Sabiha's Dilemma

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MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

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A guide for international readers: This book is set in Australia, and therefore uses British English spelling. Some spellings may differ from those used in American English. Please see the back of the book for a guide for international readers.

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Praise

'... would be excellent for class study as it concerns matters of modern Australian multiculturalism, the question of belonging and issues of identity.' Fiction Focus

'... is a candid, insightful story and a realistic portrayal of a teenager in crisis.' Magpies

'A funny and challenging debut novel that has been described as the Bosnian answer to *Looking for Alibrandi*... a gritty and enjoyable novel, at times unflinching and dramatic.' Canberra Times

'... is the debut novel from new Melbourne author Amra Pajalić and it's one you won't want to miss! It's a funny and honest story about Sahiba, a teen girl growing up in Melbourne's western suburbs who's trying to deal with family traditions and her own desire to do what she wants. (5 stars).' Girlfriend Magazine

'Amra Pajalić writes with such honesty every young adult will empathise with her... While dealing with some ordinary "stuff" Pajalić's observations are sincere and often

hilarious.' Bendigo Advertiser

'This multicultural story is frustrating, funny and sad with an ending that promises there is still much more to tell about Sabiha's life. I hope so. Loved it. Want more!' The Reading Stack

'Insightful… A spirited debut novel.' Herald Sun

'Written with a light and comic touch… Pajalić brings a fresh voice to Australian Young Adult fiction through a funny, endearing, tough and ultimately resilient, first-person narrator.' Viewpoint

'Rewarding, poignant and occasionally chuckle-out-loud funny.' Books Buzz

'A raw and honest story about duty and the desire to run free. A strong new voice in Australian fiction.' Melina Marchetta

'It had me in stitches. Hilarious, poignant, gutsy and real.' Randa Abdel-Fattah

'Funny, sharp and insightful.' Simmone Howell

'Amra Pajalić's portrayal of what it means to be a teen growing up in Australia and caught between two cultures is spot on! There were times where I was sure she must have read my journals from my own youth. Told with honesty, tenderness, simplicity, wit and subtle wisdom, it's one of the stand out young adult novels I have read in many years and my own teen loved it too.' Tess Woods

A note on pronunciation:

Č č—Ch sound
Ć ć—a softer Ch sound
Đ đ—softer Dj sound
Š š—Sh sound
Ž ž—Dj sound

Chapter 1

When I stepped out of my bedroom ready to leave, Mum gasped. 'You can't go like that!' And pushed me back into the bedroom. We were going to a *zabava*, the Bosnian name for a party. *Zabava's* were organised twice a year, once as a community meet and greet, the second to celebrate *Ramadan*, the Muslim religious month of fasting. This would be my first attendance.

'Why not?' I demanded, my hands on my hips as I twirled. I wore a little black dress Mum bought for my fifteenth birthday. I'd grown in the year since and the dress moulded to my body. I wore the dress a few months before, when we attended a work barbecue for Dave, Mum's ex-boyfriend. Mum complimented me then.

'It's not suitable.' Mum rifled through my wardrobe.

Even though both my parents are from Bosnia, I didn't have anything to do with the community. When I was six-years-old Mum moved us to the inner-city. Now that I was sixteen we were back where we'd started—in St Albans.

Even though St Albans was established in 1887, at least that's what the plaque at St Albans train station said, you couldn't tell by walking through the bustling centre. The buildings are two-storey plain block structures with tin roofs. The shop fronts are a mix of European, who settled

after the post World War II boom, and Vietnamese who came in the 1970s.

St Albans' only distinguishing feature was the streets formed into perfect rectangles, an absence of trees on nature strips and the fact that every second shop is a pharmacy catering to the ageing population.

There were always Yugos in St Albans and after the Balkan war in the early 1990s the population exploded with refugees from all sides settling there. It wasn't a coincidence that Mum and I moved away, while everyone else moved into St Albans.

I never thought of myself as Bosnian. I was born in Australia, all my friends were Australian, and if I thought about it all I would have called myself a true blue Aussie. All that changed three months ago.

'What's wrong with my dress?' I admired myself in the mirror.

'You're too, too...'

'Beautiful, hot, gorgeous, sexy.' I cocked my hip. The black dress brought out the highlights in my dark blonde hair. The V-line showed off my cleavage, while the mini skirt made my legs look longer.

