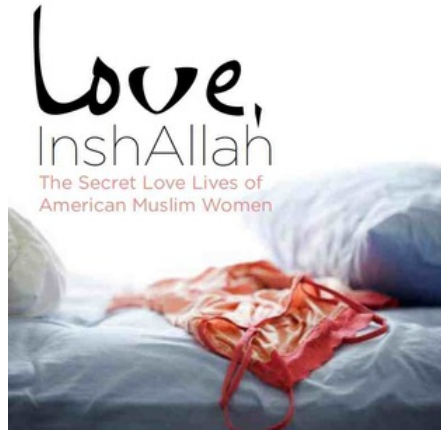


Ayesha Mattu &
Nura Maznavi



Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women

Nura Maznavi (Editor) , Ayesha Mattu (Editor)

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In this groundbreaking collection, American Muslim women writers sweep aside stereotypes to share their real-life tales of flirting, dating, longing, and sex. Their stories show just how varied the search for love can be—from singles' events and college flirtations to arranged marriages, all with a uniquely Muslim twist.

These heartfelt tales are filled with passion and hope, loss and longing. One follows the quintessential single woman in the big city as she takes a chance on a Muslim speed-dating event. Another tells of a shy student from a liberal college town who falls in love online and must reveal her secret to her conservative family. A third recounts a Southern girl who surprises herself by agreeing to an arranged marriage, unexpectedly finding the love of her life.

These compelling stories of love and romance create an irresistible balance of heart-warming and tantalizing, always revealing and deeply relatable.

Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women Details

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From Reader Review Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women for online ebook

Cristina Ana says

Meh... disappointing. My assumption was that the book would tackle complex identity issues and it probably had this initial ambition, as it is tailored as an anthology of Muslim women's love stories attempting for Islam's reconciliation with American culture. Just that most of the stories are dull and dry, poorly written, and only succeeding to present an exposé of something like tales from women' magazines.

Motasem says

As a Muslim, I feel this collection of short stories succeeds in portraying a diversity of relationships experienced by Muslim Americans but at the same time it may improperly normalize some of the more extreme examples that certainly exist but are arguably very rare. With some of these stories, I don't believe the editors sought shock value but rather to open an honest dialogue which is certainly an admirable goal. But the introduction identifies a parallel goal of breaking stereotypes and I think some of the more controversial (in a socially liberal sense) short stories overreach and create newer perceptions that many would argue are just as misrepresentative of our Muslim American community. This causes ethical concerns within the community and the non-Muslim readers may walk away with misconstrued judgments given the brevity of the context.

But all that aside, from a literary perspective, I thought the writing for most of the short stories was mediocre and thus my rating.

Bojar says

If you like to read stories about brainwashed women, that's your book. couldn't finish it after first four stories.

Madiha says

I have mixed feelings about this book. My initial assumption of what the book would be about, or rather it's content were very inflated. That balloon burst almost as soon as I began to read the book.

This book shouldn't be taken to represent Islam. Rather it should be seen as an anthology in which women, who have a common belief system, which vary in intensity, share their love stories. Many of which were very dry.

I do not see the point of the book. I see it as a source of "fitnah" and a medium to expose that which God has allowed to remain hidden. It's an exposé of one's own faults, sometimes spiritual journey, and love. It's content is dry and not very relatable in my opinion.

I'm unsure as to who the targeted audience is. Overall I don't see any point in its content. What message the book attempts to send is lost.

Asma Alsalameh says

I was excited when I heard about this book—finally someone was going to tell our stories! However, overall this book wasn't what I expected it to be. As a practicing single Muslim Arab girl in my 20s, 80% of the stories were unrelatable. In addition, maybe half of these stories were told by self-proclaimed non-practicing girls. I understand wanting to be diverse but come on!!! That was my main issue with the book—that it does not represent. Also, this book could have a lot of potential to be great when talking about the relationship issues Muslim women face, however most of these stories were superficial and not very insightful. Maybe there can be a part 2 that redeems itself by being more representative and intellectually stimulating.

