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Gordon, Mary. The Love of My Youth

It isn't an original set-up: two former lovers briefly reunite in Rome and sift through the ashes of their long-lost romance. Yet, Mary Gordon is such a skilled writer that she should have been able to pull it off. Her descriptions of Rome do bring the city to life, and she carefully develops both of the main characters. Still the book never quite lives up to Gordon's usual standard.

Part of the problem is the stilted dialogue of Miranda and Adam who speak in arch, overly philosophical sentences that remind you they are fictional constructs and not real people. This is a serious flaw in a novel that's basically a series of conversations interspersed with flashbacks. In addition, the only real conflict in the book is in the characters' past, and it doesn't develop any real momentum until the novel is nearly over.

Despite the lovely descriptions of Rome, even die-hard Gordon fans may want to sit this one out.

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