

***THREE  
HOTELS***

by

**Jon Robin Baitz**



**Samuel French, Inc.**

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**SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.**

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ISBN 0 573 69486-9

Printed in U.S.A.

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who brought it and it's author to life*

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*Three Hotels* premiered on April 6, 1993 in New York City. It was presented by the Circle Repertory Company, Tanya Berezin, artistic producer. It was directed by Joe Mantello with the following cast:

KENNETH HOYLE.....Ron Rifkin

BARBARA HOYLE ..... Christine Lahti

*Set Design:* Loy Arcenas

*Costumes:* Jess Goldstein

*Lighting:* Brian MacDevitt

*Sound:* Scott Lehrer

*Production Stage Manager:* Jody Boese

*Original Music by* Rick Baitz



# THREE HOTELS

## PART ONE: THE HALT & THE LAME

Tangier, Morocco

*A hotel suite. An air of faded Edwardian quietude hangs heavy in the air. KENNETH HOYLE stands for a moment in thought. HE has on a rather exquisite summer suit. There are manila files, papers, old copies of the London Financial Times, etc, scattered about the room.*

HOYLE. The first thing I want to say is, this is an interesting market. This little corner of Africa here. And it's been a particularly bloody morning here in Morocco, let me tell you. Because one of the interesting things about this market is we lose more money here than anywhere else in the *world*. Which believe me, is saying a lot. Because we lose money everywhere.

So this entire morning has been about cutting away the dead wood, and when I say dead wood, think of a forest, okay? Letting people go. That sort of thing. And gruesome work it is. I mean, to fly in and check into some hotel and tell people it's over is not exactly ... a joyride.

Markets. At World Headquarters in Los Angeles, we have a sort of War Room. And there is a *map*. A lucite



map of the world, upon which our competition appears as a sort of huge orange cancer encroaching. This is the same orange as the drink *Fanta* which is popular in my markets.

*(Beat.)*

Third World Markets. (They like us to say “Developing Nations” which is slightly laughable given just how little development occurs.)

*(HOYLE goes to drinks tray and takes his time mixing a martini.)*

I sometimes think that if we could color *our* product, which is powdered baby supplement, a powdered-milk formula, if we could just color our product *orange* like this drink *Fanta*, a fun color, appealing to natives, we might increase our sales threefold overnight.

“Five’ll get ya ten,” I say at our meetings in the War Room, that if this baby formula were bright orange, fizzy and sweet, we’d knock ’em dead in Lagos. Gets a bit of a laugh out of Mulcahey and Kroener who begrudge me not at all my little bits of gallows jokery so long as I perform for them. Gotta perform. This has come to mean, it appears, that “I let people go.” This morning I’ve had, well, today is a sort of a red-letter day when it comes to unemployment for many. Fraiser, Conclon, Truitt, DeWitt, and just now, Varney.

*(HOYLE takes a long drink from his martini.)*

Who had come up through the International Division with me. I mean we started at the same time. Twenty some years ago. They *handed* him this entire market. All of North Africa. Handed it to him. And he blew it. His little thing? Little boys. Loved the little native boys. But it was not that which stalled his progress through the International Division. No.

(*HOYLE sighs.*)

I did warn him. We had dinner last month in Nairobi. I said, "Kroener and Mulcahey are going to want to see *something soon.*" A clear, clear *bloody* flat-out warning to this buffoon, and I did it as a favor to him because *we came up together.* But he kept going on and on about the lovely little sales girls he found, "nut-brown little milkmaid-gals," he called them. And implied a number of them were willing. And one sits there mortified, knowing, wanting to just get up and say, "Hey pal, nobody gives a fuck if your cock is twisted, just so long as the fourth quarter profits are flyers."

(*HOYLE wipes his brow. The heat of the room.*)

That is how we speak at World Headquarters. And you've gotta learn fast. What's funny to me is that they perceive me as some sort of gentleman farmer tending his little garden. "Oh call *Kenneth Hoyle*, he'll know how to handle *Varney*. He's marvelous at that sort of work." I'm good at firing people is what they're saying.

