

# **Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy Study Guide**

**Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy by Frances  
Mayes**

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# Plot Summary

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN: AT HOME IN ITALY is the first in a series of three Tuscan memoirs by Frances Mayes. In this memoir, Frances Mayes recounts the purchase of her home, Bramasole, in Tuscany. When Ms. Mayes bought this home, it had been neglected for more than thirty years and was in desperate need of renovations. Ms. Mayes recounts the adventures she and Ed, her husband, had renovating the house and working in its gardens while enjoying the sights and food of Tuscany. Under the Tuscan Sun is a memoir that will leave the reader excited and full of appreciation for the world around them, no matter where their home might be.

Frances and Ed were in Cortona awaiting the completion of their purchase of Bramasole, a small home outside of the village as the book begins. Frances was very nervous about this purchase, concerned that she and Ed were sinking all their savings into a losing venture. However, once the long process of the purchase was complete and Frances and Ed were allowed to move into the house, the excitement of planning the renovations the house would need helped ease her fear. Frances and Ed immediately set about cleaning the house and removing old bottles that had been stored for years inside the many rooms.

Frances and Ed are forced to wait for permits before beginning the major renovations. In the meantime, Frances and Ed began clearing the terraces where their many trees and plants were growing. Frances and Ed also hired a man to fix a collapsing stone wall; in the process they meet a group of Polish men who would become both friends and reliable handymen. This process also introduced Frances and Ed to the work ethics of Italian contractors and the obstacles the language barrier would present.

Frances and Ed were forced to return to the United States earlier than they would have liked in order to return to their jobs as professors at two different universities. Upon their return the following summer, Frances and Ed learned their new well had been dug and there would be plenty of water for their everyday needs, a relief after suffering from a dry well the summer before. Frances and Ed would also learn that their permits had come through and work could soon begin on the house. Frances and Ed hoped the work will be complete in time for them to spend Christmas at Bramasole with Frances' daughter, Ashley. However, this did not happen.

When Frances and Ed returned to Bramasole over the Christmas break, they discover that the house is a mess. The workers did not bother to clean up after themselves and even wrote a phone number in permanent ink on the fresco in the dining room. Frances, Ed, and Ashley ended up spending Christmas at the home of a friend in Cortona. The work was finally finished the following spring. Frances was happy with the work and excited to begin living at Bramasole. Frances and Ed had a table built to set out under the trees where Frances had imagined having long meals with Ed and visitors to their home since first seeing Bramasole.



Ed and Frances do not remain rooted to Bramasole on their visits to Tuscany. One summer, Frances and Ed spend a few weeks touring the wilds of Tuscany, visiting many Etruscan tombs and collecting wines for their collection at Bramasole. Friends of Frances and Ed come to spend time at Bramasole, one woman celebrating her wedding there. One winter, Frances and Ed hurry back to Bramasole in order to harvest their olive trees and have oil made from the fruit. Friends and family come to visit; Ashley brought her boyfriend one Christmas to share the holiday with Ed and Frances at Bramasole.

When Frances published this memoir, she did not expect it to sell as well as it did. Later, when Disney decided to make a movie based on the book, Frances was thrilled. Frances read through the script and found that it kept intact the spirit of the book, which to her was the most important thing. Frances and Ed arrived in Tuscany that summer just in time to watch the movie being filmed in a house nearby that had been renovated to look just like Bramasole. Frances found it amusing to watch the filming. It seemed everyone in the village was an extra in the film, adding to the excitement of the moment.



# "Bramare: (Archaic) To Yearn For and A House" and "The Land It Takes Two Oxen Two Days to Plow"

## "Bramare: (Archaic) To Yearn For and A House" and "The Land It Takes Two Oxen Two Days to Plow" Summary and Analysis

Frances Mayes had recently gone through a divorce and had recently become involved in a new relationship with her lover, Ed. Frances had been a frequent visitor to Italy and had fallen in love with the simplicity of life there. For the past few years, Frances and Ed had come to visit together and began looking for a house to buy in place of the rentals they were always forced to use on their frequent visits.

In Bramare, Frances sat in her hotel room anxiously awaiting word from the bank letting them know the large amount of money they had had transferred to a local bank had arrived. Frances and Ed had found a house, called Bramasole, on a previous visit to Tuscany and had not been able to forget the beautiful old house. Upon returning, Frances called the agent to find out if Bramasole was still available. When they learned it was, Frances and Ed immediately made an offer that was most likely much too much for the long abandoned house. Now they were waiting for the slow process to be complete. Frances worried about their choice, afraid they were sinking their savings into a money pit. After waiting what seemed like years, Frances began to discuss giving up and going home. Soon after, however, Frances and Ed were notified that the money had finally arrived and the transaction could be completed. Frances and Ed were given the keys to the house, huge iron keys that could not be duplicated, and allowed to move in. They moved into the old, dirty house with only a bed and an abandoned kitchen table as their furnishings, the new owners of a house and land that it takes two oxen two days to plow.

In "A House and Land," Frances and Ed immediately set out to clean the house, removing the scorpions and spiders that had made the house a home for the past thirty years that the house had been empty. When the house was somewhat clean, they hired a geometra to begin making plans for the renovations. The house had three floors, complete with an animal shed and farmer's kitchen. The back of the house included a farmer's apartment that was inaccessible from the front of the house. Frances and Ed had plans to add a bathroom to the second floor bedroom and to tear down several walls to open up the first floor rooms. They were warned that the house was built in such a way that taking down walls would compromise the structural integrity of the house, causing them to revise their plans. Frances and Ed were then told that the roof would also need to be replaced. They decided, however, to begin the renovations by adding central heating to be used when they would visit at Christmas time. The entire



project would require many permits from the local government and they were told these could take many months to obtain.

Frances and Ed interview three contractors, looking for someone they could trust to do the work while they were back in the United States. The language barrier proved to be a small problem, but they eventually picked the man they wanted to use. Shortly before they must pack up and leave, Frances was taking a shower and the water stopped. Upon inspection, Frances and Ed learned that their well that was supposed to be deep enough to feed a swimming pool was shallow and had run out of water. The first thing they had to do was to have a well dug. Then it was time to go and Frances found herself saddened as they drove away and left Bramasole behind.

