

"This moving and unsettling portrait of obsession run amok might have been written in 1970s Turkey, when social mores after Atatürk were still evolving, but it stays as relevant as the country struggles to save the very democratic ideals on which the Republic was rebirthed."
— *Booklist*, Starred Review

"... as Zeberjet becomes increasingly unhinged, we're drawn into his dark interior life while coming to understand Turkey's post-Ottoman uncertainty. Sophisticated readers will understand why Atılın is called the father of Turkish modernism." — *Library Journal*

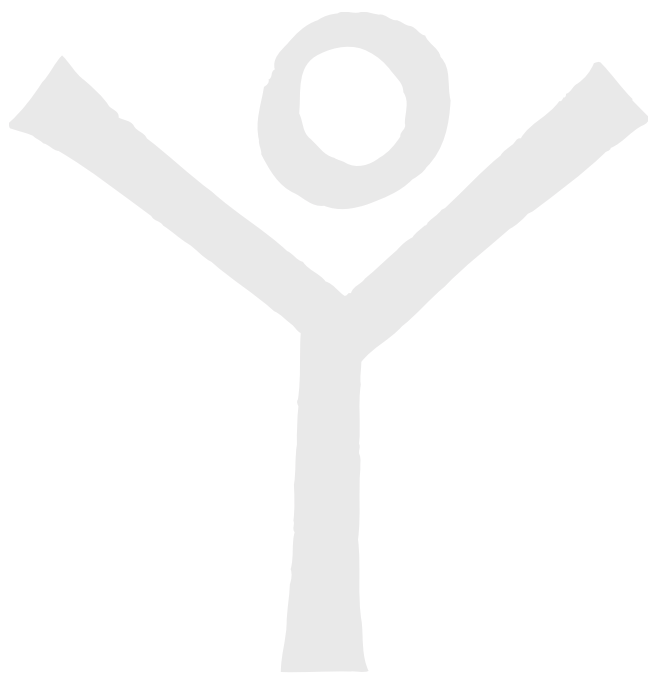
"An unsettling study of a mind, steeped in violence, dropping off the edge of reason." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Yusuf Atılın, like Patrick Modiano, demonstrates how the everyday can reflect larger passions and catastrophes. Beautifully written and translated, *Motherland Hotel* can finally find the wider audience in the west that it deserves." — Susan Daitch, author of *The Lost Civilization of Suolucidir*

"My heroes are Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Oğuz Atay, and Yusuf Atılın. I have become a novelist by following their footsteps . . . I love Yusuf Atılın; he manages to remain local although he benefits from Faulkner's works and the Western traditions." — Orhan Pamuk

"*Motherland Hotel* is a startling masterpiece, a perfect existential nightmare, the portrait of a soul lost on the threshold of an ever-postponed Eden." — Alberto Manguel, author of *A History of Reading*

“Yusuf Atılgan gives us a wonderful, timeless novel about obsession, with an anti-hero who is both victim and perpetrator, living out a life ‘neither dead nor alive’ in a sleepy Aegean city. *Motherland Hotel* is an absolute gem of Turkish literature.” — Esmahan Aykol, author of *Divorce Turkish Style*



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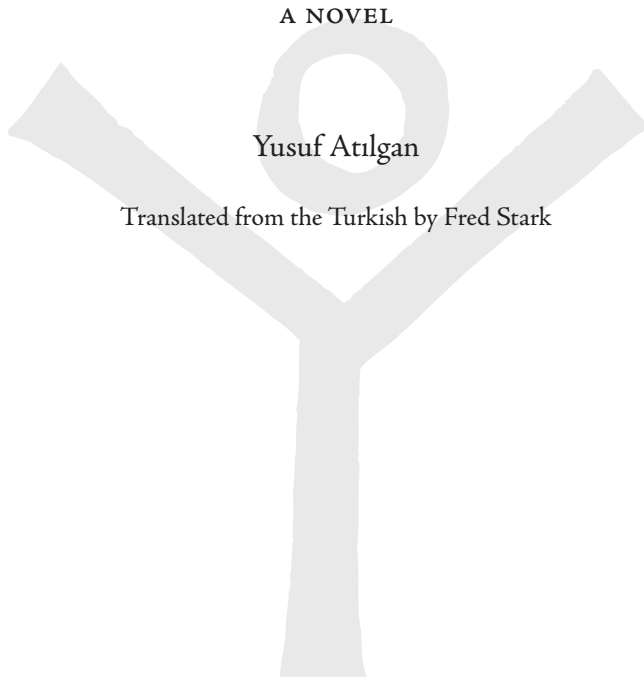
BOOKS

Motherland Hotel

A NOVEL

Yusuf Atılgan

Translated from the Turkish by Fred Stark



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BOOKS

Translator's Introduction

The appeal of *Motherland Hotel* to the Western reader should be two-fold. First, it presents small-town life in Turkey as something other than a long costumed vendetta. Second, there is a rare marriage of attitudes in the novel—oriental concern, even obsession, with pattern; intellectual assumptions recognizably European and 20th-century; and an “everyday-ness” (each culture has its own) which is thoroughly Turkish, or Aegean Turkish to be exact.

