

Three's Company

DAISY GOODWIN has recently developed a new vice, which may be related to the subject of her latest book, *Empress Elisabeth of Austria*, or Sisi, as she was known. "I've got a keen interest in jewelry," she says. "It's a pretty good investment and I like wearing it, too." She bought a diamond star to wear in her hair (Sisi was painted with 28 of them in hers), and she also likes pieces with snake motifs.

The empress is the subject of Goodwin's *"The Fortune Hunter"* (St. Martin's Press).

The original germ of the novel came some years ago, when, as a young girl, Goodwin was given a jigsaw puzzle of a famous Franz Xaver Winterhalter painting of Sisi in a white ballgown with the aforementioned diamond stars. "She looks exactly as you would expect a fairy-tale princess to look," the writer says. And indeed, Sisi was often called "the most beautiful woman in Europe." She had a tiny waist and showed it to her advantage in nip-waisted ballgowns and riding habits. She was an expert rider, and, at one point, she had gone to England for several months to hunt, riding with the Quorn. During that time, she had a "pilot," a man named Bay Middleton. Some believe that she had an affair with him. That story is the subject of Goodwin's book.

Remarkably, Goodwin was doing a lecture on the book at Althorp, a country house that is the family seat of the Spencer clan and that appears in the story, and a woman came up to her and said she

was a descendant of Middleton and showed her a ring the empress had given him, which featured his name picked out in diamonds. At that point, Goodwin was certain that the affair was real. "Her great-grandmother had all these letters that Sisi had written to Bay, but she burned them," she adds.

"There's nothing I like better than a country house," she says. "It gratifies my inner duchess." Sisi was staying at Althorp — home of the flame-haired Red Earl during her time — while



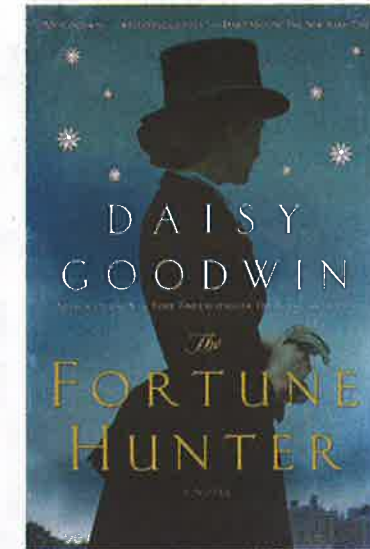
COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, VIENNA

Empress Elisabeth of Austria, painted by Franz Winterhalter.

she was in England to hunt, and it's there that her liaison with Middleton took place. In the book, Middleton is infatuated with the Empress, but he is also in love

with Charlotte Baird, an heiress, whom he proposes to repeatedly, realizing that there is no future in his affair with the royal. Rather charmingly, Goodwin writes that Charlotte is no beauty, but she is bright and has a passion for photography. The real Middleton eventually married her.

The next part of Sisi's life was marked by tragedy. Her son, Crown Prince Rudolf, killed his mistress and himself in a hunting lodge at Mayerling. Sisi was later assassinated by Luigi Lucheni, a royalty-hating Italian anarchist. Goodwin says her daughter had said that Sisi's life had become unbearable by this time. Sisi was, for one thing,



The cover of the book.

obsessed with her looks and the idea that they were fading, and often used a leather fan to hide her face. But the later tragic episodes are outside the scope of the book.



Daisy Goodwin

PHOTO BY MIKE HOGAN

Goodwin studied at Cambridge, was a Harkness scholar at Columbia University and became a television producer. Her husband, with whom she has two daughters, is an executive with ABC News. Her last novel, *"The American Heiress,"* was a New York Times bestseller.

The heiress in question was based on a combination of several of these women, including Consuelo Vanderbilt. Americans, it seems, always "talked about how cold all these houses are," Goodwin says. "Duchesses wear diamond necklaces but have dirty necks, and there's no plumbing." The writer's timing was good; the book came out shortly before the debut of *"Downton Abbey,"* and her heiress is even called Cora, like the one in the television series.

Her next book will be about Queen Victoria, and will be

called *"The Maid of Honor."* One of the points of the book is what a bad mother Victoria was. "She was the world's worst mother," Goodwin says. She hoped to keep her children with her, and nobody was even allowed to talk about engagements or marriages in front of her youngest daughter, Beatrice. When Beatrice defied her and got engaged, "she wouldn't talk to her for six months." She also wouldn't allow her son Leopold to go to any parties when he went up to Oxford. "She micromanaged her children's lives," she continues, "When one of her daughters got married, she turned up the next day on their honeymoon to sort of check on them."

Goodwin has met some of the British royals, among them Prince Charles and Prince Andrew. She met Queen Elizabeth II when she was 11 because her father was one of the producers of *"Death on the Nile"* and there was

a royal premiere. "They all have very good manners," she says. She likens the interest in royals to that of following a soap opera, and compares this fascination to Americans' obsession with the Kardashians.

The writer has several interests outside her two lines of work, among them cooking and quilting. She recently saw a show of quilts from Gee's Bend, Ala. "They're astonishing — like Matisses," she says. And she has three Patterdale terriers, a breed she says is famously naughty. "Three of them is too much," she says.

— LORNA KOSKI

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