



On Valentine's Day

A NaNoWriMo 2013 Novel

Dayang Noor

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Chapter One

It was February 13th, the day when all hopeful, doe-eyed girls anticipated phone calls, emails, texts or even post cards from someone who would ask them out the next day for Valentine's dinner. The sun shone brighter on February 13th, the road users were all smiles despite the unbearable traffic congestion and even the Makcik selling nasi lemak was more friendly than usual.

"Everybody seems unusually happy today," remarked Fahim as he put his tray on the table. A bowl of chicken soup and a few slices of bread accompanied by a cup of piping hot coffee were his usual choice for brunch.

"It's Valentine's Day tomorrow. Everyone is excited to celebrate it," says Nureen nonchalantly and she continued stirring her milk tea. "Tell me, do guys feel the same way about Valentine's Day?"

Fahim shrugged as he was busy chewing the bread he just dipped in the clear soup. A few moments later, he said, "I don't know about other guys, but to me, it's just another day where guys are expected to fork out a few hundred ringgit to buy overpriced roses and a romantic dinner at ridiculous places - not to mention the price. Even a bowl of salad can drill holes in my pocket."

Nureen reached for the sugar bowl and scooped two spoon-

fuls into her tea. “Some girls can be so inconsiderate or even mean, you agree?” She asked. Fahim nodded and continued slurping his soup. “I wonder how much I need to fork out if I were to ask one of those girls out on Valentine’s Day,” said Fahim as his eyes went in the direction of three girls who just entered the faculty’s cafeteria. Nureen looked up and saw them and gave a smirk. “It’s going to cost at least three months of your father’s salary,” she made a wild guess.

“Phew!!” Fahim wiped his imaginary sweat on his temple. “So glad I’m single.”

The three girls looked glamorous and way too dressy for classes. One of them was wearing pink jumpsuit with colourful rhinestones sewn to the round pockets. Another one flips her long, luscious, heavily coloured blonde hair that looked like a bunch of feather duster from far. The third girl had a pair of skin tight jeans paired with a light blue, see through silk blouse.

“You got classes with them this afternoon, right?” Fahim asked. Nureen had wiped her smirk minutes ago. “No, we are having labs, two labs from 1 to 6pm.” She sighed.

“Congratulations!” Fahim smiled and sipped his hot coffee.

“Ah! Save that for later,” Nureen said as her eyes were still fixed on the three girls, the most glamorous girls in her class.

“Congratulate me when my pendant and bracelets become a hit soon,” she said.

“Huh?” Faheem lifted his head and looked at Nureen’s bare hands.

“You’re not wearing any.”

“No. Not today. But I managed to design and complete a few boxes of bracelets and pendants last week. So I gave them to Jannah there,” she pointed to one of the glamorous girls with her pouting mouth. “hoping that she’d post pictures of her wearing them on her Instagram.”

“You think that would make good advertising?” Faheem asked.

“Yes. I think it’s good publicity. And have you seen how many followers she has on Instagram and Twitter?”

“No.”

“Fifty thousand followers combined. That’s five, zero - not one, five, okay?” Nureen lifted five fingers in front of Fahim’s face.

“Wow! How about the other two girls? Maliha and Raha?”

“Hmmm..” Nureen pondered for a while. “I think Maliha has about the same as Jannah while Raha has slightly less than 5 thousand followers.”

“Pretty faces can bring you a long way, huh?” Fahim shot a glance at the three glamorous girls who were now sitting at one of the long tables about 20 metres away. “But it can be a curse too,” he added.

“Yeah. Jannah and Maliha’s net popularity shot up after they won the Top Model competition, you remember?”

“Raha never won anything?” Fahim asked with a disbelieving expression. “She is kind of pretty too.”

Nureen chuckled after gulping her iced milk tea. “She is a girl with principles. Her beauty is only for herself and her loved ones. She’ll never display herself to the public.”

“But she is the prettiest among the three, don’t you think?” Fahim raised one of his eyebrows. “Although sometimes she looks kind of boyish, but the masculinity in her brings out her natural beauty.”

“I have to agree with you Mr. Philosopher. Perhaps she has telepathic ability too, because she is looking directly at us now,” said Nureen as she lowered her gaze.

“Is she coming our way? God! I’m suddenly so embarrassed.” Fahim tried to hide his face behind his palms. Nureen gave him a strange look.

“Do you have a crush on her?”

“Nooo!!” He answered immediately. “I just admired her looks and sometimes her deep voice when she performed at faculty events.”

“Yes. With her guitar. And then she’d play Nirvana songs,” said Nureen, staring blankly at her milk tea.

“Yeah! She played Nirvana. She’s so cool, right?”