My bedroom door was pushed open. '*Hajmo*,' my grandfather demanded that we leave. He caught a glimpse of me. '*Bože sačuvaj*,' he hissed, which meant 'God Save Us,' and turned his back so he couldn't see me.

'*Bahra, nađi joj nešto drugo da obuće*,' his torrent of Bosnian came in lightning-fast bursts. I understood that he wanted my Mum, Bahra, to find me something else to wear, what would people think if they saw how I was dressed, that I was a whore, and then I lost him.

'Did Dido call me a whore?'

'He said you look like a whore because of your make-up.'

My grandparents were supposed to come to Australia with my Aunt Zehra and her family after the Balkan War in 1995, but my grandmother's diabetes made her too ill to travel. When my grandmother passed away last year, my grandfather came to Australia and lived with my Aunt Zehra and Uncle Hakija.

Unfortunately for me that lasted a few months before Uncle Hakija and Dido couldn't stay under the same roof. Auntie Zehra manipulated Dido into leaving—apparently by telling him that Bahra needed to be with him after all these years. And then she served up a good dose of guilt to her sister about being the black sheep, and about all the embarrassment Mum caused by shaking up with an Aussie. So Mum caved in and she and I made the move back to the western suburbs. And Dido moved in with us. And my life became hell, because of him.

I checked my make-up in the mirror. My foundation was flawless, making my pale skin blemish free. The liquid eyeliner and eye-shadow brought out my green eyes. I was wearing the basic make-up any teenage girl would wear to an evening function.

'He's whacked, Mum.'

She glanced at my face quickly. 'You'll have to tone it down.'

'But I'm wearing regular make-up.'

'We need to make a good impression.' Mum sighed.

'You're saying we're not good enough.'

'No.' Mum put her hands on my shoulders. 'Tonight is a very important night. It's the first time we're attending a Bosnian function as a family and we're all anxious about looking our best.'

I had to admit tonight was Mum's night. During the refugee onslaught my Auntie Zehra's family had arrived from Bosnia and we'd managed to play happy families for a total of two years, before Mum and Auntie Zehra had a falling out. We hadn't had anything to do with each other during the ten years we lived in the inner-city, but tonight was The Reunion.

She hugged me, but I held myself stiff in her embrace.

'I look great.' I pulled away from her, forcing her to look at me. 'Don't I?'

Mum hesitated. 'Yes, you do—'

'What are we waiting for? Let's go.' I headed for the door.

'But this isn't an Australian function. This is a *zabava*. Everyone will be watching us, judging us, judging me.' Mum winced.

Mum and I weren't what you would call traditional Bosnians. More like exiles returning to the fold. Mum had made some bad decisions. At the age of eighteen, she married my father, who brought her to Australia. After my birth she had a nervous breakdown and went to hospital. My Dad left us because he didn't want a mental patient for a wife; so Mum embarked on what I called her 'Finding a Daddy' phase when she dated every Bosnian man in sight, supposedly to find a father for me. Some lasted a night, some a week, some a few months, but inevitably they all left us. She ended up getting a bad reputation and this was one of the reasons why we moved out of St Albans.

'Please Sam-Sabiha, be good for me.'

For years I'd called myself Sammie Omerović and so had Mum. It was the easier option because most Australians had to be taught to pronounce the 'h' in my name, and then there was the deciding incident.

I'd been looking forward to Grade 6 camp the whole year. We went to a farm in Victoria's countryside and I had fantasies of milking cows and riding horses, but what I hadn't envisioned was my camp leader and his wife. On the first day of camp Mr Howard asked all the students for their name. When it was my turn the conversation went something like this:

Mr Howard: 'That's an interesting name. Where are you from?'

Me: 'Thornbury.'

Mr Howard: 'No.' He laughs. 'Which country.'

Me: 'Australia.'

Mr Howard: 'Your name isn't Australian.'

Me: 'It's Bosnian.'

Mr Howard: 'Ah, so you're Bosnian.'

That should have been the end of the story, but then I met his wife.

Mrs Howard: 'Where is your name from?'

Me: 'I'm Bosnian.'

Mrs Howard: 'When did you come to Australia?'

Me: 'I was born here.'

Mrs Howard: 'So you're Australian.'

