



Magdalene

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Mitch, the widowed bishop of a Mormon congregation, falls in love with Cassie, the woman hired to restructure his steel mill. Meanwhile, a man in Mitch's congregation plots to take over the position of bishop using Cassie's past profession as a prostitute as his weapon.

A Mormon bishop. An ex-prostitute. A man with a vendetta.

Let the games begin...

PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY Starred Review:

"Jovan's explosive saga about the lives, loves, and deeds of a group of powerful Mormons continues in her outstanding third Dunham novel (after *Stay* and *The Proviso*). Kindly Mormon bishop Mitch Hollander, while reorganizing a merger between his steel company and a manufacturer that occurred under perilous circumstances, meets brash and brilliant Cassie St. James, one of Wall Street's toughest strategists and a former prostitute. Their immediate attraction is just as strong as the gulf between Cassie's ruthless attitude toward sex and Mitch's LDS morals, which include no sex outside marriage. Meanwhile, Mitch's scheming subordinate in the church hierarchy, Greg Sitkaris, whom he's trying to have arrested for embezzlement, threatens everything Mitch holds dear, including Cassie and Mitch's flock. Filled with nuanced, unforgettable characters and keen insights into Mormon faith and culture, this is a thrilling, romantic page-turner with a sense of optimism that never comes across as forced or cloying. Like the *Left Behind* series, the Tales of Dunham have great cross-over potential. (Apr. 2011)" --September 3, 2012

Magdalene Details

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From Reader Review Magdalene for online ebook

Jennifer says

My kingdom for more nuance in the Goodreads rating system! *sigh*

This book was very interesting, to say the least. Is it a "Mormon book"? Yes and no. Most Mormons I know will never read it, which is a pity, because they really should. Many non-members who read won't catch some of the Mormon-ish subtleties, which adds a layer to the book that is truly remarkable.

Overall I liked it, but "like" is a really feeble word to use. On the one hand, it was the first book in awhile that had me staying up waaaaay past my bedtime to finish it. The parts dealing with Mormon culture/beliefs/etc was awesome, and I found myself chuckling more than once at the authenticity of it (Every so often I found myself laughing and thinking that so-and-so would NEVER happen in Anita Stansfield's "perfect Mormon culture" universe, and liking the book all the more for it.)

On the other hand, it got bogged down in some of the corporate espionage sections, not to mention I had a bit of a time keeping all the secondary characters straight. And I just COULD NOT accept the fact that the male lead drove a Bugatti.

Notice how I haven't mentioned the sex? I'm not going to, frankly. Sex is a part of life, and as a practicing, believing Mormon I am ALL FOR more Mormon books that DON'T skip over that essential part of a marriage with nothing more than a blushing wink and an embarrassed nod.

So the book isn't perfect. I don't know if I will read it again. But it gave me a lot to think about, and at the end of the day a book can do that for me, then I'm more than satisfied.

Johnna Cornett says

An entirely fictional situation allows romance writer Moriah Jovan to explore both theological musings and romance/sex possibilities between a rich widowed mormon bishop and an rich executive ex-call girl. Some situations in the story arc speak to other books and biblical myths in a literary way, but the book is also written to please the reader.

I'd recommend it to a reader familiar enough with LDS culture and theology to get the repercussions, although there are multiple pages of theological musings, explicated as if by Ayn Rand. In order to enjoy the book, the reader must at the same time not be put off by references to things like nipple jewelry. And, be a reader for reading's sake, not looking to justify the time by merit.

I was entertained.

Heather says

Theric says this is the Mormon book of the year, and I'm going to test that. Is Theric right? Well, how often

is he wrong? :)

Ok. Read it. Thoughts.

Romance thoughts:

Come on! If a book comes to you recommended with the phrases "romance novel" and "explicit sex," you shouldn't have to wait to read over half the book to get to that explicit sex. I've read non-romance with more explicit sex than this (which is not to say that they weren't good sex scenes or that the book needed more). And while the sex was explicit, because of the emotionally vulnerable nature of sex, it was a great plot and character development device. And hey, sex is fun. McKay wanted to read this book with me, but because I knew we wouldn't have time for that, I promised him we'd at least read the sex parts together and he seemed happy with that arrangement. :) And Moriah, since I know you'll read this review, I promise I read some of the thinky parts to him as well. I'm the sort of person who reads thought food aloud to whomever is in the room with me when I'm reading a book.

