



## **A Room With A View**

Rita Ciresi (February 09, 2008)



I check into a handicap- accessible room (and adjust my vision)



I drag my suitcase off the elevator and haul it down the long hotel corridor. I stop at Room 1220, swipe my key-card, and open the overly-wide door. I hold my breath--because no matter how often I travel, I still love entering a luxury hotel room for the very first time and staking my claim to the place I'll call home for the next few days of my life.

Yet once I flick on the light and see the low bed (and raised toilet), I sigh in disappointment. I'm paying 200 dollars a night--and I've been put in a room designated for handicapped guests! I'm tempted to pick up the big-buttoned phone and complain to the front desk.

But I don't do it. I already created a scene when I first checked in. The less-than-welcoming clerk handed me my key-card and said, "Your room number is 2338."

I swallowed hard. "Got anything on a lower floor?"

She frowned. "Are you afraid of heights?"

"I once was in a hotel fire," I said.

She frowned again.

"I didn't start it," I assured her.

As she prepared my new room key, I remembered that night in Boston when I was roused from a deep sleep by a commanding voice coming over the hall intercom: "A FIRE HAS BEEN DETECTED IN THIS HOTEL. KINDLY TAKE YOUR ROOM KEY AND PROCEED TO THE NEAREST STAIRWELL."

In spite of that "kindly," I'm not overly-anxious to repeat the experience of rushing down twenty-six flights of smoke-filled stairs wearing just a winter coat thrown over my red-plaid flannel pajamas. So I don't dare call down to She Who Frowned to ask for yet another room re-assignment. She might put me on the top floor of the hotel (and come back with a can of gasoline and a box of matches).

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I park my suitcase next to the low, oversized desk. Usually I walk around a new hotel room marvelling at how clean everything is compared to my groddy home: the smooth bars of soap, towels that are whiter-than-white, sheets crisp as a cracker. Yes, life is good in a hotel room--or any room where no one calls me wife or mother or daughter. I am cut loose from all my obligations. There's solitude (but room service). Silence (but 100 channels of premium TV). Peace (but 200 blocks of teeming city life outside).

But in a handicap room, I concentrate on different details. I notice how all the light switches are illuminated, like tiny vigil candles. The phone has humongous buttons, one of which is marked SPEAKERPHONE in case the hotel guest can't use the headset. I imagine the smoke detector buzzes REALLY LOUD. And all along the hallway floor, motion-activated lights twinkle as I walk by, reminding me of those standard airplane emergency evacuation instructions: in case of power loss, red lights lead to green lights, which indicate the exit.

Say a fire broke out in this hotel. How in the world would someone in a wheelchair make it down one flight of stairs--never mind twelve of them? I can only imagine. So I walk--with renewed appreciation for my tired, aching feet--over to the low, wide nightstand, where the hotel comment card asks a more pointed question:

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR VISIT?

I'm supposed to mark LEISURE or BUSINESS. But suddenly my answer is OTHER.



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