



To Tuscany With Love

Gail Mencini

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Can one college semester abroad change the course of your life?

Bella Rossini, a vivacious college junior, lands in jail overnight with acquaintances whom she mistakes for friends. Shipped off to Tuscany by her mother, Bella is suddenly thrust into living with seven strangers during one life-altering summer.

Meet Hope, the sturdy and practical girl, steadfast in her loyalty to her boyfriend; Meghan and Karen, identical twins with an eye for fashion and beauty to match; Stillman, haunted by his hard past, and Phillip, an athlete, both fueled by competition; Lee, by family mandate in pre-med; and Rune, the Hollywood-bound wild child. All add sizzling chemistry and rebellious humor to the mix.

In one whirlwind summer, while uncovering the charms of Italy, they discover both friendship and love.

After their summer together, life – and loss – happens.

Returning to Tuscany 30 years later, their dreams, anger, secrets and disappointments create an emotional kaleidoscope. Their reunion sends them on a startling collision course that none of them could have predicted.

Set against the allure of Tuscany, with an irresistible fusion of heartbreak and humor, this debut novel, “To Tuscany with Love,” explores the fear of letting the past determine the future and the power of friendship.

To Tuscany With Love Details

Date : Published January 2014 by Capriole Group (first published December 3rd 2013)

ISBN : 9781938592003

Author : Gail Mencini

Format : Paperback 392 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Italy, Travel, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Romance, Contemporary Romance, Contemporary

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Ivyd says

A summer college course in Florence, Italy brings together eight disparate college students forging a bond and shaping futures.

Rune ~ Charming but always with an angle. Sex, drugs, and rock & roll is the life he craves. Hard, fast, and loose but what does it net you in the end?

Karen and Meghan ~ Lovely twins who dream of opening a boutique together when they get back home. Karen becomes engaged to her long term boyfriend, Ed, while in Italy. An engagement doesn't stop Karen from making her Italian summer memorable. Meghan is quieter, living in Karen's shadow, always allowing her twin to eclipse her.

Hope ~ Not beautiful like the twins or Bella, confidence and an inner beauty give Hope an appeal that goes beyond the surface. Hope's faith in the love and future with her fiancé, Charlie, are the foundation of her confidence.

Lee ~ Scholarly and appealing in a nerdy way, Lee is under pressure from his mother to be a doctor. Not just any doctor but a specialist. Lee's true love is art, especially sculpture.

Bella~ Beautiful as her name suggests, Bella's never been out of New York and away from her mother. Italy has the potential to be the experience of a lifetime for Bella. When she becomes the object of desire for both Stillman and Phillip she knows she has to choose one and only one.

Stillman ~ Handsome and charming Southern gentleman and scholar. Like Lee he's on the pre-med track at the same school. Lee and Stillman are the only two who already know each other. Stillman and Phillip are competitive from the beginning and Bella is the brass ring they're reaching for.

Phillip ~ Handsome, self assured and athletic. Phillip has a laid back California manner that puts Bella at ease and makes her laugh.

Thirty years after they left Italy the friends receive an anonymous invitation to return to Florence, first class all expenses paid. The invitation specifies no spouses, no children, no friends allowed and ends with the dare: Regrets are for cowards. Who could resist?

Ms. Mencini immediately engages the reader, skillfully bringing the characters, their experiences, environs, and the Tuscan region of Italy to vibrant life. Hard to believe this is her debut.

After their return home the reader is kept in touch with the individual characters a bit differently than the norm. Rather than following a linear timeline we're reacquainted at pivotal points in each character's life. By leaving out the insignificant and minutia we're left with the defining, life altering moments for each, the essence. This distillation gives each character glimpse weight and significance.

While there's a level of connection or relation with each character I confess to having favorites. Meghan and Stillman. They possess a poignancy and depth the other characters lacked.

