



The Girl of His Dreams

Donna Leon

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One rainy morning Commissario Brunetti and Ispettore Vianello respond to an emergency call reporting a body floating near some steps on the Grand Canal. Reaching down to pull it out, Brunetti's wrist is caught by the silkiness of golden hair, and he sees a small foot - together he and Vianello lift a dead girl from the water.

But, inconceivably, no one has reported a missing child, nor the theft of the gold jewellery that she carries. Brunetti is drawn into a search not only for the cause of her death but also for her identity, her family, and for the secrets that people will keep in order to protect their children - be they innocent or guilty.

From the canals and palazzi of Venice to a gypsy encampment on the mainland, Brunetti struggles with institutional prejudice and entrenched criminality to try to unravel the fate of the dead child.

The Girl of His Dreams Details

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From Reader Review The Girl of His Dreams for online ebook

Blair McDowell says

In each of her books featuring Venetian detective Guido Brunetti, Leon tackles a current and relevant issue, moral, religious, or political, in the context of the case before him. Always in her books, Brunetti, a highly intelligent, ethical, honest policeman is besieged by forces beyond his control to “solve” the case in a way that is most expedient or convenient for his superiors, his political bosses, the moneyed interests, and/or the church.

A man who reads Greek philosophy to relax, Brunetti is seldom able to resolve a case to his own satisfaction, even though he nearly always arrives at the truth.

The issue disclosed and running like a thread throughout The Girl of His Dreams is the ever-increasing nomad population of Italy, Zingari, Rom, Sinti, and Nomadi, commonly referred to as Gypsies. These immigrants, who are able to cross Italy’s borders legally because of lax immigration laws, now number some 40% of the total Italian population, and account for about 80% of the inmates of Italy’s jails, according to Leon. By inclination and tradition, Gypsies make their living through theft and train their children early to be beggars and thieves.

The “girl” of the title is a ten-year old who drowns in a canal, with evidence that she fell there from the roof top of the building above. On her are items that clearly were stolen. Did she fall or was she pushed? She’s a mere child and Brunetti’s sympathies are aroused. He wants to know the truth, but he’s blocked at every turn by both the community of Gypsies and by his own superiors.

Like all of the Brunetti series, this deeply disturbing and beautifully written novel is definitely a thinking person’s book. I consider it to be one of Leon’s best.

Joyce Lagow says

#17 in the Commissario Brunetti series, set in Venice, Italy.[return][return]The story opens on the funeral of Brunetti’s mother, at last released from the madness of dementia. Giving the blessing at the graveside is an old boyhood acquaintance of Brunetti and his brother, Sergio, Padre Antonin Scalloni. In the days after the funeral, Brunetti receives a visit from Padre Antonin at the Questura. Antonin has a request--that Brunetti look into the activities of a fringe preacher, a Brother Leonardo, who, Antonin fears, is running a religious scam to which a friend of Antonin’s seems vulnerable. In response, Brunetti, Paola, Vianello and his wife Nadia, decide to investigate undercover.[return][return]While on this purely personal investigation, Brunetti and Vianello recover from the Grand Canal the body of a 10 year old girl who turns out to be one of the Rom, as the Gypsies are now to be called in the latest sensitivity edicts from the Italian government in general, and Patta in particular. The girl is in possession of what are clearly stolen goods. Brunetti and Vianello carry out the investigation, which seems straightforward, but the girl’s death haunts Brunetti.[return][return]This latest of her published books--#18 will be released in April--continues and strengthens a change in Leon’s writing that she seems to have started with the previous book, *Suffer the Little Children*. Up until that time, Leon wrote (with one glaring exception) outstanding but very straightforward police procedurals. Whether as part of the plot or the way she wove daily Venetian life into her stories, there were themes that always stood out,