Character thoughts: On the review on The Exponent blog (<http://www.the-exponent.com/2011/05/2...>), it says the characters are Randian. Having never read anything from Ms. Ayn, I can't vouch for this, but I will agree with the superhumanness. And I'll agree and disagree with Amelia about the characters' flaws: yes they have flaws, but the flaws seem insignificant for the plot or too far back in the past for their characters to seem flawed as the book happens. For example, our bishop character is a multimillion dollar rags to riches story, who works full time as a CEO, part-time as a bishop, and still finds time to go salsa dancing until 2am on Friday nights and devotes his Sunday nights (because bishops have so much time on Sunday) to taking a shift at the steel mill so someone else can get a free Sunday once and a while. Oh and his wife died of MS and he spent 15 years nursing her as she died. Yeah. Ridiculously perfect. And oh yeah, he has flaws: that one time he "gave in" to masturbation (is that a flaw?), and he was still in love with his first girlfriend when he married his wife, and yeah, he's been bottling his temper for a long time which comes out violently- but with impeccable violence: glass is smashed, books are torn and burned! Yeah. Perfect. See? But I have this running joke with McKay when I read or watch fiction: I smile and say, "This is so unrealistic," knowing full well that what I'm viewing/reading is fiction and of course it's unrealistic.

Mormon thoughts: I loved the ward and it made me love my own ward more, because all the cool characters (ie Prissy) are people in my ward. The fictional ward in the book was very believable. I was a little shocked at all the politics around the calling ladder: wanting to be bishop and such. Afterall, we're supposed to say, "No one should *want* to be a bishop- what a burden!" But we can't lie that there isn't a power system behind it. I've actually heard of people making comments like, "If you haven't had a calling that makes you a high priest by the time you're 45, then something's wrong." And callings were talked about in religion classes at BYU as carrots on a string: exact words from my D&C instructor: "You might be a bishop some day, and you might be on the stake high counsel! And you might be a patriarch!" The last one was directed at me, at which time the instructor stopped and said, "Or not." Yeah. AWKWARD. BTW I have my eyes on stake matriarch, thank you very much. ;) Anyway, so yeah, the politics seemed over the top, but I won't say they don't exist and couldn't be just as over the top in reality. We're human. In other Mormon thoughts: I loved the handling of various Mormon issues and the conversations around them. Eternal families can be a really touchy subject. As can garments. And homosexuality. And sex and masturbation. And church courts. (For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the membership record, but the Lord looketh on the heart.)

Pace thoughts: It was ok, but at the end when it really got going, it was much better (and it's not because of

the sex, but because of the political inquiry. Keep your heads out of the gutter!) Good book. It hit on lots of big issues and did it with a romance in the background (or bedroom, if you'd like.)

Julie says

What I've always loved about Moriah Jovan's books is how she brings her characters alive. Each one is a special treat because she not only gives additional glimpses of characters I've fallen in love with in prior books in the series, but she brings in more people to fall in love with. It's like a family reunion, or a dinner scene from "Brothers and Sisters." You never know quite what you're going to get with family, but it's always going to be interesting and fun!

I like that each book has a slightly different flavor. I felt like I'd run a marathon when I read "The Proviso." I lounged and sighed as I read "Stay." I'm still trying to analyze my physical reaction to "Magdalene," but it's all good!

Cassie and Mitch do not disappoint. You don't have to be Mormon or even know much about Mormons to "get" this story. The story isn't about Mormons and Mormonism, it's about some people who happen to be Mormon and how that affects how they live their lives and the choices they make. I think MJ has done a fantastic job of weaving the religion in without making the book about the religion. This is hands down the best book I've read by a Mormon author that includes Mormon characters.

These books are well written and plotted. The characters continue to be the strong point of MJ's writing, in my opinion. I really recommend picking up one of these books and introducing yourself to the Dunham clan.

Emily says

Loved the characters in this book--a fun, easy summer read.

I may read more romance novels if they're like this one.

G (galen) says

I am absolutely LOVE Cassie St. James.

I will refer you here for a much more in depth review. Meanwhile, I'm making lists of which friend I will send this book to next :)

Bettie says

Can't believe I haven't written a review of *Magdalene* yet. I read it as a beta reader quite a while ago. Cass, the heroine/narrator is smart, prickly, conflicted, unreliable, and flat-out fabulous. The story sucked me in at 8 pm one night and spit me out at 4 in the morning bleary-eyed and teary-eyed, and very happy to have read

the tale. I was tired as hell the next day, but *Magdalene* is the kind of book that is worth staying up late to finish.