The first two chapters of this memoir describe the purchase of Bramasole and the first summer spent at the house. Frances is a professional woman, a university professor, who has a very busy life when she is in California. In Italy, Frances likes to relax and indulge in the history of the beautiful country she has come to enjoy. Frances has suffered through a bad divorce and begun a new relationship with Ed, the man with whom she purchases Bramasole. This house is a beginning for Frances in many ways, including a major step in her relationship with Ed. This house is about taking chances, a theme of the memoir, and it is the beginning of many changes in Frances' life.

The renovations on the house seem simple on the outset for Frances and Ed. They imagine doing much of the work themselves except for the major renovations that will require knocking down walls and building an entire new bathroom. This house is a project, something to be done together, to dream about together, to work at together. The reader is given the impression that Frances and Ed are a committed couple who have taken on this project not only to create an oasis away from the stresses of their everyday lives, but as a symbol of their committed relationship to each other. This house is a new beginning. The tone at this point is filled with excitement and an innocent sense of beginning. The reader is anxious to see how the stresses of the renovation will impact Frances and Ed as well as their commitment to both the house and each other.



# Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy

## Summary and Analysis

In "Sister Water, Brother Fire," Frances and Ed turned their attention to the gardens when they return the following spring. Frances found herself watching a local man who would bring flowers everyday to the shrine that adorned Bramasole's front gate. Frances made up stories for herself about who the man was and why he would come to the shrine, bringing whatever flowers he would find growing alongside the road. This man was an example to Frances of what made Italy such a wonderful place to be.

One afternoon, while pulling weeds from one of the terraces, Frances stumbled upon a well. The find turned out to be a chute of sorts that connected to other chutes on other terraces that all ran down to the cistern that sat at the bottom of their property. Later, Frances and Ed found a well that appeared to give access to a natural spring. Frances and Ed attached a pump to the well and began using it to water the garden. Nearby, they also uncovered a stone sink that was apparently the original kitchen sink. They cleaned it up and put it aside to have it mounted outside the kitchen for use outside. About the same time, the new well was completed and Frances and Ed once again had plenty of water to use at Bramasole.

Frances and Ed had noticed a stone wall on their property that was falling down the summer before. Ed had studied several books about stone building and had been prepared to repair the wall himself. However, the job proved to be more complicated than they originally thought it would be, so they decided to hire a contractor to repair the wall. Frances and Ed hired a friend of their agent, Signor Martini. This man proved to be inept at the work but brought along three Polish men who were more than competent, repairing the wall in such a way that Frances was convinced it would last many generations. Frances and Ed made friends with these Polish men, who would often return to do other jobs around Bramasole.

The front gate of Bramasole is old and bent. The contractor, Giuseppe, brought a friend to look at it and to assess if it would be repairable. The man was a blacksmith who impressed Frances with his medieval techniques. In "The Wild Orchard," Signor Martini stopped by one afternoon and commented on the pine nuts Frances had just discovered. Frances took the nuts and made a traditional Italian desert and invited Signor Martini over to share it with her. Frances felt as though they made a connection over the nuts and she wanted to continue to share this new change in their relationship by giving Signor Martini something to that meant something to him to celebrate the new relationship.

The gardens at Bramasole had many trees including olives and limes. The garden had figs, but Frances was unsure of using figs because of the wasps that would lay eggs inside them. There are also many fruit trees. Frances' family has always canned fruits and vegetables. That second summer, Frances bought boxes of peaches from the



market and made peach marmalade which she canned herself. Later, Frances dreamed of the deserts she would make with the many fruits growing in Bramasole's gardens.

In these chapters, Frances and Ed return to Bramasole for their first full summer. The renovations on the house cannot begin yet because the permits have not been approved, so they begin on the gardens. Frances makes many discoveries, including a water chute that runs to the cistern and a natural spring well. Frances is fascinated by the history of the area and the amazing things that the local residents take for granted, like the stone sink that Frances discovers in the garden. The house seems steeped in history, leaving Frances fascinated by the sense of being close to those who came before. In fact, Frances finds herself daydreaming about the woman who lived in the house before her and the life she must have lived. The history of the house and the gardens only add to the romance of Bramasole for Frances.

The theme of good food and good friends begins to show itself in these chapters as well. Frances discovers not only the rich variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs in her gardens at Bramasole but also pine nuts that she had not realized grew on the trees near her driveway. As Frances collected these nuts, her agent, Signor Martini, came along and for the first time, told her some personal things about himself. Frances took this information and used it to make Signor Martini a traditional Italian desert to show her appreciation to him for helping them find Bramasole. This event introduces the reader to the idea of food and the impact it has on Frances' life. Later, when Frances begins canning peaches because it was a tradition in her family, the reader sees the lack of stress involved in this process at Bramasole as compared to Frances' home in California and begins to recognize with Frances the effect Bramasole has on her.





# Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy

## Summary and Analysis

In "Whir of the Sun," Frances was at Bramasole alone because Ed had to return to Minnesota for his parents' wedding anniversary celebration. Frances fell into a routine of her own making, finding herself doing things she had never done before, such as napping at nine in the morning. Frances attended a lunch with some local Americans who also bought and renovated a home in Tuscany. Frances found the lunch to be enlightening as it was attended by many writers and artists. One woman in particular made an impression on Frances because Frances had been a fan of the woman's writing previous to meeting her. This woman, Elizabeth, who had a house in Cortona, would become a good friend to Frances and Ed. At the same time, Frances and Ed discovered they were beginning to be accepted in town. They made a point of shopping in all the local stores rather than traveling to the cheaper supermarket in Camucia. The butcher and produce woman soon got to know them and put things aside especially for them.

While still waiting the approval of their permits, Frances and Ed decided to begin taking the old paint off the walls in preparation for painting later. The Polish men came over to help. While Cristoforo and Riccardo were working in the dining room, they made a discovery that excited everyone. A fresco was uncovered on the dining room wall. Ed and Frances decided to leave the fresco and make it a centerpiece of the room. As the summer slowly passed, Frances found herself thinking about the restoration and the impact it was having on her life. Frances recalled a time as a child when she sneaked out of her bedroom in the middle of the night and discovered the feel of freedom. Frances now believed that this night of freedom excited her so much that it left her open to take the chance in buying Bramasole.

