



Soulmates

Jessica Grose

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"For anyone who has ever suspected something sinister lurking behind the craze of new-age spirituality, Jessica Grose has crafted just the tale for you. With the delicious bite of satire and the page-turning satisfaction of a thriller, *Soulmates* is a deeply compelling, funny and sharply observed look at just how far we will go to achieve inner peace."—Lena Dunham

A clever, timely novel about a marriage, and infidelity, the meaning of true spirituality, perception and reality from the author of *Sad Desk Salad*, in which a scorned ex-wife tries to puzzle out the pieces of her husband's mysterious death at a yoga retreat and their life together.

It's been two years since the divorce, and Dana has moved on. She's killing it at her law firm, she's never looked better, thanks to all those healthy meals she cooks, and she's thrown away Ethan's ratty old plaid recliner. She hardly thinks about her husband—ex-husband—anymore, or about how the man she'd known since college ran away to the Southwest with a yoga instructor, spouting spiritual claptrap that Dana still can't comprehend.

But when she sees Ethan's picture splashed across the front page of the *New York Post*—"Nama-Slay: Yoga Couple Found Dead in New Mexico Cave"—Dana discovers she hasn't fully let go of Ethan or the past. The article implies that it was a murder-suicide, and Ethan's to blame. How could the man she once loved so deeply be a killer? Restless to find answers that might help her finally to let go, Dana begins to dig into the mystery surrounding Ethan's death. Sifting through the clues of his life, Dana finds herself back in the last years of their marriage . . . and discovers that their relationship—like Ethan's death—wasn't what it appeared to be.

A novel of marriage, meditation, and all the spaces in between, *Soulmates* is a page-turning mystery, a delicious satire of our feel-good spiritual culture, and a nuanced look at contemporary relationships by one of the sharpest writers working today.

Soulmates Details

Date : Published September 27th 2016 by William Morrow (first published July 5th 2016)

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Author : Jessica Grose

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From Reader Review *Soulmates* for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

I was looking for some summer reading that was light but still smart—a harder task than it should be, in my estimation. Jessica Grose is the editor of the weekly e-newsletter *Lenny*, which is usually very sharp and well-done, so I thought her second novel, *Soulmates*, might fit the bill. Unfortunately, my instincts were incorrect. Grose sets up a reasonably intriguing premise, but it's undermined by the weakly developed protagonist, Dana, who mostly comes across as implausibly stupid. She's constantly entering into situations that seem astonishingly risky to any reader who's been paying attention, but Dana is never more than slightly cautious and never fails to be surprised by the danger that crops up in her path—there is no warning sign, no matter how blatant, that she can't blithely disregard for the sake of moving the plot forward. The book did have an interesting conclusion, and in the last few pages I finally saw what Grose had been going for all along. As I closed the book, I admired her ambition but, regrettably, felt that she hadn't achieved what she'd set out to do. One bright spot is that my copy of *Soulmates* contained a lengthy excerpt from Grose's first novel, *Sad Desk Salad*, and I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed it. I'll seek out that book eventually, but, alas, I'm unable to recommend this one.

Hannah says

I just hope my friends and sister are a liiiiiiittle more convincing/concerned if I ever decide to take a sabbatical to go investigate my dead estranged husband's murder-suicide in rural New Mexico at a New Age retreat center.

Becky says

Dana has moved on in the two years since her husband left her. She works hard and the law firm has noticed. She's also in great shape. But when she spies a headline and her ex's picture on the front page of the New York Post, she realizes she hasn't moved on quite as well as she thought. Ethan and the yoga instructor he left Dana for have been found in a cave. Or rather their bodies have. And now Dana is determined to find out what happened. In order to do so, though, it means traveling to New Mexico and spending time with the very group that Ethan abandoned everything for. A group that, for Dana and most outsiders, seems to be some sort of cult. But Dana knows that if she's ever to understand what led to Ethan's death, she'll have to convince these people that she belongs and believes - something the cynical lawyer admits is going to be difficult.

