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The Parisian Chapter

by Janet Skeslien Charles



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE PARIS LIBRARY and MISS MORGAN'S BOOK BRIGADE, a charming and ?richly populated? (*New York Journal of Books*) novel about two small-town girls with big dreams who move to Paris to become artists. But dreams don?t just come true. They require nurturing, as do friendships.

Paris, 1995: It?s been five years since Lily Jacobsen and her best friend, Mary Louise, arrived in Paris from their small town of Froid, Montana. Determined to establish themselves as artists, they shared a tiny walkup and survived on brie and baguettes. But when Mary Louise abruptly moves out, Lily feels alone in the City of Light for the first time and needs a new way to support herself. She lands a job as a programs manager at the American Library in Paris, following in the footsteps of Odile, her beloved French neighbor in Montana who told her stories of heroic World War II librarians when Lily was growing up.

At work, Lily meets an extraordinary cast of characters --- including her favorite writer, struggling students, haughty trustees and devoted volunteers --- each with their own stories...and agendas. In the library?s attic, Lily discovers a box of archives that may be a link to Odile?s own Parisian chapter.

This ?stirring and rich with detail? (Kristin Harmel, *New York Times* bestselling author) story is a love letter to the power of literature, the life of the artist, the importance of friendship, and leaving home only to find it again.

Discussion Guide

1. Consider the epigraph of THE PARISIAN CHAPTER. Do you agree that ?some things do not deserve to be accepted?? What do you think is the benefit of perspective in looking back on past memories?

2. Of all the cast of characters, why do you think we?re introduced to Lorenzo Bruni first? Describe Lorenzo?s ex-pat life. Do you think it?s useful to have our first introduction to the library through the lens of someone who isn?t as enchanted by its charms?

3. What do you learn early on about Lily and Mary Louise?s friendship? Did you expect the rift between them, or were you as surprised as Lily? What are the benefits and the pitfalls of a long-term friendship like theirs? Are there any friendships in your own life that could be considered *?fusionnelle?*?

4. In Chapter 3, we?re introduced to Jennifer de Narp and learn that she knows both Pam and Hayes from previous encounters. Were you able to guess what both characters had done?

5. At her first Entre Nous event, Lily realizes that she wants to ?create worlds to give readers respite.? This sentiment is echoed a little later, when Marius recalls that the silence of his childhood library was ?a refuge, a relief.? Which books can you think of that have given you respite? And which places bring you the most relief?

6. Marius also observes that ?there?s a certain sadness when a writer gives up, when a dream dies.? What dreams do the characters of this novel have? Do any of them end up achieving those dreams?

7. When Lily first sees Chris, she wants to know what books are at his desk, ?perhaps ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, or a translation of Camus.? What book would you be excited to see at his desk? And alternately, what book would be the equivalent of a ?literary red flag??

8. There are many religious images in the library. For example, The Faithful come to every book event, The Afterlife is the most peaceful place in the library, and Meg is compared to Saint Peter at the ?pearly revolving door.? Are there similarities between a church and a library? Are there any differences?

9. Did you expect that David was homeless? What does his life look like? How does his community help him?

10. On Lily and Chris? first date, recounting her memories of Montana makes Lily homesick. How is her life in Paris different from her life back home? How is it better, and how is it harder? Later, at dinner with Mary Louise, she observes that ?more money did not mean more fun.? How are the two girls? lives, and experiences of Paris, diverging?

11. Up until Chapter 11, we learn about Hayes only through the eyes of others. Did listening/reading a chapter in Hayes? own voice change your opinion of him?

12. Lily makes the controversial decision to save Mary Louise?s paintings, even after her friend explicitly tells her to leave them in the trash. Do you think Lily made the right decision? What role do our loved ones play in preserving our dreams?

13. There are multiple pairings of women in this book: Lily and Mary Louise, Meg and Odile, Jennifer and Pam. At one point, Odile writes that ?friendships, like romantic relationships, go through trials and tribulations. The important thing is not to run.? What do these women learn from one another? And what did you learn from their various friendships?

14. Many of the unpublished stories in this book are of women: Meg?s wartime memoir, Bricktop and her jazz club,

Iréne Cohen?s lost novel. What is the best book you?ve ever read of a woman?s life? Was it encouraging, shocking, inspiring? Share with the group.

15. Of all the characters --- the employees of the library, the trustees, the patrons, and even a ghost! --- who do you wish you could learn more about? Who do you wish received an extra chapter? Was there a perspective you were particularly surprised by?

Author Bio

Janet Skeslien Charles is the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of THE PARIS LIBRARY. Her work has been translated into 37 languages. She has spent a decade researching Jessie Carson (MISS MORGAN'S BOOK BRIGADE) at The Morgan Library, the NYPL and archives across France. Her shorter work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune, The Sydney Morning Herald, LitHub* and the anthology MONTANA NOIR.

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