tatiana. Please could you go to him and ask him politely to leave the hotel. If he refuses, I shall speak to him.’

‘Yes, Ms N.’

I am thinking of course that if Mr Burke has not left the hotel since 10 a.m. he is hardly likely to leave now, but I am confident in Ms N’s judgement, so I follow her instructions.

Mr Burke is sitting in a corner by the window and at first sight he does not look too bad. He has a glass of whisky in front of him and is cradling a tablet computer in his lap. When I get close I see that the tablet computer is showing a pornographic movie. I do not wish to look at the images which the tablet computer is displaying, but I am unable to avoid seeing that the movie shows a man doing something to a woman which she is not enjoying at all.

As I approach Mr Burke he looks up.

‘You’re the first bitch who tried to throw me out,’ he says.

‘Good evening, Mr Burke,’ I say. ‘Unfortunately, you must leave the hotel now.’

‘Is that so?’ He moves the screen of the tablet computer so that the images are facing me. ‘Do you know that I am a Platinum Megastar member?’

‘Yes, Mr Burke I do know that. But we have nil room availability. We have booked accommodation for you in another hotel. I have ordered a taxi.’

‘Do you know what I’d like to do to you?’ Mr Burke lifts up the tablet computer, where something is happening which I do not wish even to describe. ‘I’d like to do

this, for starters. Then I'll do the same with Ms N. Then perhaps the two of you together.'

I am trying not to look at the images on the computer screen and am feeling sick. I know I should summon Ms N, but I do not wish to expose her to this man. Then I feel a hand on my arm.

'Good evening, Mr Burke.' Ms N's voice is calm and professional. I turn, and see she is wearing her inquisitive face.

'You again,' Mr Burke says. 'Are you going to try and throw me out, now? Take a look at this, baby.' He holds up the tablet computer. 'How would you like to _ ,'

'Mr Burke.' Somehow, Ms N is still calm. 'I am pleased that you enjoy our hotel, although I must tell you that you may not use the lobby lounge wi-fi zone to view images which may be offensive to other customers. It is time for you to leave.'

'I'm not leaving.'

'I am sure that once you have seen what I am offering, you will leave. As you know, we have a number of amenities in this hotel which are reserved for our most valued customers.'

'Like me, you mean.'

'That is correct. Have you ever had a massage here, Mr Burke?'

'With no happy end?' Burke drains the rest of his whisky. 'Are you kidding?'

'We have a new massage therapist who offers a very special service,' Ms N says. 'I have booked you a complimentary treatment. Before you attend, you should go to your suite, take a shower, and change into the complimentary dressing gown, as the massage will be full-body.'

'Shower? Why the hell should I shower?'

'When you enter the room, please remove your dressing gown at once and tell the therapist what treatment you would like. Please be quite explicit as English is not her first language.'

'I'll tell her exactly what I want.' Burke is smiling in a way I do not like.

'She will appreciate this,' Ms N says. 'She is an oriental woman. You will find her in the Lotus Massage Room in the 10th Floor Spa.'

‘I like the Orientals.’ Burke lurches to his feet and leers at me. ‘I’ll do you later,’ he says. ‘I still got lots of juice.’

I say nothing as Mr Burke staggers off towards the lift, then follow Ms N back to reception.

‘Is that safe?’ I ask when he has gone. ‘Kyoko may still be in the Lotus Room.’

‘I know that she is there,’ Ms N says. ‘I just texted her to say that I am sending her a treat.’

‘What do you think she will do to him?’

‘I think she will have some ideas,’ Ms N says.

When we arrive back at reception it is just after 8 o’clock. The award-winning journalist is standing next to a tall, heavily-built man in a shiny suit who stinks of cigar smoke.

‘Hello, how may I help?’ Ms N says.

‘I’m from the ...’ the award-winning journalist says, naming a world-famous news channel. ‘Do you really have nowhere for the news crews to hang out? The Cigar Club is full of these guys – ’ he indicates the tall man in the shiny suit ‘ – having a good time and cheering on the ice-hockey. We need a quiet place to file our stories.’

‘Tatiana may be able to help you,’ Ms N says. She motions me to go behind the reception desk. ‘Suite 1618 has just come free. Could you issue a card-key, please, Tatiana?’

I look at her. Ms N is smiling her mischievous smile. I nod, and issue another copy of the card-key which I have already given to Ms Gentle. ‘Here it is,’ I say.

‘Could you give us a couple of spares?’ the award-winning journalist says. ‘There are eight of us altogether.’

‘I am afraid there has been some misuse of duplicate keys,’ Ms N says. ‘I suggest you make sure that all eight of you arrive and enter the room together. Then co-ordinate your movements after that.’

‘OK. I guess I should be grateful,’ the award-winning journalist says.

‘Yes,’ Ms N says. ‘I guess you should.’

The award-winning journalist takes the card-key and heads off towards the cigar club to collect his friends and go to Suite 1618. It is ten past eight.

‘What would you like me to do now?’ I ask Ms N.

‘I would like you to wait with me in the lobby,’ Ms N says.

For a while, we stand by the reception desk. Nothing much is happening. I want to ask Ms N how we should find our two additional rooms, but I feel confident she has a plan. I am also nervous that the two men in the dark suits will reappear to complain about the pork, but there is no sign of them.

