

Bestselling Author
of *The Woman
Before Wallis*

THE PARIS DECEPTION

Book Club Kit

A NOVEL

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TURNBULL

A background image of a Parisian rooftop scene with various chimneys, dormers, and a distant view of the Eiffel Tower under a hazy sky. The image is partially obscured by a dark red text box with yellow decorative borders.

Dear Reader,

I dreamed up the idea for *The Paris Deception* with my brother, who set me a challenge to write something he would like better than his favourite movie, *The Thomas Crown Affair*. We sat up for hours late one night at our family cottage, talking through the broad strokes of the book: an art heist set in Nazi-occupied Europe, focused on the real-life crimes of the ERR and the wartime heroism of Rose Valland; the notion of “degeneracy” in art, and the talents of a Dutch forger named Han van Meegeren.

It’s easy, in the early stages of book development, to gloss over the specifics in order to figure out the next plot point: *And then they forge a work of art! And then they break into the museum!* This book tested my powers of imagination once I realized that the method of forgery I’d hoped to use (which you’ll learn about in this book club guide) was not going to work... and when I got to Paris and recognized how difficult it would be to break into a museum behind the high gates of the Jardin des Tuileries. But that, to me, is one of the best parts of the process: knitting together historical elements, imagination, derring-do and pure audacity to create what I hope is a heart-pumping plot.

Thanks so much for reading this book, and for choosing it for your book club. I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Cheers, chérie!

Bryn Turnbull

BEHIND THE PAGES

CHATEAU DOLUS

THE WEINFÜHRER

"The Germans have moved in with a vengeance. They've appointed a – we call him a Weinführer – who's putting the entire region to work. Given the number of bottles he's ordering every week, it seems that Göring is keeping the Luftwaffe hydrated with champagne alone. It's a wonder they get their airplanes off the tarmac."

During the war, Germany's thirst for champagne was insatiable. In the early days of the occupation, over two million bottles of champagne were stolen by German soldiers, while Hitler himself "requisitioned" over 500,000 for his private cellars alone. Hoping to keep the champagne flowing, the Germans installed a "Weinführer" in Champagne, responsible for overseeing champagne production in the region as a whole: Otto Klaebisch.

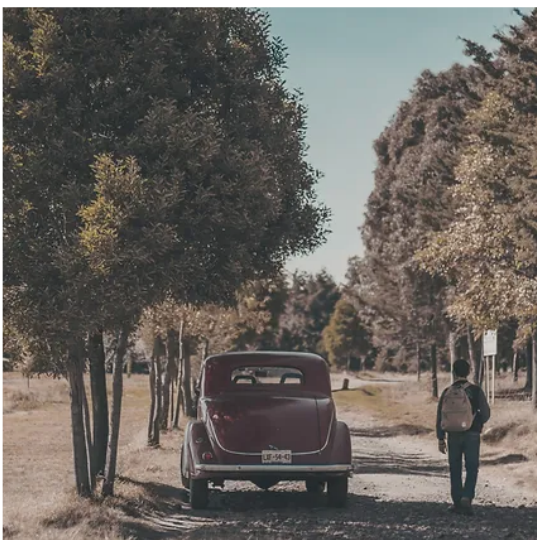
Klaebisch was a brandy merchant, familiar with the production, distribution, and sale of liquor – and it was this very familiarity with the industry which frustrated champagne producers. He ought to have known, they muttered angrily, that orders of 400,000 bottles a week bound for Germany was unsustainable! Champagne, after all, takes three years to mature, and each grape must be harvested by hand – and these orders were made taller still by the fact that the Germans had arrested most of the young men who worked for the champagne houses. But Klaebisch was unphased by the sheer scale of what he'd asked the champagne region to do. His advice? "Work Sundays."



SABOTAGE

"You recall Sébastien's friend, François? He was arrested three days ago for selling an inferior vintage to the Wehrmacht."

Needless to say, resentment rapidly became the watchword among Champagne's remaining residents. Needing a way to stand up to the Weinführer, the region's champagne houses banded together to form a union under the leadership of Count Robert-Jean de Vogüé, head of Moët & Chandon (who makes a brief cameo appearance in *The Paris Deception*!) The champagne houses also found ways to fight back by mislabelling their bottles to conceal their best vintages, and delivering their worst vintages to the Germans (a scene in *The Paris Deception* has François Tattinger arrested for selling "dishwater" to Klaebisch – this actually happened!) But Champagne had a bigger role to play with the French Resistance.



RESISTANCE

"Where do you go every night?"

