



# The Champagne Conspiracy

*Ellen Crosby*

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Winter has come to the Montgomery Estate Vineyard in Atoka, Virginia. Lucie Montgomery and winemaker Quinn Santori have decided to make champagne, a first for the vineyard.

But then Gino Tomassi, Quinn's uncle, turns up on their doorstep one afternoon, demanding help in solving the mystery of what happened to Zara Tomassi, the first wife of his grandfather, who died in a San Francisco hotel in 1923 under suspicious circumstances. And it seems there's no coincidence that her death came the day after President Warren Harding passed away in that same hotel. Gino needs answers before his blackmailer takes him for all he's worth?or exposes an explosive family secret.

Lucie searches for what happened almost a hundred years ago as she delves into Prohibition-era Washington, D.C.?a town of bootlegging and duplicity, jazz clubs and speakeasies. But then the investigation turns deadly, threatening Lucie, her relationship with Quinn, and the vineyard, as they realize someone is still out there nearly a century later who will go to any lengths to keep the truth about Zara's death a buried secret.

## **The Champagne Conspiracy Details**

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Author : Ellen Crosby

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# From Reader Review The Champagne Conspiracy for online ebook

## Barbara VA says

I love reading mysteries, Agatha Christie, local tie-in stories, wine, vineyard hopping, good eating, and history. Everything that makes a Wine Country Mystery come together for me. I can see Atoka and Middleburg, visit Barrel Oak (although I prefer the Meadery next door), and wish I could visit some of the wonderful homes that host the fox hunts. It is all so real. There are shops like Thelma's around, and antique dealers that have you in a whirl before you know what is happening! They have you wanting their finds, like Stephen King's *Needful Things* Leland Gaunt! Ok, it is Monday - time to go to the library and get *The Great Gatsby* to reread, again (really, 2 books in 1 month with such a Fitzgerald tie in [*Camino Island*]), then off to the Wilderness Run on Saturday, picnic basket in hand, for wine and music (the Blues Buckets!!!)

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## jammaster\_mom says

This series is set in a small town in Virginia outside of D.C. and centers around a small family run vineyard. Lucie has taken her family business that her father almost ran into the ground and turned it around. Her vineyard manager Quinn has been with her throughout the process. They work well together in the business but their personal relationship is anything but smooth.

This book centers around an event that happened in the 1920's. All of the primary players are dead but their descendants find themselves trying to sort out what really happened and how it is affecting their lives today. Lucie's great-aunt, Quinn's great-grandparents, and Mac's aunt all have a history together. Throw in an older women's death, with her friend swearing it was murder, and a visit from a long lost relative in England and you have a great murder mystery book.

I really enjoyed this book. The mystery was interesting and complex. I didn't really figure out all of what was going on and I really liked that. There are really three different mysteries that are interwoven with one of them going back to the 20's. My only issue is the relationship between Quinn and Lucie. I think she could do better with someone who treat's her better. I am very interested to see where their relationship goes in the next book.

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## Julie H. says

*The Champagne Conspiracy*, set in Atoka, Virginia, took the quirky small-town charm of Rita Mae Brown's *Crozet* (setting for the *Sneaky Pie Brown* mysteries) and made it claustrophobically stifling. I strongly suspect that where *Crozet* or even the *Gilmore Girls'* *Star's Hollow* worked and for me Atoka and its residents were vastly less successful is that the story's heroine, vineyard owner Lucie Montgomery, is utterly unable to enforce any sort of boundaries between herself and her intrusive neighbors, self-involved brother, and hot-headed (and not in a good way) boyfriend.

The action involves long-buried family scandal, philandering politicians, and a last-minute changed will of a recently departed (and possibly murdered) resident of an assisted living facility.

I had hoped to learn a good bit more about winemaking, and can only imagine that it's doled out sparingly across the series. All told, the series is vastly too cozy and its protagonist too much of a milquetoast for my liking. For fans of the cozy mystery, Crosby is a good writer and this may be right up your alley. (To her press, however, maybe you could hire a copy editor or two. Crosby's efforts deserve better treatment.)

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## **Ed says**

#7 in the Wine Country mystery series. I enjoy this series but thought this entry had two drawbacks. First, set in February there is not as much vineyard action as usual, though there is a section on bottling wine at small vineyards. Second, in order to handle three intersecting mysteries and a Valentines Day gala, too much is put on Lucie's plate. I felt vindicated with my suspicions, although with a mysterious death going back to 1923 and the Harding administration and coming in a convoluted fashion to the present day and involving two more deaths, theft, Lucie and Quinn's families, two attacks on Lucie, and more, there are just too many characters and interwoven relationships to keep track of.

Lucie Montgomery, who owns a small Virginia winery, is stunned to learn her winemaker and boyfriend Quinn Santori is the cousin of the legendary vintner Gino Tomassi. Gino has come to Virginia to find out who is blackmailing him with a secret that goes back to the Prohibition era. Intrigued, Lucie digs into the past, learning that one of her own ancestors had a connection. Meanwhile, the mother of Lucie's best friend believes her neighbor Roxy Willoughby, who recently died, was murdered because Roxy had recently changed her will, leaving her fortune to an unknown granddaughter. Lucie investigates both mysteries, past and present, while running her winery and preparing for a benefit Valentine's Day dance.

