

Drei Türen Hotel

Prologue

As a child my dad was not home much. Whether he was traveling the world, or simply occupied with better things, I only saw him once in a blue moon. Despite that, whenever he would come home, he would bring with him extravagant gifts for me and my mom from faraway places – India, Nepal, Austria, Russia – he went everywhere. He would also come home with stories that seemed almost too unreal to be true. Stories about blind bike thieves in the southern foothills of India to Chinese shipmen battling a great whale off the coast of Shanghai with only sticks and the wooden boards of the ship. However, upon his arrivals from Germany, he would tell a story about a new traveler he met in the Drei Türen Hotel of western Germany near the border of the Rhineland. Every story would be just as unique and unbelievable as the last, each with a remarkable hero or heroine whom he met during his long stays at the hotel. This is the story of him and his journeys at the Drei Türen.

The Story of Herr Johannes II

Upon my first arrival to the hotel, I drove in on a '35 Desoto, a luxurious car I had recently rented from a friend up in Hadersleben. A white coupe with a roar of a sports mobile, it certainly made my entrance known. The hotel was on top of a small hill just outside the archaic city of Aachen. It was a large gothic style building with five floors and a wonderful, but broken, clock tower dead center in the middle of the roof. The hotel its self was a beautiful masterpiece of architectural genius, it sat upon its hill like a king on top his throne. It was a proud and magnificent building. I was in awe as I drove up the twisty, two lane gravel road to reach the hotel.

As I neared close to the entrance I was greeted by two young German fellows of whom I did not catch the names of, but were helpful in retrieving my bags nonetheless. I entered through a set of three tall golden doors with intricate patterns of windowing throughout. As I stepped in I was immediately greeted by a wave of a scent I will never forget – it smelled of green apples and a hint cinnamon spice – it was a smell which was so unique, and simply wonderful for some indescribable reason, that it could not be forgotten. Upon my entrance, I was ushered to the reception desk and greeted by an alluring young woman by the name of Fräulein Hedda. After a brief, polite conversation, the topic of which is long forgotten, I was given a room assignment – room 347, the Master’s Suite of the third floor.

I made my way to the elevator through the smoke and laughter of nearby company enjoying drinks with friends or business colleagues. I noticed the particularly magnificent stairway which led to the second floor. It was carpeted in a lovely lipstick-red almost velvet like carpet. Along both sides was a golden handrail in which one could perfectly see their reflection and perhaps even do their morning shave with! I was disappointed as I would not have the need to use the staircase quite yet, but I promised myself I would before I left.

“Three, please,” I said to the quiet elevator boy. As he closed the door, and we ascended further into the hotel I could not help but to still be in shock at the wonderfulness of everything this hotel had to offer.

I got off on three and found myself going left down the hallway, per the wall signs, towards my room. The hallway walls were a delicate shade of yellow with golden-red patters evenly spaced up and down the sides of the wall. Along the corridor floor was the very same carpeting I saw on the staircase, though, this carpet looked a tad bit more worn down. As I

continued down the hall, I was taken aback for a moment when I saw an old man sitting upon an even older bench looking out the window at the end of the hall.

As I neared my room and began to fiddle with the key, the old man said to me with an overtly cheerful tone, "Hello there sir! How do you do on this fine afternoon, if I may ask?"

To which I politely, but in a hurry answered, "Very well sir, and you?"

It seemed he was uninterested in my reply as he quickly asked my name, and I his, and thus unknowingly started my long relationship with Johannes Schmidt II.

As I entered my room, the Master's Suite on the Third Floor, I was quite pleased with the size of it. It was a large room with a king sized bed in the middle draped with purple bed sheets and gold tinted pillows. I walked over to the bed and set my duffle bag and suitcase on top of the bed and walked over to the window. Through the window, the sun seemed to be shining brighter than I had seen it on any summer day, despite it being the middle of December. The view outside my room made me feel as if I was God himself. I could see the whole town of Aachen, from the tall, pointed, cathedral roofs, to the small farms on the outskirts of the main city. I stared out the window for a few moments, lost in the trance of the city's beauty, and decided to unpack my things.

After I settled into my room, I decided to explore this castle-like hotel. As I left my room, I saw Johannes once again and he asked if I would care to join him for dinner in the cafe on the second floor. I, being one not to decline such an offer, agreed but politely excused myself and began my exploration of the hotel.

I walked slowly, yet attentively through the long and winding corridors of the hotel. Though it was a busy hotel, I felt at times alone with myself. On the walls I saw magnificent

paintings from painters such as Otto Dix, and Max Ernest, each one just as unique and intricate as the last. I thought to myself, at times I feel I read more from a painting than I do of my books! I continued my exploration of the upper floors, each one unsurprisingly like the ones below it. Within a short time, I was taken aback to read on the clock upon the wall that it was nearing five o'clock, the time which in Johannes and I agreed to meet.

