



GOLDEN BOOK HOTEL STORIES ~ 2

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Rebecca

by

Roberta Minghetti

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GOLDEN BOOK HOTELS

HOTEL MILÓ

~ LACERNA ~

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Roberta Minghetti

(1969)



She was born in Ravenna, where she lives. She has dedicated her studies and her work to her two passions: microbiology and communication. She is a copywriter and does consulting in the advertising field. Often lost in the pages of a book, she enjoys writing short stories with the sea and succulent plants for company.

Lacerna, 1st July 2011

The Miló Hotel, recently appearing in the Golden Book Hotels, is an exclusive, elegant but very particular hotel. It is said that it is able to change shape according to its guests' secret wishes, and even to let them travel through time and space.

A mysterious legend surrounds the hotel concerning its builders, the Miló family, whose women were suspected of witchcraft. Not many people know the truth about the hotel, but I am among those who do. For years I worked at the reception desk, and if I had not resigned, I would certainly have been the next manager of the hotel. I left the hotel in the hands of Guido, the present manager, the young and inexperienced clerk Anna, and Pietro, the bizarre man Friday with an obsession for music. Together they will have to learn to live with the mysteries of the Miló hotel and manage its guests.

Do you think it's an easy job?

It's not at all, especially if you don't know the whole truth about the Miló.

Perhaps Guido, Anna and Pietro's responsibilities are beyond them, but – even if I can't be sure things will go as I have planned – I have faith in them.

It is a long story waiting to be told.

Mario

Rebecca

I like listening to two types of story – those brought by time-wearied footsteps and those that have yet to be born.

I have a dead-weight girl in my arms and two wide-open eyes staring at me from the other side of the reception desk. Anna, the owner of the eyes, quickly recovers from her astonishment and starts to shower me with orders. “The girl has just checked in, her name’s Rebecca, put her down on the sofa while I call a doctor, Pietro! Don’t just stand there, try calling her name! Lay her down!” I’m paralysed by the events, and generally the presence of such a pretty girl a few metres from me would be enough to cause this effect. The fact that she is actually in my arms, even though she’s fainted, should throw me into total chaos, yet what puzzles me most is something I noticed as she entered the hotel.

I try running mentally through the last ten minutes: I see myself in the doorway of the hotel, welcoming

guests as I wait for my evening shift. I wait for clients to approach, to cross over the “magic line” and enter the hotel, only in that way can I catch the wonderful *climbing the steps-a pace-break* sequence.

Listening to footsteps has always been important to me, and it has been a subject of study for all the generations of my family. “Footsteps are the soul’s way of making itself be heard and alighting on the world” said my grandmother. By listening to the sound a person makes when they move, you can understand much more than just by listening to words. My grandmother taught me that people’s souls can communicate with each other when they move through the same space. She believed in many other things too, but perhaps most of them were just old wives’ tales.

When I was small I devoted myself to footsteps because the pay was good – a fruit jelly if I managed to connect the footsteps to the person, and if managed it in less than five seconds, I also got the chance to play with the stamp my father kept in the second drawer of his desk. The exercise was this – I hid under the reception desk and whispered the room number so that Daddy was ready to hand over the right key straight away as he threw me a sweet with the other hand. As the years

passed, and thanks above all to my grandmother, I learned to interpret those sounds, and now I spend a lot of my time recording footsteps that I then mix with music tracks to send to a D.J. friend of mine who plays in various clubs. I haven't yet worked out if the success of this music is due only to the singularity of the acoustic effects produced or if it really is that, because of the inclusion of footsteps, people find themselves unconsciously perceiving the experiences of other human beings, as if they were listening to the words of a song or reading the pages of a book.

Perhaps it is all these things together.

