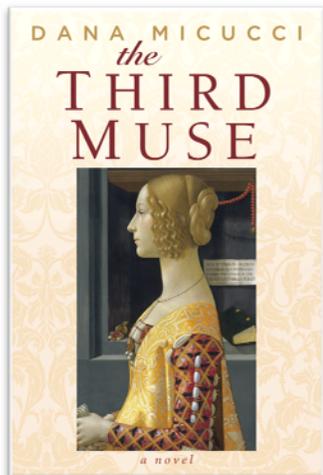


DANA MICUCCI
the
THIRD MUSE
a novel



THE THIRD MUSE PRESS KIT



The Third Muse

Dana Micucci

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An international art-world mystery inspired by Renaissance ideals and the deep divine feminine teachings of the Magdalene Order takes you beyond *The Da Vinci Code* on an unforgettable journey into your heart.

New York journalist Lena Leone is beautiful, successful, and has a devoted boyfriend. Yet something is missing. When her editor sends her to Paris to investigate and write about a stolen Renaissance masterpiece, the *Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni*, she becomes immersed in a dangerous art scandal that tests her to the core and jeopardizes her life. Lena's haunting visions of Giovanna in Renaissance Florence turn up the heat.

The Third Muse combines mystery, suspense, history, and spirituality with radiant eloquence. Dana Micucci masterfully explores the timeless quest for wholeness through the soul connection of two women six centuries apart. At the heart of her exquisite novel is a story of unbridled heroism that will inspire strength and courage in women for generations to come. Discover the seven life-altering initiations that lead Lena not only to solve the mystery of the stolen painting but to open to a more expansive love.

“This beautifully written mystery, set in the international art world, expresses a deep heart-centered wisdom inspired by Renaissance ideals and the goddess archetype. In our own time of great change and rebirth, Dana Micucci celebrates the return of a divine feminine consciousness and the power of love.”

—Marci Shimoff, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Happy for No Reason* and *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*

“Dana Micucci's *The Third Muse* is a wonderful blend of spirituality, history, suspense, and intrigue. At its center are the deep divine feminine mystery teachings of the Magdalene Order. This novel serves as a powerful vehicle of awakening and remembrance for the many present-day members of this Order who have yet to discover who they are.” —Catherine Ann Clemett, author of *Soulweaving* and co-author of *Anna, The Voice of the Magdalenes*

Dana Micucci has enjoyed a decades-long career as a widely published journalist and author writing about culture, travel, and spirituality. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Town & Country*, among others. In addition to her new novel, *The Third Muse*, her books include *Sojourns of the Soul: One Woman's Journey around the World and into Her Truth*, a gold winner in the 2013 Nautilus Book Awards; *Artists in Residence*; and *Best Bids: The Insider's Guide to Buying at Auction*. She conducts transformational talks and workshops nationwide.

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THE THIRD MUSE ENDORSEMENTS

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“The Third Muse is a captivating read! From the intriguing international art scene to time-traveling through the Renaissance, you will be inspired and touched by the spiritual exploration of this book.”

—James F. Jereb, Ph.D., award-winning author, visionary artist, and founder of the sacred site Stardreaming

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EXCERPT FROM *THE THIRD MUSE*

Chapter One

“Hold onto your seat, mademoiselle,” Max said. “You’re going to Paris!”

“What?” New York journalist Lena Leone brushed the dark curls from her face and held her breath, anxiously awaiting the news from her editor at the Balthazar bistro in SoHo. Turning toward Max, she inadvertently knocked over her wine glass. What was left of the red wine trickled onto the bar, and she quickly wiped it up with her napkin, which now appeared oddly bloodstained.

Max slung his blazer over a barstool and sat down beside her. Lena thought of him as a slightly younger version of Spencer Tracy, with his disheveled salt-and-pepper hair and kind, deep-set eyes and ruddy features. Max had never sent her abroad on an assignment; he was always so tight with the budget. And particularly now, with the magazine floundering, she could hardly believe his words.

