



# Saffron Dreams

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"Saffron Dreams" is a tale of love, tragedy, and redemption from the award-winning author of "Beyond the Cayenne Wall."..

You don't know you're a misfit until you are marked as an outcast.

From the darkest hour of American history emerges a mesmerizing tale of tender love, a life interrupted, and faith recovered. Arissa Illahi, a Muslim artist and writer, discovers in a single moment that no matter how carefully you map your life, it is life itself that chooses your destiny. After her husband's death in the collapse of the World Trade Center, the discovery of his manuscript marks Arissa's reconnection to life. Her unborn son and the unfinished novel fuse in her mind into one life-defining project that becomes, at once, the struggle for her emotional survival and the redemption of her race. "Saffron Dreams" is a novel about our ever evolving identities and the events and places that shape them. It reminds us that in the midst of tragedy, our dreams can become a lasting legacy.

## Saffron Dreams Details

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Author : Shaila M. Abdullah

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# From Reader Review Saffron Dreams for online ebook

## Niki Sorensen says

Wow, where do I start? Saffron Dreams is an endearing love story, and yet so much more. I fell in love with the characters. I couldn't help it. Shaila M. Abdullah portrays their courtship in a uniquely romantic way. How they express their love and desire for each other is tender, humorous, and very sensual.

I enjoyed learning about Muslim culture. Diversity is an extraordinary gift we have been given on Earth. This book gracefully delves in to several important issues. For instance, after 9/11, Arrisa says "Don't they know that terror has no religion? That religions don't treat terror?" And further, "I looked on day after day as the media tried, sentenced and hung my faith ... what proof did I have of the innocence of the rest of us?" This book felt so real to me, I wondered if I was reading fiction, or if it was a true story.

Another favorite quote: "What would we do without our loved ones? They drive us over the edge and yet bring sanity to our lives."

My favorite quote: "Go home and take a long, hard look at yourself in the mirror," ... "You will be pleasantly surprised. Our flaws are what make us unique. Yours make you beautiful."

I'm going to have my daughters read Saffron Dreams. In this book they will subtly learn some life lessons that are beautifully written by Shaila M. Abdullah.

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## Jaime H says

Arissa Illahi is a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, Pakistani, American, and Muslim. When the United States, and consequentially the world, was rocked by the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Arissa's life is turned upside down. Her husband, Faizan, was working at a restaurant in one of the towers and lost his life. Reeling with the loss of her love, Arissa is left struggling and trying to make sense of it all. She is also pregnant with a baby who is destined to have severe special needs and alone. She also becomes a victim of prejudice when attacked because she is wearing her veil. She sheds her veil and goes on a journey of heartbreak and empowerment all the while healing from being abandoned by her mother and building a beautiful relationship with Faizan's parents.

Poetic and moving, the story of Arissa Illahi's heartbreak and strength comes alive in Shaila Abdullah's "Saffron Dreams". This novel is written in a memoir style, taking you deep in to Arissa's heartbreak and inner struggles. Attempting to bring forth what it must be like to be a victim in so many aspects due to the terrorist attacks. Imagine what it must be like to be in the shoes of a follower of Allah and have the world blame you for what you yourself is a victim of also. Shaila Abdullah's book is multifaceted, we are given a treat of reading beautiful words, a moving story and we are also educated at the same time. Although this is a work of fiction, Arissa's heartbreak is real. Her experiences are real. Her struggle with removing her veil and blending in with an America that is reeling and scared. Her surviving when Faizan did not, her decisions to continue with his novel, and the choices and struggles with raising their special needs son. I was moved to tears several times during this book, my heart ached for Arissa and I also found myself cheering her on as she and her son found their footing and moved through their lives, never forgetting who they are: Wife, Mother, Daughter, Son, Pakistani, American and Muslim.

Shaila Abdullah's "Saffron Dreams" is a must read.