Exactness is the byword for this novel. As a precise study in mental disturbance it was for a time required reading for psychiatry students in Ankara's major hospital-university complex. As an exercise in strict purity of form—here that love of pattern finds expression—it came as a statement of artistic integrity at a time of political and social turmoil when very few writers in Turkey dared to veer from overt commentary. Not that *Motherland Hotel* is devoid of political implications, but they are implied, not brandished at the reader.

A few things we are assumed to know: Turkey was occupied by various foreign powers during and after the First World War. It was only through the passion and genius of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that a militia was rallied and, against the heaviest continual odds, inspired to

drive the occupying forces out. The “Liberation” referred to in the novel is the final push that ended on September 9, 1922, with the Greek army trapped in the bay at Izmir. The “Republic” is again the work of Atatürk. Given a base of near worship¹ by his war successes, he was able to impose Western-style democracy on a people who had known five centuries of autocratic rule under the sultans. Reforms in clothing, the alphabet and women’s rights quickly followed, but of course the cultural patterns of half a millennium are not altered overnight. The extent to which Turkey has and has not freed itself from the past is, in fact, one of the background themes of *Motherland Hotel*.

As to the rest, the book will speak for itself.

Fred Stark
Ankara 1977

1. Which persists. This was brought home to the translator in a hotel one morning when honking horns and a loud siren made me think war was on. Then I noticed a plasterer down the hall standing at respectful attention. It was 9:05 a.m., November 10th, the anniversary of Atatürk’s death in 1938, and it is with this minute of horns and sirens that the occasion is observed each year throughout Turkey.

FORMS OF ADDRESS

<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	
bey	hanim	the mantle of money and position
abi	abla	literally, "big brother, big sister"; very widely used to show a familiar kind of respect
efendi		term of formalized condescension
agha		term of maximum respect <i>among peasants</i>
usta		title bestowed on the artisan (auto mechanic, plumber, etc.)

Thus a peasant named Kerim who settles in Istanbul to be an apartment-house janitor will refer to its residents as Bey and Hanim, as they will refer to each other while calling him Kerim Efendi. If he has to address a cop it will be as abi. All, however, is made up for at home, where his wife speaks to Kerim as agha.

Note that Agha as an actual title implies a kind of feudal overlordship, and as such has disappeared from western Turkey.

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ZEBERJET, CLERK AT THE Motherland Hotel, let himself into the room where on Thursday, three nights before, she had stayed—the woman off the delayed train from Ankara. Turning the key and placing it in his pocket, he leaned back against the door to survey the room. Everything was just as she had left it: the quilt thrown back, the rumpled sheet, the slippers, the chair, the reading lamp on the bedside table, two half-smoked cigarettes stubbed out in the copper ashtray, the teapot, strainer, tea-glass and spoon, the small dish with its five lumps of sugar (that night he had brought her six Could I have some tea she'd asked and he had brewed it in the three-serving pot then tray in hand had knocked Come in she sat there on the edge of the bed coat off black sweater necklace of large silver balls *she'd looked up* Sorry for the trouble and asked how to reach that village Then wake me at eight casually saying she carried no ID. The next morning he had noticed the scent on entering and quickly shut the door. She had left the light on. He'd taken note of the towel over the foot of the bedstead, the thrown-back quilt, the rumpled sheet, the slippers, the chair, the reading lamp on the bedside table, two half-smoked cigarettes stubbed out in the copper ashtray, the teapot, strainer and tea-glass, the small dish with its lumps of sugar. Counting, "She takes one." But that scent was gone now, perhaps was gone the night before, though ever since

