



The Passion of Alice

Stephanie Grant

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"In Latin, *suffering* and *passion* come from the same root," observes Alice Forrester, the wry heroine of this poignant and sardonically witty debut. And who would know better than twenty-five-year-old Alice, passionately committed to her own suffering--an all-consuming addiction to food deprivation--as a divine form of self-knowledge?

After an episode of heart failure, Alice arrives in the eating disorder clinic of Seaview Hospital, where she detachedly watches a circus unfold . . . starring her perfectionist mother, Syd ("she'd been a synchronized swimmer in college"), her counselors ("the therapists are like tuning forks for epiphanies"), and the resident anorexics, bulimics, and compulsive eaters. But it is newcomer Maeve Sullivan, at once raucous and tender, with her fleshy body and hedonistic appetites, who turns Alice's adventure beyond her own distorted looking glass into a new perception of herself--and who wakens an attraction that touches Alice's soul and changes her life forever.

Praise for *The Passion of Alice*

"A smart, funny, wonderful book that will contain truth for every reader."-- ***Los Angeles Times Book Review***

"[A] tart and edgy first novel . . . A rarity--an examination of a twenty-five-year-old woman's peculiar inner life, wrapped in a sharp comedy of manners."--***Harper's Bazaar***

"Stephanie Grant's first novel is as grim as it is powerful, stripped entirely of the convenient life-affirming consolations and breakthroughs that can make 'social issue' fiction easier to take. Her prose style is relentlessly cool and stark, serving as x-ray vision that registers the hardest truths without prettification."--***The Boston Globe***

The Passion of Alice Details

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From Reader Review The Passion of Alice for online ebook

Kara says

This was interesting because it is set in an area that I know, using correct names of nearby towns, route numbers, and malls, but the story and the hospital are fiction. I enjoyed it although I wish the ending had been more definitive and concrete. That being said it was a much more realistic picture of anorexia and eating disorders back in this time period as compared to Steven Levenkron's books.

belva hullp says

The Passion of Alice by Stephanie Grant

This could be an important little book if you or a loved one suffers from an eating disorder. The protagonist, Alice, a 25 year old suffers from anorexia which her separated parents do not realize. They know but can't admit it until one day she suffers a heart attack. Then along with her doctors, they & she agree that she needs acute care and she goes into a rehab facility that works with addicts, alcoholics, persons with all types of disorders. They are separated by 'disease'.

Alice weighs just over 90 pounds and is 5 ft, 10 & 3/4 inches tall. While in the facility she meets girls suffering from bulimia as well as anorexia. She becomes acquaintances with a few of them and they go through their days having meals together, therapy groups together, exercise classes specifically based on their needs, etc. Alice is only allowed to do yoga, stretching, the warm up & cool down parts of the aerobics sessions and she is allowed to swim but not allowed to do laps. Their days are kept very full.

After a time she begins to eat her meals or part of them and eventually she edges over the 100 pound mark. One of her friends, Gwen who has been engaged for 10 years but has not married yet as she and her fiance want to have children. Her menses has stopped (as it does with most anorexics) and her fiance wants her to be stable before they wed. Anyway while Alice, Gwen and 2 other girls are taken on a supervised mall shopping trip Gwen collapses when she suffers a dramatic bone disintegration. A few days later she passes. Alice is devastated. She refuses to eat anything and her weight drops dramatically once again. They put her in the hospital there and tube or I.V. feed her. They weigh her in a hammock/sling like get up as they do not want her to know her weight. But the doctors are concerned as one cannot continue indefinitely being fed this way. The body is unable to process all the glucose. They put her on insulin to help her pancreas along. Every six hours they would check her blood and depending on her sugar levels, they would give her shots of insulin.

There is so much more to this small book than just the story of Alice's illness. There is the complicated story of her family life. The complicated story of an early friendship with a young man and the parting of their ways when they went off to Uni. The very complicated stories of her relationships with the other girls and workers at the rehab. One friendship in particular with one specific girl/woman on her floor. I found this friendship to be very fascinating and I can see this book one day becoming a Virago.

This one is written as a memoir and I liked the read very much and gave it 4 stars. I highly recommend it to those interested in the subject matter. I can see so easily why it ranked so well on the Orange Prize listing.

Colleen says

This story is about a young woman's experience with anorexia. In the facility that she shares with women who have all sorts of food disorders, the characters seem to personify their addictions. Alice, with her

anorexia, is addicted to control and self-sacrifice, making her character seem calculated, restricted, and empty. On the other hand, some of Alice's cohorts have much more entertaining ways of expressing their neurosis; Mauve, for example, is an overweight woman addicted to excess whose unpredictable antics and over-the-top behaviors create a character who is indulgent, daring and, like Alice, self-destructive. This is an interesting read that goes fast.