Like all good reads, TO TUSCANY WITH LOVE sweeps the reader away into another life, time, and place.

a_tiffyfit says

~~review to come. 3.5~~

This is one of those books about all the facets of life and what is truly important: not to lose yourself, love, loyalty, and friendship.

It opens with an anonymous invitation to come back to Tuscany, no spouses or children or friends invited, just you, and only cowards won't go back. Strong words that already evoke emotion. Bella's reaction is one of anger; she is SO going back in order to give him a piece of her mind! Whaaat happened?!

As we explore their semester together and then their lives, it's rather realistic. You have one out to prove himself and escape his past, you have another who seems to have a silver spoon and yet has tragedy and all these filial duties pressing down upon him, you have another who is being verbally whipped by the women in his family, the twins where one outshines the other, and the lively one who is sweet but on this precarious path.

We then catch up to them in their current lives, 30 years later, and see glimpses of their lives from that semester up til the invitation and it is sad and depressing and incredibly realistic. One doesn't grow up until handed a scary medical sentence, another struggles in a bad marriage, all are constantly looking for..unconditional love, but they don't seem to understand that they have to love themselves first.

You end up having strong feelings about the characters and their voices and decisions, etc. I found myself scoffing at one for being pathetic, another for not standing up when she should have for her daughter, another for not having the gumption to do a, b, or c, RIGHT NOW. Very evocative.

I think this is one of those novels that you have to be of a certain age to appreciate it fully. You need to be at a time in your life where you are reflecting on your past, your choices, and learning to embrace all that is you. For some, that may be in your 30s, for others your 50s. And I think that depending on your age and maturity, your view of the book would change. You may sympathize more with one character than you did before; or sympathize with him/her less.

Kathleen says

In her debut novel, *To Tuscany With Love*, author Gail Mancini weaves an intriguing new adult coming of age tale about eight American college students (for men, four women), who meet while studying abroad for a summer semester in Italy. After their summer abroad, the story then follows the eight friends through the next thirty years detailing their life experiences, culminating in a reunion that will reveal how their summer abroad thirty years ago had a life-changing and shaping effect on how they would live their lives. It is a compelling story about entering adulthood, love, loss, life experiences, regrets, successes, midlife observations, and the power of friendship.

Written in the third person narrative, this is a wonderful story that transports the reader to the panoramic beauty of the Italian countryside, where a lifelong friendship is formed by eight college students studying abroad for a summer semester. From guided walking tours, classes, activities, romance and love triangles, the reader is easily drawn into this captivating story of friendship and coming of age. The author masterfully interweaves the life stories of the eight friends that alternates between the past and the present, providing the reader with snapshots from their individual lives for the next thirty years, detailing their life experiences: loves, losses, passions, successes, and regrets. The power and bond of friendship comes full circle when these eight middle-aged people are brought back together for a reunion thirty years later.

I loved the story's message that it's never too late to take stock of one's life, relationships, passions and dreams. When life's experiences presents obstacles and circumstances beyond your control, don't waste your chances, do an evaluation and decide what action to take. And never forget that your family and tight circle of friends will be there to provide love and support. This is a compelling and realistic story that is both heartwarming and heartbreaking, it provides much food for thought.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the stunning description of the Italian setting. The author provides the reader with a richly vivid setting that reads like a tourist guide. From large cities to panoramic countrysides to old world hill towns; to guided tours of cultural historical sites and quaint shops; the author does a phenomenal job of describing the sights, sounds and smells of Italy. You can't help but feel like you are with the eight friends as their summer abroad provides them a chance to explore and create memories from a European country that will last a lifetime.

To Tuscany With Love is a touching story that captures the essence of friendship and life experiences. It is a heartwarming story that will resonate long after the last page has been read. Kudos to author Gail Mencini on a wonderful debut novel.

To Tuscany With Love is the first book in the Tuscany series.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of the book from the author / publisher via NetGalley in exchange for my honest review and participation in a virtual book tour event hosted by JKSCcommunications.

