

The Grand Hotel Sand Fountain: Original Texts

These were the texts originally written for the project. The texts subsequently changed as we brought them into the AR environment, adding and dropping elements in a recursive process as we brought in images and voice.

Welcome to the Grand Hotel Sand Fountain. We will service all your desires during this brief encounter. But first, take a moment to consider: every room tells a story. All you need to do is tap. Stop a while and wonder at the hidden pleasures of our resort. Listen to each, savoring the moment, before you move on to the next.

The Grand Hotel Sand Fountain – Scott Rettberg

The lobby is a secret room within the hidden center of the hotel that features a sand fountain. The brief encounters of the guests who made love in evenings long past can be found in the shifting sands of the fountain, and this might disturb current guests who have entered the hotel only for the proposition of one brief encounter, so we conceal the fact that all such memories are recorded in the sand. It is only the rare wanderer who, in a postcoital stupor, stumbles upon the fountain accidentally. A manager greets every visitor at the door from which they enter, and any transactions are handled at small desks placed at each of our many entrances. The bellboy takes care your luggage. The concierge has researched your desires prior to your arrival and made all the arrangements. Room service is provided at no additional charge, and every dish is either one you have always wanted to try or one that is attached to your warmest childhood memories. We do permit every guest whose visit is known to be their last at the Grand Hotel to tour the fountain, where they may perhaps briefly encounter themselves with a former or current lover in the shifting sand. Many of these departing guests spend hours at the fountain, contemplating their past longings and future endings, before they check out.

Don't be afraid of the coffins at the foot of the fountain, they're very comfortable inside. Each contains a mattress made of sand.

The elevators move not only vertically but also horizontally, and occasionally at a diagonal. It is a marvelous conveyance. It is theorized that the architect modelled the system on the passage of time. You can see how they go slowly as they begin and accelerate as they move on. They slow down again only as they reach their destination.

"First time?"

"First time with a stranger. Generally, I come with someone I know."

"And now you come again, alone."

"The person I know has gone elsewhere."

"Permanently?"

"Yes, my letters are returned by the postal service."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Maybe they got married. Maybe they are no longer around."

"So, you aren't committed?"

"Not while I'm in the hotel."

"What kind of room should we get?"

"One of the peaceful ones, with a waterfall."

"Shall we embrace?"

"I feel like you're the me I once was."

"I feel like you're the me I might become."

"Aside from age, are we quite alike?"

"Are we having a brief encounter with ourselves?"

"There are many more of us in many of these rooms."

"The closet is capacious. I wonder if leads to other closets connected to other rooms."

"I might get undressed and get changed into something more comfortable."

"Mmmm-hmm. That's nice. I notice that the room has no television. Whatever will we do?"

"So many styles of nightwear."

"Exciting, a sense of mystery."

"I won't be in here much longer."

"I hope you come soon."

None of the guests need to use contraceptives, the sand itself is prophylactic. A marvelous feature, leave your worries at the door. And you won't take anything home either, any intimate ailment is rendered harmless, if temporarily. They say that there's something in the sand that does this, a slight sea spray you can smell if you focus. Truly restorative. I would say it's magic, but the scientists have some sort of explanation. It's beyond the extent of my understanding. Perfume is strictly forbidden. None of our guests should be oppressed by the lingering scent of a room's prior occupants."

Luscious bowls of ripe fruit. Peaches and nectarines, passion fruit and pomegranates. Watermelons and durian that does not smell. Kiwis and mangosteen. Everyone's lips moist with sweet sticky juices. Pools of it dribbling onto the floor. And yet not a fly in the place. We've hired professional flyswatters. A dozen of them on this floor alone. They are remarkably accurate. It's their only job. The Grand Hotel Sand Fountain is a fruit fly's worst nightmare.

"What about casualties?"

"Deaths?"

"Does anyone decease on the premises?"

"Oh no, that's against hotel policy. It's strictly forbidden."

"Remarkable. No accidental drownings? Falls from a great height? Heart attacks? Murders?"

"Exceptionally safe, I can assure you."

"No aneurysms, stabbings, fatal slip and falls, beheadings from a falling pane of glass?"

"The only injuries sustained here are emotional, and even those are extremely rare. Most of our guests leave satisfied, sated, with some prior desire fulfilled, if only briefly, by another."

"Does the fountain provide immortality if you drink from it?"

"Of course not. The fountain is made of sand. To drink from it is to gag on particulate."

"But no one dies here?"

"Not inside the hotel. It is a place of best moments and final ones."

"Final?"

"Everyone lives inside, but there are no guarantees from the moment you open those doors and step outside. Don't let your wonderment stupefy you. The world out there is dangerous. We have both ambulances and hearses waiting in the alley out back."

