



The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam

By G. Willow Wilson



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The Butterfly Mosque, journalist G. Willow Wilson’s remarkable story of converting to Islam and falling in love with an Egyptian man in a volatile post-9/11 world, was praised as “an eye-opening look at a misunderstood and often polarizing faith” (*Booklist*) and “a tremendously heartfelt, healing crosscultural fusion” (*Publishers Weekly*).

Inspired by her experience during a college Islamic Studies course, Wilson, who was raised an atheist, decides to risk everything to convert to Islam and embark on a fated journey across continents and into an uncertain future. She settles in Cairo, where she attempts to submerge herself in a culture based on her adopted religion and where she meets Omar, a man with a mild resentment of the Western influences in his homeland. They begin a daring relationship that calls into question the very nature of family, belief, and tradition. Torn between the secular West and Muslim East, Wilson records her intensely personal struggle to forge a “third culture” that might accommodate her values without compromising them or the friends and family on both sides of the divide.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this satisfying, lyrical memoir of a potentially disastrous clash between East and West, a Boulder native and Boston University graduate found an unlikely fit living in Cairo, Egypt, and converting to Islam. Wilson embarked on a yearlong stint working at an English-language high school in Cairo right after her college graduation in 2003. She had already decided that of the three Abrahamic religions, Islam fulfilled her need for a monotheistic truth, even though her school did not include instruction in the Qur'an because it angered students and put everybody at risk. Once in Cairo, despite being exposed to the smoldering hostility Arab men held for Americans, especially for women, she found she was moved deeply by the daily plight of the people to scratch out a living in this dusty police state tottering on the edge of moral and financial collapse; she and her roommate, barely eating because they did not know how to buy food, were saved by Omar, an educated, English-speaking physics teacher at the school. Through her deepening relationship with Omar, she also learned Arabic and embraced the ways Islam was woven into the daily fabric of existence, such as the rituals of Ramadan and Friday prayers at the mosque. Arguably, Wilson's decision to take up the headscarf and champion the segregated, protected status of Arab women can be viewed as odd; however, her work proves a tremendously heartfelt, healing cross-cultural fusion. (*June*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review After an illness forces her to face her own mortality at age 18, Wilson, the child of two atheists, finds herself in search of religion. The faith that feels right for her is Islam, but in the wake of 9/11, she has difficulties embracing it fully. It isn't until she makes the decision to move to Cairo to teach at an English-language school that she is able to immerse herself in the religion she has come to love and become a Muslim. When she falls in love with Omar, an Egyptian physics teacher, Wilson becomes increasingly open about her faith, despite the reactions she fears from her friends and family. Though adjusting to life in Egypt takes some work—from learning the ins and outs of the complex marketplace to respecting societal divisions between men and women—Wilson finds herself warmly embraced and welcomed by Omar's family. Wilson's illuminating memoir offers keen insights into Islamic culture, distinguishing carefully between the radical fundamentalists who hate the West and the majority of peaceful Muslims. An eye-opening look at a misunderstood and often polarizing faith, Wilson's memoir is bound to spark discussion. -- Kristine Huntley

Review

—*A Seattle Times Best Book of the Year*

“*The Butterfly Mosque* is replete with insights into faith, family, cross-cultural courtship and the inevitable ‘clash of cultures,’ making it an absorbing read. . . . Wilson’s memoir offers the reader valuable insights into the Islamic faith. . . . A remarkable journey, one that illuminates the humanity in us all.”—*The Seattle Times*

“Captivating . . . [An] excellent memoir . . . [that] deserves attention; not just for the clarity of [Wilson’s] style and her shrewd observations, but for her sincerity and courage in following her own truth.”—*The Globe and Mail*

“Eloquent . . . A life-altering adventure in love, faith, and surrender . . . [Wilson] wins the reader over with

her courage, her keen intelligence, her insatiable hunger for truth, and her fine writing. It is riveting to watch a liberal, fiercely independent young American transform into a Muslim and an Egyptian daughter-in-law. . . . Much more than a coming-of-age story, Wilson's memoir explores expatriates and anti-Westernism, economics and fundamentalism, Egyptian culture and feminism . . . [and] builds a bridge between the East and the West through her writing."—*Charlotte Observer*

"Wilson's book, particularly in these treacherous times of mistrust and paranoia, is a masterpiece of elegance and determination. . . . Wilson has written one of the most beautiful and believable narratives about finding closeness with God that makes even the most secular reader wince with pleasure for her. . . . A natural-born storyteller."—*The Denver Post*

"Wilson skillfully conveys the terms of complex sociological discord. . . . Her careful examination and forthright wit make her an ideal ambassador to those who haven't . . . separated [Islam] from its attendant terrorist factions and stereotypes. . . . Wilson has the objective sensitivity to understand the attitudes and arguments facing her; she's multicultural, eloquent and humbly persuasive. And even better, she knows how to tell a great story."—*Paste Magazine*

"Wilson's illuminating memoir offers keen insights into Islamic culture. . . . An eye-opening look at a misunderstood and often polarizing faith, Wilson's memoir is bound to spark discussion."—*Booklist* (starred review)

"More than one skeptical reader was thoroughly won over by [Wilson's] lack of preachiness or self-righteousness."—*Elle* (Readers' Prize)

"A gorgeously written memoir about what it means to be human in a fractured world, told with warmth and wit to spare. *The Butterfly Mosque* is a book that will stay with you for years."—Reza Aslan, author of *No god but God and How to Win a Cosmic War*

"Satisfying and lyrical . . . [*The Butterfly Mosque*] proves a tremendously heartfelt, healing cross-cultural fusion."—*Publishers Weekly*

"[An] honest and uplifting memoir . . . [that] embraces—not demonizes—both Muslims and the West as critical foundations for [Wilson's] spiritual journey."—*The Huffington Post*

"Thoughtful . . . Wilson's gorgeously written, deeply felt memoir is more than a plea for understanding. It's also a love story and an exploration of life in a culture far removed from ours. . . . [*The Butterfly Mosque*] pulls aside the veil on a world many Americans judge based on thin, sometimes ugly, media stereotypes. Wilson's sincere love for her faith blooms on almost every page [and] that heartfelt desire to know The Other infuses the book with soul."—*Boulder Daily Camera*

"Memoirs like Wilson's continue to be an important counterpoint to the tales of Mideast belligerence that fill the nightly news."—*Winnipeg Free Press*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jose Anderson:

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Sylvia Medina:

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