

“Juliet” by Anne Fortier. Ballantine Books, 2010. \$25.00, 447 pages.

Julie Jacobs has always loved Shakespeare, and she’s been especially drawn to *Romeo & Juliet*, though she can’t explain her fascination with the play. She knows that she was born in Italy, but she’s been living in the United States with her Aunt Rose ever since her parents died in a car crash when she was a child. After Aunt Rose passes away, Julie expects to inherit half of her aunt’s estate (which will help her pay off her mounting credit card debt), but instead, everything goes to Julie’s twin sister. Julie’s only inheritance is a letter from her aunt which includes a key to a safe deposit box in Siena, Italy. Aunt Rose’s letter instructs Julie to go to Italy and use the key to retrieve something her mother left for her before she died. Julie also learns from the letter that her real name is Giulietta Tolomei, and that Aunt Rose changed her name once she was brought to the United States.

With no other plans for her life, Julie decides to set off for Italy to recover the item her mother left her, but as soon as she arrives in Italy, things begin to take a mysterious turn. Right away, Julie discovers that the surname Tolomei carries much weight in Siena, and the Tolomeis have a long-standing feud with the Salimbeni family. Julie also learns that her parents didn’t die together in a car accident as she had previously been told. Her mother died in a car crash, but her father died in a house fire, and rumor has it that the Salimbeni family may have had something to do with his death.

Julie recovers her mother’s treasure from the safety deposit box, only to discover that it’s nothing of value, just pages of notes and a worn paperback copy of Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet*. While disappointed, Julie begins to sort through the notes and discovers that Shakespeare’s play was apparently based on real events that took place in Siena, Italy back in the 1300s. Julie is shocked to learn that the “real” Juliet was named Giulietta Tolomei. Intrigued by their shared name, Julie delves deeper into the story of Giulietta and Romeo Marescotti and the familial feud between the Tolomeis and the Salimbenis. Soon Julie is on the hunt for a priceless treasure known as Juliet’s Eyes, with danger stalking her at every turn.

Touted by *Publisher’s Weekly* as “...a love story that reads like a *Da Vinci Code* for the smart modern woman,” *Juliet* intersperses Julie’s story in modern Italy with Giulietta’s story in the 1300s. As the chapters switch back and forth between time periods, the plots unfold simultaneously while revealing how closely the two women’s lives are intertwined. *Juliet* is an engrossing read that’s hard to put down, and readers will definitely be turning the pages the quickly to discover how Julie’s adventure ends.

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