

# The Rabbit's Top Hat (Second Person)

By J.L. Smith

"Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," you intone as a family of four tumbles through the door, "how may I be of assistance?"

"We're looking for a room for the night," responded the woman with a perky smile.

You slide a pad of sticky notes and a pen across the counter before turning to the computer, "if I could get your name."

You move the mouse around the screen a bit, tap a few keys, and click the background a couple of times while the man jots down his name, never thinking to ask why you need their name before you even know if there's room.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards you, and you glance down at the name neatly printed in black ink before giving a final click and pronouncing, "I'm sorry, we're all full up, but there's a Motel 6 in the next town. You get back on the road, go straight through the light, and keep going until you reach the next town. There's a sign right next to the road on the right."

"Thanks!" The woman replies chipperly.

The man hands you back your pen and nods at the ornate lobby, "too bad, it looks like a lovely place."

You watch them leave, waiting until they've climbed into their car before you tare off the sticky note, toss it in the trash, and reset the pad and pen for the next visitor.

A few minutes pass, and then an hour as you do your homework, post a few pictures, and watch a how-to video on making hot dog mummies. No one comes in off the street, and no one comes down from their rooms.

But when the door finally does open again, it's not a suburban family that walks through. Instead, it's a dozen dusty bikers.

Two of them breakaway, heading towards you, but the rest mill around the lobby: kicking back in the overstuffed chairs, swiping a homemade cookie off the plate on the coffee table, examining the various knickknacks on the mantle. The exception is a scruffy guy my age who hangs back by the door, watching everyone, including you, with nervous eyes.

"Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," you greet the two men as they reach

the desk, instantly feeling more at ease with them than the family, "how may I be of assistance?"

"Well, hello there, the name's Mick Webber. I have a reservation."

You nod, sliding the pad of sticky notes and pen across the counter before turning to the computer, "of course, if I could get your name."

This time you actually bother to open the booking software as he jots down his name. The pen is a formality; you're never wrong, but your aunt insists.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards you, and you glance down at the name scrawled in red ink before typing it in, "yes, here's your reservation, bunk room 2 for four nights. Will you need any additional accommodations during your stay?"

"Now that you mention it," he smiled a predator's smile, all teeth, "if you could give us directions to a field, or something, nearby for tomorrow night."

You're about to respond when a voice from the landing above cuts you off, "we own a lot outside of town. It's forested, private, and ideal for your needs. We ask only that you limit your hunting and stay within the boundaries of the property."

"Of course," Mick responded hastily, bowing his head to your aunt, "thank you for allowing us to celebrate the solstice with you."

Your aunt descends the stairs like a queen, "it's our pleasure to host your pack for the festivities."

Then less formally, as she kisses him, "it's been too long."

You sidle out from behind the desk, eager to give your aunt her space. Weaving deftly between the pack milling in the lobby, you straighten the couch cushions and refill the plate of spice cookies from the kitchen.

You return to the kitchen to bring out a pitcher of lemonade and a tray of sandwiches, but when you get back to the lobby, the scruffy guy is shoving a handful of cookies in his hoodie pocket. Face to face, he isn't scruffy so much as dirty, his clothes unwashed and ill-fitting. The dark circles under his eyes could be dirt, tiredness, or bruises, and you try not to think about which they are.

Instead, you give him a half smile as you slide the tray onto the table and offer him a sandwich wrapped in brown paper, "it's turkey."

He stares at the sandwich hungrily but doesn't take it.

On the other hand, the rest of the bikers descend on the tray, shoving him roughly out of the way while leaving you an island in the middle of their commotion.

You move to follow him, sandwich still in your hand, until your aunt clears her throat delicately, "Quinn."

# The Rabbit's Top Hat

## (First Person)

By J.L. Smith

Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," I repeat for the third time that day as a family of four tumbles through the door, "how may I be of assistance?"

"We're looking for a room for the night," responded the woman with a perky smile.

I wearily slide a pad of sticky notes and a pen across the counter before turning to the computer. Only two more hours until shift change, "if I could get your name."

I move the mouse around the screen a bit, tap a few keys, and click the background a couple of times for their benefit, even though I can tell just by being near them they aren't the type of people to stay in a place like The Rabbit. The man jots down his name, never thinking to ask why I need their name before I even know if there's room.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards me, and I glance down at the name neatly printed in black ink before giving a decisive click and pronouncing, "I'm sorry, we're all full up, but there's a Motel 6 in the next town. You get back on the road, go straight through the light, and keep going until you reach Horton. There's a sign right next to the road on the right."

"Thanks!" The woman replies chipperly.

The man hands me back the pen and nods at the ornate lobby, "too bad, it looks like a lovely place."

I watch them leave, waiting until they've climbed into their mid-sized, silver car before I tear off the sticky note, toss it in the trash, and reset the pad and pen for the next visitor. Because there's always a next visitor, I tried telling Aunt Serenity we should put a by reservation only sign in the window, but she insisted, "you never know who might show up."

