



Majorelle Blues

by

Silvia Seracini

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hotel miló

~ LACERRA ~

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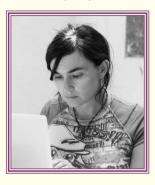








Silvia Seracini (1971)



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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.





Majorelle Blues

Flashing. First, a rustle like that of distant fronds, then a less and less shrieking hiss from the few centimeters-wide metal mouth that gradually faded to silence, though remaining wide open. A long, long curve, whose gold and steel arc had illuminated the whole city for what could have been no more than a fraction of a second. But why then had it seemed an endless corner of the eye vision of a shooting star sucked from a fifth floor window of the Hotel Miló to the few resistant couples still entwined on the benches along Murata Avenue?

It had all started on a beach and it was all coming to an end on a beach at Beluga, together with the last bonfire dying among the dunes at one of the Lacerna townsfolk's favorite places to have fun. It had been right on a Mediterranean beach that Mostafa had taken part in his first fashion competition. His Middle-Eastern charm, his amber skin, and his almond smile had bewitched an international panel of judges.

There on that beach, surrounded by the wildly flashing eyes of the cameras, the captivatingly handsome Moroccan had taken his first steps towards success in the glamorous world of fashion.

Although she was on vacation, Dana Fox, Britain's most acclaimed designer, did not let this magnificent virgin prey escape her. There were very few models in Mostafa's home country who had embarked on that profession without being drawn into the sticky web of prostitution.

And so Dana had taken to draping that perfect body with neutral-colored clothes that, according to her, highlighted the gold in his silky skin, the soft folds of his fleshy lips and the dark shade of his eyes.

First, however, she had stripped him bare, since she hated the brightly colored clothing which had always represented vitality and wealth to him.

In the beginning it had been mostly about the parties and the celebrity for Mostafa, that and the money with which he supported his family in Marrakesh. Then came the daring games she liked to play with ropes and riding crops, and the expensive gifts with which she rewarded his docility.

Such as that steel and gold ring the designer had commissioned from a celebrated goldsmith. She had given it to him on the beach and he had taken it as an engagement ring.

How naive. She had laughed at him for that.

His long eyelashes filled with tears because he was truly docile and loved Dana, who had given him so much. He had often felt the cut of her sarcasm, but this time the wound would not heal.

He had just left the exclusive party on a yacht moored in the Lacerna marina when he saw the little girl.

She came down the side of an ancient Gothic cathedral reddened by the last rays of sunset and ran along the edge of the strand towards him, smiling. He was surprised to see her alone, given the time of day. She did not seem afraid however, rather her emerald eyes had regarded him trustingly once she had drawn near.

Suddenly she stopped and dusted ashes and opalescent fish scales – dragon confetti? – from the filthy undershirt, that hung to her knees and had gaping arm holes that left her pink armpits and part of her chest bare – as if she had stolen this piece of clothing from her mother or an older sister – before beginning

to run again, now in the opposite direction to the sea. He had the urge to follow those footprints that happily dotted the beach, so he trailed her like a stray dog. All the better, given that he had no idea where to go and certainly the little girl would lead him to someone who could tell him the way.

After having hesitated for a moment upon the threshold, the little girl made a peculiar hop through the entrance of a hotel where sinuous lines on the facade outlined marine animals, reptiles, and shells – Hotel Milò he seemed to remember having read. She crossed the lobby with sure, harmonious steps before disappearing into the deep central atrium that housed the elevator and the staircase.

"On vacation with her parents," Mostafa had thought when he intercepted a brief exchange of friendly, conspiratorial looks between the girl and the bizarre looking receptionist wearing large glasses and peering out from under a bouffant, curly hairstyle.

"May I help you, Sir?"

He's a dreamer. He would like to flee, but he doesn't have the strength. Room 105 would be perfect for him, but he has



"... and with him the moon, be swallowed up by the blue flower of the bed."

asked for a room on the top floor, close to the moon. Room 302? No, it's all white with a cold marble floor.