In "Festina Tarde," Frances was forced to return to San Francisco ahead of Ed who remained at Bramasole in the hopes the sandblaster would arrive to remove the paint from the beams that stretch across Bramasole's ceilings. Frances was not as happy as she had thought she would be to be back among her familiar belongings. Soon work took over most of Frances' day, leaving her too rushed to cook as she was able to do at Bramasole. Ed called to let Frances know the sandblaster had arrived and the beams looked beautiful, but they would be cleaning sand out of the house for years to come. At the same time, Ed learned the permits had come through and work would begin immediately and would hopefully be done by Christmas. However, the original contractor became ill and had to be replaced, but the work would be overseen by Ian, a man who aided in the purchase of Bramasole. Over the next couple months, Frances and Ed received faxes from Ian informing them on the progress of the work. The work was not progressing as quickly as desired and taking down one wall nearly resulted in the collapse of the entire house. Ed and Frances decided to return to Bramasole for Christmas despite the fact the work was not done.



When Ed and Frances arrived, they discovered the house was a mess. The workers were not removing the debris and someone had written a phone number on the fresco in the dining room. Bramasole was such a mess that Ed and Frances arranged to stay at Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth was selling her house and offered Ed and Frances a lot of her furniture, so they moved the furniture to Bramasole and stored it all in one room under tarps to protect it from the workers. In April, Ed returned early to Bramasole. The workers were done, but the house still needed to be cleaned and painted. A friend of Ed and Frances was coming to Bramasole to be married, so they only had a few months to finish the renovations. Ed worked on the beams and removing the debris while he was alone at Bramasole, keeping Frances up to date on his progress. When Frances arrived a lot of work still remained, but they somehow managed to get the house livable before the wedding party began to arrive. The wedding was casual, but beautiful, and the house proved to be a fitting backdrop, despite the hot water in the toilets.

In these chapters, Frances begins to get to know her American neighbors and discuss the drama that surrounds a home renovation in Italy. These get-togethers take place over lunch, touching again on the theme of good food, good friends. Frances meets Elizabeth, a writer she has admired for many years at one of these lunches, and they begin a strong friendship that is so complete that Elizabeth allows Ed and Frances to stay in her home over Christmas when the renovations on Bramasole prove to be taking longer than expected.

The renovations on Bramasole are complicated. However, as they begin, Frances realizes that she is enjoying the work, even the frustrations, more than she ever would have at her home in California. Frances once had her kitchen redone and it was a nightmare for her. Bramasole, on the other hand, is a renovation that is full of new discoveries and excitement, leaving Frances discovering things about her personality that she has never known before. Frances is beginning to discover herself as she discovers the history that remains in Bramasole.



# Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy

## Summary and Analysis

In "Long Table," Frances went to the market in Camucia every Thursday that she could, arriving early in the morning before the heat sets in. Frances liked to buy the best fruits, the best meats, and often would find wonderful deals on designer scarf knockoffs and shoes. The kitchen at Bramasole was finally complete with marble countertops and long shelves instead of cabinets, making it possible for Frances to create wonderful meals for friends and family who often stopped by to visit. In California, Frances no longer had time to cook long, leisurely meals due to the requirements of her job, but in Bramasole, the sky was the limit. Since the first time Frances saw Bramasole she imagined a table under the trees where she could enjoy long meals with Ed and their friends. Now that the kitchen was done, Frances and Ed commissioned a long table to be custom built. The carpenters laughed when they learn they wanted the table painted bright yellow, but Frances insisted and they complied. Soon after, Frances and Ed enjoy their first dinner on that table with a young couple and their baby. They sit under the stars and talk the night away.

In "Summer Kitchen Notes," Frances shares with her reader many recipes based on fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs available in Italy during the summer. In Cortona, Noble City, Frances takes the reader on a tour of Cortona, the village near Bramasole. The city is built on Etruscan artifacts, including Frances' bank which sits on an Etruscan wall. The architecture is erratic, as though the carpenters changed their minds multiple times during construction. There is the fresh produce store where the owner often saves the best fruits for Frances and where the tourists often misunderstand the customs of the region. There are the artist stands where tourists buy authentic Italian crafts and restaurants that serve only the best Italian cuisine. There are furniture makers, tailors, and shoe stores. Guide books offer a lot of information on Cortona, but Frances does not feel that this gives justice to the beauty of her adopted home, so she gives a tour of her own. Frances walks the reader through the streets, pointing out history at the Etruscan tombs, strange architecture like the death doors, and old customs, like the Catherine wheel at a local convent where someone could have their lace repaired without ever setting eyes on the nuns inside. All the while, Frances points out people unique to the village, telling little stories about them that are either based on her personal knowledge or guessed by their appearance.

In these chapters, Frances begins to reveal her love of Tuscany to the reader. The reader has already guessed by Frances' excitement regarding Bramasole that she enjoys Tuscany. However, in "The Long Table Under the Trees," Frances begins to take the reader along with her as she lives a typical day in Tuscany. Frances takes the reader to the market, writing in the present tense as though the events are happening as the reader reads along. The tone is one of contentment, of happiness in her enjoyment of nature's gifts. Then Frances again introduces the theme of good food, good friends when she describes the table she had made to place under the trees in



Bramasole's gardens and a meal with a few good friends. Frances continues on this theme by introducing a chapter filled with wonderful recipes that are made from the fresh food and herbs she can find in Bramasole's garden.

In Cortona, Noble City, Frances takes the reader on a tour of Cortona, again in the present tense, as though she is walking beside her reader as they discover the village for the very first time. The tour is detailed, giving the reader a true feel for the village rather than a clinical description one might find in a tour guide. Frances' love of Cortona comes through in her descriptions, the tone sharing with the reader the admiration Frances has for the village, its history, and its people. Frances truly loves this little village and through her eyes, the reader comes to love it as well.



# Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy

## Summary and Analysis

In "Riva," Maremma, Frances and Ed decided one summer to visit parts of Tuscany they had yet to explore. They travel into what was known as Wild Tuscany, beginning their journey in Montalcino. After siesta, they visited a vineyard where they began to collect wines to keep at Bramasole. They visited a church built over eight hundred years before where Frances was annoyed by a group of chattering women before stopping in a local restaurant for a decadent meal. Next they visited Pitigliano, a village with a rich Jewish history. In Savano they explored Etruscan tombs built into a hillside. Next was Montemerano, a high castle town where they see a famous shrine before partaking in yet another decadent meal. The following morning they visited the hot waterfall in Saturnia. They visited more Etruscan tombs and museums in Tarquinia and Norchia, before having dinner and collecting more wine in Caino. In Vulci there was more Etruscan architecture and Roman artifacts. At a restaurant in Vulci, an artist drew their caricatures as they collected yet more wine. In Maremma they visited a beach and Riva where they strolled through the streets and enjoyed wonderful foods. Finally they visit Marittima where they walked down every street.

In "Turning Italian," Frances had begun to notice that in Italy, Ed had changed. Ed wrote lists, drank espresso, and began to drive much too fast. These habits followed Ed home, causing him to buy a fancy espresso machine for their house in San Francisco and to buy an Italian sports car that netted him several speeding tickets. When Ed fought one of those tickets based on the grounds that the officer targeted him because of the car, Ed was forced to pay the ticket and an added fine. Frances recognized that she and Ed had been affected by Italy but would never truly become Italian. However, they were more and more accepted by the people of Cortona. At a local celebration Frances and Ed were welcomed by their neighbors and made to feel a part of the celebration. Placido, their neighbor and the local tax collector, had been distant the first few summers Frances and Ed owned Bramasole. However, Placido soon became friendly, even asking to use a section of their land in order to work with his new pet, a falcon.

In "Green Oil," Frances and Ed sped to Bramasole one winter in order to arrive early enough to harvest their olives and have them made into oil. It was too wet when they first arrived to harvest the fruit, so they spent the day attempting to find a mill to process the olives. The first four or five mills were either closed already or were unable to process such a small harvest. Finally they found the perfect mill. Frances and Ed returned to Bramasole and harvested the olives themselves and took them to the mill the following day. They received about a liter per tree of oil. Frances and Ed decided they had never tasted better olive oil. They placed some in decorative bottles and took them back to California with them, leaving the rest to be used next summer.



In "Riva," Maremma, Frances and Ed take a tour of the wilder parts of Tuscany that they have not visited before, showing the reader Tuscany outside of Bramasole. Again Frances' love and enjoyment of Tuscany comes through in her narration, her tone exuding the emotions that filled her while visiting these wild places filled with history. Her love of food also comes through in this chapter as she relates the wonderful meals she and Ed share on this tour of Tuscany. In "Turning Italian," Frances begins to share with the reader the changes that have come over her and Ed during their summers at Bramasole. Ed has taken up drinking espressos and driving fast, two things that are causing him minor troubles in his life in California. Frances herself recognizes changes in her own behavior, a new relaxed attitude that does not exist in her California life. Bramasole has allowed Frances to rediscover the more innocent and happy Frances that ceased to exist amongst the stresses of her other life. At Bramasole, however, she has become a content woman, cooking and spending long afternoons with family and friends. At the same time, Cortona has come to accept them as well, welcoming them into their lives with the open arms of friendly neighbors. Finally, Frances and Ed have made oil from their olives, taking them that final step in becoming the farmers that they had dreamed of being when they began searching for Bramasole.



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## Summary and Analysis

In "Floating World," Frances and Ed arrive in Cortona shortly before her daughter, Ashley, and her boyfriend, Jess, are due to arrive to share Christmas with them at Bramasole. Frances had not met Jess before but instantly liked his openness and easy humor. In the days before Christmas, they went to Florence and walked through the outdoor market. They had agreed not to buy presents, but Ed and Jess decided they had to buy Frances a bag she had admired, nearly missing the train when they went to buy it. On Christmas Eve they went to Umbria where they hope to get a specific red wine Ed wants to have for Christmas dinner. Back at Bramasole, Frances and Ashley cook traditional treats as well as Italian dishes as Jess entertains with rock lyrics and Ed weatherproofs the windows. On Christmas morning they wake to discover it snowed overnight. They opened presents before preparing the meal they would share with friends that evening. Frances and Ed spent New Years with Ashley and Jess, dining on the traditional lentils that were meant to bring them good luck. Before returning to their respective homes, they all helped to plant the Christmas tree in Bramasole's gardens where they hoped it will bring back good memories for years to come.

In "Winter Kitchen Notes," Frances again shares recipes that one could make with ingredients easily found in Italy in the winter. In "Rose Walk," Frances returned to Bramasole alone, leaving Ed in California to finish his classes. When Frances finally ended her long journey at Bramasole, she found her sister and her family still in residence where they had been vacationing for several weeks. Frances toured the gardens, surprised to find the enormous growth of most of the plants, including the roses they had only recently pruned back. Frances spent a week with her family before Ed returned in time for their farewell meal. Over the next few weeks, Frances and Ed planted more roses, reminding Frances of the roses her father planted around the cotton mill he managed for her grandfather. In "Sempre Pietra," Frances and Ed hire Benito, a contractor, to do one last project on the house. They wanted the wall between the living room and the contadina opened to create one big room. The project would include replacing the floor in the contadina. As the workers pull up the old floor, they keep finding more and more stone until they finally reached the simple earth. At the same time, the removal of stone to open the wall revealed a beam that had rotted and needed to be replaced. The job took weeks longer than it should have and created cracks in the walls above the living room, but when it was complete, the rooms were beautiful. The big projects of the restoration were finally finished, but still there were little things to do, such as retiling one of the bathrooms.

In these chapters, the theme of family is once again illustrated. Frances and Ed spend a wonderful Christmas with Frances' daughter Ashley and her new boyfriend, Jess. The holiday is ideal, filled with good friends, family, and good food. Winter is a wonderful time in Italy, just like summer, filled with its own wonderful foods, as the recipes in Winter Notes shows the reader. Summer remains the most exciting time, however. The



following summer, Frances visits with her sister and her family, again touching on the theme of family. Later, Frances begins planting roses, reminding her of pleasant memories from her childhood, bringing a small part of the American south to Italy. Finally, Frances and Ed commission a contractor to do the final, big project on Bramasole. The living room and the contadina are connected, allowing for them to become one large room. With all restoration projects, there is much more involved than what the project appears to be at the beginning, but it is done well and ends beautifully. All the restoration appears to be done, except for little projects that will most likely continue as long as Frances and Ed own the house. This unending list of projects only adds to the character of Bramasole, leaving Frances content with the choice she made and the chance she took.