Sarah says

Love, InshAllah, at first, brought me face-to-face with a glaring prejudice I have unconsciously created about what for me is fair game for love stories.

When Bollywood started to produce movies that involved more explicit love scenes, I remember my best friend, the least prejudiced person I know, saying “Aurgh, I don't want to see that!” I chuckled: “So, what, it's okay if white people do that onscreen?” She tried to explain what she felt: “No, but that's brown people. That's us!” Thanks to the media's disproportionate portrayal of what particular acts should look like or whom they should involve, having intimacy is being acted out by people of “our kind” can be temporarily disorienting for even the least ideologically prudish Indo-Pakistani Muslim ladies like myself.

I confess that, on some level, that's what I was feeling when I read Love, InshAllah. It's one thing to know, abstractly, that those stories are out there. Before reading this collection, I did know about gay Muslimahs, about the niqabis who have multiple sexual partners, about Muslim children having to live dual lives because they could not conform to their parents' standards. But it's one thing to have these faint blobs of abstraction floating around in one's consciousness. And it's quite another to be reading a succession of those stories by the women who own them. For reading such works constituted an experience I could never have readied myself for.

I, of course, mean that in the best way possible.

Being a single person who's been feeling a bit shortchanged in the love department lately, I did at times have to face the demon of loneliness while reading the stories. And being a Muslimah—which for me means having an inner universe that is shaped and conditioned by the moral tenets of the Islamic faith—means that the moral quandaries raised in some of those stories make reading them a gut-wrenchingly conflicted experience. Yet, ultimately, reading Love, InshAllah created a glowing, steadily increasing burn of recognition of myself in the stories as a whole.

The beauty of this collection lies in how pluralistic it is, and how any attempt to explain the experience of reading these stories will fail to do justice to this collection in its entirety. Therefore, I have decided attempt to group the stories based on my experience of reading them. These categories are far from perfect, but they

help provide some insight into how varied the reading experience can get within the scope of such a collection.

1. *Deceptively Traditional Stories*: These stories moved me because they revealed the beauty of what might, on the surface, seem to be unappealing ways to meet a significant other. Aisha Saeed's "Leap of Faith" is a dream for any South Asian girl who's had to go through strangeness of having her parents play matchmaker. "Otherwise Engaged" is an endearing account of Huda Al-Marashi's yearning for a date with and formal proposal from the boy she was set up to marry.

2. *Too Good to Be True Stories*: Stories that seemed too good to be true to the point of irrelevance. Although I recognize that they were a necessary part of the collection and are as true as the other stories, they're not the kind of situations most Muslim women are lucky enough to be in. Ayesha Mattu's "The Opening" and Angela Collins Telles' "Love in the Andes" both involved meeting gorgeous non-Muslim men who ended up converting to Islam. Again, while I'm extremely happy for them and for all the women who have been so blessed, I'm too aware of the thornier issue of women who fall in love with good, worthy non-Muslim and are forced to choose between love and deen.

3. *Stories that are Not for the Faint-hearted*: This collection of stories are better skipped by those who are squeamish, especially about Muslim women. In Tanzila Ahmed's "Punk-Drunk Love," Taqwacore sensibility intersects with the heartbreak and the transience of intense passion in a way that seared my heart. Najva Sol's "The First Time" recounts her coming to an understanding about her sexuality in a way that pulls no punches.

4. *The Real Stuff of Married Life Stories*: These stories dealt with what married life (as far as I can tell) is really made up of. Melody Moezzi's "Love in the Time of Biohazards" is a beautiful portrayal of true spousal devotion in the face of pancreatic complications. "Love at Third Sight" by Patricia M. G. Dunn provides much-needed lessons about what real love, in the context of marriage, is, and the kind of trials or uncertainty one might have to go through in order to actualize this form of love.