“That’s right.” He beamed. “I loved your pitch. I want you to investigate the Ghirlandaio.” He read from an email she had sent days ago: “One of the most valuable old master paintings in the world. A rare portrait of the young Florentine woman Giovanna Tornabuoni. Just sold for \$48 million at Sotheby’s London. Supposedly stolen several months ago, now hanging in the Louvre. Claude Weintraub, the Louvre curator, has been indicted for buying it.”

Lena could barely contain her enthusiasm. Tingling shot up her back to the base of her skull. Her reflection in the mirror behind the bar revealed the refined, classic beauty of a 1940s screen star, to which she had often been compared. Slender and statuesque with innate elegance, she radiated a maturity beyond her twenty-eight years.

Max grasped her arm. “Interpol has begun an investigation based on an anonymous tip. It could be the art story of the year, Lena. Seeing as Tom is down with a broken hip, I want you to cover it.” Tom was the senior editor and a top-notch writer. Lena felt only a little guilty for being happy about his hip.

“You’re an excellent journalist.”

“I don’t know what to say, Max.” Lena fidgeted in her seat, conscious of her racing pulse. “I’m thrilled, honored. It’s a dream assignment!” This could be the opportunity she had long awaited, a chance to really shine.

Deep down, she knew she was capable of greatness, but she’d never completely trusted her instincts or given herself enough credit for her successes. Already an accomplished journalist, she had been on staff at the art magazine *Express* for six years now, having won an award for her incisive investigative reporting on the illegal trafficking of antiquities. A native New Yorker, she loved her work and the edgy, electric energy of the city, which conveniently complemented her own. She had a broad circle of friends, a few of whom enjoyed her closest confidence, and a brilliant, devoted boyfriend. Yet something was missing. There was a nagging emptiness ever since she abruptly lost her parents in a car accident on the Long Island Expressway when she was seven. Her subsequent soul-numbing shuttle from one foster home to another, and then finally to an orphanage, was now just a dimly suppressed memory.

Max leaned in closer. “Lena, we need this. The magazine needs this. Sales are down. Jobs are on the line, as you know. Can I count on you?”

“Of course. Yes, of course, Max. You have your journalist!” Her triumphal smile turned tentative. “I hope . . . I don’t let you down.”

“C’mon now, you *are* a workaholic. I practically have to throw you out of the office at the end of the day,” Max joked. “Really, I don’t know of any young journalist more ambitious than you are.”

“I appreciate your faith in me,” she said.

“You look great, by the way.” He smiled warmly, nodding approval at Lena’s silk blouse and leather mini-skirt, which showed off her long, sleek legs to maximal effect.

Lena had grown to accept Max’s flirtatious compliments without judgment and was not attracted to him, charming and available as he was. Fourteen years her senior, he was more like a father figure. Max could be the harshest of critics. Initially, he had intimidated and annoyed her, having redlined so many of her stories over the years with his excessive editing notes. But she had to admit he had made her a better journalist. And she thrived on pleasing him as much as herself. Yet she was insecure and needed frequent reassurance.

Max lit up a cigarette and inhaled deeply. “I have to warn you, though. It could get dangerous. Are you absolutely sure?”

“Dangerous?”

“The art world has its share of criminals, and some will stop at nothing to protect themselves.” He paused. “Anyway, the art crimes division of Interpol knows we’re covering this. Here’s their number.” He handed her a slip of paper.

Lena flipped his words away with her hand and nodded with determination. “Yes, I’m sure.”

Max produced a small box from his pocket and offered it to her. “A token of trust.” She opened the box and saw a shiny silver Montblanc pen.

“Thank you,” she said, touched by his thoughtfulness.

“We’re on!” He slid a flight itinerary in front of her. “You have a week to pack.”

“How long will I be there?” Lena’s voice wavered, as she realized how much her day-to-day life was about to change. And how

would Jud feel? They had been living together for almost three years, and he didn’t like to be alone.

“We’re on life support now.” Max’s expression turned serious. “Our publisher came through with a temporary infusion of capital. But it won’t last long. I’ll give you two months at the most, since it’s an investigative piece.”

