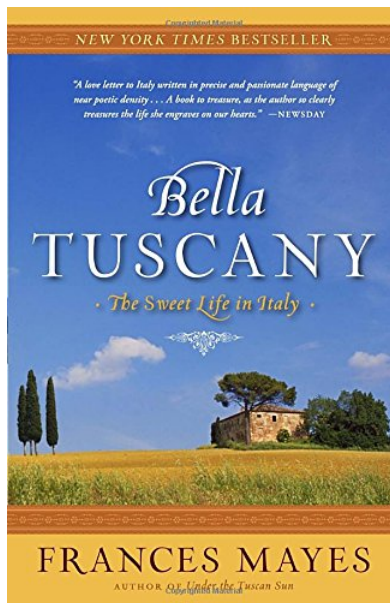


[Download] Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy



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Often the most fascinating memoirs are written by people who seem to be quite unaware that they are actually monsters. Frances Mayes' entertainingly egocentric *Bella Tuscany*, the sequel to her best-selling *Under the Tuscan Sun*, nudges into this category. Like its predecessor, a lyrical account of an American teacher of creative writing's insertion of herself into Tuscan life and the Tuscan landscape, *Bella Tuscany* (shouldn't that be *Bella Toscana*, or is something to be inferred about the intended readership?) is a sustained, ecstatic trill of cypresses, dusty, immemorial hillsides and tile-roofed hill towns. With hunky husband Ed, Frances restores her farmhouse, plants flowers and grows vegetables, cooks, travels and generally swans about Italy, in the process transforming it into a vehicle for her glowing sensibilities. Occasionally she speculates briefly about those she encounters on the way--about the old farmers who tend her olive trees, about the Nigerian prostitutes surreally stationed along a lonely rural road by the Russian mafia--but the beam of her attention barely flickers. There is a telling moment early on: she looks out of the window; the landscape reveals itself for her to love. It is as though the whole of Tuscany, no, the whole of Italy is laid out for her benefit, for those exquisite Martha Stewart moments. And people are so kind: they just can't resist bestowing gifts on her. The lady at the nursery rushes out with a plant. The shy owner of the perfumery shop in town turns out to have paid for her cappuccino. Anselmo who manages their vegetable garden presents them with his wine-press. "This gentle courtesy happens frequently." Far more than any possible reader, she is an enthralled spectator of the pageant of her gorgeous life, which she is generous enough to share. One doesn't begrudge it her one bit. One reads, fascinated, then makes one's holiday plans for somewhere else. --Robin Davidson

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