

11:30 am

Georgina is on duty in reception and notices a car enter the car park. No one is expected, so Georgina wonders who this might be.

A young woman, smartly dressed in a pale blue trouser suit, carrying a briefcase, gets out of the car, locks it and walks towards reception.

As she enters the building, Georgina speaks.

“Good morning, how may I help?”

“Good morning. My name is Caroline Ruralby and I wonder if I may see Ms Gatford please, ... I don't have an appointment, but I am an employee of Gigantic Business and I have a letter of introduction from the Managing Director of Gigantic Business.”

Caroline hands the letter, not in an envelope, addressed to The Secretary-General, and unfolded, to Georgina. Georgina reads the letter.

“I'll contact Ms Gatford's secretary. Please excuse me.”

Caroline smiles.

Over the telephone Georgina speaks to Rose.

“There is a lady in reception asking if she may see Ms Gatford, she does not have an appointment but has a letter of introduction from the Managing Director of Gigantic Business. The letter says that she is an observer come to stay - apparently Ms Gatford made an offer at the conference in Mainz.”

Georgina addresses Caroline, “She will be along shortly.”

After a few minutes, Rose enters the foyer, accepts the letter of introduction from Georgina, and invites Caroline to follow her to Ms Gatford's office. Rose and Georgina both notice and note that, as they leave the foyer, Caroline thanks Georgina.

Edith is stood, welcomes Caroline and invites her to have a seat. Rose hands Edith the letter of introduction. Edith thanks Rose, as does Caroline. Rose leaves and closes the door.

“Are you settled into a hotel?”

“Actually no. Head Office had booked me into the Ruralham Hotel, but when I got there, I was trying to find their car park and it seems that they have not got one. It appears that the hotel is in a row of Georgian buildings, and there were not cars then. I was meant to check in this morning, have some lunch and then arrive here about 2:30 this afternoon, but as I realized that there was no car park I decided that I could not stay there so I came straight here to ask if you know of anywhere locally where I could stay, somewhere with a car park.”

“Yes, there is a very nice hotel, with a car park, not far from here, I have not actually stayed there myself but I have dined there on a number of occasions. You will meet someone from another company who is also here as an observer who is staying there. It is The Golden Astrolabe Hotel.”

“Ah,” replies Caroline, “that is a bit awkward. For reasons I do not know I was told not to go there. Is there something wrong with it?”

“No, the hotel is fine.”

“So, do you know why I have been told not to go there?”

“Well, it could be that your Managing Director does not want anyone to think that he has sent someone to spy on the observer from another company who is staying there.”

Caroline and Edith look at each other silently. Edith feels that Caroline has picked up on something.

“However,” says Edith diplomatically, “if I ring him up and assure him that nobody will think that if he allows you to go there at my request, maybe he will change his mind.”

Caroline feels that there is more to this than just what Edith has said ‘could be’ the reason, but being tactful and diplomatic replies “That would be very helpful please.”

“Right,” says Edith, “I’ll ask Rose to take you along to the computing laboratory to introduce you to the researchers and I’ll ring your Managing Director. Then we can go to lunch at La Flava Floro, a restaurant near here, though they do not do accommodation. After lunch, depending on the result of my telephone call I will either show you the way to The Golden Astrolabe Hotel or try to find somewhere else for you to stay.”

Edith telephones Rose, who arrives and escorts Caroline to meet the others.

Caroline thanks Edith, following Rose’s example and addresses Edith as ma’am.

‘I don’t think she quite believed that that is the real reason.’ thinks Edith, ‘Yet she is tactful and diplomatic, and that is good.’

Edith makes a telephone call. .... To the Manager of The Golden Astrolabe Hotel.

“Good morning. This is Edith Gatford. .... It’s a bit delicate and a bit awkward actually.”

“Quite alright, .... in this line of work dealing with the delicate and awkward is just an everyday part of the job. I can assure you of confidentiality.”

“Thank you. .... Well, you may remember that there was a somewhat strange event .... shall we just say the time there was dancing in your dining room.”

“Indeed madam, .... if I may say so your companion handled that brilliantly. I got a full description of what had happened from the staff afterwards and I thought about it later and I wondered if the dancing was in case he tried to follow and continue his shouting

at your table, but he would have found it difficult to do with music playing and people dancing.”

“Well indeed yes. The thing is though he has now realized, with a little help, that he had got it wrong. He thought, based upon an erroneous story in The Daily Newspaper, that Ms Prynter is here as part of a takeover attempt by Enormous Telephones. Actually she is here as an observer of what we do as her employer is considering implementing our research in its products. Anyway, he has now sent an observer for Gigantic Business, and she is here now, though not in my office at present, she is meeting the research staff. She needs to stay somewhere with a car park. Head Office booked her into a hotel without a car park. So she came here and asked if I knew anywhere she could stay and I suggested The Golden Astrolabe Hotel. She said that she had been told not to go there, but not why. I told her that it could be so that there would not be any suspicion of her employer trying to spy on Ms Prynter. I don’t think that she thought that that was the whole story though.”

