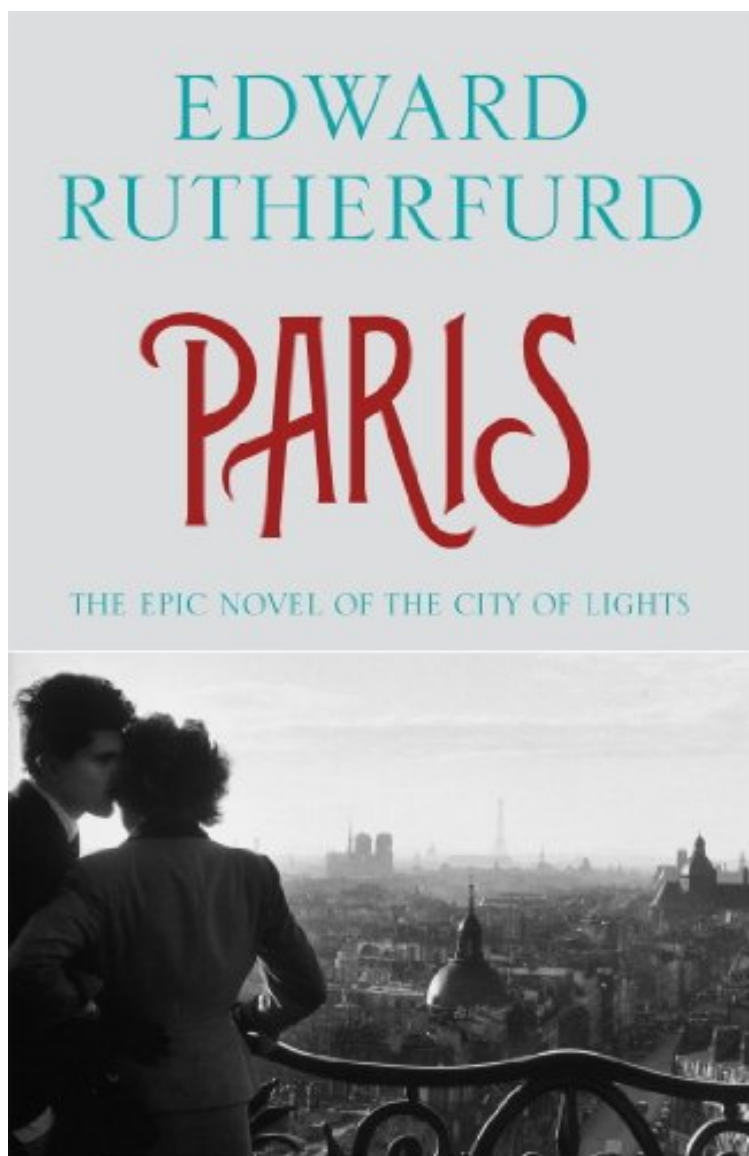


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurCity of love. City of splendour. City of terror. City of dreams.Inspired by the haunting, passionate story of the city of lights, this epic novel weaves a gripping tale of four families across the centuries: from the lies that spawn the noble line of de Cygne to the revolutionary Le Sourds who seek their destruction; from the Blanchards whose bourgeois respectability offers scant protection against scandal to the hard-working Gascons and their soaring ambitions. Over hundreds of years, these four families are bound by forbidden loves and marriages of convenience; dogged by vengeance and murderous secrets; torn apart by the irreconcilable differences of birth and faith, and brought together by the tumultuous history of their city. Paris bursts to life in the intrigue, corruption and glory of its people. Beloved author of Sarum,

London and New York, Edward Rutherfurd illuminates Paris as only he can: capturing the romance and everyday drama of the men and women who, in two thousand years, transformed a humble trading post on the muddy banks of the Seine into the most celebrated city in the world. Extrait Chapter One 1875 Paris. City of love. City of dreams. City of splendor. City of saints and scholars. City of gaiety. Sink of iniquity. In two thousand years, Paris had seen it all. It was Julius Caesar who had first seen the possibilities of the place where the modest Parisii tribe made their home. The Mediterranean lands of southern Gaul had already been Roman provinces for generations at that time; but when Caesar decided to bring the troublesome Celtic tribes of northern Gaul into the empire as well, it hadn't taken him long. The Romans had quickly seen that this was a logical place for a town. A collecting point for the produce of the huge fertile plains of northern Gaul, the Parisian territory lay on the navigable River Seine. From its headwaters farther south, there was an easy portage to the huge River Rhine, which ran down to the busy ports of the Mediterranean. Northward, the Seine led to the narrow sea across which the island of Britannia lay. This was the great river system through which the southern and northern worlds were joined. Greek and Phoenician traders had been using it even before the birth of Rome. The site was perfect. The Parisian heartland lay in a wide, shallow valley through which the Seine made a series of graceful loops. In the center of the valley, on a handsome east-west bend, the river widened and several big mudflats and islands lay, like so many huge barges at anchor, in the stream. On the northern bank, meadows and marshes stretched far and wide until they came to the lip of low, enclosing ridges, from which several small hills and promontories jutted out, some of them covered with vineyards. But it was on the southern bank--the left bank as one went downstream--that the ground near the river swelled gently into a low, flat hillock, like a table overlooking the water. And it was here that the Romans had laid out their town, a large forum and the main temple covering the top of the table with an amphitheater nearby, a grid of streets all around, and a north-south road running straight through the center, across the water to the largest island, which was now a suburb with a fine temple to Jupiter, and over a farther bridge to the northern bank. They had originally called the town Lutetia. But it was also known, more grandly, as the city of the Parisii. In the Dark Ages after the Roman Empire fell, the German tribe of Franks had conquered the territory in the Land of the Franks, as it came to be called, or France. Its rich countryside had been invaded by Huns and Viking Norsemen. But the island in the river, with its wooden defenses, like some battered old ship, survived. In medieval times, she'd grown into a great city, her maze of Gothic churches, tall timbered houses, dangerous alleys and stinking cellars spread across both sides of the Seine, enclosed by a high stone wall. Stately Notre Dame Cathedral graced the island. Her university