

The Finishing School

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By Joanna Goodman

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Introduction

In this suspenseful, provocative novel of friendship, secrets, and deceit, a successful writer returns to her elite Swiss boarding school to get to the bottom of a tragic accident that took place while she was a student twenty years earlier.

How far would you go to uncover the truth?

One spring night in 1998 the beautiful Cressida Strauss plunges from a fourth-floor balcony at the Lycée Internationale Suisse with catastrophic consequences. Loath to draw negative publicity to the school, a bastion of European wealth and glamour, officials quickly dismiss the incident as an accident, but questions remain: Was it a suicide attempt? Or was Cressida pushed? It was no secret that she had a selfish streak and had earned as many enemies as allies in her tenure at the school. For her best friend, scholarship student Kersti Kuusk, the lingering questions surrounding Cressida's fall continue to nag long after she leaves the Lycée.

Kersti marries and becomes a bestselling writer, but never stops wondering about Cressida's obsession with the Helvetian Society—a secret club banned years before their arrival at the school—and a pair of its members who were expelled. When Kersti is invited as a guest to the Lycée's 100th Anniversary, she begins probing the cover-up, unearthing a frightening underbelly of lies and abuse at the prestigious establishment. And in one portentous moment, Kersti makes a decision that will connect her to Cressida forever and raise the stakes dangerously high in her own desire to solve the mystery and redeem her past.

An unputdownable read as clever as it is compelling, *The Finishing School* offers a riveting glimpse into a privileged, rarefied world in which nothing is as it appears.



Questions for Discussion

1. The Lycée's motto is "Preparing young women to be citizens of the world since 1915."

What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? Did it mean something different in 1915?

2. What do you imagine Cressida's life would have been if she hadn't fallen?
3. What draws Kersti to her husband? What does her choice of husband say about her relationship to her family and heritage?
4. What does *The Finishing School* mean? It sounds somewhat archaic. Is such an institution still relative?
5. How do Kersti's first impressions of the Fitherns impact your opinion of them? How has time given Kersti perspective on the once beloved couple?
6. Kersti makes a very radical and controversial decision at the climax of the novel. Can you sympathize, or at least understand why she makes this decision? Would you do the same?
7. How does Kersti change from the very beginning of the novel? Do you like her more or less by the end of the book?
8. The book shifts between past and present. Why did the author choose to tell the story in this way and does she succeed?
9. How do you feel about Angela Zumpt? Do you feel sorry for her? Is she a victim or a villain?
10. What kind of mother do you think will Kersti be? How will her relationship with her own family change once she has children? And her relationship to herself?