5. *Self-Defining Stories*: Rather than relegate these stories to some overloaded form of a "miscellaneous" category, I wanted to highlight some gems in this collection, freestanding entities that made impressions I won't easily forget:

Aida Rahim's "Brain Meets Heart" is a story about how she and her daughter found the right husband and father (who incidentally is none other than Hijabman!) for themselves. I felt that this story brings out the much-needed voice of the smart, independent, admirable Muslim woman who doesn't become any less of those things just because she happens to be a mother and a divorcee.

Nura Maznavi's "Last Night on the Island" I found to be a wonderful story not just for its plot and narration, but because it functions as a portal into a grander narrative about being single. To see this included in a collection of love stories was something I had not expected, and this act of inclusion deeply moved me.

"Sex by Any Other Name" is a wonderfully uncomfortable read that explores virginity, perceived ownership of such a virtue, and the complications and anxiety that result when these phenomena are continuously confronted.

Asiila Imani's story "Three" traces the usual journey of love towards an unusual and controversial form: polygny. Given that a considerable number of Muslim women hold Imani's perspective and have had experiences similar to hers, I was especially glad to see the inclusion of such a voice in this collection.

Suzanne Syeda Shah's "Kala Love" is a raw, powerful account of complex family relationships, a pronounced clash between first and second-generation immigrants, the trauma of assault, and redemption through faith and sex. Because there was not only redemption, but redemption through a worthy man, I feel that this story epitomizes what—to me—is the real stuff of romance stories.

When I look back at the climate that surrounded my education on love and sex, I am bemused by the skewed ways that women of my religious and cultural background learn about these things: the way we would devour romance novels, the ridiculous myths about female anatomy that would circulate the unmarried girls' side in dinner parties, the simplistically treated assumption that one transforms from being 'innocent' to being someone who knows of these matters over the course of a wedding night. To realize that I made the transition from that background to being part of a Love, InshAllah post-publication world gives me a great deal of hope and self-affirmation. It is now, by virtue of this book, becoming a world I want to raise my daughter in.

At first I wasn't sure if should put myself through reading this book, thinking that it would only make me confront the demon of emotional loneliness. And to an extent, it did. Amazingly enough, however, by the time I reached the end, it had done the opposite. It instilled me with a sense of hope and empowerment I couldn't have gained in any other way. Although a little disorienting at first, it eventually lead me to breathing sigh after sigh of relief, knowing that my story—be it that of failed love, triumphant love, or singlehood—is part of a narrative that can never be conveyed simplistically, a narrative whose beauty comes from the plurality of experience and candidness about the places they come from.

This collection may be subtitled, "the secret love lives of American Muslim women," but this book brings those lives out in the open, making them secret no more. I applaud its honesty and its celebration of female sexuality from within the Muslim universe. And I hope it paves the way for more such works about Muslim women in other places and countries and other conceptions of intimacies, starting, perhaps, with Canadian Muslim women.

(This review was originally published on my blog: [http://amuslimahwrites.wordpress.com/...](http://amuslimahwrites.wordpress.com/))

Fay says

Well, I just finished this book a few moments ago and I've got to say that I loved it. This is NOT a book to teach you about Islam though you may come away from it with an understanding of **some** of it's tenets. With this book we are allowed to enter the world that these women, all of whom identify themselves as both Muslim and American, some practicing a little, some a lot, others not much if at all so openly shared with us. This wasn't a foreign world for me because I too am both Muslim (convert) and American.

These are *their* stories-their love stories. I am quite sure there will be Muslims that will read this book and think some of the stories should never have been told (we believe it is a mercy from God when our sins have been hidden from others therefore we aren't supposed to go telling people about them) and though I believe and practice that as a general rule I am hoping that the forthrightness shown in this book will begin to open some people's eyes and help build bridges. Muslim women are people too. We are human and we want and experience love. One would think this wouldn't be such a hard concept to grasp but it seems that for many, it is. We are a diverse lot, and I think this book does a great job of showing that.

