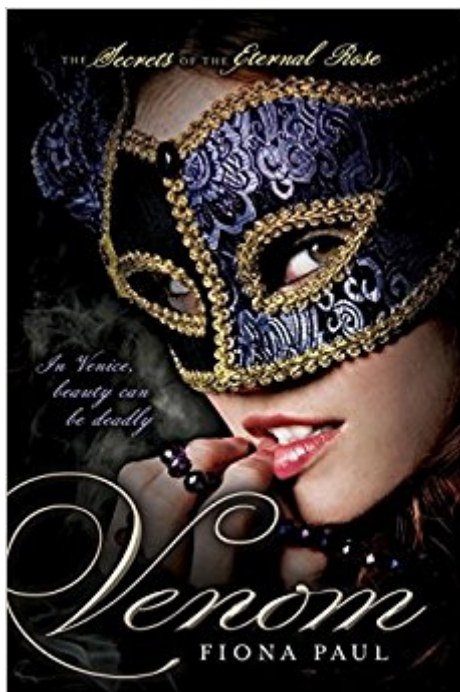


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# Venom (Secrets Of The Eternal Rose)



## Synopsis

Love, lust, murder, mayhem and high society converge in one thrilling debut. Cassandra Caravello has everything a girl could desire: elegant gowns, sparkling jewels, invitations to the best parties, and a handsome, wealthy fiancé—yet she longs for something more. Ever since her parents' death, Cassandra has felt trapped, alone in a city of water, where the dark and labyrinthine canals whisper of escape. When Cass stumbles upon the body of a murdered woman—with a bloody X carved across her heart—she's drawn into a dangerous world of secret societies, courtesans, and killers. Soon, she finds herself falling for Falco, a poor artist with a mischievous grin and a habit of getting into trouble. Will Cassandra find the murderer before he finds her? And will she stay true to her fiancé or succumb to her uncontrollable feelings for Falco? Beauty, romance, and mystery weave together in a novel that's as seductive and stunning as the city of Venice itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Andrea Cremer, New York Times bestselling author of the Nightshade series—Deftly balancing beauty and death, *Venom* renders the canals of Renaissance Venice frightening and irresistible in a sensual tale where no one can be trusted and passions kill. —Andrea Cremer

Jessica Spotswood, author of *Born Wicked*—Wonderfully sinister and thrillingly romantic, *Venom* has it all—secret trysts in graveyards, Venetian canals, murdered courtesans, and masquerades! Fiona Paul created a lush, compelling mystery I couldn't put down. —Jessica Spotswood

Fiona Paul is a writer and registered nurse who lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

This book has been on my radar for quite some time because Antony John, the author of *Five Flavors of Dumb* and the soon to be released *Elemental*, has lauded this one up and down heartily. And if he is backing it, I'm in! *Venom* by Fiona Paul centers on Cassandra, an upper class teenager, who is already set to marry Luce, another noble. She lives in Venice, which is richly described (and if anyone doesn't want to visit this place after reading this book is definitely deranged), and falls for an artist, Falco, whom she meets in a graveyard of all places. We, as readers, are swept from one gorgeous location to the next, as we creep around in the dark, and take multiple gondola rides, trying to figure out who is murdering beautiful young women in Venice and the secrets we know most other characters are hiding. I really enjoyed reading this book. One of the greatest strengths of this novel, which I already alluded to, is the setting. I'll tell you upfront, I am not a setting girl, but I desperately want to put Venice way higher on my MUST VISIT list just after reading this book. I felt like I was seeing all of the beautiful buildings, visiting all the gorgeous landscapes. The atmosphere was so deftly painted that I felt like I was there. I also loved all the great twists at the end, and I'm always a huge fan of murder mysteries. Surprisingly, the biggest strength in this novel to me (the setting) also presented somewhat of an issue-- because the setting was so dramatic and amazing, it almost overshadows the characters. I liked Cass for the most part, and was definitely interested in Luce and the mysterious Falco, but there's much more growth and development I'd like to see in those characters. I know that may be planned for the next few books, but Cass to me (although she does some maturing at the very end), is still somewhat of a naive, spoiled royal, and I want to see more of her coming into her own. Again, this may be just me being impatient for the next novel :-). Fiona Paul is a talented new writer who has just appeared on the YA scene. I'll be definitely watching out for this sequel!