“Indeed.”

“Nevertheless I suggested to her that I would ring the Managing Director of Gigantic Business and say that if he let her stay there at my request then nobody would think that he had sent a spy. She was happy with that. .... However, I did not mention to her that first I would ring you to, well, .... make a courtesy call.”

“You are a superb diplomat Ms Gatford. .... Well, I have no objection to the lady staying here, but as you will appreciate I am not the owner, I am just the Manager, though I do have quite wide discretion delegated to me. My only concern is that if he tries to get some sort of revenge on me for having him shown the way out by not paying the bill .... well .... well, I would be in a difficult situation.”

“Indeed, I understand the problem. .... How do you normally bill companies for visitors.”

“Unless a customer already has an account we ask for payment for a week, or all of it if the stay is for less than a week, upon arrival, and then weekly in advance until they leave. That way no more than a day or two ever gets left unpaid, but unpaid bills are very rare here anyway, though, alas not a zero occurrence.”

“Well, if her Managing Director agrees to her staying then maybe she has a company credit card or the company can send you a direct bank transfer. Or I’ll try to find some way round, but I do appreciate your situation.”

“Well yes thank you. I realize that this is not your fault at all and I hope that you can sort it all out. So, to summarise, as long as the money is fine then, on your recommendation, I will accept the lady to stay here. I will be tactful and diplomatically ‘forget’ about the business the other evening.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that. Bye.”

‘Well, she needs somewhere to stay tonight so if it comes to it I’ll pay the hotel for a week and then if I lose it, well, c’est la vie. .... Yet hopefully I can get it sorted’, thinks Edith.

Edith rings the Managing Director of Gigantic Business.

Janice answers the telephone. "Managing Director's office."

"This is Edith Gatford from LocSARA. Can I speak to the Managing Director please?"

"May I ask what it is concerning please?"

"Yes, a lady representing Gigantic Business has arrived and I need to ask him something."

"Oh, right. .... I'll ask."

A pause.

"Hello Ms Gatford. How can I help? Is everything alright? She wasn't meant to arrive until about 2:30 this afternoon after checking into her hotel and having some lunch."

"No need to worry, she's fine, she is meeting the others in the computing laboratory at the moment and then I'm taking her to lunch at La Flava Floro."

"Well, alright, but why is she there already and why are you ringing me?"

"Well, when she got to the hotel where she had been booked, she found there was no car park. So she didn't go in and came here to ask if I knew anywhere with a car park where she could stay, and I, well, .... I mentioned The Golden Astrolabe Hotel."

"... And I suppose that she told you that she has been told by me not to go there!"

"Possibly."

"No need for your diplomacy stuff we know each other too well. Let's be direct about it all. What did you say?"

"I said that it could be that you did not wish to give any impression that you had sent someone to spy on the observer who is from another company."

"Very tactful Ms Gatford, very tactful."

"So, I just wondered if at my request and thereby knowing that as it is at my request that you will therefore not be seen as having sent a spy, that perhaps you might reconsider your decision."

"You mean changer my mind and let her stay there?"

"Yes."

"Well, I would if I knew that there would be no bother about it from the hotel manager after that, well, unfortunate misunderstanding based on that newspaper article."

"Well, as long as he gets paid he will be quite happy with her staying there."

"Oh, you've rung him first have you. .... None of your 'possibly', did you, yes or no?"

"Yes", says Edith. Edith does not like being told 'yes or no' if asked a question, but lets it go.

“And he wants some money when she books in I suppose.”

“Well, he says it is their usual practice when a customer does not already have an account, so he is not singling you out.”

“You’re a superb diplomat Ms Gatford. .... Very well, she has a company credit card. Can you get her to the telephone and I’ll tell her its alright.”

“Well, can you hold on a minute or two please while I ask Rose to call her to come from the computing laboratory?”

“Very well.”

Edith goes to Rose’s office and asks her to call the computing laboratory and ask someone to show Caroline back so that she can talk to the Managing Director of Gigantic Business.

Edith returns and chats to the Managing Director about a learning plan for Caroline, but really just to keep the conversation going.

John arrives with Caroline Ruralby.

“Thank you ma’am”, says Caroline as Edith hands her the telephone.

Edith diplomatically leaves the room as Caroline takes the call.

As she closes the door she hears Caroline say “Yes I did. I followed her secretary’s lead. I thought it polite to do so.”

Edith smiles and wonders exactly what the Managing Director had asked her that got that reply.