Christina (Ensconced in Lit) says

Coming from an different sort of Mormon background myself, I was delighted by the unusual characters that Moriah Jovan has developed. Many times I would laugh out loud and say, "That is SO typical!" or at other times be very moved by the devout characters who still managed to love and embrace those not of the faith.

And the rest of it-- story, twists, 100 faceted characters. I could go on and on. This is the first of the Dunham series that I picked up, and it's probably still my favorite (how can you get better than a former prostitute and Mormon bishop making it work?) but I loved the other books too. A must read!! I cannot wait to see Jovan's future work.

Dara says

Okay, Can I just say you have to give any book that can make you lust after a Mormon Bishop 5 stars! Moriah Jovan writes another fantastic Dunham book, and I really suggest you go read it. I was given an ARC by the author.

Stephanie says

Yep, a Mormon romance novel. And it's definitely not rated G. In fact, I'm pretty sure it's the kind of romance being condemned in *Ensign* articles like this one. Lucky for me, I didn't read that article (I just googled it) and if you try to read it to me, I will just cover my ears. La-la-la! I am not listening to you!

I really enjoyed this book. I loved the characters, and appreciated the time that author Moriah Jovan took to develop the romance between Cassandra and Mitch. This was very much necessary because, let's face it, no Mormon bishop is going to rush into a relationship with an ex-hooker. Just saying.

However, the best part, as far as I'm concerned, was the Mormon stuff. Jovan definitely speaks our uniquely Mormon language, and she describes our meetings and tackles many of our unique beliefs (eternal marriage, garments, etc.) really well. I like how she explains things so that non-Mormons can understand us a little better.

Having said that, I think a lot of Mormons will feel like we're misrepresented. Some won't like the fact that Jovan portrays us with all our flaws (the gossip, the pettiness, the ward sociopath...). Some won't like the way her Mormons are so at home with the drinkers and the fornicators and the potty mouths (we're supposed to be "in the world, not of the world" after all). I bet many would think the Mormons as portrayed are too liberal*. Me, I liked all of that. Some of her characters are a little unrealistically super-awesome, and I did think that, overall, the characters were a little more liberal* than I'm used to (they barely batted an eye when the bishop married a non-member), but I've spent most of my life in Idaho and Utah, so I may be wrong about that.

And that's what's fun about this book: pondering it's Mormoness. Does it represent how I view myself? My fellow members? What would those fellow members think of this book, and what would non-Mormons think of us after reading this book? I think it would be a great book to read for Book Club, if the book club members can handle some naughtiness and a lot of salty language.

* Actually, "liberal" is not the word I'm looking for, because I'm not talking politics. I'm tempted to say "open-minded" but that sounds kind of condescending/offensive. I just mean to say that Jovan's Mormons, at least her main characters, don't seem to concern themselves too much with what others are doing, and in my experience, we Mormons generally like to follow the rules, and we like others to follow them, too. Hope that makes sense.

Christine says

Intrigue and eroticism have often been paired in the Romance genre. In Magdalene, Moriah Jovan converts the couple to a ménage à trois by adding an unexpected bedfellow: "Mormonism." (+1 point)

The novel was not written specifically for Latter-day Saints (the detailed doctrinal and procedural explanations would be unnecessary for practicing Mormons), but in the vast cast of characters LDS readers will likely recognize at least one member of their own congregations (such as Prissy, the perspicacious, plus-sized Relief Society instructor). (+1 point)

The relationship between the former hooker and the bishop gets little development, from the first moment of their immediate and mutually acknowledged attraction: only garden-variety misunderstandings and circular arguments constitute the conflict between the protagonist and her hero. The love scenes and sex consume much of the page count, but they take a back seat to the corporate, religious and family intrigue, making the novel more like General or Women's Fiction than a Romance. (-1 point)

Portrayal of contemporary realism is heavy-handed: an excess of expletives that lose their emphasis value, and a surfeit of sexual encounters that lose their sensual potential, by the sheer weight of repetition. (Note to self and all contemporary writers, of whatever genre: It doesn't take long before the four-letter words begin to blur like overlapping graffiti on a ghetto wall, and there's a point beyond which graphic groping and explicit eroticism morph into a mundane catalogue of body parts. Use them judiciously.) (-1 point)

