

★ **Nadia****Christine Evans**

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Secrets choke two London-dwelling refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Christine Evans's startling, sensitive novel *Nadia*.

In Nadia's childhood, being Muslim in Sarajevo was unremarkable. By her young adulthood, it made her a target. Nationalist forces took over, destroying the Yugoslavia she knew; village boys picked off people in the streets from their snipers' positions in the hills. Confined to her apartment, Nadia found refuge with Sanja, the fearless, gorgeous artist to whom, even before, she could only whisper "I love you" in the dark.

Iggy was a village boy. He wanted to be a punk star. Instead, he became a soldier. With two band mates and childhood friends—one prone to viciousness; one tender, even in the depths of war—he traveled to Sarajevo. He saw Nadia and Sanja through his scope. He longed for before, when shooting at them did not feel obligatory. But, misgivings or not, Iggy still participated in the act of murdering Sarajevo's "beautiful muddle."

Three years past escaping, Nadia has an office job in London. In this city: lesbians can be out. Murderers are frowned upon. But specters still creep. Iggy slides into the seat next to hers; they recognize something in one another; bleak confrontations are sparked.

A tale thick with trauma and acute with a sense of longing for a home that was erased, this often brutal, sometimes lovely, and always humane novel wades through the refuse of war to elevate those who were blotted out. Nadia dances with a woman who looks like Sanja from a distance; she presses Iggy to seek news of Sanja. Iggy, tortured by visions, is careful about sharing what he knows. Around them both, houses-of-cards fall and concealed truths push toward the light.

*Nadia* is a poetic, unflinching novel that centers the victims and ripple effects of the Bosnian War.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2023)

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