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## Summary and Analysis

In "Relics of Summer," Frances relates to the reader how hot and dry summers in Tuscany can be so much like her childhood summers in Georgia. Not a religious woman, Frances began reading about saints and martyrs one summer in Italy due to the history contained in those stories rather than the religious connection. The stories remind Frances of a childhood experience of visiting odd sites, including a boa constrictor wrapped around a woman's neck. In Italy, Frances enjoyed visiting the churches, admiring the architecture and the sense of history each contained. Frances bought a shrine to the Virgin Mother, not because of the religious connection but because of the history it offered, the connection to the past that seemed to come from every Italian custom. In "Solleone," Frances relates to the reader the many walks she would take while at Bramasole. Frances would walk the Roman road into town to pick up supplies or on one of the other trails near Bramasole where history seemed to exist at every turn of the road. The heat cooked the ground, producing wonderful fruits and allowing the whole country to take three hours in the heat of the day to sleep or make love, a siesta for all to enjoy.

In "Ben Tornati," Frances added a chapter after the publication of this book to discuss the film that was made of the book. Frances was allowed to see the script before filming began and was happy to see that the writers kept the overall tone and theme of the book alive, while adding new aspects to her character including an Italian lover that she told Ed she was sorry to have missed out on. Frances and Ed went to Bramasole while the movie was filming a few miles away and watched as the local people of Cortona were extras in the film. Frances was even introduced to several of the stars, including Diane Lane who played Frances. Frances was excited by the life the book took, offering her a great many surprises in its wake.

In these chapters, the tone becomes one of lazy contentment as Frances describes what life has become at Bramasole since the renovations have ended. They have settled into the easy Italian life, enjoying the heat and the rich history of the area. As a child who grew up in Georgia, Frances believes her contentment in Italy comes from her upbringing. However, there is more to Italy than that and Frances continues to enjoy every bit of history and acceptance that she has found at Bramasole.

The final chapter of the memoir has been added since the original publication of the book. This final chapter takes the reader back to Bramasole ten years after Frances and Ed purchased it. Ed and Frances are married now and continue to enjoy Bramasole, which has grown under their continued guidance and loving care. Disney has begun filming a movie based on the book. Ed and Frances come to Bramasole to watch the filming and are amused by the open acceptance of most of the people in Cortona, many of whom are extras in the film. The book, as well as Bramasole, has taken Frances on a wonderful journey and she hopes the journey will continue for many years to come.



# Characters

## Frances Mayes

Frances Mayes was a college professor when she decided to buy a house in Tuscany with her future husband, Ed. Frances was frightened at the idea of losing all her savings in this purchase, but the idea of having a permanent getaway in the country she had come to love was too much to pass up. Frances and Ed went through the rocky and often confusing process of buying the house and found themselves owners of a small farm that had been abandoned and left to the mercy of the elements for thirty years. The house would require a great deal of work, but both Ed and Frances were excited by the challenge.

Frances Mayes grew up in a family where food was the centerpiece of all family get togethers and celebrations. Frances loved food, and the idea of being in Italy, where food was traditionally simple and decadent, thrilled Frances beyond words. Frances could now make huge meals from the fresh ingredients growing in her own garden. Frances made desserts and meats and breads from the herbs and fruits growing in her garden. The kitchen at Bramasole was renovated to Frances' exact specifications, creating a haven for her to create her wonderful dishes. Soon family and friends would come and enjoy these foods with Frances and Ed at a long table under the trees, creating a relaxing atmosphere that was worth every risk they took to buy and renovate the wonderful house.

## Ed

Ed was Frances's lover. Frances had recently gone through a bitter divorce when she met Ed. Frances and Ed shared a love of Italy and would visit there often on their breaks from the respective jobs at California universities. Eventually they decided they would pool their savings and buy a more permanent residence in Tuscany rather than rent a farmhouse every time they came for a vacation. With the purchase of Bramasole, Ed and Frances found themselves taking on projects they have never dealt with before and are unsure how to proceed. Ed threw himself into the projects, learning more about building with stone, plastering, and painting than he had ever wanted to know. Together, he and Frances were finally able to create a haven at Bramasole that was perfect for their purposes.

While staying in Italy every chance he got, summers, winter breaks, and spring breaks, Ed began to take on some of the habits of the Italians. Ed, a lifelong tea drinker, began drinking espresso on a daily basis. Ed even bought a fancy espresso machine for both his home in California and for Bramasole. Ed also embraced the driving habits of the Italians, learning to drive sports cars and speeding through traffic. This habit caused Ed trouble in California when he bought an Italian sports car and was given many tickets for



speeding. Ed even fought one of these tickets, claiming the cop targeted him because of the car. Ed ended up paying a fine in addition to the original cost of the ticket.

## Ashley

Ashley is Frances Mayes's daughter. Ashley was a grown woman when Frances and Ed bought Bramasole, living in New York making her living as an artist. Ashley showed every sign of being the first in Frances' family to resist the food gene, deciding that cooking was too much work. However, as an adult, Ashley began to change her mind and call her mother for recipes she could use. Ashley would also come to visit at Bramasole to see her mother and to share the holidays with Frances and Ed. Ashley even brought her boyfriend, Jess, one winter. Ashley and her mother made holiday treats that Christmas and shared a wonderful holiday that Frances hoped Ashley would recall every time she came to Bramasole and saw the Christmas tree they planted in the garden.

## The Poles: Cristoforo, Riccardo, and Stanislao

One of the first projects Ed and Frances completed at Bramasole was to rebuild one of the stone walls supporting a terrace. Frances and Ed hired a man to do this work, but this man proved to be somewhat inept. However, the man brought with him three Polish men who were in Tuscany to make money to support their families in Poland. These three men proved to be an asset to the project, often pointing out to Frances and Ed what their boss had done wrong and repairing it before the damage could cause a problem. Frances and Ed befriended these men and soon they were helping with other projects around the house. In fact, it was Cristoforo and Riccardo who found the fresco on the dining room wall while helping Ed and Frances remove the old paint from the walls.