There were stories of women who only met their soon to be husband once, others who met their loves online or married after having built up sincere admiration for them in a platonic friendship, born-again virgins, punk Muslims, flings, polygynous family lives etc and through it all there are lessons learned, loves lost, love found, and even love found again. These women learn things about themselves and love, and we can learn along with them. I'm sure many readers will be reminded of the love stories of their lives.

Is this a book about Muslim American women or a book about love? I've asked myself. I'd say it's both but I kind of feel like it's really a book about love, it's just the major characters happen to be Muslim American women and I for one, really like that. As for me, I think this book couldn't have come out at a better point in my life. It's renewed my faith in so many things and it's one of the books for which I will always be grateful.

If you liked this book then you may also like the book called Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak I really think that this book Love InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women is far more relatable and enjoyable than the other which I found far more dreary but it's been years since I read it and really only one story from it that touched me (the one about the mother of an autistic child). I also remember coming away from it feeling they didn't quite show much of a diverse lot of Muslim American women unless diversity only means showing those that are more alienated from the mainstream Muslim community.

The timing of this book coming out this past month leading up to Valentine's Day is perfect. If you celebrate the day and are looking for a book for your best friend I'd suggest this book and some chocolates. :) I think this book could make a light yet really interesting and fun read for a book group.

N.B.

Being a part of the American Muslim community I did not have any issue with the foreign vocabulary drizzled throughout the book. I can see however this being an issue for some people. Before you start reading you may want to bookmark the glossary in the back that has all the words you need to know and even a few (or at least one) that wasn't used in any of the stories. :)

I read the ebook version and there is one change I would make to the formatting. I think the foreign words should be hyper-linked to their definitions in the glossary. I just may have to write the publisher about that one.

** This review has been edited for spelling.

Juwi says

This is a great collection of essays from all kinds of Muslim Women writing about love and relationships. If you are someone looking to get married, or if you are married yourself...whether Muslim or not, it's an insightful read.

As a young Muslim woman, i could relate to a few of the stories but at the same time i haven't found the one for me yet so i'm like THAT IS FAKE THAT NEVER HAPPENS PLEASE WHAT HOW DID THEY REALLY MEET LIKE THAT but it IS real and yeah...God works in mysterious ways. some of the stories were REALLY CUTE AND MADE ME BELIEVE IN LOVE AGAIN. lol but seriously it's so strange how people end up with their partners...

It's good to see a mix of views from people that were born Muslim as well as converts and how everyone deals with relationships, marriage, sex, divorce and other various issues differently.

Thanks to the editors for deciding to make this book happen and for all the contributors for sharing their stories.

I would specifically recommend it to muslim women but also men. But you don't have to be Muslim to read it obviously.

Yasmeen says

It was a quick, enjoyable read on my flight back from Chicago on Memorial Day. I mostly laughed; it was nice to be able to relate to the many anecdotes that the writer's described i.e. American friends who don't really understand the nuances of our culture that is intrinsically tied to our religion. It brought me back to my awkward teenage years and oddly enough, I didn't mind. It also brought me back to my college years where I discovered and lost love. And no, he wasn't a Muslim.

I'm quite content with my life now, and have found ways to navigate through my dual-identity. But for all you that are feeling a bit repressed and follow arbitrary rules imposed by familial influences, I would recommend this novel. But fair warning: don't expect to be enlightened. The only thing you may gain from this read is that you'll realize you're not alone in your kooky yet loving family.

Arabian Rihanna says

Poignantly disappointing.

I was expecting a few inspirational stories with the main focal point being Islam, but instead I read about breakups, new relationships, other relationships, more relationships, lust and maybe a story or two about love; I'm still not sure though.

I shouldn't have ignored the big red flag of "The *Secret* Love Lives of *American* Muslim Women". What was I thinking?