I have to say that I really appreciated Grose's humor and snark in this latest. I, too, have what I think is a healthy skepticism for any kind of cultish mentality and that's exactly what the group Ethan joins seems to share. At least at the outset. In reality it's kind of worse than she expects.

In spite of all the signs that she shouldn't get involved, not least of which is some time spent with Ethan's father before heading off to the "yoga retreat," Dana throws herself into her investigation. And it's not just the truth behind Ethan's death that Dana is searching for, it's what happened to their marriage as well. How the man she thought she knew so well could become someone so different. Someone who would leave her so easily.

I'll try not to be spoilery, but I have thoughts about the ending. Thoughts I've been dying to mull over with someone!

The end of Soulmates was not at all what I expected. I kind of saw it coming, but it still wasn't what I expected. And I wasn't sure how I felt about it either. It's definitely an ending that I think a lot of readers will probably not be so keen on, but after much thought I've decided that I kind of loved it. Again, it wasn't where I expected the story to go, but it was the kind of ending that sticks with you. And I found I stewed over it. Until I decided it worked. I'll admit a younger me would have hated it thought :)

Elizabeth says

i get the daily email newsletter the skimm & they recommended this book. yikes- i'm thinking they should stick to delivering the news.

Katy says

What did I just read?

I don't even know. I'm somehow simultaneously bewildered, pissed, annoyed, and frustrated.

Dana is a lawyer who works 90 hours a week to support herself and her husband Ethan, who is doing a good job of not having a job. He's a creative type, waiting for inspiration by playing video games and watching Law & Order re-runs. This causes major resentment on her part and their marriage becomes tense but Dana doesn't think of it as more than just a rough patch. Evidently, Ethan disagreed. He leaves her for his yoga partner Amaya, who "understands him". And you know, "encourages his spiritual growth". And also sleeps with him. He leaves Dana a note and never contacts her again. Two years later, she finds a picture of him and Amaya in the newspaper. They were found dead in a cave not far from the ashram in New Mexico they ran off to. This brings up a lot of unresolved feelings for Dana as she never really got any closure. The sheriff in New Mexico wants to meet up with her and she decides that if she goes to see him, she can also check into the resort/ashram and maybe find out what happened to Ethan and Amaya. She doesn't really buy into anything that is practiced at the ashram but finds a pamphlet there that Ethan wrote about this experience finding himself and leaving Dana for Amaya. This gives her insight into his side of the story and leads her to discover things she never knew about him. There is a whodunit vein running throughout the book or at least a *whatthefhellhappened* kind of thing but the ending left me feeling empty and pissed that I spent hours reading this book.

Honestly, I don't think I have anything positive to say about this book. Dana spends 85% of the book as one person and the last 15% as someone completely different. There is no explanation for her transformation and even if there was, I still don't think I'd buy it. It was a complete 180-degree change that was just utterly unbelievable. I had a lot of sympathy for Dana throughout the entire book. Then the ending just obliterated all of it. (view spoiler)

I didn't even enjoy the writing. The sections that are written from Ethan's point of view as a pamphlet read

like a badly written diary entry. He is basically whining about how mean Dana is to him and how that justified his affair and abandonment. He can't believe that when he tells his brother that he made out (what grown man calls kissing "making out") with Amaya (while married to Dana) his brother becomes angry and disappointed in him. What did he expect, a pat on the back? Permission because Dana is grouchy from working 90 hours a week? I hated that Ethan was made into such a terrible person that I didn't care that he was murdered. Or Amaya. I felt like that should have been the point of the book. He never came off as a sympathetic character.

This was just a truly underwhelming read that left me feeling cheated and just plain pissed. I do not, will not, recommend.

