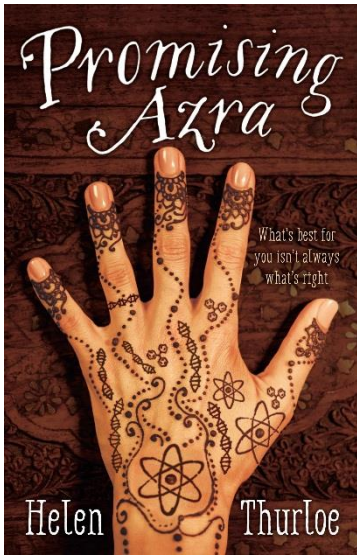


PROMISING AZRA HELEN THURLOE



'Reading *Promising Azra* prompted me to revisit stories I have heard too many times to count. Forced marriage is not bound to a certain culture or religion, it's an epidemic affecting children from many diverse backgrounds where culture reforms are essential. For real change to be possible, it's important for us to hear these stories.'

**-Dr Eman Sharobeem
Community Engagement Manager, SBS**

Azra is smart and knows how to get what she wants. She thinks. When she wins a place in a national science competition, she thinks her biggest problem is getting her parents' permission to go. But she doesn't know they're arranging her marriage to a cousin she's never met. 20 years her senior. In Pakistan. In just three months' time.

Can she find a way to do what she wants, while keeping her parents happy? Or must she choose between being a good daughter or having her own freedom?

**In 2012-2013, at least
250 Australian girls
aged under 18 were
forced into marriage.**

**In the UK, between
2000 and 3000 child
marriages occur each
year.**

**In Pakistan in 2013,
20% of women aged
20-24 were married
before the age of 18.**

'Azra Ajmal is a fictional character. However, the things that happen to her are all based on true and/or possible events. The stories on which I based *Promising Azra* were either told to me by people I interviewed, or discovered in my reading of legal cases and other published articles. In fact, much worse things have happened to real life girls, but I wanted Azra's story to reflect a more typical (and less clear cut) forced marriage experience in contemporary Australia, and not to highlight the extremes that sometimes appear in the media.'

-Helen Thurloe



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen is an award-winning Australian writer, with her poems and essays published in national newspapers and magazines, anthologies and on-line. *Promising Azra* is her first novel. To support its completion, this project was awarded a mentorship from the NSW Children's Book Council of Australia, as well as two residential fellowships. Helen has worked in many fields, from politics to PR, and she has also taught creative writing workshops at Birrong Girls High School in Western Sydney.

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