<http://jerseygirlbookreviews.blogspot...>

Aditi says

While reading this book, I couldn't stop myself from thinking about Bob Marley's spectacular words about "friends":

"The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you. You just got to find the ones worth suffering for."

Gail Mencini, an American author, penned down her debut novel called, *To Tuscany with Love*, which is all about regrets, past demons, loss and love and mostly about priceless friendships.

Synopsis:

Bella Rossini, a vivacious college junior, lands in jail overnight with acquaintances whom she mistakes for friends. Shipped off to Tuscany by her mother, Bella is suddenly thrust into living with seven strangers during one life-altering summer.

Meet Hope, the sturdy and practical girl, steadfast in her loyalty to her boyfriend; Meghan and Karen,

identical twins with an eye for fashion and beauty to match; Stillman, haunted by his hard past, and Phillip, an athlete, both fuelled by competition; Lee, by family mandate in pre-med; and Rune, the Hollywood-bound wild child. All add sizzling chemistry and rebellious humour to the mix.

In one whirlwind summer, while uncovering the charms of Italy, they discover both friendship and love. After their summer together, life – and loss – happens.

Returning to Tuscany 30 years later, their dreams, anger, secrets and disappointments create an emotional kaleidoscope. Their reunion sends them on a startling collision course that none of them could have predicted.

A group of disparate students visit Tuscany in Italy for a semester. And that was the most beautiful period of their lives. Young and naïve, together they all explore the ends of a relationship and physical intimacy among each other, thereby trying to find themselves from the inside. Moreover, they all blend themselves into the rich culture of Italy. Soon their dream trip comes to an end when they return back to the States, where we see them evolving out of their innocence into more mature and sensible human beings. 30 years down the line, they all receive another golden reunion opportunity in Italy from an anonymous person. But will things be same between them, especially where they left it off?

You rarely come across those books which inspire you so much that you feel like hopping on to the next flight to the book's destination. By the name itself, *To Tuscany with Love* sounds like an enchanting book, and honestly this book can be your best guide book, if you are planning to visit Italy. The author portrayed the landscapes, culture, religion and people of Italy strikingly and captured the beauty of Tuscany with her exquisite words. Moreover, her descriptions about Italy are filled with passion and love for the beautiful country, thus will completely transport you right into the streets of Italy. While reading the book, you will need to look up at times to make yourself realize that you're actually sitting inside your room and not inside some Italian café.

All the eight characters are well-developed and moreover, their demeanour will strike you as someone in their youth trying to explore the beauty and the mysteries of the world. Drastically lost and carefree- that's what I call them as. I loved how the author poured down emotional tantrums and insecurity in their carefree lives, thus challenging them with their unfinished past. All these flawed characters simply left an impressionable mark upon my mind. The romance that the author tried to explore through these characters is quite delicately written with deep passion, intimacy and with emotions running wild and high. For a first time author, Mencini simply entranced both my mind and heart with her beautiful novel.

I absolutely flowed with the author's simple and smooth narrative style. This the perfect book to carry on your travel handbag. There is love, friendships, regrets and a bit of mystery and a lot of Italy. Thanks to the author for letting me see Italy with her own eyes so vividly and brightly.

Verdict: *A compassionate as well as an engaging novel that you can't miss.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Gail Mencini, for giving me an opportunity to read and review her debut novel.*

Leslie says

Received this from a Goodreads Giveaway. It took a while for me to read - could not get over the whole "should I choose boy #1 or boy #2" storyline when they were in Italy. The book got better after that summer

was over.

Lauren Henderson says

I received this book for free from the publisher via NetGalley.

I really like this book. I liked the way it was told. I liked the character development. I think it is a great debut that wasn't too predictable!