## Signor Martini

Signor Martini was the man who helped Frances and Ed find Bramasole. Signor Martini acted as an agent, showing Frances and Ed many houses in the area of Tuscany where they wanted to buy a home. Later, Signor Martini would recommend contractors to help them complete the renovations on Bramasole and explain the process, including the permits that would be required before work could begin. Signor Martini was always professional, never sharing anything about his personal life. However, one afternoon Signor Martini stopped by while Frances was picking pine nuts and mentioned that his grandmother had once made a traditional dessert with pine nuts. As a gesture of thanks and friendship, Frances made the traditional dessert and invited Signor Martini over to share it.



## The Duomo

In the first few years at Bramasole, Frances would often imagine what life was like for the people who lived in the house when it was first built. Frances would often imagine the duomo planting trees and plants to help feed her family. Frances would imagine the duomo in the house making wonderful, traditional dishes to feed her family. The history in Italy and the history that Frances ran into every day at Bramasole caused her to feel nostalgic. This nostalgic got her imagination running wild and Frances would imagine every aspect of the former owners' lives, imagining the work they did and the meals they shared while living in Bramasole.

## Alfiero

Alfiero was the contractor Frances and Ed hired to rebuild the stone wall supporting one of the terraces. Alfiero was a charming man who assured Frances and Ed that he would do a good job on the wall. However, Alfiero was a busy man with many projects going on at the same time. Alfiero would often appear at Bramasole early in the morning to do a small amount of work and then would disappear for the rest of the day. The workers that Alfiero brought with him to do the bulk of the work, the Poles, would often point out things Alfiero had done wrong and repair it. Frances and Ed did not fire Alfiero because the Poles were doing a good job on the wall, but they never hired him for another job.

## Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a writer Frances had admired for many years. They had a mutual friend and Frances had been given Elizabeth's phone number, but Frances had never called Elizabeth because she did not like to make cold calls such as those. After buying Bramasole, Frances encounters Elizabeth at the home of another friend. Elizabeth had a house in Cortona and Frances would encounter her often. They became good friends. One winter, when Bramasole was undergoing renovations, Elizabeth allowed Frances and Ed to use her house. Elizabeth was selling the house, so she also gave Ed and Frances some of her furniture, helping to fill up the empty rooms of Bramasole.

## Benito

Benito was a contractor Frances and Ed hired to do the renovations on their house. Benito was the second contractor they hired because the first became ill. Benito did a good job on the house; however, the job took twice as long as it should have, and Benito and his workers left a terrible mess at Bramasole. When Ed and Frances went to see the house during the renovations, they discovered debris all through the house and a phone number someone had written on the fresco in the dining room. Frances and Ed were frustrated with this mess but relieved when the renovations were complete and done well.

## Placido

Placido, the tax collector for Cortona, was Frances and Ed's neighbor in Italy. Placido made Frances and Ed feel welcome in Cortona when they attended a local celebration. Placido also asked Frances's permission to use a piece of Bramasole's land to work his falcon. Placido was one of the first to make Frances and Ed feel welcome in Cortona. Eventually, Frances and Ed were made to feel welcome by all their neighbors.



## Objects/Places

### Olive Oil

Frances and Ed rush back to Bramasole one winter in order to pick the olives from their trees and have oil made from them. Frances and Ed manage to get several bottles of oil from their olives that they share with family and friends.

### Espresso

Ed, who was a tea drinker before buying Bramasole, became addicted to espresso. Ed would often visit the coffee bars in Cortona to have his espresso many times a day during his visits to Bramasole.

### Table Under the Trees

When Frances first sees Bramasole, she imagines long, lingering meals under the trees. During renovations, Frances and Ed have a table built to place under the trees and they surprise the workmen by insisting the table should be painted bright yellow.

### Stone Sink

While renovating Bramasole and cleaning up the gardens, Frances discovered a stone sink buried in the yard that clearly had been the original kitchen sink and abandoned in the garden when a new sink was put into place. Frances and Ed have the sink mounted outside the kitchen to be used during cookouts and to clean fruits and vegetables taken from the garden.

### Horse Statues

Frances found a horse statue years before buying Bramasole while digging in a garden. At Bramasole, Frances finds another horse, similar to the first. Frances keeps both horses on her desk at Bramasole.

### Fresco

While removing paint from the dining room wall during renovations, Frances and Ed find an old fresco they decide to keep intact. Unfortunately, one of the contractors' workers writes a phone number in black ink on the fresco while completing the first renovations on the house.



## **Terraces**

Bramasole sits on a hill. In order to plant gardens and trees, the land around the house is divided into separate terraces that are surrounded by stone walls to support the earth and the roots of the plants.

## **Water Wells**

Bramasole has a water well that supplies the house when Frances and Ed buy the house, and they are assured that the well has plenty of water to supply the home. However, Frances soon discovers that the well is very shallow and they are forced to hire someone to dig a new well the first summer she and Ed live in Bramasole.

## **Cistern**

There is a cistern on Bramasole's property. While clearing wild ivy in the gardens, Frances and Ed discover curved stones that appear to be some kind of chutes for water to run from the top terraces to the cistern during and after a rain.

## **Open Air Market**

There was an open air market in Camucia once a week where Frances was able to buy foods and products to use in Bramasole.

## **Under the Tuscan Sun Movie**

The author discusses in the final chapter of this book that a movie was made based on this memoir. This movie starred Diane Lane. Frances and her husband, Ed, watched as this movie was filmed near Bramasole and many of their friends and neighbors took part as extras in the movie.

## **Camucia**

Camucia is a village a few miles from Cortona, at the bottom of Cortona's hill, where market day took place on Thursdays.

## **Cortona**

Cortona is the small village near where Bramasole is located.

## **Bramasole**

Bramasole is the name of the home Frances Mayes and her husband, Ed, buy in Tuscany. Bramasole means something that yearns for the sun.





# Themes

## Taking Chances

Frances Mayes always loved Italy from the first time she visited there as a young woman. After a difficult divorce and the budding of a new relationship, Frances decided it was time to buy a permanent residence in Italy rather than renting a new place every time she and her lover, Ed, decided to visit. While looking at available homes, Frances was excited. However, when they made a bid on a home and began going through the process of purchasing the home, Frances began to panic. The idea that she was sinking all her money into this home thousands of miles from her year-round home was a scary thought. Frances was almost ready to stop the process, but finally the sale went through and Frances was once again excited by her new home.

