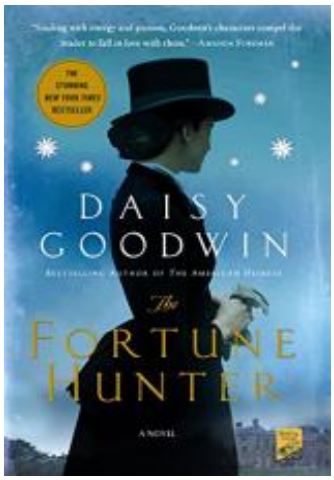
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The Fortune Hunter

by Daisy Goodwin



About the Book

A beautiful empress, a handsome horseman and a bluestocking heiress form a passionate love triangle in this historical novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE AMERICAN HEIRESS.

Empress Elizabeth of Austria, known as "Sisi," is the Princess Diana of 19th-century Europe. Famously beautiful, as captured in a portrait with diamond stars in her hair, she is unfulfilled in her marriage to the older Emperor Franz Joseph. Sisi has spent years evading the stifling formality of royal life on her private train or yacht or, whenever she can, on the back of a horse.

Captain Bay Middleton is dashing, young, and the finest horseman in England. He is also impoverished, with no hope of buying the horse needed to win the Grand National --- until he meets Charlotte Baird. A clever, plainspoken heiress whose money gives her a choice among suitors, Charlotte falls in love with Bay, the first man to really notice her, for his vulnerability as well as his glamour. When Sisi joins the legendary hunt organized by Earl Spencer in England, Bay is asked to guide her on the treacherous course. Their shared passion for riding leads to an infatuation that threatens the growing bond between Bay and Charlotte, and all of their futures.

THE FORTUNE HUNTER, the brilliant new novel by Daisy Goodwin, is a lush, irresistible story of the public lives and private longings of grand historical figures.

Discussion Guide

1. The fortune hunter of the title, of course, is Bay Middleton. What do you think of his character, and what fate do you think he deserves?

2. In her day, the Empress of Austria, or Sisi, was considered the most beautiful woman in Europe, married to one of the

richest and most powerful men. In what ways do you see her position as enviable or otherwise?

3. By the time the novel opens, Sisi is in her 30s, and so worried that her beauty is fading that she refuses to sit for new portraits or to have her photograph taken. How do you regard her beauty rituals and her fears? Were you struck by the similarities between Sisi?s routine and that of a modern celebrity: the exercise, the veal, etc.?

4. While very different, both Sisi and Charlotte Baird face constraints because they are women: Sisi is defined by her husband?s position, and Charlotte, whose wealth gives her certain freedoms, is nevertheless ordered around by her aunt and her future sister-in-law. Maintaining at least the appearance of propriety is essential for both. In what ways has life improved --- or not --- for women in the 21st century?

5. Queen Victoria offers a different perspective on a woman with unusual power. What do you think of her in this story? How do she and Sisi reflect the privileges and/or burdens of royalty?

6. What is your view of Charlotte? Do you think that she and Bay could be happy together?

7. Daisy Goodwin has said Sisi reminds her of Princess Diana: Each was unhappily married at a very young age to a much older husband with whom she had little in common; each was idolized and hounded for her glamour; each found consolation both in affairs and in charity work. What do you think of these parallels?

8. In the love triangle here, do you see one of three the principals as the central figure, or does the focus seem equal? Do your sympathies lie with one of the characters more than the others, and do your allegiances shift in the course of the story?

9. How do you feel about the ending? Would you have wanted something different for any of the characters?

10. What role do photographs play in the story? How do pictures hide or reveal the truth?

11. Charlotte compares Caspar?s photos of the American west to her own work: ?How I envy you your deserts and your endless light. We have nothing like that here, that?s why we have to create little tableaux in studios?housemaids dressed up as goddesses.? Similarly, Sisi feels the need to ?escape the stifling formality of the Austrian court.? What does this say about Victorian society, and do you feel things have changed for the better or the worse?

12. The Author?s Note says: ?This novel is based on fact: The cast of characters, Sisi, Bay, Charlotte, Earl Spencer, and even Chicken Hartopp are all real, even if their thoughts and feelings have been supplied by me.? What do you think of the mixture of history and fiction here? (One fascinating footnote: In real life, Lady Blanche Hozier?s daughter Clementine, whose paternity has been much debated, grew up to marry Winston Churchill.)

Author Bio

Daisy Goodwin is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE AMERICAN HEIRESS, THE FORTUNE HUNTER, VICTORIA and DIVA. She attended Columbia University's film school as a Harkness scholar after earning a degree in

history at Cambridge University, and was Chair of the judging panel of the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction. She is the screenwriter and executive producer of the PBS/Masterpiece drama "Victoria." She lives in London.

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