

# Nina of Arabia: A Novel

## Book Review

By [Marina Bulatović](#)

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Theme: [History](#)

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## Synopsis

**by Barbara Ellis-Uchino**

*Nina, growing up in Belgrade, is a different kind of child – she prefers cleaning her parents’ apartment to playing with her younger sister and their friend. Nina cleans so thoroughly that she throws out all the socks her father leaves lying around the apartment – by tossing them off the balcony.*

As young adults with good jobs, Nina, her sister, and their best friend enjoy the single life of Belgrade – until her sister marries at 29.

Many years later, Nina is in her 40s... That’s when she meets Filip. “Finally I would have a family of my own, just when everyone had written me off.” After a dismal “vacation” in Toronto in the winter, including an awkward dinner with his ex-wife Selena, they marry in her hometown, with 100 guests invited to the wedding.

Immediately after the wedding, Filip’s surprise new job takes him to Saudi Arabia. Nina is game, if wary. How, living in close quarters, will she adjust to Filip’s foibles? To the rules for women in this alien country? To the loneliness? Can she work? She cannot. And finally, will love win in their long-awaited marriage?

“If I lived in New York, I would have run to my shrink, lay down on the couch and told him this nightmare. I would feel better at once. Then I could meditate in Central Park with other stressed-out people struggling with difficult jobs, unpaid bills and loan payments, dissatisfied spouses, weeping (abandoned) lovers... but I lived in the Arabian Gulf and I had to be my own psychiatrist.”

Nina solves these problems by observing and writing about the men and women and the customs of Saudi Arabia, by dreaming about how to make the abaya a fashion statement, and most of all, by fantasizing that one day, she will fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a Manhattanite.

Nina turns her observations into a novel – *Nina of Arabia*. It is published to accolades, enabling her to make her dream of Manhattan come true. Faced with the realization that they could lose each other, as they quarrel often, Nina and Filip understand that what they have together is indeed true love. They move to Manhattan and throw a birthday party for all the family and friends who have supported them, both in their marriage and in the writing of the book. The novel ends (utterly believably) with success on every level.

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**What is it that you can find in the novel “Nina of Arabia”? And why would you be interested in her adventures at all? And who is this Nina, after all?**

Moving from Europe to a different continent (Western Asia) in her early 40s, Nina finds herself momentarily without a clear direction in life, but her spirits are still up.

You will discover that it is her ‘karma’ to always be the second wife to her husbands (Alex and Filip). Why she craves marijuana while driving down Saudi highways.

How Donna Karan helped her to overcome the fashion trauma instigated by wearing the black abaya, but also how her Chinese neighbors, with whom she had hidden in the same bomb shelter, brought delight into her life. How she coped with the fact that she had no children... Why she thinks that New York is the capital of our planet – on what occasions she wears her lucky Calvin Klein panties. How often the ghost of Lawrence of Arabia haunts her – why she sometimes pities Saudi men (not women!). How she ended up sleeping in the same bed that Nicholas Cage once slept in. Why she thinks that her acquaintance with Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson is inevitable and written in the stars. Why she is keen on Selena (a new friend) whom she had met under very strange circumstances in Canada. Why she believes that Mark Twain and Nikola Tesla are still friends up there, in Heaven. Why she sometimes longs to move to the Himalayas and live with the Hunza people. Why she had been persistent in inviting King Abdullah while he was alive to be her guest, and all the things she promised him... and much, much more.

My novel “Nina of Arabia” is being sold in three countries: Serbia (publisher: **Mali Nemo**); Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro (publisher: **Nova knjiga**).

The manuscript of my novel was translated into English by Alice Copple-Tošić and was then edited by **Barbara Ellis-Uchino**, who also wrote the synopsis.

My husband and I spent 10 years in Saudi Arabia, and that is where my novel originated, inspired primarily by my life in this Kingdom, but also by numerous travels that we took together.

Since I think that nothing in life happens ‘by accident’, therefore neither did my move to such a faraway and unknown country, it got me thinking: What is my purpose? Why did I, of all the countries in the world, have to move to this particular place? Since I had been one of the pioneers of the PR profession in Serbia, and had been writing for magazines in Serbia

and Montenegro for years – writing presented itself as a natural choice, spurred on by a desire to chronicle the world around me.

Image on the right is from the author



“Nina of Arabia” is a modern fairytale and if you catch a glimpse of its magic world, you will discover why love is all around us. It will inspire you to observe your surroundings with hope and optimism.

Considering that societies around the world are founded on multiculturalism, I am sure that the target demographic for my novel will be broad, because my novel promotes these values.

I have written from my heart, with utter sincerity, hoping that readers who are members of my “energy tribe” and share my sensibility will recognize this. Here, I particularly mean women from **25** to **75** years old.

**The novel “Nina of Arabia” could easily be adapted into a movie or a TV series script.**

Therefore, I believe that **Nina of Arabia**, a century after the legendary **Lawrence of Arabia**, could reveal many unknown and interesting details about life in this Kingdom, and inspire people to turn their lives into a FAIRYTALE, regardless of where they live. Lawrence’s Arabia doesn’t exist anymore, and thanks to Nina, you will find out how much it has changed since the **beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**.

My novel has 243 pages, and is a work of literary fiction. The book that it could be likened to is **Notes from a Small Island by Bill Bryson**, or **Bridget Jones’s Diary by Helen Fielding**.

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**Marina Bulatovic** has been a member of the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) since 1998. Today, she is a freelance journalist and is working on a new novel, under the title "Happy Serbian New Year".

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