

A Night Clerk's Puzzle

by

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INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

The NIGHT CLERK (20s) is sleepy, jaded, and bored. He's staring at the screen of his phone, playing some kind of game.

The door opens and a STRANGER (30s) walks in. The night clerk raises his eyes, but doesn't stand up. The stranger strides to the counter, and only when he firmly puts his hands on it, the night clerk gets up, against his will. The stranger is sweating and seems worried.

STRANGER

(in a hurry)

Hi, I need five rooms.

The night clerk stares at him, looks at the clock (it's 2:30 AM), and sighs. He types on the computer for a moment. The stranger keeps glancing toward the door.

NIGHT CLERK

You're lucky, we only have five rooms left. All on the same floor.

The stranger doesn't feel lucky at all.

STRANGER

On the contrary. This complicates things very much.

NIGHT CLERK

How come?

STRANGER

Well, it's not that simple. You see, as we speak, as we're wasting time if I might add, right outside that door, things are heating up. I got five people, all very unstable, to place for the night, and it's a pressing matter. They don't get along very well, to say the least. And if you don't hurry, trouble will happen out there, and therefore, in here too.

NIGHT CLERK

Alright, I'm not sure I'm following. Is that a threat or a request?

STRANGER

It's a problem. It's a problem that I'm sharing with you.

NIGHT CLERK

It's the middle of the night. We only have five rooms left. Why not take those?

STRANGER

Because, once again, it's not that simple. There are things to consider. You can't just place people anywhere, next to anyone, with anything in their hands. You place someone next to the wrong person, shit happens. You put someone with the wrong thing in their room, shit happens too.

NIGHT CLERK

Sure.

STRANGER

So there are constraints to respect, you know. For instance, the drug dealer can't be next to the cop, neither does the killer. And the idiot can't be in the middle because he makes too much noise. Oh Jesus, and now he's getting drunker and drunker as we speak, that's why he can't have the whiskey. You have to consider the objects they have with them, too.

NIGHT CLERK

(confused)

What?

STRANGER

(sigh)

Right now, the drug dealer has the pills, the impatient has the gun, the cop has the handcuffs, the killer has the knife, and the idiot has the whiskey. But it can't stay that way, you understand? We need to find another arrangement.

A pause.

NIGHT CLERK

Well good luck with that.

STRANGER

Excuse me?

NIGHT CLERK

You can come back when you got it figured out.

STRANGER

I believe it is part of your job to find solutions when clients come to you with problems. I see the problem, where's the solution?

NIGHT CLERK

But we don't... deal with that kind of thing. Well, we've never had to.

STRANGER

On your job application, under the word tasks, does it say anything about arguing with clients?

Silence -- the night clerk is really thinking.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

I was expecting an answer.

NIGHT CLERK

No. No, it doesn't say that.

STRANGER

And does it mention helping the clients with their problems?

NIGHT CLERK

Not in those words, but yeah.

STRANGER

Then you can start working on finding the solution to my problem, right?

PUSH IN on the night clerk's face.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

MANAGER'S P.O.V. - The night clerk is sitting in a chair across the desk. He really tried to look presentable.

MANAGER (O.S.)

And what are your strengths? What would make you the ideal night clerk?

NIGHT CLERK
 (unconvinced)
 I'm really good at...

SUPERIMPOSE a translucent image of a screen with a Tetris game on the night clerk's face -- he's thinking of that. The screen is dark pink/purple, and an L shape is moving to fit at the bottom left of the screen.

NIGHT CLERK (CONT'D)
 ...solving problems.

DISSOLVE TO:

BACK TO SCENE

NIGHT CLERK
 Sure.

STRANGER
Great. So what you have to keep
 in mind --

NIGHT CLERK
 I'm gonna need coffee.

The stranger hates him silently.

INT. HOTEL LUNCHROOM - NIGHT

They are standing in front of the coffee machine. The stranger is tapping his foot. The night clerk looks left and right, then glances up.

NIGHT CLERK
 I'm gonna make myself a cup of
 coffee now, is it alright?

