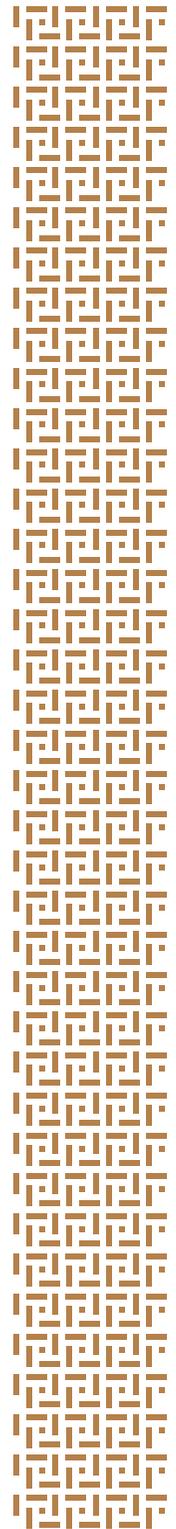




Élodie Torrente

Élodie Torrente, author and journalist by trade, writes short stories – her fetish format – and novels since 2008. Her passion for words and people leads her to animate writing workshops for young and old, all year long. Her latest novel, *VOSTFR* (Original version with French subtitles), is published by NDB Editions (2018).



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A story inspired by

LE GRAND HÔTEL

Cabourg

BEDTIME STORY BY MGALLERY

In the Shade of Room 414

by Élodie Torrente

A story written for
Le Grand Hôtel de Cabourg

shortédition

In the Shade of Room 414

How did they first meet?

It was by the revolving door, on the beach side. It was like a scene worthy of a Lelouch film. As a person who hums shoobedoobedoo every time I walk into our dear old hotel, I was delighted. You've booked room 414, haven't you? It's the one that truly exemplifies the hotel. Here's the key, Marie, my colleague, will take you up there. She'll tell you all about how they met.

Follow me, Sir, it's this way. Hannah Dawson has been coming here since she was a little girl. She used to come with her grandmother who she called Poupette. Just like in the French film *The Party*. That was a coincidence that always made us laugh. Even as a child, Hannah was very clumsy. Her mother often used to scold her and it was dear Poupette, a lovely woman, who would console the little girl. To cheer her up, she would buy her a hot chocolate with thick froth on top and our speciality: some of those famous madeleines that Marcel Proust praised so highly. The little girl would end up with chocolate all over her dress but her grandma always managed to keep her out of trouble with the help of the head housekeeper. Mrs. Dawson was very strict with her daughter. Her father, she had only seen him twice. According to her mother, he had abandoned them. The little girl took that very hard. But I am digressing. So Hannah has always come here in December. That day, the day they met, she was day-dreaming and dropped all her parcels in the revolving door. Our porter came to her rescue and everything was soon picked up. Except for one very light garment, the sort you only see in intimate circumstances, which slipped out of a bag. In all the commotion, nobody saw it and it blew away on the sea breeze, wafted by the spinning of the doors. Fayçal Hadja, the famous trumpeter, was coming in by the same door from his walk along the seafront. And that's when... Ah shoot, I have to answer this. Sorry, it's urgent. Go and see Jules, the barman, he'll tell you the rest. He knows the story as well as I do. I'll see you later, Sir. Enjoy your stay in Marcel Proust's room!

Here's your Calvados. Oh yes, it was a very amusing scene. Mr Hadja was coming up the steps and he was just

under the awning when Miss Hannah's delicate lace item blew into his face. Suddenly blinded, he bumped into the glass. The porter rushed to his aid. Miss Hannah blushed when Fayçal handed her the flimsy garment. His face was serious but there was amusement in his eyes. Our Australian friend was embarrassed and snatched the flimsy object from his hands, turned her back on him and headed for the elevator. He tried to catch up to her but the doors clanged shut in his face. I remember the receptionist was smiling quietly to herself. The trumpeter wanted to know Hannah's room number but my colleague wouldn't tell him. All the same, it was us who helped them to fall in love. We're very proud of that. Our charming manageress took the lead. And look, here she is.