To Tuscany with Love starts out with an invitation to a reunion for a group of friends who shared a summer studying in Florence 30 years prior... then the story immediately goes way back and tells the story of the summer primarily through the eyes of Bella but also through the eyes of the others in the group (the chunky but spunky girl, the beautiful blonde twins, the womanizer, the country boy, and the quiet guy << Maybe that all sounds like it can get cheesy but not to worry, it only happened once or twice). The summer is left with a lot of unresolved love issues... which leads to a lot of suspense later.

From there, you get glimpses into everyone's lives about 10 years later... then again 20 years later... then again at the reunion in the present. Some have suffered loss, some have suffered regret. And you are kept guessing as to what decisions everyone will make until the very end.

The story is extremely chick flicky, but I knew that going in and was not dissatisfied. However, the story was not primarily centered around the love triangle aspects. The theme that really came through was not wasting your life... and if you feel like you are, then change something (even if you are 50).

There are also extremely vivid and beautiful scenes of life in Florence. The setting is wonderfully described and used as a magical place for lives to be changed.

There were just problems in a couple places where a side story seemed a little disjointed and then guys' banter didn't really fit with how most guys really do act. Sometimes as a reader, you could not get a true picture of their feelings and motives.

I still believe this book is worth a read and would recommend it to those who enjoy books about friendship and happy endings.

Stephanie Morrow says

I received this book as an ARC for an honest and open review from NetGalley

"Two Turban-clad men with dark complexions looked at the four students with obvious disdain."

I read as far as that paragraph, and then stopped, knowing full well that if I continued to read I would just get frustrated and upset (turns out I was right, after I browsed through the remainder of the chapter). What was supposed to be an "adult coming of age" novel instead was a book filled with every sort of stereotype known to man, exemplified, along with racism.

It starts off with a group of American students traveling abroad. Each student has a very defined stereotypical personality. There's the fat nerd (who actually has a boyfriend), the blond twins, the rebel, jock, etc. There is nothing unique to any of their personalities, and the entire story follows one stereotype after another. When the novel isn't busy slamming people in this manner I felt it made no sense, having little at all to do with the actual story. It felt incredibly disjointed.

I also found it rude when the students started on the train to Paris and then the book launched into how these "Middle Eastern turban wearing men" were probably carrying bombs in their luggage and so the students had every right to search through their bags. It felt unrealistic and incredibly racist.

This book was certainly not what I was expecting or hoping for.

Lolly K Dandeneau says

To Tuscany With Love follows a group of strangers for a semester abroad, in Italy. Friendships are forged, a love triangle involving the character Bella is center with her new friend's stories revealed throughout the novel. We dip into the future to see where life has taken them, and how Italy has had lasting effects. Death, children, disappointment, marriage, lit flames that never die, all of these things are spinning the story as the characters return midlife for a reunion. Italy is always a beautiful setting for any story and holds its own in this novel. However, there were issues as I reader I couldn't ignore. I didn't feel the characters were fully developed. Some of the moments in the novel seemed out of touch with the story, without purpose. I also had a hard time with the dialogue, right from the start the 'guys' didn't interact as I imagine most males that age do. Throwing pillows at each-other because of sexual innuendo about twin girls? I don't know what would be worse, high-fiving? I think for older adults it's a less impressive novel, but I don't want to insult the story- I just feel young adult readers are a much better audience. I had a hard time investing my interest, I think what kept me reading most was Italy itself, which I love. I gave it three stars because I know there will be readers ready to gobble it up. There is plenty of youthful joviality between the pages and the harsh realities of being a grown up. But I still think of this as a light novel. Again, not my usual pick, but a good story.

Virginia Torres says

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Loved the story

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Ok

Looking forward to your work n

Loved the

Story the design

Loved the way you described the scenery was beautiful the story m a Dr me cry and cheer for all the players.
Looking forward to your next book.

heather - NightlyReading says

I really enjoy stories about traveling to other countries. I doubt that I will ever get anywhere myself, so when I received the email about this book...I jumped on it! I love to read about the other cultures and what the characters did and saw so that I can literally live through them.

So many characters...