The story is front-loaded with back-story data-dumping disguised as dialogue, and the denouement is weak. There are a couple of minor inconsistencies in repetitions of a character's physical description. But the integration of back-story evens out as the plot progresses, and the psychology of most of the characters presents as reasonably plausible most of the time. (+1 point)

I probably over-analyzed things by finding an extra layer of meaning in the choice of Cassandra for the heroine's name, and in perceiving the overtones of a "passion-play" in the betrayal of Mitch, the beleaguered bishop, but that's the fun part of reading: looking for creative use of conventions, and tropes with twists. (+1 point)

Whatever its warts, the important value of Magdalene lies in seeing Mormons in literature move away from the grossly inaccurate and outdated "evil polygamist" role, as well as out of the cozy-inspirational niche that dominates traditional LDS publishing, into mainstream world culture. Latter-day Saints have been around for almost two hundred years, now, so it's about time they took their place among the multitude of flawed but

ultimately faithful Anglicans and Amish, priests and Puritans, nuns and Nonconformists, monks and Muslims, Buddhists and Biblical protagonists that have populated every genre of fiction. (+2 points)

(The copy of this book that I read came from a public library.)

Philip B. says

The Avengers are back. But I'm not talking about Iron Man, Captain America and Thor. This is the Mormon Avengers, led by the heavy hammer of Sebastian Taight and the stiletto pen of Knox Hilliard along with the rest of the tribe. Just like the previous Tales of Dunham, this one starts by shooting the reader out of a cannon. But at the same time, there is a subtle nuanced threat of intrigue on a personal level.

Jovan employs all her usual building blocks to construct a huge, oversized epic of Titans butting heads, but this time around she seasons the stew with an outsider. Certainly up for the challenge, but a Titan with an unsavory past, Cassie introduces an intimate personal tension into the mix that adds a new and delicious layer in the ongoing street fight.

The second delight, and one of fascination to the non-Mormon reader, is that Jovan takes us much farther into the mundane and daily life of Mormon society than previously. It is effortless. As Cassie is introduced to the Ward, so are we. In this way, Jovan shakes out the voodoo and urban legends and shows us the actual real flesh and blood folks of this society.

Needless to say, as in the other Tales of Dunham, the last third of the book is a stampede to end. At least that is what it feels like.

And I was lucky. After I finished reading and was catching my breath, I got to have a beer.

Leslie says

I don't really have much to add here, to what's already been said by my gaggle of tax deduction producing friends that is. I agree with them for the most part, other than I have a hard time finishing books with dense, large pages. I read for an hour and I make it like 10 pages. This one took me awhile to finish because of it. I liked the Mormoniness of the story, but tended to get bogged down in the detailed business background information given in the first few chapters, and periodically deposited throughout the book(I had the same complaint about The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo). That minor blip aside, of course I liked the well-written thinking about sex, talking about sex, wanting to have sex, and finally actually having sex parts, so no surprises there, and I liked the generalized likeability of the heroes of the story, and there were many, probably because they were super rich do gooders, and of course, hot.

Estara says

Yes, this grabbed me again right away - another tale featuring the Dunham family, historically and religiously rooted in Mormon Kansas City but with personal drama and histories making them very un-Mormon Mormons indeed.

And in this book the focus is widening to include family friend Mitch Hollander and his future wife-to-be - who actually is the first-person heroine and unreliable narrator (mostly because she is very effective at lying to herself)- Cassandra St. James. Her first person narration is interwoven with an omnipotent narrator who can look into the thoughts of the others in the chapters focussing on Mitch.

There is undeniably a bonus if you have read the two previous Dunham tales, because this book is a follow-up to those stories (and partially an accompaniment to *Stay* in particular). This time Moriah Jovan, who is from a Mormon background herself so she should know what she's talking about, also dips much deeper into Mormon faith and organization - which as a Roman Catholic in conservative Bavaria is quite fascinating to me.

As Cassie St. James is not Mormon the information never comes across as an info-dump - which is a relief after the dense economical dealings and intrigues in the first few pages of the book which basically went over my head, being based on how corporations work. They are needed to explain how Cassie and Mitch meet, though, her being set-up as the spiritual successor to *King Midas*/financial wizard Sebastian Taight (one of the heroes in *The Proviso*) and necessary to finagle Mitch Hollander's Steelworks company out of a disadvantageous situation.

