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Jaroslav Holoubek
The Dragon Chamber Hotel



THE CZECH ASSOCIATION[®]
OF HOTELS
AND RESTAURANTS

Jaroslav Holoubek
THE DRAGON CHAMBER HOTEL

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Translated from Czech by: Ivo Hloch

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Foreword

Dear travellers,

If you just happen to be opening this book, then you must be in a hotel or a boarding-house of some kind, probably somewhere far from home. That is fine, because travelling is full of new adventures and interesting experiences. Put simply, full of something that we all look forward to. What we never enjoy much though is all the packing prior to setting out on our way. When I travelled with my parents, I sometimes forgot to put a book in my knapsack. And that was too bad. Falling asleep with a book is much more enjoyable. If you are a similar kind of a scatterbrain as I used to be, then you need not worry, because we have prepared a bedtime story for you. But our fairy tale may come in handy even if you are not a cuckoo at all.

We have decided to tell you a story to make your evenings more comfortable. It is a story of the adventures experienced by little Jimmy and his sister Clementine while on a trip with their parents. A story full of thrill and colourful images. A blank page is awaiting you at the end of the book that you can draw your dream hotel on – or anything else for the matter.

I am not sure if you are aware that, much like you get marks at school, also our hotels are rated. Well, not exactly by marks, but rather by stars – also ranging from one to five. Only it is all the other way round a bit in this case. The more stars a hotel gets, the better the mark turns out to be. So, besides reading the fairy tale, you can play another game with us in that you can try to find out just how many stars your particular hotel has.

And if on top of all that you like contests too, then feel free to draw a picture of the hotel and send it to us by post or via e-mail. We will give you a small present in return. What exactly sort of a present that will be is a secret to be learnt only by those who will be playing this game with us. We are going to evaluate the most commendable pictures at the end of the year and the winners will receive an invitation from us to a magic hotel full of adventure.

We wish you lots of beautiful moments spent with our friends Jimmy and Clementine.

Wondering where your picture should be sent to? Here is the address:

AHR ČR, Revoluční 13, 110 00 Praha 1

fialova@ahrcr.cz

And do not forget to drop us a line whereabouts you have been and how you liked it there!

Thank you!

For AHR ČR team

Václav Stárek, AHR ČR President

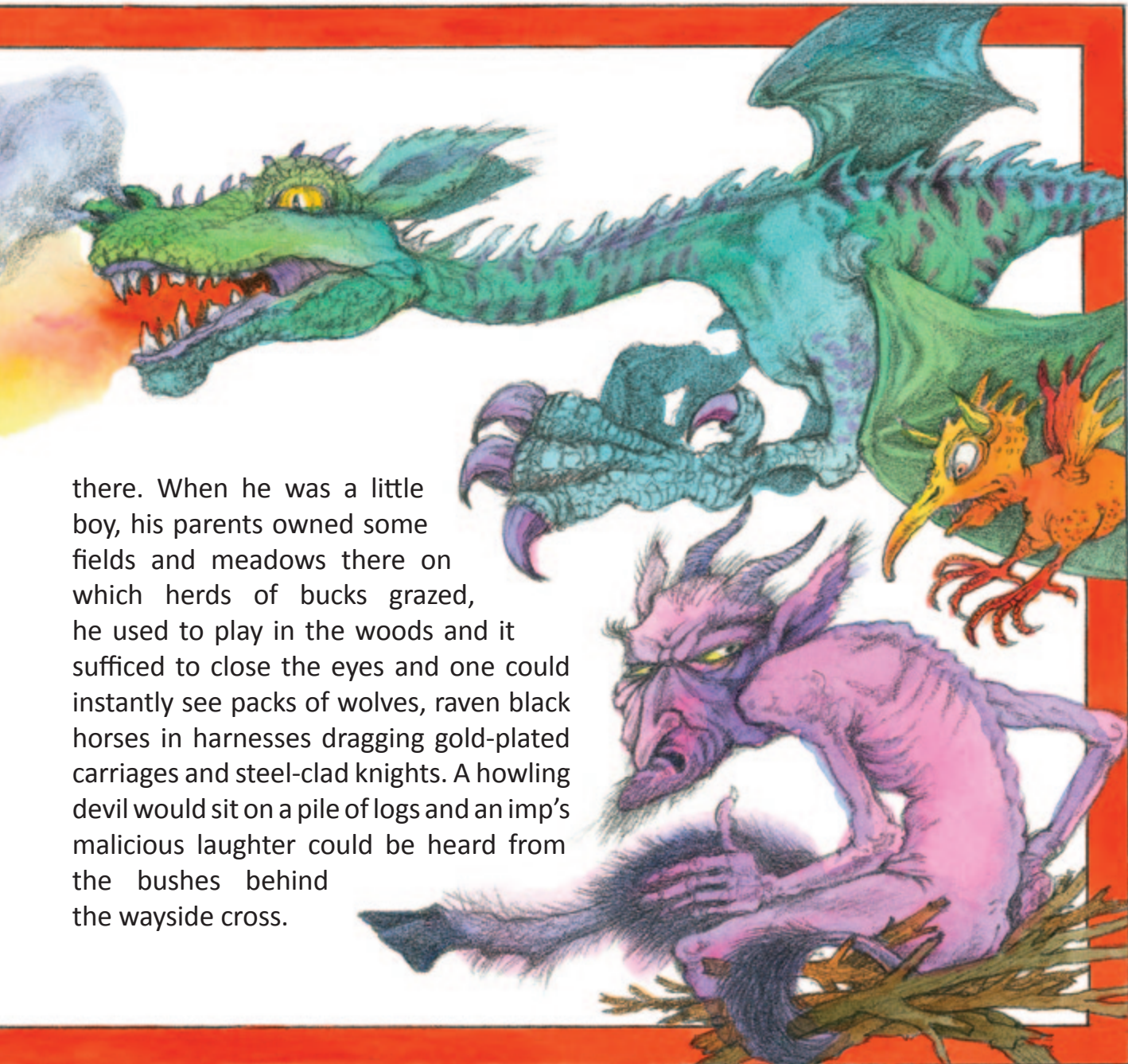
Jimmy and his little sister Clementine have been looking forward to that day for a long time. The end of holidays was drawing near and there was an expedition full of incredibly wonderful adventures and unpredictable events awaiting them. As soon as their mummy had packed everything they needed and returned home from the car one last time just to make sure she had not forgotten anything, they were ready to set out on the journey at last.

