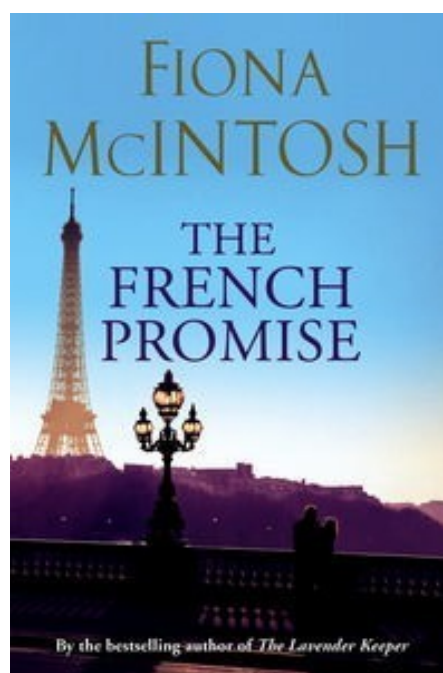




The French Promise

Fiona McIntosh

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Luc and Lisette Ravens – a former French resistance fighter and a one-time British spy – have somehow survived the war, but recovering from the horrors of those years is a challenge they're yet to overcome. Casting their fate to the winds, they sail to Tasmania, hoping to rebuild their lives and plant new lavender fields in a land that's full of promise.

In his darkest hour, Swiss law student Max Vogel learns a confronting truth. A long-held family secret links him to the Ravens on the other side of the world, and he finds himself holding the key to his own future and to Luc's troubled past.

Together they return to Provence, so Luc can fulfil the promises by which he has been bound – to his beloved Lisette, to his Jewish family, and to the one man responsible for ripping so much from his life. With the future generation of lavender keepers in his care, Luc must lay to rest the ghosts of years gone by so that they all might live and love again.

From the south coast of England to the rugged farmland of northern Tasmania and the lively streets of postwar Paris, this is an extraordinary story of courage, determination and everlasting love from an internationally bestselling author.

The French Promise Details

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From Reader Review The French Promise for online ebook

Charmaine Elliott says

As I proceeded through this book I became increasingly unconvinced and skeptical about the authenticity of the characters. The Acknowledgements provided the answer. The author tripped around like a tourist and plopped some chick lit in historical locations, inventing romanticized bad and good guys to fill the scenery. It verges on Mills and Boone and I am filled with grumbles around the trivializing of historically grave events. As evident from the reviews this is a genre that holds considerable appeal. Back in the day I was a Forever Amber fan. I suspect that this is a modern version - more simplified, faster moving and designed for the 20 year old age group that I was when I read the romances budding in historical settings. The problem I suspect is me - not it...Read it for light entertainment. Avoid it if you expect any depth, interpretation, layering or reasons to ponder. This is one dimensional and I was disappointed. The hype promises more.

Vickie says

I absolutely loved The French Promise by Fiona McIntosh. The story begins with Luc and Lisette Raves now trying to cope with life in post-WWII. Luc and Lisette now have two children, Harry and Jennie, as well as a huge move to Tasmania where they begin a lavender farm. The story then progresses back to Europe with some new characters all connected to Luc's previous war experiences.

The author does a wonderful job with the subjects of readjustment, PTSD, and loss. I love the connections between everyone and was just pleased with the progression of everyone's lives.

Go Cards! L1C4!!

Dale Harcombe says

I hadn't read The Lavender Keeper, in fact I haven't read any of Fiona McIntosh's novels except for one children's novel, but it didn't matter. This book stands without it. The first chapter I found hard to read as it dealt with life and death of several members of the Bonet family in Auschwitz. Having read several on this theme recently, I wasn't sure I wanted to keep reading on that topic. But then the scene changes to Luc, the sole survivor of the Bonet family.

After World War 2 Luc, a resistance fighter and his wife Lisette who was a British spy set about rebuilding their lives. This takes them first to England and later to Australia. In Tasmania Luc hopes to start a lavender farm from his grandmother's seeds which he wears around his neck like a talisman. He and Lisette have changed their surname to Ravens but it is not enough to stop the past resurfacing when a Swiss Law student discovers the truth that connects him to the Ravens family.

The further the story goes on, the more connections become apparent as other characters are introduced.

Although I have to say I was expecting a connection that didn't actually eventuate as I thought it would.

Obviously it was only my writer's mind at work but that didn't detract from the book.

This is a story that brings out the horrors of war, the adjustments needed with immigration, loss, as well as the power of love and of revenge. The further I got into the novel the more I wanted to keep reading.