Still intently peering after the girl child, his tapered hands were pleasantly surprised at the unexpected warmth of the key that the boy behind the counter handed him.

Approaching the elevator that was already waiting and opened emptily as soon as he pressed the button, he had given one last look at the stairs that wound upwards, deserted.

There was a salty odor inside the limited space of the cage. And an odor of ashes. The gears of the hoisting mechanism ticked like an antique clock.

Steps like those of a wounded gazelle that echo millennia of trodden earth.

Pietro – so read the name written on the tag affixed to his breast – had written, hunching his shoulders over his notebook:

... steps restrained by the din of centuries of chains...

The large, finely-wrought iron bed in room 513 opened to receive Mostafa like a blue petaled flower.

A glimpse of the colors of the *suq*, together with the odor of cumin and the nauseating one of leather,

hurled him backwards in time into his hometown's covered market.

The intensity of that memory made his heart ache at the thought of his body imprisoned in the absolute absence of colors that characterized Dana's designs, and his eyes glistened with tears in the night.

"You are the color of milk and I of amber, you are rich and I'm poor. You are always looking for a taxi and I for the stars. You give me a steel and gold ring and I, to you, my desire to care for you for the rest of my life. I ask you again, Dana, will you marry me?"

She and her friends exploded with laughter.

"Rather, it should be me asking you, my dear. But don't worry, I will leave you free."

Her friends had continued to smile and chew on the straws in their cocktails and he had wandered away with his heart broken.

No, she hadn't followed him to ask his forgiveness. She never did because she was sure he wouldn't be able to go far without her.

An unusual perfume of orange blossom permeated the air and intensified the image of the moon between the curtains at the windows of room 513. The whole room was completely blue, except for a peculiar, dark red, stuffed cushion with a partly rounded and partly pointed shape that was ensconced on the bedspread.

"Just the moon keeps me company in my room, only I can't sleep by myself," Mostafa tortured himself while clutching the cushion to his breast. That moon kept telling him stories to keep him awake.

"Rather, it should be me asking you, my dear. But don't worry, I will leave you free."

He had hurled the ring at that stupid satellite, which continued to mock him from behind the curtains, trying to wound it. Finally, exhausted, he let himself, and with him the moon, be swallowed up by the blue flower of the bed.

Aicha, the little girl he had dreamed of marrying when he was small, was playing at embroidering the fates of her suitors with blue silk thread in a garden flourishing with cactus, lemon trees, and bougainvillea in the new city.

"You are nice, Kamal is richer than you, Nabil is very intelligent..." all the while circling him. In the end, he found himself with his hands tied behind his back and



"... the little girl he had dreamed of marrying when he was small, was playing at embroidering the fates of her suitors with blue silk thread..."

the other children taunting him with a singsong, "How stupid you are, Our prisoner are you..." while gall rose in his throat, preventing him from making any retort.

He awoke at dawn's first light, with bags under his eyes and a parched throat, to the voices of children bickering outside. Then it wasn't a dream after all! Clutching the small cushion, which was all wrinkled by now, he approached the French window that opened onto an unexpected garden. Again that tormenting perfume of orange blossom and almond paste.

The little girl from the beach was sitting next to a boy of her age on a crooked swing under a soaring blue Art Nouveau arcade in the garden from his childhood. The boy was in penumbra and his face could not be discerned, though his voice sounded familiar. The two kept sliding to the lower side, squabbling over sweets typical to his native country.

At the same time they spelled out the words letter by letter as they read uncertainly from a book that was much too large for their sugar-sticky hands.

"I soon realized that I was enthralled by his strong character, that I hung on his every word and copied everything he did [...] Until after a while, I realized that I had stopped

doing the things that I liked, and I began to feel a veil of unhappiness enshrouding my spirit more and more every day." >> (N. 1)

"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 [...] My parents trapped me, my future and my desire to travel in that office, and satisfied only their own expectations." >> (N. 2)

"... true beauty is found where humanity has become just a remote memory: I learnt this following stray dogs wherever they went, day and night, eating what came to hand and sleeping rough." >> (N. 3)

"Unkept promises..."