the most prominent of which was the omnipresent government corruption that penetrates every aspect of Venetian life. She almost always incorporated some theme of social justice into her plots as well.[return][return]In this book, even more than *Suffer the Little Children*, all that is practically nonexistent. The only theme she can say to bring out, and that briefly, is the Mafia, who were brought back into power by the US after World War II to counteract international Communism, in another move of monumental stupidity on the part of the US. But that makes just a brief appearance and is a sidelight.[return][return]In almost all of her books, the excomunitari--illegal immigrants--are present to some degree or another and even form the matrix of some of her plots. Here, the Rom and their culture are integral to the story.[return][return]There are two aspects to this book that are really striking. One is the frustration and despair that Brunetti and Vianello feel in trying to carry out their jobs decently. Given that Leon is writing realistically about Venice, that has always been an undercurrent, but in this book it is very pronounced. You wonder how Brunetti can continue.[return][return]The other aspect is that Leon, starting with her previous book and continuing very strongly in this one, has moved away from an easily classifiable genre--police procedural--into what is for her uncharted territory--a more ambiguous, much more subtle story in which she seems to be taking on more profound questions than her usual ones of corruption, environmental crimes, and the like. Now she seems to be trying to examine not just the impact on society but where Venetian society itself is heading. The result is far more of a literary endeavor than it is a crime story. Indeed, crime is the least important element in the book.[return][return]In one of her books, Brunetti, an atheist, reflects that while he does not agree at all with the Catholic Church and dislikes the power it wields, he is afraid of what would replace it should Christianity just simply die out. Since I have had exactly the same reaction, it struck me strongly at the time; I was reminded of that brief segment while reading this book. [return][return]*The Girl of His Dreams* has all of the standard Leon strengths; in particular her wry sense of humor is back, which had been missing from some of her previous works. While Paola plays a part, she and the family are not so prominent in this book as in some others. Instead Vianello is given his biggest role; he has clearly become a friend and not just a highly valued colleague.[return][return]There really is no denouement to the story--but the end is perfect.[return][return]A major and ambitious striking out from the kind of story that won her international fame in the crime genre, this is a far more serious, more thought-provoking book. Highly recommended.

Alex is The Romance Fox says

The Girl of His Dreams, the 17th novel in Donna Leon's Commissario Brunetti Series opens with Brunetti attending his mother's funeral, where he's approached by a priest, a friend of Brunetti's brother, asking him to investigate a new age minister who may be swindling Venetian old parishioners.

There is quite a few things that happen in this story but the main mystery that Brunetti and Vianello investigate relates to a body of a young girl found in one of the city's canals. This leads them into the local gypsy communities and how children are used to rob the homes of the local rich Venetian community.

Corruption continues to erode Brunetti's beloved city. Bribes are an accepted part of Venetian life.

In recent years, Brunetti had begun to see the death of the young as the theft of years, decades, generations. Each time he learned of the willed, unnecessary destruction of a young person, whether it was the result of crime or of one of the many futile wars that snuffed out their lives, he counted out the years until they would have been seventy and added up the plundered years of life. His own government had stolen centuries; other governments had stolen millennia, had stamped out the joy these kids might and should have had. Even if life had brought them misery or pain, it would still have brought them life, not the void that Brunetti saw looming after death.

We continue following Brunetti's life with his family and his work colleagues, which is a total pleasure.

The last couple of books in this series have been somewhat lackluster and I am happy to say that this is a much better one.

Ashling says

Ha sido un pelín decepcionante, pero siempre es un placer volver con Brunetti

Jan C says

Came across this on my shelf and realized I had started reading it.

I wasn't that far in and so when they spoke of Father Antonin having spoken at Brunetti's mother's funeral, I thought it was a long time ago, instead of at the beginning of the book. Oh, well, such are the hazards of putting a book down for several years for no apparent reason.

And the priest comes to see Brunetti at work to ask for help. There's apparently a con man taking people's money under the aegis of religion. This investigation is kind of a side journey. The primary investigation involves a "nom" (gypsy or Romani) girl who was discovered drowned, after apparently sliding off a roof. I think she was only about 11. But she was apparently sent out to "work" (burglarize) with her older brother and sister. She was the unlucky one. So that made it kind of sad.

But it was a good book. And most of Leon's books revolve around one issue: corruption. This is no different. But she also looks at social problems that are going on.

Jeanette says

Fini! This completes my final read for the Leon Brunetti series, although I've read them quite out of order. This is #17 and very far from the most lighthearted at any point in the series of 25 books (so far- 2016).

This could be a tedious reaction and overlong. So I will refrain from all the particulars I might mention. Suffice it to say that Paola's pessimistic, fatalistic dissing, sneering snark and venting sarcasm reigns high and becomes core to at least a third of this book. And the "case" that Guido investigates does not even begin to raise its occurrence until well past page 100.

