



Double win for mum's first novel

MELBOURNE mother and first-time author Amra Pajalic (above), 32, is on a high.

Her young-adult book *The Good Daughter* won the Melbourne Prize for Literature Civic Choice Award last week and two weeks ago she received a \$12,000 grant from Arts Victoria to write her second novel.

"It's been an amazing month, with all these wonderful things happening," she says.

"My little baby (Sofia) is nearly one year old. Motherhood is getting easier. She has started childcare, so next year is going to be all about writing."

About 2400 people voted for the Civic Choice Award via the Melbourne Prize website and at an exhibition held at Fed Square.

The main prize, the \$60,000 Melbourne Prize for Literature, went to local literary legend Gerald Murnane and the \$30,000 Best Writing Award to Nam Le's *The Boat*, which has won an astonishing eight awards this year.

"I thought I had no hope in hell of winning this award, considering all the brilliant nominees," Pajalic says.

The Good Daughter (Text Publishing) is about Sabiha, a teenager of Bosnian-Muslim decent growing up in the western suburbs.

"I was really drawing on myself," Pajalic says. "Sabiha is a bit similar to the way I was at that age, when everything is black and white. I was completely full of myself."

"The book is set in St Albans where I was brought up and Sabiha has a parent who suffers from manic depression, so there are a few characteristics and experiences that we share."

Sabiha also deals with family pressure to become a strict Muslim and speak Bosnian.

"That was one of the things I wanted to show, based on my experiences and the people I know, there is no black and white about the way you express your identity and your point of view," Pajalic says.

"I wanted to show that there is so much complexity to any migrant community."

Her next book is a sequel to *The Good Daughter*.

Pajalic says it was her childhood dream to become a writer.

After working part-time in administration for years and doing a BA, a diploma of professional and editing at the CAE gave her the skills to write the book.

"It has been 10 years to get to this point," she says.

Blanche Clark