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## **Julie H. says**

This is the beautifully written story of Arissa Illahi, a Pakistani woman living in New York City and the 41 days during which her world falls apart after her husband (a full-time waiter at Windows on the World and part-time writer) is killed in the 9/11 attacks, she is attacked by skinheads in the subway, her unborn child is diagnosed with Charge syndrome, and her official period of mourning is over and she is supposed to "get on with her life"--whatever that means. Arissa's story is painful, fascinating, and doubtless the story of many many Muslims living in NYC who lost loved ones and saw their religion and cultures hijacked. While that is the historic backdrop, the gripping story is Arissa's personal tale of her loving in-laws who come from Pakistan to nurture her back to health, who live with her for six years and assist in the day-to-day care of her special needs son. Probably the most uplifting incident in the book (and, ironically, there are several) is the exchange that occurs when Arissa collects her injured son Raian from school one day and is quietly fuming to herself as she drives him home, contemplating removing him from the school that would allow him to be injured, so clearly isn't equipped to meet his needs, etc. etc. Raian is gesturing frantically to his mother who must pull the car over to figure out what he is saying. He is so excited to tell her that they learned about Beethoven in school that day and, like himself, Beethoven was deaf and couldn't hear his own compositions. Somehow this remarkable little boy has found inspiration in Beethoven's story and innocently asks his mother whether he, too, might become a great musician. After their exchange, during which Arissa assures her son that he can be anything he wants to, she tells her readers, "We rode the rest of the way quietly. The school was all right for now, I decided" (p. 188). My point here is that Arissa's highs and lows are so realistic, and the joy, solace, and perfection that she finds in her fragile son is what allows her to rebuild a life and move on. The characters in the novel are well developed, the cultural insights are much-needed in a society far too prone to black-and-white generalizations about Islam, and the healing power of art (Arissa is a painter who decides to tackle completing her dead husband's aptly-named unfinished novel, *Soul Searcher*) is well demonstrated here. This was a wonderful book, and you feel that you might have grown a little bit as you watch Arissa's tremendous journey toward an uncertain future that we share with her.

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## **Angela Simmons says**

Writer, Shaila Abdullah, takes you into the life of Arissa Illahi, a Muslim, born into the upper class struggling to find who she is. Abandoned by a mother, who could not find a way to love, hesitant to fall in love herself, until one-day fate intervened. Meeting an aspiring author, over a stack of books, who turned out to be the man of her dreams. Marring

Faizan, moving to New York, and starting a family, life was starting to come together for

Arissa. Unfortunately, a happy ending was not theirs to have, and one fateful day changed their lives forever. On September 11, 2001, Faizan died in the World Trade Centers. Now, a widow, pregnant with a disabled child, and viewed as an outsider in the

land that she now calls home. She decides to take off her veil but keep her culture. Struggling with the challenges of moving to a new city, starting a new job, and raising a child with multiple disabilities. She has also decided to finish Faizan's novel, breathing life into the characters he created and bring his novel to a

close. Slowly, she starts letting go of the anger she held for her mother, and bit by bit letting go of the man he loves. Willing herself to carry on for the amazing gift that Faizan left, their son Raian. Proving that she is intrepid, and will continue on.

Vividly written, with the phrasing being as bold as the colors Arissa painted with. I could almost smell the jasmine floating through the air, as I lost myself in a different world. With characters as spicy and flavorful as curry, you could not help but to fall in love with each and everyone of them, It was as if you were with Arissa on the emotional rollercoaster that became her life, and felt the strength she finally find. I was elated at every milestone that Raian accomplished and found myself hoping for another, Abdullah has offered readers an inside look into the Muslim culture, and blended it perfectly with the American.

“Saffron Dreams” is an ingenious work of art that captures the raw emotions of love, loss, the path of letting go and the one that leads to self discovery. Abdullah wrote that,

“presentation, is the key to leaving a lasting impression”. With this book she has accomplished that goal with the beautifully written way in which she tugs at your

heartstrings. This will defiantly be a book I will remember. Truly a book that should be on every must read list .

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### **Georgiann Hennelly says**

Saffron dreams is a fascinating look at how events can change a life for ever. This is a Muslim womens story of her life after the death of her husband in the 9/11 attacks. She tells of the grief, memory, dreams, and relationships. In this aengrossing story the author shows how losses can actually strengthen and provide a sense of meaning and purpose. This is not a story of happy endings but of hopeful endings.This is a powerful compelling story of love and loss.