It starts with Guido's mother's funeral and the usual Brunetti observation of Catholic ritual without an ounce of religious interpretation or belief of any sense in the spiritual partaking of the ceremony. Such straight arrows they! Rather as in the mode of similarity to Chiara's going to Confession tale in one of the other books. In fact Leon uses the same confession story for Guido's 12 year old tale that she used for Chiara's hear-say for her friend's Confession. But you know, they are all the same anyway, right? Untrustworthy at the least. But that is a mere 8 pages or so for all the Brunetti's (Sergio's family too) grief- because the priest who is officiating becomes a character who has something to ask of Guido quite soon after the fact of his duties.

This case is about the Rom. It concerns immigrants and nomads of all types and the Italian response to stealing, cheating in charity schemes, cultural differences for their values, and crimes against property gone endemic. It made me truly wonder how they (Northerner Italians) feel right now in 2016 when I just heard today that 142,000 more non-Italians have arrived within Sicily alone, mainly from 4 countries in North and NE Africa in just the last few years. Maybe Palermitani aren't so bad after all, huh!

So glad I didn't read this one at the beginning- within the first 5 or 10 books I read, because I don't think I would have finished all of them if I had. At one point Guido reacts to a parable Paola relates from the New Testament by saying to himself. "She'll read anything." And in this one, IMHO, Donna Leon's hater skills become just as embedded within Guido as in Paola's more vocal displays. And he has the nerve to act scandalized by Vianello's more guarded and honest opinions!

There are some long, long passages that have nothing to do with the plot or family life, IMHO- but are merely situational descriptive parleys for coring 4 or 5 page preaching philosophy treatise material of superiority. And Americans with their "feelings" and "awareness" as answers to problems that require specific and quick action instead of emotion; that soliloquy did actually make me laugh. She detests in several different directions and entire countries are never left out.

But it is Spring and gelato is back and fresh- and the spinach risotto and shrimp go well with the prosecco and a grappa to finish. And our poor girl's family gets a new car. And the favors are all returned. Elettra even has a new slim black computer and keyboard you can barely see. Not my favorite, but I can see why others may 5 star this one. It's murky, but contains pithy masses of floating meat within that murk. And some methods by under characters are fully explained by themselves in words or in motions to the oversee contexts- so this one grabs crux to intents and to goals for all the books (Elettra's being that Patta should never trust her completely- because then he would not be afraid of separating her job from his circle.)

At the end I am going to list a couple of themes, thoughts, situations Leon repeats in numerous different novels of varying case or seriousness thought tracts during this series. One is the San Marco constant rehabbing project with the multitudes of scaffolding. Another is the methods used or jobs given to Alvise to get him out of everybody's hair because he is so stupid and ineffective (of course he gets promoted and ends up holding/heading an entire office of "Multi-cultural Appreciation") and another is the interplay between Chiara and her father, usually at meals or when he asks her to do a task. That last is delightful and has facets that are truly interesting. But Guido falls several times into the easy, yet dangerous, method of using her as a spy to know more about the habits of the "young" people. Raffi- we never, ever get that depth for him at all, IMHO. Only his appetite is fully disclosed. For both food and Sara. I wonder if Leon knows next to nothing about teenage boys?

If you only read one, read *Beastly Things*.

Barbara says

After his mother's funeral, a priest acquaintance approaches Commissario Guido Brunetti and asks him to look into the bona fides of a "spiritual advisor" who takes big monetary contributions from his followers to 'help the poor.' Meanwhile, Brunetti also investigates the death of a young gypsy girl who has valuable jewelry on her person when her drowned body is found in a canal. Brunetti suspects the girl may have fallen or been pushed from a roof while she was robbing a home.

Brunetti goes about the investigations in his usual laid back fashion, attending a meeting of the spiritual advisor and attempting to get information from the robbed family and from the gypsy girl's parents - all of which proves to be almost impossible. The burglarized family seems to have something to hide and the gypsies are suspicious and antagonistic toward the police.

Leon's usual characters - Brunetti's police colleagues and his wife and kids - are on hand and, as always, the interactions between Brunetti and the police chief's wiley secretary, Signorina Elettra, add a touch of intrigue and humor. Donna Leon is adept at infusing the feel of Venice into her stories - the canals and cafes and people speaking Venetian. This is a good light mystery.

Monica says

I love the Brunetti books and greedily read this in one sitting, but unfortunately I was disappointed. The first part of the story consisted of a lengthy soapbox criticism of the Catholic Church, and while I actually agree with that criticism, I heard in it too much of the author's voice (rather than the character's) and I found it extremely distracting. I read a long interview with Leon a while back in which she was strident in her negative opinions about America, the Church etc and now I'm having a hard time separating that out and just enjoying her books. It was particularly difficult in this case, as that side story about the priest petered out into nothing; it simply seemed like an excuse for a good rant. Oh well... Hopefully she'll keep her eye on the ball in the next one.