her departure [setting down a small leather suitcase that morning to open her purse What does it come to Never mind the change no ring on Well thanks so much then for the tea too picked up her suitcase and left] the door had been locked and the key in his own pocket. Except that after waiting the whole day till midnight when all the guests were in, after locking and barring the main door [the bell had rung he'd opened she at the door coat unbuttoned suitcase in hand Do you have a room and he strode to the key rack] he'd been switching off the lobby light and coming here for three nights now), her towel forgotten on the foot of the bedstead, the gold-fringed maroon curtain, the sink and over it the round mirror (where the morning she had left he caught his face. Everything down-turned there—tips of eyebrows, corners of mouth, nose. He had studied the face, its small, square mustache; though he did shave three times a week This was the face she had looked at that night [easing down the tea tray, leaving to re-lock and bar the main door, he had set the alarm for six—though he always woke up at six—turned off the light and, clock in hand, had gone past her door, carefully treading the linoleum-covered stairs to the attic with its two rooms {the maid's room, rank with sweat. She sleeps a great deal, turns in early. Every morning he has to shake her awake. At night he'll come in as a rule and lie with her. To sleep undisturbed she beds with no underthings and with legs slightly apart. When he strokes her, even when he's on her, she goes on sleeping. Sometimes he'll bite a nipple and she mumbles "Ow" or "Scat." When he's through he climbs off and uses a handkerchief to wipe her dry} and had chosen his own room. He had set the clock within reach on the floor, undressed and gone to bed. A while later, when the bed shuddered from a car passing below, he sat up. He'd

forgotten to wash his feet. Every night he washed them before bed. He got up, washed his feet, and came back. Sat on the edge of the bed for a time. "Suppose she hasn't locked the door. Someone could open it by accident." He dressed and went to the stairs, descended quietly, and stood beside her door. Keyhole dark. He held his breath listening, heart-beat painful. Slowly, pausing frequently, he turned the smooth round knob clockwise and tested the door with his shoulder. Locked. His breathing steadied and he turned the knob back, again slowly, again intermittently pausing, and let it go; then climbed deliberately up the stairs, went into the maid's room, and switched on the light. The quilt lay motionless. From under it poked her feet, big, the soles black. He snapped off the light and withdrew, shutting the door on his way out, then went back to his room and lay down fully clothed: awake all night long, alarm might fail, might sleep through] and the same face she had seen that morning. Toward eight he had put the kettle on the kerosene burner. At eight exactly he approached her door but paused to let her sleep the extra minute. Then knocked. "That's fine, I'm getting up." He brewed the tea, straightened his tie, sat down in his chair. The thick register lay before him. He could hardly ask her name now that she was about to leave. She had pulled her door shut and was coming toward the desk. Black hair, unbuttoned brown coat, smoke-gray stockings, low-heeled shoes. She set down the small leather suitcase to open her purse asking, "What does it come to?" Then, "Never mind the change." No ring on. Long, palely pink nails. "Well thanks so much then. For the tea, too." She picked up her suitcase and left. As she was going through the doorway that man came in, small leather suitcase in hand. His face looked boneless. "Do you have a room?" "Yes." "A good one if possible. The

room that woman had, who just left." "She hasn't checked out, sir. She's staying on." "All right, another one then." He fished an ID from his pocket, the standard birth certificate booklet, and laid it on the hotel register. "Occupation?" "Put down retired officer." Zeberjet took a key from the rack and handed it across. "Room 2, second floor. On your left at the top of the stairs." For the past three days this man had spent his afternoons and evenings in a corner of the lobby, reading books and newspapers, smoking, glancing up whenever the door opened. After eleven p.m. he would go up to his room. Last night, as Zeberjet was emptying the ashtray at his side, the man had seemed to have a question. Tonight it had been asked. He had come in late and stopped on the way up, breathing the boozy licorice fumes of raki. Their eyes had met. "You looked better with a moustache." Was he being funny? That morning Zeberjet hadn't been able to bring himself to shave it off. He smiled. "Doesn't she ever leave her room?" "Who?" "You know, that woman the day I arrived. Friday morning as I came. . . ." "Oh, her. She's checked out, sir. Yesterday morning." "Checked out? Where was she going?" "I wouldn't know, sir. She didn't say.") with hand-stitched flowers at top and bottom, the hotel towel on a hook to the mirror's right, the lampshade at the end of a lead pipe that hung from the ceiling, the baroquely framed painting centered on the right-hand wall: a full-hipped, well-endowed woman all in lace reclining on a wide, highly ornate couch while two half-naked black girls stood on either side of her with fans. "A choice bit of harem-snatch," the Dentist had said. Zeberjet's father had brought it home from the flea market one day long ago and hung it up. "Son, when I'm dead and gone I don't want you giving this room to just anyone who comes along. Every hotel needs a room like this." He pulled

