

LADIES *of the* HOUSE

A NOVEL



BOOK CLUB
KIT

A Modern Retelling of *Sense and Sensibility*

LAUREN EDMONDSON

The Story Behind *Ladies of the House*

Sense and Sensibility has long been my favorite Jane Austen novel. It seems many readers don't find *Sense* as hilarious as *Emma* or as romantic as *Pride and Prejudice*, but I've always been drawn to the novel's pointed depictions of womanhood. Unlike in Austen's other works, fathers are mostly absent from *Sense*, and the Dashwood sisters' love interests almost entirely disappear from large sections of the novel. This absence of men focuses our gaze on the female characters, but the patriarchal systems of power still drive the story, allowing Austen room to explore what it means for women to demonstrate "proper" conduct.

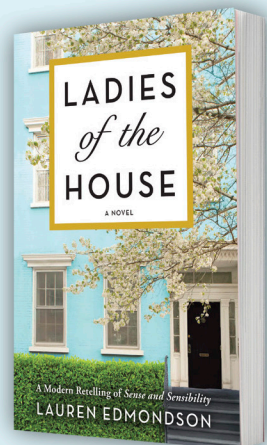
I thought adapting Austen's framework to a contemporary setting would provide an enlightening contrast and benchmark for how women's lives have and have not changed across history. Like *Sense and Sensibility*, my novel, *Ladies of the House*, also features two sisters, Daisy and Wallis Richardson, who must rebuild their lives following the passing of the family patriarch. But, as they live two centuries later, they have tools the Dashwood sisters would *envy*: they can vote, their educational and employment opportunities are greater, there is less stigma around premarital sex and cohabitation. They don't *have* to marry men and give birth to sons to have security and protection.

Still, while the Richardsons have far more legal rights and agency than women in Austen's era, they, too, find themselves constrained by that question of *how a woman should be*. When older sister Daisy is faced with the dilemma to speak out or to stay quiet regarding her late father's corrupt behavior, at first she chooses the latter. Her silence, she rationalizes, is the safest, most practical choice because women are often excoriated when they publicly speak truth about powerful men. I wanted my novel to be hopeful, though. So, while at first Daisy obeys the demands of the patriarchy, she and her younger sister, Wallis, ultimately triumph by writing and following *their own* set of rules, learning how to use their power in a way that reflects who they are and not who society says they should be.

While some may read Marianne and Elinor Dashwood as each representing two contrasting types of impulses—sense and sensibility—in my view, Austen's novel and my own are not so much about the *differences* between the sisters but about the unbreakable bond between them—how the women's support and love for each other is the real, transformative power.

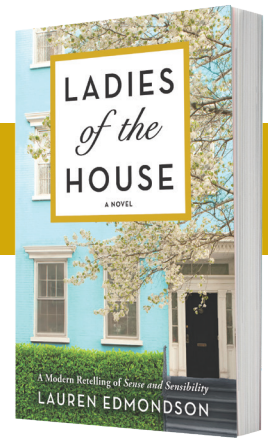
Lauren Edmondson

Ladies of the House: A Modern Retelling of Sense and Sensibility
By Lauren Edmondson
On sale February 9, 2021
Original Trade paperback
9781525895968
\$16.99 US | \$21.99 CAN



Discussion Guide

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



- 1) Discuss the plot differences between ***Ladies of the House*** and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. How does Lauren Edmondson's novel update Jane Austen's?
- 2) What do you think Jane Austen might say about the society in which Daisy and Wallis operate? What has or has not changed for women since the Austen era?
- 3) Did you understand Daisy's justifications for not initially going public about her father's behavior?
- 4) Did you think Daisy's ultimate decision to speak out was the right move? Why or why not? What might you have done in her situation?
- 5) How did you feel about Wallis at the beginning of the novel versus the end? Do you think she grew as a character? In what way?
- 6) Daisy at first has trouble accepting Blake because of his family's actions. Is this something you have ever faced in your own life? Can you separate a person from their beliefs?
- 7) Toward the end of the novel, Daisy tells Blake Darley: "You think you're something special, don't you? You think you're unique. But you're just one of the millions in this town who will regularly choose power above all." Is this a fair assessment of him? Or did you have more sympathy for Blake?
- 8) As parents, how are Gregory Richardson, Cricket Richardson, Melinda Darley, and Judge Collette Reed similar and/or different?
- 9) Which character(s) did you most identify with in the novel? Why?
- 10) How can society better support women and raise up their voices?