

Hotel Babylon

Imogen Edwards-Jones & Anonymous

7am - 8am

It was a big night last night and, Jesus Christ, do I feel shit. I've got what sounds like roadworks going off in my head and a tongue like a shagpile carpet. I hadn't really intended to get pissed, but it was Michelle's leaving do so I couldn't really help myself. That's the thing about working in the luxury hotel business: you're surrounded by so much hedonism and debauchery that at the end of a long hard day at the coalface of the service industry you just want to get hammered.

We all ended up doing shots at Samantha's on Oxford Street. It's a hangout for hotel staff who want to drink long and late into the night. It's a well-known place, if you work in any of the big hotels in the capital. All you need to do is show your hotel ID card, and you're in. There were loads of us there last night to see Michelle on her way. Well, Michelle's a popular girl. She's been on reception with me for a couple of years, and she's leaving this place to go on to Claridge's. Or is it the Dorchester? She's told me many times, but I'm afraid I still can't quite remember.

Anyway, it was a good night. Plenty of gossip. James, head of purchasing, who is prone to filling old bottles of 1982 Château Rothschild with plonk to impress girls he takes home, disappeared with one of the waitresses. One of the maids was violently sick everywhere. But the best thing I heard was that one of the girls in housekeeping caught Michelle giving the manager, Adrian, a blowjob. Amazing. I tell you, if you knew Adrian you'd probably be even more shocked. He is one of those posh boys who came to us through the Savoy training scheme; all stripy shirts, cufflinks and citrus-smelling aftershave. The sort of bloke you would never expect to drop his trousers in a men's toilet on Oxford Street.

But then again, I have been working in hotels long enough now not to judge people on appearances. It's always the straights in suits who have cases full of rubber and porn mags; it's always the weird-looking blokes who just drink mineral water and go to bed early; and it's always the married women who want to sleep with the staff. But there is one thing they all have in common. There's one thing that absolutely everyone does when they come to a hotel: they steal. TV sets, teaspoons, ashtrays, bathrobes, drinks from the ludicrously named 'honour bar', KitKats, crisps, carpets, furniture, works of art. You get men who are shelling out £3,500 a night (not including breakfast) who will piss in a miniature bottle if it means saving them from coughing up for a Teacher's whisky from the mini bar.

Anyway, what is particularly appealing about Michelle's behaviour last night is that she's got to do her exit interview with Adrian later on today. The exit interview is normally one of those little sit-down chats where the manager, or personnel manager, goes through your strong and your weak points, telling you where you can improve, where you are good and where your particular talents lie. Oh, to be a fly on

the wall in that meeting! Roll on eleven o'clock. At least that is something to look forward to today.

It's a bit quiet in reception this morning as I walk in. My mate Ben, who is doing nights this week, is nowhere to be seen. I know I'm a couple of minutes late. It's 7.05 a.m. by the time I have hung up my coat in the staff cloakroom and walked back up the stairs. But he shouldn't have clocked off already. He is supposed to wait until I get here, to debrief me on what's been going on overnight, and then get himself off home.

'Oi, Derek,' I say to the doorman, who is looking a little the worse for a whole night sitting in his leather-padded chair. 'Any idea where that lazy git of a receptionist is?'

'What, Ben?' asks Derek.

'Yeah, Ben,' I nod.

'Have you tried in the back office?' he suggests.

'Of course.'

There is a small office behind reception where reservations make up the bills, receive faxes and deal with the ever-changing, ever-annoying occupancy plan on the computer. It is a claustrophobic place you try not to spend much time in during the day as it smells of instant coffee, stale biscuits and bad breath. At night, however, its long, flat desk doubles as a bed. Ben has been told off for kipping in the office before. His is the first face guests see when they come into the hotel. And this is a luxury hotel where rooms go from anything from £200 to £2,000 a night. The face they are supposed to see should exude luxury; it shouldn't be some crinkled, slept-in piece of shit with stapler marks on its cheek. I walk in and, sure enough, he is there. Flat on his back, his mouth wide open, catching flies.

'Oi, Ben! You bastard! Wake up!' I shout.

Jesus, does the man jump.

'What? Shit!' he says, leaping to attention like someone's shoved a cattle prod up his backside. 'Sorry? Oh, God, it's you,' he mumbles, running his hands through his lank brown hair, looking relieved that he has not been properly busted. 'I only dozed off for about five minutes. I thought I'd catch a few before the red-eye guests start coming in from Heathrow.'

'Yeah, right.'

'Honestly, man, I haven't been here long,' he protests, brushing down his rather shiny suit. 'Anyway, what was Michelle's thing like?'

I tell him about Michelle and Adrian and he starts to laugh. He thinks it's the funniest thing he's heard all week. 'D'you think he'll talk her through her technique?'

Give her marks out of ten?' He says that it's almost worth staying up to see her come in at eleven for her exit meeting, and asks me to phone him later with all the details.

He tells me he had a quiet night. Nothing too heavy that he couldn't handle. There were a couple of drunks left in the bar who were a bit difficult to shift, and some girl who walked through at three a.m. swinging a plastic carrier bag full of vomit like it was the latest fashion accessory. But other than that, he says, I'll have to ask Derek where he thinks the hookers might be when it comes to checking out, or chucking out, later. He says he wasn't really paying attention. But we both know that he was either in the bar serving himself a few vodka shots to keep him going or he was flat on his back in the office. I smile. It is annoying being on split shifts with Ben, as he always does the bare minimum and seems to get away with it. Actually, it is more than annoying - it really pisses me off. Today more than most, I suppose, because I am so hung over.

'Anything else I need to know?' I ask Ben as I play with the complimentary mints on the counter and click my free hotel pen.

'Not really,' says Ben. 'Except I gather there's some Yank coming in today. A Texan.' He grins. 'Chink, chink, chink.'

'Oh, right,' I say, perking up a bit.

'Oh yes.' Ben smiles, rubbing his hands together. 'Everyone loves a Texan.'

'I'll see you later,' I say to him, giving him a small shove on his way.

'Yeah,' he replies, pulling up the collar on his coat.