

At the airport doors, a familiar figure appears.  
"It's Baba!" Salma shouts.

It's been a year, eleven months, and six days since Salma hugged Baba goodbye in Damascus. And now her dad is finally joining the family in their new home! Salma can't wait to show him around the city and help him learn English . . . but no matter how much fun they have together, Baba still misses Syria. What if he misses it so much that he wants to go back?



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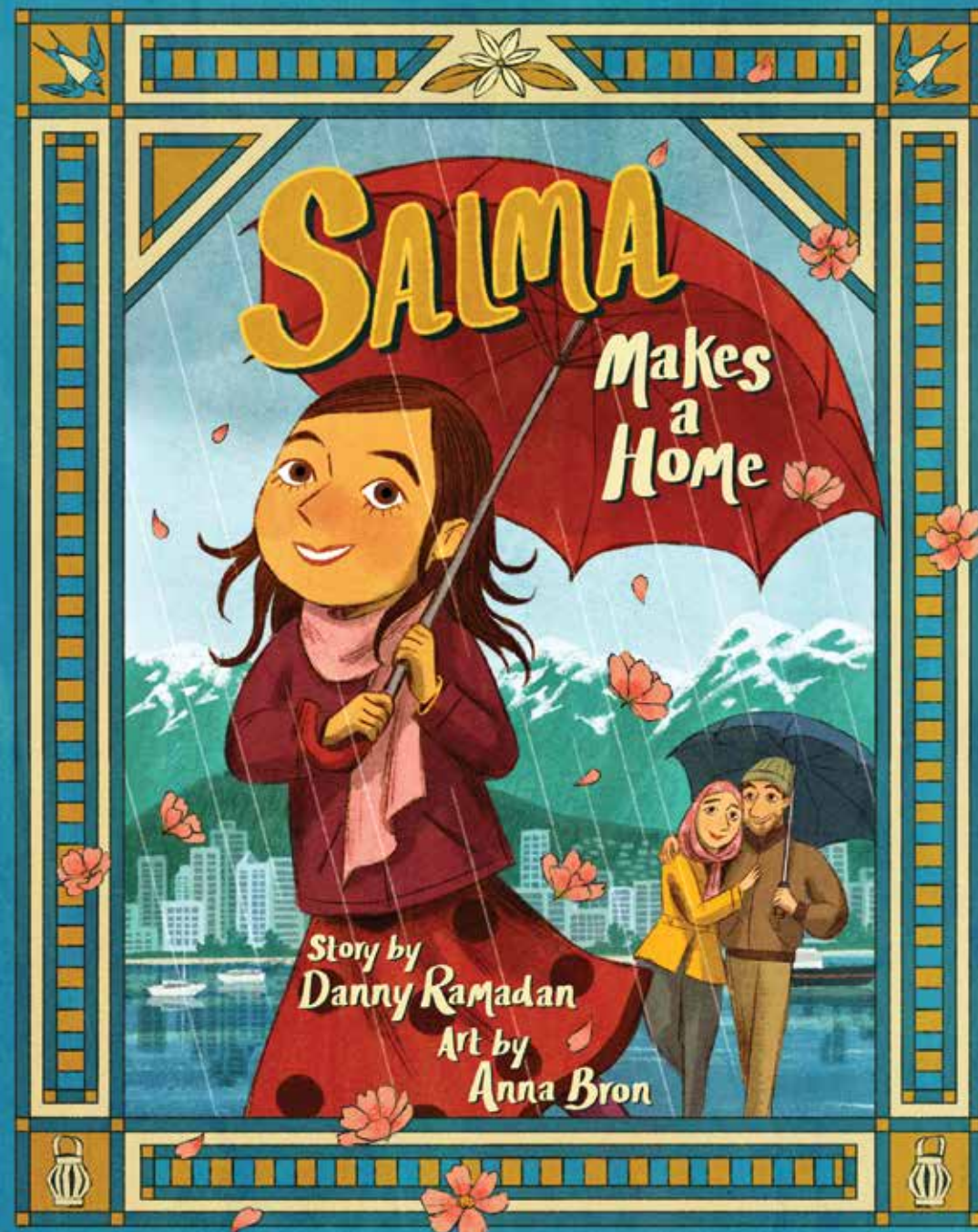
Salma Makes a Home

Ramadan



Bron

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# SALMA

## Makes a Home

Story by  
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# Chapter 1

With her little scissors, Salma carefully snips off a final thread then looks at her beautiful handiwork: a colorful paper lantern she learned how to make online.