The sun was showing through some fine cloudlets swinging overhead resembling glittering trimmings on a Christmas tree and a breeze as light as a feather was breathing through the treetops of the rowanberries growing along the road. An old asphalt road wearily wound through the hilly countryside, the hillsides were scattered with ominously rising huge bales of straw that seemed as if they were about to start rolling into the valley any minute. A train pulled by a steam engine was panting through the narrow valley along the river.

The children's father occasionally reflected on how funny it was that the places had been given such names as Organ Growl, Devilish Trick, Tomb, Gallows Hill, Underforest or Unsheathed. God knows, perhaps they were haunted and some ghosts still appear



there. When he was a little boy, his parents owned some fields and meadows there on which herds of bucks grazed, he used to play in the woods and it sufficed to close the eyes and one could instantly see packs of wolves, raven black horses in harnesses dragging gold-plated carriages and steel-clad knights. A howling devil would sit on a pile of logs and an imp's malicious laughter could be heard from the bushes behind the wayside cross.



As they stopped before a junction, the daddy looked about thoroughly as if possibly he might see a dragon flying past accompanied by shoals of eagles, a white lady with the weird sisters, or perhaps a singing waterfall – but nowhere was there anything as fabulous as that to be seen. Nothing but an outlook tower on the Rabbit Hill and the shattered ramparts of a medieval castle in the Rose Garden. “It is so long ago and everything has changed”, though the father as he drove on.

The journey was long and far-distant and the children were looking forward all the more. All of a sudden it occurred to Clementine: “But daddy, we are not going to see aunt Flora, are we? She always makes us swallow that disgusting cod-liver oil!”