Tony says

THE GIRL OF HIS DREAMS. (2008). Donna Leon. ***.

There two things that knocked my rating down from a 4-star to a 3-star score. First, what in hell does the title have to do with the book? Secondly, whatever happened to the opening plot line using a potential religious scam on unwitting or unconscious group members? That plot direction slowly faded into the west as soon as the secondary plot theme came to light. It was a good thing that this way out was found, or the book might have ended on page 75 or so. OK. Let's forget the religious scam beginning. If we concentrate on the secondary situation involving the young girl found in the canal, the book is well written and makes sense. I found that Ms. Leon utilized current themes in this novel that should resonate with her readers – even though she was about nine years ahead of her time. Her use of a segment of the population that was on the fringes of society was a good way for her to get her personal views out there. She did not become didactic, but took a reasoned approach to the problem that was developing in the area of northern Italy. In all, this was a good read. I'd sure like some hints from readers as to the meaning of the title on the book. If you have a good idea – or I managed to miss some key points, let me know.

Helen says

What good is it to think good and proper thoughts, to have sympathy for the under dog, if you don't do anything about a bad situation? MS Leon brings anti-clericalism right up front, including the reason Brunetti walked away from confession at age twelve and never returned. We meet Padre Antonin who appears to have been used by his superiors in Africa to further their own careers. He will never become a prelate but

you'll always be able to count on him to do something about problems. The unconnected clergy-like man who preaches loving concern and thinking good thoughts is probably scamming the community and is never to be trusted with anything. "By their fruit ye shall know them."

With that background we address the death by drowning of an 11 year old Romany girl, a girl who has definitely been robbing houses. The pain and frustration increases as Brunetti insists on investigating the case, even when he is told by everyone, Patta, his sergeant, the victims of the theft, and the girl's father himself, to just leave it. The situation is still bad when the story ends but there were attempts at rectifying things. We need more Brunettis in all fields. This is actually an important book, especially now with so many helpless people wandering the world.

Erin Reilly-Sanders says

While I enjoyed the sort of insider view into Venice, the story overall seemed sort of mediocre and unexciting. I guess I was just expecting something more action-filled rather than about character and people. A lot of the book seems to focus on ethnic differences between the Venetians and the Roma (the term "Gypsy" being considered derogatory) and the conflicts between two very different cultural systems, one heavily influenced by poverty while the other is rather well to do but does not come to any conclusions or present any solutions. The ending felt vaguely unsatisfying because while appropriate discoveries are made, justice is not adequately served at the end, at least according to my accustomed-to-Law-and-Order palate. The voice acting on the audio recording seemed very good and the details of life in Venice were easily appreciable. Not a bad book, but I would probably try one of the other books in the series first unless you were already a fan. This one is sort of sad and hopeless.

Nikki says

Not my favorite of Leon's books (so far, that honor goes to *Acqua Alta*). I'm catching up after not having read one of the Brunetti series for some time. All our old friends are here, Brunetti's family, his colleagues, and the annoying Patta. It seems at first that there may be two mysteries to be solved that might be connected -- but that doesn't turn out to be the case. The discovery of a young girl's drowned body in a canal leads Brunetti and Vianello to an encampment of Romany and the political concerns that result from a clash of cultures. (The Rom have mostly come from the, at the time recently, former Yugoslavia.) I enjoy the descriptions of Brunetti's family life, especially the lunches and dinners; but each time I read one of the books I wonder how much longer I will stick with the series. It's becoming a little difficult to read these books with their cynicism and acceptance of corruption. (In fact in this book there are a few mentions of things even the sainted Brunetti does which would not pass muster in the US Civil Service.) Too often the wrongdoers are not arrested or punished because they have money or position. It gets wearing. Also, I'm pretty sick of the knee-jerk stereotyping of Americans and the general hatred of tourists that Leon attributes to the Venetians. My hope is that this stems from her own ex-pat issues and is not reflective of Venetian feelings.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Commissario Guido Brunetti

SETTING: Venice, Italy

SERIES: #17 of 17

RATING: 3.5

THE GIRL OF HIS DREAMS is the 17th entry in the Commissario Guido Brunetti series by Donna Leon. Longtime fans of these books know what to expect. You'll be treated to the usual evocative Venetian setting that Leon is so superb at creating. You'll dive deep into the Italian political environment and all its flaws. And finally, you'll spend time with Guido and his family, his loyal and prickly wife, Paolo, and their two teenaged children who are rapidly becoming adults. And don't forget the food – the pages are a veritable smorgasbord of Italian cuisine.