Frances took a chance when she bought Bramasole and began to put all her energy into renovating the home in order to make it a fun escape for herself, her lover, and her family and friends. Frances did things at Bramasole she might never have done at home in the United States, such as painting the walls and napping at nine in the morning. Frances found a part of herself in Bramasole that she had never known was there. By buying Bramasole, Frances put her financial health at risk. By buying Bramasole with Ed, her lover who was not a committed spouse at the time of the purchase, Frances put her emotional health at risk. Frances took many chances by buying Bramasole and did it in order to give herself a place to relax and to discover the woman she wanted to be. By taking these chances, Frances was able to find a place where she could be herself outside of the normal stresses of day-to-day life and get to know her family and friends again in a relaxed, happy atmosphere. Bramasole proved to be the best risk Frances had ever taken.

## Good Food, Good Friends

Frances, as well as being a university professor, wrote for food magazines. Frances has always liked food and, coming from a food-oriented family, enjoyed cooking. Frances enjoyed cooking as a young woman and in living in Italy during the summer rediscovered cooking. Italy is well known for decadent and exciting food, especially with the use of wines, oils, and fresh ingredients. Bramasole has a large garden and many species of fruits and vegetables. Frances used every one of these ingredients to cook beautiful, delicious foods for herself, Ed, and family and friends who came to visit.

Frances and Ed spend the first summer at Bramasole alone together due to the amount of work the home and its grounds required. However, Frances and Ed soon found the time to visit friends in Italy who also bought homes and renovated them, sharing their war stories of home renovation with one another. Frances and Ed also invited people to Bramasole to share delicious meals under the trees on the table Frances had made and put outside for that purpose. Frances and Ed also invited friends from the United States



to come visit, sharing one friend's wedding at Bramasole. Frances and Ed also invited Frances' grown daughter to visit for Christmas. Bramasole became a place where Frances and Ed could relax but also where they could spend time with family and friends over a long, relaxing meal.

## Family

Frances' family was close knit when she was a child. Frances began to recall good times with her family when she moved to Bramasole during the summers. Cooking good Italian recipes, Frances began to recall spending time cooking with her mother and the family cook during her childhood in the South. It seemed Frances' childhood memories were filled with memories of meals enjoyed with the whole family and with the men who worked with her father. Being at Bramasole and enjoying the kitchen once more brought these pleasant memories back for Frances and made the experience all that much more exciting for her.

Frances and Ed could only go to Bramasole during the summer and over the Christmas holiday because of their work schedules at the universities where they were employed. Other times of the year, members of Frances' family would visit Bramasole. Frances' sister and her family were visiting one year before Frances and Ed arrived to check on ongoing renovations on the house. Frances was able to arrive early and spend some time with them. Bramasole became a meeting place of sorts for Frances and her family. Frances' daughter would come often and even bring her boyfriend one Christmas. Family was important to Frances and having them at Bramasole, where she had rediscovered who she was as a person and her love of cooking, made having family to Bramasole all that more special to her, making family a theme of the novel.



# Style

## Perspective

Frances Mayes has written *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN* based on her experiences buying and renovating a home in the Tuscany countryside. Frances and her then lover, and later husband, Ed bought Bramasole to have a permanent place to stay whenever they visited Italy on their time off from their jobs as university professors. The purchase of Bramasole was frightening for Frances because they were sinking all their savings into a single purchase that may or may not be a good investment in their futures. Later, Frances and Ed would discover that the renovations on Bramasole were to be much more involved than either of them had imagined. It is these experiences that Frances wrote about in the book, *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN, AT HOME IN ITALY*.

Frances Mayes's perspective in this non-fiction book is based on her own experiences. Frances is open and honest with the reader as she describes first her fear in buying the house and then the work involved in renovating it. The entire book is a first person recounting of Frances' experiences with Bramasole, but it is also a diary of sorts that expresses her love of Italy and of the food that is so much a part of the culture in Italy. Frances' love of Italy and cooking come through in her prose, filling the reader with the same excitement and wonder that Frances feels for her adopted home. The book is a touching memoir filled with recipes and love for Italy that drips from the pages and leaves the reader ready to catch the first plane to Tuscany. Frances' perspective is highly personal, completely subjective, and incredibly exciting.

## Tone

The tone of the book varies through the pages, changing from fear and uncertainty, to excitement, to contentment. In the beginning of the book, Frances and her lover, Ed, buy a house in the Tuscany countryside not far from one of their favorite villages. Frances was frightened by this purchase, afraid that she and Ed were sinking all their savings into a losing deal. However, once the house was securely theirs, Frances began to feel the excitement of a new beginning and imagine what it would be like to live in the house and entertain friends and family. As the renovations began, the understandable frustrations fill the tone, allowing the reader to worry and fret alongside Frances as workers talked about the house falling down around them and left a mess that was completely unacceptable. Finally, however, the house was complete and the tone became one of happiness and contentment as Frances began to realize that by renovating and living in Bramasole she had finally discovered who she was and who she wanted to be.

The tone of this book is a barometer through which the reader is able to decipher the mood and emotions of the author. Frances does not hide her emotions and the tone reflects this. The tone changes with Frances' emotions, showing fear when Frances felt



fear and showing contentment when Frances was content. The fact that Frances loves food is not only revealed in the recipes she offers her readers but also in the way she discusses food throughout the book and the tone she uses when discussing such mundane things as picking olives from Bramasole's many olive trees. Frances also loves Italy which is revealed as Frances takes the reader on a tour, first of Cortona, the village near Bramasole, then along with herself and Ed as they visit Etruscan tombs and artifacts. The tone of this novel is one of excitement, of happiness, and contentment that excites the reader and leaves them with a desire to plant an herb garden or fly to Italy and buy a Bramasole of their own. It is a tone that works well and serves the author's intentions perfectly.

## Structure

The book is divided into twenty chapters, the final chapter being one that was added after the filming of the movie that was based on this book. The novel includes several chapters filled with recipes, a preface, and a grouping of conversion charts for the reader interested in trying some of the recipes offered. The chapters are not numbered, but are given titles that describe a person, place, or event relative to the things discussed within the chapter. The book is told in a linear fashion, beginning with the purchase of Bramasole, taking the reader through the renovations, and into the first years of enjoyment Frances and Ed share at Bramasole with family and friends.