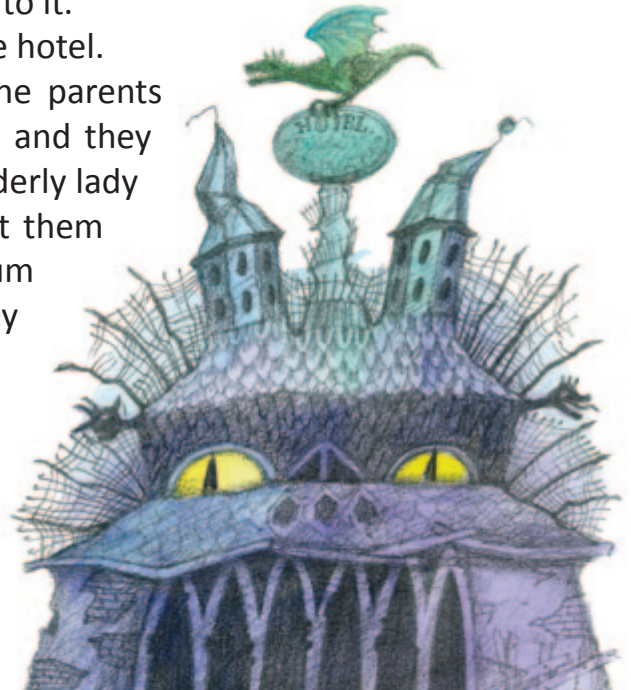
Jimmy stared at his papa with wild looks...

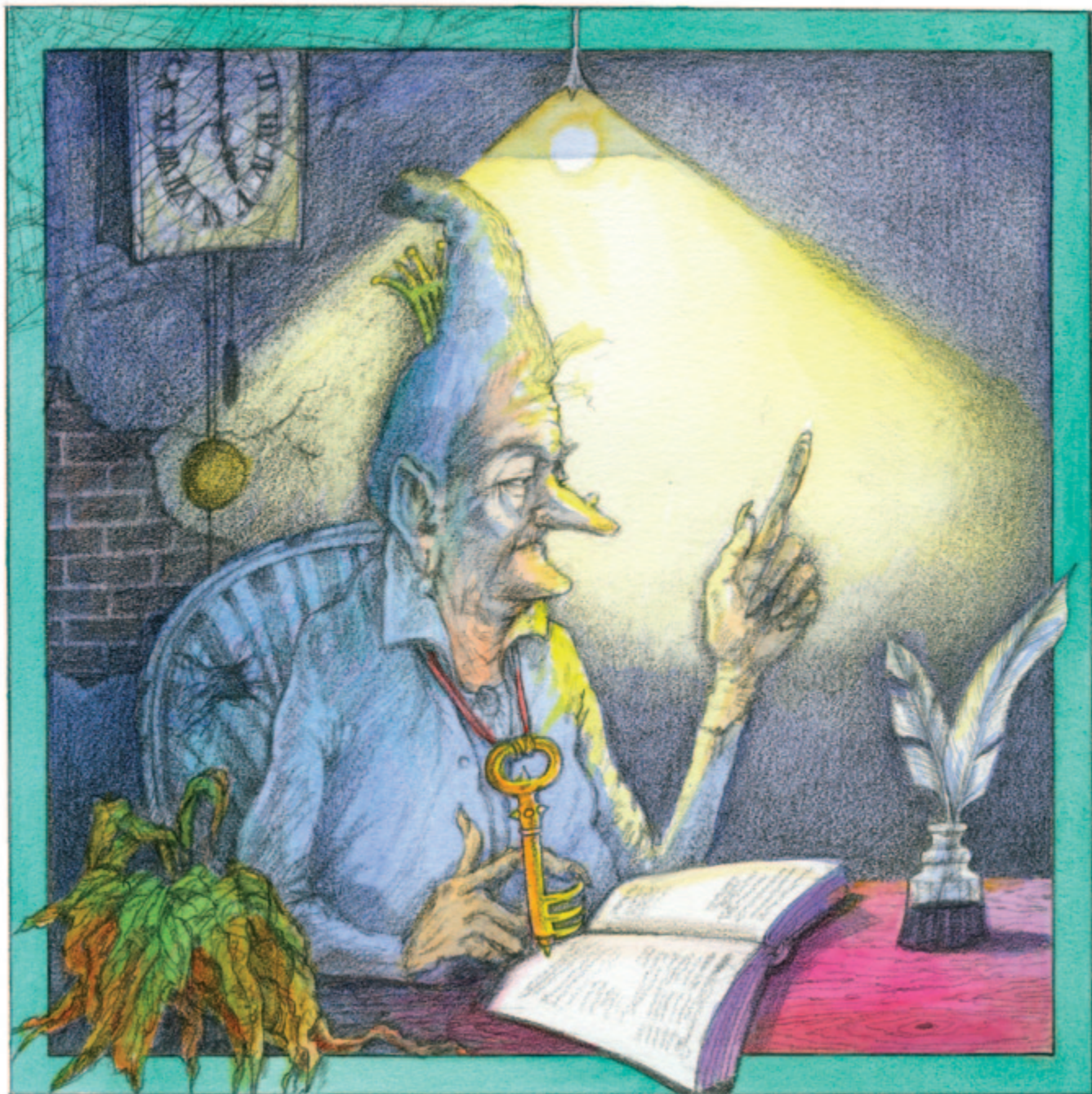
With a mischievous smile, the father turned around to look at his children: “No way, don’t worry, we are not seeing her today, but wait, we’ll be there soon”.

