Love and Other Consolation Prizes

by Jamie Ford



About the Book

From the bestselling author of HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET comes a powerful novel, inspired by a true story, about a boy whose life is transformed at Seattle?s epic 1909 World?s Fair.

?An evocative, heartfelt, beautifully crafted story that shines a light on a fascinating, tragic bit of forgotten history.? -- Kristin Hannah, author of THE NIGHTINGALE

For 12-year-old Ernest Young, a charity student at a boarding school, the chance to go to the World?s Fair feels like a gift. But only once he?s there, amid the exotic exhibits, fireworks and Ferris wheels, does he discover that he is the one who is actually the prize. The half-Chinese orphan is astounded to learn he will be raffled off --- a healthy boy ?to a good home.?

The winning ticket belongs to the flamboyant madam of a high-class brothel, famous for educating her girls. There, Ernest becomes the new houseboy and befriends Maisie, the madam?s precocious daughter, and a bold scullery maid named Fahn. Their friendship and affection form the first real family Ernest has ever known --- and against all odds, this new sporting life gives him the sense of home he?s always desired.

But as the grande dame succumbs to an occupational hazard and their world of finery begins to crumble, all three must grapple with hope, ambition and first love.

Fifty years later, in the shadow of Seattle?s second World?s Fair, Ernest struggles to help his ailing wife reconcile who she once was with who she wanted to be, while trying to keep family secrets hidden from their grown-up daughters.

Against a rich backdrop of post-Victorian vice, suffrage and celebration, LOVE AND OTHER CONSOLATION PRIZES is an enchanting tale about innocence and devotion --- in a world where everything, and everyone, is for sale.

Discussion Guide

1. What did you most connect with about the book?

2. Let?s start at the beginning. The story of how Ernest journeys from China to the U.S. is pretty incredible. What did you think about his mother?s decision and do you think she could have made a different choice?

3. Ernest?s daughter Juju, a reporter, discovers that Ernest was the child she?d read about who was auctioned off at Seattle?s World?s Fair. What do you think it must have been like for Ernest to revisit those memories and get honest about his past?

4. This book shows us how families and friendships can blossom in all environments. Ernest finds his family in a brothel. Why do you think he?s happy there?

5. The book describes a familial world that existed among the prostitutes and staff who worked and lived at the Tenderloin. Is there an intersection between prostitution, personal agency, and feminism? Or are these mutually exclusive concepts?

6. The early suffrage movements in the U.S. all took place in what were regarded as frontier territories in the west. Why do you think the trends of suffrage and vice emerged at the same time, in the same places? (Like Wyoming, where women first got the vote in 1869).

7. At the Tenderloin (and in the character of Turnbull) we see wealthy, successful men breaking rules and social conventions. Is there a modern analog? Are wealthy men today able to live above and beyond the margins of law and civil discourse and if so, who, and how are they able to get away with such behavior?

8. Madam Flora and Miss Amber have a unique relationship. Do you see this as one born of love, of shared business interests, or a bit of both?

9. Speaking of business interests, do you see Madam Flora and Miss Amber as two people exploiting young women, or benefiting them?

10. This book is about the power of friendship and love. Ernest falls in love with both Fahn and Maisie and for much of the book, the reader is wondering whom Ernest will ultimately end up marrying. Did he make the right choice? Why or why not?

11. This book is also about finding your place in the world. Do you think Ernest, Fahn and Maisie ultimately find themselves? And are they happy with their choices in the end?

12. Can you see this book being made into a film or TV show?

Author Bio

Jamie Ford is the great-grandson of Nevada mining pioneer Min Chung, who emigrated from Hoiping, China to San Francisco in 1865, where he adopted the western name Ford, thus confusing countless generations. His debut novel, HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET, spent two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list and went on to win the 2010 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. His work has been translated into 35 languages. Having grown up in Seattle, he now lives in Montana with his wife and a one-eyed pug.

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