"Or, maybe, when you give up something that you like doing to because of someone..." went on the little girl, sliding her finger along a different line in the big book that reddened her knees with its weight.

"Unkept promises and disappointed hopes, I was saying..." the little boy was trying to take up the theme again but was continually interrupted by his little companion swinging at his side. Or rather, they should have been swinging together given that they were seated on the same swing, but an imperceptible dissonance rendered their swinging awkward.

Only upon looking more carefully did Mostafa realize why the swing was uneven: one of the two chains suspending it had an extra link. It was a ring that glinted gold and steel grey. The same ring he had rid himself of only shortly before.

He felt a pang pass through the cushion he clung tightly to and remembered vividly a precious wish from his childhood. With every sip of mint tea he renewed his promise to himself never to abandon his search for a love as pure and intense as the blue in the heart of that garden, where among the palms, bamboo, banana trees, and azaleas, he had dreamt of marrying Aicha.

"Don't worry, it doesn't finish that way!" the girl had reassured him, indicating a line with a small finger. "You are still in time to choose your ending," she said with an infinitely sweet smile.

Having become as young as Aicha again, he imagined brushing her lips with his and he truly tasted almonds, orange blossoms, and mint tea.

With that imaginary kiss, he had put the little girl to sleep, and with her, her mysterious companion.

He had rested during that intact moment in which the hands of time stood still, before jumping ahead or diz-



"... one of the two chains suspending it had an extra link. It was a ring that glinted gold and steel grey. The same ring he had rid himself of only shortly before."

zily spinning backwards to recover past dreams and passions buried under the sands of the merciless hourglass. But no, time doesn't work that way at the Miló. At the Hotel Miló, time is guided by the desires of its guests. That is as it should be. Forever.

Feeling as if he were still swinging, he had awakened from what seemed to him a reawakening, and now the sunlight filtering through the open window of his room lit up his amber skin.

Outside, Murata Avenue was slowly coming to life. Like him. Like Jeema el Fna plaza, that took on the colors of the vendors' stalls, the street musicians, and the snake charmers every day.

He smiled.

It wasn't true that he had no place to go.

"Anna" was lettered on the tag she had pinned to her breast.

"I found this book on my window sill. I don't know how, but a little girl who is staying here with her parents must have left it."

"Thank you, Sir. But there are no children among our guests at the moment."

[&]quot;May I help you, Sir?"

With a smile and without further ado, he left the Hotel Miló, barefoot, the splendor of his skin revived by the Majorelle blue bedspread he had draped around his statuesque body.

"He's a very handsome young man, don't you think?" as she replaced the book in a space under the reception desk.

The healed gazelle regains his springy step and sets off again to the rhythm of his heart.

A curly-headed boy sitting under the reception desk switched off his small recorder and stamped another page of that book while sucking a little vexedly on his umpteenth fruit jelly.

"Thanks again for having covered those two hours for me yesterday evening. I really needed to stretch my legs a bit," Anna whispered to him as she slipped off her jogging shoes, kicked them under the reception desk and replaced them with a pair of elegant pumps whose heels crunched on grains of sand.

Flashing. First, a rustle like that of distant fronds, then a less and less shrieking hiss from the few centimeterswide metal mouth that had gradually faded to silence, though remaining wide open. A long, long curve, whose gold and steel arc had illuminated the whole city for what could have been no more than a fraction of a second. But why then had it seemed like an endless corner of the eye vision of a shooting star sucked from a fifth floor window of the Hotel Miló to the few resistant couples still entwined on the benches along Murata Avenue?

But it's well known that lovers tend to believe anything. The ring, on the other hand, ended up in an envelope in the lost or left property room, together with an elegant colorless linen suit.

Appointment at the Miló in the next story: **July 1st 2012**











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