What a fluke that she’d happened to sit down beside a stray copy of the French newspaper *Libération* on the subway last week. Her college French had served her well. She had picked up the newspaper and read about the scandal, then froze in recognition when she saw the small illustration of Giovanna Tornabuoni—the same painting she had first seen as a young girl on a school field trip to an exhibition at the Frick Museum. Entranced by Giovanna’s otherworldly beauty, Lena remembered standing at length before the portrait, which had haunted her for some time afterward. She had even written a paper about the Renaissance painter Domenico Ghirlandaio for her college art history class, wishing to learn more about Giovanna. But those details were hazy now, and the same unanswered questions resurfaced: Why was she so taken by her, this Giovanna Tornabuoni? What secrets did she hold?

“Lena?” Max waved his hand in front of her.

“Sorry. It’s just that I saw the portrait that I’m about to investigate in an exhibition a long time ago. I *love* her.”

Max looked surprised. “Good, one step ahead. Oh, and I may need a few other stories from you, too, while you’re over there.”

“I could be your Paris correspondent?!”

“If we can get our numbers up, why not? Bartender,” he called out, “two champagnes!”

By the time she left Balthazar, Lena’s initial trepidation had diminished. Excited and eager to celebrate, she walked directly to the bank, withdrew \$1,500 from her savings, and delighted in spending it throughout SoHo. She bought a black wool cape lined with velvet, a pair of suede boots, lacy lingerie, and an emerald silk scarf, all of which she decided to wear home. The boots were particularly expensive, but she rarely indulged herself. She’d be leaving for Paris in one week. Just one more week, thanks to Max’s faith in her. This was her chance to help save the magazine and make a name for herself. At the thought, her insecurity resurfaced, and she grew nervous again. “No!” she said, shrugging it off. “I can do this!”

In the golden November sunlight, the streets surged with life. Lena passed by crowded boutiques, galleries, and cafés. A crisp breeze carried the scent of honey-roasted peanuts and fried food. Striding along Lower Broadway, she playfully adopted the posture of the Parisian model she had once seen on television sauntering across the vast Place de la Concorde, one long leg in front of the other, her head swinging from side to side. Paris! One week away! How she had always longed to go there. Swept up by the excitement, she tripped in her new boots and fell. An elderly gentleman kindly helped her up.

“Thank you, sir.” She laughed, embarrassed, and brushed herself off.

Lena turned more than a few heads as she continued down Broadway, her new cape fluttering around her. Others had often remarked that she had a certain, undeniable presence, and she was well aware of it.

She felt renewed, buoyant, as if she were crossing a threshold into a strange, new universe. I must risk all, she thought to herself as she had many times before, but without the same conviction. She reached into her purse and pulled out a tiny slip of paper that she had saved from a fortune cookie: “Soon you will reign over everything.” What if it were true? What did it really mean? Fame? Fortune? Power?

A street violinist was playing a melancholy tune that sounded vaguely familiar. Feeling her festive mood dampen, she inquired about its origin. “Oh, it’s very old,” he answered.⁵

On a whim, Lena darted into an antiques shop, where she found herself drawn to a glimmering gold chalice.

“A common fixture on the Renaissance table and in the church,” the sales assistant said.

She could not take her eyes off the chalice, its beautifully molded grapes and garlands. She lifted it to her lips in what felt like a familiar gesture and paused with wonder.

“You can have it for two hundred!” The young man jolted her out of her trance. “Gold plate, of course.”

Not knowing why, she impulsively purchased the chalice.

Outside the store, a crowd had gathered at the corner of Broadway and Grand, so she stopped to have a look. A man had been hit by a car. As he lay in an expanding pool of blood, a pedestrian tried to revive him. The now mangled white canvas the man had been carrying looked like a sinister abstract sculpture.

Lena's buoyant mood dimmed as she hurried downtown, breathing in the crisp smell of the leaves crackling under her feet. Once home, she picked up the mail in the vestibule of her apartment building—a renovated, old red-brick warehouse on Laight Street in Tribeca.