And so they drove and drove through the beautiful Czech landscape and then another forest appeared behind a turning, which seemed even deeper than the previous one. All of a sudden, a big old ramshackle house came into their view with a signboard reading “The Dragon Chamber Hotel” hanging on it. It was shaped so as to remind of a dragon head and the children took an immediate liking to it.

There was not a single car parked outside the hotel.

“Mom, dad, shall we go and check in?” The parents nodded their consent, picked up the suitcases and they all walked into a spacious lobby together. An elderly lady receptionist with a wart on her nose smiled at them quizzically. A big clock with a motionless pendulum was hanging on a cracked wall behind her. They were welcomed by some flaccid pelargonium and asparagus in flower pots resting on a long table and by newspapers and magazines hanging over a chair armrest. There was a smell of burnt cooking oil in the air coming from the kitchen.





The receptionist was sitting in an armchair and a bleak light bulb under the ceiling shed poor light on an open black book and on her hand with long fingers and pointed fingernails. She muffled in a jersey knitted from angora wool, on which buttons were missing, and then she logged their names in the book and handed them the keys from their room.

Jimmy paused a bit and then started tugging on his mummy's chequered coat. "Mom, mom, what is that big golden key that is hanging on the lady's neck?"

And again before long: "Mummy, and don't you find this hotel somehow funny?"

"Oh Jimmy, enough of those questions of yours", said the mother resolutely.

They were walking along the hallway, treading on its uneven and rickety stone tiling. There were vaulted moss-grown timbers above them and the improperly sealed windows let such strong blasts of wind in that the extensive cobwebs under the ceiling started dancing as some kind of fairies. A lonely black bird was worriedly crouching in the skylight above the door.

Jimmy tried his luck once again on their way to the room and pulled his mummy's coat asking: "Hey mum, what kind of key was that?"

Mummy turned around and uttered in an undertone: "It's a key from the Dragon Chamber".

"And what is in that chamber?", Jimmy would not give up easily.

"Nobody knows", answered mummy mysteriously.

What if there was a treasure of some kind, thought Jimmy and imagined all the coffers full of gold, all the powerful motorbikes, small aeroplanes, brilliant rings, large paintings and awesome cell phones and PCs...

In the meantime, daddy brought the remaining luggage in from the car, relishing they were far from civilization at last and, most importantly, they had not a single tablet or notebook along with them in this beautiful nature. Clementine smiled and said it was likely to be pretty boring here. And that they might be able to endure only it if they could at least experience some adventure.

Father was sitting at the table, desperately looking for something in a map, circling the names of towns, villages and hills, and scribbling notes on a sheet of paper with a pencil. Then they were haggling with mummy over something – she disagreed a little at first,

asking him if could also think of the children sometimes, but in a while she exclaimed that it was fine – well, that was exactly what they had come here for after all.

When it got dark, mummy put the children to sleep. “Honeys, be good here and sleep well. A long day is awaiting us tomorrow; there is a lot we have to do”. She put out the lights and the hotel immersed in silence.

The night sky was spangled with brightly shining stars and a sharp crescent of the moon forced its way through the window. A silent murmur of tree branches resembling a distant symphonic music hit the room. An occasional creak of the old beams could be heard. The kids did not feel like sleeping.

Clementine fixed her eyes on the sky and then turned to Jimmy: “What beautiful stars they are. Could you count them?”

Jimmy looked out of the window, raised a hand and stretched out his fingers one by one – a thumb, a forefinger, a middle finger, a ring finger and a little finger – then the other hand, counting at the same time. “Well, there are lots of them. Of course, I would be able to count them, but not today”, he said creeping under the blanket and turning around to the other side.

Suddenly Clementine exclaimed she had seen a star fall and asked Jimmy: “And do you know what our grandma used to say? That if we see a star fall, we have to wish something and it will come true. So make a wish, quickly. But you did not see it fall in fact. So only my wish will count”.