Me: 'Yes.'

While I had many conversations that went along these lines, what made this so different was that Kristy Newman, my Grade Six nemesis, witnessed both. She made the three-day camp a living hell by by calling me Sabiha-No-Country.

When I came home from camp I told Mum I wanted to change my name to something more Australian. By the time I began high school I had a clean slate and everyone knew me as Sammie Omerović. Now that we were embracing our ethnic roots I was Sabiha again...

'Bahra.' My grandfather was getting angrier with Mum.

'There's nothing suitable here.' Mum closed my wardrobe doors. 'Find something in my wardrobe.'

'Mum,' I whinged.

'Please Sabiha.' Mum gave me a harried look and went to answer Dido's demands.

I sighed heavily as I rifled through Mum's wardrobe. It used to be fun playing dress-ups in Mum's wardrobe when I was a child, but now it would be a disaster. Mum was a few inches taller than me and her figure was fuller. Anything I put on would hang like a sack.

As I pushed her clothes along a parcel fell at my feet. I bent and picked up a bundle of letters tied with a ribbon. I pulled a letter out, but it was written in Bosnian and I couldn't understand much. I glanced at the salutation and saw it was signed from 'Darko.' Another old boyfriend? But this name didn't ring any bells... I returned the letter to its envelope and tossed the bundle back to the bottom of the wardrobe. I'd make sure to come back and decipher them later.

'How did you go?' Mum asked as she rushed in.

'There's nothing here that will fit me.' I shut the wardrobe doors.

'Nice try.' Mum opened the doors.

'No way.' I cringed as Mum held out the dress to me. And that's how I ended up at the *zabava*, without a spec of make up and wearing the dorkiest outfit in the history of female fashion.

'Nice dress,' snickered my cousin Adnan as I sat in the chair next to him. I stiffened. His sister Merisa gave me a dismissive once-over. She was wearing a silver silk suit jacket and skirt that was fitted around her tall willowy body. She'd managed to toe the line between modesty

and good taste without looking frumpy. Unfortunately I wasn't so lucky.

Adnan pinched a fold of fabric between his fingers. 'For your birthday I'll get you a subscription to *Vogue*.'

I went red. It was one of Mum's 'conservative' dresses. On her it was a knee-length fitted dress with a scooped neckline and almost skin-tight; but on my thinner frame the hem reached my calves and the scooped neckline was too low, so Mum had insisted I wear a top underneath. I looked like an op-shop reject.

'Read between the lines, buddy.' I lifted my hand, joining my thumb and little finger and keeping my other three fingers in a straight line. I caught my Aunt's eye across the table. Guiltily I put my hand down by my side.

'You look nice,' she called out.

I forced a smile. 'Thanks.' Adnan smothered a laugh. I elbowed him. Having a family was way overrated.

I examined what other people were wearing. If you say you're Muslim most people go to the stereotype of the turban-wearing, bearded Arab-man or the *hijab*-wearing subjugated Arab woman. They don't get that there are 1.5 billion people practicing Islam in 57 languages and that each ethnic group had a different way of expressing their religion. Since the Balkan War people know of Bosnia, but they don't know about Bosnians. They don't understand why women aren't covered up and men aren't turbaned.

I hadn't known either, but since Dido moved in his pet project was to educate me about my 'roots.' He told me that Bosnians were ruled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire from fifteenth to the early twentieth century, that most Bosnians converted from the Bosnian Church to Islam. As a result we have a lot of Turkish words in our vocabulary and dress like Turks in Western fashion.

Most of the people at the *zabava* wore regular clothes. The men were in suits and the women wore loose clothing with no skin showing. There were a few older women who were covered up, but instead of the *hijab* they wore a headscarf. Single young men wore jeans and a shirt. Adnan said he'd tried to do the same, but Auntie Zehra ordered him to change into a suit.

Mum waved to someone. I turned and groaned. Safet and his sister Safeta were making their way over to our table. It was the Bosnian tradition to use one name in the family and add variations to it, the most popular being adding an 'a' to make names female.

'*Salaam Aleykum*,' Mum said, uttering the Arabic greeting, 'Peace be unto you.'

