



## ★ **The Madonna Secret: A Novel**

**Sophie Strand**

Bear & Company (Aug 15, 2023)

Softcover \$25.00 (608pp)

978-1-59143-467-2

Sensual, earthy, and mystical, Sophie Strand's novel *The Madonna Secret* views Jesus via the woman who loved him.

Refreshing in its perspective and stunning in its breaks with church-curated, patriarchal characterizations of Jesus and his mission, the story is told from the viewpoint of Mary Magdalene, whom, herein, Jesus loves and weds. She is fleshed out as an educated woman who was born to wealth, and who became a powerful mystic and healer. The book reframes the couple's lives, work, and love from a feminist perspective: here, the voices of oppressed women come through loud and clear, and the human body is honored and enjoyed.

The narrative also shreds patriarchal definitions of who Jesus was and the intent of his ministry, as well as the soul-crushing constrictions that a society dominated by men forced upon women. The image of Jesus as a white, bearded, ascetic man with eyes turned to heaven is shattered as the book brings forth a Jesus who is young and virile—a Jewish man with his own drives and desires, who exhibits a boisterous sense of humor. Close to nature, as likely to be found laughing and drinking with friends as teaching about God's kingdom, he is characterized as a man who loved children and the oppressed and who raged against injustice.

Strand's synesthetic, multisensory descriptions capture a world in which rich incense cannot compare with the scent of a lover's skin, and all senses are equal in their ability to awaken ecstasy. And Jewish life under the cruelties of Roman domination is also portrayed in depth. Still, it is emotion that rules in *The Madonna Secret*, a novel that retells the story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene from a feminist perspective.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2023)

*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.*