*I received an ARC in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Kari Olfert says

I loved Soulmates especially the last chapter, I actually want to tell you what happens!! But I won't. The book is laid out kind of like a diary with each chapter being a different characters perspective and I'm learning that this is my favourite style of fiction. I read this book in a day and would have preferred to read it in one sitting but daily interruptions kept interfering. Read this if you get a chance. :)

Gloria Cangahuala says

Well, this book had a lot of potential and an interesting premise. Dana Morrison is doing fine after her husband Ethan left her for another woman two years ago. Then Dana sees a newspaper headline with a photo of Ethan and his paramour: "Nama-Slay: Yoga Couple Found Dead in New Mexico Cave." That's when Dana realizes she actually hasn't gotten over Ethan. She resolves to find out what happened to him and in the process finds herself exploring Ethan's world of new-age yoga and mysticism.

The plot of finding out what happened to Ethan is actually secondary to the main plot of Dana's discovering herself. And this is the major disappointment. I read this book with the expectation of reading a mystery novel. It's not a mystery novel. Although there is a mystery (Ethan's death), and the mystery is solved in the end (in a most unsatisfactory way), this is not a mystery novel. The majority of the novel revolves around Dana's exploration of new-age spirituality, and the book goes into great detail about her experiences. Admittedly, author Jessica Grose's descriptions are bitingly funny in their acerbic lampooning of new-age culture, but these descriptions are the gist of this book.

Maybe if my initial expectations had been properly set, I would have enjoyed this book more. Don't read this book expecting a mystery because you'll be greatly disappointed.

Julie says

Soulmates by Jessica Grose is a 2016 William Morrow publication.

This is a quirky novel, not at all like what I was anticipating.

Several years back. Dana's husband, Ethan, runs off with his yoga instructor, to live in a cult like environment, and make yoga videos for married couples.

But, when Dana discovers the couple has been found dead, she simply must travel to the compound, convinced something about the deaths just doesn't add up.

I'm not sure what to think of this book. It's a mystery. It's a satire. I normally enjoy anything that's off the beaten path like this, but what makes a satire work, for the most part, is knowing a little bit about the subject at hand and well, I know nothing about New Age, and while I have incorporated yoga into my exercise regimen from time to time, I had no idea yoga enthusiast had their own 'community'. So, the exaggerations and perhaps ridicule of this lifestyle fell flat for me, as I found it mostly just annoying, and these people were eye rolling ridiculous to me.

Ethan's narrative got on my nerves after a time, because I can't stand lazy, immature people with no ambition, in the first place, so this segment dragged on far too long, because, of course I knew how things were going to turn out for Ethan in the end.

No one in this book was sane, I did understand the irony of how things turned out in the end, although I had a hard time buying it, and was pretty disappointed in it, but I think this book just flew over my head for the most part.

Thankfully, this is a short book and didn't require a large investment of my time. But, overall, I applaud the imaginative plot, if nothing else, but this was not my kind of book.

2 stars

Kaisha says

Meh. This one had a great potential and a fun plot but it didn't quite pull it off. I think what bothered me the most was the multiple 1st person narratives which all sounded the same (save for the dad) and Ethan's book about why he left Dana, which I just could not buy as anything other than a convenient plot device. I did appreciate the ending though, that was a nice touch.

Juliecambria says

No. Just no.

Ade says

If you like *The Girls* by Emma Cline then you'll like this book. so sad this book is also not for my mood. It could be good romance thriller but it hard to related to the character. Because I consider myself as religious person so I totally consider this spiritual mumbo jumbo kind of bullsh** just like Dana in the beginning then the ending is totally big 'wth'

Katie says

Absolute trash. Sloppy and lazy writing. All of the characters have the exact same voice and the story is so cliché that there's no suspense. This is either "My very first creative writing class assignment" or "Trying to write a (badly executed) parable about what happens when a woman gets too caught up in a failed relationship." Either way, the result is garbage.

Laura says

This is the story of Dana, who sees her ex-husband on the front page of a newspaper, along with the woman he left her for. They're both dead, and Ethan is being blamed for it. Dana goes about exploring what happened, and setting things right: the end of her marriage, the end of Ethan's life, the direction of her own future.

I really liked the way this started. It felt very modern, and pulled the reader right into it.