He leaned back. "Don't ask questions that I can't answer," he replied. "It's safer for everyone these days if we all keep to our own business."

Unbeknownst to the Weinführer, Robert-Jean de Vogüé was not only the spokesperson for the champagne houses: he was also the head of the regional French Resistance, and he made sure that Champagne did its part for the war effort. The champagne houses worked alongside the Resistance to sabotage German efforts, hide and protect downed Allied airmen and Jewish families, and hid airdropped provisions. They also kept a close eye on the champagne orders sent down by the Nazi top brass and passed information on to Allied forces, because the Germans often revealed their military intentions through their champagne orders: in one case, instructions to specially cork and pack a large champagne order for travel to a warm climate indicated that the Germans anticipated an upcoming victory in North Africa. The champagne houses alerted the Resistance, who passed the information along to the Allies... and ensured that victory never happened.

INSIDE THE JEU DE PAUME

AN UNWILING HOST



Sophie froze. "He can't do that," she replied. "This art doesn't belong to him. It doesn't belong to us. The ERR is safeguarding the paintings, but they still belong to the families they were taken from."

Rose's expression was almost pitying. "Not anymore."

During World War II, German forces plundered hundreds of thousands of works of art – an estimated 20 percent of all artworks in Europe – from people opposed to Nazi ideology, including Communists, Freemasons and, most prominently, Jewish families.

In Paris, most of this artwork ended up in the Musée Jeu de Paume – a small museum located within the Jardin des Tuileries. During its four-year tenure as an unwilling repository for the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), the Nazi commission responsible for the theft and seizure of artwork, an estimated 22,000 stolen works of art passed through the museum, where they were either transferred into the Reich, exchanged with other dealers or destroyed.

A TWISTED IDEOLOGY

Hitler's goal was to create a thousand-year Reich, crystallized in amber. What need was there for innovation, when the Nazi party had already created perfection?

The notion of *Entartete Kunst*—"Degenerate Art"—was developed in the 1920s by the Nazi party as a response to the perceived decadence and experimentalism that flourished throughout Germany during the Weimar Republic. Upon gaining power in 1933, the Nazis, led by Joseph Goebbels and Hitler (himself a failed artist), vowed to supposedly cleanse Germany of degenerate art -- and thus, of degeneracy itself.

This vow resulted in the destruction of thousands of publicly-owned works of art in Germany following the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition – an exhibition intended to "educate" the German people on the causes of the Weimar Republic's moral decline.





A ROOM OF MARTYRS

Rose Valland had separated the modern artworks from the rest of the collection, concealing them from Göring's prying eyes and grasping fingers, hoping that Göring's greed would blind him to the presence of sedition in his midst. She had hidden away the works too dangerous for those from whom the Nazi party demanded blind loyalty, blind faith, unquestioning devotion—paintings that questioned stasis, demanded change. Art that challenged established norms, took aim at dogma and skewered it at its heart.

The ERR used the smallest gallery in the museum to house plundered “degenerate” works of art, separate from the artworks that the ERR deemed ideologically “pure”. While their counterparts in the rest of the museum were transported into Germany to be hung on high-ranking Nazis’ walls, the works in the “degenerate” collection were used as bargaining chips, exchanged with unscrupulous art dealers for highly desired classical paintings – until the collection got too large to manage through exchange alone.

In July 1942, the artwork kept in the storeroom was burned in the Jeu de Paume's courtyard in a shocking act of vandalism that mirrored the fate of the works in Germany's Entartete Kunst exhibition only a few years earlier. One brave undercover Resistance agent witnessed the destruction of the artworks in the Jeu de Paume and thereafter referred to the storeroom at the back of the gallery as the *Room of Martyrs*—a sobriquet Sophie borrows in *The Paris Deception*.

A HIDDEN HEROINE

Behind her round glasses, Rose's gray eyes shone with cold, bright indignation. “Do you honestly believe that I would risk any harm befalling pieces from this collection? Might I remind you, Colonel, that I have repeatedly brought the welfare of this collection—a collection for which you take full credit—to your attention in order to keep it safe from mishandling and rank incompetence.” She looked down her nose at Bohn, her dowdy skirt suit shining like a suit of armor. “You really haven't the first clue about me, have you?”

When the ERR moved into the Jeu de Paume, Rose Valland was the sole member of the museum's existing staff to stay on payroll: and while many suspected her of collaborating with the Germans, Rose risked her life to safeguard the artwork within the museum. Under the direction of Jacques Jaujard, director of the Musées Nationaux de France, Rose served as an operative for the French Resistance and despite the constant threat of being discovered, Valland secretly recorded every movement of the ERR within the Jeu de Paume, concealing her ability to speak German in order to monitor and pass information about the ERR's looting on to the Resistance.



