

MOLLY CARLSON, EX-CHRISTIAN, USA (PART 1 OF 2)

Rating: 5.0

Description: She was searching for what turned out to be already a major part of who she is: Islam.

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I remember it so well. I remember the exact moment when my entire life changed, and I realized that I was no longer thinking “if I became Muslim”, but that I had at some point begun thinking “when I become Muslim.” It was no longer optional for me. It had become inevitable.

When it hit me, the realization was like cold water over my head. It was like that moment when you realize you had forgotten something important at home and your stomach flops and you can't breathe.

At that moment, I realized that I was no longer the American girl I wanted to convince myself I was, and that I had not been that girl for a long time. I remember the sun on the snow. I remember the road in front of me. I remember forgetting, for a second, where I was driving to. And I remember being scared, unequivocally and irrationally scared.

This realization, this conversion of self, had been decades in coming. When people say — when the religion says — that we are born Muslims by the will of God, I do not doubt it. I certainly was and I knew I was, although exactly what I was, I didn't know at that time.

Still I knew what I was not. I was not a Catholic Christian no matter how many Hail Mary's I prayed, or crosses I wore, or Church services my mother brought me to. I studied and I prayed and I searched for the final answer to the questions that plagued me, while all the time the little voice in my heart gnawed at the strings of my soul.

There was a series of events throughout my life, legends, memories of my own, and dreams that made no sense in the moment I dreamed them, but have become clearer in reference to all that I know now.

My first brief introduction to Islam came in the form of a book called King of the Wind, by Marguerite Henry, which chronicles the story of a small Moroccan stable boy and his special foal. I was an avid reader at a young age.

Even though I don't recall how old I was at the time, I do remember vividly the part about him fasting in the month of Ramadan. I kind of consider this to be the original awakening of my heart to what I really was, but without any other serious exposure to Islam in the years after reading that book, I lost it all again.

Some time later, assuming I was around the age of eight when I read King of the Wind, when I was around the age of twelve I was plagued by mysterious dreams that I didn't quite understand of things that I didn't know anything about. They weren't scary, they were more of the sub-conscious reflections of the yearning I had inside.

In the one I remember most vividly I was standing inside a perfectly square, wood-paneled room with patterned carpet laying in one direction. There were burning lanterns to light the room.

Off to my left side there was a carved wooden screen behind which was another room, a room I knew in this dream to be the room that women used. I also knew that a woman like I was not allowed to be in the room I was standing in.

Not only was I standing in this forbidden room, the room for men, but I was also standing there with nothing covering my head.

As a twelve-year-old Christian girl, the concept of separate rooms for men and women and the concept of covering your head was something I quite literally had never been told about nor exposed to. Yet in this dream I knew what I was doing wrong, what I needed to do right, and there was no question in my heart as to why.

I felt the love and concern of the merciful God watching me stand in the room and I felt like I had let my Creator down. This sense of shame and sadness are what stand out to me the most vivid of the dream, although I could draw the room and the carved panel. I remember them so well.

I also remember the old-fashioned dress I was wearing. Even though in the dream I did not go into it, I even remember what the women's section looked like. I consider this dream to be the reason I feel so strongly about wearing hijab, I feel like God was making me ready for the things I would need to do just one decade later.

There were other dreams, fleeting glimpses of things like Sunnah beards that made no sense at the time. It was a decade later, maybe five months or so before I converted, that my last dream came. This was not so much as dream as it was an unbidden vision.

I had just ended a phone conversation with a Muslim acquaintance of mine in which he had teased me about converting. I was adamant that while I respected Islam, I did not believe it and I was fighting hard to keep myself in denial. I was so scared that I didn't want to acknowledge what I already was. But God had a different idea.

The moment after I ended the call, I lay back on my bed, closed my eyes, and was instantly lifted into another level. Before me stood a woman covered in black from head to toe, and on her face was what looked like a ninja mask: a veil that covered the lower half of her face, but was connected to the top by a thin strip that ran up her nose and between her eyes.

I was fascinated and terrified by her. I drew closer to look, and in that moment I realized that it was me behind the veil and that I was looking back at myself with an I-told-you-so look in my eyes, as if I were simply looking in a mirror.

I recoiled in horror, jumped almost straight out of my bed, and threw my phone across the room. I was terrified, I was shocked, and inside a little part of me knew that this was the beginning of the end of all I was comfortable with. I knew I had seen a glimpse of my own future.

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