Deḟne Ersin Tutan

Escape from Smyrna: An Historical Mystery Novel. Charles Gates. Winchester, UK: Top Hat Books, 2013. P/bk 325 pp. ISBN 978-1-78099-849-7. Price £11.99.

In the summer of 1982, in Andros, Greece, four young wandering tourists from Zurich steal a gold locket from a deserted chapel on a hilltop during their sightseeing adventures. Deciding to sell it when they get to their ultimate destination, they move on hitchhiking towards İstanbul. In the meantime, Oran Crossmoor's grandfather in New York receives an anonymous mystery letter mailed from Turkey that reads: "It is time to repent. Come find me. The jewels will show you the way. The beautiful, magical, tragic jewels." Motivated by the mystery of the letter, the 26-year-old American Oran sets out for İstanbul to meet his Turkish mother's acquaintance, Leyla Aslanoğlu, a rich old woman willing to come to terms with her past, and also to face the painful memories he had locked away for four years. While he was working in İstanbul taking photographs for a book, Oran had met a nice young Turkish lady, Elif, with whom he had intensions towards marriage. Unfortunately, Elif got killed at a demonstration at İstanbul University and Oran stayed away for these four years, hoping the pain would go away. As he is window shopping at the Covered Bazaar, Oran finds a gold locket at an antiques dealer, and instantly remembers seeing it in family albums and hearing about it in his grandfather's stories. It was a family treasure that had disappeared about fifty years ago, and it was the mystery letter to the grandfather that brought it out from among long-forgotten memories once more. That the locket's origins date back to the 1520s' Island of Rhodes remains unearthed.

Thus starts a modern quest, literally for the four pieces of an old treasure believed to have magical powers and metaphorically for the pieces of a family history with many a mystery. This quest strongly binds together two families, those of Crossmoor and Aslanoğlu, in ways that keep the mystery alive until the last pages of the novel. At the same time, it sheds light upon the interconnectedness of two histories and two cultures - Turkish and Greek - through the shared experiences in Smyrna during the Great Fire. The constant shifts in the setting, from 1982's Andros and İstanbul to 1922's Smyrna and Samos, are so well crafted that the novel provides a very pleasant reading. Moreover the climax is constantly deferred, and

the beguiling questions remain intact: will the Aslanoğlu family give up their professed rights over the treasure or will the Crossmoors take it home after years of yearning? Will Oran's interest in Beril, Leyla Hanım's niece, replace his love for Elif? More importantly, will each character come to terms with their respective family histories?

Gates' expertise in archeology and art history must surely have lent the story the inspiration. However, not all expert academics make natural fiction writers. That is where the ingenuity lies: history, mystery, and romance are so brilliantly engraved that the readers will anxiously look forward to sequels to this *Escape*. Anyone who is familiar with the settings and the communities involved would surely feel at home with this representation as it sounds to be coming from within. In other words, Gates writes like an insider rather than an outside observer. Although the novel could very well have done without its subheading, *An Historical Mystery Novel*, as it generates a preconditioning, Gates' delicate craftspersonship makes the novel an amazing success. At present, close to the 93rd anniversary of the Great Fire of İzmir, *Escape from Smyrna* reads as a tribute to the communities on the two sides of the Aegean that shared a history that must have been beautiful, magical, and, at the same time, tragic, just like the jewels that initiate the quest in the novel.

Defne Ersin Tutan
Başkent University