

A Romance Novel

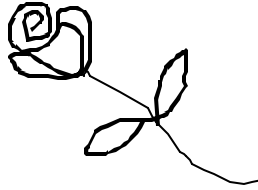


Little Miss

A Preview

BY

ALI YILDIRIM



All the characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the Author, and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the Author, and all incidents are pure invention.

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Main characters and concept in collaboration with Teemeah Baksa

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CHAPTER ONE

HER attention caught by a sudden ray of sunlight gleaming on the aircraft's broad wing, Giselle Bennet leaned forward to look out at the massed furrow of low cloud below her which stretched away into the distance.

"You remind me of a girl I once knew who was out on an adventure," a voice chuckled from behind her. She turned round to see an elderly lady with a round smiling face stretching out a small, pink hand. "I'm Caroline Davenport, my dear, and I'm very pleased to meet you."

The girl lifted her own slender hand in response to her fellow passenger, and greeted her with a warm handshake. "Giselle Bennet," she smiled back, "and the pleasure is mine."

The lady's grey eyes twinkled at her. "I couldn't help notice that you were traveling alone and thought you wouldn't mind keeping me company. I hope you don't mind having a guest so late in the flight?"

Giselle had taken an immediate liking to the woman's pleasant and easy manner. "Not at all. Though I don't know whether I'll be good company."

"Oh don't worry about that. I think you and I are going to get on just fine." The lady continued to speak effortlessly and Giselle nodded and smiled occasionally, trying to divert her attention from the growing sensation inside her stomach. The fact that the plane wouldn't probably land for at least another thirty minutes didn't lessen her excitement. Ever since takeoff from London, in the pit of her stomach there lay a strange feeling. The closer the minutes ticked away on her wristwatch, the more intense it became. She realized rapidly that it was a sense of longing, a sense of imminent reunion. Yet, how could she miss a place she had never seen?

"This is your first trip to Istanbul isn't it, my dear?" The lady's grey eyes looked at her questioningly.

"What?" Giselle replied to the old woman's enquiry, adding hurriedly, "I-I'm sorry, I'm so nervous you see..."

"So, *it is* your first time," smiled the lady, nodding her head and taking out her knitting work from her bag, began to unravel a colored ball of wool. "Well, you must be careful. It can be a confusing place, and dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

Without looking up from her work the old woman shrugged her shoulders. "A big city has its dangers of course, especially for a young thing like you." The grey eyes looked up suddenly, and stared at Giselle with a reassuring, warm glance. "But that isn't what I meant really. Dangerous in that Istanbul can be intoxicating. It gets into your blood somehow and doesn't let go of you." She

sighed as though remembering something. “My late husband thought a lot of the city.”

“I’ve wanted to visit ever since I can remember,” Giselle confided, sensing suddenly that a common interest lay between them.

“And is this a short visit or are you thinking of staying?”

“I’m going to study there...” Giselle felt her stomach move as the plane went through an air pocket, disturbing the butterflies that were fluttering hard in her tummy. Ever since she could remember, growing up in Hungary and then in London, she knew that one day she would end up in Istanbul. A timeless force she couldn't explain had been pulling her towards the ancient city. Her parents and her close friend Erica thought her crazy, but she believed in destiny.

When she had applied to the University of Istanbul to study for her Master’s in ancient history, she hadn’t really held out hope that the school would accept her application; even with a high commendation from Warwick University for her first degree in history. However two months later when she received much more than a letter of acceptance her faith in destiny had been affirmed. Along with the dispatch she had been sent a first class plane ticket, with an inclusive offer of accommodation within the school grounds. Giselle had initially been astonished at the response, wondering whether all international students were treated this way. Still she decided not to question her good fortune. After all, it felt gratifying to have been accepted at the two hundred year old prestigious school. She told herself that it was just meant to be.

“But why go at all...and for so long Giselle?” Her mother had implored, her hands continually falling to her lap in a gesture of helplessness. “Why go so far away to study a post-graduate degree in history?”

She’d smiled, stopping herself from replying that a four hour plane journey could hardly be described as the other end of the world. “It’s what I’ve always wanted to do, mum.”

“If this is your way of remembering your grandfather then it’s very sweet of you darling, but completely unnecessary.”

She’d just been about to reply when her father had interjected, unhelpfully, “Well just go for a holiday then and see the sites you always talk about. But you’re far too young to stay there.”

