

Kill the Cynic

By Ina Disguise

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“What are you doing?” Andi, Margaret’s improbably feminine friend, fiddled with her exquisitely styled hair.

Margaret looked up from the computer. “Buying curtains – this dude is selling 9 giant sage green velvet curtains for 99p.”

“Why on earth do you want 9 giant sage green curtains?” Andi pouted at herself in the mirror before adjusting her cleavage and smoothing down her shiny pink skirt. “How do I look?”

“Fabulous darling. No-one would ever guess that you used to be a man.” Margaret’s deadpan expression did not change as she teased Andi. “The curtains are for room 10.”

“Room 10?”

“Yes, at the Mermaid Hotel – that place we stayed at last month remember? The curtains are in Poole. We can drive down next week and pick them up.”

“Poole is 300 miles away. Does Malcolm know that you plan to buy curtains for his hotel?” Andi wriggled into her other skyscraper heels and reached for her handbag. “Is there a budget?”

“A budget? No of course not. You don’t walk into other people’s hotels and demand to redecorate. I thought we could sneak in and do a bit of renegade decorating next month as a surprise for him.” Margaret continued to browse for matching curtains. “I have to get the curtains first and then match up the paint. Room 10 needs quite a lot but I can still double the room rate for about two hundred I reckon.”

“And you’re going to pay for that?” Andi grimaced prettily and took out her compact to examine her lips more closely. Her mobile rang, yet another call from the lengthy range of suitors that seemed to enjoy the constant rejections and delays involved in failing to successfully woo Andi. She ignored the call. “And what about the other rooms?”

“I thought we would just do one at a time. On this occasion I thought we could be very important and yet uncommunicative Albanians. Disguise ourselves, check in, refuse to leave the room. Three days and we’ll be done. I wasn’t really thinking about money. I just thought it would be a fun way to spend three days whilst mother is away. The carpet is quite good in that room. Sage green will bring that out quite well, I think.” Margaret turned to youtube for some Albanian lessons from Viola. “You’ll have to do all the talking though, he knows my voice. I’ll just have to say things like *Mire* and *je* a lot.”

“*Live the rhoum at iz.*” Andi practised her broken Albanian English. “*We ir not hahngray. No nid for surviss.*”

“Perfect. Are you game?” Margaret almost smiled. “I thought a blonde wig, fur coat and maybe some red lipstick. He’ll never guess it’s me.”

“Yes, but I don’t see why we are doing this. Is Malcolm your new muse?” Andi turned her protesting phone off to prevent any more calls from lovelorn men. “I think he will know it’s you. I can tell these things.”

“Not Malcolm, no. I think maybe the Hotel is? How on earth will he know it’s me if I don’t speak and look fairly odd? I’m distinctive only by my appalling scruffiness normally.”

“Trust me, he’ll know. You know someone got done for criminal damage for doing someone else’s hotel room up a few years back? We could pay cash though, and then ring the papers to report it.” Andi was clearly enjoying the prospect of secretly redesigning the Mermaid, despite the potential risk to her nails.

“That kind of foils my plan to return as Greta from Austria to do the appalling room with the plasticised bunk beds. He might be OK about it, but I like that hotel. I would rather go back as myself once I’ve completed all the rooms. Rarely have I experienced the inexorable joy I felt looking at his broken joinery, neglected light fitting and blown double glazing.”

“You’re planning to spend nearly three grand redesigning someone else’s hotel? Don’t you think that by the time you are Fifi from France or Angela from Argentina he might notice something?” Andi twitched at her stocking tops with a trace of nervousness.

“I wasn’t really thinking about it like that. I just thought – he seems like a nice chap. It’s not going to be done otherwise. I like doing nice things for people. Why does it always go so horribly wrong? No-one ever likes anything, so I thought if I do it in secret, it won’t really be me doing it.” Margaret started to look despondent. Andi noted that she was, in fact, terribly upset and her plans to reinvent someone else’s hotel was an effort to distract herself, so she decided to be gentle.

“You don’t think you should speak to him about it first? You could always redesign my dining room. At least it wouldn’t cost you anything and I would like it.” She smiled prettily, as if flirting with an invisible camera.

“I can do that too? Drat, someone else wants the curtains. I bet they are closer to Poole. We will need a folding ladder, filler, lining paper, coving and some cream and sage green paint.” Margaret pushed up her paint covered sleeves and scratched her head, causing her unbrushed hair to stand up in a messy bouffant. “That brown in the bathroom could do with being a yellower shade too. And we mustn’t let him carry the bags up. I will have to do it, with a series of monosyllabic negative sounding Albanian grunts.”

“I think you need to go and speak to Malcolm.” Andi adjusted an earring. “Maybe take some swatches and paint samples.”

“God no, what a bore. He will think I am touting for business. They never understand.” Margaret got up from the computer and carried her enormous teacup towards the kettle. “I don’t suppose I can really afford it, to be honest. And what happens after that? That place would make a fabulous bistro and the village could do with a high end joint, but would I really want to do it?” The former stately home caterer sized up the imaginary opportunity.

“Are you sure you don’t just fancy the pants off Malcolm?” Andi giggled and stroked her legs.

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