People always find stories of conversion to Islam to be "impressive". I personally call that the "Farangi Complex".

Wow, a French Jew embraced Islam? See? Islam is cool!

A British Christian raised Catholic converted to Islam? I told you. Islam is great!

A hot celebrity joined our cult? Woot, woot! We be rockin' our deen or whattt?

Let's get it straight right now, right here: Islam doesn't need anyone's validation. Islam will never be tarnished by any Muslim's bad reputation.

That being said, I don't really see the "Muslim" part in this book. It could as well have been just about

women, or American women, or American women of born foreign parents. There is very little emphasis on Islam per se in some stories that it's hard to relate to them.

I was really hoping to read real stories about the challenges of modern Muslim women who take their religion seriously. As I see it, most of these stories were about women who choose to be identified as Muslims, but who push Islam down their priority list. Freedom of choice, no question about that; but I'm still disappointed overall.

Huma Rashid says

Some of the stories in this book are better than others, but the book itself is a must-read simply because of the picture it presents. Everyone has an image of Muslim women. Especially those who don't know one personally.

In reading this book, you'll see a whole world of feeling and passion and angst that's never part of the discussion of Muslim women, and for that reason, this book goes a long way in fighting misconceptions about women like us.

I want to do a full, meaningful, carefully written review, but I just can't. So much of the stuff in this book hits too close to home. If you're inclined, you can read my many posts on the subject **here at my book blog** . I discuss specific stories, certain quotes, general ideas, and even personal thoughts and experiences.

I'm so glad a book like this was written. (And screw the haters who will only talk about how the women in this book are all hell-bound for daring not to adhere to that particular critic's narrowly tailored view of what Islam is and what it demands.)

Manaar says

This book was a surprisingly good read; I finished it within a couple days. It was on my to-read list for a long time before I finally decided to give it a try, since I'd heard a few negative reviews about it. I'm glad I picked it up, though. What kept me reading despite a few stories that made me feel uncomfortable (e.g., they were unnecessarily crude) were the brutal honesty, faith, and vulnerability-driven courage that each woman (Muslim-born or revert) wrote with. For example, one was experiencing a love-filled arranged marriage after having met her husband once before the nikkah, another was actively dating and having sexual relations before marriage, and another was struggling with a queer identity while trying to find love. But each woman identified herself both as American and Muslim (this was the authors' only requirement for them), and wrote with such intense faith in Allah, mA, that I couldn't help but admire them. Of course, I definitely would not do or write about some of the experiences mentioned in the book, but who am I to judge them? We're all on our own path. For this reason, I recommend the collection to everyone.

I'm really glad Nura Maznavi and Ayesha Mattu helped make this book happen, and I'd very much like to read the American Muslim man's perspective (next book, Ayesha and Nura?). It opened my eyes to the dynamics of love in the lives of American Muslim women like myself, a topic I've admittedly been very naive about, and allowed me to witness first-hand the beautiful ways Allah SWT brings people together. Because at the end of the day, we are all just reading the book He wrote.

Viola says

As a non-Muslim American, who likes to be generally worldly and culturally sensitive, I was drawn to this book because I love love. Love is one of the most universal human experiences; it is powerful enough to breakdown boundaries and unify people of all different backgrounds. With this book, I was ready to be charmed by some love stories and to be enlightened about the Muslim-American experience. Instead, I should've prepared myself to be disappointed.

Before I purchased the book, I downloaded the Kindle sample and was immediately drawn into the first story, "Leap of Faith." It is what I think of as a traditional Muslim love story, one in which the marriage is arranged and love doesn't necessarily come before marriage. An arranged marriage may seem very foreign to non-Muslim and non-Indian Americans, but, as this story depicts, love can prevail. This young woman's heartwarming story makes you believe that love can appear anywhere, even in arranged marriages; you just need to take that leap of faith.

