



Blackberry Wine: A Novel

By Joanne Harris

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Years later, Jay's life is stalled with regret and ennui. His bestselling novel, *Jackapple Joe*, was published ten years earlier and he has written nothing since. Impulsively, he decides to leave his urban life in London and, sight unseen, purchases a farmhouse in the remote French village of Lansquenet. There, in that strange and yet strangely familiar place, Jay hopes to re-create the magic of those golden childhood summers. And while the spirit of Joe is calling to him, it is actually a similarly haunted, reclusive woman who will ultimately help Jay find himself again.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Joanne Harris's first novel, *Chocolat*, was set in the sleepy French village of Lansquenet, where enchantment, romance, and soft-centered truths issued from the local confectioner's shop. She returns to the same location for *Blackberry Wine*. But as the title suggests, she's shifted her focus from food to drink, choosing a half-dozen bottles of homemade plonk as the catalyst for her "layman's alchemy." And even the narrator is no human being but a faintly tannic Fleurie 1962: "A pert, garrulous wine, cheery and little brash, with a pungent taste of blackcurrant!"

There are, of course, some less vinous characters in the novel. Harris's protagonist, Jay Mackintosh, is a former literary star, now sadly stalled. He spends his time writing second-rate science fiction, leading a hollow media life, and drinking: "Not to forget, but to remember, to open up the past and find himself there again." Yet the nice, expensive wines don't do the trick. Instead, six "Specials"--a gift from his old friend Joe--function as Jay's magical elixir. Like Proust's lime-blossom tisane, they give him the gift of his memories but also unlock his future, which encourages him to flee the rut of his London life and buy a house in Lansquenet.

As Jay settles in, he contemplates his childhood friendship with Joe, whose idiosyncratic outlook was the inspiration for his only successful book. Meanwhile, he becomes involved in village life, encountering some familiar faces from *Chocolat*. Caro and Toinette, the snooty troublemakers, soon put in an appearance, and Josephine, the bar owner and battered wife of the earlier novel, becomes a real friend. But it's a new character, the enigmatic Marise, who becomes the focus of Jay's attention--and who helps to restore his literary joie de vivre. This feat of resurrection makes for a hugely enjoyable read. It also goes one step further in adding Lansquenet to the map of imaginary destinations, where daydreams can come true with intoxicating frequency. --*Eithne Farry*

From Publishers Weekly

Like her well-received 1999 novel, *Chocolat*, Harris's latest outing unfolds around the arrival of an outsider in a tiny French town. This time wine replaces chocolate as Harris's magic elixir, and the newcomer to the village of Lansquenet sur Tannes is Jay Mackintosh, a 37-year-old has-been writer from London. Fourteen years have passed since Jay's debut novel, *Jackapple Joe*, won the Prix Goncourt. Since then, he has been churning out B-novels under a pseudonym; he currently lives with his girlfriend, Kerry, an aggressively successful 25-year-old celebrity journalist. Flashbacks reveal that Jay's only recollections of happiness are the golden summers he spent as a youth with old Joseph "Jackapple Joe" Cox in the small English town of Kirby Monckton. Joe, a colorful character who made wines from fruits and berries, inspired Joe's successful first novel. But one day he disappeared. When Jay stumbles across an advertisement for an 18th-century "chateau" in wine-growing country, the spell of his misery is broken. After downing a bottle of Joe's '75 Special, which he has been hoarding for 24 years, Jay decides to buy the house sight unseen. Leaving Kerry in London, Jay moves to Lansquenet and starts a new rural life, beginning to write under his own name again. He is bewildered by his reclusive neighbor, Marise d'Api, who apparently coveted his derelict house and land, and is ostracized by the townspeople. Jay's quest to discover why everyone, including Marise's former mother-in-law, blames Marise for her husband's suicide keeps the plot moving at a steady clip. Despite some unbelievable twists and a slightly uneven pace, it begins slowly, but by the last quarter races ahead. This is an entertaining narrative, equal parts whimsy and drama. (July)

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From [Booklist](#)

The new novel by the author of the delectable *Chocolat* [BKL S 15 99] lacks its voluptuous perfection but entrances nonetheless. We're back in the tiny French town of Lansquenet, where some of the major players in *Chocolat* now have supporting roles. On a whim, struggling writer Jay Macintosh has bought an old farmhouse near Lansquenet that reminds him of the summers he spent as a teenager with Joe, a combination of faerie godfather, Jerry Garcia, and Johnny Appleseed. In Joe's tender regard for growing things, his wondrous stories, and the magic he places in bottles of strange fruit wine, the teen Jay finds both solace and fury. It's those wine bottles that whisper to Jay and send him to the French cottage; he is even more amazed when Joe, absent for decades, appears and disappears abruptly, slightly transparent but still somehow present. *Chocolat* lovers will be pleased, and new readers satisfied. *GraceAnne DeCandido*
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Users Review

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