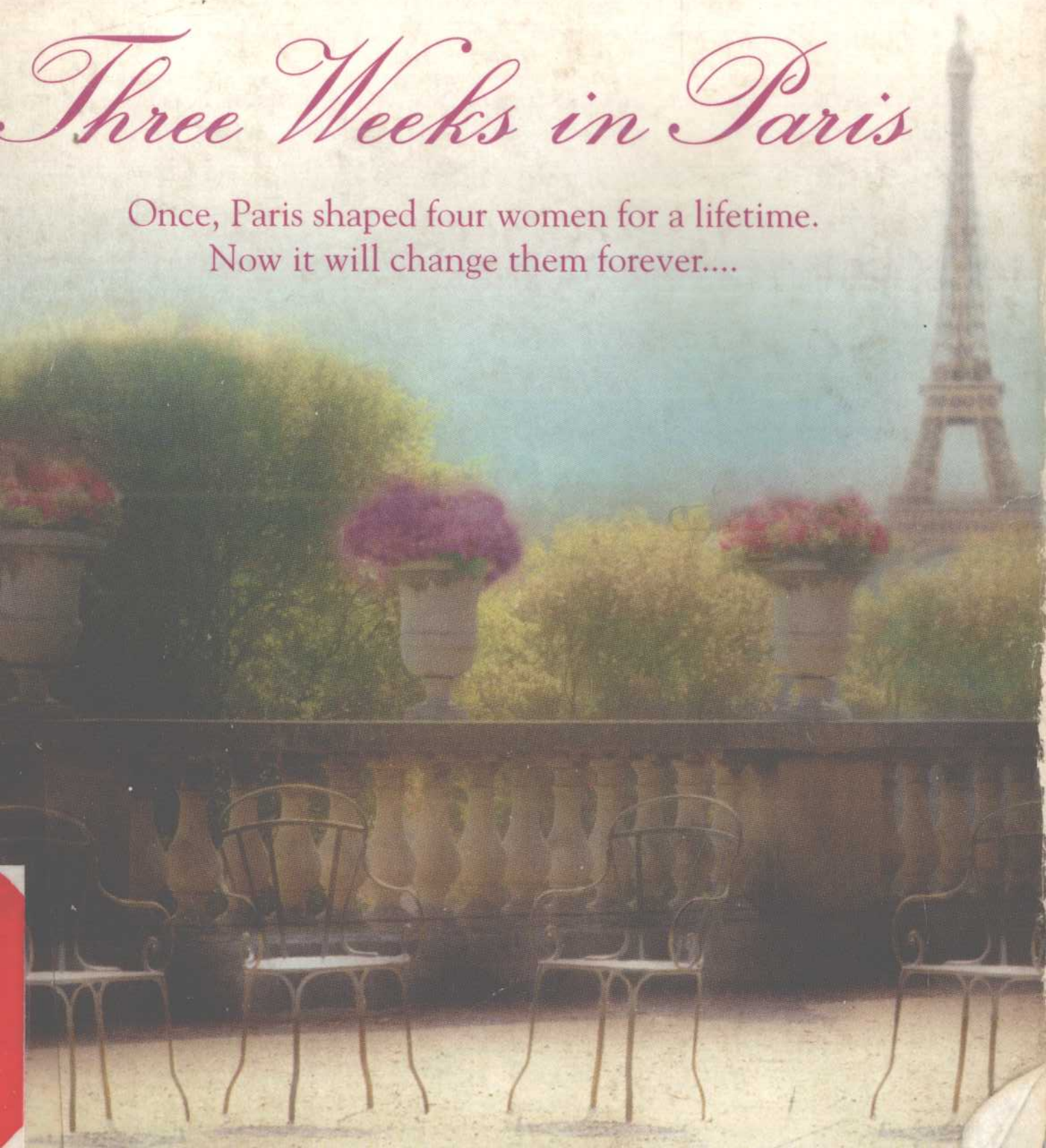


THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER BY THE  
AUTHOR OF THE TRIUMPH OF KATIE BYRNE

# BARBARA TAYLOR BRADFORD

## *Three Weeks in Paris*

Once, Paris shaped four women for a lifetime.  
Now it will change them forever....



*Three Weeks  
in Paris*

Barbara Taylor Bradford

A Dell Book

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THE CRITICS LOVE  
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
BARBARA TAYLOR BRADFORD

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*For Bob,  
truly a man for all seasons,  
with all my love*

## Contents

PROLOGUE 1

PART ONE

*Les Girls* 3

PART TWO

*Doyenne* 105

PART THREE

*Quest* 149

PART FOUR

*Celebration* 321



## PROLOGUE

ON THE RUE JACOB THE MAN SHIVERED AND TURNED UP the collar of his overcoat. It was a bitter February day, icy from the wind that swept down from the Russian steppes and across the plains of Europe to hit Paris with a sharp blast.

