



by Vernesa Berbo
Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt
September 2025 / 448pp
Fiction

The Son and the Snowflake

Der Sohn und das Schneeflöckchen

review

This poignant story explores the human impact of war, family relationships, first loves and the strong bond between two sisters. Set primarily in Sarajevo, before finishing in present-day Berlin, it provides first-person accounts of the siege of Sarajevo between March 1992 and April 1993 and touches on the impact of the Balkan Wars on a generation and especially the women who survived it.

Dijana (the elder sister, nicknamed 'Son' by her father) and Dada (nicknamed 'Snowflake') are caught up in the siege of Sarajevo. Their father has ignored warnings about the imminent war and has not fled the city like many others. When he suddenly takes ill, Dijana assumes responsibility for the family, fetching water and bread, and protecting her sister and mother from the events unfolding outside.

Dada, meanwhile, falls in love with Mirza at the start of the blockade; he disappears in 1993. She takes her blue chair and sits upon it as she waits for his return, like Penelope in *The Odyssey*. Her stalwart attitude earns her respect, and people flock to her for inspiration, including Phil, a soldier who leaves music cassettes for her.

Dijana thinks she witnesses Dada having group sex with three soldiers, and this sours the sisters' relationship, because Dijana thinks her younger sister is offering sex in exchange for payment. When a bomb goes off, Dada and her mother are on the other side of town, and Dijana ends up on her own; soon afterwards, she

witnesses a mass killing. She manages to escape and joins a troop of soldiers to defend her people. When the siege ends, Phil gives Dijana a recording of the investigation into her sister's case, and she realises Dada was forced to participate in the sex act and was the victim of a war crime. Dijana is then called as a witness in the trial relating to the events. In the final chapters, the action jumps to present-day Berlin, where Dada is now working as an interpreter for the Berlin Summit for the Western Balkans.

In chapters that alternate between the sisters' recollections, Vernesa Berbo handles these complex, harrowing events in sensitive prose, bringing out of the shadows the whispers of the women who lived, survived and died during the siege of Sarajevo. An absorbing and engaging read, which will appeal to readers of *The Eighth Life* by Nino Haratischwili (Scribe UK, 2019, tr. Charlotte Collins and Ruth Martin) and *The Postcard* by Anne Berest (Europa, 2023, tr. Tina Kover).

Find out more:

<https://www.fva.de/Buecher/Alle-Buecher/Der-Sohn-und-das-Schneefloekchen.html>

about the author



(c) Kimi Palme

Vernesa Berbo was born in Priboj, Yugoslavia. She studied acting at the State Academy of Dramatic Arts in Sarajevo. She came to Berlin in 1993 as a wartime refugee. Since 1994, she has worked as an actress, musician and author at various theatres in Berlin, including the Maxim Gorki Theatre, the Berliner Ensemble and the Deutsches Theater. 'The Son and the Snowflake' is her first novel. Vernesa Berbo lives in Berlin.

rights information

Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt

Contact: Nadya Hartmann

hartmann@fva.de

<https://www.fva.de/>