After some time, Jimmy looked at the wooden ceiling asking: “Clem, are you sleeping? Have you heard about that key?”

“No, I am not asleep”, said Clementine, “are you also thinking of that treasure?”

Jimmy nodded his consent and suggested: “Let’s find that treasure together.”

“Jimmy, wouldn’t that be scary? What if this place is haunted?”

“This place? No way!”

They jumped out of beds dauntlessly, walked out into the hallway and stopped in dismay. “Where are we? What has happened?” asked Jimmy. It was quiet and sinister everywhere, as if there was no one in the whole hotel. To the right and to the left alike, arrays of copper door handles were glittering, there was that stony, frosty floor underfoot, and at the end of the hallway a lantern was hanging with a small flame flickering inside.





“Don’t worry Jimmy, oh, come on, it’s all just that darkness”, Clementine reassured her brother. But it wasn’t. The hotel had its big secret, to which an old legend tied. The thing was that it was believed to have been cursed. The children had absolutely no idea that the hotel would turn into an old dragon’s castle after twilight every day.

Jimmy with Clementine stepped into the deep of the darkness as they set out on their way to reach a huge vestibule. Their hunger for the unknown adventure was stronger than their fear. When they arrived there, they caught sight of a receptionist napping in an old creaky armchair. Yet it was no longer that shabby lady who had welcomed them to the hotel earlier in the evening, but rather an ominously looking hag with grey hair combed into three buns, rotten teeth peeping out of her mouth and with the arms being mere bones coated with parchment skin.

Jimmy spotted the key on her chest. He rejoiced deep inside.

“Clementine, come here quickly, we have to take it away from her”.

“But how can we do that? What if she awakes?” asked Clementine.

“Well, she is sleeping like a log and snoring like our aunt Flora would”.

They drew nearer to the counter and, all of a sudden, the receptionist opened up her eyes and stared straight into Jimmy’s paled face. Jimmy was dumbfounded, but soon found out that the ghastly receptionist was still sleeping with her eyes wide open. He took a deep breath of relief. Then he came up to the desk again and, ignoring her cold glare, summoned up all his courage and started stretching out his arm towards the chain with the key slowly.

“Got it, let’s get out of here fast!” he exclaimed.

So they made a break for it, never looking back, rushing up onto the third floor where the Dragon Chamber was supposed to be. They were moving on down the hallway towards the chamber and then saw a golden door – and big things started to happen at that very moment.

Jimmy pulled out the key, aimed it at the keyhole and the door number changed out of the blue! It was no longer number thirteen, the Dragon Chamber notice also disappeared and the key would not unlock the door. Clementine looked left and right and turned around only to see that the numbers on all doors started to change quickly. “Jimmy, can you see it, too? The doors are vicious. Come, better let’s get away from here quick!”

And they started to run. They ran as fast as they could down the long hallway, sometimes in absolute darkness, at times in sharp brightness of the blinking lights, there were owls flying over their heads and ominous silence was pushing on their chests, almost suffocating them. The walls revealed mysterious images of dragons, ruined castles, witches, angels on flying fish, gigantic ships and statues of steel-clad knights and dragoons on horses. Over them, long gaily coloured drapes were fluttering as if they wanted to bite into the heavy black curtain of the night.

The children's minds were replaying the memories of their grandmother telling tales of beautiful princesses, frog-eyed water sprites, fulfilled wishes, fate mongers, princes, footpad raids, an elf-struck prince, eagle nests and dragon ravines. And they contemplated what might have happened here and why the house was cursed.

And so it occurred to them that perhaps a rich merchant used to live here a long time ago who had had this hotel built and, because he did not always succeed at doing things the way he had intended and wanted, he vented his anger on the coachman, chambermaids and cooks.

One day, as he was returning back from a roebuck hunt with a nice quarry, a dragon made for him from the cave, its outspread muzzle spitting fire among the teeth and yelling a reminder of an already forgotten covenant at the merchant, which meant the first roebuck, buck, pheasant, partridge or duck hunted in the neighbourhood should always belong solely and exclusively to the great dragon. The merchant replied he did not care for any such arrangement and that the beautiful roebuck was his own and the chef would turn it into a fabulous delicacy as soon as it reached the hotel kitchen. Then he spurred on the horse and quickly rode away carrying the roebuck towards the hotel triumphantly. The dragon flared up, spouted even some more fiery breath and rushed out to chase the fleeing merchant.