One of the letters had a Paris postmark. Curious, she opened it and read: “Don't investigate the painting or else.” No signature. Who could be threatening her? Jason. It must be Jason, her nemesis at *Express* who was recently laid off. He had always been envious of her success and the plum assignments Max gave her. Perhaps he had already pitched the story and Max had turned him down. He had probably asked a Paris contact to send this nasty, spooky note. What a silly prank. Or was it? Since she could not be sure, she dared not tell anyone, especially Max, who could take her off the assignment. Determined not to be thwarted, she stuffed the letter in her purse and pulled herself together.

She was barely inside the apartment when Jud rushed over, lifted her clear off her feet, and spun her around. “I missed you!”

“What? I'm only an hour later than usual.”

“I know, I know. But I have some good news. I got the grant. I got it, Lena!”

He showed her a letter announcing that he would receive \$20,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to complete his biography on the British writer D. H. Lawrence—a huge boost to his career as an English professor at Columbia University.

“Oh, Jud, I'm so happy for you!” She embraced him. But she was still anxious about the threat she had just received and couldn't stop thinking about it.

How could she tell Jud about her new assignment? Why intrude on his good news? After all, she'd decided to go without even consulting him, and he was so devoted to her. More than anything it was the way he spoke—the effortless refinement with which he chose each word, cultivated each sentence—that first attracted Lena when they met five years ago. On that June afternoon, she had come alone to Central Park to watch the Shakespeare Festival's performance of *Othello* with thousands of other New Yorkers who had packed picnic lunches for the long wait in line. She had spread her blanket on a patch of grass, and there was Jud sitting beside her, with crystalline blue eyes and a near perfect symmetry to his face. He had been sipping wine from a thermos. Noticing that she was alone, he offered her some. They talked for a long time and never did see all of *Othello* that night.

After they moved in together three years ago, they gradually threw themselves into their work and a comfortable routine. Of the two of them, however, it was Jud who doted more on Lena, creating for her a troubling paradox, for she both relished and resented his intense love, which sometimes felt suffocating.

"You're so beautiful, and you're mine," Jud whispered in her ear. He unbuttoned her blouse, then removed her boots and skirt. A familiar tingle worked its way up Lena's spine. In her eyes, Jud was the ultimate romantic, yet distinctly masculine. His sensitive nature perfectly complemented his sexy, athletic physique. She was aware that most women would find him hard to resist.

"That's somebody else's song," Lena teased, tussling his sandy hair. Her eyes settled on the slat-back oak chair and leather sofa in the living room and the copper mirror hanging above the fireplace. She would soon be leaving this cozy nest.

Did anyone ever tell you that you have a certain power over people, and you know it?" Jud slowly slipped off her new lace lingerie. "Love this."

Lena's entire body quivered with pleasure, as he trailed his fingers down her back and along the inside of her thighs. She led him into the bedroom and lit two candles while he undressed. They made love tenderly, but for Lena it felt strained. The whole time she was thinking about how she'd tell him her news.

"What's bothering you?" Jud asked afterward. "You seemed distracted."

"There's something I have to tell you." She felt her heart pounding.

"Yeeesss?"

"You know how much I care about you." Her eyes moistened as a cascade of confusing emotions—guilt, anxiety, excitement, anticipation—surged through her.

"C'mon, Lena, what's going on?"

"I'm going to Paris!" she blurted.

"Paris."

"Max is sending me to Paris to get the scoop on a stolen Renaissance painting. Just sold for a huge amount." She waited hopefully for a supportive reply.

"Wow, that's great, honey. How long will you be gone?"

"Two months . . . maybe longer. Max may need some other stories." Lena folded her hands at her heart. "You'll visit!"

Jud's initial enthusiasm suddenly faded, and he fell silent.

"What's wrong?"

"You think it's okay, just taking off like that?" His tone was brusque.

Lena tensed. "Oh, Jud, can't you at least be happy for me?"

