



The Twentieth Wife

Indu Sundaresan

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An enchanting seventeenth-century epic of grand passion and adventure, this debut novel tells the captivating story of one of India's most legendary and controversial empresses -- a woman whose brilliance and determination trumped myriad obstacles, and whose love shaped the course of the Mughal empire.

She came into the world in the year 1577, to the howling accompaniment of a ferocious winter storm. As the daughter of starving refugees fleeing violent persecution in Persia, her fateful birth in a roadside tent sparked a miraculous reversal of family fortune, culminating in her father's introduction to the court of Emperor Akbar. She is called Mehrunnisa, the Sun of Women. This is her story.

Growing up on the fringes of Emperor Akbar's opulent palace grounds, Mehrunnisa blossoms into a sapphire-eyed child blessed with a precocious intelligence, luminous beauty, and a powerful ambition far surpassing the bounds of her family's station. Mehrunnisa first encounters young Prince Salim on his wedding day. In that instant, even as a royal gala swirls around her in celebration of the future emperor's first marriage, Mehrunnisa foresees the path of her own destiny. One day, she decides with uncompromising surety, she too will become Salim's wife. She is all of eight years old -- and wholly unaware of the great price she and her family will pay for this dream.

Skillfully blending the textures of historical reality with the rich and sensuous imaginings of a timeless fairy tale, *The Twentieth Wife* sweeps readers up in the emotional pageant of Salim and Mehrunnisa's embattled love. First-time novelist Indu Sundaresan charts her heroine's enthralling journey across the years, from an ill-fated first marriage through motherhood and into a dangerous maze of power struggles and political machinations. Through it all, Mehrunnisa and Salim long with fiery intensity for the true, redemptive love they've never known -- and their mutual quest ultimately takes them, and the vast empire that hangs in the balance, to places they never dreamed possible.

Shot through with wonder and suspense, *The Twentieth Wife* is at once a fascinating portrait of one woman's convention-defying life behind the veil and a transporting saga of the astonishing potency of love.

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