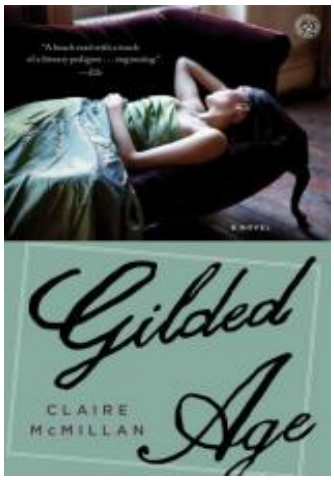
Gilded Age

by Claire McMillan



About the Book

Eleanor Hart had made a brilliant marriage in New York, but it ended in a scandalous divorce and thirty days in Sierra Tucson rehab. Now she finds that, despite feminist lip service, she will still need a husband to be socially complete. A woman?s sexual reputation matters, and so does her family name. Ellie must navigate the treacherous social terrain where old money meets new: charitable benefits and tequila body shots, inherited diamonds and viper-bite lip piercings, country house weekends and sexting. She finds that her beauty is a powerful tool in this world, but it has its limitations, even liabilities. Through one misstep after another, Ellie mishandles her second act. Her options narrow, her future prospects contract, until she faces a desperate choice.

With a keen eye for the perfect detail and a heart big enough to embrace those she observes, Claire McMillan has written an assured and revelatory debut novel about class, gender, and the timeless conundrum of femininity.

Discussion Guide

1. In parts of this novel, there is first-person narration from an unnamed woman: a wife, friend, and mother-to-be. In other parts there is a third-person narrator. Did you prefer one style of narration to the other? Did you have any questions about the narrator that were left unanswered?

2. Do you like and trust the narrator of the novel? Is she always honest with herself and others? What do you think motivates her?

3. How much of an impact do the judgments and actions of the narrator have on how you feel about the people and events she describes? Does she like her friends?

4. Is Ellie a feminist? What are her views on marriage and being a wife? Do they sync with her actions? Did you relate to any of her sentiments?

5. Do you think every social group, every society, has ?victims? and ?victors?? Did society hurt Ellie, or did she hurt herself?

6. Ellie says to Selden, ?Passion is fine?What I really want is freedom.? Is she being genuine when she says this? Does she want freedom consistently through the novel? If you could give Ellie one piece of advice, what would it be?

7. What mistakes does Ellie make? Do you feel sympathetic to her situation? How does her social circle judge her?

8. Why does Ellie resist Randall Leforte?s advances and reject his proposal? Why does she find him so cringe-worthy, when in fact he is both handsome and wealthy?

9. When Selden binds Ellie?s wrist with her ribbon, and she wears it, what does it mean to him? To her? Are they bound together through anything more than sexual attraction?

10. The narrator says, when chiding herself for not calling Ellie to check in, ?Funny that with a friend that old I?d need to gin myself up to call her.? What does it say about their friendship? Have you ever felt that way about a friend?

11. Do you think that the narrator?s friendship with Ellie would have persevered if Ellie hadn?t betrayed her trust?

12. What do you think could have saved Ellie?

13. If you?ve read Edith Wharton?s **The House of Mirth**, how does this modernized version compare?

14. Consider the title, **Gilded Age**, now that you?ve finished the novel. Has the meaning changed in any way?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. A scene in the book describes a benefit at the Cleveland Museum of Art where select members dress up and pose as famous pieces of art. What pieces of art would you and the other members of your book club best embody? Discuss with your group.

2. Read aloud the first chapter from Edith Wharton?s **The House of Mirth** at your book club. Compare and contrast Claire McMillan?s updated version in chapter two of **Gilded Age**.

Author Bio

Claire McMillan grew up in Pasadena, California, and now lives near Cleveland on her husband?s family?s farm with

their two children. She practiced law until 2003 and then received her MFA in creative writing from Bennington College. GILDED AGE is her first novel.

Gilded Age

by Claire McMillan

Publication Date: February 12, 2013
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 272 pages
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
ISBN-10: 145164048X
ISBN-13: 9781451640489