

The Forbidden Book

Sacha Lamb

Levine Querido (Oct 1, 2024)

Hardcover \$19.99 (256pp)

978-1-64614-456-3

A girl resists the limits imposed by her class and gender, daring to seek a new kind of life (with some supernatural help), in Sacha Lamb's wonder-filled historical novel *The Forbidden Book*.

In a shtetl whose rabbi possesses a text written by an angel, Sorel is a rich man's daughter who is promised to a boy she does not love. But on the night before her wedding, compelled by impulses somewhat beyond herself, she escapes through her window instead, venturing into town in disguised as a boy. She tells those she meets that her name is Isser, not knowing that her assumed identity is a beleaguered one: the true Isser is known for printing and selling illegal pamphlets about Jewish emancipation. Soon, Sorel is swept into a mystery involving stolen magic and a probable murder.

As she travels, Sorel encounters a cemetery keeper who speaks in near riddles, a peddler who's fast to offer assistance, and Adela, the tough, enchanting friend of the dybbuk who sometimes rises to guide her. They face off against smugglers, Sorel's scheming father, and Agrat, an angel who resents a contract forged long ago with the Jewish citizens of their town. Still, though they contend with formidable historical and supernatural forces, they prove unflappable: "all three of them were used to wishing the world looked different," and vicious black dogs and lookalike corpses cannot deter them.

Set against the backdrop of a changing world, *The Forbidden Book* is captivating. In a matter of days, Sorel goes from feeling trapped by her status and father's promises to being free of outside expectations and even perhaps able to pursue a different kind of love. Her growing affection for Adela is an electric undercurrent to her story of defiance, bravery, and unexpected friendships.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.