'*Aleykumu Salaam*,' Safet returned the greeting. Bosnians speak a Southern Slavic language, like most people in the Balkans, but they use a few Arabic words and greetings that they learnt, because all Muslims pray in Arabic. Mum introduced Safet as her special friend. In private she called him her boyfriend, even though they'd only been going out for a month. I was reserving judgement.

The men shook hands with Safet, my Uncle Hakija making a point of greeting him with *Zdravo*, 'Hello', to needle my grandfather. Uncle Hakija was still a fervent communist and a thorn in Dido's side. Dido explained that it was an insult to use non-Muslim greetings among Muslims. These were reserved for mixed company only.

I turned to find Safeta standing behind me, holding out her arms. I leaned in for the kiss on the cheeks, another custom. We were pretty relaxed about it. I used to have a Turkish friend and I'd never seen so much cheek-kissing in my life. They have the whole three-kiss thing down pat. We used to do the three-kiss thing too, but we dropped

it because the Serbs have the same practice with their three-fingered crossing of the chest.

Usually I managed to avoid kissing, but Safeta was trying to impress and was over-compensating. She thought she had to win me over. She didn't know that Mum's boyfriends never lasted and that I'd stopped caring one way or another.

Safet and Safeta sat on the seats we'd been saving for them. Dido watched Safet with approval. Safet used to be a university professor before the war and was considered a catch, even though he worked as a taxi driver in Australia—that is, when he chose to work.

Soon after the preliminaries they moved onto their favourite game. Safet and Safeta were originally from Prijedor while Mum's family came from Banja Luka, which was roughly an hour away.

'Do you know Ishmael Sahović and his wife Husna?' Safet asked, ash hanging off his cigarette. My Auntie and Uncle looked blank.

'He has a daughter Esma and a son Faruk,' Safet's sister added. Auntie and Uncle shook their heads.

They could keep this up forever, trying to find a tenuous link, a friend of a friend of a second cousin whose mother was related by marriage to their grandfather five generations back.

When I called this the 'Connect the Bosnian Game', Mum told me off. She said that in Bosnia everyone knew his or her neighbours within a twenty-kilometre radius. Bosnia and Herzegovina was roughly half the size of Tasmania and had a population of 4.1 million, so even if you were dropped on the other side of the country by direction-challenged aliens, chances were you'd find people who knew someone you did.

Now that everyone was scattered to the four corners of the world this was the only way they had of learning about their former neighbours and creating a sense of community. They also trawled the telephone directories looking for possible relatives. When they found someone with the same surname they'd call to sniff out if there was a family connection.

Mum told me that Bosnians who arrived in Australia during the 1970s were desperate for kinship and that anyone with the same surname would become a cousin, whether they were a blood relative or not. Now that there was a larger population there was no need to settle like that.

As they talked I opened my bag and found my mobile. I typed in a message: 'Hope you're having a better time than me. Love Sammie.' I scrolled to Kathleen's name in my address book and pressed 'send'. Kathleen was my best friend. We were friends since primary school when Mum and I lived in Thornbury.

During the summer holidays we still saw each other regularly. She visited me once, but my grandfather was less than welcoming so mostly I travelled down her way and we met in the city or hit the op-shops and cafés around Brunswick Street, in Fitzroy.

In the week since I started Year 10 at my new school, St Albans High, we hadn't spoken much. I was used to seeing her every day, and then we'd call each other after school, or send an email or text message. I missed her. I returned my mobile to my handbag. When I tuned back into the conversation they were talking about the war, again. I was so sick of hearing about the war.

'I was on the front line,' Uncle Hakija said. 'That's where I got injured.' He touched his stomach. There was a col-

lective sigh by the group. There weren't many men who could claim hero status. Most men fled with their families when the war broke out.

When he arrived in Australia Uncle Hakija had surgery to repair the damage to his gut. He attempted working for a few years, but his health was frail and he was in too much pain. Now he tended to the garden and ran errands, while Auntie Zehra and my cousin Merisa, who was 20 years old, worked as cleaners. In Bosnia, Hakija had been a veterinarian and Zehra was a nurse.

'I lost my wife and two daughters. My oldest would be Sabiha's age.' It was Safet's turn and he glanced at me. We all shook our heads on cue.

'My fiancé was a police officer in Prijedor. After Serbs seized the city he was arrested, with all the other officials and non-Serb leaders. I never heard from him. They were probably sent to Omarska,' Safeta said.