It didn't come as any surprise to me to read that the author had been mentored by Bryce Courtenay as I felt the way of telling the story showed some of his influence. This is an excellent read, probably much richer if you have read The Lavender Keeper but not absolutely necessary as this novel recaps enough to get the

picture of what went before.

Andrea says

In post-war Europe, Luc and Lisette from *The Lavender Keeper* are trying to carve out a happy family life for themselves and their young son. Luc in particular is struggling with the war-time loss of his family, his country and his livelihood. It's like they are gambling on their one last chance at happiness when they decide to migrate to Australia as ten-pound-Poms, with a view to establishing a lavender farm in Tasmania.

It's been 2 years since I read *The Lavender Keeper*, and I must admit I'd forgotten a lot of the detail in the meantime. Just because that's what I'm like, I had to keep dipping back into the previous book to remind myself who different characters were and how they related to the story. In hindsight this really wasn't necessary, because if I'd just kept reading, McIntosh would have mostly filled in the gaps for me. So I think this book could be read in isolation.

It was all a bit ho-hum (but nice) until about halfway through, when the plot took a most unexpected turn. *She did WHAT?!?!?! And for me, this elevated it into more than just a mere continuation of the first book. From that point on, the action returned to Europe and the pace of the story really picked up.*

What I really enjoyed about this book was McIntosh's handling of Tasmania as a major location. I think I have read before that she often goes to Tasmania to write, and her familiarity shows. There was only one very minor error that I picked up on (I can be *very* critical about people writing about Tasmania as if it's just any old place!), but that could actually have been an editorial oversight rather than a mistake in the writing, so I'll forgive her for it.

Mary Ladrack says

Another beautiful book by Fiona McIntosh with a lovely writing style. Read *Lavender Keeper* first to give context for this second book. Great exploration of emotions for all characters after the experience of WW11. It delves more into the scenes in *The Lavender Keeper* and part 4 was definitely a page turner. I kept wanting to know what would happen next. I really liked the reference to names of places in France. It reminded me of my Europe trip a few years ago. This one won't disappoint.

Jess says

If you do yourself one favour this year, you **MUST** read this book. Absolutely breathtaking and heartbreaking beautiful.

The French Promise by Fiona McIntosh is the follow up narrative to the much-loved *The Lavender Keeper*. When I initially set out to read this novel, I had not read *The Lavender Keeper*, nor realised *The French Promise* was a sequel. That said, reading *The French Promise* as a stand-alone narrative did not hinder my understanding of the novel. I will elaborate further on this later in my review.

The French Promise starts with the final moments of Rachel's life in Auschwitz, and although I didn't know

who this character was, I was completely and utterly hooked from the very first page with everything she had to say. So much so, that when Rachel's life is over in the matter of a few pages I was emotionally distraught. This was my first indication that I knew I had struck gold with this particular novel.

In a nutshell, *The French Promise* is Luc's story. Plagued by an identity crisis, he is forced to overcome a number of obstacles to learn what really matters in life. Like Luc, the narrative itself confronts some pretty horrific truths about the characters and the time setting, and its these moments and insights that set this novel apart from others within the genre. In many ways (and I mean no disrespect by saying this) writing about WWII and the Holocaust is popular within the current mainstream market, with at least six new release titles coming to mind from the last twelve or so months (Jodi Picoult's *The Storyteller*; Ben Elton's *Two Brothers*; Anna Funder's *All That I am*; Leah Fleming's *The Girl Under The Olive Tree*; Joy Chamber's *The Great Deception*; Ken Follet's *Winter of The World*; Elizabeth Wein's *Code Name Verity*). Yet it is *The French Promise* that stands out the most for me. Like many of the novels listed it is incredibly well written, but the emotional undercurrent and the unique perspectives combined with the novel's intriguing elements of mystery and romance really place this narrative out on its own. Fiona McIntosh really shines as a must watch author here, one I know I will be following closely from now on.

Through the course of the novel we are introduced to a number of characters in a various geographical locations revealing the shared experiences of life after the war. In many ways it is these inclusions, and the various larger-than-life-characters portrayed throughout the novel that really appealed to me as a reader.

Unlike the first novel *The Lavender Keeper* (or so I'm led to believe), this novel is set mainly in the aftermath of WWII, when the world at large is trying to come to terms with what happened and how to move on. I'm not old enough to have witnessed the war personally or to have experienced the years directly following it. And yet it is periods of unrest and uncertainty like these that particularly interest me, especially since they are so rarely documented in either fiction or non-fiction. History books are rarely concerned with anything other than the event itself and the conflict's immediate resolution. On the rare occasion when the aftermath isn't entirely dismissed in the first place, it is usually dealt with in a short clinical assessment and then forgotten. The aftermath of such events is of little consequence; as far as the world is concerned the traumatic event has ended and those people involved are guaranteed (or so society and fiction usually leads us to believe) their happy ending. If they don't get their 'happy ending' society simply doesn't want to know; we can't deal with it and we don't know how to handle it.

