



# *The Queen's Fortune*

ALLISON PATAKI

BOOK CLUB KIT

# A LETTER FROM ALLISON PATAKI

Dear reader,

I am so excited to share *The Queen's Fortune* with you, and so grateful that you are taking the time to read it! The story of Désirée Clary captivated me from the very start, as hers is the sort of sweeping and dramatic life story that seems too good to be true—except that it is true, so that made it all the more fun.

While *The Queen's Fortune* will be my seventh book, this one feels particularly exciting and personal to me because it is a return to what I love most and feel so passionately about as both a reader and a writer—namely, uncovering the stories of fascinating and significant women who made a meaningful mark in history, and yet have been largely lost in its telling.

While researching Désirée's fascinating life story, I stuck to strictly historical texts and biographies on the era and its personalities. What stunned me in the research process was that I could not find a single English-language nonfiction biography in which Désirée Clary Bernadotte served as the central subject. Copious biographies and resources exist on Napoleon, Josephine, and Bernadotte—and certainly Désirée figures in those texts as a supporting character, but I have yet to find one in which she occupies center stage. Ultimately, I found that to be a gift to me as a writer of historical fiction, because it presented me with the opportunity not just to put Désirée squarely at the center of the story (it's about time), but to be free to imagine her narrative even as I based it off of the historical accounts that have already been offered to readers. Désirée came alive in my mind and not only took her warranted place at center stage but, ultimately, stole the show.

As a lifelong lover of books and book clubs, I know very well the power a well-placed story has to transport, to inspire, and to educate—while also entertaining. I hope that this book will do that for you and for all of its readers.

Happy reading!

Warmly,  
Allison

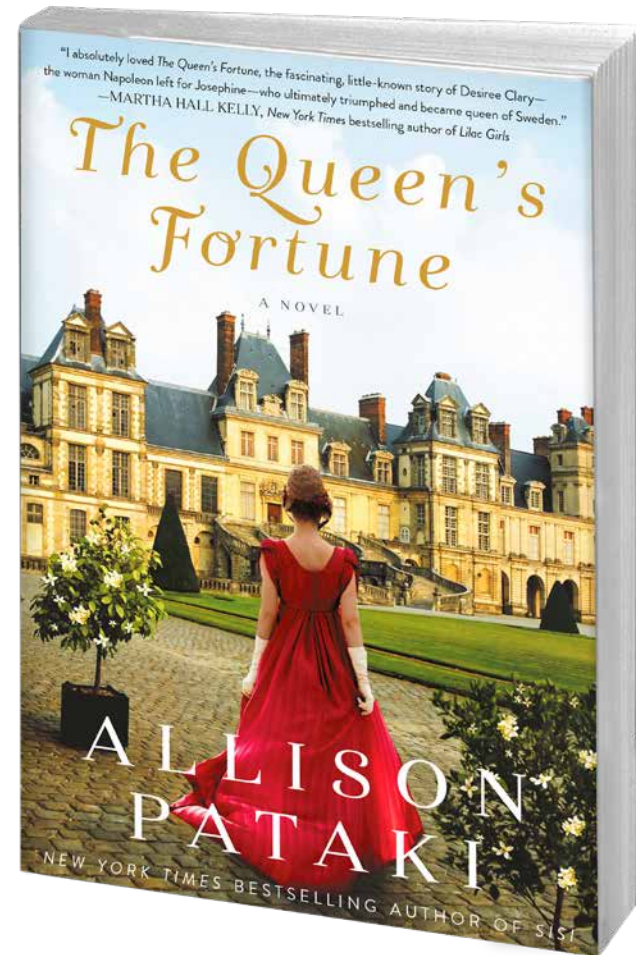


# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the prologue, 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 it 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 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? Do you think she was dealt a difficult hand in life? How would you feel if you were thrust into her place?

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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 novel: the time period, the characters, the setting, the plot? Another aspect? 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?



# Family Tree of

**FATHER:**  
**FRANÇOIS CLARY**

(1725–1794)  
Married in 1751 to Gabrielle  
Fléchon (1732–1758); married in 1759  
to Françoise Somis.

