



The Sword and the Rose

Tara Sufiana

Go to Publish (Aug 9, 2021)

Softcover \$15.99 (270pp)

978-1-64749-327-1

The Sword and the Rose is a memoir about practicing faith that expresses hope that people can work toward making this a better world.

Tara Sufiana's soulful memoir *The Sword and the Rose* covers travel and five years spent with a Sufi community in Egypt.

In the 1970s, Sufiana, a Californian, ended up in Egypt after four years traveling through Europe and the Middle East. Shifting from her troubadour career playing, singing, and dancing in restaurants and on streets, she adopted the nomadic lifestyle of Sufis, celebrating frequent religious festivals and events. The Oxford hotel in Cairo was her home base. The Sufis bestowed her the title of a healer, and she became famous as a performer. She fell in love. After five years, life as a single woman traveling alone, and with her lover in a conservative religious land, caught up with her, though. After a few run-ins with the police, her visa was not renewed; she departed for Switzerland.

Though the adventure-led beginning of the book covers Sufiana's carefree escapades as she roved between professional gigs, the book becomes more reflective and less active as it progresses, and as Sufiana chooses a lifestyle of intentional poverty and longing. When covering her new relationship, intimate moments and rapturous sensations dominate. At the same time, the Sufis whom she lives among compel her to pursue her artistic and spiritual passions; while she does so with zeal, her unorthodox ways catch the attention of the authorities. She expresses fatigue, and records desperate thoughts; she becomes eager to get away from crowds and watchful eyes.

As the book progresses, the volume of its criticisms of Western culture and institutional religion increase. At the same time, its descriptions of Sufiana's artistic pursuits fall off; they are replaced by meditations on climate change and terrorism. The pacing mimics the actions of a whirling dervish: it builds into spinning energy, then collapses. It moves from coverage of Sufiana's adventures into pointed arguments, following along as its narrator develops greater self-awareness.

The book is immersed in its central culture; it includes Arabic terms and shares insights gathered from fellow travelers. Still, it is inquisitive in tone; Sufiana evades repeating conversations with others in favor of independent reflection, so that her own observations about fellow Oxford hotel residents and the Sufis whom she meets dominate the book, where other people are concerned. And the time period itself is captured via small details, as of the books Sufiana read and the interests of her compatriots.

As the book moves between chronological storytelling, spiritual meditations, and commentary on Sufi and Egyptian cultures, it centers sentiments and pleasure, lending it immediacy. And there are artistic metaphors and sonorous tones that convey Sufiana's persistent longing well. In the end, *The Sword and the Rose* is a meditative memoir about practicing faith and working toward making this a better world.

MARI CARLSON (October 26, 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.