My first year of this particular assignment consisted almost exclusively of getting off of prop planes and doing “that sort of work.” Because by the time Mulcahey and Kroener finally decided to let me have a shot at it, the orange bits on the lucite map had pretty much occluded our blue. And I was a sort of last-ditch-try-*anything-what-about-*Hoyle** sort of a thing.

The result has been a bit of a bloodbath. People who used to want to have a drink ... they shy away a bit now. Do I blame them? You can't. Even though I don't make a game of it or take the slightest bit of pleasure out of the task. What sort of person would? But the thing to do is do it quickly. Because when you linger it's sheer hell.

In less than an hour the next batch starts trudging in. Less than an hour, next batch.

*(Another martini is mixed.)*

This is how it's done. “Varney. It's no accident that I'm stopping off here in Tangier.” And he looks at me. At first there is this moment of denial. The raw animal response — the instinct — “Do I run, do I hide?”

*(HOYLE is quiet for a moment.)*

And I'll just sit very quietly. Because I want him to understand the thing that is happening and to create *an atmosphere of dignity*. Which is up to them. Before I have to utter the unfortunate words, “I'm here because we have

to make a change." It's so much better when the words are not actually spoken.

But Varney, he gets it, he's an old hand. You know when it's over. So we sit here quietly. And then he asks me, "Doesn't it feel odd, Ken?"

"What?" I say.

And he says, "Your rise to power, Ken." And then he goes. Quietly goes. They go quietly when I do it.

And afterwards, when one is sitting by oneself here in one's room, it is not hard to think of the railroad tracks to the ovens.

You do not want to talk about the ovens at World Headquarters. One time in the War Room, I made one of my little asides. I said I hoped that our baby-formula marketing policy in the Third World would not be looked upon as some sort of horrifying mercantile ... Final Solution in twenty years. And Kroener looked at me over this huge table we have and said in his Havanaesque accent, "Well I hardly see the comparison between baby formula and Zyclon B gas, do you?" Barks out a laugh. Which shuts *me* up. Quickly. Let me tell you.

*(Pause.)*

When I told my wife that story, she said, "What I'd like to do is hang a big dead cow from one of the palm trees." At World Headquarters we have two giant palm trees in

front of the building flanking the neon Iris and Rose sign that lights up Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica. So sometimes I think, "Well, why *tell* her these stories if she's going to be so hypersensitive?" But who else is there. To discuss this with. If not your mate? I mean, if not her, then ...

*(Pause.)*

Yeah, well.... Oh well. I will say this. I shocked her last winter in London. A young man who — well let me preface this — a lefty Brit with money. And when I say lefty you can safely read Stalinist. Which I really don't mind, I think it's cute, but not once has any of them apologized for having gotten it so very wrong for so many years and for having given the rest of the world such a bloody hard time all the while. *Not once* has any of them had the class to so much as stand up and say "Oh dear, oh sorry, we were wrong."

I have only one wish. That my father had been around to see Leningrad revert to St. Petersburg. I would have liked to have handed him *that* headline.

*(HOYLE cuts and lights a cigar.)*

Anyhow. This Brit kid who works for us. We're at a party for the London office. Me. My wife, Barbara. Bunch of the guys. And the kid says to me, "Mr. Hoyle, sir," (and you know they're gonna fuck ya when they call you sir) "I must tell you I think that what we are doing in Africa is morally indefensible."

Well. I mean. There you are. His wife stands there grinning at me like a mad little Staffordshire terrier and there is my *own* wife, grinning, thrilling. And Kroener and Mulcahey taking it in too.

“Morally indefensible,” I say. “How so?” And he sputters like a boiling tuber. “You’ve got saleswomen dressed up as nuns and *nurses* for God’s sake running around *hospitals* in Lagos and Nairobi. You’re treating baby formula in the Third World as if it’s tonic water, which it is not, though by the time the mothers dilute it and the babies drink it, it may as well be. You’ve got billboards with *doctors* on them, for Christ’s sake, proclaiming ‘Iris and Rose is better than breast milk.’ And the only reason you’re getting away with any of this, Mr. Hoyle, is because you are doing it in a place where white people do not go on holiday. Come on,” he says. “Defend *that*.”