The book's structure allows the reader to follow along with Frances as she buys Bramasole and begins the renovations on it and continues through Frances' process of self evaluation, watching as Frances slowly finds herself through the excitement of renovating Bramasole and settling down to an Italian way of life. Frances does not discuss her life in California much throughout the novel even though she continues to spend the majority of the year there. Frances mentions from time to time how different her life in California is, but the focus of the novel is Bramasole and Italy and it remains so throughout the novel despite the fact that Frances only lives there during the summer and the occasional Christmas break. This focus allows the reader to concentrate on Bramasole, Tuscany, and the impact everything surrounding the purchase and renovations of Bramasole have on Frances's life. It is these things that Frances wants to discuss with the reader and these things that are discussed in fascinating detail.



## Quotes

"I am about to buy a house in a foreign country. A house with the beautiful name Bramasole." Bramare: (Arabic) To Yearn For, pg. 1

"This sack of money in question has been wired from California but has not arrived. How can that be, I ask at the bank, money is wired, it arrives instantaneously. More shrugs. Perhaps the main bank in Florence is holding it. Days pass." Bramare: (Arabic) To Yearn For, pg. 14

"Rule one in a restoration project: be there. We will be seven thousand miles away when some of the big work is done." A House and the Land It Takes Two Oxen Two Days to Plow, pg. 30

"May summer last a hundred years." The Wild Orchard, pg. 73

"Restoration. I like the word. The house, the land, perhaps ourselves. But restored to what? Our lives are full. It's our zeal for all this work that amazes me. Is it only that once into the project, what it all means doesn't come up? Or that excitement and belief reject questions? The vast wheel has a place for our shoulders and we simply push into the turning? But I know there's a taproot as forceful as that giant root wrapped around the stone."

Whir of the Sun, pg. 85

"Finally, finally, June—I can go. With all the work Ed has described, I expect the house to glow when I arrive. But, naturally enough, Ed has concentrated on telling me his progress."

Festina Tarde (Make Haste Slowly), pg. 100

"On my way out, I see a man in a sweater, despite the heat. The trunk of his minuscule Fiat is piled with black grapes that have warmed all morning in the sun. I'm stopped by the winy, musty, violet scents. He offers me one. The hot sweetness breaks open in my mouth. I have never tasted anything so essential in my life as this grape on this morning. They even smell purple. The flavor, older than the Etruscans and deeply fresh and pleasing, just leaves me stunned. Such richness, the big globes, the heap of dusty grapes cascading out of two baskets. I ask for un grappolo, a bunch, wanting the taste to stay with me all morning."

A Long Table Under the Trees, pg. 113

"Now the night is big and quiet. No moon. We talk, talk, talk. Nothing to interrupt us except the shooting stars." A Long Table Under the Trees, pg. 125



"I'm fascinated by the perfect doors of the dead on this street. Traditionally, they're considered to be exits for the plague dead—bad juju for them to go out the door the living use. If this is so, the custom must have come from some superstition much older than Christianity, which was firmly the religious preference of that time. Some suggest that the raised, narrow doors were used in times of strife when the portone, the main door, was barricaded. I've wondered if they were not simply doors used when stepping out of a carriage or off a horse and right into the house in bad weather—rather than stepping down into the wet, probably filthy, street—or even in good weather to protect a long silk skirt." Cortona, Noble City, pg. 151

"Means of life. The Etruscans had it. In certain times and places, we find it. We can run full out, if not fly." Riva, Maremma: Into Wildest Tuscany, pg. 182

"The Italian Ed is a list maker. On the dining room table, the bedside table, the car seat, in shirt and sweater pockets, I find folded pieces of notepaper and crumpled envelopes. He makes lists of things to buy, things to accomplish, long-range plans, garden lists, lists of lists. They're in mixed English and Italian, whoever word is shorter. Sometimes he knows only the Italian word if it's a special tool. I should have saved the lists during the restoration and papered the bathroom with them, as James Joyce did with his rejection slips." Turning Italian, pg. 183

"The thought of the future spins through me. What magnet out there is pulling now?" Solleone, pg. 288



## Topics for Discussion

What is Bramasole? How did Frances and Ed find it? Why do they choose to buy it? What condition is Bramasole in when they first receive possession of it? How do Frances and Ed undertake the renovations? How different are the customs in Italy that affect these renovations as compared to customs in America? How do these customs make renovations of Bramasole difficult?

Why do Frances and Ed chose to buy a house in Italy? Where do they live and work? Why do they not buy a house there? What purpose do Ed and Frances have in buying Bramasole? How does buying Bramasole affect their relationship? Does their relationship change through the course of the book? If so, how?

Who are the Etruscans? Why does Frances often mention them in the book? What impact did they have on Tuscany history? What is significant about the artifacts Frances talks about finding in her garden? What reaction do the local, Italian people have to these artifacts? Why? How does Frances feel about these finds? Why?

Why is food so important to Frances? Why does Frances discuss food so often in the book? What ingredients for her meals does Frances find in Italy that she cannot find in America? Why is that? Why is so much of what Frances cooks in Italy fresh? Is that true of the dishes she can make in America? Why the difference? How is food seen differently by the Italians? How does Frances' opinion of food similar to those of the Italians? How is it different?

What are the terraces that Frances talks about in the book? Why are they important to her gardens? How are they supported? Why is this support important? What difficulty did Frances and Ed have in repairing one of these supports? How did they have the job completed? What did Ed want to do himself? Why did Ed not do the job himself? Who did Frances and Ed met during this time that proved significant to them?

Why does water get a whole chapter on its own in this novel? What is so important about water? What do Ed and Frances have to do their first summer in Bramasole? Why? What could they have done about the lies told to them by the previous owner? Would they have reacted differently if they had bought the house in America? Why or why not?

Discuss Frances' love of Italy. How does her love of Italy come through in the book? Discuss the impact the tone of the book has on the reader. How does the tone change with the subject Frances is describing? What is the tone at the beginning of the novel; during renovations of Bramasole' when Frances describes Cortona and her visit to nearby tourist locations? How does that tone tell the reader how Frances feels about Bramasole and Italy?