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### **Trupti Dorge says**

Arissa is born in an affluent family in Pakistan. She moves to New York when she marries Faizan who works in a restaurant in the World Trade Center. Arissa is very happy with her life, her husband and their future prospects. Also, she is 2 months pregnant. On 11th September 2001, with the attack on the world Trade Center, her whole world came crashing down along with the towers. Faizan is dead and the last rituals

are performed without a body, her baby is deformed in her womb and will probably never live a full life. Arissa's friends and in-laws help her move on. But she is alone and scared, scared of living her life without a companion and scared to raise a child with disabilities.

As Arissa is managing to live life each day, she is confronted with another dilemma, her religion. After 9/11, the way Muslims were viewed changed drastically. The horror of Terrorism reached people who never thought something like this would happen to them. The targets were the innocent Muslims. As Arissa tells someone,

"When you put all your potatoes in a sack, you should know they all have unique flavors. Some are rotten, some fresh. Just because they are clumped together doesn't make them all the same."

...

"They are not my people, but I don't think you are smart enough to figure that out."

*Saffron Dreams* is a journey of a young widow away from her homeland and in a country she has adopted. It's a delicate subject and a book that handles a lot of sensitive issues without wanting to create a sensation. The writing was so raw and honest that I could feel Arissa's pain seeping through the pages.

I did struggle through this book as I found it a little difficult to read, I even had tears in my eyes a couple of times, but the author's simplistic and crisp writing style and Arissa's struggle to find some hope in her chaotic life kept me reading and rooting for her. In the end, this book is not about 9/11, her husband's death, her child's disabilities or even her religion. It's about what binds us together even though we are from different homelands and different cultural backgrounds, which I believe is the crux of this book. Though not easy, it's definitely something that deserves to be read.

Here are some of my favorite passages:

Why was there no fear in my heart? Probably because there was no more room in my heart for terror. When horror comes face-to-face with you and causes a loved one's death, fear leaves your heart. In its place, merciful God places pain. Throbbing, pulsating, oozing pus, a wound that stays fresh and raw no matter how carefully you treat it. How can you be afraid when you have no one to be fearful for? The safety of your loved ones is what breeds fear in your heart. They are the weak links in your life. Unraveled from them, you are fearless. You can dangle by a thread, hang from the rooftop. Bungee jump, skydive, walk a pole, hold your hand over the flame of a candle. Burnt, scalded, crashed, lost, dead, the only loss would be to your own self. Certain things you are not allowed to say or do. Defiant as I am, I say and do them anyway.

How do you end a story that's not yours? Add another sentence where there is a pause? Infiltrate the story with a comma when really there should have been a period? Punctuate with an exclamation point where a period would have sufficed? What if you kill something breathing and breathe into something the author wanted to eliminate? How do you get inside the mind of a person who isn't there? Fill the shoes of someone who will never fill his own?

Rating: 4.5 stars rounded to 5

Originally posted at <http://violetcrush.wordpress.com/2009...>

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## **Natalie says**

A beautiful story about a Muslim woman from Karachi who loses her husband in the 9/11 attacks. Arissa, married 2 years has lost her beloved husband while working a restaurant at the Trade Center. The author poetically details Arissa's memories of her husband and how she attempts to deal with the grief. As Arissa tries to get on with her life, she faces the accusing stares, like she was part of the cause of the attack, the enemy. After receiving some life changing news she knows she must get past the grief to move on. The book is written so beautifully, at times poetic. I highly recommend it, you won't be disappointed. The food she talks about will also make you drool!

"I held the book up to my ear. I willed for it to bring back the laughter it had once given us. I shook it, tugged at it, as if worrying it could give me back some past moments. I rubbed the soft cover, now aged and wrinkled against my cheek, urging the lifeless piece to talk to me....."

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## **Sheri says**

Saffron Dreams by Shaila Abdullah is an emotional journey. Arissa Illahi is unexpectedly widowed in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, while pregnant with her first child.

From her Muslim beliefs, Pakistani heritage, and her new role as single mother, she is just trying to "fit in" as a modern American Woman. She faces many challenges and overcomes many obstacles to live a normal and balanced, happy life.

Shaila Abdullah pulls the reader into the mind and heart of this courageous woman, on a journey filled with, love, hope, warmth, sorrow and happiness.

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## **Cheryl Malandrinos says**

"Saffron Dreams" by Shaila Abdullah is an eloquently written and moving story of a Muslim woman living in America, whose world is turned upside down on September 11th.

