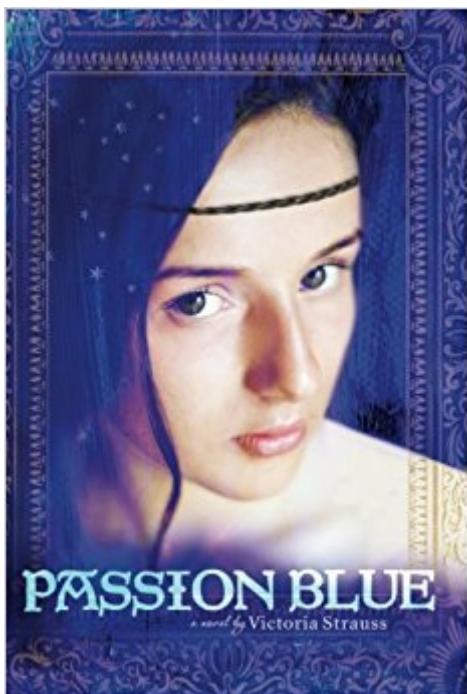


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# Passion Blue (A Passion Blue Novel)



## Synopsis

When seventeen-year-old Giulia, the orphaned, illegitimate daughter of a Milanese nobleman, learns she's to be packed off to a life behind convent walls, she begs an astrologer-sorcerer for a talisman that will secure what she's certain is her heart's desire: true love and a place where she belongs. But does she really know the compass of her heart? The convent of Santa Marta is full of surprises, including a workshop of nuns who are creating paintings of astonishing beauty using a luminous blue mixed from a secret formula: Passion Blue. As Giulia's own artistic self is awakened she's torn: should she follow the young man who promises to help her escape? Or stay and satisfy her growing desire to paint? This richly imagined novel of a girl's daring journey towards self-discovery transports readers into the fascinating world of Renaissance Italy where love and faith and art inspire passion of many different hues. Passion Blue is a Kirkus Reviews Best Teen Books of 2012

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Giulia's late mother was the favorite mistress of a count in 15th-century Milan, and when Giulia's noble father also dies, his jealous wife arranges to send the illegitimate 17-year-old girl to a convent. Feeling like she is falling down a well that has no bottom, Giulia asks a sorcerer to make her a talisman, hoping it will help her find a husband instead. At the convent, Giulia begins to contemplate her true heart's desire after she is invited to train as a painter under a talented maestra. The maestra tells

Giulia she could run the workshop one day if she takes her vows and becomes a nun, but Giulia is falling for a craftsman repairing a fresco. Strauss (Guardian of the Hills) takes great care to illustrate Giulia's complicated world fully, including the limited choices available to women during the Renaissance, convent life, and painting techniques of the time. Giulia's path may not surprise readers, but her unusual story is sure to capture their attention. --Publisher's Weekly

October 22, 2012 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Vividly set during the 15th-century Italian Renaissance, Strauss's novel has a strong and thoroughly likable heroine who is only one of many well-developed female characters. Artistically brilliant, 17-year-old Giulia Borromeo is desperately searching for her heart's desire—a husband. She is so desperate that she makes a bargain with a sorcerer for a talisman to aid her. He warns her, "Be very sure you know what [it] is. Or you may find yourself surprised by what you receive." As the illegitimate daughter of a nobleman, she has no security regarding her future. When her father dies, Giulia is forced into a convent by her father's jealous wife. From the moment she is dragged through Santa Marta's door, she plots her escape. She is surprised to learn of the beauty within, and that nuns and novices have vocations. When her extraordinary talents are discovered, Giulia is offered a place in the famous painting workshop. Her world expands as she learns the tools, materials, and techniques of great Renaissance painters. By chance, she meets a young male artisan repairing a convent masterpiece. They begin a clandestine romance. Her two desires—painting and a husband—war within as she contemplates her future. In a time and place when women were excluded from nearly every realm of life, Giulia and the other members of Santa Marta excel in spite of gender and cultural restrictions. --School Library Journal November 2012, Lisa Crandall, Capital Area District Library, Holt, MI --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I liked the setting of the book and all the artistic things that made the world of medieval Italy come alive. Very enjoyable. Not too heavy, but very interesting.

I really liked this book. I felt like I had a motion picture in my mind as I read it. It was interesting to see how some women were treated by being sent to a convent and also denied a expression of their talent. This book was very easy to read and follow the story. I would gladly read more by this author.

Giulia is the illegitimate child of Count in Renaissance Italy...and her father just died. The Countess uses her husband's willed money for a dowry at the will's bequest, but not for a husband as Giulia hoped, but for a dowry for a convent. Giulia is to become a nun instead of finally being able to have a husband and home-- a place-- of her own as has been her heart's desire her entire life. Hoping to counter act this fate, she buys a talisman from a magician before arriving at the convent. The magician promises it will bring her heart's desire. Although Giulia knows her time at the convent is limited, she finds herself not constrained by rules and hard prayers and locked inside cells (at least not yet) but instead part of a vital world of colors, gesso, pigments, commissions, and painting. In the midst of this world she finds a woman who is a master painter, only allowed to express her god-given gifts because she is a nun. Suor Humilita holds the secrets to Passion Blue, the most vital, richly colored blue Giulia has ever seen. It makes her hands burn to draw, to paint, to create art in the way the nuns under Humilita do. But then there is a painter boy who may be the path the talisman has chosen to help her escape the convent.... Passion Blue's cover at first glance made me think this was a fantastical novel. While Giulia does believe in magic, the novel is so immersed in well-researched and vibrantly drawn details of convent life and art of that time as historical fiction that I think the cover might be leading readers astray. This is a lovely, younger YA that keeps true to limitations of what women faced in Giulia's time while allowing Giulia to experience a more feminist life through the atmosphere of the convent. I think it was hard for me to give Giulia my whole heart as I couldn't identify with the choices she made in her narrow focus on finding a husband, but I do believe those were genuine choices. This Book's Snack Rating: Zesty Ranch Kettle Chips for the complex seasoning of the rich details of Italian painting on the sturdy crunch of Giulia's believable character

The story was very good and the author did an excellent job with character development. The writing flowed well and the plot was well-constructed without any holes or inconsistencies. I very much enjoyed this story, getting to know the characters and watching the main character develop. The reason I am not giving 5 stars is because I wish the prose had been better.

"Passion Blue" was one of the most original titles I've read in the past six months, if not longer. It was easy to root for the protagonist. She was unique, plucky and likable, even when she made the kind of unwise decisions most 17-year-olds are wont to do. Setting the book in 15th century Italy was not only unique, but fascinating. I would have given this book 5 stars if the setting had been more fully developed, perhaps with a bit more evocative language. Not that Ms. Strauss didn't develop the

setting ~ it's just that I kept finding myself wanting more ~ more sights, more sounds, more tactile sensations, more tastes. The real star of this book was the convent workshop and its inhabitants. The descriptions of the methods of painting and the passion involved with the creative process were so fascinating, they sucked me in completely. I felt like I could have read hundreds more pages concerning what went on in that workshop and with those people ~ a true testament to Ms. Strauss' writing. As for the ending ~ it may not be for everyone, but I personally adored it and found it very organic to the story. It was wonderful to see such an empowering story set in a time when women did not have choices, and to see the growth in the protagonist. I felt like there was room for Ms. Strauss to revisit this world and these characters someday, for surely there are more adventures to be had here.

loved it

I really enjoyed *Passion Blue*. Beautifully written, lovely theme, interesting read. The story was engaging and ended well. Better than *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*.

A well-written novel that parallels the certainty of today's young adults in their desires, only to discover otherwise. An enjoyable read.

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