

*A candid, heartfelt love story set in contemporary California that challenges the idea of what it means to be American, liberated, and in love*

“Told with exuberance and honesty, *First Comes Marriage* is a charming, delightful memoir of love and self-discovery. Huda Al-Marashi has written a smart, down-to-earth, and unforgettable modern-day love story that celebrates the enduring bonds of culture, faith, and family. A wonderful book.”

—**Jasmin Darznik**, *New York Times*—bestselling author of *The Good Daughter* and *Song of a Captive Bird*

# First Comes Marriage

## My Not-So-Typical American Love Story

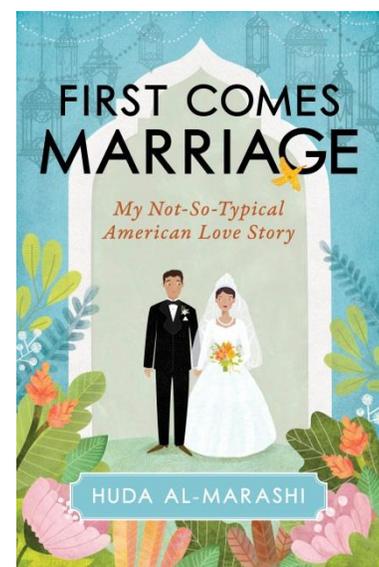
### Huda Al-Marashi

When Huda meets Hadi, the boy she will ultimately marry, she is six years old. Both are the American-born children of Iraqi immigrants, who grew up on opposite ends of California.

Hadi considers Huda his childhood sweetheart, the first and only girl he's ever loved, but Huda needs proof that she is more than just the girl Hadi's mother has chosen for her son. She wants what the American girls have--the entertainment culture's almost singular tale of chance meetings, defying the odds, and falling in love. She wants stolen kisses, romantic dates, and a surprise proposal. As long as she has a grand love story, Huda believes no one will question if her marriage has been arranged.

But when Huda and Hadi's conservative Muslim families forbid them to go out alone before their wedding, Huda must navigate her way through the despair of unmet expectations and dashed happily-ever-after ideals. Eventually she comes to understand the toll of straddling two cultures in a marriage and the importance of reconciling what you dreamed of with the life you eventually live.

Tender, honest and irresistibly compelling, *First Comes Marriage* is the first Muslim-American memoir dedicated to the themes of love and sexuality. Huda and Hadi's story brilliantly circles around a series of firsts, chronicling two virgins moving through their first everything: hand holding, first kiss, and first sexual encounters. *First Comes Marriage* is an almost unbearably humanizing tale that tucks into our hearts and lingers in our imagination, while also challenging long-standing taboos within the Muslim community and the romantic stereotypes we unknowingly carry within us that sabotage some of our best chances for finding true love.



**Huda Al-Marashi** currently lives in Encinitas, California, with her husband and three children. Her writing has appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *LA Times*, *Al Jazeera*, the *VIDA Review*, the *Offing*, and elsewhere. Visit her online at [www.hudaalmarashi.com](http://www.hudaalmarashi.com)

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## Praise for *First Comes Marriage*

“An honest, often amusing, account of one young woman’s quest to balance the traditional Muslim values she acquired from her Iraqi immigrant parents with the romantic fantasies she acquired from American media. Her story is both unique in that the devout, overachieving narrator is not the rebellious first-generation daughter we’ve come to expect from immigrant narratives, and universal in its instructive journey from youthful hubris and naïveté to learning how to make a marriage work.”

—Faith Adiele, author of *The Nigerian Nordic Girl’s Guide to Lady Problems*, and founder of VONA Travel Workshop for Writers of Color

“This sweet, sharply insightful memoir of an Iraqi American marriage skewers stereotypes as it leaves you cheering for these newlyweds.”

—Susan Muaddi Darraj, author of *A Curious Land*

“Determined to weave her own love story from the threads of the two seemingly opposing cultures she grew up in, Al-Marashi fearlessly takes us on a journey into the darkest corners of her young marriage, as well as herself.”

—Jen Waite, internationally bestselling author of *A Beautiful, Terrible Thing*

“There comes a time in every relationship (romantic or platonic) when one must decide to leave or stay. With courage, humor, and vulnerability, Al-Marashi excavates the contours of her marriage, intimately sharing with the reader the journey to her moment of choice.”