At 2030 I see the lift doors open and a group of people spill out. I hear raised voices. It is Theo, the man in the black polo-neck, with four journalists. Theo is red in the face. He walks quickly towards the reception desk.

‘We would like to hire a conference room,’ he says. He looks at Ms N as if he is about to say something, but then he notices that the journalists are watching him. Ms N is wearing her inquisitive look. ‘The Prime Minister wishes to hold an additional press conference at nine-thirty. To explain the situation.’

‘Certainly, sir,’ I say. ‘What size room will you need?’

Theo shakes his head and sighs. ‘The largest one you have.’

‘That would be the Sapphire Ballroom,’ I say. ‘Unfortunately, there will be a short-notice supplement for us to prepare it by 2130.’

‘Just do it,’ Theo says.

Behind Theo I see another lift open. This time it is Ms Gentle. She, too, has four journalists in the lift with her. She looks magnificent: serene, smiling and beautiful. She, too, approaches the reception desk. She ignores Theo.

‘I would like to hire a room for a press conference.’ She nods at the journalists. ‘These gentlemen will pay.’

‘Certainly, madam,’ I say. ‘What size would you like?’

‘The biggest you have,’ one of the journalists says. He is smiling like a wolf. ‘Every journalist in town will be here.’

‘Our biggest room is already booked,’ I say.

‘If it’s for the Prime Minister’s press conference, we’ll take it after him,’ the journalist says. All the journalists look at Theo and Ms Gentle. Ms Gentle is looking happy. Theo is not.

‘How about an exclusive on the life story?’ one of the journalists says to Ms Gentle. ‘We’ll give you \$250,000.’

‘I’ll go to \$300,000,’ the second journalist says.

The journalists and Ms Gentle move away from the reception desk, discussing large sums of money. I see the lift doors open again, and my heart sinks. It is the two men in the dark suits. Both of them look angry. Both are walking in a mechanical way, as if their suits are still too tight.

‘I wish to speak to the manager about the pork,’ the first dark suit says.

I glance at Ms N. She nods imperceptibly.

‘The Hotel Manager is here,’ I say. ‘She will be pleased to assist you.’

‘Yes, sir, how may I help?’ Ms N says, as if she somehow will be able to magic up some legal pork.

‘I have a personal message from Mr Dolgov,’ the second suit says. Suddenly, for the first time, he smiles. ‘Mr Dolgov wishes me to tell you that he considers the sweet and sour pork prepared by this hotel the best he has ever tasted. He says the flavour is subtle yet tender. He says he will buy the hotel from Ms Sofia. When he does that, he will increase the salary of your chef to twice whatever you are paying him.’

‘Thank you,’ Ms N says. ‘Actually, Mr Dolgov’s banquet was prepared by our Executive Chef, Kyoko, who is a lady from Japan. I will pass on Mr Dolgov’s appreciation, and his offer. I am sure she will look forward to working with him.’

The second suit looks serious again. ‘But Mr Dolgov is not happy that you are pretending there is no pork available, then you are serving pork. This cause him unnecessary concern.’

‘That is because no pork is available,’ Ms N says. ‘For this hotel to serve pork would be breaking the law.’

The two suits look at each other and frown. Then one of them smiles. Then they are both smiling. They turn to Ms N.

‘No pork is available,’ says the first suit. ‘Of course. Because that would be illegal.’

‘So the meat you served to Mr Dolgov was not pork, even though it tasted like pork,’ the second suit says.

‘That is correct,’ Ms N says. ‘That meat was not pork.’

‘We understand,’ the first suit says. ‘We will tell Mr Dolgov that you fixed the problem in a very clever way. Perhaps he will recommend a bonus.’

‘If there are any bonuses, they should be for Kyoko,’ Ms N says. ‘She worked very hard to prepare the banquet for Mr Dolgov in good time. Maybe she will wish to buy herself some new Chroma knives.’

The two suits look at Ms N and nod. Then they walk back to the lift.

Ms N turns to me. ‘Thank you, Tatiana. Please can you tell Housekeeping to start making up Suite 1618. This room is now free. Also, they can clear out Mr Burke’s room. He will not be needing it tonight. This gives us the two rooms we need for our guests arriving later this evening.’

I look at Ms N. She is smiling her mischievous smile. She is good at solving problems. One day, I would like to be like Ms N.

A message from Robert Pimm

Thank you for reading *The Two Rooms*. I hope you enjoyed it. If you did, please [write a short review on Amazon](#). Reviews are gold-dust for writers.

If you'd like to read more about Ms N and Tatiana, [Seven Hotel Stories](#), available on Amazon in paperback and as a Kindle download, brings together the first seven of these tales.

The disclaimer: all the *Hotel Stories* are works of fiction. None of the hotel customers, alligators, tycoons, Lovely Lassies, ice-hockey players, border guards, Prime Ministers or other characters who appears in the works is based on anyone I've ever met, heard of, or seen on TV. Nor, by the way, are any of the police officers, journalists, diplomats, presidents, military types, terrorists, Janissaries, secret agents, people-traffickers or diamond merchants who people my novels.

You can read more about me and my writing [on my website](#).

Thanks again for reading.

Robert Pimm

Vienna, December 2020