A few minutes pass, and then an hour as I do my homework, post a few carefully cropped pictures that show I have a life without giving too many details, and watch a how-to video on making hot dog mummies for the next time I have to babysit. No one comes in off the street, and no one comes down from their rooms. The whole place is eerily quiet as the aunts and the guests rest for tomorrow's festivities.

But when the door finally does open again, it's not a suburban family that walks through. Instead, it's a dozen dusty bikers.

Two breakaway, heading my way while the rest mill around the lobby: kicking back in the overstuffed chairs, swiping a complimentary homemade cookie off the plate on the coffee table, examining the various knickknacks on the mantle, most of which are priceless or mystical and some of which are cursed. The exception is a scruffy guy my age who hangs back by the door, watching everyone, including me, with nervous eyes.

"Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," I greet the two men as they reach the desk, instantly feeling more at ease with them than the family, "how may I be of assistance?"

"Well, hello there, the name's Mick Webber. I have a reservation," his voice is a deep growl, and he leans in with a smile.

I nod, blushing, sliding the pad of sticky notes and pen across the counter before turning to the computer, "of course, if I could get your name."

This time I actually bother to open the booking software as he jots down his name. The pen is a formality; I'm never wrong, but my aunt insists, claiming it's necessary unless I want to work the desk 24/7.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards me, and I glance down at the name scrawled in red ink before typing it in, "yes, here's your reservation, bunk room 2 for four nights. Will you need any additional accommodations during your stay?"

"Now that you mention it," he smiled a predator's smile, all teeth, "if you could give us directions to a field, or something, nearby for tomorrow night."

I'm about to respond when a deceptively soft voice from the landing above cuts me off, "we own a lot outside of town. It's forested, private, and ideal for your needs. We ask only that you limit your hunting and stay within the boundaries of the property."

"Of course," Mick responded hastily, bowing his head to my aunt and forgetting me entirely, "thank you for allowing us to celebrate the solstice with you."

Aunt Felicity descends the stairs like a queen, "it's our pleasure to host your pack for the festivities."

Then less formally, as she kisses him, shooing me away with a hand beneath the desk, "it's been too long."

I sidle hastily out from behind the desk, eager to give them their space. Weaving deftly between the pack milling in the lobby, I straighten the couch

cushions and refill the plate of spice cookies from the kitchen.

I return to the kitchen to bring out a pitcher of lemonade and a tray of sandwiches, but when I get back to the lobby the scruffy guy is shoving a handful of cookies in his hoodie pocket. Face to face, he isn't scruffy so much as dirty, his clothes unwashed and ill-fitting. The dark circles under his eyes could be dirt, tiredness, or bruises, and I try not to think about which they are.

Instead, I give him a half smile as I slide the tray onto the table and offer him a sandwich wrapped in brown paper, "it's turkey."

He stares at the sandwich hungrily but doesn't take it.

On the other hand, the rest of the bikers descend on the tray, shoving him roughly out of the way while leaving me standing un-jostled yet surrounded by pushy bikers who smelled like sweat and unwashed dogs.

I move to follow him, sandwich still in hand, until from behind me, Aunt Harmony clears her throat delicately, "Quinn."

# The Rabbit's Top Hat (Third Person)

By J.L. Smith

Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," Quinn intones listlessly for the third time that day as a family of four tumbles through the door, "how may I be of assistance?"

"We're looking for a room for the night," responded the woman managing to paste on a perky smile.

Quinn wearily slides a pad of sticky notes and a pen across the counter before turning to the computer, only two more hours until shift change, "if I could get your name."

She moves the mouse around the screen a bit, taps a few keys, and clicks the background a couple of times for their benefit, even though she can already sense they aren't the type of people to stay in a place like The Rabbit. The man jots down his name, never thinking to ask why she would need his name before she even knew if there's a room.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards her, and she glances down at the name neatly printed in black ink before giving a decisive click of the mouse on the blank screen and pronouncing, "I'm sorry, we're all full up, but there's a Motel 6 in the next town. You get back on the road, go straight through the light, and keep going until you reach Horton. There's a sign right next to the road on the right."

"Thanks!" The woman replies chipperly, although a bit confused by their abrupt dismissal.

The man hands Quinn back the pen and nods at the ornate lobby, "too bad, it looks like a lovely place."

Tempted to agree, Quinn holds her tongue as she watches them leave, waiting until they've climbed into their mid-sized, silver car before tarring off the sticky note, tossing it in the trash, and resetting the pad and pen for the next visitor because there's always a next visitor. Quinn had tried suggesting to her Aunt Serenity they should put a by reservation only sign in the window, but she'd insisted, "you never know who might show up."

Very few people who just showed up were the sort of people who stayed at The Rabbit, but Serenity had been firm, and Quinn, not wanting to deal with

trying to convince her, had quickly given up.

