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Opening extract from

Princess in the Middle

Written by

Meg Cabot

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Dear Reader

You don't know how excited I am to be welcoming you to Genovia, home of the most not-ready-for-royalty princess ever, Amelia Mignonette Grimaldi Thermopolis Renaldo.

It's been fifteen years since we were allowed our first glimpse into the diaries of Princess Mia (and introduced to Genovia, that glittering little principality tucked along the sea between France and Italy), and so much has happened since then:

We used to shop in stores. Now we shop online. Phones hung on the wall. Now we keep them in our pockets. We used to go to the record store. Now we download music.

But where many things have changed since the original publication of The Princess Diaries series, most things have stayed the same:

Struggling to pass Algebra. Fighting — and making up — with your best friend. Getting asked out by the boy you secretly like. Being forced to have dinner with your grandmother. Cats. Foreign princes attempting to overthrow the throne. High-school graduation. And real princesses!

I hope you'll accept my royal invitation to visit Genovia (and the world of The Princess Diaries). I just know you're going to enjoy the trip.

Much love

Meg Cabot



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English class

Assignment (Due December 8)

Here at Albert Einstein High School we have a very diverse student population. Over one hundred and seventy different nations, religions and ethnic groups are represented by our student body. In the space below, describe the manner in which your family celebrates the uniquely American holiday, Thanksgiving. Please utilize appropriate margins.

My Thanksgiving
by Mia Thermopolis

6:45 a.m.

*Roused by the sound of my mother vomiting. She is well into her third month of pregnancy now. According to her obstetrician, all the throwing up should stop in the next trimester. I can't wait. I have been marking the days off on my *N Sync calendar. (I don't really like *N Sync. At least, not that much. My best friend Lilly bought me the calendar as a joke. Except that one guy really is pretty cute.)*



7:45 a.m.

Mr Gianini, my new stepfather, knocks on my door. Only now I am supposed to call him Frank. This is very difficult to remember due to the fact that at school, where he is my second-period Algebra teacher, I am supposed to call him Mr Gianini. So I just don't call him anything (to his face).

It's time to get up, Mr Gianini says. We are having Thanksgiving at his parents' house on Long Island. We have to leave now if we are going to beat the traffic.

8:45 a.m.

There is no traffic this early on Thanksgiving Day. We arrive at Mr G's parents' house in Sagaponack three hours early.

Mrs Gianini (Mr Gianini's mother, not my mother. My mother is still Helen Thermopolis because she is fairly well-known as a painter under that name, and also because she does not believe in the cult of the patriarchy) is still in curlers. She looks very surprised. This might not only be because we arrived so early, but also because no sooner had my mother entered the house than she was forced to run for the bathroom with her hand pressed over her mouth, on account of the smell of the roasting turkey. I am hoping this



means that my future half-brother or sister is a vegetarian, since the smell of meat cooking used to make my mother hungry, not nauseated.

My mother already informed me in the car on the way over from Manhattan that Mr Gianini's parents are very old-fashioned and are used to enjoying a conventional Thanksgiving meal. She does not think that they will appreciate hearing my traditional Thanksgiving speech about how the Pilgrims were guilty of committing mass genocide by giving their new Native American friends blankets filled with the smallpox virus, and that it is reprehensible that we, as a country, annually celebrate this rape and destruction of an entire culture.

Instead, my mother said, I should discuss more neutral topics, such as the weather.

I asked if it was all right if I discussed the astonishingly high rate of attendance at the Reykjavik opera house in Iceland (over ninety-eight per cent of the country's population has seen Tosca at least once).

My mother sighed and said, 'If you must,' which I take to be a sign that she is beginning to tire of hearing about Iceland.

Well, I am sorry, but I find Iceland extremely



fascinating and I will not rest until I have visited the ice hotel.

9:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

I watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade with Mr Gianini Senior in what he calls the rec room.

They don't have rec rooms in Manhattan.

Just lobbies.

Remembering my mother's warning, I refrain from repeating another one of my traditional holiday rants – that the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade is a gross example of American capitalism run amok. I mean, using cute animal-shaped balloons to lure children into begging their parents to buy them products that they don't need and the manufacturing of which is contributing to the destruction of our planet?