Arissa Illahi is a Muslim artist and writer living in New York City with her husband Faizan. Expecting their first child, they are happy with life. But on the morning of September 11, 2001, Faizan would go to work in the World Trade Center...and never return.

Always free to live as a Muslim in America, after the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Great American Melting Pot doesn't seem to blend so well. People who greeted Arissa with a smile before that fateful day, barely look at her. Feeling adrift after her loss, Arissa wanders through the days awaiting the birth of her unborn son, a son Faizan would never hold. The discovery of her husband's unfinished manuscript may be the key to her survival. And perhaps by finishing Faizan's legacy, Arissa will redeem a race.

If ever there was a book more eloquently written than "Saffron Dreams", I would like to see it. The words

simply fly off the page and float into your consciousness; their power touching you in a way like no other book might ever touch you again. The struggles of being a 9/11 widow and a Muslim come together in a moving story that will find you filled with every emotion ever experienced by a human being.

Abdullah's masterful storytelling draws you in from the very first moment and does not release you until you've turned the very last page. Anyone who has ever loved and lost will be touched by this heartrending, yet triumphant story of one woman's difficult journey to pick up the pieces of her shattered life in a country that has suddenly put her and an entire race under a microscope in order to make sense of a monumental tragedy. The descriptions and details put you right alongside Arissa so that you are totally captivated by her world, her dreams, her struggles, and her triumphs.

The stunning cover art must be seen up close, as it is even lovelier and more striking in your hands than what you see posted here.

"Saffron Dreams" is destined to add more awards to Abdullah's portfolio. This is a must read book for 2009!

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### **Holly (2 Kids and Tired) says**

Fascinating. A fictionalized story, written as a memoir. Arissa is a young Pakistani-American woman who loses her husband in the 9/11 tragedy. Pregnant with a special-needs child, she struggles to find her place in this post 9/11 world. A world without her beloved husband, and a world where many people do not understand the life and faith of Muslims.

Arissa's story is told first-person through flashbacks and present day. Her childhood in Pakistan is covered: an affluent family, a loving father, an emotionally absent mother, and an arranged marriage with the man who would be her true love.

After her husband's death at the World Trade Center, Arissa discovers that her unborn child will have multiple disabilities. Her strength, as she moves forward with her life is remarkable and inspiring. With the support of her in-laws she takes on her challenges. Her son is born and becomes the center of her life. She discovers her husband's unfinished novel and sets out to finish it, and ensure that her husband is not forgotten.

A beautifully descriptive novel: full of color and flavor. A fascinating tale of love and loss, tragedy and triumph, and following your dreams even when they take you on an unexpected journey.

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### **Laura says**

I was immediately drawn to the beautiful cover of this book. It depicts a veiled Middle Eastern woman with sad eyes shielding her face with her bejewelled arms. How appropriate for this novel about a Pakistani-Muslim woman who loses her husband to the tragic collapse of the World Trade Center.

I love novels that are of the multi-cultural genre. And this book is filled with the flavours and traditions of the Middle East. Abdullah's writing is lyrical and poetic, with a sad tone that permeates this story told from



the first person point of view of the main character Arissa Illahi. With flashbacks, we come to learn of her childhood and marriage to Faizan, the husband she knew for barely two years. She is pregnant when he dies and her pain is compounded with the knowledge that her unborn baby will have multiple birth defects.

The whole story is Arissa's struggle with losses—her mother's lack of love throughout her childhood, her husband's death and his unfinished novel, her child's disabilities, the age-old traditions of her former country, and her lost dreams. Through her eyes we see what she endures as a Muslim woman in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks—the prejudices, the hatred, the misunderstandings, and her guilt for not wanting to return to Pakistan when Faizan wished it.

Throughout, she voices her frustration and philosophy about death and God. It was clear to me that although she believed in God, she lacked faith in Him and struggled with this, too. Arissa also makes it her project to finish Faizan's novel, no easy task, even though she is an artist and a writer herself. She keeps her husband alive in her heart and fulfills his dream, making it a lasting legacy.

Although this novel received great reviews, I had mixed feelings about it. Overall, it gave me a glimpse into the life of an immigrant Muslim widow in America, mourning her many losses and the decisions she made to cope with them. Sometimes, I had to put the book down and read something else because the sombreness of it was all encompassing. Besides her painful losses, it saddened me that her Muslim faith did not provide comfort or answers regarding death and tragedies. This book also contained mildly explicit sexual scenes and unmarried sex, which I did not expect from a Muslim author.