STRANGER
 Well, by all means, go right ahead.
 Why the fuck you're asking me for?

NIGHT CLERK
 I wasn't talking to you.

STRANGER
 Oh, you were asking the machine
 permission?

NIGHT CLERK
(uncaring, starting the
machine)
The ghost.

STRANGER
The ghost?

NIGHT CLERK
Yeah. Because of the noise.

The stranger gives up. He keeps looking at his watch.

The coffee machine makes a weird, unsettling, and awkward
NOISE. The night clerk grabs his cup and they walk back to
the counter.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

NIGHT CLERK
So what's the thing I have to do?

STRANGER
You gotta place the right person,
in the right room, with the right
object.

NIGHT CLERK
Wait, I need a piece of paper.

He looks around for a piece of paper and a pen while the
stranger taps on the counter with his fingers.

STRANGER
Are you ready now?

NIGHT CLERK
Yeah sure.

STRANGER
(fast)
So we got the dealer with the
pills, the impatient with the gun,
the cop with the handcuffs, the
killer with the knife and the idiot
with the whiskey.

NIGHT CLERK
Ok, so I guess it makes sense to
give the gun to the cop.

STRANGER

Are you nuts? Don't you watch the news?

NIGHT CLERK

Alright, so if we put the cuffs in the killer's room and we give the cop the whiskey --

STRANGER

The cop can't have the booze, he's an ex-alcoholic.

NIGHT CLERK

Right, so we give the whiskey to the dealer.

STRANGER

He doesn't want that. He can't count when he's drunk. And he can't be a drug dealer when he can't count.

NIGHT CLERK

Can't we just throw the bottle in the trash can?

The stranger looks at him with disgust.

STRANGER

You sick little thing, what kind of idea is that? I should leave a complaint, but we've already wasted too much time.

NIGHT CLERK

Can we put two objects in the same room?

STRANGER

Don't be ridiculous.

NIGHT CLERK

What if we give the handcuffs to the idiot, is there a problem with that?

STRANGER

Of course, he'll get caught in them.

NIGHT CLERK

The pills?

STRANGER

He'll eat them.

NIGHT CLERK

Is that bad?

The stranger just stares at him

NIGHT CLERK (CONT'D)

And I guess the idiot can't have the gun 'cause he'll shoot himself?

STRANGER

No, that'd be fine.

(then)

But then you'll have to put him at least two rooms away from the killer, 'cause the killer's a light sleeper and if the idiot starts shooting around, that'll wake him up. And if he wakes up against his will, that's bad for everyone. How do you think he ended up with a blood-stained knife?

The night clerk scribbles something on the paper.

NIGHT CLERK

We'll put him in the room on the side then.

STRANGER

Impossible. The idiot can't be in a room on the side of the building because of his phobia of going through walls while sleeping.

The night clerk crosshatches on the paper.

NIGHT CLERK

Are there any other things like that I should know? I feel like we should just get them out all at once.

STRANGER

Usually, night clerks are supposed to have a sense of what the customers need, so the client doesn't need to spell it out for them.

NIGHT CLERK

I'm new here. They didn't give me that sense yet.

STRANGER

(raising his voice)

Well that's just great!

A ghost can be seen passing in the background.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Ok, let's summarize, and I won't repeat this again. We've wasted so much time! So the idiot can't have the handcuffs or the pills, the killer can't have the knife 'cause it's incriminating, the drug dealer needs a weapon, the impatient gets a headache if he's in a room with an even number, the killer can't be next to cop, the idiot can't be in the middle or on the sides, the pills have to be --

NIGHT CLERK

Sorry, could you slow down? I'm trying to write this stuff down.

STRANGER

Slow down?

The stranger takes out the gun and SHOOTs the clerk.

He walks out, frustrated.

The elevator doors OPEN. The JANITOR (50s) comes out, pushing his cart. He stops in front of the counter, walks up to the night clerk's body, drags the corpse in front of the counter. He takes out a garbage bag, puts the corpse in it, and puts the bag under the cart. He places the "Wet Floor" sign in the blood puddle, and pushes the cart out of the frame.