The French Promise doesn't make these assumptions, for unlike many other novels, it invites readers into the world of the characters and their chaotic lives and it holds nothing back. Luc Ravens and his haunting past is both troubled and exciting at the same time. He is confronted with demons from his past, while learning to cope, even to be content, with what he has in the here and now. That is, of course, until the unthinkable happens and his family is torn apart. Luc fails to come to terms with these events until he receives a letter from a stranger in Europe and his life is once again altered. This letter holds the key to many of Luc's unanswered questions from the war, whilst also offering him everything he needs to fulfil certain promises made and the tools to right the wrongs done to him. From here Luc and his daughter Jenny are catapulted across Europe on a journey that is both about self-discovery and revenge.

This experience of the shared aftermath resonated so strongly with me personally, that I found myself unable to tear myself away from the narrative and the characters. It completely and utterly consumed me as it took over every waking second and thought I had; it's emotions entangling with mine until I was crying as though I had lost my very own loved ones. McIntosh's characters were so strong and lifelike as though they could literally leap of the page and they'd be standing right before you; they felt more like old friends than fictional characters and I'm not ashamed to admit that I mourned their deaths and losses accordingly.

McIntosh has perfected the art of pacing in this novel, with a perfect blend of romance, action, mystery and intrigue. Furthermore the relationships between her characters are tangible and so realistic that it is really not

that hard to see these characters living in our world even now. The pain the characters felt was real, the lives they live tangible, and their hopes and dreams inspiring.

Interestingly enough, I started off not liking Jenny's character, but with the narrative's development and her overshadowing family members gone, I opened up to her in much the same ways Luc did. Her maturity surprised me and although I know many blunt people like her, I often questioned her age. Here is a girl whose lost her mother and brother in one fateful swoop, but she's living it up in Europe. I liked that she was self-contained and driven; she knew what she wanted in life and how she was going to achieve it. In many ways, I hope that McIntosh has a third book waiting to be released in this series, for I'm optimistic in the belief and hope that we may get to see more of Jenny, Max and Robert in the future.

As a hopeless romantic, I simply adored the glimpses of the back-story and the natural progression of the relationships in this narrative. None of the relationships felt forced nor were we told how to view them. I was happy with Luc and Lisette when they started getting their lives back together, and overjoyed when we learnt about Jenny for the first time. After finding out about the connection between this book and *The Lavender Keeper*, I made sure to purchase it straight away. I should point out here that it wasn't until a customer came into work begging for *The French Promise* that I even realised it was part of a series. It reads well on its own however, and while there were references to a back-story that I wasn't fully aware of, there is enough in this book alone to keep you captivated and on top of everything. In fact the subtle hints of what came before enhanced, rather than detracted, my overall reading experience of the narrative. For at no point (even after having learnt that there was a book prior to this one) did I feel frustrated or as though I didn't know enough of the back-story to fully comprehend the story before me. At times, especially early on in the story, I thought there might have been more to the narrative and I wanted to know what had come before, but I truly believe that *The French Promise* can stand alone by its own merits with no prior knowledge of McIntosh's other books. That in itself is a true testimony to McIntosh's ability to create a world before your eyes and immerse you so fully in it.

That said, I am very much looking forward to experiencing the relationships and emotions all over again, to see love blossom for the first time (in *The Lavender Keeper*) and to get more than a glimpse of the raw emotions surrounding the love triangle of Killan, Lisette and Luc. I was flooded with emotions when Luc remembers driving a limo for Killan, as the latter has sex with the woman Luc loved in the back seat. The pain he feels is gripping, and McIntosh's imagery and characterisation are unparalleled to anything I have read before. I thoroughly look forward to reading the first book to live through this love triangle and the first meeting between Luc and Lisette and how their story began. I wish to learn more about Rachel and her family and to relive the world that was theirs. And yet at the same time, I am desperately clinging to the hope that McIntosh continues with this series, as I'm not ready to leave these characters yet.

The depth of McIntosh's writing and the world she presents both emotionally and historically is astounding; I couldn't get enough. On more than one occasion I kept reading despite being exhausted and sleepy because one more page couldn't possibly hurt. Before I knew it, it was well and truly past three in the morning and I had work in roughly five hours. Despite being tired all the following day, it didn't stop me from managing to do the same thing the following night! At one stage in the narrative Max exclaims that his research "was fascinating. He simply had to know [more]" and in many ways I think this sums up my experience of the book.