"You didn't even bother to discuss this with me!" From the nightstand, he lifted the Chinese cloisonné enamel vase they had bought together, turned it around in his hands, and carefully put it back.

"I thought you'd understand," Lena shot back, annoyed. "It's an incredible opportunity. And I'm not going to pass it up!" She spoke with such certainty there was clearly no dissuading her. "It's just for two months."

"But you said longer. Maybe longer."

"Well, maybe. Possibly."

"Men, they just come and go like actors in your production, Lena," Jud snapped. "There's a wall around your heart. The only thing you're in love with is your work!"

Lena turned away. She wanted to ask him to leave. But she was determined not to let anything ruin this magical day, her day. A single petal from the pink roses in the Chinese vase dislodged itself and floated gracefully onto the table.

"I've always loved you more than you've loved me." Jud's face looked drawn in the candlelight. His voice was filled with sadness. "You know your ambition can border on obsession."

Lena considered his words, recalling how Sister Ruth, the director at the Catholic orphanage all those years ago, rewarded her with affection whenever she aced a test, wrote the best story, or won a race. She could not deny that she was ambitious, competitive, too, though mostly with herself. And she had to admit that deep intimacy was difficult. Having lost her parents at such a young age, she had always felt so alone, consumed with a lingering doubt, as though she were always on the verge of losing something. Jud sat at the edge of the bed, his back to her.

“I do love you, Jud,” she said with some regret. “But maybe you *are* able to love more deeply. I’m so afraid of failing that it sometimes overtakes me. So I keep pushing myself to succeed. Maybe I’d be different if I’d had the love and support of a real family, like you did.” Her eyes filled with tears at what she had often felt but never revealed.

“So where does that leave us, Lena?” He turned, looking her square in the eyes.

What could she say? She remained silent, torn between her commitment to Jud and her need to break free. Was she doing the same thing with him that she had done with the other men she had dated? Those relationships had not lasted long. Was she subconsciously pushing Jud away? No, she decided, it was different this time. Her career was really about to take off.

“A wise man once said, ‘The way in and the way out is through the heart,’” Jud continued. “I learned that when Lindsey died eight years ago, and my heart cracked wide open. Loving you is enough for me. All there is, really.”

“I’m sorry about your sister, Jud.” Lena stroked his arm. “I know how close you were, and it wasn’t fair that she died so young from leukemia. But I don’t see what that has to do with us.” She shot him a puzzled look. “Or why you have to keep quoting people all the time to support your case”

He closed his eyes and shook his head. “You don’t get it.”

The telephone rang. Relieved by the interruption, Lena raced into the living room to answer it. “Sure, Max, yes . . . that’s fine. I understand . . . Bye.”

“What was that about?” Jud asked, as she crawled back into bed.

“Max forgot to tell me he doesn’t want me to interview Marv Steinert, the old master paintings dealer. Thinks he’s a crook who supposedly smuggled paintings out of Mexico years ago.”

Lena crinkled her brow, pondering her options. “I’m going to call Steinert anyway. I have a hunch he could be helpful.”

Jud glared at her with a mix of suspicion and concern. “I’m not sure you know what you’re getting yourself into. He’s sending you on a wild goose chase, and you’ll be getting mixed up with shady characters. It’s dangerous!”

Lena pressed her lips together hard. That’s just what Max had said. And what about the letter? Was she being naïve? Maybe she should rethink this whole thing. No, that was not an option.

“Oh, Jud,” cooed Lena. “Maybe it’s time for a break.”

“I thought we were good together.”

“We are, but . . .”

“But what?”

Agitated, she struggled for an explanation. “I need a breather. I guess I’m feeling . . . stuck.”

“With *me*? Fine, I’ll leave!” Before Lena could respond, Jud had jumped out of bed and yanked on his clothes.

“Wait, where are you going?!” she yelled as he stomped out of the bedroom.

“Grand,” he muttered, referring to the neighborhood hotel where they often met friends for drinks. The door slammed behind him.