—Ayesha Mattu, Coeditor of *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women* and *Salaam, Love: American Muslim Men on Love, Sex, and Intimacy*

## About the author: Huda Al-Marashi

Marriage was a regular topic of conversation in my Iraqi-American immigrant household. To praise me, my elders would call me a bride and pray to see the day of my wedding, and when I misbehaved, my mother threatened me with becoming a spinster. “No one will want to marry you if you act like that,” she’d call out.

Although I went on to uphold our cultural ideals by marrying the son of our closest Iraqi family friends, I soon found myself questioning the myths and circumstances of my marriage. I was now a wife, struggling to pursue my career plans. As I followed my husband from place to place, I could not help but wonder how I’d gotten myself here.

I had been born in America. How had I wound up living such a traditional life?

It was this question that drove me into conversations with other married women, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and put me on the path to writing *First Comes Marriage*. Although I once envied my non-Muslim peers for the liberty they had to meet and marry the partners of their choosing, I soon discovered that marriage was a great equalizer. Regardless of our ethnic backgrounds, we all had to reconcile what we dreamed of with the life we were living.

I have now been married for over twenty years, with three children between the ages of 15 and 7. My op-eds and essays, covering Muslim communities and the immigrant experience in the US, have appeared in the *LA Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Refinery29*. For me, writing has always been a way to make sense of both my background and my future, and I hope *First Comes Marriage* will widen the narrative around love and relationships for both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences alike.



**About the book: *First Comes Marriage***

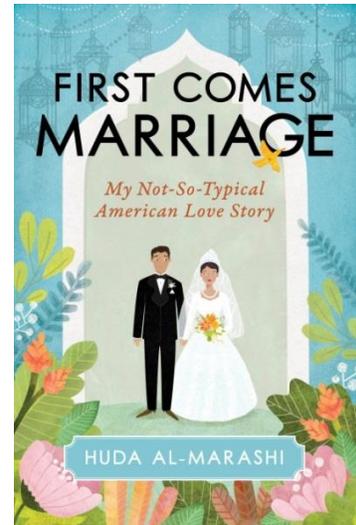
*First Comes Marriage* is the book I wish I had when I was a newly married Muslim-American woman. Raised on modern entertainment culture's almost singular love story of chance meetings and defying the odds, I had no sense of what a healthy, traditional relationship looked like from within the Muslim community. Among non-Muslims, my marriage to the son of our closest family friends, a boy I met when I was only six years old, felt almost embarrassing in its innocence, but in the company of other Muslims, I was convinced that my fiancé and I had sinned for sneaking hugs and kisses before our wedding.

I continue to see the same spirit of confusion among the younger generation practicing Muslims. Although many books and movies have explored the of resisting one's parents and faith to marry outside of the Muslim community, far more common experience: the woman who never had a relationship with prior to her husband; the woman who never dated the man she married; the who loved her spouse but didn't know how to reconcile what she felt with she encountered in romantic novels, television, and movies.

*First Comes Marriage* circles around these kinds of relationship *firsts*. It two virgins, Huda and Hadi, through their first everything, their first time hands, their first kiss, and their first sexual encounters. In doing so, *First Marriage* challenges long-standing taboos regarding the discussion of intimacy within the Muslim community while also combating the most persistent and pernicious stereotypes about Muslims. *First Comes Marriage* deliberately avoids the post 9-11 experience and the narrative surrounding terrorism in order to tell a love story that not only addresses the misconceptions about Muslims and arranged marriages but also sheds light on the immigrant experience in America. At its heart, *First Comes Marriage* is the story of an immigrant family and their American-born daughter's struggle to reconcile a "life within a single body constantly toggling between two minds."

These are themes with an ever-widening cultural relevance for non-Muslim audiences, as well. Not only has the current refugee crisis renewed the debate surrounding immigration, but I'd go so far as to say that with the advent of online dating, a large number of people are voluntarily being set up by database. They are surrendering control to an automated 'aunty,' collecting their information and searching for their algorithmic match. In recent years we have seen reality television programs that are nothing more than modern spins on matchmaking, the long-running *The Bachelor/Bachelorette* series, the early 2000s *Married by America*, Lifetime's *Married at First Sight*, and TLC's particularly analogous *Married by Mom and Dad*.

According to the 2010 census, around 60.3 million Americans are married, and according to a study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, one in three of those couples met through an online service. It is time to broaden the conversation about what it means to fall in love and what it means to call a marriage arranged. As a society, we need more stories that reflect the different paths to coupling and the wide range of experiences within committed relationships. Love stories are not the exclusive property of the single and unattached nor do they belong only to young, white Americans as many the entertainment media would have us believe.



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