Overall I found this novel to be a compulsive read. It's a book I picked up on a whim, and I have never been so happy and glad that I did so. I laughed, I cried, I feel in love and I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. The narrative itself is full of mystery and intrigue that is sure to leave you wanting more. It's historically set and emotionally bound and the simple fact that the book explores the aftermath of the war and its continued toll on humanity both highlights McIntosh's talent as an author, but also her novel in its own right.

The French Promise is a quick and captivating read that will leave you wanting more with its breathtaking writing and heartbreakingly beautiful narrative; it's perfect for fans of historical novels; especially those enthralled by Paullina Simons' *The Bronze Horseman* series.

My thanks go to the publisher and NetGalley for the e-copy of this book I received to review.

Read as part of the Australian Women's Writer's Challenge 2013 and part of my Romance Appreciation Challenge 2013.

This review originally appeared on my blog - The Never Ending Bookshelf - and can be found here: <http://theneverendingbookshelf.blog.c...>

Julie says

'The French Promise' not only takes us round the world on an adventure in its own right but also deals with the Second World War and its repercussions in Europe afterwards. Throughout runs the thread of romance, buried secrets, tragedy, love and lavender fields. Multi-layered, it was difficult at first to work out the connections between the different families but the ending had me gasping. It didn't work out as I thought it would but then that's the beauty of fiction.

Nigelle-ann says

The French Promise delivers a perfect sequel to *The Lavender Keeper*. Having received an early copy it made for a great birthday present. We meet up with Luc and Lisette after the war when the world was still trying to figure out what to do with it's self. Luc is unsettled and is desperately trying to find out what has happened to his family, while Lisette really just wants to move on with life with their baby Harry.

We go on a bit of a Journey with these two, ending up in the wild of Tasmania where Luc and his lavender finally find a place to be together.

I have always felt that *The lavender keeper* and now *The French promise* has always been Luc's story.

The opening chapter brought tears to my eyes and from then on it was full steam ahead.

The big question of this books is "is revenge worth it" its is something that Luc has to work out.

Fiona is never one to just let her characters drift about doing nothing, she writes with a force that is just amazing. There is such an emotional depth to Luc that is rare these days. Fiona send Luc on such roller coaster ride that even I felt that I wanted him to get off, then it all falls into place and you suddenly see the light at the end of the tunnel and you realise that it is meant to be and all will be well.

The ending is perfect for me, and I was beyond satisfied that this book was the perfect sequel to this series. I was happy to leave Luc but sad to say goodbye as well, this has been a journey well travel together.

You will cry and rejoice in this book and most likely in that order. So sit back and enjoy. This is a must read

book of the year. Fiona does not disappoint and really delivers.

Toni Carter says

A wonderful read. I like it when a book surprises me. The journey of the characters was inspiring and I found myself gasping out loud, 'No!' I was extremely sad at one point in this book, but I don't want to give anything away. The emotions I experienced emphasizes the journey I have been on, in reading this.

Rachael McDiarmid says

Believe it or not, I've never read Fiona McIntosh and this book was my introduction to her writing, her wonderful, rich storytelling. And you know what? I loved her and I thoroughly enjoyed this book! I also found out later this book is a sequel to The Lavender Keeper but that didn't matter. You can read it as a stand alone book.

I don't know what I loved most about The French Promise - the narrative, the characters, the settings... I don't know. I just got lost inside the story from the very beginning when we are taken to the worst possible place in the world - the hell that was Auschwitz-Birkenau. We follow the story of Rachel during the darkest of days of WWII.

We fast forward to 1951 in Eastbourne where Luc (former Resistance fighter) and Lisette (former British spy) are living. Both are "injured emotionally" by their past. Craving his beloved France but unable to return there, the two of them make a life with each other, eventually moving to Tasmania where they grow lavender and raise a family.

We follow their life there but when the past interrupts, it changes everything and then tragedy strikes the family. We then journey back to France so Luc can confront his painful past. And all the pieces of the story come together. Beautifully.

What a read. Just my sort of book. Takes me away to another place in time - with characters from all walks of life. You laugh, you cry, you cheer, and you read. It was glorious!

Julie Cohen says

This not particularly well-written book was interesting in its basic plot, but it's prose was clunky and awkward at times. I can see what the author was aiming for, but it was not well executed and at times felt contrived. Shame really, as I'm usually such a sucker for this kind of novel.

