

Hotel Bosphorus

Esmahan Aykol

Ruth Whitehouse, translator

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Hotel Bosphorus is light and flaky as Turkish baklava. It features a heroine who is “not the sort of woman to spend [her] time gazing at wrinkles and cellulite” when there is a crime to solve. A foreign film director has been slain, and the prime suspect is the star of the B-movie being shot in Istanbul. She is an actress who happens to be the most famous friend of bookstore owner Kati Herschel, who decides to take a hand in the investigation.

Kati is single, blithe, and chatty. She is given to speculation in the case thanks to two things: one, her interest in detective fiction, which she sells; and two, her interest in the detective inspector whom she very nearly beds. Both are pumping each other for information, and for a while their coy relationship gives the story some impetus. What gives it charm is the author’s breezy tone as she lets her amateur sleuth run about Istanbul trying to solve the who-done-it rather than sit in her shop selling crime fiction all day.

This is Esmahan Aykol’s “first Kati Herschel murder mystery.” The author lives in Istanbul and Berlin, and during her legal studies was a journalist for a number of Turkish publications and radio stations before turning to fiction.

Hotel Bosphorus will appeal to fans of Miss Marple-type mysteries in which being “a connoisseur of human nature” is more important in solving a crime than technology or the dogged footwork of detectives like Batuhan Onal, the hapless man with the movie-star looks who falls for Kati so hard that he spills way more than any sane cop would (even if it is to glean what she knows about the prime suspect, the German actress who was the lover of the murdered director ...). You get it. Full of romance and the underworld of drugs, this story is like the districts in Istanbul where the jet set and ordinary people rub elbows.

Don’t read *Hotel Bosphorus* if you’re looking for an elegant, immaculately paced, and well-constructed murder mystery. But do read it if you want a taste of what a frenzied, beautiful city like Istanbul has to offer a smart, wry, sexy woman who deep down longs to be a detective. As Kati says of her smitten policeman, “A kebab with *raki* would have Batuhan warbling like a nightingale.”

TRINA CARTER (June 29, 2011)

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