



***A Gentleman in Moscow, by Amor Towles***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, September 2017***

Every now and then a novel comes along that begs to be recommended. For this reviewer, Amor Towles' *A Gentleman in Moscow* is such a book. Panoramic in scope, yet intimate in detail, *A Gentleman in Moscow* completely captured my imagination.

The story begins in 1922, after the Russian Revolution. Thirty-year-old Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov is found guilty of being an unabashed aristocrat by a Bolshevik tribunal. The usual sentence for such an offense is death by firing squad. However, in his youth the Count had published a poem which was revered by the revolutionaries. On that point alone, the Count's life is spared. His sentence is commuted to lifetime house arrest at Moscow's grand Metropol Hotel. If he were ever to leave the hotel, the Count is warned, he would be summarily shot.

The Count, moved out of his posh suite at the Metropol into a cramped upper-floor garret room, assesses his fate. Raised from childhood by his aristocratic grandmother, the Count recalls her maxim: "A man must master his circumstances or else his circumstances will master him." The Count resolves to build a meaningful life amid his hotel-bound exile.

Adjusting to his new circumstances, the Count explores the inner workings of the hotel. At the Metropol's famed restaurant, the Boyarsky, the Count befriends French Chef Emilie and Maître d' Andrey. The three men form a triumvirate against the oafish headwaiter they disparagingly deem "the Bishop." A consummate communist, the Bishop orders the removal of wine bottle labels, striving to eliminate all vestiges of elitism.

As time progresses, several engaging characters in *A Gentleman in Moscow* come and go against the backdrop of Russian history. Nina, the charming nine-year-old daughter of a Russian bureaucrat, is the first hotel guest to become the Count's friend. The striving poet Mishka, the Count's university companion, visits regularly. The Count conducts an affair with a beautiful actress, Anna Urbanova, whenever she breezes through the Metropol.

At the brink of World War II, Nina, now an adult, returns to the Metropol to ask the Count for his help. He is surprised to see Nina after so many years, but he agrees to her unusual request. Now, the Count's life has a new purpose. And more than ever, he is determined to find a way to be free.