I really enjoyed the different personalities of the characters. The author allowed you to get into the heads of several of them and it kept the reader entertained right from the get go. I can't really say that I had a favorite character because I really enjoyed them all. From the good all the way to the bad. I kind of am a sucker for the bad guys. Not really sure why????

The scenery was amazing....

The author did a fantastic job at explaining what the characters were seeing through out their journey for the summer. I loved the way she explained the scenery and what Tuscany was like as a whole.

The Storyline....

The storyline itself intrigued me. I always have felt that I missed out on something when I didn't go away to college. Reading this book helped me realize that I did miss out on the wonderful relationships that you create while you are at college. You will always have your high school friends or the friends that have known you your whole life, but there is something to say about meeting new people when you are on the verge of adulthood.

Each of these characters had their own issues. I actually admire that, I mean who is perfect really? This book was full of love, loss and friendship. The trials that you go throughout life and relationships and what you do with all of your experiences.

In Conclusion...

I highly recommend this book to anyone whom is looking for a powerful read. Pick it up! And then come on back here and let me know your thoughts:)

Roxanne Kade says

I have always dreamed of visiting Tuscany, and Mencini's stunning debut made that dream come true. I got to experience the adventure, romance, and beautiful history and culture of this amazing region through the eyes of eight fabulous characters who each now own a piece of my heart.

Not only was I drawn to this story because of the location, but I'm in love with love and romance, and this book had plenty to offer. I really enjoyed the multiple POVs. It was exciting to get into the mind of each character, even player, Rune. I was immediately drawn to Stillman. He was sweet and humble, but had a fun and somewhat wicked side. The love triangle between Bella, Stillman and Phillip wasn't the norm, and I liked that Bella was the one who had all, well most, of the say in it. The boys kept her on her toes, but she had fun with each of them and I could see why she was so drawn to them. I have to admit though that if I were Bella, I would have chosen differently, even in the end.

This book offered so much in the way of romance, but it was also a coming of age story that made me question my own life and the path I was on. Each character grew to be so different from what I was expecting, and it made me think about how our actions and their consequences shape our future. But this book wasn't all hearts and kisses. It had it's sombre, hard-hitting moments. Those times when the unexpected crept in and reality took over.

This book was about friendship, loyalty, betrayal, love and lust. It was an enthralling read that kept me wanting more. If you are looking to be swept away on a romantic adventure this book is the one for you.

Tripfiction says

Novel set in Tuscany (and USA) (Bella Toscana)

If you like Tuscany, and you like budding relationship encounters (with an edgy adolescent flair), a bit of romance, and a novel that evokes this gorgeous part of the world, then this might be right up your 'via'.

A diverse group of students comes together as they spend a Semester in Florence, roughly in the 1970s, and we observe how friendships develop and sexual partners hook up within the group. Initially, it is the story of young people finding their place in the world, as they assimilate themselves into Italian culture and explore their surroundings. The next part of the book moves swiftly through their lives, when they have all returned to live in the USA, until they hit late middle age. Out of the blue each receives an invitation to revisit their time in Tuscany. A First Class Ticket, together with gorgeous accommodation is the fantastic lure, sent out to all by one anonymous member of the group – though that person is soon identified.

The parts in the book set in Tuscany at the beginning and the end feel like two solid bookends, with superb attention to local detail, and cradle the, at times, ephemeral 'lives lived' in the USA in the middle. The central part feels like a 'gloss over' to enable the plot to move from Tuscany at the beginning, back to Tuscany three decades later at the end.

It is so clear that Gail loves Italy, you can feel it through her prose, and she really does a good job of transporting the reader to locale, espresso no doubt in hand. Oh, the culture and feel of the region, right down to the cobbled alleyways and the odd vespa. It is a debut novel which has much promise for any follow up books that she may have in the pipeline.