I am sorry, but that is just sick.

Besides, at one point during the broadcast I caught sight of Lilly standing in the crowd outside Office Max on Broadway and Thirty-Seventh, her video camera clutched to her slightly squished-in face (so much like a pug) as a float carrying Miss America and William Shatner of Star Trek *fame passed by. So I know Lilly is going to take care of denouncing Macy's on the next episode of her public-access television show,* Lilly Tells



It Like It Is *(every Friday night at nine, Manhattan cable channel 67).*

12:00 p.m.

Mr Gianini Junior's sister arrives with her husband, their two kids and the pumpkin pies. The kids, who are my age, are twins – a boy, Nathan, and a girl, Claire. I know right away that Claire and I are not going to get along, because when we are introduced she looks me up and down the way the cheerleaders do in the hallway at school and goes, in a very snotty voice, 'You're *the one who's supposed to be a princess?'*

And while I am perfectly aware that at five foot nine inches tall, with no visible breasts, feet the size of snowshoes and hair that sits in a tuft on my head like the end of a cotton bud, I am the biggest freak in the freshman class of Albert Einstein High School For Boys (made coeducational circa 1975) I do not appreciate being reminded of it by girls who do not even bother finding out that beneath this mutant façade beats the heart of a person who is only striving, just like everybody else in this world, to find self-actualization.

Not that I even care what Mr Gianini's niece Claire thinks of me. I mean, she is wearing a pony-skin



miniskirt. And it is not even imitation pony-skin. She must know that a horse had to die just so she could have that skirt, but she obviously doesn't care.

Now Claire has pulled out her mobile phone and gone out on to the deck where the reception is best (even though it is thirty degrees outside, she apparently doesn't mind. She has that pony-skin to keep her warm, after all). She keeps looking in at me through the sliding glass doors and laughing as she talks on her phone.

I don't care. At least I am not wearing the skin of a murdered equine.

Nathan – who is dressed in baggy jeans and has a pager, in addition to a lot of gold jewellery – asks his grandfather if he can change the channel. So instead of traditional Thanksgiving viewing options, such as football or the Lifetime channel's made-for-TV movie marathon, we are now forced to watch MTV 2. Nathan knows all the songs and sings along with them. Most of them have dirty words that have been bleeped out, but Nathan sings them anyway.

1:00 p.m.

The food is served. We begin eating.

1:15 p.m.

We finish eating.

1:20 p.m.

I help Mrs Gianini clean up. She says not to be ridiculous and that I should go and 'have a nice gossip' with Claire.

It is frightening, if you think about it, how clueless old people can be sometimes.

Instead of going to have a nice gossip with Claire, I stay where I am and tell Mrs Gianini how much I am enjoying having her son live with us. Mr G is very good about helping around the house and has even taken over my old job of cleaning the toilets. Not to mention the thirty-six-inch TV, pinball machine and foozball table he brought with him when he moved in.

Mrs Gianini is immensely gratified to hear this, you can just tell. Old people like to hear nice stuff about their kids, even if their kid, like Mr Gianini, is thirty-nine-and-a-half years old.

3:00 p.m.

We have to leave if we are going to beat the traffic home. I say goodbye. Claire does not say goodbye back to me, but Nathan does. He advises me to keep it real.

Mrs Gianini gives us a lot of leftover turkey. I thank her, even though I don't eat turkey, being a vegetarian and virulently opposed to the mass slaughter of helpless fowls every time a holiday rolls around.

6:30 p.m.

We finally make it back into the city, after spending three and a half hours in bumper-to-bumper traffic along the Long Island Expressway. Though there is nothing very express about it, if you ask me.
I barely have time to change into my baby-blue, floor-length Armani sheath dress and matching ballet flats before the limo honks downstairs and Lars, my bodyguard, arrives to escort me to my second Thanksgiving dinner.

7:30 p.m.