himself away from the door and went over to the picture where he stood awhile looking. As he turned back toward the mirror there were stirrings from the room up above where that fellow was staying. He listened. Creak of floorboards, sound of water. 'Must be washing his face. Has he thrown up?' He looked at his reflection, mustached as usual, but with the effect of a slight tilt now to the nose. Turning again he went to the bedside. There were darkish stains on the pillowcase. What was she doing in that village? His knees felt shaky and he reached for the foot of the bed, but steadied and moved away. He left the bulb burning as he went out, locked the door, and headed upstairs. Some man was snoring in the double on the second floor. Putting out the hall light he stood by the door of Room 6 and listened. Not a sound. When he reached the top of the stairs to the attic there was a pair of eyes gleaming at floor level across from him. They belonged to the hotel cat.

The Town

or city. By day a westbound rail passenger, absorbed in the newspaper or chatting with his seatmate, when the train slows will wonder where they are and, glancing left, be startled. A mountain, its upper half sheer granite, is like a wave about to break over the train. The town (or city), with its minarets and broad, shady streets, spreads across the gentle slopes at the foot of this mountain. (The broad streets, parks and parade ground all date from the Fire. In early September of 1922 the Greek army had set this town to the torch before withdrawing. Old-timers say that if just one gunman in each neighborhood had shown his face, then nothing would have burned. Almost everyone fled to the mountain, where all that day and night they watched the great Fire.) A green

and yellow plain stretches away north of the town. Along it flows a river, winding sluggishly in the summer months, murkily swelling in the winter. The plain boasts vineyards, cotton and wheat fields, and villages of some size.

The Hotel

is one of the buildings, spared the torch because wealthy Greeks had lived in the district, that stand opposite a street connecting the main avenue with the square behind the station. Three-stories, it was originally a manor house. (When Rüstem Bey of the Kecheji line—the “cloth-merchant” family—settled in Izmir after the Fire he turned his house into a hotel at the insistence of Ahmet Efendi, who was formerly a clerk with Vital Statistics. In time a washstand came to be installed in each room, a toilet on each floor. The lobby, halls, stairs and wooden flooring of the rooms were meanwhile being carpeted with linoleum. As the years went by and that small-town-hotel odor seeped into the walls and woodwork, Rüstem Bey’s old manor house turned into a real hotel. According to him it had been his grandfather, Melik Agha, who built the house in the previous century. On the doorway arch now covered by the hotel sign there was supposed to be an inscription in relief on white marble. Conforming to neither classical nor syllabic meter—some local hack poet, cadging a livelihood by churning out rhymes whenever a death or birth among the town gentry required, must have hit a creative snag when the manor house was ready—the jingle etched into the stone under that sign was, as reported, somewhat odd:

One two and a double face
Kecheji’s son Malik’s place

In Arabic numerals one followed by two and then two circles reads twelve fifty-five; eighteen thirty-nine by the modern calendar.)

The front of the hotel on the avenue side is painted ochre. Three marble steps rise to a double door with their glass upper halves protected by iron bars. Flanking the door are two large windows, also barred—unlike those on the other floors. A tin sign hangs on the arch above the door, in white lettering on a dark green background: THE MOTHERLAND HOTEL. (An emblem perhaps of the shame-faced patriotic zeal to be found, during the years just after Liberation, in those towns and cities where very little had been done about the enemy.) Across from the door as you go in there is a stairway to the second floor with a carved wooden banister, and to its left a room that serves as a combination pantry, linen closet and tea galley. (In the village to which the woman off the delayed train from Ankara asked directions, Rüstem Bey had an acquaintance whose son, the same age as Zeberjet, used to stay in this room during the winter while in secondary and high school. Later, with Zeberjet in the army, his father had moved in down here, and in fact it was the handiest room for the clerk. But when his father died Zeberjet hadn't moved down. He kept his old quarters where at one time he had made a habit of reading library books and jerking off to visions of high school girls' gym class.) Between this cubicle and the foot of the stairs, a wooden armchair and a high half-moon-shaped desk stand on a platform. (The burly, loquacious dentist who stays for a couple of nights every year when the Party convention brings him from a distant county calls this Zeberjet Efendi's rostrum.) Next to this is a long, narrow table and on it, flush with the wall, an iron safe. Beneath the stairs a windowed door opens onto the back yard. The lobby has a pair of low