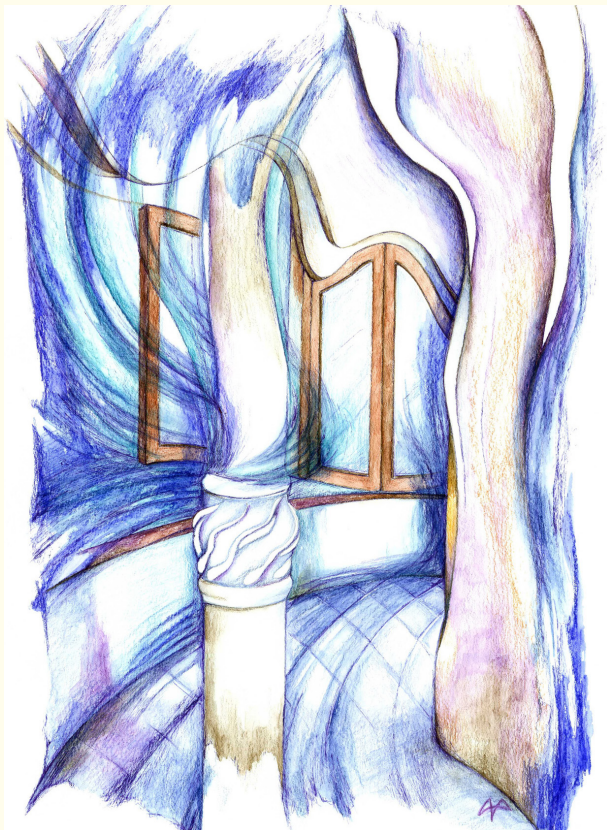
A few minutes ago I was on the doorstep of the Milò hotel, because that is the place I most like to be; the threshold is magic for me, it marks the passage between the everyday and the new. Inside the hotel you are no longer surrounded by the noises and sights that form the backdrop to everyday life. Shapes and colours change... and the souls of those who come in are affected by a silent start which manifests itself as a break in the sequence of footsteps dictated by routine. I sense this change of rhythm as a laugh that somersaults out of the mouth in the middle of a speech, unexpected and sudden.

I've always thought I was the only one to have no break in the transition between inside and outside the hotel – after all, the Miló is like another room in my grandparents' house for me. Today, however, my certainty crumbled. A few minutes ago, the girl I am now looking at as she lies stretched out on a sofa, walked past me like a manatee, without a sound, moving the air between herself and the ground as in an aerial dance. I remember following her to the reception desk, staring at her silent feet, and that is why I was in time to catch her as soon as she felt faint. I have no break and she has no footsteps; we are completely complementary.

I am still lost in thought when I realize that the doctor is talking to Anna about our guest's state of health. He thinks it could be a slight panic attack, maybe brought on by the stress of finding herself in a new place. He says some homoeopathic drops could be useful. In the meantime, the girl sits up, not at all surprised by what happened.

“How are you feeling? Is there perhaps someone waiting for you in Lacerna who you'd like to get in touch with?” – are the first words that come out of my mouth.

“Everything is fine, thank you. Yes, there's someone I



“Inside the hotel you are no longer surrounded by the noises and sights that form the backdrop to everyday life...”

have to meet, but it's not time yet." Her mouth widens in an impatient smile.

I help her up and I realize with surprise that she has no luggage with her. I decide to put my arm around her waist to help her stand and we move towards the lift. Anna runs over and puts the keys to the room into my left hand: it is number 302. "Well done" - I think, looking at the number. The room is all white, from the furniture to the shiny white marble floor. All this monochromatic space could seem cold and unwelcoming, but Anna knows very well that she has made the right choice. And it is so.

Rebecca stops just inside the door and looks around almost euphorically. She frees herself from my grasp and bends over to touch the icy floor with the palm of her hand, closes her eyes, smiles and asks me "Can I ask your name?"

"Pietro, I'm the night porter, if... if... you need anything... don't... don't hesitate... to..."

"Pietro" she interrupts me without standing up and without looking at me "do you mind if we call each other by our first names?"

"No, of course not. You see, I..."

"Pietro, don't worry about what happened. I'm fine,

it's just my way of preparing myself for a special encounter." She sits down on the end of the bed, takes off her shoes and begins to rub her bare feet on the floor. I don't think I've properly understood the meaning of what she has just said to me, but on the other hand, I haven't understood much about what's been happening for almost an hour. I'd like to ask her endless things, but I realize that now her feet are moving in the same way I saw my mother's feet fidget as I hid under the kitchen table to avoid a telling-off. I hold back all my questions, rolling them around my mouth and swallowing them down past my tongue. It's clear that it's time I was on my way.

"I'm going now. If there is anything, please call me at once."

"Yes, thank you".

At the bottom of the stairs, Anna's sarcastic, sly tone reaches me: "Ah, Pietro, so you didn't get lost, you've been ages...She's pretty, our guest, don't you think? Come on, tell me... is she feeling better?"

"It seems she's feeling much better, and I have nothing else to tell you, unless... unless you want to tell me something about a certain Alberto who comes here with his girlfriend of the moment and has now started

calling you by your first name and greets you with that knowing little smile every time he sees you," I say with a smile.

