

Hotel People

You think that you've met us. We've taken your bags. We've wheeled them to your rooms on luggage carts. We've opened your doors and delivered your breakfast. We know more about you than you can imagine, but you know so little about us.

We live in your hotels. Some better than others. You see us during the day. We are acting as your bellmen, valets, and concierges. You don't know that our own lives begin when you're all tucked in. Our lives are about the night, in secret rooms where we do as we please.

Our guests need not ever imagine us outside the roles we perform for them. We speak freely in our own spaces. We use our own language. We're filled with a very potent type of magic which they cannot possess or understand.

I live in an especially extravagant, historic five-star. Mine has thirty-eight floors. Formality is obligatory. Our interactions with hotel guests are not supposed to occur on a personal level. However, sometimes it just happens.

I remember one particular day. I was working at the front desk welcoming guests. A three-person family arrived. It was a man, a woman, and a little girl about five years old. The man and woman were well-traveled. They wore it. They spoke it. Exuding sophistication, they approached the desk knowingly.

"Hello," the woman said. "We're the Mojsons. We're delighted to be staying with you for this long weekend."

I typed their name into our computer files. Their account was flagged. They were special guests.

"Yes," I said, stretching my face into a wide smile. "I have you listed right here. Welcome back to the Fairwood. You'll be staying in Room 3808."

I handed Ms. Mojson two gleaming gold room keys that opened the door to our finest room. From the look on her face, it was clear that was exactly what she was expecting. I glanced over at their daughter, who was hanging back, looking at me behind the desk. The carved and gilded opulence all around her appeared to be closing in on her. She was trying to acclimate to her surroundings but she was overwhelmed. She regarded me as if I were a ferocious animal that might pounce.

“Is this your first time staying at a hotel?” I asked in the voice that my human costume provides me. It’s lower than my usual voice and much more pleasing. The little girl made a slight nod, keeping her distance.

Her father interjected as he looked right through me. “It’s her first time sleeping away from home. Come on, my dear. Let’s go on up to our room.”

The little girl was shaking. She scurried to her parents' side and stayed close to them all the way to the elevator. I would have waved at her, but her eyes were darting frantically about the space and she never looked back. Reluctantly, she stepped onto the elevator.

When a guest is uncomfortable in our world we are compelled to create comfort and a sense of well-being. We’re not built the same way as these humans. We are inherently programmed to make them feel the magic that is present within our realm. As the trio departed, my instincts were swirling. Ideas and feelings forming beneath my facade. My official shift ended, but I had more work to do. I had not yet fulfilled my purpose.

I waited until much later in the evening, when all the guests were tucked into their turned-down beds. I slipped back into my human costume and accessed one of the secret passageways that help keep us invisible. I commandeered a standard room service table, wheeling it to Room 3808. Upon arrival, I took a pinch of the bright purple powder from my

jacket pocket and sprinkled it onto the white tablecloth. The cloudy mist began to form into a plate of mini cakes, chocolate eclairs, a bowl of cookies, and chocolate-covered strawberries.

When the transformation was complete, it was very late. My human costume had reached its limit. It had been an extraordinarily long day, and I could no longer be contained. I was bursting through the seams.

There was no one in the hallway. I unfastened. What a relief to let myself out. I pressed the message button at their door to alert them to the delivery. As I did I felt the certain sensation that someone's eyes were upon me. I was too exposed. I bolted away.

I went to sleep deeply satisfied that night, imagining the little girl's excitement when she opened that door. She would most certainly know that this was all for her.

The next day was what I call splendiferous. Back in the lobby, I observed that a transformation had occurred within our midst. The imposing grandeur had taken on a sparkle. The little girl, as well.

I repeated the plan for the next two nights, wheeling decadence from one realm into the other. A chocolate fountain. A cotton candy bouquet. I was stealthy and timed it out perfectly but each time I was sure I felt eyes upon me.

At check-out time, that formerly frightened little girl bounced toward the desk. She ran her fingers along its edges and squinted to see her reflection in the shiny surfaces. Standing on her toes, she peered over the counter. She looked directly at me.

"Hello, Miss," I said, leaning forward to meet her eyes. "I see that you're checking out today. I hope you enjoyed your stay here with us."

Her eyes widened in recognition. Then I was sure she had seen beyond the masquerade.

She nodded. Then, I saw her glance back at her parents. They were caught up in something, speaking in hushed tones. She turned her face back toward me with some intensity.

“Thanks for making magic for me,” she whispered. “I didn’t know that anyone like you existed.”

We were there together. This little girl had seen me. Our worlds had intersected somehow inside the deep divide. She understood and someday she might even try to explain it to her parents, who will listen but never believe.

“We are everywhere,” I said.

Then, Mr. Mojson stepped forward to thank me for a most enjoyable stay. He handed me some cash and a bright purple note written in the crude handwriting of a small child. It thanked the staff for the “chokolats and cottin candy.” Beneath the text was something remarkable. There she had drawn a circle with a picture inside. It resembled a peephole in a door. The image took my breath away. It was my face inside the circle, and not the one I wear with my human costume. It was both startling and beautiful to see who I really was through her eyes. To have been truly seen.

The Mojsons will return. All these humans keep coming back. They arrive tired and anxious. They leave relaxed and rested. It is our magic that heals them. But back at home they will live without it. They simply reenter the very existence that drove them here in the first place.

Sometimes I wish that I could teach them. Sometimes I wish that they could see things. I taped the purple note inside of the desk drawer I open every day. A daily reminder of who I really am.

