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People Who Travel Are Always Fugitives

by Sandra Banks

Paul drove slowly into the large carpark of the Hilton Hotel on Junction 4 of the M4. He was quite tired. The lads had managed to stuff everything into the van but it was heavy and unpredictable to drive. Somewhat reluctantly, he had driven all the way in the slow lane. He would be going back empty tomorrow and could travel as fast as he liked. He was happy to have arrived.

He parked the van close to the main entrance, pulled out his bag and walked in. The glass doors opened as he approached. He liked that. The woman behind the desk smiled at him.

“How can I help you?” she asked against the background of deep carpets and soft music.

“I have booked a room – Paul Smith.”

“Welcome, Mr. Smith. I have found your reservation. Would the second floor at the back suit you?”

“That’s fine.”

“All our rooms have queen size beds, ensuite facilities, a drinks bar and television. Meals are served in the bar. She gestured to the large bar and tables running along the front of the building. Breakfast is served there as well.

Would you like to leave an impression of your card with us. You can bill your purchases to your room and avoid the need to check out in the morning?"

Paul handed over his credit card.

She handed him the electronic key and he strode away to the lifts. The room was nice and spotlessly clean. Free water, coffee and biscuits attracted him. He made his coffee and phoned the office. Jane had nothing for him but reminded him the firm would pay for his meals but not alcohol. He smiled then dialed his home.

"Just got here. No probs. How are things at your end?"

He heard shouting and whining in the background.

"Mad as usual. We all miss you."

"Me too. I've got to go. Love you."

Paul had a long, hot shower and used the body cream. He changed his clothes. He had brought a smart pair of tapered jeans and posh white shirt. He looked at himself in the mirror approvingly and walked down to the bar.

As he expected, there were some people sitting at the tables but a small group of men were standing at the bar. He ordered a lager, took a sip and turned towards the group. It was so easy to talk to people. The hotel was an oasis in the journey. He would spend a happy hour or two chatting and drinking with total strangers, order a burger and retire for the telly. The only decision he had to make was whether to pay for the adult film.

When he woke in the morning his bill had been pushed under the door as had the Daily Mail. He opened the bill and smiled. As he expected, all the drinks were listed as "Beverages". Perfect! He took a deep breath and prepared to challenge the M4 again.