Lena sunk beneath the sheets, weighed down by a hollow pit in her stomach. She resented Jud for making her choose between him and her work, yet she was certain that she had made the right decision. Her apartment was dark except for the faint glimmer of the candles, whose wax had dropped and hardened into milky circles on the nightstand. She blew out the flames and tried to fall asleep, completely spent from the day’s emotional twists and turns.

The following morning, Lena awoke alone. There was Jud's watch lying on the nightstand. Their fight came flooding back. She supposed he had spent the night at the hotel. She began dialing his number on her cell phone, then stopped. Why stir things up again?

After a quick breakfast, she headed out with a heavy heart to the New York Public Library. The library's massive, old-world reading room was one of her favorite Manhattan spaces, with its beautifully painted domed ceilings and long mahogany tables with brass lamps. Once there, she searched on a computer for books about the Italian Renaissance and Ghirlandaio, wrote down their call numbers, and anxiously waited for a clerk to find them. Finally, with a stack of books in hand, she found a seat and began researching the history of the Giovanna Tornabuoni portrait.

Despite recurring thoughts of her fight with Jud, the more she read, the more intrigued she became by her subject. Before long, she was completely immersed in Renaissance Florence and the power struggles between its wealthy families. Again, she could not take her eyes off a photo of the painting—the young, ethereal Giovanna in profile with opalescent skin and an attractive, otherworldly countenance, her blonde hair knotted at the back and plaited in ringlets at her ears. Wearing an ornately patterned Renaissance dress and a diaphanous mantle, she radiated an inner beauty and serenity that captivated Lena, as she had that day long ago at the Frick Museum exhibition. She appeared so human, so real, as though Lena might catch a glimpse of her at any moment, gliding between the book stacks. Ghirlandaio had painted Giovanna in 1488. Turning a page, Lena lapsed into a reverie as she fixated on a photograph of the famous Santa Maria Novella church in Florence, with its unusual green, white, and pink marble façade. The sights and sounds of her immediate surroundings vanished as she was pulled into the cool, dim Tornabuoni Chapel inside the church.

Chapter Two

In the Tornabuoni Chapel of Santa Maria Novella church, the twenty-year-old Giovanna Tornabuoni, a woman of striking grace and elegance, and her husband, Lorenzo, ten years her senior, stood admiring new frescoes in which Giovanna had been depicted by the popular local painter Domenico Ghirlandaio. Lorenzo, who emanated an aura of reserved self-assurance, was a prominent merchant and art collector from one of Florence's wealthiest families. Nearby, in equally rapt admiration, was Lorenzo de' Medici, arts patron, de facto ruler of Renaissance Florence, and cousin to Giovanna's husband.

"You could not be more beautiful," Medici said, kissing Giovanna's hand. "And your husband could not be more fortunate." Giovanna blushed. She did not accept compliments easily, humble as she was.

"My dear wife and I have noticed that you seem unusually quiet today," Lorenzo replied. "Not your usual good-spirited self." Giovanna nodded in agreement.

The tall, dark-haired Medici hesitated. "I believe my life is in danger . . . again," he lowered his voice. "Saturn seems to have impressed the seal of melancholy on me from the beginning, as my childhood tutor Ficino once said of himself."

Giovanna gasped, covering her mouth with her hand. Lorenzo's expression turned grave as he pulled Medici closer. "Cousin, we will do anything we can."

"I have many enemies, as you know," interrupted Medici, whose family had created a powerful banking empire. "The Pazzi, they would still have me dead."

Possessed of an innate dignity and magnetic charm, Medici looked every bit the statesman, impeccably dressed in polished black leather boots, close-fitting knit pantaloons, a regal red wool tunic embroidered all over in gold with the family's coat of arms, and a black felt hat, from which protruded a large white ostrich feather. Lorenzo, who was fair and blue-eyed, was dressed much the same, but for his considerably less adorned tunic.