I read this book with pleasure, because it does have a real spark to it, it moves along well and has good pace. The element that perhaps detracted a little but didn't marr the overall enjoyment, was the intensity and level of bonding between members of the group at their first encounter. Stillman, Bella, Phillip et al hung out together, held hands an awful lot, had sex, engaged in a great deal of breast ogling, and explored the notion

of what it might be to be ‘in love’, back-slapped and palmed each other – as adolescents do – but not sufficiently deeply to warrant them choosing to regroup after decades, with little or no contact; and particularly after some questionable behaviour that occurred between some group members then and now! Would Bella really have wanted to see Phillip again, or for that matter rambunctious Rune? I certainly wouldn’t have wanted to have set records straight with one self centred character, nor would I have want to spend more time with another character who, although ill, came across as an incontrovertible schmuck.

PS. Spotted the polyglot wordplay in the title?

Kathryn Laceby says

Originally reviewed at Novel Escapes

The appeal for me in *To Tuscany With Love* was the travelling aspect of the book and I liked Mencini’s attempts to bring some of Italy’s culture, history and scenery into such a busy set of story-lines. While I enjoyed the general outline of the book there were a number of little irritations that stopped me from giving it a higher star rating.

The first impression I got of the writing was a feeling of awkwardness- I felt uncomfortable with the language and turns of phrases used by both the young men and woman interacting on the course. None of them knew each other and I found that the things they said, within minutes of meeting, didn’t seem natural. It wasn’t that the feelings they were expressing were unexpected, just the way the words came across on the page. I cringed a number of times in the first few chapters. However, once we were more into the adult voices there was less of the awkwardness and I was able to get more involved in the actual plot.

Mencini crafted a history for each of the students and as their grown-up existences emerged I was more and more intrigued by how their meet up would play out. Their different lives included joy but much more difficulties and heartbreak and on occasion it was a bit much. I wish there were more positive lives unfolding rather than the constant barrage of sadness. However, there was romance and friendship that brought them all together again, and I suppose the positive end results could put a spin of hope on all their lives.

I loved the concept of renewing friendships after so many years from other countries or school friends lost. There’s a lot to be said for rediscovering youthful relationships.

Thank you to Capriole Group for our review copy. All opinions are our own.

Jenny says

Best character driven novel I've read! Mencini's imperfect characters battle through moral dilemmas, death, and personal demons to reach places of acceptance, understanding, and friendship. Mencini dares the reader to understand the grey areas of actions and the impact of choices. While a few lulls in movement stall the story, the novel earns a solid four stars. *To Tuscany With Love* will be an excellent book for book club discussion!

Rachel says

To Tuscany With Love was such a fun, quick, easy read! Mencini does an excellent job of weaving the stories of eight interestingly unique characters against the backdrop of the Florence, Italy. The reader is immersed into first an energetic, romantic summer where all of these young college students meet and mingle. They form bonds and friendships that seem to be so strong. The backdrop changes to follow the characters into glimpses of their lives alone after their summer together abroad has ended. Finally, the reader is shown that these characters are stronger together than they are apart when a reunion in Tuscany, meant to rekindle their friendship, sends them rocketing towards truths that friendship and love can really conquer all.

I absolutely loved all of the characters in this novel. Bella is passionate, Phillip is competitive, Rune is a playboy, Meghan and Karen are flirtatious, Lee is a brainiac with an artist's heart, Hope is the friend everyone wishes they had, and lastly Stillman is the classic Southern charmer. All of their unique personalities come together to create passion, friendship, and lots of fun both as young college students and as adults entering the second half of their lives. The setting and background for this story really transports the reader to the cobbled streets of Florence. The Italian culture is so rich and lively that it sucks the reader in and to be honest I didn't know if I wanted to come back out.

One line that particularly stood out to me was when Lee said, "Life is a compromise. It's not black and white." It really struck home with me not only is the book about friendship and love but it is about coming of age, making compromises, taking chances on love, and learning who you really are. I look forward to reading more from Mencini in the future!
