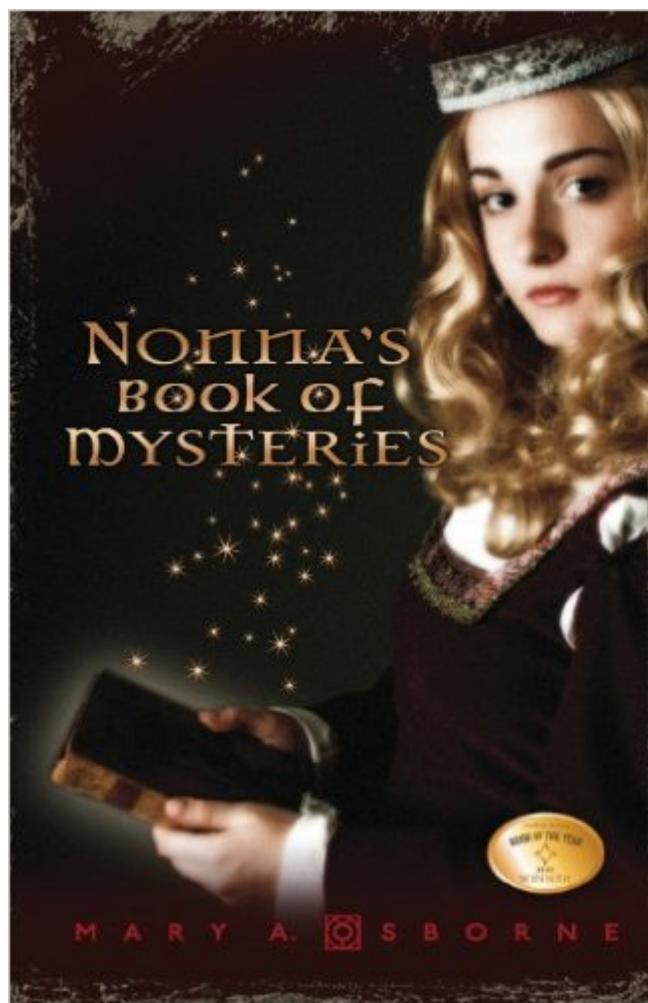


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# Nonna's Book Of Mysteries (Alchemy)



## Synopsis

At age fourteen, all Emilia Serafini wants is to learn to paint so that she can become an artist. But painters' apprenticeships for young women don't exist in the Florence of Renaissance Italy. The odds appear stacked against her until she receives a fascinating book, *A Manual to the Science of Alchemy*. It was once her grandmother's and Emilia turns again and again to the Manual for guidance. When Emilia meets the wealthy, brooding Franco Villani, her life takes a thrilling, but dangerous turn. Franco will do anything to win a place in the court of the powerful Cosimo de' Medici. Well aware that Cosimo prizes ancient manuscripts above all, Franco realizes Emilia's Manual would be invaluable to him in more ways than one. Infused with the mysticism of alchemy, Nonna's Book of Mysteries is an exciting portrait of a young woman who defies convention to seek her destiny. "I loved Nonna's Book of Mysteries! It's a wonder of a book—exciting, mysterious, and wise. I'll long remember the courageous and determined Emilia who learns about choices and the consequences of choices, about the importance of struggle and perseverance, about loyalty, friendship, and love, amid the splendors of Renaissance Florence. I can't wait for another from Mary Osborne." • Karen Cushman, Newberry Award Winner, author of *The Midwife's Apprentice*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Author Mary Osborne has written the story of what might have been an impossible dream. Fourteen

year old Emilia Serafini knows without a doubt that she must become an artist to fulfill her longing, but in Florence, Italy in the 1460's only male apprentices are accepted by masters. With the help of her mother, Emilia disguises herself as a boy to take her place in the establishment of an artist. All goes well until her true identity is revealed. Emilia doesn't think that her dream can become a reality now and she will be made to marry a man who works for her father. Emilia's mother gave her a very special book, a book that had been in her family for over a hundred years, and told her to turn to the wisdom contained within *A Manual to the Science of Alchemy* whenever she was troubled. At first reading the stories in the manual don't seem to be making any difference in Emilia's life, but then she meets a man named Makarios Levantes of Constantinople who describes himself simply as a painter. From then on Emilia's life begins to head in a different direction guided by both Makarios and the wisdom she finds in the manual. What a lovely story this was. Emilia used the writings in the manual to find peace in her heart and guidance for her actions. Her life gradually came closer to being what she wanted but she always knew that it required changes within herself to adjust to whatever difficulties came her way. This book is a wonderful example of how a belief in yourself can help you accomplish your dreams, even if those dreams have to be slightly changed or modified along the way. When Emilia's manual is stolen she completely understands how much she had relied on it for comfort and a connection with her mother and all the other relatives who had cherished the book.

In "Nonna's Book of Mysteries," author Mary Osborne tells the delightfully warm story of Emilia Serafina, a teenage girl living in the Florence of the Medicis with the very true heart's desire to become an apprenticed painter in one of the city's famed botteghe. As the career of painter usually is a vocation reserved just for men, Emilia, encouraged by Violante, her wise and resourceful mother, attempts the impossible, flouting the wishes of her more conventional and, at times unscrupulously pragmatic, father who wants only to marry her off without love to whomever would provide a financial and mercantile arrangement best suited to his long term needs. Dressing like a boy and armed behind the scenes by a book of secret hermetic knowledge handed down to her by her mother, she grinds stones to mix colors for the group of painters employed at a famous artist's workshop until gender revealed, she loses her position. Nevertheless, as in all good stories, destiny intervenes giving our heroine a second chance in an encounter and eventual employment with Makarios Levantes, a painter of icons from Constantinople. Fighting both the convention of the times, her lack of technical experience and her own self doubt, Emilia embarks on a journey of self-discovery. With the help of her ancestor's alchemical manual, the fledgling painter recovers

from each of her setbacks while sharing the magickal text with the reader. Together, reader and heroine, begin to understand the unpeeling of the onion that leads to knowledge of the self. Through her painting, Emilia feels, knows and sees her own soul; she becomes acquainted with her spirit that sparks with the creativity of the Divine.

Author Mary Osborne's trip to Florence inspired this engaging novel of Emilia, a young girl in 15th century Florence who dreams of becoming an artist. Very few women became artists at this time, and while her mother is supportive, her father is eager to have her understand "the way things are in the world." However, he indulges her and allows her to apprentice with a local artist, while disguised as a young boy. When her deception is revealed, she is dismissed, much to her dismay. Emilia finds solace in a treasured book which has been in her family for generations, *A Manual to the Science of Alchemy*. This text, which Emilia considers to be little more than a family heirloom, contains passages from ancient texts that her mother assures her will help her get through difficult times. Throughout the novel, Emilia's story is interspersed with often mysterious quotations from this alchemy book. When a grey-bearded man, a foreigner from Constantinople, finds her sketching in a Florence church, he offers her a position working with him at his workshop. While Makarios paints commissions for the Florentine gentry, he also creates ethereal icons from his own Orthodox tradition, and Emilia learns how to paint in this exotic tradition as well as in the Florentine style. Emilia's head is soon turned by one of Makarios' patrons, a handsome and wealthy businessman from Genoa, Franco Villani. His flirtatious behavior makes Emilia believe that perhaps she could become his wife and the lady of his exquisite home. When they become engaged, it seems that all her dreams will come true. But when Emilia's friend Giacomo returns to Florence, she realizes she has romantic feelings for him as well when they exchange a passionate kiss.

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