Giovanna lowered her head in shame. Through her mother, she was a member of the aristocratic Pazzi family, who resented Medici's power. Her father's family, the Albizzi, also had a longstanding rivalry with the all-powerful Medici clan.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "This animosity between our families has caused me great pain. But I have no part in it, Lorenzo, as you know. I would give anything for peaceful relations."

"My dear Giovanna, you are a model of goodness," Medici tried to comfort her. "I hold nothing against you. You can always count on my friendship and affection." He closed his eyes briefly. "But with your cousin, Francesco de' Pazzi, a leader in what our townspeople call the Pazzi Conspiracy, I had no choice. I had to execute him for murdering my brother and attempting to assassinate me."

Giovanna instantly raised her hand in truce. "Though my family has been disgraced, we are all as one. It is only our belief in separation that makes it real."

Medici appeared baffled. Giovanna's sparkling brown eyes radiated forgiveness. Her expression was serene. She did not indulge in judgments or hatred; her heart was pure and filled only with love. And for this, she was both admired and misunderstood. Her husband, a man of great integrity whose family had established the most thriving spice trade in Italy, lovingly grasped his wife's hand. "Some say she is not of this earth." Turning to Medici, he offered his unequivocal support. "We are in this together, and we *will* prevail."

Giovanna stood contently by his side, stroking the bejeweled crucifix dangling from her neck. “Love will see us through,” she said confidently. “Love breeds magic but needs faith.”

“I hope you’re right.” Medici’s face brightened, and he embraced the Tornabuonis in turn. “Your support is most appreciated, my friends.”

As the three walked silently out of the church, Medici became disturbed by a raven circling overhead in the bright mid-summer sky. “An ominous sign,” he winced. “Symbol of death.”

“And rebirth,” Giovanna quickly added. “Perhaps we should not take it so literally. Nevertheless I will pray for you, Lorenzo. I see the priest has just arrived for Mass.”

Giovanna kissed her husband goodbye and waved the men off before slipping back inside the church, its dim recesses fragrant with frankincense. Late afternoon sunbeams filtered through the exquisite stained glass windows, casting rainbow stencils on the Doric columns and mosaic stone floors. She found a place in one of the rear pews, where she prayed and sang the hymns with her usual devotion, then proceeded gracefully to the altar to receive communion, aware of the gazes of her fellow churchgoers.

Though Giovanna typically shunned attention, she could not deny that she was a known figure in town, given her own aristocratic heritage and affiliation with the Medici. Some people even bowed in her presence. She often dispelled any projections of superiority by casually chatting with strangers on the streets. A regular at Sunday Mass, Giovanna also enjoyed attending weekly services whenever her schedule permitted. Her main activities were philanthropic ones. She had established a Platonic Academy for Children, where the spiritual philosophies of Plato, Marsilio Ficino, and other great thinkers were taught. And she read to prisoners at the Bargello these same philosophies as well as works of Renaissance literature, another passion.

After the priest placed the communion host in her mouth, conferring a symbolic union with the body of Christ, he held out a gold chalice filled with red wine, representing the blood of Christ. Giovanna grasped the chalice with both hands and slowly swallowed the wine, feeling that she had blissfully merged with the Christ Consciousness. It was a sacred, empowering ritual. She murmured a prayer as she walked solemnly back down the aisle to her seat, her hands folded at her heart, a defining gesture that was as natural to her as the gentle smile that always hovered on her lips, instantly warming those in her presence. On her way out of church, she lit two votive candles. “For Medici,” she whispered to herself. “And one for my Lorenzo.”