This first story prompted me to purchase the entire book of some two dozen stories. Unfortunately, not all of the stories are as good as the first one. In fact, many are not good at all. Despite the fact that the editors sought diversity, the stories all seemed to meld together for me after awhile. Most of them are very forgettable and not particularly well-written. A few stories aren't about love at all, but rather lust. Other stories end abruptly, leaving you feeling unresolved and shortchanged. And, instead of being about love, by and far, most of the stories are actually coming of age stories -- young women trying to figure out who they are and who they want to be -- young women caught between the world of their parents and their own world -- young women wanting to remain faithful to their religion and also wanting to find a compatible husband.

The diversity in this book shows up as diversity in the level of each woman's Muslim practice from very conservative to very liberal. At the extreme ends, there are a couple of gay Muslim stories and one of polygamy. But, like I said, all the stories seemed to feel the same after awhile. Maybe that is what the editors intended -- that is, to show how similar our experiences are despite our differences. But, unfortunately, that doesn't make for a very interesting anthology.

I'd say in total, there are four, maybe five, stories that are worth reading. My top four are "Leap of Faith," "Love in the Time of Biohazards," "Rerouting", and "It Will Be Beautiful." The fifth on my list is "The Birds, The Bees, and My Hole," if only for the scene in which the girl's mother describes the birds and the bees to her daughter.

In sum, although there are a few gems in the book, as a whole it was rather disappointing.

Khadijah Qamar says

I was excited about this book when it came out and special ordered it through my library. As my rating indicates, I was very disappointed. The negligee on the front cover should have warned me. This book simply falls into a long line of oriental literature that sexualizes Muslim women. What's the biggest shame is that it's written by two Muslim women. This was their opportunity to delve into a subject rarely spoken about and explore the nature of romantic relationships among Muslims. However they chose to do it insensitively

and chose stories that were usually racy, if not downright raunchy.

Perhaps the authors were trying to demonstrate that "Muslim American women are just like other American women" - if I remember correctly, they might have even said something to that effect in their introduction. But that's painting Muslim American women with too broad a brush stroke and ignoring the nuances that differentiate them and the spirituality that guides them.

Their audience was obviously the broader American public. In order to appeal to them, they chose cheap stories that had very little "Muslim" about them. I'm not just referring to the "un-Muslim" behavior that many of the women displayed - that's ignorant of how varied and diverse actual Muslims are in their character and behavior. The fact that many of the stories hardly referred to anything Islamic at all suggests that Islam had very little to do with the way many of the women lead their lives. For a reader unfamiliar with Islam, this book gives the wrong message about what Islam professes. For Muslims, this book might aim to generate tolerance of the diversity within Islam. However, too many of the stories depict behavior that most Muslims would consider un-Islamic. For that reason, it likely creates more divisions than it does build bridges.

I understand that the authors were trying to show Muslim American women as they really are. But if you are going to tie Islam to a book about love, you should choose a more responsible message that actually reflects the teachings of Islam. In many cases, the women in these stories just happened to have been born Muslim. Islam was not something they seemed to reflect on when they made their romantic choices. This book should not have had "Muslim" in the title. Of course without it, the authors would probably have lost the "shock and awe" factor they earned from the racy stories inside that helped the book to sell.

Hannah says

I have read a lot of negative reviews for this book. People are expecting something based on the title and the cover of the book (which they shouldn't). This book is not going to teach you a whole lot about the Muslim rules for dating or marriage (some, but not a lot). It will, however, tell you a lot of personal stories and experiences of American women who identify as Muslim. People can identify as something and not accept every practice of the group they identify with. There are practicing Muslims, lapsed Muslims, cultural Muslims, and Muslims in name alone. This book deals with a little bit of each. Each woman tells their love story (failed and successful) and talks about how Islam played a role in it. I think it is a beautiful collection and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. If you're looking for a book on the Muslim rules of dating and marriage however, this is not it.