And the idea of closure, of finding out what really happened to the end of Dana's marriage, is too tantalizing to ignore.

Getting the different points of view fills in the picture fully.

And Dana's immersion into Ethan's life before his death is a risky adventure, but one worth taking.

Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, the story derails. I didn't like the ending at all, and the set-up doesn't really lead to this conclusion. But for 90% of it, this is a really great read. If you're interested in it, you'll be happy you read it, so pick it up.

My thanks to Library Thing for a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Jennifer says

Soulmates is a standalone, satirical mystery novel written by Jessica Grose. Through the use of satire, this story features elements of New Age spirituality, the yoga culture, meditation practices, and how a stereotypical cult may operate/manipulate. The whole subject felt like one big internal chuckle and eye roll while you listen to a brand new ~~duped~~ fanatic talk about their amazing life discovery...and that's exactly how this novel is supposed to feel.

On a non-satirical note, I found a real life lesson in watching the disintegration of a marriage. It's easy to expect that all the work we put into a new relationship will carry us through the long-haul but that's so far from the truth. The seasoned relationship is the one that requires the most nurturing. Like a garden, you can never stop caring for it or it will not continue to grow. Pay attention, show interest, be supportive, everyday remember why you chose that person, and grow your love ♥

My favorite quote:

"When you have a partner that supports you fully, you can go places physically and metaphysically that you did not think were possible. You can walk right up to the edge of darkness, stare into the abyss and know someone is there to catch you if you fall."

Note: According to an online interview with Ms. Grose found [HERE](#), the plotline and subject matter of Soulmates was inspired by a true life, cult-related tragedy you can read about in this NY Times article. However, Ms. Grose stresses repeatedly that the people and events in Soulmates are completely fictional and are not to be confused with the true 2012 event.

Sally Ember says

I usually do not read others' reviews before writing my own, but this time, I did. I also read an extensive interview of the author, Jessica Grose <http://www.vogue.com/article/jessica-...> , which I do recommend others read if you are going to consider reading this book Soulmates: A Novel, anyway (after reading my or others' reviews). I had to read others' POVs because my own were all over the place.

I ended this book feeling angry, disappointed, betrayed, disgusted and confused, and that was all the author's fault. However, once I read the interview with her and some of the other reviews online, I was able to sort it all out.

Here are my issues with this book and the reason I gave it only 1 star (which I rarely do for a book I can actually finish):

- 1) it is (by the author's own admission, which was brazenly given in the above-linked interview), NOT a well-researched fiction-based-on-fact book, even though it pretends to be. The aspects of Buddhism, yoga, retreat centers, cults, leadership issues in same, and potential for exploitation and seduction (psychological and sociological) that this author presents are mostly and hugely inaccurate and misleading. In her words, a "mish-mash" which she "made up."
- 2) there are about three types of characters, and then each of them sounds just like all the others in their group. Even the main characters are not well-differentiated from each other and not well-drawn.
- 3) the plot is not credible. Many other reviewers have picked it apart in their write-ups, so I won't rehash all the issues, here. NO spoilers. However, I will say, if you're looking to read a "who done it" that answers questions by its end, which this book is sometimes billed to be (a "mystery"), you will be disappointed. Almost nothing key is answered definitively.
- 4) the changes that Dana (the protagonist) undergoes are neither credible nor suitably motivated.
- 5) there is no one to like in the cast of characters.
- 6) most of the characters are 2-dimensional and not interesting.
- 7) this book is filled with stereotypes and cliches from the 1960s and 1970s plastered into the 20teens for no apparent reason (which she tries to justify in her interview and fails, in my opinion).

I kept reading it because I needed to know how badly this author would trash sane spiritual seekers, authentic

spiritual teachers who operate with integrity, and genuine practitioners (I am personally acquainted with dozens). However, there was no one in her book fitting those descriptions, so I never found out.

This book is a poorly written, unsatisfying, failed satire/ unresolved mystery: don't bother
