

# FAST TRACK LOS ANGELES

*Our global fixer gets accosted in an LA steam room. By Charles Finch*

THEY HAVEN'T SEEN ME YET, thank God, or maybe they don't care. But the Korean; he's snarling now. Froth is gathering mouth-side. "I gonna blake hith hlead open like egg loke, man; 'wlack that motherfucker dead."

"Worth fuckin' killin' a man just ta see that omelette, Mr Ming," grunts his fat buddy, Baldy.

And suddenly they're giggling like two very bad-ass schoolgirls, and I'm thinking, "Oh boy, this is really *not* that funny at 9am on a Saturday morning in a tiny dark steam room, somewhere in LA's famed Koreatown."

So, I slide further back in the steam, back against the clammy concrete that feels as if it's going to give me something to take home, and it's not a hug. It doesn't help any that I'm suffering a mighty bout of jet lag, also known by its most descriptive term yet as "jet rogering". My whole being feels like it's been rectally perforated by the 757 I just flew in on.

"Fluck him. *Fluck* hith wife and hith children..." Mr Ming clears a hole in the steam.

He sees me for the first time. "Morning," I mumble, softly.

Baldy is shaving his head in the steam. Shaving every inch of it. Slowly. Obscenely. Not a hair on this pot-bellied pork of a monster. Not a single pube. Nada.

"You lukin' at thumthin'?" says Ming.

"Leave it," says Baldy, watching me.

"You lukin' truble?" pushes Ming through the vapour.

"Excuse me?" I reply, feebly.

Both take me in now with some interest; after all, few people excuse themselves, even at the most appropriate times. They clearly enjoy the fear plastered across my face. They sense the over-privileged education that's ill-equipped me for the steam-room thrashing that's coming my way. Minutes ago, I had slipped off my handmade Berluti loafers and hung up my silk Charvet pyjamas, and now I am about to get gang raped at the Beverly

Hot Springs. I now notice the tattoos. I particularly like the well-drawn barbed-wire choker around Baldy's neck and the daggers on Mr Ming's shins. His shins! How much green tea would a man have to drink to get over that pain?

"Excuse me," they both mimic in the Queen's English.

I haven't been this scared in a long time, but for some reason I don't run. You see, I'm beyond running. I'm tired and travelled out. Bored by security midgets at overcrowded airports, by men in ill-fitting suits and whining movie stars and agents and producers and luxury brands and, right this second, my whole life. I just wanted a fucking steam. So I lean forward in my steam, the steam that I paid for, and peer right at them. Face to face. I can smell the oyster sauce and garlic on Ming. The soap on Baldy's scalp. The eucalyptus — you get the picture — and still I move closer.

"Looks like you've taken too much heat, old boy. You should cool down some," I hear myself saying, my family jewels hanging dangerously near the steam.