Kathryn says

I enjoyed this sequel to The Lavender Keeper, although I do wish I hadn't let months lapse between the books as I couldn't remember some things. I think most things were generally explained at some point in the

story, so that this book could be read on its own but it just annoyed me that I could only vaguely remember some things.

I was completely blind-sided by one of the twists of the plot about half-way through- totally unexpected! The book seems very authentic, probably thanks to the research put in by Fiona McIntosh. Very believable and the characters are ones I can identify with.

Laura says

I absolutely loved The Lavender Keeper and could recommend it to anyone; this sequel didn't live up to my expectations and although it has been a good eighteen months or so since I've read its predecessor, I felt this instalment was too descriptive and "word heavy" for my liking.

Luc and Lisette have a complex, exciting, romantic past. Part of why I loved The Lavender Keeper so much was their chemistry. In The French Promise, the dialogue felt too stiff and corny. Having said that, there were indeed parts of the book I enjoyed and I appreciate the authors dedication to historical fiction writing, as she has clearly shown her skill. Having this book set in part in Australia also made an unexpected yet nice touch.

I would read another this authors books and hope this sequel was the only one that I didn't fully enjoy.

Sue says

Excellent story line and dealt with a dark time in history in a very realistic manner.

As I teaxcher of Humanities I really enfoy sweeping sagas across time and continents and this was exactly that. The characters were believable and appealing, they had their annoying flaws that got you angry with them at times.

The theme of loss of loved ones was dealt with realistically and I loved the Australian French connection. This writer does her homework and knows how to weave a tale or two great read and thoroughly recommended.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

The Lavender Keeper, set primarily in France during World War 2, introduced Luc Bonet, a lavender farmer who joined the Resistance after his family was dragged away by Nazi collaborators and their farm in Provence was seized, and Lisette Forestier who was recruited by the London Home Office, tasked to infiltrate the Reich and aid the downfall of the Nazi regime.

The French Promise continues their story as they rebuild their lives after the war has ended. Luc, haunted by all he has lost, is struggling with his new life in England. Though he loves Lisette, and their son, Harry, he is unable to lay the ghosts of his past to rest. Lisette, increasingly concerned about her husband, believes they need a fresh start and the family sets sail for Tasmania where Luc can return to Lavender farming. Luc's grief recedes as they establishes themselves in Australia, adding a daughter, Jennifer, to their family but when tragedy strikes Luc is overwhelmed by despair until a letter from the son of a war time friend provides him with the opportunity to finally fulfill his sworn promise to avenge those he loved.

I had been looking forward to this sequel after having enjoyed the blend of action, adventure, romance and intrigue in *The Lavender Keeper*. While Lisette is the dominant character in first novel, *The French Promise* features Luc and is a quieter story that focuses on emotion and human drama in the aftermath of the war. I love how the author connects the characters and events of *The Lavender Keeper* with *The French Promise*, and for that reason wouldn't recommend this as a stand alone novel. I feel the experience would be lacking without knowledge of the history of Luc and Lisette's history.

The novel begins by sharing the fate of Luc's family at Auschwitz-Birkenau where Rachel and Sarah are the only family members to survive the initial purge on arrival. While Sarah labours in a German factory, Rachel's musical talents provide her with some advantages when she is chosen to teach music to the camp supervisor's children. Unfortunately it is there that she comes under the notice of Commander Herr von Schleigel, an enemy of Luc's, who takes perverse pleasure in condemning Rachel and her sister to death. McIntosh deals with the subject of the Holocaust sensitively but it is it's aftermath and it's impact on the survivors that is featured in the novel.

Not knowing exactly what happened to his family after they were taken by the Nazi's has been a festering source of grief for Luc. Though he was certain they died in a German death camp it's not until he is contacted by Max Vogel seeking information about his own father, Colonel Killian, with whom Luc and Lisette share history, that Luc is able to mourn his family. Through Luc, McIntosh explores the ethics of vengeance and it's cost, as he decides to confront Commander Herr von Schleigel for his wartime atrocities. I found it interesting that though my sympathy was wholly with Luc, and my hatred for the Nazi officer complete, I hoped Luc would surrender his drive for revenge in favour of moving on with his life and finding the happiness he deserved. The characters of *The French Promise* are so finely and realistically drawn that I became invested in their well being and cried and laughed along with them.

The French Promise is a captivating saga of love, loss, and the triumph of the human spirit, providing closure for Luc and Lisette's story. Fiona McIntosh is an extraordinary storyteller (I can also recommend her DCI Jack Hawksworth crime series and her fantasy stand alone, *The Scrivener's Tale*) and this historical fiction duology is a stunning example of her talent.