I adore the fact that Cassie is not a WASP, and nothing big is made out of that. It just enhances her beauty. We also have happy gay people in this book, both married and single. And all the scenes that clearly show the value of female friendship, yay!

Yes, we actually have grown-up people who have grown-up children of their own (both married and procreated very young indeed) as the focus of the romance part of this book, which I actually thought was the main focus (much like *Stay*. I guess when Moriah Jovan takes the time to focus on one couple only, the romance as a whole stays at the centre of her books). However, as the author tags her own book, this is also all about family, -creating family, dealing with family history, letting-go of family if necessary, the fact that family does not have to do with blood relations.

As is always the case in her books, the protagonists come with hefty baggage - like the book blurb implies. I had been wondering why certain turns in MJ's books were vaguely familiar to me - and now that the focus is more clearly on the importance of religion to these people as well, I have found the books they reminded me of: Andrew M. Greeley's Roman Catholic lovers who worship the women they end up with and often go through a crisis of faith, but also have the support of a large family.

The advantage to me as a woman is that MJ's heroines are not set-up as angels or saints, rescuing the men in their lives and gracing them with their presence (I do have to admit I enjoy AMG's general fondness for women, considering he's a Catholic priest in Chicago). They are extremely competent at what they do (I wonder if the Rand/Libertarian sympathies that are included but not as featured as in *The Proviso* here, are one reason for that), but they want a partnership where they can help and be helped in turn.

And they go at that with style and panache and zest ^^ (and lots of money because I guess that is a marker of

success or even god's favour in that world - I remember learning in history class that Puritan faith had this idea and spread it in the New World to a large extent), no matter if it's dealing with family or business or personal hang-ups. The cameos we got from the couples of the previous books made sense and didn't overtake the storyline, so it was just nice to see them.

The sexual tension between Mitch and Cassie is total fun, and I adore the fact that her is a white man who CAN dance. I like that MJ's men own their bodies, their brains and their sexuality with no bowing under peer pressure by the time we meet them.

I question the idea that *paying forward* comes naturally to humans and if everyone did it we wouldn't need government support for the disadvantaged in this day and age. However, MJ doesn't harp on this, so the two of us can just agree to disagree - and be happy that the Dunham family sees itself as the protectors of producers (I didn't get the impression that farmers were counted among those, for example) and as distributors of the vengeance of God to the bad guys (and yes they are aware, that this sentiment is out of the OLD testament and not the new one).

So we get a relishing bit of an eye for an eye, which would be over the top but for the fact that the crimes are dastardly (taking advantage of upstanding workers in no position of strength and ripping off their savings, as well as psycho-terror) and that it is dealt with by a woman whose personal history made her a victim from her childhood on and who had to go through horrid times to be able to free herself of ties she had been forced into.

In the end I cheer her and Mitch on for standing up for themselves and triumphing. I sure hope MJ is interested in eventually returning to this timeline (the next one will be a historical prequel), because I've become invested in this family group.

Caveats: (view spoiler)

Aside: As a woman whose teenager time was during the 80s, I loved the various fragments of songs used as the chapter headings. And - as always for her own company - the .epub is impeccably and beautifully formatted.

Inez Kelley says

I adored this book. I never thought I would find a Mormon Bishop sexy but I did!

Cassie irritated the hell out of me halfway through the book but she was supposed to. Her unreliable narrator stance made me want to shake her but Mitch never wavered in his values or beliefs, in his religion or in Cassie. And that gave her the strength to grow. They were real and vivid and not carbon copies of stereotypes. I wanted Mitch to bend, to cave, to give into his desire but he didn't because that wasn't who he was. He was a devout man who fell in love but never strayed from his faith. And when his world was rocked like the Titanic, Cassie was his life raft.

The Mormon culture is foreign to me, outside my scope of experience. But Jovan's insights and explanations walked me through it, explained the mythos to me in a way that didn't bore me to tears. Much like a

historical, I trusted a Mormon author to show me her world and she did it in ways that made sense to me, someone outside that culture. It wasn't a preachy story or a YOU WILL GO TO HELL tale, it was an honest glimpse into a world I had no experience with.

The book is long and involved and twisted and frank and I read the entire thing in 2 days. Plus I walked away feeling richer for having read it.