Paige White says

This book starts as a book about anorexia and ends really weird.

Sara Giron says

Alice is very distant, she only cares about being skinny. Throughout the book she always compared and judged other people's bodies. Alice has Anorexia disorder and has gotten a heart attack. Her life had many troubles, she has faced drugs and a couple loves in this book. I think what impacted Alice when she was at Seaview Hospital was Maeve. For example they went to a bar with Maeve did cocaine and when they went to the mall Alice stole to give Maeve something. Then when Maeve decided to leave Alice completely stopped eating and in my thoughts Maeve left a permanent scar on Alice. The reason I say this is because it would be very difficult for Alice to recover and get back to normal. I think Alice loved Maeve so much that it affected her in every way. The only thing I have left to say about this book is it was very much a plot twist. When I heard about the book I thought it was just going to be about a person dealing with their anorexia. But it was more than that. Partly that's what probably made the book a little bit more thrilling.

dg says

a good read. the characters all felt real, i loved their interactions and relationships. i definitely wouldn't recommend this book to someone suffering from an eating disorder, however, as the main character has a lot of damaging ideas about weight, which i guess is obvious from the plot of the book.

Skyler says

Anorexia is, by definition, "an eating disorder characterized by an abnormally low body weight, intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of body weight." For Alice Forrester, her anorexia is something she lives and breathes constantly. Friends? Why bother? For years, being anorexic has taken up most of her time, occupied the majority of her thoughts, and for the most part, ruled her life.

"I had always liked my anorexic reflection. It meant seeing the parts inside of the whole. Each connection, each articulation of muscle, skin, and bone made explicit. Gert said that we all had distorted images of ourselves. Either fatter or skinnier than we really were. She said we hated our bodies, hated ourselves. I had never thought so."

In 1984, after collapsing from heart failure in her mid-twenties, she is escorted by her mother, Syd, to the

emergency room of Seaview Hospital. The physicians assess her and agree upon a goal for Alice: everyone must encourage her to focus on her own recovery; because if she does not, the eating disorder might finally steal her away for good.

As soon as Alice is medically cleared, she is transferred to the eating disorders clinic where, perhaps for the first time, she is asked to take a step back and look at herself objectively. But it is much more difficult to see yourself as separate from yourself when the mirror reflects back all sorts of shapes and figures that are supposed to represent your "youness".

"I took off my clothes and stood close to the glass. I was thinking what I always think: wouldn't it be nice to be truly in the mirror, like the other, fictive Alice, two-dimensional instead of three? The appearance of life without the mess."

As Alice progresses through the eating disorders program, the bonds she has formed with the other girls on the unit become deeper and more meaningful. There's Louise, who, although grossly overweight, cannot help but bury her loneliness in more and more food. Gwen is delicate, flaxen-haired, and reticent. Amy, though only thirteen years old, has become trapped in the world of dieting. And finally, Maeve, who is outspoken and brazen, yet furtively pukes whenever the opportunity presents itself.

The Passion of Alice reads exactly as it sounds. It is a story of recovery and relapse, of friendships and blossoming desires. It is both a book you cannot put down and yet a book that is somehow so *real* that it is occasionally hard to read. Although I feel that the conclusion is much too abrupt and leaves readers with an equal amount of answers and questions, I can't help but feel a special kinship with this book- a no holds barred look at the struggles and triumphs of a woman named Alice Forrester.

Alana says

This book was very a very unique look into the mind of of Alice, a 25 year old girl admitted to an eating disorder treatment center in a hospital, and her mental health during her stay. I enjoy reading books like this because they seem to reach a part of my heart that stays with me long after I've read them. I will be talking more about this book in my August 2017 wrap-up on my youtube channel!

Clelia says

The characters in this book really lingered with me... it's an intelligent, passionate, and harrowingly sad meditation on adulthood, adolescence, death, sexuality, therapy, loneliness, and pretty much anything else you can think of on the emotional spectrum. It was hard to not read it all in one go, I had to pace myself to make it last.

Also: I would not classify this as young adult fiction. But that's not to say that teenagers shouldn't read it, especially teenagers struggling with eating issues or questioning their sexuality.

Lightreads says

Narrative of anorexia, hospitalization, sexuality, and love. The smartest thing about this book is the way it

repossesses anorexia from popular conception, transforming it from an external "you are sick because you are a woman and you want us to see you thinner" into a deeply internal experience of control, which is far closer to the truth when you're talking about five foot eight women who are ninety pounds and who are dying and who will not eat. Unfortunately, the last quarter of the book falls flat in that way it does when the author realizes she needs something clear and decisive to happen, but can't commit herself to anything. Clever, though, with some complex religious overtones and some interesting, if confused, attempts to draw it all together into a narrative of suffering and beauty and deprivation and control and love. First novel, I suspect.