Delighted to meet you, Mr. Robert. I hope you like our hotel. We're pleased to have you. Writing a romance based on our Grand Hotel, how wonderful of you to pay us such an honor! And how brave! Good for you, trying to follow the genius of Proust! To get back to Hannah and Fayçal, they didn't see each other again that night. Because of the embarrassing incident with the lingerie, our beautiful Australian stayed in her room all evening. He dined in the restaurant and then spent an hour or two playing melancholy pieces on the piano in the great hall. It was the following day when they next saw each other, once again near the revolving door, this time on the garden-side, not on the beachside. With her back to the hotel, facing the beautiful summer vacation residences, with a bottle of soda in one hand and her cell phone in the other, she was talking while gesticulating dramatically. Unfortunately, the top flew off the bottle. The liquid spurted all over the white cotton sweater of Mr. Hadja who was coming out at that very moment. The trumpet player let out an "Oh!" while our barman rushed over with towels to dry him off. Hannah, engrossed in her conversation, did not hear his exclamation. It was only when she hung up that he tapped her on the back. They exchanged a few words. Caught yet again by her own clumsiness, she could hardly refuse his invitation. From ten in the morning to one o'clock, the story had time to spread all around the hotel. Jules even invented a cocktail for the evening, with the sweet name of 'Trumpet of Love.' We still serve it. You should try it while you're here. Well, I'm telling you all this just to say that she never tasted it because she didn't... Yes, I'm coming! Please excuse me, I'll have to leave you. But here's our chef, Mr. Lebeau. He'll be delighted to tell you all the rest. Won't you, Jérôme?

If you're talking about the secrets of my cooking, I'm not promising anything, but I'll tell you that story with pleasure. The splendid Hannah didn't turn up. She rang room service and asked for dinner in her room. Fayçal waited a long time. I've always taken it upon myself to seek our guests' opinions of the meal and, even though he assured me he had enjoyed dinner very much, he didn't really have any appetite. With a sad look on his face, he apologized, then asked for my help to win her over. It was the first time he had been so captivated by a woman. I don't know what got into me because I don't usually get mixed up in our guests' romantic affairs, but, despite his huge talent, Fayçal Hadja is so humble, polite, and so sensitive that I couldn't say no. So I advised him to take Hannah by surprise, rather than courting her in the traditional way. Women who are very sought after

hate all that. I also told him that the fact she hadn't moved to Sydney where her mother lived showed that she enjoyed her freedom and was protective of it. Nevertheless, I didn't have an idea to suggest to him. Everything that happened afterwards came from him. But time is getting on, I'll have to leave you. It's all hands on deck in the kitchen. David, our sales manager, will tell you the rest. You can find him in the office.

Come in, Sir. Welcome behind the scenes of the Grand Hotel! What Fayçal set about doing to win Hannah's heart was completely crazy. He only went and booked every single room! For three nights, emptying our hotel of all its occupants. That would have been impossible in the high season, but there are not so many guests in December. That was why we agreed to his request, although we made him wait a little. He used that time to order hundreds of red roses, which our teams arranged all over the hotel. He had pink balloons delivered. We put them on the grand piano, all over the big reception room, and hung them from the great chandelier in the hall. When she came out of Room 414, she was so surprised by the decorations that she asked the receptionist if they were in preparation for a wedding. She burst out laughing when my colleague replied teasingly, "Yes, yours!" Hearing her tinkling laugh, Fayçal appeared via the revolving door, with a red rose in one hand and a balloon in the other. She realized that this decor, so unusual and so romantic, had been created by him and for her. She agreed to go for a carriage ride on the beach. When night fell and Jean-Louis Trintignant and Anouk Aimé appeared on the big screen set up on the beach just for the occasion, she was completely won over. They spent three days getting to know all the rooms in the hotel, crazy with love. Ever since then, they've booked the whole hotel every December. Tomorrow they are coming to be married. It will be magical. Before the wedding, she will be staying in Room 414.

But tell me more about your project. What is your novel about, exactly?

In response, I invented some story or other. The truth is that I am not a writer. I have booked Room 414 at the Grand Hotel in Cabourg in order to find Hannah and discover when she will be coming back here. Now that I know, everything is ready. I have written a letter explaining to her all the long years I have spent looking for her. I will leave the envelope on her pillow. Inside it I have slipped her birth bracelet, which I have carefully kept. Along with all the love of a father for the daughter he has refound at last.

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