“Mama, look. I made this to celebrate the arrival of Ramadan.” She used red papers and drew little geometric designs along its edges. “Red for the Canadian flag, and mosaic like the mosques of Damascus.”





Mama lifts up the lantern and smiles, examining it in the living room light. “What a wonderful piece of art, Salma. A great way to celebrate the arrival of our holy month.”

“I based it on my own memories,” Salma says. She remembers seeing al-mesaher walking the alleyways of Damascus right before sunrise. His son walked beside him sleepily, holding a real lantern in his hand to light the way. Al-mesaher knocked on a little drum to wake people up to eat their suhour: the pre-fasting meal.

“Do you think al-mesaher will come to visit us in Vancouver, Mama?” Salma asks.

Mama returns the paper lantern to Salma. “Maybe when your Baba comes here, he will be your personal mesaher.”

*Knock, knock knock knock, knock.* Mama taps her knuckles on the coffee table then sings, “Wake up and eat suhour, let Ramadan visit you.”

Salma giggles.

“Now off to bed, young lady,” Mama says. “You have school tomorrow.”

In bed, Salma closes her eyes and wishes for Baba to come here soon. Vancouver has been a beautiful new home: Salma loves the seawall and its many seagulls. She learned how to skate at the ice rink, and she looks great in her purple rain jacket. But there is something missing that she can't figure out. Is it how much she misses Baba? Is it how different this city is from her hometown back in Syria? She isn't sure.

In her dreams, Salma walks the streets of

Damascus with Baba. He wears a red fez on his head and a long silky shawl on his shoulders.

“Let’s go celebrate Ramadan’s return together, Salma,” Baba says. He holds his little drum by his chest and knocks on it.

*Knock, knock knock knock, knock.*





Salma looks around. This is her old school in Damascus, and that's her favorite candy store. Over there is the little park where she used to climb the slide from the slippery side. At the end of the road is her old home.



Suddenly, as if they were made of clouds, the buildings blur then disappear. One after another, the buildings turn to smoke, and in a moment, they are gone. Salma's heart aches. She feels a burn in her eyes.

"Baba, why is this happening?" Salma presses herself closer to Baba and squeezes his hand.

"Because you've forgotten what they look like, Salma," Baba says. He pulls his fingers away from hers and walks away. He waves goodbye then knocks on his little drum.

*Knock, knock knock knock, knock.*

"Baba, please don't leave me again." Salma feels her heart fluttering like a bird trying to escape a cage. She runs after Baba, but her feet are heavy. The streets around her blur, and her little home in

Damascus turns to smoke. She is scared. “Baba, come back.”

*Knock, knock knock knock, knock.*



## Chapter 2

Salma opens her eyes, startled. That was a scary dream. She hears the knocking once more, as if it echoes back from her nightmare. Then she realizes it's just Mama, knocking on her bedroom door.

“Is it morning yet?” Salma rubs her eyes as Mama comes into her room.

“I have such good news for you, Salma,” Mama says. Mama's news makes Salma leap out of bed.

She and Mama dance around the room before Salma has to get ready for school.

Salma races out of the apartment. Her best friend, Riya, runs to catch up.

“Salma, wait!” Riya says. “Why are we running?”



“I have such good news that I want to share with everyone!”

Salma rushes into her classroom and almost crashes into Ms. Singh’s chair. “Baba finally got his papers sorted,” Salma announces in front of the whole class. “He will join us in Canada soon!”





Riya squeezes Salma's hands, a big smile on her face. "I'm so happy for you, Salma!"

"You have been waiting for so long," Ayman says from the back of the classroom.

The other students cheer for Salma. Her heart beats so fast; it feels as if it's going to jump out of her chest. She thanks everyone and squeezes Riya's hands back.

"Why don't you tell us about your father?" Ms. Singh asks.

Salma shares one of her favorite memories: the time Baba built them a swing on their balcony back in Damascus. At first, she was scared because the swing went too high. "But then, I grew up, and I wasn't scared anymore," Salma says.