square tables hedged round with black leather-upholstered armchairs, four to a table. Two lead pipes hang from the ceiling and end in lampshades. A full-length portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the righthand wall, and just as you start upstairs, a door on the right bearing the numeral 1. Walls and doors alike are done in off white—paint, not limewash. To the right of the main door a rectangular placard: *Door Locked After Midnight*. One flight up on the left are a single and a triple, and on the right a double, a triple, and the toilet. The third floor is a replica of this. At each side of the three midway landings a window looks out onto the yard. The attic has a bathroom and kitchen on the right, and two slope-ceilinged rooms on the left with small lights and their view of the neighboring roof. In the enclosed yard, an open shed on the left runs along one of the three high stone walls. Here the maid does her weekly wash. If it's raining she drapes her sheets and other laundry over two thick lines strung the length of the shed. A large iron gate, rusty and discolored, opens from the yard onto a street. Next to the righthand wall are a stable and quarters for coachman and groom. (At the head of the street leading from the station square hangs a dark green tin arrow with HOTEL lettered in white, nailed to a pine tree. But one of the nails—eroded through over the years—has sheared off, so the sign points downwards giving the impression that the hotel lies underground.)

Zeberjet

Of not quite average height, but not particularly short either. In the army they had him listed at 5'4" and 119 pounds. Now, at the age of thirty-three, he could strip and weigh in at 124 or 5. For the past two years his stomach muscles have been going flabby. Head too large for his

body, high forehead. Hair, eyebrows, eyes and mustache are brown. A pinched face, somewhat downturned but not, after all, as much as he found its reflection that morning, when the woman off the Ankara train had left. Small hands, stubby fingernails. Narrow shoulders and chest. He was born at seven months. Toward evening of November 28th, 1930, his mother had felt the pangs. After a while she saw there was no point trying to wait them out and put a scarf on to go down to the head of the stairs. "Ahmet Efendi," she called out, "go for the midwife." Who happened to be home so Ahmet Efendi reappeared shortly, midwife in tow. They had the mother lie in the righthand room. "Two months to go, midwife. Will I lose this one as well?" The midwife had turned to the expectant father. "You go boil some water." "So I locked the front door and put the water on. Your mother cried out maybe twice while it was heating, then the door opened a crack and the midwife asked for the water. 'It's a boy,' she said. Called me in soon after. She'd got you all swaddled and lying there in the palm of her hand. That's how small you were. 'You could wrap this one in cotton and lay him in a jewel-box,' she said. 'Call him Zeberjet—peridot.' So I leaned and whispered the name in your ear." A very rare name. There were four men from one of the provinces staying at the hotel that night, come to town because some relative was on trial. Returning from their supper out they had shaken Ahmet Efendi's hand and given the child their blessing.

During his mother and father's lifetime, Zeberjet had had this premature birth rubbed in on various occasions.

1. Morning. Ready for school, comes down to the lobby. His father there scooping clinkers out of the coal stove, which at that time they used for heat.

Zeberjet: Father, can you let me have twenty-five qurush?

Father: Any special reason?

Zeberjet: I have to buy a notebook.

His father loads clinkers into the bucket, then pokes the shovel back into the grate.

Zeberjet: Come on, Father, I'm late.

Father: Keep your pants on, son. Let me get these clinkers. How you managed waiting seven months to come out I'll never fathom.

2. Home from school one noon. Goes upstairs. His mother chopping lettuce onto a plate. There's a pot on the kerosene stove.

Zeberjet: I'm hungry.

Mother: It's almost ready, be patient. What a boy! Couldn't wait nine months to be born, even.

(If impatience did figure in this birth it could just as well have been on the part of the mother as the fetus in her womb. The former probability seems stronger. Expecting adult behavior from a fetus would be harsh. But a woman pregnant at forty-four might well be in a hurry, particularly if she has had three miscarriages; one at two months, another at two and a half, a third at three. Nevertheless, and whether the boy deserved these accusations or not, they had a positive effect on him. As he grew up, Zeberjet became progressively more serious and patient.)

The summer he graduated from elementary school brought his circumcision. Before that summer was over his mother died. His father didn't send him to secondary

school, and for the next eight years, until he did his military service, the two of them ran the hotel together. Two months after Zeberjet's discharge his father died; put off dying until his son came back from the army, seemingly, to keep the hotel in family hands. Sixty-three years old, he died in his chair behind the tall half-moon desk one spring morning. Undertakers were found and they washed him in the back yard. After the burial the imam asked Zeberjet his grandmother's name. Not knowing, and declining to fabricate one (in view of possible complications above or here below) he simply lowered his gaze and blushed. "It's all right, my son," the imam had said, "a mother is a mother." Rüstem Bey got the telegram that night and arrived the next morning. He offered condolences, collected on arrears, and turned the hotel over to Zeberjet. "It's all yours," he said as he was leaving. "Make sure you get a woman in." "Did my father ever mention his mother's name?" "Not that I heard. Check his birth-certificate why don't you." "I've looked through his pockets and in the safe. There isn't any."