was respected all over Europe. Yet even then, the English came and conquered her. And Paris might have been English if Joan of Arc, the miraculous maid, hadn't appeared and chased them out. Old Paris: City of bright colors and narrow streets, of carnival and plague. And then there was new Paris. The change had come slowly. From the time of the Renaissance, lighter, classical spaces began to appear in her dark medieval mass. Royal palaces and noble squares created a new splendor. Broad boulevards began to carve through the rotting old warrens. Ambitious rulers created vistas worthy of ancient Rome. Paris had altered her face to suit the magnificence of Louis XIV, and the elegance of Louis XV. The Age of Enlightenment and the new republic of the French Revolution had encouraged classical simplicity, and the age of Napoleon bequeathed imperial grandeur. Recently, this process of change had been accelerated by a new town planner. Baron Haussmann's great network of boulevards and long, straight streets lined with elegant office and apartment blocks was so thorough that there were quarters of Paris now where the rich mess of the Middle Ages was scarcely to be seen. Yet old Paris was still there, around almost every corner, with her memories of centuries past, and of lives relived. Memories as haunting as an old, half-forgotten tune that, when played again--in another age, in another key, whether on harp or hurdy-gurdy--is still the same. This was her enduring grace. Was Paris now at peace with herself? She had suffered and survived, seen empires rise and fall. Chaos and dictatorship, monarchy and republic: Paris had tried them all. And which did she like best? Ah, there was a question... For all her age and grace, it seemed she did not know. Recently, she had suffered another terrible crisis. Four years ago, her people had been eating rats. Humiliated first, starving next. Then they had turned upon each other. It had not been long since the bodies had been buried, the smell of death been dispersed by the wind and the echo of the firing squads departed over the horizon. Now, in the year 1875, she was recovering. But many great issues remained still to be resolved. The little boy was only three. A fair-haired, blue-eyed child. Some things he knew already. Others were still kept from him. And then there were the secrets. Father Xavier gazed at him. How like his mother the child looked. Father Xavier was a priest, but he was in love with a woman, the mother of this child. He admitted his passion to himself, but his self-discipline was

complete. No one would have guessed his love. As for the little boy, God surely had a plan for him. Perhaps that he should be sacrificed. It was a sunny day in the fashionable Tuileries Gardens in front of the Louvre, where nannies watched their children play, and Father Xavier was taking him for a walk. Father Xavier: family confessor, friend in need, priest. What are your names? he playfully asked the child. Roland, D'Artagnan, Dieudonne de Cygne. He knew them all by heart. Bravo, young man. Father Xavier Parle-Doux was a small, wiry man in his forties. Long ago he had been a soldier. A fall from a horse had left him with a stabbing pain in his back ever since--though only a handful of people were aware of it. But his days as a soldier had marked him in another way. He had done his duty. He had seen killing. He had seen things worse than killing. And in the end, it had seemed to him that there must be something better than this, something more sacred, an undying flame of light and love in the terrible darkness of the world. He had found it in the heart of Holy Church. Also, he was a monarchist. He had known the child's family all his life, and now he looked down at him with affection, but also with pity. Roland had no brother or sister. His mother, that beautiful soul, the woman he himself would have liked to marry had he not chosen another calling, suffered with delicate health. The future of the family might rest on little Roland alone: a heavy burden for a boy to bear. But he knew that as a priest, he must take a larger view. What was it the Jesuits said? Give us a boy till he's seven, and he's ours for life. Whatever God's plan for this child, whether that service led to happiness or not, Father Xavier would lead him toward it. And who was Roland? Roland was a hero. The little boy looked up for approval. My mother read me the story. He was my ancestor, he added solemnly. The priest smiled.