She tells them about the yummy sandwiches he

used to make her: he warmed the bread and melted the cheese first, then added a layer of strawberry jam on top.

“Mama makes really good sandwiches,” Salma adds, “but they are not like Baba’s.”

“When was the last time you saw your Baba?” Ms. Singh asks.

“A year, eleven months, and six days ago,” Salma says. “We were standing outside our old home in Damascus, and I asked Baba if we could just take the house with us.”

“The whole house?” Ms. Singh asks. “That’s a funny thought!”

“I just wanted to hide Baba in the house and bring him,” Salma says. She doesn’t know why, but she feels as if a fire burns behind her eyes. Her bad dream

flashes in her mind. “It was the day we left Baba behind in Syria.”

“What did your house look like back in Damascus, Salma?” Natalie asks. “I’ve never been outside of Canada.”

“It had two bedrooms,” Salma says confidently. “No. Three? It was a three-bedroom home.” Salma suddenly feels unsure. What was the color of the walls in the living room? How many pillows did she have on her bed? What fabric were the curtains of her bedroom window? She can’t remember.

Salma feels small. She crosses her arms over her chest and looks at the ground. Tears gather in her eyes. Salma doesn’t understand why she is sad. It’s a happy day. Baba will be here soon, and he will love everything about Canada. She shouldn’t feel sad.

She sniffs then makes herself smile. “I’m just so happy he’s coming,” Salma says. Her voice quivers.

“It’s okay to be sad that Baba is not around, Salma,” Ms. Singh cuts in before other students ask more questions. “Sometimes, we get sad in our hearts, but we know in our heads we will be happy when we see our loved ones again.”



“I’m not sad,” Salma insists, quiet at first, then louder as she continues. “Baba will be here soon, and he will love it here.”

*But what if he doesn’t?* The thought rushes through Salma’s mind. Quiet at first, then louder, too. Soon, it is the only thing Salma can think about.



## Chapter 3

On her way home from school, Salma can't think of anything to talk about with Riya, like they usually do. She watches her steps so she doesn't step in a puddle and silently gazes at the trees. Salma sees an empty bird's nest on a branch.

“Are you mad at me, Salma?” Riya asks.

“No. No. Just thinking,” Salma says. “Do you think that's a swallow's nest?”





“What’s a swallow?” Riya is confused.

“It’s a small blue bird with a red head and white wings.” Salma is surprised that Riya doesn’t know her favorite bird.

“I’ve never seen one!” Riya says. “Are you sure you didn’t dream them?”

“They are everywhere in Damascus,” Salma mumbles. “Or at least I think so?” The burning in her eyes returns. Salma stops walking. She tightens her hand around her umbrella.

Riya looks back at Salma. “What’s wrong?” she asks.

“I don’t know. I’m really happy that Baba is coming but . . .” Salma pauses then confesses, “I feel scared, too.”

Riya takes Salma’s hand and steps closer to her. Their umbrellas smack against each other. Riya’s

caring eyes make Salma feel warm inside. “Why are you scared?” Riya asks.

“I’m worried that Baba won’t like this new home,” Salma says. She feels the burn in her eyes again. She sniffles. “What if he hates the straight roads and prefers Damascus’s old alleyways? What if he dislikes the tall buildings and misses our small home? What



if he misses my grandparents, the way that I miss him?”

Riya’s eyes tear up, too. She tightens her hand on Salma’s. Salma feels the warmth of her best friend’s fingers, even though both of their hands are cold. “Salma, when my family came here, I didn’t like it either,” Riya says. “I didn’t like the new language I had to learn and didn’t enjoy the cold, rainy winters.”

“You didn’t?” Salma is surprised. Riya is the smartest kid in their grade. She always reads in front of the whole class. She has an accent, just like Salma, but Ms. Singh, their teacher, also has an accent. And when it snowed last February, Riya and Salma played in the snow together for hours. They even built a snowman.

“The language was hard, but I learned it. The winters are cold, but I love my colorful gloves and my

soft scarf,” Riya says. “Now I love Vancouver, and your Baba will, too.”

*But what if he doesn't?* Salma feels the burning behind her eyes again. But maybe Riya is right. Maybe all it will take for Baba to love Vancouver is good language practice and some warm clothes. She takes a deep breath and nods at her best friend. They walk home holding hands the whole way.