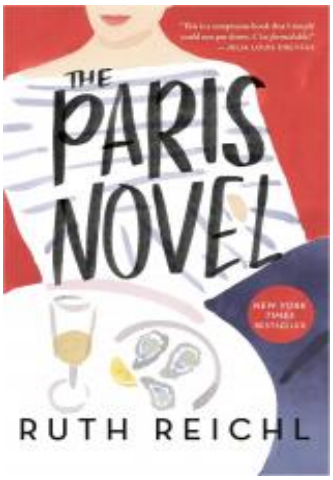
The Paris Novel

by Ruth Reichl



About the Book

A dazzling, heartfelt adventure through the food, art and fashion scenes of 1980s Paris --- from the *New York Times* bestselling author of SAVE ME THE PLUMS and DELICIOUS!

Stella reached for an oyster, tipped her head, and tossed it back. It was cool and slippery, the flavor so briny it was like diving into the ocean. Oysters, she thought. Where have they been all my life?

When her estranged mother dies, Stella is left with an unusual inheritance: a one-way plane ticket and a note reading ?Go to Paris.? Stella is hardly cut out for adventure; a traumatic childhood has kept her confined to the strict routines of her comfort zone. But when her boss encourages her to take time off, Stella resigns herself to honoring her mother?s last wishes.

Alone in a foreign city, Stella falls into old habits, living cautiously and frugally. Then she stumbles across a vintage store, where she tries on a fabulous Dior dress. The shopkeeper insists that this dress was meant for Stella, and for the first time in her life Stella does something impulsive. She buys the dress --- and embarks on an adventure.

Her first stop: the iconic brasserie Les Deux Magots, where Stella tastes her first oysters and then meets an octogenarian art collector who decides to take her under his wing. As Jules introduces Stella to a veritable who?s who of the Paris literary, art and culinary worlds, she begins to understand what it might mean to live a larger life.

As weeks --- and many decadent meals --- go by, Stella ends up living as a ?tumbleweed? at famed bookstore Shakespeare & Company, uncovers a hundred-year-old mystery in a Manet painting, and discovers a passion for food that may be connected to her past. A feast for the senses, this novel is a testament to living deliciously, taking chances and finding your true home.

Discussion Guide

1. How does Stella?s character evolve from the beginning to the end of the story? What do you think are the key moments that catalyze this change?

2. Stella?s adventure begins with a mysterious inheritance from her estranged mother: a one-way plane ticket to Paris with a note reading ?Go to Paris.? Discuss the importance of this inheritance in the story. How does it function as more than just a physical item, and what does it symbolize in terms of Stella?s relationship with her mother and her journey ahead?

3. How do Stella and her mother differ? How are they similar?

4. Pick one scene that you felt vividly captured the essence of Paris during the 1980s, and discuss why it stood out to you. If you could travel to Paris during any era, which would you choose, and why?

5. Stella?s first encounter with luxury and spontaneity is the Dior dress, leading her to take her first taste of oysters. How do you think this act of indulgence impacts her outlook on life and her willingness to embark on new adventures?

6. Have you ever encountered something --- a piece of clothing, jewelry or even a song --- that made you realize your potential in a new way? If so, what was it?

7. Throughout the book, Stella meets a variety of characters, from art collector Jules Delatour to the Tumbleweeds of Shakespeare & Company. Which secondary character did you find most intriguing and why? How do they each contribute to Stella?s transformation?

8. Food plays a pivotal role in this novel, from Stella tasting her first oysters to discovering a passion for food that may be connected to her past. Discuss how food is not just sustenance but a key that unlocks memories, emotions and connections in the story. Which meal did you most want to eat?

9. THE PARIS NOVEL is imbued with elements of mystery, such as the hundred-year-old enigma surrounding a Manet painting --- and, of course, the identity of Stella?s father. What theories did you have about either of these mysteries before they were solved?

10. ?Being a Tumbleweed, even a reluctant one, was making Stella understand what it meant to lose yourself to become part of a community.? Discuss this line. How does Shakespeare & Company contribute to Stella?s personal growth and her emotional connection to Paris?

11. As Stella integrates into Paris?s literary, art and culinary worlds, she begins to understand what it might mean to live a larger life. What do you think are the essential elements of ?living a larger life,? according to the novel? How does Stella?s journey inspire you to reflect on your own life and aspirations?

12. Reflecting on Stella?s journey, discuss the concept of ?home? in the novel. Is it a place, a feeling, a discovery of self or something else entirely? How do you personally define home, and how has this book influenced your perception?

Author Bio

Ruth Reichl is the *New York Times* bestselling author of five memoirs, the novels DELICIOUS! and THE PARIS NOVEL, and the cookbook MY KITCHEN YEAR. She was editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine and previously served as restaurant critic for *The New York Times*, as well as food editor and restaurant critic for the *Los Angeles Times*. She has been honored with six James Beard Awards. In 2024, she received the James Beard Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Paris Novel

by Ruth Reichl

Publication Date: April 22, 2025
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0812986377
ISBN-13: 9780812986372