*(Long pause. HOYLE smiles.)*

At World Headquarters you learn a kind of manufactured thuggishness. It is a sort of currency, if you will. The coin of our realm. It means nothing. Less than nothing. It’s totally made up.

I look at the boy. “For years,” I begin, “this company was run by uncomplicated men who had a clear goal: make a buck. And with the opening of so many world markets, it’s taken these men a while to learn that you can’t do business in Togo the same way you do in Elbow Lake,

Minnesota.” I stop for a moment. “Cause in *Togo*, pal, things are different.” What I’m doing is, I’m doing my gentleman farmer number. (Someone said Bush might have seen me on PBS, that documentary on corporate accountability, and stolen my style.)

Anyhow, back to the party. I say, “Listen. You and I both know that *you* know that. I can see from your tie that you did your hard time at the London School of Economics, so kiddo, clearly you’re bright. Therefore, I’m not gonna stand here and play sandbox ethics with ya, so let me offer you this. *Quit.*”

I take a breath. The room, it is glistening; it is limp. He is beginning to look queasy but I’m not about to let this cocksucker off the hook. And this is where I got Mulcahey and Kroener. “If it’s so very morally indefensible sitting here overlooking Green Park with your glass of stout and sausage on a toothpick, well then, this must be your resignation, and happy am I to accept it right here and now. *Sir.*”

Exactly eighteen days later I was made Vice-President in charge of Marketing and Third World Affairs.

And like that. The reasoned apologia followed by the sucker punch. The boy, incidentally, never quit. Gave him Cairo and Libya, doing fine.

After the party, on the drive back to the hotel, Barbara said to me, “Did you have to do your Bugsy Siegal routine on that poor boy?” And I, without looking up from my

*Financial Times*, said, "The little shit wants an ideological debriefing and some Altoid mints for his breath."

And silence until Claridges. Africa? Barbara says it has hardened me.

I seem to spend more and more time lately fending off a particular brand of self-satisfied righteousness. Mostly from women. Who think I will be shamed by a photo of a toddler with a swollen belly. And you know, you just find yourself retreating into a kind of manufactured Zen trance. It does no good to tell them I have *seen* swollen bellies. I have seen this face to face.

So what if Barbara has taken to imitating some of my bromides in a deeply Teutonic accent reminiscent of Henry Kissenger. I get the "choke." Because sometimes I have to apologize for the way in which we do business. But. When Barbara has toppled over the edge of bitterness into that realm in which careers are ruined, she will call me "the Albert Speer of baby formula."

I always know we're in tricky waters when I'm compared to some German or other. You see ... I had some of our saleswomen in Africa dressed in sort of nurse's outfits. Pink. An error. A *mistake*.

And there's no winning with Barbara lately.

On the phone just now, when I tried to discuss this with her, she says, "You love bloodshed, don't you Kenneth." And I said to her, "Barbara. Have you ever had to



work a day in your life. Have you? Because I do not think you know what it is to be simply afraid. Because I, Barbara, am *always* afraid."

And she says nothing. I go on. "My father, a card-carrying member of the party, sending me to communist summer camp in Peekskill, making me sing the Internationale with those lyrics about taking over the world.

"Barbara," I say. "I have been surrounded all my life by people who have to impose their earnest view of the world, this tidal wave of warm piss crashing down on me." I say, "At least, Barbara, in business there is a tangible measure of reality and achievement." And she says, "Chameleon. Lizard."

"Barbara," I say. "Please. We are not the Agency for International Development. We are no longer in the Peace Corps. We are not administering to the masses of the bloody *halt and the lame*. For God's sake, Barbara. It is business."

(*Beat.*)

"Please." And she will not answer. She has nothing to say to this. This, after the great pleasure of waiting six hours for them to get you a phone line with an echo from Tangier to Santa Monica.

Marcus Hirshkovitz. My father.