Following the war, Valland worked with the Monuments Men, sharing her records about the ERR's looting with James Rorimer to help locate and return stolen art and artifacts to their rightful owners. In recognition for her wartime heroism, Valland was awarded the *Légion d'honneur*, was appointed a *Commandeur of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, and was awarded France's *Médaille de la Résistance*, along with the United States's Medal of Freedom, for her bravery. She died in 1980 and was buried alongside the love of her life, Joyce Helen Heer.



RECOVERING WHAT WAS STOLEN

Today, there is still an ongoing effort by the families of the victims to recover masterpieces stolen from them, not only from private collections but also from public institutions which, knowingly or unknowingly, acquired artwork of dubious provenance. Many organizations, including the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project, the ERR Project, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Claims Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and the Monuments Men and Women Foundation work tirelessly to identify stolen artworks and return them to their rightful owners.

To this day, the fate of an estimated 100,000 works of art looted by the Nazis from Jewish families remains unknown.



THE ASTRONOMER VERMEER, 1668

Purchased by the Rothschild family in the late 1800s, Vermeer's *The Astronomer*, arguably one of the Dutch artist's most famous paintings, was seized by the ERR in Paris in 1940 from Edouard de Rothschild's hotel room. At the Jeu de Paume Museum, Hermann Goring handpicked the painting as a present for Hitler, in the hopes that it would become the foundational piece in Hitler's dream project, the Linzmuseum. The painting was repatriated to France in 1945, and restituted to Edouard's son, Guy de Rothschild. In 1983, Rothschild sold the painting to the Louvre, where it now resides.

REAL-LIFE ARTWORK

PORTRAIT OF MADAME PAUL ROSENBERG PICASSO, 1918

This painting of art dealer Paul Rosenberg's wife and daughter was part of one of the earliest exchanges of "degenerate" paintings between the ERR and Gustav Rochlitz, a Swiss art dealer who traded two Old Masters – a painting by Jan Weenix and a painting thought to be by Titian – for eleven "degenerate" works of art, including this portrait of Paul Rosenberg's wife and daughter (erroneously believed by the ERR to be a portrait of Picasso's wife). The painting, part of Paul Rosenberg's extensive collection, was restituted to the Rosenberg family in 1946.



THE ART OF FORGERY



HOW TO FORGE A WORK OF ART

After Sophie's departure, Fabienne had stared at the Kirchner for hours, and while she was confident that she could replicate his practiced strokes, she knew that the true test of a forgery lay not in the top layer of paint but in the countless brushstrokes beneath: the slowly built-up layers of impasto that gave a painting its depth.

The challenge in forging a work of art goes beyond the obvious need for artistic skill: not only does the painting need to look convincing, it also needs to act like a painting of its time and place. This means not only making the right brushstrokes – it means having the right canvas, supports, and indications of wear and tear to make the entire illusion convincing.

In Van Meegeren's case, he used authentic 17th century canvases for his paintings and, where possible, mixed his own pigments using materials that Vermeer would have used, including white lead and lapis lazuli. He then mixed those pigments with acrylic resin – Bakelite – so that the paint would harden to the point of resembling a 300 year old painting; and so that it would pass the dreaded "alcohol swab" test used by critics to test for forgeries. Then he would crack the painting over a table edge or cylinder to create convincing craquelure on the canvas. He would rub India ink and vacuum cleaner dust – the "dust of ages" – in the cracks to give it that added level of authenticity.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The notion of ideological degeneracy is a running theme throughout this book. How do the characters in *The Paris Deception* reflect elements of what the Nazi party deemed “degenerate”?
2. How does Sophie and Fabienne’s relationship mature throughout the course of the novel?
3. Fabienne grapples with the notion of cowardice throughout the novel, and when we meet her, she is in a dark and desperate place. How does Fabienne take accountability for her actions – and for her perceived cowardice – as the novel progresses?
4. Sophie considers herself to be at her professional best when her work is invisible. Does Sophie remain invisible throughout *The Paris Deception*?
5. Nazi Germany considered the destruction of Degenerate Art, to be a vital part of preserving their culture. Is this mentality ironic or logical (or both)?



