ReadingGroupGuides
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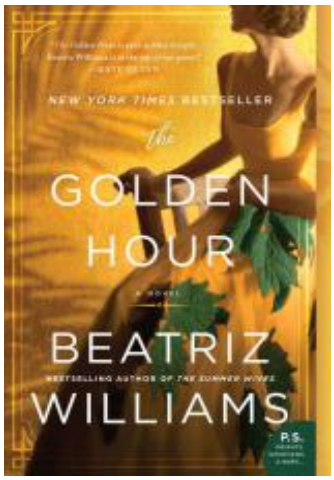
The Golden Hour

by Beatriz Williams



About the Book

Beatriz Williams, the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE SUMMER WIVES, is back with another hot summer read: a dazzling epic of World War II in which a beautiful young ?society reporter? is sent to the Bahamas, a haven of spies, traitors, and the infamous Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

The Bahamas, 1941. Newly widowed Leonora ?Lulu? Randolph arrives in the Bahamas to investigate the Governor and his wife for a New York society magazine. After all, American readers have an insatiable appetite for news of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, that glamorous couple whose love affair nearly brought the British monarchy to its knees five years earlier. What more intriguing backdrop for their romance than a wartime Caribbean paradise, a colonial playground for kingpins of ill-gotten empires?

Or so Lulu imagines. But as she infiltrates the Duke and Duchess?s social circle, and the powerful cabal that controls the islands? political and financial affairs, she uncovers evidence that beneath the glister of Wallis and Edward?s marriage lies an ugly --- and even treasonous --- reality. In fact, Windsor-era Nassau seethes with spies, financial swindles and racial tension, and in the middle of it all stands Benedict Thorpe: a scientist of tremendous charm and murky national loyalties. Inevitably, the willful and wounded Lulu falls in love.

Then Nassau?s wealthiest man is murdered in one of the most notorious cases of the century, and the resulting coverup reeks of royal privilege. Benedict Thorpe disappears without a trace, and Lulu embarks on a journey to London and beyond to unpick Thorpe?s complicated family history: a fateful love affair, a wartime tragedy and a mother from whom all joy is stolen.

The stories of two unforgettable women thread together in this extraordinary epic of espionage, sacrifice, human love and human courage, set against a shocking true crime...and the rise and fall of a legendary royal couple.

Discussion Guide

1. ?The American appetite for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor is just insatiable,? Lulu explains about her assignment for *Metropolitan* magazine. About the royal family she says: ?We like to gossip about them, all right. Just not to let them rule over us and all.? Is this still true today? Do you follow the news and gossip about the British royal family? If so, why?

2. Jack the bartender describes Lulu as ?a real tough dame? and ?a real honest dame..honest and kind-hearted.? Do you agree? Does your assessment of Lulu change the more you see her in action, and the more you learn about her back story?

3. ?I went mad after [my baby] was born,? Elfriede tells Wilfred, ?An extreme form of nervous melancholy.? Do you know women who have had the same mental health crisis? How does Elfriede manage to survive? How does postpartum depression change her life?

4. Elfriede tells her doctor, ?A wife would be a beast if she didn?t love a man such as my husband. She would be unworthy of life.? Is that just the ?melancholy? talking? What do you make of their marriage? Does Elfriede truly love Gerhard? If you were in their shoes, would you make the compromises they do?

5. Discuss the ways Lulu and Elfriede?s stories intertwine. What characteristics do these two women share, even though they?re separated by a generation and different cultures?

6. ?The circumstances of your childhood determine your character, the entire course of your future, your fate, your destiny, all of it. You are just a mere slave to your subconscious.? Lulu reflects. Do you agree? How did her childhood and her relationship to her newspaper mogul father shape her life and affect her destiny? What about the other characters in this book? How did their childhoods direct the course of their lives?

7. Why did Charlotte decide to leave Elfriede and take the girls with her? Would you have done the same? How did that decision change the course of everyone?s lives?

8. What motivated Elfriede to disappear after Benedict?s birth? Was it the right decision to make? How would Benedict and Margaret have turned out had she stayed and raised them?

9. Lulu says of the Duchess of Windsor, ?Women like Wallis never, for a single moment, imagine themselves guilty of anything.? What is Wallis guilty of? Why does Lulu hold her in such contempt? What did you think of her and the Duke? When they appear in the last scene of the book, does Lulu have any sympathy for them at all? Do you?

10. What do you think becomes of Lulu and her family in the decades after the war? What about Elfriede?s children? Have you glimpsed any of the characters from THE GOLDEN HOUR in Beatriz Williams?s other novels?

Author Bio

Beatriz Williams is the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of HUSBANDS & LOVERS, THE SUMMER WIVES, THE SECRET LIFE OF VIOLET GRANT, A HUNDRED SUMMERS, the *Wicked City* series, and several other works of historical fiction, including five novels in collaboration with fellow bestselling authors Karen White and Lauren Willig.

A graduate of Stanford University with an MBA in Finance from Columbia University, Beatriz worked as a communications and corporate strategy consultant in New York and London before her first novel was published in 2012. Beatriz?s books have won numerous awards, have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and appear regularly in bestseller lists around the world. Her essays have appeared in magazines such as *Real Simple* and *Southern Living*, among others, and she regularly reviews fiction for the *New York Times Book Review*.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Beatriz now lives in southeastern Connecticut with her husband and four mostly grown children.

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