

A short story extract

By Christopher Green

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Just inside the door the hotel porter, a young man whose jacket looked a size too big, wrapped both hands around the handle of the suitcase, straightened his back and hoisted it off the trolley onto the floor with a thud. With a look of embarrassment he turned and trundled the trolley out into the corridor. Paul smiled; the check-in weight had been thirty-two kilograms. He had been lucky to get away without an excess charge.

Paul strode over to the coffee table, picked up the television remote control and switched it on. A morning Hong Kong chat show appeared. He found CNN and turned the volume up a couple of notches before tossing the remote onto the bed.

He was thirsty from the dry in-flight environment and drained from Richard's dry lecture about how the Japanese do business. He found the room's mini-refrigerator and with a tingle of excitement opened the door, happy to see the usual staple supply of whisky, wine and beer. But for now it was mineral water. It was, after all, only eleven thirty in the morning and he had to meet Richard in the lobby in forty minutes time. He unscrewed the cap and gulped most of it down.

What could be so difficult about doing business in Japan? Make sure you exchange business cards properly, be seen making an effort to bow, and remember to smile and nod as frequently as you can. And he had his secret weapon, his Japanese skills. He'd been listening to self-study tapes on the train to and from the office ever since he'd known about the trip. He was going to make an impression.

He turned to the suitcase which stood where the porter had dropped it, plucked it up and walked it over to the bed. He swung it up onto the rust-colored bedspread and in a couple of seconds had it arched open, like a book, with its contents on show.

Careful to minimize disturbance he leverage out a pressed white shirt and his bag of toiletries. He stifled a yawn. The cool to the touch white cotton sheets and pillow cases were inviting and he had to resist the temptation to lie down. On the bedside table sat a phone. He would call Sarah that evening, after he'd had a whisky to wind down. It was two thirty in the morning in London. She'd have gone to bed.

He took off his jacket and laid it over a chair. Toiletries bag in hand, he entered the bathroom. He removed the hotel's supply of shampoo and body soap and replaced them with the contents of his bag. This room was going to be his castle for the next week and when he left it at the end of that time he intended to make a victorious return home.

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