A few minutes pass, and then an hour as Quinn does her homework, posts a few carefully cropped pictures that show she has a life without giving too many details, and watches a how-to video on making hot dog mummies for the next time she's forced to babysit for the guests. No one comes in off the street, and no one comes down from their rooms. The whole place is eerily quiet as the aunts and the guests rest for tomorrow's festivities.

But when the door finally does open again, it's not a suburban family that walks through. Instead, it's a dozen dusty bikers.

Two breakaway, heading Quinn's way while the rest mill around the lobby: kicking back in the overstuffed chairs, swiping at one of the dozens of cookies Quinn had been forced to help make the night before off the plate on the coffee table, or examining the various knickknacks on the mantle, most of which are either priceless or mystical and some of which are cursed.

All except Lee. He hangs back by the door and watches everyone, especially her, with inquisitive eyes. The way she moved, how she talked. She reminded him of the overachieving girls at his old school, driven yet kind. They could have been in the same class; they might have been friends.

But there was something about her that told Lee the girl at the front desk didn't do friends, and, under the surface, she was nothing like the girls at his old school.

"Welcome to the Rabbit's Top Hat," Lee watches her greet the two men as they reach the desk. If she realizes how dangerous they are, she doesn't show it as she smiles across the counter at them, "how may I be of assistance?"

"Well, hello there, the name's Mick Webber. I have a reservation," the hairs on the back of Lee's neck prickle as the deep growl of Mick's voice drifts across the lobby, and he leans toward Quinn with a predator's smile.

She nods, blood rushing to her cheeks as she fights the urge to react, and slides the pad of sticky notes and pen across the counter before hurriedly turning to the computer, "of course, if I could get your name."

The booking software is open and ready, by the time he sets down the pen. Quinn uses the pen because her aunt insists, but it's more of a formality. Even she can't explain how, but from the time she first came to The Rabbit's Top Hat Quinn has been able to tell who's meant to be at The Rabbit and who isn't, which lines up with the pen most of the time.

When he's done, he slides the pad back towards her, and she glances down at the name scrawled in red ink before typing it in, "yes, here's your reservation,



bunk room 2 for four nights. Will you need any additional accommodations during your stay?"

Across the room, Lee watches with concern as a predator's smile flits across Mick's face, and he leans closer across the desk, "now that you mention it if you could give us directions to a field, or something, nearby for tomorrow night."

If Quinn notices the lean, she doesn't skip a beat when she turns her attention to the burly Alpha, but Lee hadn't been the only one eavesdropping.

Stepping into sight on the landing across from the front desk, Felicity Ledger cut a striking figure. Dressed in the height of 1940s fashion, she looked by design as though she'd stepped out of a period drama, Homemakers of the Homefront.

Drifting down from the landing, her deceptively soft voice stops Quinn in her tracks, "we own a lot outside of town. It's forested, private, and ideal for your needs. We ask only that you limit your hunting and stay within the boundaries of the property."

"Of course," Mick responded hastily, bowing his head to Felicity out of instinct, not choice, forgetting Quinn entirely, "thank you for allowing us to celebrate the solstice with you."

Felicity descends the stairs like a queen, "it's our pleasure to host your pack for the festivities."

Then less formally, as she kisses him, shooing Quinn away with a hand beneath the desk, "it's been too long."

Hastily Quinn sidles out from behind the desk, eager to give them their space. Weaving deftly between the pack milling in the lobby, she straightens the couch cushions and refills the plate of spice cookies from the dozens still in the kitchen.

Leaving his place by the door, Lee circles the table, snatching a handful of cookies as he passes close to the table, only to stop dead as Quinn pops back out of the doorway carrying a pitcher of lemonade with one hand and balancing a tray of sandwiches on the other.

He blanched, shoving the cookies into his hoodie pocket as he backed quickly away, but even as Lee tried to get away from Quinn he was taken by how much prettier she looked now than when she was behind the desk. In jeans and a cropped hoodie, she was most definitely more modern than the woman from the stairs, but beyond that, the resemblance was uncanny. They had the same straight light brown hair, hazel eyes, and judgmental half smile.

Quinn pulled up short, struggling not to drop the lemonade or the sandwiches. Up close, he wasn't scruffy so much as dirty, his clothes unwashed and ill-fitting, with dark circles under his eyes that could be dirt, tiredness, or bruises.

Refusing to think about which they are, Quinn gives him a reassuring half smile as she slides the tray onto the table and offers him a sandwich wrapped in brown paper, "it's turkey."

Lee stares at the sandwich hungrily but doesn't take it while the other bikers descend on the tray. He falls back, shoved roughly out of the way by the others, but Quinn holds her ground, refusing to step away even though she's surrounded by bikers who smell like sweat and unwashed dogs.

One moves to take the sandwich she's still holding in her outstretched hand, but Quinn deftly sidesteps them only to bump into another biker who turns on her, when from the door to the kitchen, her Aunt Harmony clears her throat delicately, "Quinn."