"It's as if there are dancers within the shifting sands. Or is that just me?"

"The sand is a kind of mirror."

"Is that me, and—"

"Yes, the woman you first came with."

"Many years ago."

"Yes, the first time you checked into the hotel."

"We were so young then."

"As this is your last visit, you are entitled to see all your visits past within the sand. And the visits of others as well, people like you, albeit of different eras."

"Last?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I've have never bathed with so many strangers, and naked besides."
"It's natural to feel awkward at first, au natural, but there is a sense of community that begins to form as your inhibitions fall away."
"Yes, and it doesn't necessarily feel erotic."
"Only occasionally."
"And the water is so perfectly warm."
"It's as if we all become infants again, sharing the same memories of the time before our births."
"Yes, floating in the same womb."

"You pay on a sliding scale. Each according to their own means. Factors taken into account include income, age, social status, and expected longevity."
"How would you know that?"
"We employ actuaries who assess you even before you approach the front desk. They have proven remarkably accurate according to scientific studies of mortality rates of former guests."
"So you pay more as your time approaches?"
"As you'd expect. Money has become less important to you. It becomes apparent that it is only a matter of tokens in an imaginary system of worth. But everyone can afford a *last* visit to the Grand Hotel, no matter how wealthy or destitute you might be."

GRAND HOTEL SAND FOUNTAIN – Roderick Coover

BIRDS

Although droppings from the hotel aviary were initially intended to be kept for compost for the hotel's prized organic artichokes, the tacky consistency of the waste, proved to be joyful for guests who struggled to build castles with the soft blowing sand in the sand fountain room. The bird residue provided a tacky base and with enough of it, one could even poke holes into the substance for windows, doors, design furnishing, and characters in all states of interaction.

Searching for the loosest, finest sand to build their objects, guests would meet at recesses of the fountain room, a dark outer universe that seemed to extend infinitely beneath the hotel. Searching further and further back into dark outer limits, they may find themselves crawling into dark tunnels on their knees, led only by the sense of touch. This offers the risky pleasure of a hand unexpectedly falling upon the leg, ass or face of someone else, or upon bird shit formed in strange shapes or unexpected falls into chasms.

Some guests have been unnerved by a flutter of birds, probably of bats, really, and there is a sensation of crunching that can only be explained as bones which might be understood to

be corpses once held in shackles. The bones have melded with the metal rings that once held them, and overtime they have gained a shiny coating of sand.

TAILOR

An invisible and underappreciated position at the Sand Fountain Hotel had long been that of the hotel tailor who spent his time sewing buttons ripped off during guest bondage play or darning holes poked out through socks, underwear, or other more game-specific garments.

The lowly status of the hotel laundry staff changed after one young tailor, an apprentice working only for his porridge breakfast, began stitching tiny poems into buttonholes, torn pillowcases and split blouse seams. Soon the entire staff were stitching novels that would extend across garments, sheets and towels.

The pursuit of the master text connecting these fragments became an obsession for some guests and clothes-ripping become of even greater interest than carnal connection. These obsessions were misplaced as every narrative fragment is unstitched and rewritten with each pass through the laundry system, yielding a narrative that is forever changing. The beginnings or ends are long since erased. Stories about the guests, recorded by observant maids and bellhops soon became part of the work, as did those of staff writing these notes, and those observing those observing others.

DOLLS

The staff occasionally places old artifact such as apothecary jars, odd keys and dolls in alcoves, under furniture between the sheets or inside medicine cabinets. These are normally cast aside by the guests who are hurrying toward encounters or sat upon in compromising moments.

Very few guests stop to notice that the dolls lying about take the form of other guests they might have just encountered. A fortunate guest might even see herself in a doll, although some may be unsettled by the speed at which the dolls seem to change their form from one person to another.

The uncanny transformation of the features of dolls is said to be an omen of death, but perhaps it is only the death of an assumed identity, as all identities of the guests are transitory and subject to change; indeed, they must change regularly. This fragility of identity in a world of sand is accentuated if a guest attempts to underdress a doll, which will, that that moment of impropriety, dissolve into sand.

ELEVATOR

The central elevator, which only runs if at least two guests enter it, has padded velour walls with mirrors on the ceiling and floor. The buttons are arranged in a fountain shape. This is not simply aesthetic. As the elevator rises, it tilts and lurches in one direction toward its goal, provoking unexpected intimacies against the padded walls.

Regular guests to the hotel choose spots to maximize or minimize these encounters. However, through an ingenious twisting mechanism in the shaft, it is impossible to know in which direction the elevator might tilt and who might end top or bottom in a sudden lurch. This uncertainty soon became a source of gambling, and today each elevator ride is represented through avatars in one of the most popular games in the hotel's casino room.

