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Poisoned Honey: A Story Of Mary Magdalene



Synopsis

This story begins with Mariamne, a vulnerable girl who knows little of the ways of the world. Much as she wants to be in control of her own destiny, she soon learns she has no such power. She must do as her father and brother see fit, and when tragedy strikes, Mari must marry a man she does not love and enter a household where she is not welcome, for the good of her family. But she finds a small way to comfort herself when she meets an Egyptian wisewoman who instructs her in the ways of the occult arts. In the spirit world, Mari finds she has power. Here, she really is in control of her fate. But is she? Or is the magic controlling her? This gripping portrait of one of the most misunderstood and controversial Biblical figures is the story of a young girl's path through manipulation and possession, madness and healing, to a man who will change the world forever. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales. Quick & Dirty: A realistic, and therefore, somewhat sad story of what the author perceives to be a good explanation of what Mary's day-to-day

life and major experiences may have been like, starting in adolescence and moving through to a more refreshing conclusion, perhaps to where the story would begin in the Bible. Opening Sentence: I was possessed. The Review: Marianne, also called Mari, lives in a time period where, as we know, everything was controlled by men. Women were just tools to be used, and were expected to act as such. Women did all the work of the household and lived to serve men, whether their fathers, their husbands, or, even their brothers. Beatrice Gormley, the author, does a most excellent job of describing not only what day-to-day drudgery this equated to, but how trapped and desperate a woman like Mari would feel, with such slim chances that she would be able to live a happy life, with people who love her and she loves in return. Gormley builds up Mari's character exquisitely. She definitely had an exact point she wanted to get across in this book and I think she was able to do that. The narrative makes sense, as do the characters. The characters do not just make decisions on a whim, they are distressed people and are dealing so much with life and death situations that they have little left for things like true love. They have dreams, but must often give them up for the good of their family, which Mari ultimately ends up doing. It really is no surprise when the despicable life Mari is thrust into drives her ultimately to the point of madness. Overall, her story is a depressing one, and most hope is lost that she will be able to recover. The few people that she could trust have been driven away from fear that she is just too much of a risk. Gormley times the book just right, to show that Mari begins as a pretty regular girl, with pretty regular dreams, but with an extra gift, shown to come from her father, that can either be a great blessing when she has the freedom to use it correctly, or a great curse without her even realizing the difference. When she tries to follow her heart, she is rejected at every turn, even by those who love her, and so she ends up using it for selfish purposes instead. When she finally has the experience and wisdom to overcome the evil, she becomes a more powerful woman than even she could imagine. Although Mari is definitely the main character, Gormley alternately gives the view from a man's perspective as well, however, not just any ordinary man. Matthew, as a tax collector, portrays that although men have more control than the women, they are still driven by their opportunities and circumstances. Birth, religion, class and social standing, and business all play a role in decision making as well, and although Matthew's heart tells him one thing, he often listens to his head, knowing that any illogical risk could have deadly circumstances. As Gormley walks through Matthew's decision-making process, it becomes understandable why good people still often make bad choices. Although most of the book shows the difficult journey of survival through less than ideal circumstances, there begins to be hope when the brother that originally surrendered Mari's happiness to save the

family. Her business takes pity on her in her completely despicable state and takes her to the rabbi Yeshua. This is really where the whole story becomes worth reading, when brotherly love is justly shown, especially by those with imperfect faith. Although parts of the book are hard to read, not because they are ill written, but because the pain and hopelessness are so apparent, only someone who knows what true unhappiness is would risk everything to have true happiness.

Notable Scene: In the following days, I was glad for the sparrow's company, and I quickly got to depend on it. One morning, I came down the stairs chatting out loud with Tsippor, thinking the courtyard was empty. Suddenly I realized that Chava was standing there in the shade, watching me. She didn't seem disturbed, and she didn't say anything, but the incident made me remember Ramla's warning about letting spirits follow me into our world: They can do all kinds of mischief. Probably Ramla didn't mean a harmless spirit like the sparrow, but maybe I needed to ask her. By that afternoon, I'd decided to go tell Ramla about the sparrow spirit and ask her advice. On my way to Susannah's house, though, I kept changing my mind. What if Ramla urged me to banish the sparrow, even from my private garden? He was an old friend. These days, I didn't have such a great crowd of friends that I could afford to lose one.

FTC Advisory: Knopf Books for Young Readers/Random House provided me with a copy of *Poisoned Honey: A Story of Mary Magdalene*. No goody bags, sponsorships, material connections, or bribes were exchanged for my review.

While not quite as good as her novel *Salome*, Beatrice Gormley offers a deep and at times disturbing speculation of Mary Magdalene's life before she became a follower of Jesus. In Donna Jo Napoli's *Song of The Magdalene* (also wonderful) Mary Magdalene's demons take the form of epilepsy, and in this novel they resemble schizophrenia. Gormley is not afraid to be gritty and frank about sexuality and the complexities of human nature, which make her characters more believable. She thickens the plot cleverly by overlapping it with the conversion of the tax collector Matthew, who was also (in the novel) a potential husband for Mary. Mary is not simperingly sweet or a cliché tart with a heart- some of her actions are simply terrible and selfish, such as a scene with a fraudulent fortune teller. Gormley purposely leaves it vague as to how she was possessed- was it her practicing black witchcraft, was it building since her innocent childhood, or was she simply mentally ill? Was she truly cured, or was it an extraordinary act of mind over matter? The novel is certainly religious, but not agenda-driven. It has an excellent historical setting, that seems to be quite well researched. A good novel to compare it to, as I said before, is Donna Jo Napoli's *Song of The*

Magdalene.

The depiction of Jesus in this book differs from the Jesus of the Bible. He is dependent upon Mary to explain things to him. Regarding this book being marketed to girls, Mary is forced to have sex with an old man every night. Parents considering buying or checking out this book for their daughters should be aware that this book should not be considered a Christian book and that although it uses the names of characters in the gospels, the Yeshua that this Mary finds is not the same person as the Jesus described by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Mariamne was a pampered daughter of a Jewish wealthy sardine merchant who had visions threw out her childhood and was never taken seriously. Just when she was about to be married to a young man from a family of dyers whom was in her social circle of the village, She was dealt a hard blow to her family. Not only did she lose her beloved father to the fever that swept threw their village on her wedding day but also her betrothed Nicolaos. Mariamne's life would change forever. Her brother promised her hand to a old wealthy merchant named Eleazar to keep the family from losing their business. Mariamne was devastated and soon became possessed by evil spirits. The book has a lot of biblical references and keeps you wondering will Mariamne ever escaper her troubled life.

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