We all looked down, remembering the television images of emaciated men staring at the camera through steel fences. Omarska was the Serb-run concentration camp in which Bosnians were imprisoned, the Bosnian equivalent of Auschwitz. Even though I was sick of the constant talk about the war, when I remembered those images, I realised why they couldn't let it go.

I turned away and watched the Bosnian folk dancing on what passed as the dance floor. When Mum talked about attending the *zabava* I'd imagined a fancy ball, instead we were in a high school gym. There were folding tables and plastic chairs laid out in long rows from one end of the gym to the other with a walkway in the middle.

In the canteen attached to the gym the women were making food. Heavy clouds of cigarette smoke hung over the tables blending with the smell of sweat, onions and

cooked meat. On the stage behind me a folk band were producing an ear-piercing tune. Some people would call it music, but I wasn't one of them.

While I watched the folk dancing it had seemed deceptively easy. Dance in a circle holding hands as if you're in a conga line and shuffle your feet in a quick two-step. But for some reason I lacked the necessary rhythm to transform the simple moves into a high-spirited jig.

When I tried dancing it looked like I was jumping on a pogo stick. Mum had natural rhythm. Her cheeks were flushed, a wide smile on her face as her feet kicked in unison with the other dancers.

As we walked back to our table a man stared at us. 'Isn't that Mustafa?' I asked Mum as we sat. Another ex-boyfriend—he'd lasted nearly a year and was one of the rare guys I'd liked. I smiled and lifted my hand to wave.

'Don't.' Mum slapped my hand down. 'He's with his wife.'

A little girl about eight years old sat on his lap. His wife noticed me staring. I looked away and met my Aunt's gaze.

Auntie Zehra cast Mum a scathing look. Mum blushed. Auntie looked like she was about to get stuck into her sister.

'I'm hungry,' I exclaimed loudly.

Uncle Hakija and Adnan stood to get *ćevapi* and soft drinks for us to eat. I loved *ćevapi*. The grilled skinless sausages made with minced beef or lamb, garlic and spices served on a Turkish roll with diced onion. While we were eating they resumed their conversation.

Uncle Hakija had a toothpick between his lips. 'The war happened because of who we are. It's backward the way everyone's identity is decided by his or her religious beliefs. We call Bosnian Catholics Croatians, or Orthodox

Bosnians Serbs, even if their family has lived in Bosnia for centuries.'

Uncle Hakija's theory was that there were no problems when former Yugoslavia existed under the communist President Tito who led the Partisans to defeat the Nazis in World War II. It was only when Tito passed away in 1980 and communism was eroded that tensions started simmering as everyone sought independence.

Dido thumped the table. 'Those Orthodox Bosnians *are* Serbs. If they weren't why did they rise up in the *coup d' etat* even though they'd been living in Bosnia all their lives?'

'Just like you were a Muslim all your life.' Uncle Hakija made a dig at Dido's previous life as a communist. Dido was now a Born-Again-Muslim like most of the Bosnians since the war.

'I did what I had to do,' Dido defended. 'It was the only way to make a life.'

While those with religious beliefs weren't persecuted in Yugoslavia the way they were in other communist countries, they weren't promoted at work and given opportunities that communist party members received.

Safet clapped Dido on the shoulder. 'Come on friends, let's talk of happy things.'

Auntie Zehra covered Uncle Hakija's hand. 'We came to have a good time, not rehash old arguments.'

Dido and Uncle Hakija engaged in a staring contest. Safet and Safeta finished eating and left to speak to friends at another table.

Mum picked at her *ćevapi*. 'Do you want it?' she asked Uncle Hakija. He broke the stare, smiled and shook his head.

Auntie Zehra narrowed her eyes at them. 'You were always wasteful, Bahra.' Using a fork she transferred the ć*evapi* to her plate. 'You need to eat more.' She bit into a *ćevap* and chewed it with relish.

Mum scrunched her nose and watched Safet as he worked the room. 'I need to watch my figure.'

'If you put meat on your bones you'd be able to keep a man.' Auntie Zehra followed Mum's gaze.

'Not all men like big women,' Mum replied.

Uncle Hakija pinched the roll of fat bulging over Auntie Zehra's skirt. 'You should watch your figure too.'