Hardly had the merchant emerged from the valley when he saw there was an old shack with dragon's head in sign standing in the place where his renowned hotel used to be...

Since that day, there had been fewer and fewer guests checking in, only merchants would stay there overnight now and then who were half down their way to Moravia, and later also some tourists who had learnt there was an old spooky hotel somewhere deep in the forests and wanted to experience some adventure.





So as they were so scurrying and dreaming, in her mind's eye Clementine thought perhaps they might succeed in voiding the bad dragon's spell. Perhaps yes, perhaps no... She raised her eyes to the paintings on the walls close to the ceiling. Some of them stirred as if they were coming alive. Suddenly, something made Clementine shriek. A mysterious voice echoed from behind the walls whispering: "Come, come and follow me".

The children looked at each other and followed the voice until they came to the very same door they had been before. There was the number thirteen and the sign reading Dragon Chamber again, and the voice suddenly died away.

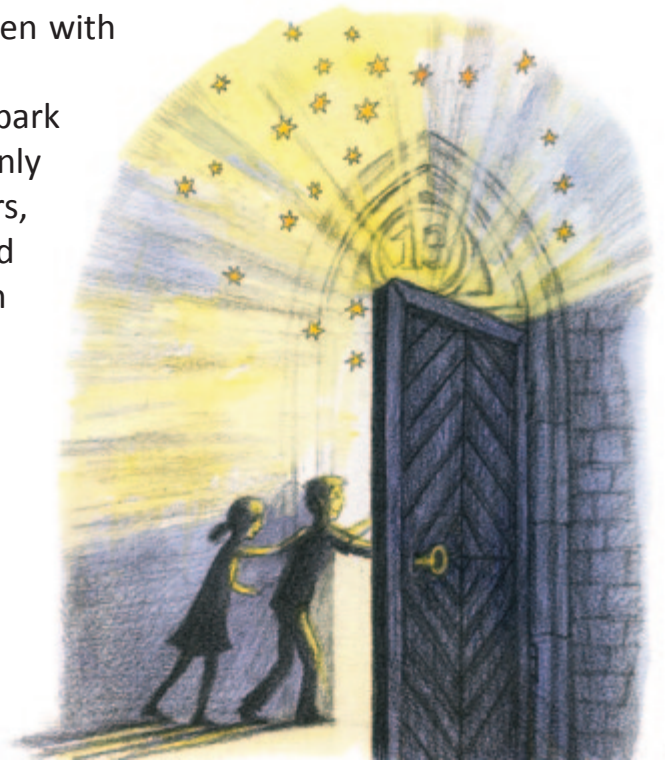
Clementine gathered up her courage: "Jimmy, shall we try?"

"Okay, let's go for it!" Jimmy slowly and carefully inserted the key in the keyhole only to hear a slight click soon afterwards.

The door opened lazily and the children had to cover their faces for a while, because the whole hotel burst in bright light and a piercing glare at once. As if all lucid stars from the sky landed here. In one brief moment, the building turned from an ugly and old house into a beautiful, clean and modern hotel with a summer terrace, a garden with a children's playground, a sandpit and a slide.

Modern cars were standing in the car park and Jimmy and Clementine were suddenly encountering smiling guests, fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles and namely lots of hilarious children and grandchildren in the hallways. A cook with a high hat on his head and a wooden spoon in his hand was waving at them from the kitchen door, and pleasantly alluring smells of delicious meals were coming from within.

Jimmy and Clementine's parents ran out to embrace the two adventurers and the mummy was asking in disbelief, both with

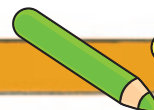



joy and tears in her eyes, if it all had just seemed to her and if they happened to be in a fairy tale, or if it all was true indeed. And true indeed it was. Nor could the father believe his eyes. The children were hugging their mummy and papa and told them about what everything they had been through and what it was all like. And mummy was very proud of her children.

Either way, no matter if the cursed hotel story was all fictive, resembled truth to a certain extent or was entirely untrue, Jimmy and Clementine's courage did help annul the long standing eerie curse hovering over the Dragon Chamber.

The hotel has never more been changing overnight since. Thanks to Jimmy and Clementine, five stars keep glowing above the entrance of the now beautiful hotel and the old, rude receptionist has turned into a young and charming lady.

 Draw your dream Hotel



 Draw How many stars your hotel or boarding house has _____




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