

The Maverick Hotel
by Eszter Molnár T.



Eszter T. Molnár

**The Maverick
Hotel**

For Lilla

MOLNÁR T. ESZTER
**A KÖBOR
SZÁLLÓ**
MOLNÁR JACQUELINE
ILLUSZTRÁCIÓIVAL



Chapter One

Hugo Faraway Looks for Lodgings

Out at the forest's edge, where the city stretches its fingers curiously in among the trees, and there are squirrels, pine martens and foxes on the roads instead of cars, there is a small, round clearing. In the middle of the clearing stands an age-stooped hunter with his faithful dog crouching at his feet. A piece of the dog's silky-smooth stone nose has broken off, and the old man's face is covered with lichen, his hat with bird droppings. No one pays them much attention any more, although the number 24 bus circles around them once every half an hour.

One lonely Wednesday afternoon, Hugo Faraway stepped off the bus clutching a bulging plastic bag in each hand. He trudged across the road, looking neither left nor right, and completely failing to notice the statue because his nose drooped down to his knees as always. Only the rays of the sun, tickling his ears and the top of his bald head, broke through the gloomy haze of his sadness. He had come to expect rain whenever he had no roof over his head, or a flurry of snow,

or at the very least for the north wind to come whistling. These days of course, more often than not he had nowhere to call home. Hugo could not be termed a lucky man, pursued as he was by dark clouds and accidents, grief coming and going from his heart as regularly as the tides.

He paused on the far side of the street and waited patiently to get back onto the bus that he had dismounted from just two minutes previously. A scruffy little blonde girl was the only other person waiting at the stop. The bus completed its turn and drew up before them. The little girl hurried up the steps, but by the time Hugo had got a grip on his carrier bags the driver had closed the doors and set off towards the town centre. Hugo Faraway didn't grumble or shake his fist at the disappearing bus, instead he sighed sadly. With no watch and no idea what the time was, he didn't rush off anywhere. His tummy was rumbling loudly, and the sun was slipping down behind the hill, so he thought it might be late afternoon. He glanced at the timetable, but then waved his hand at it and set off towards the forest. It might be less comfortable than in the town, he thought, but he could just as easily spend the night here. Especially if it didn't rain. Hugo was hoping very much that on this particular night it would not rain.



The dishevelled little blonde girl who boarded the bus before Hugo was called Riki, and she was not just dishevelled, she was grubby, too. She gazed out at the streets with her nose

pressed to the window of the bus. She hadn't started school yet, but she could count to nine, which was very handy since that was exactly how many stops she had to travel to get home. In the evening hardly any passengers got on and off the bus, which sometimes glided past the bus stops without even stopping. Riki kept a sharp lookout because she didn't want to miss her stop, so she never gave a moment's thought as to why Hugo Faraway and his bulging bags had been left behind.

Hugo Faraway had not startled her at all because, despite his tatty clothes and matted beard, his face was not in the least bit frightening. Riki was not afraid of anything, not of spiders, not of the bully boys, not even of the neighbour lady Manyi who, mummy told her, had false teeth that she could take out. Riki thought that such things must be terrifically practical, especially given that you could not only take them out, but put them back in again. For example, if you fancied some ice-cream you could take out your teeth first and they wouldn't hurt from the cold, but then put them back in again to munch on the cone. She decided that when she was grown up she would get herself a set of false teeth.

In the entire world there was only one solitary thing Riki was afraid of: Dino, the huge Rottweiler that lived in the garden of the pink house at the end of the street. Dino was neither green nor scaly. But despite the sleek black hair stretched across his muscular body, his head resembled that of a tyrannosaurus rex. His teeth were unlikely to be false ones though: they gleamed white and chomped through the thickest of wire fences in a couple of days. At this very moment he was barking at Riki through a brand new hole as

she crept past the bushes on the other side of the road.

– Stop barking or I will tell Witch on you! – The little girl muttered the threat under her breath as she slipped in through the gate of the house.



Of course, Witch had no idea that Riki was talking about her or indeed that Hugo Faraway was so perilously close to her hideout. Although it is worth noting that just then Witch was snoring so loudly that her cave could hardly be called a hideout. Hugo couldn't fail to notice the dreadful din. At first he thought he was approaching a sawmill, then he began to suspect that at any moment he would come across a narrow-gauge steam railway track, but it was only when he stood before the entrance to the cave that he realised that it came from a human being.

– Ahem! Hello, anyone at home? cried Hugo, for he was a terribly polite man, and although he lacked a home of his own, he knew that it was not all right to wander into someone else's without asking first.

- Humph! was the answer from deep within the cave.
- Good evening! I am Hugo Faraway. cried Hugo a bit louder.
- What? You? Faraway? Hugo? – questioned the croaky the voice
- Indeed, and I am looking for shelter for the night.
- Well, you can't stay here – resounded the reply.
- It looks like a very comfortable cave, though, Hugo

pondered.

- You could call it a hidey hole. Tell me, are there any spiders in there?
- It's a comfy cave, but it's not available to rent.
- Surely there is more than enough room in there for me, too. It would be splendid if there were, because it's about to rain. Or even if the sun is shining at this moment, the rain is on its way because believe me, whenever I sleep in the open air, it always rains.
- Well you can take my word for it, I am the only person who is going to be sleeping in this cave!
- Not even your spiders?
- You wouldn't regret it, and we would quickly get over all this. We would be snug and cosy all night.
- And of course it's your breathing I want to warm me up!
- As you like – said Hugo, slightly huffily. Since he was a man of good manners, he didn't push the matter any further, instead, he sat down on the ground in front of the cave and
- began to root around in his bags.
- What are you up to now? – questioned the hostile voice
- I need a bite to eat, if that's not a problem.
- And you want to eat it here?
- Well, since you ask so nicely...
- I never asked! What have you got there in any case?
- A few little delicacies – said Hugo, plucking out a tin of tuna in tomato sauce, holding it up triumphantly.
- Hand it over and I will tell you where you can sleep.

- Really? – Hugo’s face lit up.
- A good place? Clean? D-r-y?
- Just put that can down onto the floor! – said the voice, firmly.
- Now take a step backwards. If you set off on the path to the right, you will reach a gate in three minutes. Go in and ask for Gizi.
- Now just hang on a minute! Hugo scratched his head.
- If it is so good there, then why are you here?
- It’s none of your business. Now, buzz off and stop bothering me!

The toe of a boot stretched out from the cave and hoicked the can back into the darkness, and after a brief pause the rasping sound of snoring rang out once more. Hugo shrugged as he turned his back on Witch’s hideout, and set off down the path.

