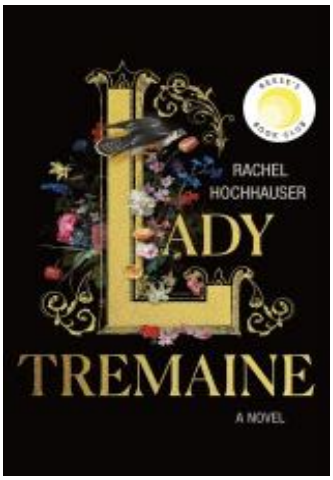
Lady Tremaine

by Rachel Hochhauser



About the Book

Twice-widowed, Lady Etheldreda Verity Isolde Tremaine Bramley is solely responsible for her two children, a priggish stepdaughter, a razor-taloned peregrine falcon, and a crumbling manor. Fierce and determined, Ethel clings to the respectability her deceased husband?s title affords her, hoping it will secure her daughters? future through marriage.

When a royal ball offers the chance to change everything, Ethel risks her pride in pursuit of an invitation for all three of her daughters --- only to see her hopes fulfilled by the wrong one. As an engagement to the future king unfolds, Ethel discovers a sordid secret hidden in the depths of the royal family, forcing her to choose between the security she craves and the well-being of the stepdaughter who has rebuffed her at every turn.

As if "Bridgerton" met CIRCE, and exhilarating to its core, LADY TREMAINE reimagines the myth of the evil stepmother at the heart of the world?s most famous fairy tale. It is a battle cry for a mother?s love for her daughters, and a celebration of women everywhere who make their own fortunes.

Discussion Guide

1. What was it like to experience this classic fairy tale through Etheldreda?s point of view? How did it change your perspective on these archetypal characters, if at all?

2. Compare and contrast the types of love emphasized in the original fairy tale and in LADY TREMAINE --- and the key takeaway messages of both.

3. ?One day, if I was successful, we could all be done with the risks and the pretending. With my whole soul, I wanted my family to find some stability in the world? (p. 18). How does upholding a certain reputation affect the way the characters interact with each other? What kind of pressure does this place on Etheldreda as a mother, and how does

living in survival mode drive her character? How much of the characters? authenticity is traded for appearance and facade? How does Etheldreda?s relationship with appearance evolve over the course of the novel? Can you relate to any of these pressures in your own life?

4. ?Had I been striving for years, wanting, aching for more, more, more, unable to recognize the value of what was in front of me?? (p. 309). How does Etheldreda?s relentless pursuit of a better life for her daughters cause her to overlook the meaningful joys and connections already present around her? What does this suggest about the costs of ambition?

5. ?The only being that defied the ancient standard --- the standard of me first, me only, I, I, me --- was a mother? (p. 15). What role does sacrifice play in this novel?

6. Through the depiction of Etheldreda?s and Sigrid?s differing ways of mothering, what does the novel suggest about the ferocity of a mother?s love? ?We mothers are expected to have that instinct. Our intuition. Our supernatural understanding of our children?s habits and bodies and rhythms. You learn to trust your knowledge.? (p. 276).

7. ?Falconry, at its core, is taking a creature that is primordial, instinctive, beautifully primitive, and fundamentally selfish and teaching it obedience, order, and fidelity? (p. 31). What do you make of falconry playing a key role in the novel? What does Lucy symbolize for Etheldreda?

8. In what ways might this fairy tale setting --- in a land far, far away --- mirror modern society, if at all? How does this make you feel?

9. Etheldreda grew up with men. ?Women were not meant to express. But I had always sat at a table of men who ate with their fingers, ripped flesh from bone, laughing as the fat glinted on their lips and chins. And it was only recently I had understood I was supposed to be different? (p. 57). How do you think her childhood experiences amongst the other sex shaped and prepared Etheldreda to be the fiercely capable woman, and protective mother, she becomes?

10. Discuss the nuances of what marriage means for the women in the novel?s society, and how their pursuit of it shapes and directs their lives --- and how this meaning evolves over the course of the story for Etheldreda. Additionally, for most of the novel, what would the marriage of Rosie, Mathilde and Elin mean for Etheldreda as a mother? How does it represent both a source of freedom and a form of loss for her?

11. ?A woman could be kept so quiet it was hard to notice when she disappeared? (p. 251). How do the expectations of women within this setting deeply impact the characters? Consider the fact that Agatha?s voice forever lives in Etheldreda?s mind. How do Etheldreda?s teachings and her approach differ from Agatha?s, and do you think her voice will stick with Rosie, Mathilde and Elin in a similar way? Discuss.

12. Compare and contrast Elin and Etheldreda.

13. What does ?happily ever after? mean to you? What does this novel suggest about self-discovery and earned agency? Do you think LADY TREMAINE has a happy ending?

Author Bio

Rachel Hochhauser grew up in Santa Barbara, California. She attended New York University and earned a master?s in professional writing from the University of Southern California. Currently, she lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband and two daughters. LADY TREMAINE is her first novel.

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Publication Date: March 3, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Hardcover: 352 pages
Publisher: St. Martin's Press
ISBN-10: 1250396344
ISBN-13: 9781250396341