It took me a while to settle into THE GIRL, as I wasn't sure where the narrative was going. Initially, Guido is asked by a priest who was a boyhood friend of his brother, to check into a possible scam by another cleric. Although that did involve some investigation, the thread never really went anywhere. There was also quite a lot on the influence of the Mafia on the country and the negative impacts on daily life. That turned out to be more of a riff than a real narrative thread. But then Brunetti and his partner, Vianello, are assigned to a case involving the drowning death of an 11-year-old gypsy (Rom) girl. Shockingly, her autopsy reveals that she had a venereal disease. Was she killed or was it an accident that occurred while she was robbing one of the local elite? Obviously, this is a case that engages Guido's heart as much as his intellect.

During the course of the investigation, the team needs to go into the Rom community to interrogate its members. This group of people leads lives that are far outside the norms of society that Guido is used to. It was interesting to learn about their mores. It was also sad to see how much poverty existed and the quality of life for the children. The situation also exposes the degree of racism faced by these people, including from individuals that you wouldn't expect.

Although most of the elements that I enjoy in this series were present in this book, I found that I didn't enjoy it as much as some of the earlier works. Leon often has a political agenda, and I found some of her personal views intruded on the narrative. There's a strain of anti-Americanism and some digressions about the Mafia's influence, although the Mafia had really nothing to do with what was going on in the book.

I always enjoy the characters, but Brunetti seemed somehow more world weary than in the past with less of his trademark optimism. His best scenes were when he was interacting with his boss's administrative assistant, Signorina Elettra. The dialogue was full of amusing double meanings.

I don't think Leon is capable of writing a bad book. This one just wasn't quite as engaging for me. The pace was slow; and as previously noted, the narrative direction a bit muddled. I did appreciate the resolution of the book—no pretty wrapped-up-in-a-nice-bow ending here.

John McDonald says

Donna Leon is like many lapsed Catholics, of which I am one, who cannot quite shake the indelible marks that Catholic education, Catholic rituals (some in Latin) for every event and season of the year, sacred music, and the virtues (compassion, forgiveness, social justice, respect for elders, the nuns, and immigrants). Like many lapsed Catholics, who consider why their affinity or affiliation to the Church has diminished, I

persistently try to explain lost faith to myself and to others.

I only mention this because about 70% of this book is devoted to some circuitous, but well written and interesting, enigma involving priests of Opus Dei and priests who tend to the souls of Venezia's elite Catholics. Her musings do not quite fit into the mystery, but they fascinated me since I have almost the exact same thoughts from time to time. Odd as it seems, we lapsed or at least not as faithful Catholics still pine to understand why, in the words of the young scholar-prince in Shoes of the Fisherman, we "hate her and yet love her" but cannot rationalize our contradicted emotions.

Brunetti, with his sidekick Lorenzo Vianello, track down the murderer of a Romini child--a Gypsi to some--and their discussions about the Church, its prelates, the issues of migrations and the presence of travelers and their activities preside over their search. A well-formed picture of Patta--Brunetti's Vice Questura--comes into focus as he unsuccessfully tries to impede Brunetti's investigation, reminded by his Sancho Panza (Viannello) that Brunetti is committing professional suicide dragging Viannello along to his demise.

Kathryn Davidson says

I didn't enjoy the book for the following reasons. 1) There's no closure. We know that it might be one of two people, but we don't know who. There is a price that is paid, but we don't know whether the people that paid it are also victims or the perpetrator (there is clearly one bad guy, we just don't know if he actually did it). 2) I didn't buy that a show of force would make people more interested in providing information than the threat of force that is withheld in order to encourage participation. 3) I felt the author was more interested in showing off their knowledge of Italy than including the reader in the story. 4) How is it that this detective has so much time on their hands that they can have leisurely lunches with alcohol, wander around Venice without any sense of urgency (and without showing us the beauty of the city) and sit staring at walls? 5) The inconsistencies (they're thankful at the beginning of the book that there's no drug problem but reference the drug problem at the end of the book). 6) Did the girl really have to be fair haired for everyone to care about her? This is the first book that I've read by Donna Leon. As you can guess, I won't be running out to read any more.