She slapped his hand, hard. 'You should keep your eyes off other women's figures.'

Uncle Hakija rubbed his hand. 'I was joking.'

'He didn't mean anything by it,' Mum said.

'You're in your thirties yet you're as vain as a teenager,' Auntie Zehra attacked Mum.

Even though Auntie Zehra was forty-two years old to Mum's thirty-seven, she was right. Mum looked like she was twenty-something. She did push-ups and sit-ups every night to keep her figure trim, while Auntie Zehra's weight aged her face and the frumpy clothing she wore made her look like a senior citizen.

Auntie Zehra kept going, pointing at Mum. 'And you're dressed like a whore.' Mum's only fault was that she looked too good. Her knee-length dress fitted against her curves and her cleavage was just visible.

After over fifty years of living under communist Yugoslavia, there were only a few customs Bosnians practised in their everyday life that identified them as Muslim: the names they gave their children, drinking Turkish coffee, and the fact that male children were circumcised. Since the war they were groping for a new-found sense

of identity after being pigeon-holed as Muslim; and while many of them didn't know how to be Muslim, they knew what didn't make the grade and what got gossiped about. Skimpy clothes, drugs and pairings with non-Muslims were at the top of the hit-list. Mum had already received two out of three strikes.

Mum picked up her glass and took a sip, her hand trembling. She wasn't good at confrontations.

'That's not—' I interrupted my Aunt. Adnan pinched me under the table. 'Ouch!' I exclaimed.

'Leave them to it,' he whispered.

'She's my mother,' I whispered back.

'She's her sister.'

I was about to speak, but he held up his fingers like he would pinch me again.

Uncle Hakija held Auntie Zehra's hand and looked at Mum. 'Bahra looks nice,' he pronounced.

Auntie Zehra's face was flushed and rivulets of sweat trickled from her temple. 'Keep your eyes to yourself.' She dug her nails into Uncle Hakija's hand.

'Zehra,' Dido snapped. 'This isn't the time.'

Mum and Auntie Zehra's bickering went back nearly twenty years ago when Uncle Hakija was courting Mum. Everyone expected that they would marry, but then my father came home from Australia to find a bride. Mum ended up marrying my Dad and moving to Australia, Auntie Zehra and Uncle Hakija married and stayed behind, and there's never been peace between the two sisters since.

In the quiet afterward we heard a hushed whisper at the table behind us. 'That's the woman who's crazy.'

A woman at the table behind us scowled at Mum.

Glossary

Allah Arabic. God

Babo Bosnian. Dad

Bože sačuvaj Bosnian. Colloquial, God save

Ćevapi Bosnian dish of skinless sausages served in bread with sliced onion

Dido Bosnian. Grandfather

Dimije Bosnian traditional garment, variation of harem pants

Džamija Bosnian. Mosque

Dženaza Arabic. Funeral

Dženet Arabic. Heaven

Džezva Turkish. Coffee pot

Fildžan Turkish. Small demitasse coffee cups. (singular) *Fildžani* (plural)

Hadith Arabic. Oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Islamic prophet Muhamed

Hodža Bosnian. Priest

Hurmašice Bosnian dish of buns made from cornmeal and baked in sugar water

Qur'an (Kuran) Arabic. Islamic holy book

Maslanica Bosnian dish of pastry layered with cheese and butter

Mecca Arabic. Islamic holy city in Saudi Arabia that Muslims face when praying

Mejtef Bosnian. Islamic classes for children

Merhaba Arabic. Welcome

Muhamed Bosnian spelling for the Prophet Mohammed who received messages from God that formed the *Kuran*

Mutuša Bosnian dish of pancake-like mixture with diced potatoes, baked in the oven

Oklagija Bosnian. Rolling pin—a long stick the length of a broom handle

Omarska Serb-run concentration camp in which Bosnians were imprisoned

Pita Bosnian dish of pastry filling formed into a spiral shape

Ramadan Muslim religious holiday in the ninth month when Muslims fast

Šah Mat Bosnian. Checkmate

Šamija Bosnian. Headscarf covering hair

Salaam Aleykum Arabic greeting. Peace be unto you

Vlah Bosnian. Unbeliever

Zabava Bosnian. Party

Zeljanica Bosnian. Spinach pita

Zdravo Bosnian. Hello

Sassy Saints Series

Sabiha's Dilemma was my debut novel that was traditionally published under the title *The Good Daughter*. This story was inspired by my own experiences of being from a Bosnian background, growing up in the Western suburbs of Melbourne (a low socio-economic suburb) and being brought up by a mother who suffers from Bipolar.