Here's the thing. I'm all for a good intriguing mystery in historical Venice. Although the *Stravaganza* series has sort of set a standard for me, I'm a willing delver. But I actually had to stop and remind myself I was IN Venice and make my own haphazard guesses at the time period. (Although references to the canals of course would remind me as well.) The budding romance between her and Falco seemed almost...violent. Maybe not violent. Controlling? She seemed so stupid sometimes. I get that she's sheltered, but MAN, the whole world is hiding stuff from her and she really isn't paying any attention, it seems. And every single dress she owns gets ruined. Seriously,

and then flaps of fabric seem to get left everywhere, including whole petticoats. Oh, and the sexual tension felt a lot like peaking into a romance novel - inappropriate and out of place. Characterization was floppy at best. Luca is an enigma of his own, but what REALLY got my goat is that the inside flap calls it a novel, which in my mind suggests closure and there was NONE. Missing people still missing, murderer still out there, and guess what (Small spoiler here.) No resolution on romance. Super duper. We went through all that and really nothing happened.

Serial Killers aren't a new phenomenon, they are just more commonly talked about. So, is it hard to imagine the dark dealings that may be going on in the shadows of a city like Venice? In Fiona Paul's new series, *The Secrets of the Eternal Rose*, she explores the mystery of murders only a young girl is willing to investigate. Cass lives the life of any other Venetian girl of means: she waits to be married off so she can become a proper wife. The only problem is her fiance, Luca, is a terrible bore. When her friend succumbs to an illness and dies, Cass has a hard time dealing with the loss, especially after having lost both her parents. At night she slips out of her house to visit her parents' graves, and when she does so to visit her friend, she finds the body has been replaced by another body- one that certainly doesn't belong there and certainly did not meet a peaceful end. With a giant X carved into her chest, the girl clearly met an ugly ending. Terrified, Cass leaves the crypt and bumps into a man named Falco. She should be scared of any guy wandering the graveyard at night, but there is something about Falco she finds intriguing. When he agrees to help her investigate the girl in the crypt, Cass finds herself with a new partner in crime. Together, Cass and Falco delve into the seediest areas of Venice, places Falco is clearly comfortable with but that Cass has never experienced. Throughout their investigation, Cass finds herself drawn to him in ways a proper engaged girl shouldn't be thinking about a man who isn't her betrothed. Of course, she isn't exactly proper as she escapes into the night in her nightgown with a strange man to hunt down a murderer. Cass's connection with Falco makes her forget just how dangerous what they are doing truly is, but the shadows of Venice can only stay hidden for so long. I had actually started this book a while ago and put it down only a few pages into it because I just wasn't in the mood for historical fiction, and I am really glad I did, because when I finally did read it, I really enjoyed it. Good historical fiction doesn't get bogged down with too many specifics of the time period, but rather allows them to come out naturally through the progression of a really good plot. That was how this story was. It had a great pace, a solid story, and it really kept me intrigued right to the last page. In fact, I really loved how the whole setting developed around the plot. Sometimes I was a little annoyed with Cass, especially with her volleying feelings about Falco and Luca. There were times when it felt like her

feelings went from one guy to the other six times before the end of a page. It was so frustrating! But in the end, I was surprised but not displeased with where the story left her between the two men. It left me wanting to come back for more and check out the next book in the series. The story deals with some ugly parts of the time period (prostitution, lack of police protection, murder, indentured servants, etc.) and might be better for older readers. But if you have a younger student who is a strong reader and enjoys historical fiction, this is for you!

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