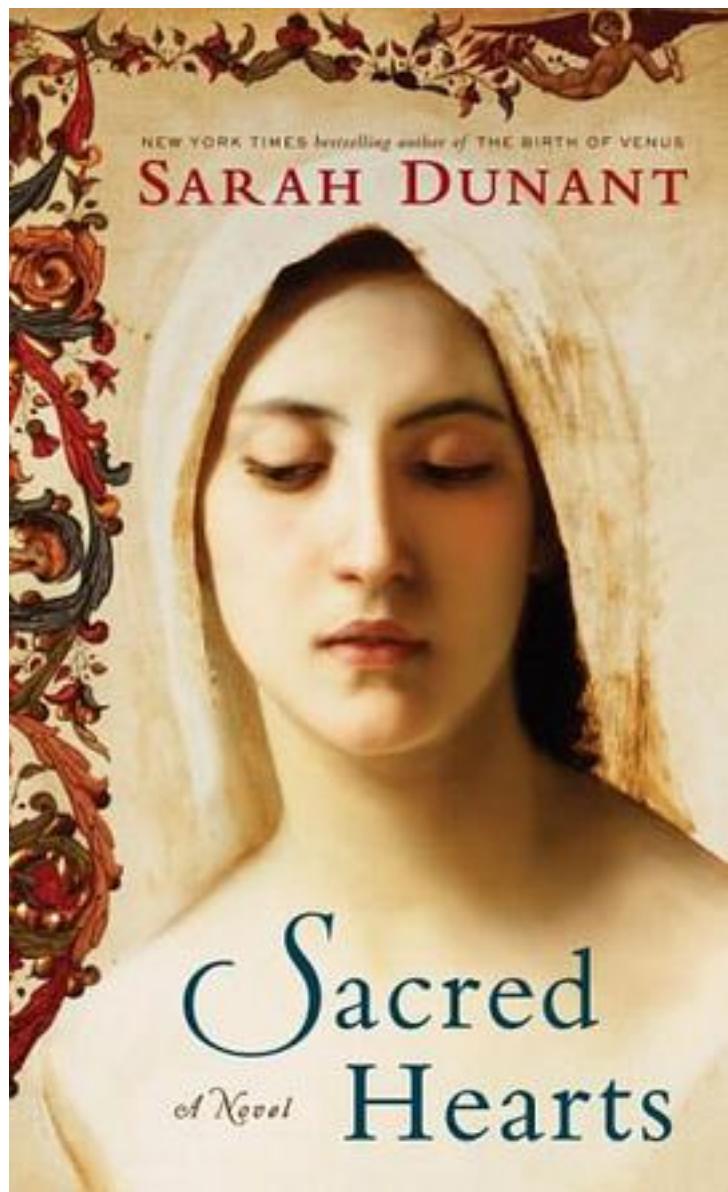


Sacred Hearts



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The year is 1570, and in the convent of Santa Caterina, in the Italian city of Ferrara, noblewomen find space to pursue their lives under God's protection. But any community, however smoothly run, suffers tremors when it takes in someone by force. And the arrival of Santa Caterina's new novice sets in motion a chain of events that will shake the convent to its core.

Ripped by her family from an illicit love affair, sixteen-year-old Serafina is willful, emotional, sharp, and defiant—young enough to have a life to look forward to and old enough to know when that life is being cut short. Her first night inside the walls is spent in an incandescent rage so violent that the dispensary mistress, Suora Zuana, is dispatched to the girl's cell to sedate her. Thus begins a complex relationship of trust and betrayal between the young rebel and the clever, scholarly nun, for whom the girl becomes the daughter she will never have.

As Serafina rails against her incarceration, others are drawn into the drama: the ancient, mysterious Suora Magdalena—with her history of visions and ecstasies—locked in her cell; the ferociously devout novice mistress Suora Umiliana, who comes to see in the postulant a way to extend her influence; and, watching it all, the abbess, Madonna Chiara, a woman as fluent in politics as she is in prayer. As disorder and rebellion mount, it is the abbess' s job to keep the convent stable while, outside its walls, the dictates of the Counter-Reformation begin to purge the Catholic Church and impose on the nunneries a regime of terrible oppression.

Sarah Dunant, the bestselling author of *The Birth of Venus* and *In the Company of the Courtesan*, brings this intricate Renaissance world compellingly to life. *Amid Sacred Hearts* is a rich, engrossing, multifaceted love story, encompassing the passions of the flesh, the exultation of the spirit, and the deep, enduring power of friendship.

From the Hardcover edition.

作者介绍:

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