The Maid

Chestnut hair, deep blue eyes. A long face with a turned-up nose and toothy, full-lipped mouth. Medium height, firm and smooth-fleshed—what they call being "firm as a fish." Thirty-five years old and slightly bow-legged. Two years ago a man claiming to be an uncle showed up with her from a distant village. "Rejep Agha says you need a woman here." After some haggling over wages they sent her, bundle under one arm, upstairs. He asked the man to sit down for a glass of tea and as they sipped he listened to the woman's story. It seemed

her mother and father were dead and that his family, the unclé's, had taken her in. At seventeen they had married her off but toward dawn of the wedding night the groom sent her back saying he wanted a virgin. "Well, then, little slut, who's been in at you? Dunno, she says, and won't tell. I beat her and so forth. I dunno, honest, is all she'll say. Lay off, says the missus, what's the difference anyhow?" Five years later they had given her to a widower with three children in a nearby village, and before three months were out he had brought her back because she slept too much. "She sleeps, she does sleep, but then she's hard working. Off in the village there's no peace for a divorced girl. No peace at all if she happens to be barren. Bachelors, married men, they all strut the mustache at her and watch for a chance. We heard from Rejep Agha the other day, so here we are. Now then, if you'll excuse me. . . ." He went and called up the stairs. "Zeeyy-nep! I'm leaving, you ill-bred goose, aren't you going to kiss my hand?" No answer. He shook his head. "All the best, then," and left. Zeberjet went up to the attic but didn't find her there. He searched the other floors. She had dropped her bundle in the middle of Room 2 and was sound asleep on the bed. He'd woken her up the next morning. She quickly got the hang of the routine. Always with her scarf on, she would make beds, swab floors, dust, cook every other day, launder on Sundays, and call Zeberjet "agha." But she didn't talk much. One day near the beginning as she was swabbing the stairs an old peasant came down from the third floor and she looked up. "Do you know the village of Sindelli, uncle?" "Sure do." "Pocked Ali is my uncle there." This uncle would come several times a year bringing a sack of milk curds, converse for a while, pocket her savings, and go away. "Should I give it to him—all your savings?" "Sure.

Sure, it's okay." An accounting would always be demanded down to the last qurush. "Five meters cotton flannel, money for seamstress, woolen vest . . ." "What's that? A woolen vest? She had a cotton one when she got here." It had been six years now since the uncle last appeared. (One early afternoon of the first week she'd been down on her knees swabbing the lobby floor. Zeberjet was in his chair reading the paper and at some point he looked up. She was leaning forward, bloomers stretched over her copious backside. Swabbing that way while slowly backing up gave it a motion, a certain rise and fall. He'd gone back to his paper, but from that moment on he'd seen her as a young female, up and about by day, asleep in the next room at night. On his way to bed he would pause outside her door and then have trouble sleeping. In dreams it would be army days again, the house in town with that tall woman. Often the two women would merge. Mornings when he went to wake her the room with its low, slanted ceiling always smelled. After opening the window he would stand at her bedside, shake her shoulders, and touch the breasts as if by mistake. One night he'd gotten up after going to bed and crossed to her room where he switched on the light. It was hot, and she was sleeping with no covers, and her shift was hiked up. He closed the door and went over, undid her buttons, took a breast in each hand, firm and full. He shook her. Not stirring she spoke in her sleep. "That you, uncle?" He shook her again. "Wake up girl, would you?" Her eyes opened and she rose in bed. "I'm getting up, agha." "Don't get up, just make room." Sliding over toward the wall, she saw Zeberjet's naked chest and jutting shorts. She turned her back and lay there. When he climbed in and rolled her over face up she closed her eyes. With some effort he took her bloomers off disclosing

a thick patch. He lay on her and went ahead, panting and groaning. A short while later when he straightened up she looked very long, lying there, and he bent to listen. Her breathing was undisturbed.

The Woman Off The Delayed Train From Ankara

Twenty-six years of age, fairly tall. Chesty, with black hair and eyes, long lashes, eyebrows plucked somewhat. Sharp-nosed, thin-lipped, her face dark and taut.

The Man Claiming To Be A Retired Officer

Of medium height and stocky. Hair mostly gone to gray. Green eyes and bushy brows, a fleshy, thin-lipped face. The birth-certificate left on the register the morning of his arrival, and which was picked up again that same noon, gave his name as Görgün, Mahmut; his father's name as Abdullah, his mother's Fatma. It says he was born in Erzincan, 1327 (1910 or 1911 by the modern calendar).