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## Deborah says

"Saffron Dreams," is about letting go and learning to live despite every challenge life brings. It's about the strength of women and relationships. It's about the experience of women left behind in the 9/11 Twin Towers/World Trade Center terrorist attack. And, it's about the Muslim woman's experience in America.

Ms Abdullah has a big order to fill on her proverbial plate, and she comes shining through like a bird of paradise! I loved this book for so many reasons, it will be difficult to convey them to you, so you'll ultimately just have to read this book for yourself to understand.

The main character, Arissa, is a young woman who was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan. After having survived a home of material wealth and non-existent maternal love, Arissa becomes the bride in a traditional "arranged marriage." Surprisingly, this marriage is to a young man she had previously met on a trip to New York visiting relatives! So, fortune seemed to be with them. On the flip side of that fortune, however, rests a bad omen flung at them by a seer woman who predicts that the young husband will dance with fire. Arissa and Faizan also have dreams of flames and smoke, but set these things aside and ignore them.

We learn along the way such interesting information about Muslim life in the everyday workings of the kitchen cookery, the ritual of the veils the women wear, the landscape and gardens of Pakistan, and the role saffron plays in the life of Arissa. I will never look at or smell Night Blooming Jasmine in quite the same way again.

Ms Abdullah knows grief and heartbreak. Her novel tells us truly the pain of loss and the redemptive qualities that keep one living despite the agony of pain and loss. I was widowed at a young age with young

children so I speak from experience, when I say that this book conveys the feelings and experiences I had so profoundly and gently that it was shocking.

I learned that women and widows are the same no matter what their religion or culture. I learned that not all Muslims are terrorists. That children can save you. That family can hold you up but can't save you. And that somebody else unknown to you can have the same experiences and live to tell about it. Please do yourself a favor and read this wonderful book. It will help you know how it feels to be a widow of the 9/11 attack....I promise you!

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### **Huda Ialhaisony says**

Arrisa Ilahi is the main character of the novel. She is a Pakistani American lady. She belongs to the middle class. Her mother has left her father and married to another one. However, her father takes care of her and doesn't let her to feel the missing of her mother. So, he supports her until she becomes a writer and artist. After that, she gets married to a kind man; Faisan and they decide to immigrate to America. When they immigrate we detect that they have a happy life and everyone accepts them. In a flash, everything starts falling apart after the terrorist attacks of September 11. This tragedy is the beginning of her struggles. Her life is taking a downfall. She starts suffering from many things, such as, the suffer of losing her husband in the destruction of the 2 towers. His death affects her so bad because losing someone who's very close is not an easy thing. Things go from bad to worse when she discovers that she is pregnant and her unborn child will have multiple disabilities. Above that, she suffers from the society, people who accept her start to reject and blame her. Although, she lost her husband in the collapse, they treated her as if she is responsible for this catastrophe. Despite all these difficulties, she does not give up, she decides to move on and take numerous difficult decisions. First of all, she decides to stay in USA instead of leaving the country to cure her child. So, she takes off her veil "Hejab" in order to find a job. However, she keeps her religion, traditions and culture. She feels guilty and uncomfortable but she has forced. She is trying to coexist with the society which rejects to support and understand the life and faith of Muslims. After a certain amount of time, she moves to a new city, starts a new job, raises a child with multiple disabilities. She manages to make the society accepting her. Basically, Arrisa Ilahi is a strong woman. She does not play the victim and make herself look pitiful. She stands and deals with her difficulties and bad situations. In the end, she reflects that humans are the same, they are sharing one feelings and passion, and as there are bad people, there are also good people. She is ready to accept any changes.

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### **Cecilia says**

I really appreciated Shaila's writing. It was lyrical and beautiful, something that I have come to expect from South Asian authors. I loved her analogies and descriptions. To me, that helped bring Arrisa to life and I felt her sadness and despair at suddenly being a widow in a world that might hate her for the color of her skin.

[Complete review on my blog](#)

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### **Suzanne says**

I have a special interest in multicultural fiction and also literature featuring families with children with

special needs. This book, about a Pakistani Muslim 9/11 widow, has both. The characters and their relationships are never simple, and the writing is often beautiful. A wonderful book!

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