I headed down the stairs at the end of the hall on the fifth floor and made my way to the lobby. The lobby at this time was much fuller than I expected. Guests took advantage of every possible seating arrangement known to man in order to, perhaps less than comfortably, meet and drink with their friends. The room was filled with a layer of haze from the cigars and pipes that accompanied the mouths of almost every man. The smoke flowed from between their lips like vulgar obscenities flow from a sailor's mouth. I took this chance to walk up the aforementioned golden-railed staircase. It was just as wonderful as I hoped, though I was a bit disappointed with the view from the second floor looking in to the lobby.

I looked around at the top of the stairs and heard my name being called from afar. I looked around, yet saw no recognizable faces, at least until I saw Johannes peer from behind a tall Austrian man sitting in front of him. I noticed that, and perhaps said out loud quietly to myself, Johannes was quite a short man. Not only that, but Johannes had many interesting and peculiar features about him. He was an old man with a large gray handlebar mustache and receding gray hair. Simply between when I first met him and now, he had changed his outfit from an old blue and white sailors uniform to a quite handsome gray and pink-toned three-piece suit. To top it off, he was always seen smiling – at least when I saw him – and had quite the cheerful aura to him.

I walked over to his table that was not so conveniently located directly next to the café's kitchen doors. With each fling of the door, a new wave of unknown smells, some sweet, others like that of the favorite food of the *dung beetle* came out to greet us. I took my seat, luckily facing toward the other café guests rather than the door, and before I could say but one word, a waiter came by and politely asked us for our drink of choice.

Before I was able to formulate a response, Johannes told the waiter, "two Blackthorns please!" I was happily taken aback. Little did Johannes know a Blackthorn was my favorite drink! As I settled in, we exchanged polite conversation. He told me was staying here to visit his sisters in the neighboring village of Eschweiler for a humble reunion of the family. I asked him where he calls home, to my surprise, he said he couldn't really tell me. He called himself a 'citizen of the world', he told me he has lived in places as hot as the Sinai Dessert, to the coldest tundra in the Siberian north. As we talked more about his past, I sensed a sort of urgency in his voice, but it subsided as soon as we changed topics. We continued to converse through our light supper and into the late evening. Around twelve o'clock, we mutually excused ourselves but agreed to meet tomorrow for brunch at a local establishment called Café van den Daele.

I woke up refreshed, albeit a bit hung over from all the liquor we had the night before, but I felt quite ready for the day ahead. I decided to get dressed in a casual suit, gray slacks and jacket with a white shirt and an amazing silk baby-blue tie. Perhaps a bit over dressed for brunch, but I wanted to make a good impression on Mr. Johannes, who more than likely could remain a friend long after my departure. After getting settled into my outfit of the day, I walked down to the main lobby of the hotel and greeted the beautiful Fräulein Hedda who sat quite idle at the main desk reading the local news.

“Anything interesting miss?” I asked motioning toward the paper.

“No sir, however, there’s news of possible war over the Rhineland” she said seemingly unmoved by the news of war.

I asked politely for a newspaper, though if I’m being honest, it was more of an excuse to talk to her further, though I couldn’t muster the courage to discuss anything more. I took the paper up to the second floor café and found myself a better seat than last night’s, by the railing overlooking the main lobby. A young German boy came up to me and eagerly asked me for my choice of drink and pastry. I thought a bit and decided only to get a coffee, for brunch was soon approaching and I wanted to save some room for the pastries of the local café. The boy brought out the steaming coffee after a few minutes and I sat to read the paper accompanied by the silence of the mid-morning lobby.

After what was a good few hours intently reading the morning paper and occasionally gazing around the lobby below me, I was taken out of my trance like state by the sound of a wonderful jazz quartet playing one of my favorites, Moonglow. The sound flowed and danced around the lobby like a couple of swing dancers entranced by the melody of calmness and peace that now overcame the grand hotel. Despite the urge to stay, it was now time for me to head out and meet Mr. Johannes.

I walked briskly through the golden plated doors into the sharp December air where I was greeted by the falling of snow. From on top the hill where the hotel stood, the city of Aachen looked like a winter wonderland with its snow-covered roofs and white pointed chapel towers. I walked over to the young German boy who stood attentively waiting for any request. I politely asked for my car so I could drive into the city. Thankfully they had it nearby, so I decided to take the short walk to the side of the hotel where it was parked.