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## **Cathy Cole says**

I don't care what Ellen Crosby is writing-- if it's one of her Sophie Medina mysteries or one of her Wine Country mysteries-- I can count on her for fast-paced, exciting stories, fascinating historical tidbits, well-developed characters, and all-around intelligent writing. After reading two "Sophie" novels and two Wine Country mysteries, Crosby has become one of my favorite authors.

In *The Champagne Conspiracy*, I learned about Prohibition-Era Washington, DC; why all "champagne" is French; and had a little refresher course on President Warren Harding. In addition, some of the information Lucie learns is about her own family history, and (very true to life) it is not always pleasant.

Lucie is the strong heart of this series. Due to an automobile accident, she must use a cane to walk, but even though she may be a bit hampered by physical infirmity, her quick mind more than makes up for it. In fact, she comes across a saying that should be a staple in all crime fiction: "What you can't say owns you. What you hide controls you." She has a strong network of family and friends, which comes in very useful because she and her lover Quinn appear to be having difficulties. And speaking of difficulties, there's never any in finding out all the latest gossip in Atoka. All you have to do is stop by the General Store and talk with Thelma, who has amazing "God-given psychotic powers." There's nothing like having Mrs. Malaprop in charge of Gossip Central....

Although I did know the identity of two out of three bad guys very early on, *The Champagne Conspiracy* is still a first-rate read because Ellen Crosby doesn't have her entire book solely depend on whodunit. No,

there's a lot of meat on the bone, and I enjoyed every bite. If you're in the mood for great characters, intriguing fast-paced mysteries, a bit of humor, and a few glasses of wine, I think you'll enjoy this book-- and the entire series-- too.

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### **Jonathan Shell says**

This review contains \*\*\* S P O I L E R S \*\*\*

The Champagne Conspiracy by Ellen Crosby is book #7 in her Lucie Montgomery Wine Country mystery. The Champagne Conspiracy is a stand-alone work by Crosby makes the assumption that the reader has a somewhat understanding of her characters and doesn't spend a lot of time filling the reader in on their backstory. As such a new reader to the series may not quickly pick up how all of the characters fit together but it does nothing to distract from the plot.

The Champagne Conspiracy centers around Lucie's winemaker Quinn Santori, his Uncle Gino Tomassi and blackmail plot involving Zara Tomassi, the first wife of Quinn's grandfather who died under mysterious circumstances. The plot seems to involve President Warren Harding as well as one of Lucie's relatives, her name sake Lucy Montgomery.

The Champagne Conspiracy has a couple of different story arcs going at the same time and they all seem to come together in the end although it feels as though a few aspects of the story was sort of rushed to make it fit but overall it makes sense.

The Champagne Conspiracy is a nice light read which gives a peek into the Northern Virginia wine country.

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### **Avid Series Reader says**

The Champagne Conspiracy by Ellen Crosby is book 7 of the Wine Country mystery series set in contemporary Virginia. I was first drawn to the series because I didn't realize Virginia had a wine-making region. I continue the series because I enjoy the sympathetic character of the protagonist, Lucie Montgomery. For full enjoyment of this book, read the prior books in the series. Otherwise the many relationships and eccentric personalities that are key to the solution would be confusing.

When Lucie discovers a beautiful 1930s-flapper style dress in an old trunk in the attic, her business manager Francesca urges her to wear it to the Valentine's Day gala the winery plans to benefit a local homeless shelter. Soon after, Lucie sees a photo of her great-grandmother Lucy wearing the dress. Lucie's joy in the dress is soon marred by discovery of a long-concealed scandal, revealed when her winemaker Quinn is confronted by his hostile cousin Gino. Of course Lucie wants to know the facts, and she begins digging into Gino & Quinn's family history.

Faith, mother of Lucie's best friend Kit, lives in the luxurious Foxhall Manor, an assisted living community on an historic estate. Faith is convinced that her friend Roxanna (in the next room to Faith's) was murdered, and wants Lucie to investigate. Faith's daughter Kit, a journalist, and son Bobby, a policeman, believe Roxy

died a natural death. Lucie's affection for Faith overrides her common-sense reaction that Faith's fears are unfounded, and she agrees to try and find out who was shouting in Roxy's room the day before she died. Roxy's will had startled everyone: she left her wealth to her granddaughter Uma in England, whom she had never mentioned. The gorgeous redhead has come to town to claim her inheritance, and alienated everyone with her hostile attitude.

Roxy's nephew Mac McDonald, former boyfriend of Lucie's who still carries a torch, is in financial trouble due to a Ponzi scheme (in a previous book). He was expecting to inherit from his aunt, before the surprising will.

Lucie's cousin Dominique, owner and chef of the local upscale inn, has an upcoming interview, a test meal to qualify for a job as White House Chef. Lucie is proud of her cousin, but sad if she will be moving away.