The Cat

Male, black. The second cat since Zeberjet took over. A tall girl in town with her father to see the ancient ruins, who stayed two nights and always carried a few horse-chestnuts in her purse, had christened the cat Lampblack. But nobody uses this name.

The Two Towels In The Room

1. The hotel towel. Hanging to the right of the mirror. Small, solid green. One slightly crooked 'M' and one

straight 'H' are sewn in white thread into one corner, with a vague dot between them. Added by Zeberjet to prevent theft after three other towels had been taken. Only a single towel had been taken during his father's time (thirty years), whereas the ten years that Zeberjet has been in charge have seen a total of nine towels and two pairs of slippers carried off. His father had made that one incident the basis for a fulminating indictment of mankind, which he maintained was made up entirely of thieves. Actually, the possible causes for increased theft at the hotel may be ranged by a tranquil mind as follows:

- a) There may be more thieves around.
- b) More people may enjoy rebelling against traditional values—honor, decency, etc.
- c) Something about Zeberjet's father may have intimidated potential filchers. (This is the weakest likelihood. When Zeberjet was sixteen and still waiting for a mustache, Rüstem Bey, who used to come in from Izmir every month to collect the hotel proceeds, had stroked his hair once and called him a "drop off the old cock.")

2. The towel forgotten by the woman off the Ankara train. Tossed over the foot of the iron bedstead, half trailing onto the quilt. The towel has broad red and yellow stripes, narrow black ones.

MONDAY

He woke to a dim room. From on top of the chest of drawers at his bedside he took a heavy Omega pocket watch that had been given to his father (while still a clerk at Vital

Statistics) by a friend as collateral against the loan of two gold pieces. He held it to the window—quarter of six—wound it, put it down. The front of his underwear was jutting and he pushed it down with his left hand, then sat up, sniffed his undershirt, and got out of bed. Before going to the john he set some water on the kerosene stove and when he was out he bathed, dried off, wrapped a towel around himself and went back to the room. He took some clean things from the chest of drawers, put them on, combed his hair in a small mirror on the wall. Mustache per usual. Tucking the watch into his vest pocket he opened the window, made his bed, and dropped his socks and towel in the bathroom. Then to the maid's room. Opened the window, woke her up.

Downstairs he lowered the iron bar from across the front door, took the key out of his lefthand pocket, undid the lock. In the pantry he boiled water in the two-serving pot, brewed himself some tea, and laid out breakfast on a tray. Toward seven he was at the desk eating. Tea with his normal one lump. There were knockings and creakings upstairs, and a middle-aged peasant with a bushy mustache came down. Zeberjet had asked the night before. He was not from that village.

“Enjoy your breakfast.”

“Join me?”

“Thanks anyway. What do I owe?”

He paid up and left. Zeberjet was picking at his food. After one more glass of tea he cleared the tray, brushed his teeth, and went back to his chair where he lit a cigarette. For the last three days he'd been smoking occasionally without inhaling. Had he smoked on Friday as well? Friday was muddled. While the man who called himself a retired officer read the papers after lunch Zeberjet had dozed off for a spell and woken to a tap on the desk. He had looked

up to see a young couple all smiles. Had he been snoring? These were the married teachers newly assigned to the high school who had checked in on Tuesday. They planned to stay until they could rent a place of their own. "Feeling unwell?" "No, just a headache."

He laid his cigarette in the ashtray, opened the register in front of him, and began making entries from yesterday's forms in a hand that was legible, if cramped. The register had two days per page, each day with numbers from 1 to 9 and laid out according to beds per room. He turned back to Thursday. Twelve names, but nothing for the room where the woman off the delayed train from Ankara had stayed. It didn't really matter, seeing that he gave the room to only a few guests each year, and that every other week he would show a bed or two unoccupied to account for the lira-per-day that went—each morning when he availed himself of a lull to stow the drawer cash in the safe—from the hotel funds into his own. But he wanted to establish her having been there, in that room, that night. Still, he couldn't just put down a name.

He closed the register. His cigarette had gone out. Side by side, two men were coming down the stairs. They were livestock dealers who stayed at the hotel now and then. They paid and were on their way out when he all but asked them. No. Better go to the barber. In putting away the cash he banged the wart on his left middle finger against the drawer. He had made it bleed the morning before, trying to pick it off with his nail. He pushed the drawer closed. The clock on the safe showed a quarter to eight. That fellow had said eight fifteen. He wound the clock and put it back. Down the stairs came the maid on her way out to shop. He made a list. Four eggs, two packs of Yenijé brand cigarettes, four boxes of matches. From his pocket he drew the broad

leather wallet left him by his father and removed a fifty-lira bill. This, together with the list, he handed across.

