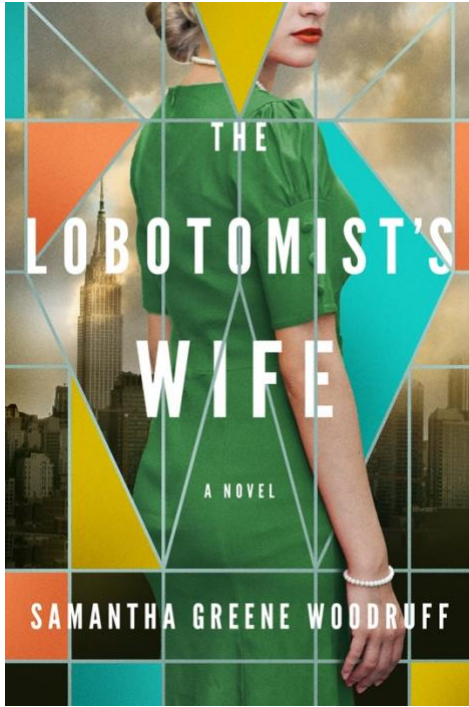


THE LOBOTOMIST'S WIFE

By: Samantha Greene Woodruff



THE LOBOTOMIST'S WIFE, written by debut author Samantha Greene Woodruff. At its heart, *The Lobotomist's Wife* is a novel about the struggle – particularly for women – to be true to themselves in the face of society's oppressive norms, and the lengths people will go to fit in.

Since her brother took his life after WWI, Ruth Emeraldine has had one goal: to help those suffering from mental illness. Then she falls in love with charismatic Rover Apter—a brilliant doctor championing a radical new treatment, the lobotomy. Ruth believes in it as a miracle treatment and in Robert as its genius pioneer. But as her husband spirals into deluded megalomania, Ruth can't ignore her growing suspicions. Robert is operating on patients recklessly, often with horrific results. And a vulnerable young mother, Margaret Baxter, is poised to be his next victim.

Margaret can barely get out of bed, let alone care for her infant. When Dr. Apter diagnoses her with the baby blues and proposes a lobotomy, she believes the procedure is her only hope. Only Ruth can save her—and scores of others—from the harrowing consequences of Robert's ambitions.

Inspired by a shocking chapter in medical history, *The Lobotomist's Wife* is a galvanizing novel of a woman fighting against the most grievous odds, of ego, and of the best intentions gone horribly awry.

Discussion Guide

1. *THE LOBOTOMIST'S WIFE* is inspired by the real story of a doctor whose passion turns to deadly obsession. Can you think of other moments in history in the same vein? How often do science and medicine cross the line of ethics and morality in the name of progress?
2. The novel explores how ego can distort best intentions into horrifying results, with broad-reaching consequences. Do you believe Robert did indeed have the best intentions? Can you pinpoint a scene or series of scenes in the book where his character began to deviate from the initial plan?

3. The book takes place between the 1930s-50s in New York at a time when the medical community endorsed lobotomy as a “miracle cure.” By the early 1940s, it was in broad use for extreme psychosis. How does the author convey mental health treatment in the era, and does it help explain why lobotomy was embraced by the medical community? Do you have a sense of whether the author remained true to the events and social structures of the time period?
4. Throughout the beginning of this novel, lobotomy is depicted as an innovative and revolutionary solution to what was believed as insanity. Compare and contrast this depiction of lobotomy to other titles that also reference it, such as *The One Who Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.
5. Is this a time period you knew a lot about before you read this book? If so, did you learn anything new? If not, did you come away with a greater understanding of what this particular time and place in history, especially for women, was actually like?
6. Ruth mourns her beloved brother, Harry and his suicide played a significant role decision to devote her life to caring for the mentally ill. Do you think Ruth is trying to compensate for not being able to save her brother?
7. Ruth falls for the brash and innovative neurologist Robert and his perceived compassion for his patients. Is she too readily accepting of his self-proclaimed cure for insanity and radical new treatment?
8. How did the blended genre of historical fiction and suspense/ thriller impact your reading experience? Did you have a sense of foreboding because of the knowledge we have today of the harmfulness of lobotomy?
9. Ruth is torn between her role as supportive wife and caretaker and administrator of the hospital. Both identities are at war throughout this book. When was the turning point for Ruth to accept that her role as a supportive wife shouldn’t be the reason her patients are mistreated? Do you think it should have happened sooner?

10. The novel keenly depicts postpartum depression in the character Margaret Baxter. As a young housewife humiliated by her inability to be a “proper” wife and mother, she’s desperate for a cure for her “baby blues.” Describe how mental illness awareness has changed over the course of time and how it hasn’t.
11. Margaret believes lobotomy will “fix” her. Does this desire to find a quick fix for the woes of being a housewife and mother have any parallels in today’s world?
12. Ruth and Margaret are both strong female characters who were held to a specific standard of their time. How did these standards impact their journeys? In what ways are they victims of society’s standards of typical loving, supportive wives?
13. Ruth blames herself for Robert harming her patients, and others, do you believe she could have done something different to deter him from acting so recklessly, or was he predetermined to be on this path?
14. The story is told in the close third person from Ruth and Margaret’s perspectives. How does this affect the story and how might it have been different if another character was telling the story?

AUTHORS BIO



AUTHOR. WRITER. STORYTELLER.

Samantha Greene Woodruff has a BA in history from Wesleyan University and an MBA from the NYU Stern School of Business. She spent most of her career telling stories to executives at MTV Networks as the senior vice president of strategy and business development and, subsequently, audience research for the Nickelodeon Kids & Family Group.

After leaving corporate life, she pursued her varied passions, teaching yoga, cooking, and taking classes at the Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College. It was here that she combined her multifaceted background with her wild imagination and passion for history, reading, and writing. *The Lobotomist's Wife* is her first novel, and she is already at work on her next historical fiction book. Sam lives in southern Connecticut with her husband, two children, and two dogs.

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