

In this comic Cold War novel, Canadian restaurateur Emmet Argentine is trapped in Khrushchev-era Vilnius, Lithuania, under the tyranny of two equally formidable forces: the Soviet Union, and his staunchly socialist mother.

Raised in the kitchens of Toronto's Royal York Hotel, Emmet's got a talent for hospitality that catches the attention of a high-ranking architect, who hires him to helm a magnificent new restaurant. Under Emmet's direction, the Seaside Café Metropolis, though located neither by the sea nor in a major metropolitan area, attracts a colourful cast of bohemian artists, writers, and philosophers, including a visit from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir — all while kgb operatives listen in from the basement via microphones in the bread baskets.

Through guile, wit, and charm, Emmet, his staff, and other restaurant regulars strive to make rich lives for themselves in the heart of the repressive Soviet regime, drawing warmth from good food, good humour, and even better company.