Lucie's investigations put her in mortal danger, and leave her too injured to carry out her normal duties at the winery. It's time to bottle their wine. Bottling equipment is too expensive for a small winery to own and install for once-yearly use; they hire a service that brings a van with all the equipment.

By the time of the Valentine's Day gala, Lucie connects all the plot threads, and solves the many mysteries affecting her friends and loved ones, just in time for a very happy ending.

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## **Gaele says**

Never having read this series before, I was curious to see if this book would work on its own, and whether information would be presented in a way to keep the major players in the story identifiable. The relationship with Lucie and Quinn did take some adjustment to understand their dynamic, but the characterizations are so present that it wasn't long before that dynamic was presented. Plenty of other secondary characters, sure to be familiar with those who have read the series, presented themselves, and understanding everyone's roles and relationships to the plot and one another did take much (if not all) of the book, and unfolded in ways that made sense.

The villain in this story was wonderfully complex with his fingers in many different subplots, all coming clear at the very end. Intermixing history and the politics of the Harding era was a nice touch that helped to set both the reasons and a depth to the feud that made sense, and had me continually engaged. Not over-dramatized or laced with red herrings to increase readers' tension, the story was reasonable in pacing and never had moments of "oh get on with it" that interrupted the flow.

Truly intriguing with plenty of characters that I am curious about and would like to see more of (Hope being a particular favorite) I've added earlier titles in this series to be read during my leisure time.

I received an eArc copy of the title from the publisher via NetGalley for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility  
This review was originally posted on I am, Indeed

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## **Nd says**

This may be the best yet in this series. There are multiple good guys and bad guys as well as plot lines to keep you on your toes while reading. Virginia winery owner Lucie Montgomery learned that Quinn, her winemaker, had not told her that he was part of a prestigious Napa Valley wine family when his cousin Gino showed up at the winery and the bad blood between them revealed itself. Gino first accused Quinn of blackmail but then demanded that he and Lucie help in solving what happened to his their grandfather's first wife who died suspiciously in 1923 and whether an heir survived her.

Faith Eastman, the mother of Lucie's oldest friend, Kit, had provided support and refuge after Lucie's mother died. When Lucie visited her posh assisted living facility, Faith extracted a promise from Lucie that she would look into the death of Roxy her friend next door who recently had died. Faith heard arguing and was sure Roxy had been murdered, and she was afraid for her own life and that the murderer was aware that she had overheard the argument.

While dealing with these two and other dilemmas, Lucie still had to run the winery in winter, worry about losing her her cousin, who contributed greatly to success of the Montgomery Estate, to the White House as its new head chef, and multiple additional difficulties.

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### **Deb says**

Lucie Montgomery is preparing for a charity party on Valentine's Day at her winery, when she and her winemaker, Quinn, are challenged by his second cousin to find a blackmailer. Before long, eighty-year- old deaths, President Warren G. Harding, Lucie's flapper relative, a couple of World War II women pilots, two illegitimate children and various dead bodies confuse and distress everyone. As usual, intrepid Lucie sees the mystery through. I thought one of the villains was telegraphed this time, but the wine lore, the characters and the setting in Atoka, Virginia, all combine to make this series enjoyable every outing.

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### **Linda Smatzny says**

This book is all about families and their secrets present and past. Lucie Montgomery finds a dress that belonged to her great aunt and then sees a picture of the great aunt with President Warren Harding. The picture includes other young women some of whom are related to Quinn Santori and Mac . Danger comes to Lucie who is asking questions and trying to put the answers together to get a picture of the past. The book was an easy read.

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### **Sue Em says**

Consistently well-written entertaining series set in the wine country of Virginia.

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### **Nefty123 says**

Confusing family tree but otherwise a winner

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## **Erik Moloney says**

Winter has come to the Montgomery Estate Vineyard in Atoka, Virginia. Lucie Montgomery and winemaker Quinn Santori have decided to make champagne, a first for the vineyard.

But then Gino Tomassi, Quinn's uncle, turns up on their doorstep one afternoon, demanding help in solving the mystery of what happened to Zara Tomassi, the first wife of his grandfather, who died in a San Francisco hotel in 1923 under suspicious circumstances. And it seems there's no coincidence that her death came the day after President Warren Harding passed away in that same hotel. Gino needs answers before his blackmailer takes him for all he's worth?or exposes an explosive family secret.

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## **Charles Finch says**

My review from USA Today

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The cozy mystery often gets tagged as lightweight, when in fact the best cozies are frequently about the redemption we find in community and friendship, a serious subject indeed. In *The Champagne Conspiracy*, her charming, funny seventh novel set in Virginia's wine country – I didn't know it was there either – Ellen Crosby has written a superior cozy, narrated by winemaker Lucie Montgomery. She has two mysteries to solve, when she's not contemplating tannins – a death, potentially a murder, in a family friend's retirement community, and the murky history of one of her employee's grandparents. Coming deep in the series, *The Champagne Conspiracy* can feel a bit crowded for newcomers, and it's guilty here and there of the Stepford sunniness of its genre. But it has tight plotlines, and in Lucie a winning heroine, her personal troubles ameliorated by the acceptance of an endearing circle of friends.

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