

Bride of the Buddha

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Bride of the Buddha is a luminous, imaginative story of love, courage, and devotion that brings the turbulent times around the birth of Buddhism to life as they were lived by the wife whom Siddhartha abandoned to follow his spiritual path.

In a time when women were expected to marry, have children, serve their husbands in silence, and hope to be reborn as a man, Yasodhara, traumatized by the death of her younger sister, vows never to marry. Her greatest desire is to become a homeless spiritual seeker and wander in search of meaning and truth. When treachery causes the death of her older sister just as she is about to wed Siddhartha, fifteen year-old Yasodhara agrees to take her place, sacrificing her quest for enlightenment for the sake of her family. Two days after the birth of their son, Siddhartha tells her that he is leaving. It is he who will wander, seek, and find the truth.

Locked into the women's quarters, Yasodhara learns of Siddhartha's enlightenment, and of the many women who desire to follow the master. Left desolate when her small son determines to follow his father and become a monk, Yasodhara escapes to undertake her own spiritual journey. Disguised as a monk, she takes the name "Ananda," meaning "bliss," and marshalls all her courage and devotion to engage in a quest that involves life-threatening challenges and rebellion against a society entrenched in patriarchy. Infiltrating the all-male sangha, she works for women's ordination and learns of hidden intrigues and dangers that threaten the Buddha's life and teachings.

Blending fact, fiction, symbolism, and creative imagination, *Bride of the Buddha* is an immersive novel about the founding of Buddhism, told in the voice of a woman who would not be excluded from the spiritual quest, nor from the presence of the man whom she loved.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January / February 2021)

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