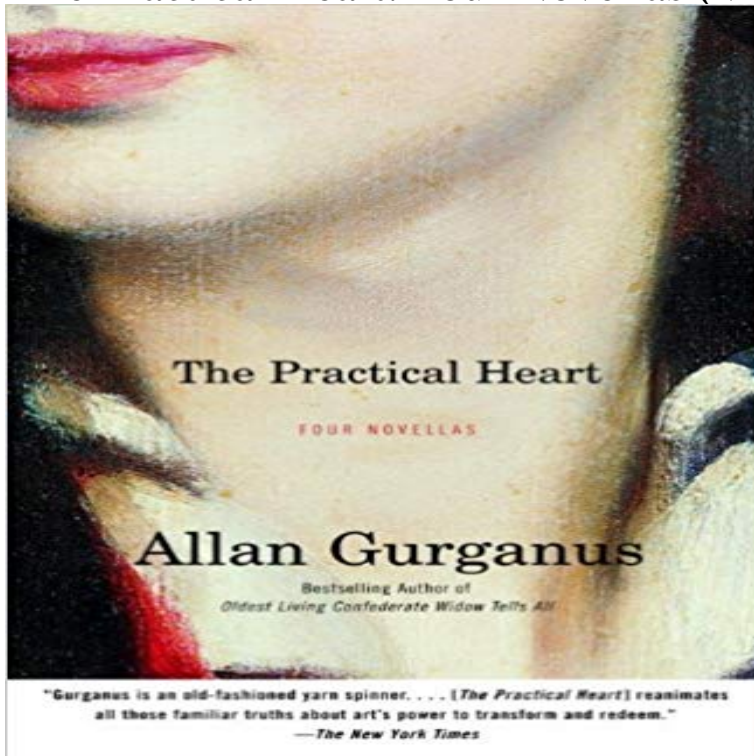


The Practical Heart: Four Novellas (Vintage Contemporaries)



A luminous quartet, five years in the writing, reveals even more fully the breathtaking range of a storyteller in the grand tradition (New York Times). Allan Gurganus voice--by turn bawdy and serene, folkloric and profane--deepens as it soars into this quiet masterwork. Four new fables--rich in event, comedy, experience--surge with the force of history's headlines versus sidestreet human fortitude. Improbable heroes and heroines spiral outward from Gurganus's familiar Carolina terrain. Each fires into a wild and differing direction, all in quest of some fantasy that's practically impossible.--An impoverished immigrant has her portrait painted (or not) by John Singer Sargent.--A young man's devotion to saving eighteenth-century homes and their odd lingering ghost helps him find unlikely ways to renovate his own mortality.--A pillar of the community becomes, over the course of one cartoon matinee, its pariah.--A beloved, transfixingly homely father shows his village and his only son a decency stronger than race, humiliation, or even death itself. These characters' quixotic missions prove mysterious, often even to themselves. Their legacies are not easily deciphered. And yet, their most impractical wishes soon become the heartiest facts about each. They manage to wrest battle-courage from everyday indecision. Out of superstition and convention, they lift certainty. They each find a wealth of consoling truths banked--immortal--in the all-too-human heart. Allan Gurganus's great powers--announced more than a decade ago by *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*--here achieve a yearning exuberance worthy of a new Whitman. These leaps of sexual longing, empathy, and faith become a major new gift from this essential fablemaker. From the Hardcover edition.

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