

The Gustav Sonata



Gustav Perle grows up in a small town in Switzerland where the horrors of the Second World War seem distant. He adores his mother, but she treats him with bitter severity, disapproving especially of his intense friendship with Anton, the Jewish boy at school. A gifted pianist, Anton is tortured by stage fright; only in secret games with Gustav does his imagination thrive. But Gustav is taught that he must develop a hard shell, like a coconut, to protect the softness inside - just like the hard shell perfected by his country to protect its neutrality. But despite this hard shell, nothing in Gustav's life can be called neutral. Older and increasingly curious about his absent father, Gustav discovers the traces of an erotic love affair - traces which still glow white-hot even now. Fierce, astringent, profoundly tender and spanning the 20th century, Rose Tremains beautifully orchestrated novel explores the big themes of betrayal and the struggle for happiness and, above all, the passionate love of a childhood friendship as it is tested over a lifetime.

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