The sky was a faded blue, the sun watery as it slanted across the rooftops, almost silvery in this cold northern light, and without warmth. But Paris was always beautiful, whatever the weather; even when it rained it had a special quality all its own.

Spotting a cab, he hailed it, and as it slowed to a standstill he got in quickly and asked the driver to take him to the post office. Once he was there, he unwrapped the package of stamped envelopes, seventy-one in all, and dropped them, in small batches, into a mailbox, then returned to the cab.

The man now gave the driver the address of the FedEx office, settled back against the seat, glancing out of the window from time to time. How happy he was to be back in the City of Light, but, nonetheless, he could not help wishing it were a little warmer. There was a chill in his bones.



In the FedEx office the man filled in the appropriate labels and handed them over to the clerk along with the four white envelopes. All were processed for delivery within the next twenty-four hours, their destinations four cities in distant, far-flung corners of the world. Back in the taxi he instructed the driver to take him to the Quai Voltaire. Once there, he headed toward one of his favorite bistros on the Left Bank. And as he walked, lost in his diverse thoughts, he had no way of knowing that he had just set in motion a chain of events that would have far-reaching effects. Because of his actions, lives were about to be changed irrevocably, and so profoundly they would never be the same again.

PART ONE

*Les Girls*





## CHAPTER ONE

### *Alexandra*

IT WAS HER FAVORITE TIME OF DAY. DUSK. THAT IN-between hour before night descended when everything was softly muted, merging together. The twilight hour.

Her Scottish nanny had called it *the gloaming*. She loved that name; it conjured up so much, and even when she was a little girl she had looked forward to the late afternoon, that period just before supper. As she had walked home from school with her brother Tim, Nanny between them, tightly holding on to their hands, she had always felt a twinge of excitement, an expectancy, as if something special awaited her. This feeling had never changed. It had stayed with her over the years, and wherever she was in the world, dusk never failed to give her a distinct sense of anticipation.

She stepped away from her drawing table and went across to the window of her downtown loft, peered out, looking toward the upper reaches of Manhattan. To Alexandra Gordon the sky was absolutely perfect at this precise moment . . . its color a mixture of plum and violet toned down by a hint of smoky gray bleeding into a faded pink. The colors of antiquity, reminiscent of Byzantium

and Florence and ancient Greece. And the towers and spires and skyscrapers of this great modern metropolis were blurred, smudged into a sort of timelessness, seemed of no particular period at this moment, inchoate images cast against that almost-violet sky.

Alexandra smiled to herself. For as far back as she could remember she had believed that this time of day was magical. In the movie business, which she was occasionally a part of these days, dusk was actually *called* the Magic Hour. Wasn't it odd that she herself had named it that when she was only a child?

Staring out across the skyline, fragments of her childhood came rushing back to her. For a moment she fell down into her memories . . . memories of the years spent growing up on the Upper East Side of this city . . . of a childhood filled with love and security and the most wondrous of times. Even though their mother had worked, still worked in fact, she and Tim had never been neglected by her, nor by their father. But it was her mother who was the best part of her, and, in more than one sense, she was the product of her mother.

Lost in remembrances of times past, she eventually roused herself and went back to the drawing board, looking at the panel she had just completed. It was the final one in a series of six, and together they composed a winter landscape in the countryside.

She knew she had captured most effectively the essence of a cold, snowy evening in the woods, and bending forward, she picked up the panel and carried it to the other side of the studio, placing it on a wide viewing shelf where the rest of the panels were aligned. Staring intently at the now-complete set, she envisioned them as a giant-size backdrop on the stage, which is what they would soon become. As far as she was concerned, the panels were arresting, and depicted exactly what the director had requested.



"I want to experience the cold, Alexa," Tony Verity had told her at the first production meeting, after he had taken her through the play. "I want to shiver with cold, crunch down into my overcoat, *feel* the icy night in my bones. Your sets must make me want to rush indoors, to be in front of a roaring fire."

He *will* feel all that, she told herself, and stepped back, eyeing her latest work from a distance, her head on one side, thinking of the way she had created the panels in her imagination first. She had envisioned St. Petersburg in winter, and then focused on an imaginary forest beyond that city.

In her mind's eye, the scenery had come alive, almost like a reel of film playing in her head . . . bare trees glistening with dripping icicles, drifts of new snow sweeping up between the trees like white dunes. White nights. White sky. White moon. White silence.

That was the mood she sought, had striven for, and wished to convey to the audience. And she believed she had accomplished that with these panels, which would be photographed later that week and then blown up for the stage.

