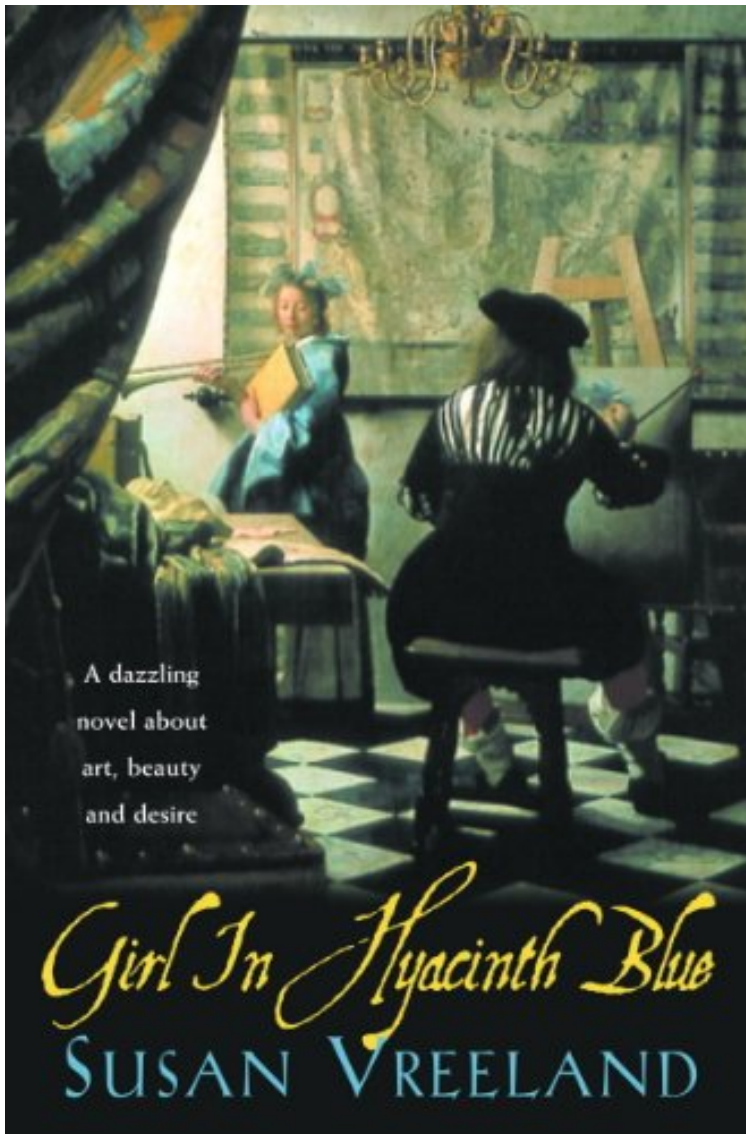


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# Girl in Hyacinth Blue (English Edition)



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*Par Susan Vreeland*  
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**Par Susan Vreeland : Girl in Hyacinth Blue (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Girl in Hyacinth Blue (English Edition):

## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSusan Vreeland's GIRL IN HYACINTH BLUE was shortlisted for the ABA Best Novel of the Year award, and is a hugely absorbing fictional portrait of Vermeer's daughter sure to appeal to any reader of THE GIRL WITH THE PEARL EARRING by Tracy Chevalier. 'Subtle and atmospheric...an impressive debut' Publishers WeeklyHere is the story of an imaginary painting by Vermeer, and the aspirations and longings of those whose lives it illuminates, and darkens. From a proud father regretting his lost love to a compromised French noblewoman, from a hanged girl to Vermeer's own gifted daughter, Susan Vreeland's beautiful and luminous tales link to form an evocative jewel..comThere are only 35 known Vermeers extant in the world today. In Girl in Hyacinth Blue, Susan Vreeland posits the existence of a 36th. The story begins at a private boys' academy in Pennsylvania where, in the wake of a faculty member's

unexpected death, math teacher Cornelius Engelbrecht makes a surprising revelation to one of his colleagues. He has, he claims, an authentic Vermeer painting, "a most extraordinary painting in which a young girl wearing a short blue smock over a rust-colored skirt sat in profile at a table by an open window."