The famous Song of Roland was a haunting, romantic tale, from a thousand years ago, about how the emperor Charlemagne's friend was cut off as the army crossed the mountains. How Roland blew on his horn for help, to no avail. How the Saracens slew him, and how the emperor wept for the loss of his friend. The de Cygne family's claim to this ancestor was fanciful, but charming. Others of your ancestors were crusading knights. Father Xavier nodded encouragingly. But this is natural. You are of noble birth. He paused. And who was D'Artagnan? The famous Musketeer. He was my ancestor. As it happened, the hero of The Three Musketeers had been based upon a real man. And Roland's family had married a noblewoman of the same name back in the time of Louis XIV--though whether they had taken much interest in this connection before the novel made the name famous, the priest rather doubted. You have the blood of the D'Artagnans in your veins. They were soldiers who served their king. And Dieudonne? the child asked. Hardly were the words out before Father Xavier checked himself. He must be careful. Could the child have any idea of the horror of the guillotine that lay behind the last of his names? Your grandfather's name is beautiful, you know, he replied. It means the gift of God. He thought for a moment. The birth of your grandfather was--I do not say a miracle--but a sign. And remember one thing, Roland, the priest continued. Do you know the motto of your family? It is very important. *Selon la volonté de Dieu*--According to God's Will. Father Xavier turned his eyes up to survey the landscape all around. To the north rose the hill of Montmartre, where Saint Denis had been martyred by pagan Romans, sixteen centuries ago. To the southwest, behind the towers of Notre Dame, rose the slope above the Left Bank where, as the old Roman Empire was crumbling, the indefatigable Saint Genevieve had asked God to turn Attila and his Huns away from the city--and her prayers had been answered. Time and again, thought the priest, God had protected France in her hour of need. When the Moslems had first swept up from Africa and Spain, and might have overrun all Europe, hadn't He sent a great general, the grandfather of Charlemagne, to beat them back? When the English, in their long, medieval struggle with the French kings, had even made themselves masters of Paris, hadn't the good Lord given France the maiden Joan of Arc to lead her armies to victory? Most important of all, God had given France her royal family, whose Capetian, Valois and Bourbon branches for thirty generations had ruled, reunited and made glorious this sacred land. And through all those centuries, the de Cygnes had faithfully served those divinely anointed kings. This was the little boy's heritage. He would understand it in due course. It was time to go home. Behind them, at the end of the Tuileries Gardens, lay the vast open space of the Place de la Concorde. Beyond that, the magnificent sweep of the Champs-Élysées, for two miles up to the Arc de Triomphe. The little boy was still too young to know the Place de la Concorde's part in his history. As for the Arc de Triomphe, grand though it was, Father Xavier did not care for republican monuments. Instead, he gazed again at the hill of Montmartre--that site where once a pagan temple stood; where Saint Denis had been martyred; and where such terrible scenes had taken place in the recent upheavals in the city. How appropriate that this very year, a new temple should be arising there by the windmills, a temple to Catholic France, its pure, white dome shining like a dove over the city. The basilica of Sacre Coeur, the Sacred Heart. This was the temple where the little boy should serve. For God had saved his family for a reason.

