



The Champagne War

Fiona McIntosh



Author Background

Fiona McIntosh is an internationally bestselling author of novels for adults and children. She co-founded an award-winning travel magazine with her husband, which they ran for fifteen years while raising their twin sons before she became a full-time author. Fiona roams the world researching and drawing inspiration for her novels, and runs a series of highly respected fiction masterclasses. She calls South Australia home.

“It’s been a curious pathway to writing novels having spent years in PR, sales/marketing for the travel industry and including 15 years running a travel magazine with my husband. I was fortunate that my first attempt at a creative tale won the notice of a global publisher and I’ve been writing fiction ever since and across various genres although I am best known these days for my historical drama.”

Book Summary

From the killing fields of Ypres to the sun-kissed vineyards of rural France, *The Champagne War* is a heart-stopping adventure about the true power of love and hope to light the way during war.

In the summer of 1914, vigneron Jerome Méa heads off to war, certain he’ll be home by Christmas. His new bride Sophie, a fifth generation champenoise, is determined to ensure the forthcoming vintages will be testament to their love and the power of the people of Épernay, especially its strong women. But as the years drag on, authorities advise that Jerome is missing, considered dead.

When poison gas is first used in Belgium by the Germans, British chemist Charles Nash jumps to enlist. After he is injured, he is brought to Reims, where Sophie has helped to set up an underground hospital to care for the wounded. In the dark, ancient champagne cellars, their stirring emotions take them both by surprise.

While Sophie battles to keep her vineyard going through the bombings, a critical sugar shortage forces her to strike a dangerous bargain with an untrustworthy acquaintance – but nothing will test her courage more than the news that filters through to her about the fate of her heroic Jerome.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ 'Épernay must survive – the champagne must keep flowing.' Sophie is determined to continue making her champagne throughout the war. Why is this so important to her?
- ❖ Charlie joins the war effort as a soldier rather than using his skills as a chemist in chemical warfare. Do you understand his choice?
- ❖ At one point, Charlie feels closer to Willi, his enemy, than to any other person alive. Why do you think that is?
- ❖ Would the strong women of Champagne who had gone before Sophie – like Veuve Clicquot and Madame Pommery – have approved of her determination not to conform, and of her choice in a husband?
- ❖ Sophie believes that 'everything responds to kindness'. In what ways does she display her own kindness in the novel?
- ❖ Who really holds the power in the relationship between Louis and Sophie? Would you be as forgiving of him as she is?
- ❖ Jerome believes he is likely to die from the gas attacks, and yet he strives to get a message to France. What is his motivation?
- ❖ What does Charlie mean when he says home is an emotion? Why is this an important revelation for him?
- ❖ If you were Sophie, would you have chosen Charlie or Jerome?
- ❖ Sophie tells Charlie: 'It's a great pity the world cannot behave like a good champagne. Harmony, peace, pleasure – every grape giving its utmost, its very best to the champagne experience.' What parallels can we draw between life during the war and modern times?
- ❖ What connections does the author make between champagne itself and the themes and issues explored in her novel?
- ❖ The Champagne War features many real events in history. What new or surprising things about France or World War I did you learn while reading this book?

References

- ❖ Author website: <https://www.fionamcintosh.com/>
- ❖ Penguin: About the author <https://www.penguin.com.au/authors/fiona-mcintosh>
- ❖ Penguin: Book club notes <https://www.penguin.com.au/book-clubs/2864-the-champagne-war-book-club-notes>