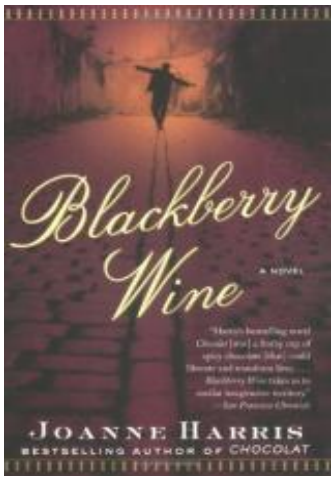
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Blackberry Wine: A Novel

by Joanne Harris



About the Book

Jay Mackintosh is uninspired. After penning his first and only successful novel, Jackapple Joe, he has faded into obscurity. His ambitious girlfriend tries mercilessly to goad him towards a new literary endeavor, but nothing seems to stir him.

Then, one spring day, he finds himself thinking back to his summers with Joe, the crusty, magical old man who was the inspiration for his novel. Joe lived in a ramshackle house near an unused railroad line, where he cultivated a lush and almost jungle-like garden. At the time, Jay was a lonely, bored kid, and Joe adopted him and kept him spellbound with stories of his adventures, and the lore of the charms he used to help grow his flowers, vines and trees.

This strong wave of nostalgia drives Jay into his cellar, where he dusts off six bottles of Specials -- Joe's potent homemade fruit wine. The wine, it seems, has a life of its own, and once Jay breaks the wax seal around the neck of one bottle, his life is changed. A sudden epiphany leads to a permanent change, and he impulsively decides to buy an old farm in France that reminds him of Joe's long ago home.

Moving to the small town of Lansquenet in the French countryside, he begins to cultivate his garden and rebuild the run-down farm. Slowly he is welcomed by his colorful neighbors, including the secretive, strong-willed Marise, who lives on the farm next to his. When the sun goes down each night, he retires to a candelit room where he feverishly spins the lives of the villagers into a new novel. As the novel progresses, Joe begins to appear to him, gently coaxing Jay to embrace a life that feeds his soul, and to challenge the very foundation upon which he has built his life.

Discussion Guide

1. Compare Kerry and Jay's relationship to Marise and Tony's relationship. In what way are they similar? If they don't satisfy each other romantically, what other needs might the relationships fill?

2. "Wine talks; ask anyone.... It has a million voices. It unleashes the tongue.... It revives summers long past and memories best forgotten" (pg 1). Does this statement resonate for you? If so, how? How does it relate to the Specials? Are there other instances in the novel in which food or wine play an active role in guiding a character's actions?

3. What qualities made Joe so appealing to Jay? Jay felt betrayed; was his anger justified? What was Joe attempting to teach Jay about reality, about everyday life? Did Jay ever learn this lesson?

4. Discuss the presence-or lack thereof-of nature in Jay's life, and how it affects his state of mind. What-if anything-is the author saying about country living versus city living?

5. Why did Jay have to destroy his new manuscript before beginning a new life? Why was it important for Jay to finally plant Joe's "Specials" seeds?

Author Bio

Joanne Harris is the internationally renowned and award-winning author of 22 novels, plus novellas, scripts, short stories, libretti, lyrics and articles. Her novel, CHOCOLAT, was adapted to the screen, starring Juliette Binoche and Johnny Depp. She is an honorary Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and is Chair of the Society of Authors. She lives in Yorkshire and also has a form of synaesthesia that enables her to smell colours. Red, she says, smells of chocolate.

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