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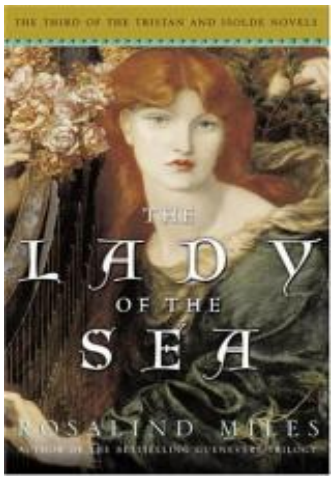
The Lady of the Sea

by Rosalind Miles



About the Book

The final thrilling chapter in the Tristan and Isolde trilogy

Isolde, heir to the throne of the queens, is now a sovereign in her own right. With the glories of the throne comes the responsibility of a queen, and Isolde knows she must return to her beloved Western Isle. She can no longer tolerate her marriage to King Mark of Cornwall, a marriage she has accepted for years to save her country from the threat of war --- and to be near her only love, Mark's nephew, Tristan of Lyonesse. And so she leaves Cornwall and comes home to Ireland, where her lords face a growing threat from the warlike Picti, who live in the barren highlands to the north of England. The Picti have a bold new king, Darath, who is determined to take the riches of Ireland for his own people, whether by war or by marriage with Isolde.

Isolde gathers her armies to confront the Picti while facing a violent conflict with King Mark, who vows he will not let a prize like Isolde, and Ireland, slip from his grasp. Isolde is last in a line of famous warrior queens who have guarded Ireland from time before memory, and now she --- and her knight, Tristan --- must play out their fate and face her enemies in a final battle, a war that could spell ruin for them both.

Discussion Guide

1. How does the relationship between Merlin and the Lady of the Sea frame the novel? Does their discourse read as power struggle or love affair? Ultimately, these two mighty forces have the same goals. Why, then, is Merlin open to the whims of the Christians while the Lady is vehemently not?

2. At a certain point in the novel, Mark shifts from being a weak, impressionable, almost comical character, to being a terrifying, truly dark-hearted menace. What causes this change? How does the author build tension around Mark's transformation?

3. Knowing all that he does about Mark, why does Tristan cling to his fealty to the rascally monarch? Does his resistance to Isoldes's plan to abandon Cornwall stem from chivalry, or fear?

4. How does the author weave comedy into the relationship between Dominian and Arraganzo?

5. Isolde is well-schooled in the ways of the Mother-right and the fact that, as Queen, she is entitled to a "chosen one" whenever she wants and however many times she wants. Why, then, is she desperate for Cormac's approval of her leaving Mark? What link to her past does Cormac represent?

6. Tristan suffers from a crippling lack of faith in Isolde's opinion of him. He worries that if she accidentally dies in the woods, "she would have thought of him as a faithless man. If he never again contacted her after that, she would be sure he was a recreant knight who had broken his oath to them both, and simply slipped away to find an easier life." Is there any basis for this fear? Is Isolde aware of his fragile grip on trust?

7. Darath presents two faces: one, a man hopelessly in love, who defies his own war ethics in the pursuit of Isolde; and two, a man who would happily slaughter Isolde after bedding her and winning her lands. Which one do you believe?

8. Why does Andred join Arraganzo and Dominion in encouraging Mark to marry one of the Dun Haven princesses, if his ultimate plot is to be named sole heir to the throne?

9. What is the source of Merlin's obsession with "Tristan --- Arthur --- all these sorrowful lost boys. Motherless, fatherless, nameless, and homeless, too, flying boys becoming wounded men?" Is Merlin successful at helping these hapless boys?

10. Where does the author harness natural phenomena like the weather as a storytelling device? How does this contribute to the mood of the novel?

11. Tristan and Isolde agree to return to Castle Dore with the intention to "make a clean and honorable break with the past, then afterward we can live as we want." Why are they suddenly naïve about Mark's capacity for justice? Do they honestly believe they'll sway the king, or are they trying to assuage their own sense of guilt? Are they doing the right thing?

12. How does the theme of abandonment play out in the characters of Dominian, Gawaine, and Igraine?

13. How do townfolk help Gawaine solve the riddle of Tristan and Isolde's so-called deaths? Why does his well-intentioned visit to them spell disaster?

14. Dominian is charged with helping to oust the "pagan" Isolde from the throne of Cornwall. Why, then, does he challenge Isolde's assertion that her marriage to Mark is null and void?

15. How is Isolde's mother's curse --- *"May all those he loves, and all who ever love him, suffer until the sea kisses the sky, and the trees bow down their heads at his cursed feet!"* --- fulfilled, while leaving Tristan and Isolde unscathed?

Author Bio

Rosalind Miles is the author of the bestselling Guenevere trilogy, as well as the Tristan and Isolde trilogy and **I, Elizabeth**. A well-known and critically acclaimed novelist, essayist, and broadcaster, she lives in Kent, England.

Critical Praise

"Miles concludes her spellbinding Tristan and Isolde trilogy with a bang. . . . Interwoven with plenty of passion and intrigue, this mystical reworking of a time-honored fable provides an enthralling new spin on an irresistibly romantic old legend."

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