Hazel McHaffie says

Alice is seriously anorexic. Her condition leads to a heart attack and thence to a specialist centre where she meets many other patients struggling with eating disorders. But Alice has many personal issues to resolve (relating to her size, her sexuality, family relationships, her first boyfriend, authority) and along the way she gets into a range of difficult situations which highlight the endless journey she faces. Readable but not riveting.

Jane says

3.5

Heather says

In her 1995 novel of self-acceptance, *The Passion of Alice*, Stephanie Grant paints a picture of a young woman stuck-not able to move forward with her life, and slowly fading away to nothingness. Alice is a 25 year old librarian who is hospitalized at the eating disorders clinic at the well-known Seaview Hospital after a heart attack caused by her extreme thinness. At 89 pounds and 5'10" tall, Alice feels that she is starving herself down to her very essence, shedding everything not about her that is not essential. While at the hospital, she begins to gain weight while getting to know Gwen, a frail timid anorexic; Louise, a grossly overweight woman who is a compulsive eater; and finally Maeve, a risk-taking bulimic who forces Alice to confront her sexuality. When Maeve escapes the hospital, Alice has her second brush with death, and when she gets a visit from an old friend, she finally realizes that in order for her to move forward with her life, she must accept all parts of herself. She cannot starve away her feelings.

If this sounds a little bit like the gay version of *Girl, Interrupted*, you're not wrong. It felt a bit like the gay version of *Girl, Interrupted*. However, many of the things that made the book *Girl, Interrupted* powerful are also present in this story. Grant focuses not so much on the disease of anorexia as the reasons for Alice's starvation. When Alice goes to chapel on week, she shares with the nurse that escorts her that "passion" also means "suffering", and that becomes the major underlying theme of the book. Anything that causes Alice to feel passionate also causes her suffering. Trying to live up to her mother's expectations, her feelings about women and sex, her desire for food that she knows she won't eat. Her anorexia becomes a way to control her passions, essentially trying to starve the feelings away until she is left with nothing but her most essential essence. What she discovers is that her feelings, especially her feelings about women and sex, are an

essential part of her.

Loss of innocence and maturation is also a recurring theme throughout the book. For Alice, that means coming out of a state of willful ignorance about herself-basically, she figures out it's time to put her big girl pants on and get on with things! To some extent it feels as though most of the women on the unit are having a similarly hard time integrating into adulthood-even the ones who have been chronological adults for quite some time. Their reactions to each other, their petty fights, their childish behavior when in public all lead to this sense of them being childlike. The implication seems to be that perhaps the first step in being healthy was to grow up. This can mean confronting some harsh realities-like when one of the doctors catches them off-grounds and offers to trade his silence for sex.

There is less accusation against the psychiatric community in this novel than in similar books, but as the example above shows not everyone in the hospital is portrayed in a positive light. What the setting of the hospital did for me was provide a symbol of the way in which society tries to define what is healthy and normal, and how anyone outside of that definition is considered broken and in need of fixing. It is my sincere hope that we are finally getting to a point in our country where gays and lesbians are no longer seen as broken, but are fully accepted for who we are.

Melissa Lee-Tammeus says

This book closely resembles "Girl, Interrupted" for its brutal look at girls in an institution. This time is for those suffering from eating disorders. Alice is the main character and you read from her point of view what anorexia truly looks like from the inside out. If you are aware of this disorder and its nuances, there are no surprises here however, it is still a wonderful reminder in the fact that this disease is multifaceted and very difficult to treat. The numerous underlying meanings behind why people suffer from eating disorders can be hard to relate to for those of us who do not, but Grant does an incredible job of using empathy as a tool to understanding the inner struggle. This a great ficitonal book for anyone who likes psychological, institutional, twenty something angst tales or would like to learn more about this disease from a story standpoint.

Karschtl says

The plot-outline reminded me of Girl, Interrupted. A young girl with a problem is attmited to a clinic where she meets a girl that is more self-confident, louder, stronger and completely different from her and that she secretly admires. There are some other girls as well, one of them having a tragic ending.

The rest is different though. Alice has to deal with an eating disorder, which is acutally not the focus of the story but rather the frame for it. The main interest lies on the relationship between Alice and Maeve, both having problems of themselves - and those have not only to do with eating disorders.

Somehow I don't really know if I liked the book. I guess the topic didn't interest me much. And the reason why she started the calorie-counting in the first place isn't made clear. Also the ending is kind of a sudden and leaves some questions unanswered.

Interesting but controversial is Alice thesis that Jesus was the first anorexic. I wouldn't agree to that before

hearing more reasons for this belief, but on the other hand I don't know that much about Jesus. By the way, the title is another reference to him, because "passion" is here not (or at least not only) used in the sense of "desire" but more in the sense of "suffering" like in the "Passion of Christ".