I loved the characters that I created and kept imagining their lives beyond the pages of the book I wrote. The year after publication I wrote a follow up novel about another character, Alma, who finds out she has a half sister she never knew, Sabiha, and through Alma's story I continued Sabiha, Jesse, Brian, Dina and Adnan's stories.

When I embarked on my indie publishing career and was preparing *Sabiha's Dilemma* for release I was hit by a wave of inspiration. What if I expanded this universe and created a series where each character had their own book? This would give me the opportunity to recreate so many of the experiences that happened off-page for each of my characters and to extend their storylines.

And so the *Sassy Saints Series* was born.

Sassy Saints Series

Follow the lives of six sassy teens coming of age in St Albans, as they navigate their sexual and cultural identity and search for belonging.

These books will be an inter-connected series that can be read out of order (I'll be keeping any spoilers off the page). If you want to follow the *Sassy Saints* journey join my mailing list and stay in the loop.

Sabiha's Dilemma

Sabiha's dilemma is being the good daughter so that her mentally ill mother is accepted back into the Bosnian community.

Alma's Loyalty

When Alma finds out that she has a half sister she never knew, she is faced with competing loyalties.

Jesse's Triumph

After Jesse's debut novel is published while he's a high school student, he contends with becoming popular.

Brian's Conflict

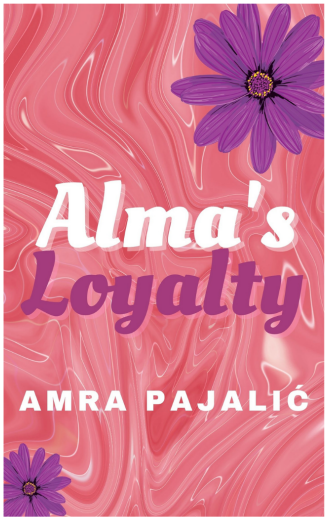
Brian's dreams of being a designer are in conflict with his father's hopes he'll join the family business as a bricklayer.

Dina's Burden

Dina carries the burden of living up to her parent's expectations to make up for her brother's errant ways.

Adnan's Secret

Adnan is the perfect son carrying the weight of his migrant parent's expectations, who lives a secret life.



When Alma finds out that she has a half sister she never knew, she is faced with competing loyalties.

For more information

Either type hyperlink or scan

https://www.amrapajalic.com/almas_loyalty.html

SCAN ME

About the Author

Amra Pajalić is an award-winning author, an editor and teacher who draws on her Bosnian cultural heritage to write own voices stories for young people, who like her, are searching to mediate their identity and take pride in their diverse culture. Her short story collection *The Cuckoo's Song* (Pishukin Press, 2022) features previously published and prize-winning stories. Her debut novel *The Good Daughter*, was published by Text Publishing in 2009 and won the 2009 Melbourne Prize for Literature's Civic Choice Award and is re-released as *Sabiha's Dilemma* (Pishukin Press, 2022).

Her memoir *Things Nobody Knows But Me* (Transit Lounge, 2019) was shortlisted for the 2020 National Biography Award. She is co-editor of the anthology *Growing up Muslim in Australia* (Allen and Unwin, 2014) which was shortlisted for the 2015 Children's Book Council of the year awards. She works as a high school teacher and is completing a PhD in Creative Writing at La Trobe University.

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A guide for international readers

This book is set in Australia and uses British English spelling. Some spellings may differ from those used in American English.

Australia's seasons are at opposite times to those in the northern hemisphere. Summer is December–February, autumn is March–May, winter is June–August, and spring is September–November. Christmas is in summer.

In the Australian school system, primary school is for grades Kindergarten to Grade 6, and high school is for grades Year 7–12. Secondary college is a name frequently used for high school. Tertiary education after high school is either at universities and TAFE (technical and further education) institutions.

In Australia, each school year starts in late January and finishes mid-December.

The legal drinking age in Australia is 18 years old.

AUSTUDY is financial help if you're 25 or older and studying or completing an Australian apprenticeship.