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a novel



DANA MICUCCI

Dana Micucci is an award-winning author, journalist, speaker, and healing practitioner. Over the past twenty-five years, she has written for the *International Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Architectural Digest*, *House Beautiful*, *Town & Country*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Art & Antiques*, *Spirituality & Health*, and many other well-known publications, having served as a contributing editor at several of them, specializing in culture, travel, and spiritual and social issues. She is the author of a new novel, *The Third Muse*, a metaphysical mystery set in the international art world. Her memoir *Sojourns of the Soul: One Woman's Journey around the World and into Her Truth* was a gold winner in the 2013 Nautilus Book Awards. Both books serve as a platform for her inspirational talks and workshops nationwide. Her other books include *Artists in Residence: A Guide to the Homes and Studios of Eight 19th-Century Artists in and around Paris*; *Best Bids: The Insider's Guide to Buying at Auction*; and *Collector's Journal*. Reviews, articles, and interviews about her books have appeared widely in radio, television and print media. She was formerly a senior publicist at Christie's, the international art auction house. Ms. Micucci holds a B.A. and M.A. in English from Northwestern University and a certificate from Columbia University's Creative Writing Program, where she was a senior writing fellow. She is also trained in a variety of healing modalities by many noted teachers and has a private healing practice.

DANA MICUCCI
the
THIRD MUSE
a novel



INTERVIEWS FOR *THE THIRD MUSE*

Main Themes of *The Third Muse*:

The wisdom of the heart
The transformative power of love
The divine feminine mystery teachings of the Magdalene Order

Questions:

- 1) What is *The Third Muse* about?
- 2) Why did you write this novel?
- 3) Who is the audience for *The Third Muse*?
- 4) What is unique about this book, and why would someone want to read it?
- 5) What do you hope readers will gain from *The Third Muse*?
- 6) You're a career journalist and author. Tell us about your writing process?
- 7) How does *The Third Muse* differ from or build upon your prior books?
- 8) What do you most enjoy about writing fiction?
- 9) What other projects are you currently working on?
- 10) What unique gift/transformation do you provide through your writing, speaking, mentoring, and healing services?

Video Link: <http://youtu.be/fv9phR6zLP8>

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DANA MICUCCI EVENTS

Dana's novel *The Third Muse*, a metaphysical mystery set in the international art world, and her spiritual travel memoir *Sojourns of the Soul: One Woman's Journey around the World and into Her Truth* (Quest Books), have become catalysts for talks and workshops in which she weaves together teachings and practices from diverse wisdom/spiritual traditions, showing their inherent similarities. Dana provides a roadmap for others to approach their own spiritual path with clarity, focus, and passion. The main focus of her books and events is transformation of the self at the deepest level. She inspires people to strip away all previously limiting beliefs and perceptions and step into their true essence and power.

Dana's energy and her words, whether written or spoken, carry a healing vibration that have led many who have attended her presentations to experience deep shifts in consciousness, an expanded awareness, and a recognition of their soul's true mission. One of her greatest gifts is communicating authentically from her heart and her own spiritual guidance and relating to others in a warm, personal, down-to-earth way. She transmits timeless truths and wisdom that people can apply in daily life. Dana's extensive background in art and literature, and training in a variety of healing modalities, also inform her work, while her sense of humor adds a lightness and joy to her presentations. She is passionate about encouraging others to ignite and accelerate a fearless journey toward wholeness.

Read more about Dana's events:

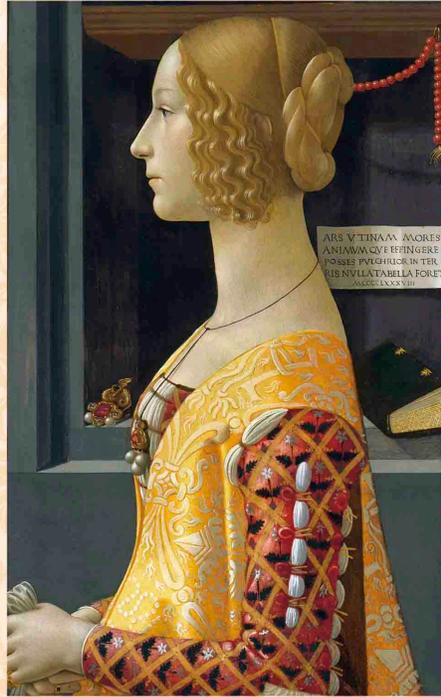
<http://www.danamicucci.com/events.php>

Find Dana's upcoming events:

<https://www.facebook.com/DanaMicucci>

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