**BROTHER:**  
**NICHOLAS JOSEPH CLARY**

(1760–1823)  
Married to Anne Jeane Rouyer.



**BERNARDINE EUGÉNIE  
DÉSIRÉE CLARY**

(1777–1860) Married to Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte  
(1763–1844), King Charles XIV John of Sweden and Charles III  
John of Norway. Two half-brothers, two half-sisters from her  
father's first marriage, two sisters and four brothers from her  
father's second marriage.

**MOTHER:**  
**FRANÇOISE ROSE SOMIS**

(1737–1815)

**SISTER:**  
**JULIE CLARY**

(1771–1845)  
Queen consort to spouse Joseph-Napoléon  
Bonaparte (1768–1844), King Giuseppe I  
of Naples and Sicily and King José I of  
Spain and the Indies.

**SON:**  
**OSCAR I**

(1799–1859)  
King of Sweden and Norway; married to  
Joséphine Maximilienne Eugénie Napoléone de  
Beauharnais (1807–1876), granddaughter of  
Empress Joséphine of France, and wife of  
Napoléon Bonaparte.

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**GRANDSON:**  
**CHARLES XV**

(1826–1872)

King of Sweden and Charles IV Norway.



**GREAT-GRANDSON:**  
**GUSTAF V**

(1858–1950) King of Sweden; son of Oscar II.

**GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON:**  
**GUSTAF VI ADOLF**

(1882–1973) King of Sweden.

**GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON:**  
**CARL XVI GUSTAF**

(1946–present)

King of Sweden; the succession skipped a generation as Carl Gustaf's father died in an airplane crash in 1947.

**CHILDREN:**

Crown Princess Victoria; (1977–present); middle name Désirée.  
Prince Carl Philip; (1979–present).  
Princess Madeleine; (1982–present); middle name Josephine.

**GRANDSON:**  
**OSCAR II**

(1829–1907) King of Sweden and Norway  
(the last Dual Monarch of both countries)

\*succeeded his older brother.\*

**GREAT-GRANDSON:**  
**CARL**

(1861–1951) Crown Prince Carl of Sweden  
and Norway; son of Oscar II.

**GREAT-GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER:**  
**MARTHA**

(1901–1954) Crown Princess Martha of Norway;  
daughter of Crown Prince Carl.

**GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDSON:**  
**HAROLD V**

(1937–present)

King of Norway; son of Crown Princess Martha.

**CHILDREN:**

Princess Märtha Louise; (1971–present).  
Crown Prince Haakon; (1973–present).



# FUN FACTS

- The contemporary (and beautiful!) Swedish royals that we read about in the news and in fashion magazines are in fact Desiree's offspring: the two current princesses's—Victoria and Madeleine's—middle names are, respectively, Desiree and Josephine! Desiree lives on in the 21st century through the next Queen of Sweden. . . .
- The reigning King of Norway—King Harald V, Desiree's great-great-great grandson—spent part of his childhood in Washington, D.C., where some of the Norwegian Royal Family lived in exile following the Nazi invasion of Norway in 1940. One of his most vivid memories from this time is of standing behind Franklin D. Roosevelt as FDR swore his oath of office to begin his third term as US president.



# THE FRESHEST FRENCH LEMONADE

**Preparation Time:** 5 min

**Cooking Time:** 5 min

## **Ingredients:**

*(Makes 1 pitcher)*

- 5 lemons
- 3 tbsp lavender honey
- 1 small bottle of sparkling water
- 15oz still water
- Optional: some verbena leaves
- Add gin or vodka for a yummy, refreshing cocktail!

## **Preparation:**

1. Squeeze the lemons.
2. Boil the still water. Stop the heat, add the lemon juice and the honey. Mix until honey is dissolved.
3. Pour in the pitcher (it must be half-filled). Keep in the fridge for 20 min.
4. Once cold, add the sparkling water.
5. Optional: add some verbena leaves for a colorful and tasty drink!