“Add that to the groceries.”

Her hands were purple from yesterday’s laundry. Had she noticed? He couldn’t tell. As she left, the trio of young men came down from Room 3, wooden suitcases in hand. Two of them had trim mustaches, the other was clean-shaven. Zeberjet had learned the night before that they were headed for their hitch in the army. They laughed and wisecracked over who should pay, then settled separately and left.

The maid, back from the grocer’s, laid out his change along with the cigarettes and matches. Her string bag held two loaves, and before going upstairs she deposited one of these in the pantry. Zeberjet got out of his chair. He stretched his legs in the lobby for a while. At eight fifteen he went up to the third floor and stopped at Room 6. He could hear movement inside. This was the teachers’ room. He knocked.

“That’s fine, we’re awake.”

“That’s fine, I’m getting up,” she’d said that morning. This evening was too soon to expect her back. He went down and sat in his chair. People generally didn’t come in for rooms during the morning. Any large vehicle passing outside on the avenue rattled the panes and shook the building. When the diesel thrum of the Izmir-Ankara train reached him the high school teachers were on the stairs hurrying down. They rushed out with a “Good morning.” Only the self-styled Retired Officer was left upstairs. He always came down toward noon. For some reason Zeberjet felt that he’d be leaving today.

The front door opened. It was the newsboy, who left a paper. Every Monday Zeberjet gave him the week’s check-

in forms for delivery to the police station. He opened the righthand drawer now and rummaged a bit.

“Couldn’t you pick them up tomorrow?”

“Okay. See you.”

“So long.”

He browsed through the paper for a while. Serap was nervous today, wary of her john. A prostitute with drooping shoulders, Serap (she had other names) sometimes brought men to the hotel. Folding and laying aside the paper, Zeberjet opened the cash drawer, then took the key from his inside pocket to unlock the safe. There were two compartments. In the upper one, along with receipts and two birth-certificate booklets, was an envelope marked H O T E L into which he now slid the cash. From the small copper change bowl he took one lira and put it into a similar bowl in the lower compartment. One of the two envelopes in this lower compartment was marked Z E Y N E P. From the other, a thick one marked M E, he withdrew a pair of five-hundred-lira bills. Then he swung the door shut, locked it, replaced the key in his pocket, and took out the wallet. The two five-hundreds went in alongside several hundreds, then he folded the wallet and put it back in his pocket, which he patted with his left hand. He sat down, and dipped into his breast pocket for the fiver that the woman off the Ankara train had given him. This he smoothed out on the register. Not exactly given him. She had paid with two tens and said never mind the change. That morning, after spending some time in her room, he had withheld the five from the bills going into the safe. He creased the note double now and tucked it back into his pocket.

Toward noon the Retired Officer came downstairs. Under his usual sports jacket he wore a pale green sweater. No suitcase, which meant he was staying. Passing the desk

he half turned to offer a greeting, face clean-shaven as usual. He shut the front door softly on his way out.

At noon the maid brought his lunch on a tray together with the keys.

“Did you swab the floor in Room 2?”

“Yes.”

“Sheets clean?”

“All clean.”

He hung the keys up. The numbers were etched into the metal. He ate without appetite, went to the pantry to wash his hands and lips, came back. Lit a cigarette, coughed. The maid was coming for the tray. Her own meals were taken upstairs in the kitchen. Stubbing out his cigarette he heard the 1:10 train pull in. Outdoors the woman took yesterday's wash off the line and carried it to the pantry. When she started ironing it was past 1:30. No one was coming, he got up. At the door of the room he stopped.

“I'm going out for a while. If anyone asks for a bed say yes.”

“All right.”

He looked around. Everything in place. Then he opened the front door and went out. The weather was fine, just a cloud or two. He headed downtown. Naturally he couldn't go to the neighborhood barber on the street leading to the station. This wasn't his day there. Once every four weeks on Thursday afternoon the barber would send his apprentice to the hotel when no one was waiting to call Zeberjet over for a haircut. Anyway, if he told his long-time barber to shave the mustache off there'd be no end of remarks. He'd go to one of the places on the avenue that led downtown. He seldom left the hotel. Unless something came up, as now, it was once a year or once every two years for the tailor, once in six months to have his dead skin cells