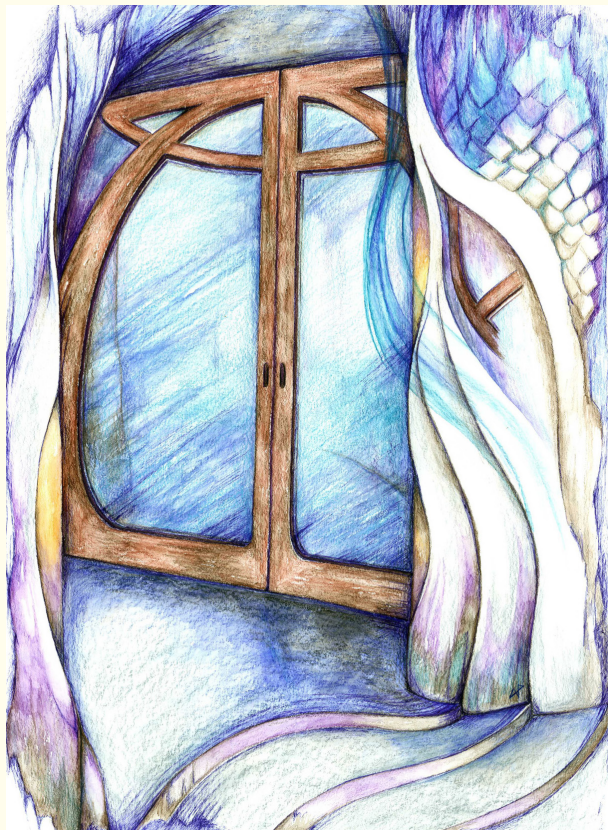
A look of understanding puts an end to any further comment from either of us.

The night is my favourite time. The guests are already back In their rooms, the dragon's back shape of the hotel roof seems to be curled around a yawn and my field of vision seems to reveal one thing at a time,
One footstep at a time,
One thought at a time.

I see a shape pass quickly in front of me, move away and stop a few steps past the door of the Miló. It went out with such urgency that it seemed swept along by such rapid thoughts as to be forced to hurry to keep up with them, or perhaps the attempt was to shake them off.

"You can run out of a door, but not out of the night" - who knows why I say that to her.

At my words, Rebecca turns with a start, her head wobbling on her slim, chilled neck and her lips pursed in the grimace of someone who is probably already regretting having given me permission to call her by her first name, "Pietro, you've startled me".



*"Shapes and colours change... and the souls of those
who come in are affected by a silent start..."*

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to, I’ll go away immediately if you like. Is everything all right?”

She turns her back to me, dropping onto the last step outside the door and resting her head in her hands. Then she straightens her back, and still without looking at me, whispers: “To answer you I’d have to tell you something a bit strange. You wouldn’t believe me.”

“Perhaps I won’t believe you, but I’m sure I’d like your story.”

The girl smiles silently and begins in a whisper:

“My life started suddenly, but it was a pretence. My parents imagined me already grown up, missing out on my present as a child. I spent my first and last months shut up in my father’s legal office with a boy shorter than me and with manners as dry and dusty as my Latin dictionary. He did nothing but smile at me while I pored over those books full of laws, which were so forbidding to me, just to see if there was a way of getting away with it in the event I managed to get rid of him for good. My parents trapped me, my future and my desire to travel in that office, and satisfied only their own expectations. When I arrived here today and saw my room, white as ice, shiny as ice and cold as ice, I realized what my inner desire to travel is linked

to. I want to be an ice-skater and compete all over the world. My only problem now is how to tell my parents, and seeing that I certainly won't be able to tell them straight away, I have to hope I won't forget and will have the strength to do it when the time comes."

Her voice is becoming more and more excited, worried and happy. She goes on, "Professional killers take drugs to slow down their heartbeat because they want to shoot between one beat and another. For my start, though, the real one, I'll wait for the space between two breaths."

The ringing of the reception desk telephone brusquely interrupts the story and I run to answer.

"This is Mr. Giusti in 204! We need an ambulance. My wife's waters have broken! Hurry! We're coming down to the foyer!"

Lacerna is a small town and the hotel is not far from the hospital. They've assured me that the ambulance will be here in five to eight minutes. The Giusti couple are already in front of me - he red in the face and short of breath, his forehead sweating; she with her hands on her stomach, trying to breathe evenly, without success. She makes smothered moans as she grinds her teeth, clutching her husband's hand in a

grip that cuts off the flow of blood in his hand. With a snarl she asks me where that “f***** ambulance” is. Shocked by the lady’s unexpected manner, I answer almost frightened, “It will be here in front is just a few moments, keep calm, everything will be all right. Will it be a boy or a girl?”

Almost relieved at the chance to chat to relieve the tension, her husband answers, “It’s a girl”.

I don’t know how to make myself useful; I turn anxiously towards the outside steps to see if the ambulance is here, but there’s no sign of it, and the girl I was chatting to has also disappeared.

Mr. Giusti starts a chant that is totally useless for his wife, but not for me: Breathe dear, breathe... breathe...”

I smile and ask slowly, “What name have you decided on?”

“Rebecca.”

Appointment at the Miló

in the next story:

“The Saint in procession”

by **Andrea Cattanéo**





drawings by
Anna Parisi



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