

# Hair-Raising Hotel

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A further installment of my 'multi-strand' project. Please bear in mind once more that the names of the characters are likely to change and that this is an early draft



Published on  
**Booksie**

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# Hair-Raising Hotel

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The Majestic Hotel stood in all its glory near the railway station in a somewhat run-down street in a poor area of the town. It was anything but a Majestic, although it might have been when it had been built in the heyday of King Edward VII. For a start, the paint was peeling, the gutters hung on for dear life and threatened to fall onto the head of any innocent passer-by who happened to walk near to the building. In some areas they were rusting so badly and hanging off their supports dangerously. Whenever it rained, the downpour from the gutters gushed into the street in a constant stream. The window-frames were rotting badly, and none of the doors seemed to fit properly due to the damp. On the roof, plants grew out of the spaces in the tiles, where some had slipped, others looking near the point of actually falling off. In other words, this wasn't the sort of place you'd automatically be drawn to if you were in need of a room for the night, or even a place to visit for a quiet evening's drink and something to eat.

Walk up the steps and in through the front entrance and you'd be greeted by a receptionist called Melanie who wasn't entirely concentrating on the job she was paid to do. She would be reading a magazine while sitting at her post, propped up on a shelf underneath the counter. She occasionally glanced at her mobile phone which she kept in her handbag, which was itself hanging on the back of the door connecting the reception area to the office. She was half-expecting a text message from her boyfriend, inviting her out for the evening, or possibly, however remote, some form of communication from an agency she had recently signed up with for a modelling job. Hotel receptionist was merely a means to an end to her, just another way of earning an honest crust, a way of paying her bills. She had a dream of one day becoming a super model and strutting her stuff along the catwalks of Paris, London or New York. But until that moment came, she would have to endure the indignities of dealing with the riff-raff who drifted in and out of the hotel and bored silly with their endless complaints about dripping taps, lumpy mattresses and inedible food which seemed to make up the vast percentage of her time working behind the reception desk.

Her boyfriend, Eddie, was a tolerant soul. He put up with her endless need to spend money on clothes, make-up and the latest gadget. He claimed to have contacts in the music and media world, but at the moment he was busily helping with the opening of a nightclub, but as he was on the fringes of the entertainment world and had a vast number of contacts, she knew that he would be able to help her become either an actress or model. She was absolutely determined to get her foot on the bottom rung of the ladder that she hoped would lead to fame and fortune.

As she sat and read her magazine, which carried articles about the lives and loves of celebrities, her eye was caught, if only for a brief moment, by the sight of a couple of men in the street through the glass of the hotel's front door. They were dressed neatly in smart suits and carried clipboards in their hands. They stood together on the opposite pavement and were talking together, and then appeared to be looking at the hotel. One was pointing at some feature or other of the building, and then wrote something on his clipboard with a pen. One of them had a briefcase and opened it, and supported it by placing it on top of a post-box that stood on the corner of the street. He fished out a sheaf of papers, one bundle of which he handed to his

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accomplice. They continued to chat for a couple of minutes, and then strode off in the direction of the town centre.

Melanie sat and continued to read her copy of *Hello*. She flicked the pages over slowly. Her concentration wandered as her eyes met those of some celebrity hunk who was posing beside his swimming pool in Beverly Hills. Her mind was elsewhere when she turned the page to behold a two-page spread on the home of some elegantly dressed actress. What, she thought to herself, were those two men up to? Why were they eyeing up the Majestic Hotel? Was there something the owners of the rotting pile weren't telling their staff? She was itching to know, and even more so, itching to tell the other members of staff what she had just witnessed.

The ancient lift descended from the floors above, bringing with it a couple in their sixties. They approached the reception desk. The wife, a formidable-looking woman who wore a chain store two-piece outfit in crimson-and-black polyester and glared at Melanie through a pair of rimless glasses, while her husband cowered several paces behind.