6. Do you think that Sophie and Fabienne place too much importance on physical art, given everything else that is occurring in France? Why or why not?
7. Richter considers himself a man of refined tastes whose views can diverge from those of his party and its actions. How is he able to reconcile the two?
8. Perspectives on the possibility of the war ending vary widely among the characters in the novel, from Lev Lowenstein's stubborn optimism to Sophie's father's resigned acceptance. In a similar situation, which might you find yourself adopting?
9. Both Sophie and Fabienne must contend with their parents' dreams for their respective lives. How do they differ in their approaches to breaking from those expectations?
10. Sophie spends most of the novel having to hide her identity: as a German, as Resistance sympathizer, and as a woman who is attracted to other women. Do you think it was more difficult masking one part of her identity than any other, and why?



LE SABOT

Ingredients

- 1.5 oz dry gin
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz triple sec
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz simple syrup
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz egg white or aquafaba
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz champagne

Preparations

1. Shake the first five ingredients with ice, then strain it back into the strainer.
2. Dry shake (shake without ice), and strain into a chilled coupe.
3. Top with champagne, and garnish with a lemon twist.

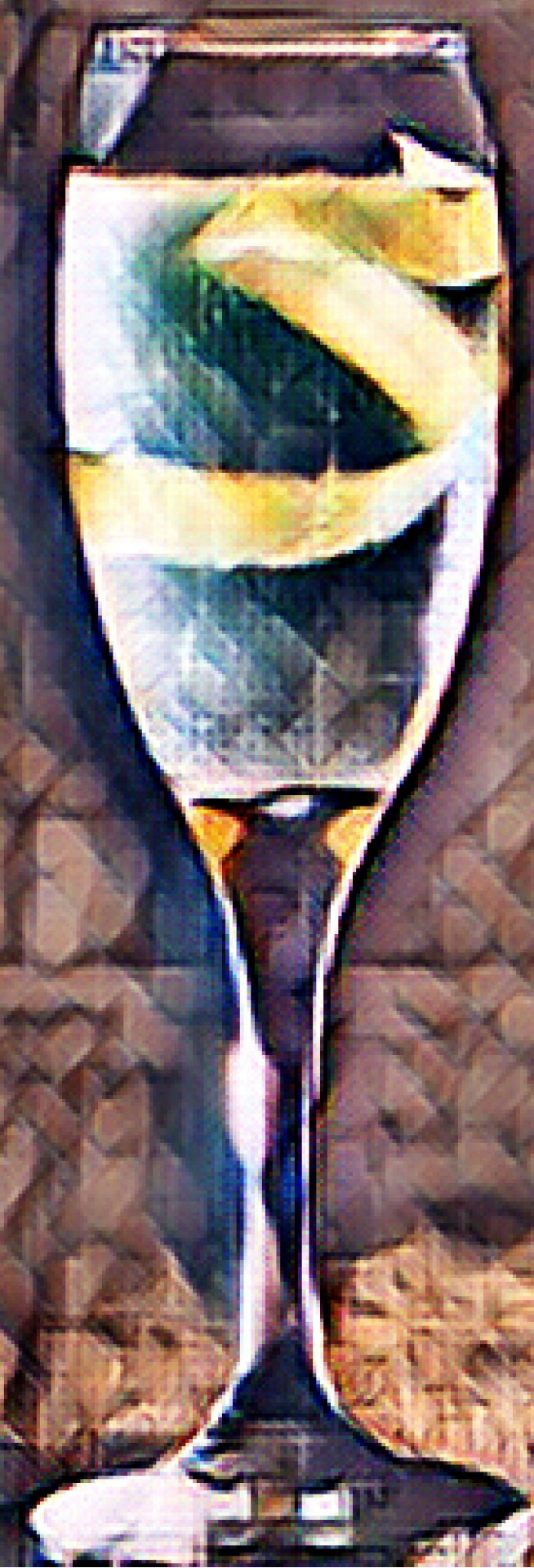
Elderflower Champagne Cocktail

Ingredients

- 1 oz dry gin
- 1 oz elderflower liqueur
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz lemon juice
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz champagne

Preparations

1. Shake the gin, elderflower liqueur, and lemon juice with ice.
2. Strain into a chilled flute, and top with champagne.
3. Garnish with a lemon twist.



CLASSIC MIMOSA



Ingredients

3 oz juice of choice
(orange, grapefruit,
cranberry, pomegranate,
and mango are all lovely
options)

3 oz champagne

Preparations

Pour into a chilled champagne
coupe and garnish with a citrus
wedge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bryn Turnbull is the internationally bestselling author of *The Woman Before Wallis*. Equipped with a master of letters in creative writing from the University of St. Andrews, a master of professional communication from Ryerson University and a bachelor's degree in English literature from McGill University, Bryn focuses on finding stories of women lost within the cracks of the historical record. She lives in Toronto.