His colleague, an art teacher, is skeptical and though the technique and subject matter are persuasively Vermeer-like, Engelbrecht can offer no hard evidence--no appraisal, no papers--to support his claim. He says only that his father, "who always had a quick eye for fine art, picked it up, let us say, at an advantageous moment." Eventually it is revealed that Engelbrecht's father was a Nazi in charge of rounding up Dutch Jews for deportation and that the picture was looted from one doomed family's home: That's when I saw that painting, behind his head. All blues and yellows and reddish brown, as translucent as lacquer. It had to be a Dutch master. Just then a private found a little kid covered with tablecloths behind some dishes in a sideboard cabinet. We'd almost missed him. By the end of "Love Enough," this first of eight interrelated stories tracing the history of "Girl in Hyacinth Blue," the painting's fate at the hands of guilt-riddled Engelbrecht fils is in question. Unfortunately, there is no doubt about the probable destiny of the previous owners, the Vredenburg family of Rotterdam, who take center stage in the powerful "A Night Different From All Other Nights." Vreeland handles this tale with subtlety and restraint, setting it at Passover, the year before the looting, and choosing to focus on the adolescent Hannah Vredenburg's difficult passage into adulthood in the face of an uncertain future. In the next story, "Adagia," she moves even further into the past to sketch "how love builds itself unconsciously ... out of the momentous ordinary" in a tender portrait of a longtime marriage. Back and back Vreeland goes, back through other owners, other histories, to the very inception of the painting in the homely, everyday objects of the Vermeer household--a daughter's glass of milk, a son's shirt in need of buttons, a wife's beloved sewing basket--"the unacknowledged acts of women to hallow home." Girl in Hyacinth Blue ends with the painting's subject herself, Vermeer's daughter Magdalena, who first sends the portrait out into the world as payment for a family debt, then sees it again, years later at an auction. She thought of all the people in all the paintings she had seen that day, not just Father's, in all the paintings of the world, in fact. Their eyes, the particular turn of a head, their loneliness or suffering or grief was borrowed by an artist to be seen by other people throughout the years who would never see them face to face. People who would be that close to her, she thought, a matter of a few arms' lengths, looking, looking, and they would never know her. In this final passage, Susan Vreeland might be describing her own masterpiece as well as Vermeer's. --Alix Wilber

Cornelius Engelbrecht invented himself. Let me emphasize, straight away, that he isn't what I would call a friend, but I know him enough to say that he did purposely design himself: single, modest dresser in receding colours, mathematics teacher, sponsor of the chess club, mild-mannered acquaintance to all rather than a friend to any, a person anxious to become invisible. However, that exterior blandness masked a burning centre, and for some reason that became clear to me only later, Cornelius Engelbrecht revealed to me the secret obsession that lay beneath his orderly, controlled design. It was after Dean Merrill's funeral that I began to see Cornelius's unmasked heart. We'd all felt the shock of Merrill's sudden death, a loss that thrust us into a temporary intimacy uncommon in the faculty lunchroom of our small private boys' academy, but it wasn't shock or Cornelius's head start in drinking that snowy afternoon in Penn's Den where we'd gone after the funeral that made him forsake his strategy of obscurity. Someone at the table remarked about Merrill's cryptic last words, "love enough," words that now sting me as much as any indictment of my complicity or encouragement, but they didn't then. We began talking of last words of famous people and of our dead relatives, and Cornelius dipped his head and fastened his gaze on his dark beer. I only noticed because chance had placed us next to each other at the table. He spoke to his beer rather than to any of us. " 'An eye like a blue pearl,' was what my father said. And then he died. During a winter's first snowfall, just like this." Cornelius had a face I'd always associated with Piero della Francesca's portrait of the Duke of Urbino. It was the shape of his nose, narrow but extremely high-bridged, providing a perch for glasses he did not wear. He seemed a man distracted by a mystery or preoccupied by an intellectual or moral dilemma so consuming that it made him feel superior, above those of us whose concerns were tires for the car or a child's flu. Whenever our talk moved toward the mundane, he became distant, as though he were mulling over something far more weighty, which made his cool smiles patronizing. "Eye like a blue pearl? What's that mean?" I asked. He studied my face as if measuring me against some private criteria. "I can't explain it, Richard, but I might show you." In fact, he insisted that I come to his home that evening, which was entirely out of character. I'd never seen him insist on anything. It would call attention to himself. I think Merrill's "love enough" had somehow stirred him, or else he thought it might stir me. As I say, why he picked me I couldn't tell, unless it was simply that I was

the only artist or art teacher he knew. He took me down a hallway into a spacious study piled with books, the door curiously locked even though he lived alone. Closed off, the room was chilly so he lit a fire. "I don't usually have guests," he explained, and directed me to sit in the one easy chair, plum-coloured leather, high-backed and expensive, next to the fireplace and opposite a painting. A most extraordinary painting in which a young girl wearing a short blue smock over a rust-coloured skirt sat in profile at a table by an open window. "My God," I said. It must have been what he'd wanted to hear, for it unleashed a string of directives, delivered at high pitch. "Look. Look at her eye. Like a pearl. Pearls were favourite items of Vermeer. The longing in her expression. And look at that Delft light spilling onto her forehead from the window." He took out his handkerchief and, careful not to touch the painting, wiped the frame, though I saw no dust at all. "See here," he said, "the grace of her hand, idle, palm up. How he consecrated a single moment in that hand. But more than that." "Remarkable," I said. "Certainly done in the style of Vermeer. A beguiling imitation." Cornelius placed his hands on the arm of the chair and leaned toward me until I felt his breath on my forehead. "It is a Vermeer," he whispered.