It's no good, Geoffrey! I insist on complaining!

If you must, my dear.

Of course I must. I want service and I expect to get it!

Melanie looked up from her magazine.

Yes madam. How can I help?

It was last night. We came in late and wanted something to eat. We rang room service. I'd hardly call it SERVICE, but never mind. We were hungry, so we wanted to order a sandwich, nothing out of the ordinary. This is a hotel, after all. Quite straightforward, I'd say, wouldn't you, Geoffrey?

Yes dear, said her husband, very keen to agree with her.

What did we get, when they bothered to answer the phone? They didn't seem to understand a word I said. They said it was far too late to order food and that the kitchen was closed for the night.

Did you get your sandwich? ventured Melanie.

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â It took over an hour to arrive. And then the bread was dry and there was far too much mustard.â

â Do you wish to make a formal complaint?â

â Why, yes, of course. It completely spoilt our weekend!â

â I wouldnâ t say that,â said her husband, sheepishly.

â Geoffrey! Weâ ve spent good money. I expect better service. The man was rude!â

â Iâ m sorry madam. If youâ d just fill in one of our complaint forms, then we can look into your complaint. Itâ s our procedure.â

She carried a sizeable handbag, which, from looking at it, one would suppose it contained half the contents of a department store. She swung it onto the reception desk in one almighty movement, and plonked it down hard immediately in front of Emily. The woman opened the handbag, and with much deliberation and effort thrust her hand inside and delved about for a good half-minute. She took out several items, a handkerchief, a set of car keys, and an address book.

â Whereâ s my glasses case? I canâ t find it. Oh, here it is!â she drew out the case, covered in fake crocodile skin, and clicked it open. She took out the small cleaning cloth from inside the case and then took off her glasses, and glaring at Emily, proceeded to clean the glasses as agitatedly. When she had cleaned them as thoroughly as possible, she placed them back on her nose, returned the cloth to the glasses case, closed the case with a snap and put it back in her handbag. She then lent on the counter and stared directly at Emily.

â The complaint form, madam!â said Emily, producing a blank card from a filing cabinet behind the reception desk, and handing it over to the, by now, seething guest, who snatched it sharply from Emilyâ s hand.

â If you care to fill it in and hand it back we can then investigate your complaint.â

â Geoffrey, letâ s fill it in over breakfast!â said the woman, and they ambled off into the restaurant.

Geoffrey didnâ t look the sort of man whoâ d put up any sort of fight, particularly with his wife, as he was small and pasty faced with a thin moustache. He was all for a quiet life, so he agreed wholeheartedly with everything she said. Infact, he looked the sort of man whoâ d got to his time of life and given up all efforts with regards arguing with her or to have any sort of opinion of his own on anything.

Melanie breathed a sigh of relief as the couple left the reception desk and returned to her copy of

â Hello.â

It was at this point that there was the sound of a muffled mobile ring tone in the office. Melanie stepped deftly through the door to quickly grab her handbag, find her mobile and silence the thing. She remained in the office, but kept an eye on the reception desk, just in case another guest needed her assistance.

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â Hello,â she whispered into the mobile.

â Hi, Mel! Itâ s me, Eddie.â She hated being called Mel, but just this once she let it pass.

â Didnâ t I tell you NOT to ring me? Iâ ll get into trouble if Iâ m seen using my mobile. What do you want?â

â Youâ re off this weekend, arenâ t you?â

â Yes, thank goodness.â

â How do you fancy a trip to Devon?â

Sounds great to me. Anything to get away from this mouldy old hotel. Whatâ s going on there?â

â Iâ ve got to deliver a sofa for a friend of a friend. As a sort of favour.â

â O.K. I canâ t talk anymore. I must get back to work. You can tell me more about it when I see you this evening when Iâ ve finished work.

â O.K. Bye.â

She snapped the mobile shut and put it back in her handbag and returned to the reception desk.

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