Giselle had reminded her parents gently that she was twenty-three not sixteen years of age, but being an only child she knew that they found it difficult to accept her attempts at independence.

The drone of the aircraft's engines altered in pitch, and a few moments later a female steward's voice announced over the intercom that the plane was

beginning its descent towards the airport and that passengers should fasten their seatbelts.

From a distance the land had been indistinguishable, but as the plane began its descent to ground level, the small matchbox buildings grew larger and the swirl of grey ribbons widened into recognizable roads. The noise of the engine increased to a thunderous roar, but Giselle didn't take her eyes from the window. She was going to catch her first glimpse of the city. She hadn't thought it possible, but her excitement grew.

Out of the window from her western viewpoint, it was difficult at first for her to discern any recognizable shapes in the clutter of foreign forms below. There were so many colors and patterns all melting together, divided into two by a blue line shaped like a lightning bolt drawn by a child. She guessed correctly that was the Bosphorus waterway, dividing Europe from Asia. Enclosed by a large swarm of cars, she saw an imposing turquoise mosque with six minarets pointing to the clouds in the sky, against a backdrop of houses with terracotta colored rooftops untidily dotting the side of lush green hills. There were so many houses cramming its outskirts! She had read somewhere that Istanbul was built between seven hills, but all she could see were hills and hills of houses!

As they neared ever closer, squawking seagulls swirled high above them like defensive matadors, while docked ships sunbathed lazily, buoyed by the sinuous body of the Bosphorus sliced into streamers of light, a collection of water ripples and reflecting sunlight. It was a glorious attack on the senses, an intense experience for her, and as the plane finally neared the ground, the sights loomed up into their real size, engulfing the window and momentarily overloading her mind.

There was a slight jar as the plane's wheels touched and then rolled along the runway, the powerful slipstream sending long waves rippling through the short cropped yellow-green grass at the side of the tarmac.

Well, here I am, she thought, as she waited impatiently for the seatbelt sign above their heads to go out. Will the arrogant invader welcome me?

The very first moment she stepped out on to the tarmac and the hot wind warmly kissed her cheeks, she knew she had the answer to her question. A long awaited dream was finally coming true.

After a smooth passage through passport control and customs with nothing to declare, Caroline pressed a handwritten card into her hand, as they said farewell in the large arrivals hall.

"Come and see me and I'll tell you the best places to visit during your stay here," the elderly lady said adamantly over Giselle's appreciative protests.

Relenting to a promise to meet, she waved goodbye to her elderly flight companion, and took a long look around the large and modern lounge. Before

she had caught her plane, the school had wired to say that they would send someone here to meet her. She hadn't expected to be greeted on arrival, but as everything else had been out of the ordinary, she thought that this too could possibly be a custom regarding international students. She had readied herself for the chance of a prolonged wait as the plane had arrived earlier than scheduled. However, her spirits rose quickly when a few feet away from the exit doors she viewed a sign written in English stating, "For Gisella Bennet flying from London, UK".

She gave a wry smile to discover her name was spelt incorrectly. Although her mother's parents were Hungarian by descent, her father's parents had been French. She had been christened after his great-grandmother and she had never liked the name, until her grandmother Belle had explained the meaning behind it. Giselle meant to make a pledge. Her parents had seen her as a pledge of their love to each other and that was why she had been given this name. Her grandmother had turned an unwelcome difference that had made her feel like an outsider growing up in London, into a special difference that had made her stand out from the crowd.

Pulling her luggage behind her, she walked towards the sign, and noticed it was being held by a tall man, leaning against the frame of the sliding exit doors. A little over six feet tall, urbane and yet rugged with it, he seemed to radiate an inborn air of confidence. The way he held his dark head spoke of someone undeniably masculine. He was young, she would have guessed about twenty-six, and was good-looking in a swarthy type of way. And even though he was dressed in an immaculate suit, with a charcoal grey shirt and tie to match, she reminded him of a pirate. He must be from the university but he was dressed as though he were meeting a client, she thought, suddenly feeling a little shy. Stopping in her tracks and trying not to be too obvious, she continued her inspection of the tall, dark man.

It was his eyes, she decided, those wide hypnotic dark jade-green gems framed in long, ebony lashes that seemed to hold her back from approaching him.

Giselle opened her small handbag to look for her compact mirror. For some reason she wanted to check herself, but feeling foolish she snapped her bag shut. Gathering up a semblance of self-confidence, she walked up to him briskly...