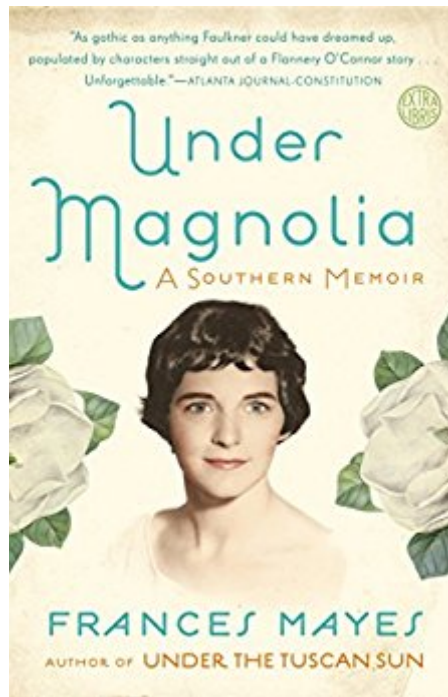


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Under Magnolia: A Southern Memoir



Synopsis

A lyrical and evocative memoir from Frances Mayes, the Bard of Tuscany, about coming of age in the Deep South and the region's powerful influence on her life. The author of three beloved books about her life in Italy, including *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Every Day in Tuscany*, Frances Mayes revisits the turning points that defined her early years in Fitzgerald, Georgia. With her signature style and grace, Mayes explores the power of landscape, the idea of home, and the lasting force of a chaotic and loving family. From her years as a spirited, secretive child, through her university studies "a period of exquisite freedom that imbued her with a profound appreciation of friendship and a love of travel" to her escape to a new life in California, Mayes exuberantly recreates the intense relationships of her past, recounting the bitter and sweet stories of her complicated family: her beautiful yet fragile mother, Frankye; her unpredictable father, Garbert; Daddy Jack, whose life Garbert saved; grandmother Mother Mayes; and the family maid, Frances's confidant Willie Bell. *Under Magnolia* is a searingly honest, humorous, and moving ode to family and place, and a thoughtful meditation on the ways they define us, or cause us to define ourselves. With acute sensory language, Mayes relishes the sweetness of the South, the smells and tastes at her family table, the fragrance of her hometown trees, and writes an unforgettable story of a girl whose perspicacity and dawning self-knowledge lead her out of the South and into the rest of the world, and then to a profound return home. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Frances Mayes went to Oxford, Mississippi for a book reading. She had planned on spending an extra day to look at the town, and to look at William Faulkner's birth place. What really happened was that Frances found her birth place, the soil, the heritage from which she was born, and she knew at that moment she wanted to move home. Frances Mayes of Tuscany fame, was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia. She had a traditional southern upbringing for the time. The 50's when integration was not in the vocabulary. She was brought up by Willie Mae, the family caretaker, cook, housekeeper, and whose husband looked after France's father, Garbert. Garbert ran the local mill, and was fond of saying he treated everyone fairly. He would ask the help if they were treated fairly, and they always answered, "Yes, Cap'n" and turned with a different expression on their face. Her mother, the southern bell, Frankye, ran the home and the card parties, the afternoon teas, brought up the three girls, spent money like wildfire and loved her family. Frankye and Garbert had vicious arguments most nights, fueled by the alcohol they drank. Frances tells us of her life in Fitzgerald, like a great old southern novel. Free of worries, cared for by Willie Mae, loved by everyone, summer vacations on the islands off Georgia's shores. A really nice life, but with the current of alcoholism cutting through everything. As Frances was growing up, it was okay for women to go to college. You studied the nice things, English, and wanted to be a teacher. Working in the summer was not something that was done by most girls. You read and played and went to the shore. Frances went to Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia. Far enough away from home, but not up north.

Under Magnolia: A Southern Memoir is Frances Mayes latest book and it shows a much different Frances Mayes than most of her readers are likely used to. In this memoir she takes us back to her roots and to the struggles and triumphs that made her who she is today. I listened to the audio book which is narrated by Frances Mayes herself and I thought she did a wonderful job. To me a memoir is made all the more powerful when the author reads it themselves. Frances didn't have a rosy childhood with a father who was quite ill and a mother who struggled with depression and alcoholism. From a young age she wondered why her family wasn't like others and why they couldn't be happy. I think it's a testament to her that she became the amazing writer she is today. To overcome adversity and rise above it is always an inspiration to others. As a young

woman she was basically told she needed a husband because that's just how things were done and yet she wanted more for herself. I found too that the dynamic between mother and daughter was interesting. Despite the struggles with her mother Frances always make it clear that nobody is perfect and her mother had good and bad points. Truthfully we all do. While her mother left her with bad feelings she also left her with good ones. In all of it she realizes that her mother never got to have the life she may have wanted and it resulted in her alcoholism and depression. One of things that Frances said that stuck in my mind was that her mother's life had blossomed into hers meaning that while her mother may not have gotten to see her dreams realized Frances was going to do it for her. It was just so profound to me to be so forgiving and accepting. This memoir is so different from her memoirs about Tuscany which I loved.

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