There was shame to be overcome, faith to be restored. Could you walk a little way? he asked. Roland nodded. With a smile, the priest reached down and took the child's hand. Shall we sing a song? he asked. Frere Jacques, perhaps? So hand in hand the priest and the little boy, watched by several nannies and their charges, walked out of the gardens, singing. As Jules Blanchard reached the Louvre end of the Champs-Elysees and walked up toward the church of La Madeleine, he had every reason to be a happy man. He already had two sons, good boys both of them. But he'd always wanted a daughter. And at eight o'clock this morning, his wife had presented him with a baby girl. There was only one problem. And solving it would require a certain delicacy--which was why, at this moment, he was going to a rendezvous with a lady who was not his wife. Jules Blanchard was a well-set, vigorous man, with a solid family fortune. The century before, as the charming, rococo monarchy of Louis XV encountered the grand ideas of the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution turned the world upside down, his ancestor had been a bookseller of radical views. The bookseller's son, Jules's grandfather, was a doctor who came to the notice of the rising general, Napoleon Bonaparte, during the Revolution and never looked back. A fashionable physician under Napoleons empire and the restored Bourbon monarchy that followed it, he'd finally retired to a handsome house in Fontainebleau, which the family still possessed. His wife was from a merchant family, and in the next generation, Jules's father had gone into business. Specializing in wholesaling grain, by the mid-nineteenth century he had built up a considerable fortune. Jules had joined the business and now, at the age of thirty-five, he was ready to take over from his father, whenever that worthy gentleman chose finally to retire. At La Madeleine, Jules turned half-right. He liked this boulevard because it led past the city's huge new opera house. The Paris Opera, designed by Garnier, had been completed only at the start of this year, but already it was a landmark. Besides its many hidden wonders--which included an ingenious artificial lake in the cellars to control the swamp waters below--the Opera was such a magnificent concoction that, with its great, round roof, it reminded Jules of an enormous, decorated gateau. It was rich, it was flamboyant, it was the spirit of the age--at least, for lucky fellows like him. And now he was in sight of his rendezvous. Just a short way past the Opera, on a corner site, was the Cafe Anglais. Unlike the Opera, it was rather plain outside. But inside was another matter. It was lavish enough for princes. A few years ago, the emperors of Russia and Germany had dined there together for a legendary feast that went on for eight hours. Where else could one meet Josephine for lunch? They had opened the big paneled room known as Le Grand Seize for lunch today. As he entered past bowing waiters, gilt mirrors and potted plants, he saw her at once. *Revue de presse* 'From the ice-age to the present day, Rutherford's scope is vast. Both historical novel and adventure epic, this is a work of universal appeal.' (Kirkus UK, on SARUM) 'Hold your breath suspense, buccaneering adventure, and passionate tales of love and war.' (The Times, on LONDON) 'Remarkable ... grand.' (The New York Times, on LONDON) 'Not all good things come in small packages. If you like books that are big, Edward Rutherford is your man. He writes wonderful sagas, tales that cover centuries, always keeping these long stories lively by telling us about the events and conflicts of people's lives. Rutherford does the painstaking research; the reader has all the fun.' (The Seattle Times, on IRELAND) 'Incredible storytelling . . . Readers will fall in love with the iconic city.' (Post and Courier, on NEW YORK)