



Altar Music: A Novel

Christin Lore Weber

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In her achingly beautiful and revelatory first novel, Christin Lore Weber, a former nun, explores the nature and power of passion -- sexual, religious, and artistic -- and brings us into a mysterious, cloistered world rarely made public. Set in the wild, rock-and-lake region of northern Minnesota, this is an exquisitely told tale of three generations of strong-willed women and their inner battles to balance personal longings with the disciplines of their church.

Meghan, in the first generation, dismisses the priest's injunctions regarding sex and succumbs to her passion for her husband. But when family tragedy strikes, she believes she has been brought down by the hand of God himself for her sexual indulgence. In the second generation, Kate is so afraid of what God could take away -- "husbands, fathers, brothers, music even. God could take your life if he wanted" -- that she learns to steel herself against any deep emotion or desire, to simply "endure, be faithful, and hope to be spared some small thing she loved, something perhaps God didn't want." By the third generation, the passions that moved her mother and grandmother have converged and intensified in young Elise, who is roused by forces beyond her understanding. She is at once a daughter of the Catholic church, a music prodigy, and a tuning fork for nature's wildness. But upon her high school graduation in 1958, Elise forsakes her musical genius and her family to enter the convent -- a beautiful, exhilarating, disillusioning, and haunting experience that will drive her, ultimately, to consider leaving the church.

Written with stunning lyricism and emotional authenticity, *Altar Music* is a portrait of a nun as a young girl, a portrait of a family both defined and divided by its religious beliefs, and a powerful story about mothers and daughters. Heart-wrenching and thought-provoking, this novel brilliantly depicts the blurring of the lines between sexual passion, artistic passion, and religious fervor, and the losses we suffer when we try to translate one into another.

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Ken Martin:

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