She had not used any colors except a hint of gray and black for a few of the skeletal branches. Her final touch, and perhaps her most imaginative, had been a set of lone footprints in the snow. Footprints leading up between the trees, as if heading for a special, perhaps even secret, destination. Enigmatic. Mysterious. Even troubling, in a way . . .

The sharp buzzing of the doorbell brought her head up sharply, and her concentration was instantly broken. She went to the intercom on the wall, lifted the phone. "Hello?"

"It's Jack. I know I'm early. Can I come up?"

"Yes, it's okay." She pressed the button that released the



street door, and then ran downstairs to the floor below in order to let him in.

A few seconds later, Jack Wilton, bundled up in a black duffle coat, and carrying a large brown shopping bag, was swinging out of the elevator, walking toward her down the corridor, a grin on his keen, intelligent face.

"Sorry if I'm mucking up your working day, but I was around the corner. At the Cromer Gallery with Billy Tomkins. It seemed sort of daft to go home and then come back here later. I'll sit in a corner down here and watch CNN until you quit."

"I just did," she said, laughing. "I've actually finished the last panel."

"That's great! Congratulations." As he stepped into the small foyer of her apartment, he put down the shopping bag, pulled her into his arms, and pushed the door closed with his booted foot.

He hugged her tightly, brought her closer, and as his lips brushed her cheek, then nuzzled her ear, she felt a tiny frisson, a shivery feeling. There was an electricity between them that had been missing for ages. She was startled.

Seemingly, so was he. Jack pulled away, glanced at her quickly, and then instantly brought his mouth to hers, kissing her deeply, passionately. After a second, he moved his mouth close to her ear and murmured, "Let's go and find a bed."

She leaned back, looking up into his pellucid gray eyes, which were more soulful than ever at that moment. "Don't be silly." As she spoke, a small, tantalizing smile touched her lips and her sparkling eyes were suddenly inviting.

"Silly? There's nothing silly about going to bed. I think it's a rather serious thing." Throwing his coat on the floor

next to the shopping bag and putting his arm around her, he led her into the bedroom.

He stopped in the middle of the room, and taking hold of her shoulders, turned her to face him, staring into her eyes, his own questioning. "You went missing for a bit," he said, sounding more English than ever.

She stared back at him, said nothing.

He tilted her chin, leaned down, and kissed her lightly on the mouth. "But I have the distinct feeling you're suddenly back."

"I think so."

"I'm glad, Lexi."

"So am I," she answered.

He smiled at her knowingly and led her toward the bed without another word. They sat down together side by side, and he began to unbutton her shirt; she tugged at his tweed jacket, and within seconds they were both undressed, stretched out on the bed.

Leaning over her, he asked, "And where was it that you went?"

"Not sure. Fell into a deep pit with my work, I suppose."

He nodded, fully understanding, since he was an artist and tended to do the same at times when he was painting. But he had really missed her, and her withdrawal, her remoteness, had worried him. Now he brought his mouth down to her, his kisses tender.

Alexandra felt that frisson once more, and she began to shiver slightly under his touching and kissing, which was becoming provocative. He continued to kiss her as he stroked her thigh, and she experienced a sudden rush of heat, a tingling between her legs.

Unexpectedly, she stiffened. Swiftly, he brought his mouth to her mouth; his tongue sought hers, slid alongside hers, and they shared a moment of complete intimacy.



And all the while he did not stop stroking her inner thigh and the center of her womanhood, his fingers working gently but expertly. To him it soon seemed as though she was opening like a lush flower bursting forth under a warm sun.

When she began to gasp a little, he increased his pressure and speed, wanting her to reach a point of ecstasy. He loved this woman, and he wanted to bind her to him, and he wanted to make love to her now, he joined with her.

With great speed, he entered her immediately, thrusting into her so forcefully, she cried out. Sliding his hands under her buttocks, he lifted her up, drew her closer to him, calling out her name as he did. "Come to me again, come with me, come where I'm going, Lexi!" he exclaimed, his voice harsh, rasping.

And so she did as he demanded, wrapped her legs around his back, let her hands rest lightly on his shoulders. Together they soared, and as he began to shudder against her, he told her over and over again how much he loved making love to her.

---

AFTERWARD, WHEN THEY FINALLY lay still, relaxed and depleted, he lifted the duvet up and covered them with it, then took her in his arms. He said against her hair, "Isn't this as good as it gets?"

When she remained silent, he added, "You know how good we are together . . ."

"Yes."

"You're not going to go away from me again, are you?"

"No . . . it was the work, the pressure."

"I'm relieved it wasn't me. That you weren't having second thoughts about me."