Arrive at the Plaza Hotel. I am greeted by the concierge, who announces me to the masses assembled in the Palm Court:

'Presenting Her Royal Highness Princess Amelia Mignonette Grimaldi Thermopolis Renaldo.'

God forbid he should just say Mia.

My father, the Prince of Genovia, and his mother, the Dowager Princess, have rented the Palm Court for

the evening in order to throw a Thanksgiving banquet for all their friends. Despite my strenuous objections, Dad and Grandmère refuse to leave New York City until I have learned everything there is to know about being a princess . . . or until my formal introduction to the Genovian people the day before Christmas, whichever comes first. I have assured them that it isn't as if I am going to show up at the castle and start hurling olives at the ladies-in-waiting and scratching myself under the arms. I mean, I am fourteen years old – I do have some idea how to act, for crying out loud.

But Grandmère, at least, does not seem to believe this and so she is still subjecting me to daily princess lessons. Lilly recently contacted the United Nations to see whether these lessons constitute a human rights violation. She believes it is unlawful to force a minor to sit for hours practising tipping her soup bowl away from her – 'Always, always, away from you, Amelia!' – in order to scrape up a few drops of lobster bisque.

The UN has so far been unsympathetic to my plight, but that, I believe, is only because they have never actually met Grandmère. Were they to witness for themselves the frightful visage – made all the scarier by the fact that years ago Grandmère had her eyeliner permanently tattooed on to her lids, not to mention

the fact that she shaves off her eyebrows every day and then draws on new ones in black pencil – hovering over me during these torture sessions, they'd send over a hostage negotiator before you could say Kofi Annan.

It was Grandmère's idea to have what she calls an 'old-fashioned' Thanksgiving dinner featuring mussels in a white-wine sauce, squab stuffed with fois gras, lobster tails and Iranian caviar, which you could never get before because of the embargo. She has invited two hundred of her closest friends, plus the Emperor of Japan and his wife, since they were in town anyway for a world trade summit.

That's why I had to wear ballet flats. Grandmère says it's rude to be taller than an emperor.

8:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.

I make polite conversation with the empress while we eat. Like me, she was just a normal person until one day she married the emperor and became royal. I, of course, was born royal. I just didn't know it until last October when my dad found out he couldn't have any more kids, due to his chemotherapy for testicular cancer having rendered him sterile. Then he had to admit he was actually a prince and all, and that

though I am illegitimate, since my dad and my mom were never married, I am still the sole heir to the Genovian throne.

And even though Genovia is a very small country (population 50,000) crammed into a hillside along the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and France, it is still this very big deal to be princess of it.

Not a big enough deal for anyone to raise my allowance higher than ten dollars a week, apparently. But a big enough deal that I have to have a bodyguard follow me around everywhere I go just in case some Eurotrash terrorist with a ponytail and black leather trousers takes it into his head to kidnap me.

The empress knows all about this – what a bummer it is, I mean, being just a normal person one day and then having your face on the cover of People magazine the next. She even gave me some advice: she told me I should always make sure my kimono is securely fastened before I raise my arm to wave to the populace.

I thanked her, even though I don't actually own a kimono.

11:30 p.m.

I am so tired on account of having gotten up so early to go to Long Island I have yawned in the empress's



face twice. I have tried to hide these yawns the way Grandmère taught me to – by clenching my jaw and refusing to open my mouth. But this only makes my eyes water and the rest of my face stretch out like I am hurtling through a black hole. Grandmère gives me the evil eye over her salad with pears and walnuts, but it is no use. Even her malevolent stare cannot shake me from my state of extreme drowsiness.

Finally, my father notices and grants me a royal reprieve from dessert. Lars drives me back to the apartment. Grandmère is clearly upset because I am leaving before the cheese course. But it is either that or pass out in the fromage bleu. I know that in the end Grandmère will have retribution, undoubtedly in the form of forcing me to learn the names of every member of the Swedish royal family, or something equally heinous.

Grandmère always gets her way.

12:00 a.m.

After a long and exhausting day of giving thanks to the founders of our nation – those genocidal hypocrites known as the Pilgrims – I finally go to bed.

And that concludes Mia Thermopolis's Thanksgiving.