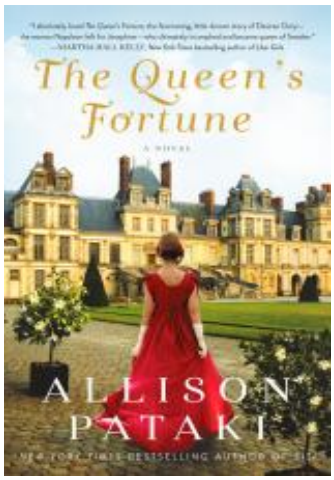
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Queen's Fortune

by Allison Pataki



About the Book

A sweeping novel about the extraordinary woman who captured Napoleon?s heart, created a dynasty and changed the course of history --- from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE TRAITOR'S WIFE, THE ACCIDENTAL EMPRESS and SISI.

As the French Revolution ravages the country, Desiree Clary is faced with the life-altering truth that the world she has known and loved is gone, and it?s fallen on her to save her family from the guillotine.

A chance encounter with Napoleon Bonaparte, the ambitious and charismatic young military prodigy, provides her answer. When her beloved sister Julie marries his brother Joseph, Desiree and Napoleon?s futures become irrevocably linked. Quickly entering into their own passionate, dizzying courtship that leads to a secret engagement, they vow to meet in the capital once his career has been secured. But her newly laid plans with Napoleon turn to sudden heartbreak, thanks to the rising star of Parisian society, Josephine de Beauharnais. Once again, Desiree?s life is turned on its head.

Swept to the glittering halls of the French capital, Desiree is plunged into the inner circle of the new ruling class, becoming further entangled with Napoleon, his family and the new Empress. But her fortunes shift once again when she meets Napoleon's confidant and star general, the indomitable Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte. As the two men in Desiree?s life become political rivals and military foes, the question that arises is: Must she choose between the love of her new husband and the love of her nation and its Emperor?

From the lavish estates of the French Riviera to the raucous streets of Paris and Stockholm, Desiree finds herself at the epicenter of the rise and fall of an empire, navigating a constellation of political giants and dangerous, shifting alliances. Emerging from an impressionable girl into a fierce young woman, she discovers that to survive in this world she must learn to rely upon her instincts and her heart.

Allison Pataki?s meticulously researched and brilliantly imagined novel sweeps readers into the unbelievable life of a woman almost lost to history --- a woman who, despite the swells of a stunning life and a tumultuous time, not only adapts and survives but, ultimately, reigns at the helm of a dynasty that outlasts an empire.

Discussion Guide

1. In the prologue of the book, Désirée wonders if she could have ?prevented it all, thwarted the insatiable beast that would consume everything in its wake --- his crown, his empire, his continent, his life?? How do you think history would have been different if Napoleon had married Désirée instead of Josephine?

2. What was your first impression of Désirée Clary? How did that impression change throughout the course of the novel? How did Désirée change? When courting her, Napoléon tells Desire that he needs her because she?s earnest and pure. In what ways does she remain so, and in what ways does she not?

3. Despite being replaced by her as Napoleon?s wife, Désirée ultimately befriends Josephine and feels genuine affection for her. Discuss the complicated nature of their relationship.

4. Early in the novel, Napoleon asks Désirée?s mother if she agrees with the infamous Renaissance writer and politician Machiavelli?s opinion that the ends justify the means, no matter how immoral the means might be. Why do you think Napoleon asks that question? How do you think he would answer it --- and how would that answer be reflected in his behavior as the first emperor of France?

5. Upon meeting Désirée, Josephine commented that Napoleon had a tendency to remake people in the image of his own mind. How do each of these women withstand the tendency to conform? How do they not?

6. What would you have done if you had been in Désirée?s position in THE QUEEN'S FORTUNE? Would you have made the same choices she did? Do you think she was dealt a difficult hand in life? How would you feel if you were thrust into her place?

7. Discuss the three marital prospects of Désirée?s life: Napoleon Bonaparte, Leonard Duphot and Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte. How do they each treat her differently? How does Désirée behave differently with each of them?

8. Discuss the various roles women occupy in this book. How are they used to serve men?s purposes? How do they assert independence and influence for themselves?

9. What was your favorite part of the book: the time period, the characters, the setting, the plot? Did you learn something new or surprising about this major moment in history?

10. Désirée has many facets to her identity; she is, at various times, defined as a daughter, a wife, a mother, a sister, a Frenchwoman, an expatriate, a queen --- just to name a few. Discuss how these various labels shift and evolve, which of these are most indelible to her character and sense of self?

Author Bio

Allison Pataki is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE TRAITOR'S WIFE, THE ACCIDENTAL EMPRESS, SISI, THE QUEEN'S FORTUNE, THE MAGNIFICENT LIVES OF MARJORIE POST and FINDING MARGARET FULLER and IT GIRL, as well as the memoir BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN PLACES. Her novels have been translated into more than 20 languages.

A former news writer and producer, Pataki has written for *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and other outlets. She has appeared on "Today," "Good Morning America," "Good Day New York" and MSNBC?s "Morning Joe." Allison Pataki graduated cum laude from Yale University and lives in New York with her husband and family.

The Queen's Fortune

by Allison Pataki

Publication Date: February 16, 2021
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 464 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0593128206
ISBN-13: 9780593128206