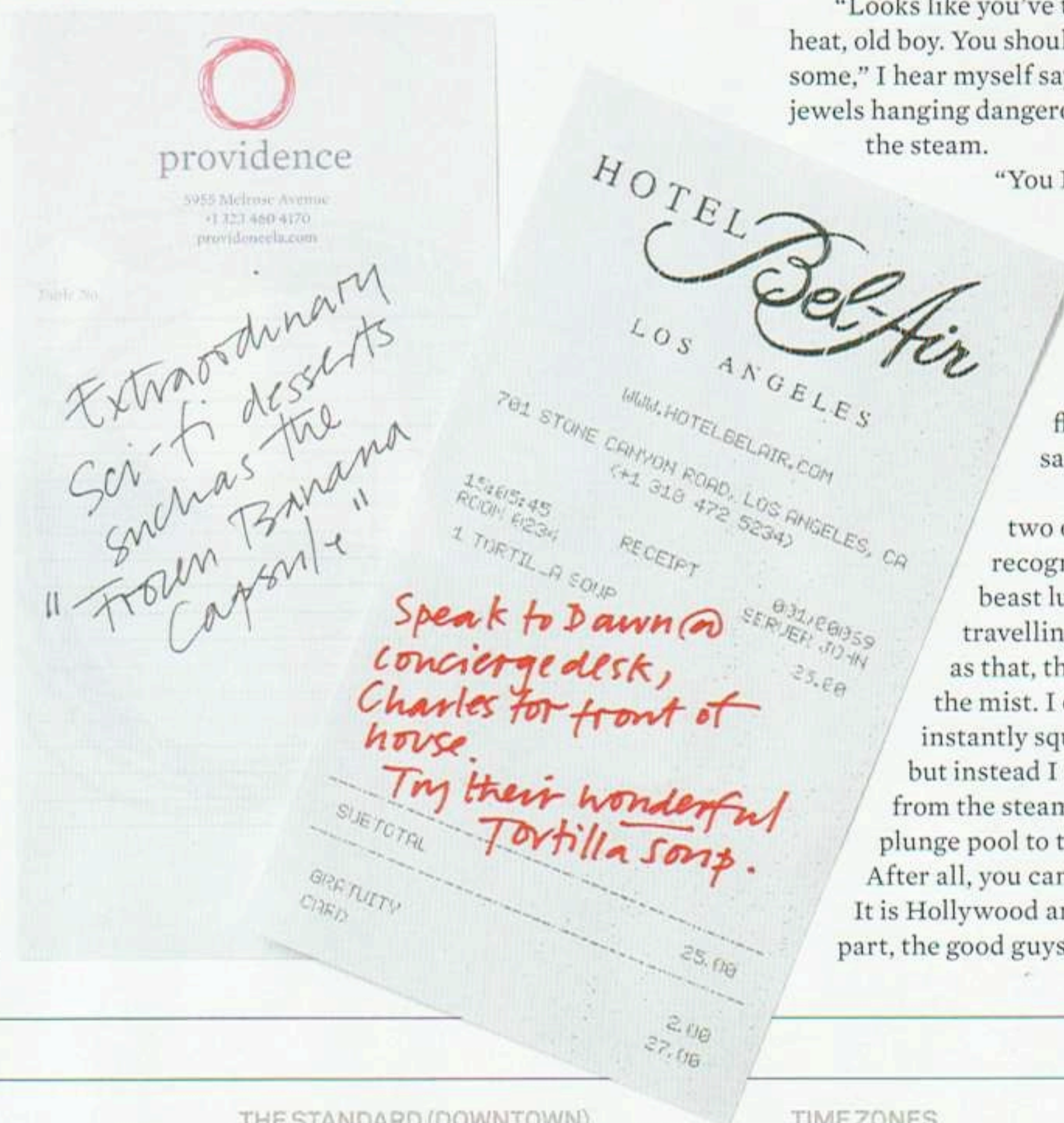
"You Blitish?"

I nod.

"You don't luk like James Blond," he says.

"And you don't luk like fuckin' Bluce Ree," say I.

They nod, the two of them. Perhaps recognising the caged beast lurking in all travelling Brits, and, simple as that, they back away into the mist. I could have been instantly squealing like a pig, but instead I am walking out from the steam and past the plunge pool to the changing room. After all, you can only take so much. It is Hollywood and, for the most part, the good guys win. ☺



TRAVEL NOTES

**NISHIMURA**  
Understated and chic Japanese restaurant  
8684 Melrose Avenue (+1 310 659 4770)

**THE GRILL ON THE ALLEY**  
Classic US food, from steak to chicken pie  
9560 Dayton Way (+1 310 276 0615  
www.thegrill.com)

**THE STANDARD (DOWNTOWN)**  
Forget the more famous Sunset Boulevard hangout and head downtown to its sister hotel. Check out the rooftop bar by the pool, sip some cocktails (particularly the mojitos) and drink in the view  
550 South Flower Street (+1 213 892 8080  
www.standardhotels.com)

**TIME ZONES**  
London 0.00 | Los Angeles -8.00

**DIALLING CODES**  
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**USEFUL NUMBERS**  
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