Nureen let out a short sigh. “And I can’t help wondering why she’s friend with those bimbos. She’s a lot more talented than them.”

“And has principles too,” Fahim added. Nureen couldn’t help but agreed with her friend.

“Hey! While they’re here, I think I’d go talk to Jannah about the accessories. She’s been keeping them for almost a month now and I don’t see any of her Instagram photos had my bracelet or pendants on her.” Nureen stood up a bit too abruptly, she almost knock down her tall glass of milk tea.

“Sure! And do tell Raha that I enjoyed her last performance during English Week.” Fahim lifted his coffee cup in Raha’s direction. The three glamorous girls were now looking at him. He blushed a bit.

The three girls were laughing at something when Nureen approached their table. Their laughter died off instantly. As usual the girls were having their usual Caesar salad and mineral water for brunch. I should be changing my diet soon, Nureen reminded herself.

“Hello beautiful,” Nureen greeted them and faked the sweetest smile possible. Jannah looked up, not smiling.

“Oh. It’s you.” She sounded uninterested.

“What’s up with you, ladies?” Nureen pulled the nearest chair and sat between Jannah and Raha.

Maliha rolled her eyes and answered, “Ah... the usual. Classes, shows, photo shoots, hair spa, massage. Damn busy, don’t you think?”

“Not to mention the parties,” Jannah added while Raha

nodded.

“I see... I see... I think I can imagine,” Nureen tried not to allow them to elaborate on all the boring stuff she had no interest in. “Well, I’m just wondering whether you’ve posted any picture wearing the bracelets and pendants I gave you.”

Jannah made a surprised face and her lips curved into an ‘O’ shape. Then she covered it with her hand. “God! I’m so sorry. I’ve been really busy and forgotten all about it.”

Nureen realized her apologies were not genuine. She probably had never planned to help her promote the accessories. “Oh, that’s okay. I understand,” Nureen said, trying hard not to lose her temper. “If you are so tied up with other things, can I take the boxes back? A few orders just came in.”

“What? You are selling them to your customers?” Maliha looked hurt and offended. “Those are considered display items, Nureen. You are going to insult your customers!”

Jannah and Raha looked as offended. Then Jannah said, “this is fashion business, Nureen. No one wants to buy display items. They all want those in packages. Clean. Untouched.”

Nureen didn’t know how to respond. Both Jannah and Maliha had been part time models since they won the Top Model competition more than a year ago. They had more experiences and more exposed to the fashion business. She’s just another collage student trying to make extra

income selling bracelets and pendants.

“Think about your customers, girl. Think about your customers,” Raha repeated herself, as if she was the fashion business expert among them. Nureen forced a wry smile.

“Okay, I won’t sell them.” She cave in. “But I’ll still need the accessories back. I gave you three boxes more than a month ago. I hope you still remember where you kept them,” she said rather sarcastically.

“It’s on my dressing table...” Jannah’s voice trailing off.

“...gathering dust!” Maliha added and their throaty laugh broke, almost mercilessly leaving Nureen a bit disheartened.

“Yes,” Nureen said when their laughter died down. “That’s why I’m taking them back tonight. Will you be home tonight?” The three glamorous girls looked uncomfortable and started jabbing each other’s arm.

“Erm... tonight won’t be a good time,” finally Jannah told Nureen.

“One of your sugar daddies is sleeping over, huh?” Bimbos won’t get offended by such joke, Nureen thought.

“Hey! Watch your mouth, girl!” Raha’s deep voice startled everyone. “You don’t say those things to my besties!”

Nureen chuckled although none of the glamorous girls understood what was so funny. “Sorry, my bad.” Nureen brought her palm to her chest and arched her body forward. “I forgot you have a Sugar Mummy, Rayray.”

Raha got up and was about to hit Nureen with her fist when Fahim came to the rescue. He pulled Nureen away. “Please girls,” said Fahim. “This is not the way to behave in public,” he whispered when he noticed that many pairs of eyes were on them.

“Fahim,” Raha said. “Your friend just crossed the line. Tell her to behave!” Raha’s face was flushed with anger.

“Okay, cool it, okay,” Jannah finally intervened. She realized it would be better if they speak the truth. “Nureen, you can come tomorrow afternoon. We’re throwing a Valentine’s party tonight at the apartment. So, we’ll be very busy and I won’t have time to entertain you. I’m so sorry, you two are not invited to the party.”

Everyone fell silent upon hearing Jannah’s explanation. The three girls planned to keep the party a secret. They didn’t plan to invite anyone from college. It was purely for their friends in the fashion industry - the photographers, the agents, fellow models, actresses, directors, business owners and a few strippers to entertain them.

“Great! Simply great!” Said Nureen, followed by a long sigh. “I’ll get the boxes tomorrow afternoon, then.”