TEENAGERS

Teenagers are not permitted into the Sand Fountain Hotel, however many hang-out in cavernous underground tunnels that connect many of the hotels. The tunnels have become such a popular hangout that many parents find themselves provoked by their teens to seek the hotel of brief encounters so they can tag along for underground experiences and inter-hotel story-making.

Grand Hotel Sand Fountain – Caitlin Fisher

I'd been to this hotel before. Pretty sure. The brochure in my nightstand and even a photo of me, apparently on the entry threshold, grinning madly. In the picture it is winter and I am leaning against an iron gate decorated with a single griffin, black coat green scarf. I do not remember this picture being taken. I called the reservation line anyway.

Now I am on the threshold again, iron gate, but no griffin. Instead, an intricately carved monkey in low relief making a rather terrifying face. I knock.

"You've come alone?"

"Yes."

Good. That's good for you. Welcome back. Would you like to put your clothes in the bin?"

I hesitate until the rightness of it all sinks in.

"Yes, thank you William." How could I have forgotten William? His hands are waiting for my clothes and I undress just a bit slowly. I know those hands. This is as close as staff and guests get, really, the rules of the hotel coming to me with the naturalness of a yawn. Me, William, Brief. Burning, impossible, almost perfect. I blink.

"Is my regular room ready?"

Of course.

I grab a chiffon robe more popular last century and walk determinedly down the hallway, trying to stay very focused as first the ceiling slants and then the whole damn thing contracts like a pulsing live thing and now the hallway is too small and I am forced to my

knees in the dimly lit passage, summoned by the sound of a far-way carousel. As good a direction as any, I think, as I move tentatively forward, now registering someone crawling toward me. I'd forgotten this part. I stop moving and unfold myself to make more space for the stranger to get by me, but as our fingertips touch, the hallway contracts again and the stranger and I flatten against each other, eye to eye at first, now lip to lip, unkissing and electric... two three four five six.... I move my eye to the stranger's clavicle, make my way with difficulty past his inner thigh before the stranger bites my ankle gently by way of goodbye and he is gone and the hallway resumes its regular dimensions; its deceptive rectangular shape. I am slow to stand and unsurprised that the encounter has robbed me of my robe. Tant pis.

I resume the search for my room. I feel it's upstairs. I remember that when I find it the door will open in welcome and I do not need a key. And I stand for a long time in the elevator until a woman dressed for something like the opera steps in and we can finally operate the buttons, because the elevator, like most things at the hotel, is brief-encounter operated.

The grand hotel Sandfountain... hotel of brief encounters ... is undemanding beyond the basics, no intimacy required, but I like her smile and the way her long blue gown catches the light and also how it makes me feel more naked. I put my hand on her waist and she pulls me in and we kiss languidly before she gets out and throws herself into the pool at floor 6. Floor six is evidently all pool.

Great.

I resign myself to waiting for a swimmer so I can restart the elevator. Outside the light is bright against the water. Inside the elevator is all shadow, the way it knows I like it.

Finally, a young couple does the backstroke in the general direction of the elevator and hops in. They are followed by two older men. It's hard to tell people's ages or even gender sometimes here in the west elevators where features can be blurred with a visual filter some people pay extra tokens for. Well? We blurry strangers evaluate the moment. The elevator is instant yes. Instant hands and panting and a rushing rhythm informed by the violence of a long wait. Yes. We are all going to fuck each other now, we know, as the elevators eyes close...

...and we do, my back against the wall, right leg pulled roughly over a shoulder, my fingers hairpulling and urgent before that one's rapidly over and I am pushed down open-mouthed and full, fingers now reaching for a waist before my hips are positioned more conveniently and a single thrust propels me forward with such force that I almost bite down against this cock in my mouth. This is why girls are sometimes better, think, as I gag and want and soon we uncouple with a pop and I spin and find new skin, kissing deeply and with the holiness of the fleeting and someone's tongue in my ass.

We do hold up the elevator longer than strictly desirable. How brief should a brief encounter like this be? We do the mental abacus. Someone's cramped hand finds the buttons. We all get out on floor 9, but will never see each other again. Not exactly.

*

I know this as well as I know my room. My room is sometimes decorated in deep forest green, though today the door opens and it is still perfect, though utterly changed, its pale yellows just right for today. My belongings on the bed, my waterglass on the nightstand. Slippers and robe waiting. Scattered on the floor and escaping the drawer are all the love notes I wrote last time, and the time before that. And the time before that. And the time before that. And some that aren't exactly love notes, of course. Because the Grand Hotel Sand fountain, while not exactly one of the didactic hotels, does teach the difference.