

From: SAGReiss

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Subject: Le Sommelier

The wine steward at the Taybet Zaman Hotel Restaurant, where we stayed near Petra, is a dwarf, a big dwarf, dressed in a black cape like a eunuch guarding the harem. (In Jordan four wives are legal.) He is far more obviously in command than the managers, who wear Western clothes and professional smiles. The dwarf doesn't smile. He gives excellent service and scatters the captains and runners and bus boys with his stare. He doesn't speak. He nods at the guests and gestures to the waiters. The Taybet Zaman is the most beautiful hotel I have ever seen, but there is no grinning, friendly hospitality, just a lot of hard brown eyes staring at you and mostly doing your bidding. Two of these eyes look out at you from a poster of employees of the month. I almost didn't recognize the face, framed in an incongruous tuxedo and without the deformed body. Under the portrait is the name Ibrahim (or Abraham). I said to Clo: "Look, it's the dwarf." This otherworldly token of Western civilisation stands out in this shamelessly Oriental outpost of the Sofitel chain, whose ownership also owns the Mercure hotel where I now work. Hotel franchises don't mean shit. They just take down the Hilton signs and throw out the ashtrays, replacing them with Sheraton. The Marina Mercure is the worst hotel I have ever worked in. On occasion, however, we can provide beautiful service. A Turkish businessman asked me about nightclubs. I sent him to Allenby Street, where posh bars for tourists stand next to strip clubs, because I wasn't sure what he was looking for. He returned before midnight, very pleased with the tourist bar I had sent him to, but asking for an escort. "No, problem, sir. Let me work on it. Heineken?" I went to the front desk manager: "Are escort services legal in Israel?" He didn't want to get involved and sent me to talk to security. The tall, skinny kid called a service. Our Turkish friend had a special request. He had said that he wanted an Israeli girl, not a Russian: "I want to meet the Israeli people. I go to Russia to meet the Russian people." But there are no Israeli whores, only Russian and Arab. Anyway, we arranged for a Russian girl, who turned out to be young and pretty, at the absurdly low rate of US\$125 for four hours. I'm not sure if that means US\$125 covers the escort service and the rest is on a fee-for-service basis, but if a nice young Russian girl is going to fuck for four hours that's a bargain.

RECTVM VINVM

Scott Alexander Gabriel Reiss