

THE HOTEL by ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER (1904–1991) was the first Yiddish writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize. Born in Poland, Singer immigrated to New York before World War II and, in 1973, bought an apartment in Miami, Florida. This gently comic portrait of Jewish émigrés in doctor-mandated retirement shows that Miami Beach may not be everyone's idea of paradise on earth.

210

WHEN ISRAEL DANZIGER RETIRED to Miami Beach it seemed to him as if he were retiring to the other world. At the age of fifty-six he had been compelled to abandon everything he had known: the factory in New York, his houses, the office, his children, his relatives, and his friends. Hilda, his wife, bought a house with a garden on the banks of Indian Creek. It had comfortable rooms on the ground floor, a patio, a swimming pool, palms, flower beds, a gazebo, and special chairs designed to put little strain on the heart. The creek stank a bit, but there was a cool breeze from the ocean just across the street.

The water was green and glassy, like a stage decoration at the opera, with white ships skimming over its surface. Seagulls squeaked shrilly above and swooped down to catch fish. On the white sands lay half-naked women. Israel Danziger did not need binoculars to view them; he could see them behind his sunglasses.

He could even hear their gabble and laughter.

He had no worries of being forgotten. They would all come down from New York in the winter to visit him—his sons, his daughters, and their in-laws. Hilda was already concerned about not having enough bedrooms and linen, and also that Israel might have too much excitement with all the visitors from the city. His doctor had prescribed complete rest.

It was September now, and Miami Beach was deserted. The hotels closed their doors, posting signs that they would reopen in December or January. In the cafeterias downtown, which only yesterday had swarmed with people, chairs were piled atop bare tables, the lights extinguished, and business at a standstill. The sun blazed, but the newspapers were full of warnings of a hurricane from some far-off island, admonishing their readers to prepare candles, water, and storm windows, although it was far from certain whether the hurricane would touch Miami. It might bypass Florida entirely and push out into the Atlantic.

211

The newspapers were bulky and boring. The same news items which stirred the senses in New York seemed dull and meaningless here. The radio programs were vacuous and television was idiotic. Even books by well-known writers seemed flat.

Israel still had an appetite, but Hilda carefully doled out his rations. Everything he liked was forbidden—full of cholesterol—butter, eggs, milk, coffee with cream, a piece of fat meat. Instead she filled him with cottage cheese, salads, mangoes, and orange juice, and even this was measured out to him by the ounce lest, heaven forbid, he might swallow a few extra calories.

Israel Danziger lay on a deck chair, clad only in swimming trunks