

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women Podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Lydia Reeder, author of *The Cure for Women: Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi and The Challenge to Victorian Medicine that Changed Women's Lives Forever*. Now, we've covered Dr. Jacobi on a previous episode, but I asked Lydia back to discuss another part of her book, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the rest cure. So first, could you explain what the rest cure was? Because I don't want anyone conflating this with self-care or a spa visit.

[Listen to Lydia's episode on Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi](#) or [read the transcript](#).

LR: No, it was about the opposite of a spa visit. The rest cure was a treatment developed by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell in 1877. He was a contemporary doctor with Mary Putnam Jacobi, and he developed it to address women's supposed mental deficiencies that kept them from adequately performing their wifely duties. And really, only wealthy women or upper-middle-class women could afford the rest cure. And these women usually spent their days sewing and reading romantic novels and planning meals and overseeing household chores and raising children. Because the more wealth a man had accumulated, the more leisure time his wife enjoyed, making this a status symbol during the height of the industrial age back then. So women stayed in the domestic sphere, is what they called it, and they were never supposed to enter the public sphere of politics and careers and higher education. Those areas were strictly reserved for men.

So this kind of restricted life for women often led, as you would suppose, to boredom and a trend known as female infirmity. Women kind of cultivated a worn-out appearance, wore airy white gowns. Pretending to be ill became all the rage, sort of. Popular women's magazines featured stories like *The Grave of My Friend* and *The Song of Dying*. Being at death's door was kind of trendy because women literally had nothing else to do. And the waiting rooms of prominent physicians became crowded with fashionable ladies providing a lucrative source of income for these doctors treating these supposedly sickly women. As a result, a thriving industry that depended on women's infirmity and sickness arose. Sometimes a woman confined to a life without any other options, other than staying at home and taking care of the kids, would erupt into fits of screaming, laughing, and crying. She might explode in rage or experience chronic fainting and violent contortions, hair tearing, and attempts to bite herself. This is what was described. And these frenzies became known obviously as hysteria. And if they lasted long enough, the family's last resort would be to send this woman, and they were most often younger women, to have a rest cure.

And so here's what the rest cure entailed. First of all, the patient was taken away from her family and all of her friends. She entered a hospital, usually a clinic specifically devoted to the rest cure. And after running tests to make sure that her illness wasn't real, like cancer or tuberculosis, which a lot of women did have, if the doctor found nothing clinically wrong with her, he diagnosed her with neurasthenia, a vague medical condition with the symptoms that I described, and also fatigue, headache, and irritability that was associated mostly with her emotional disturbance. And a patient's stay at these rest cure clinics could range from six weeks to two months or even longer. And once she entered the clinic, the patient was locked in a room with just a chair and a bed. She wasn't allowed visitors. She couldn't talk to her family. She couldn't read or write letters or even knit or sew. She could not do anything but just lie there. Many of the patients who visited the clinics were anorexic and had to be fattened up. So the crux at least of the first part of the rest cure was forced feeding. But first, if the patient was constipated, the doctor, and this was the 18th, 19th century, the doctor would insert an electrode into her anus and administer a brief shock to stimulate bowel movements followed by enemas made with olive oil and sometimes a quart or more of flaxseed tea.

So if the patient had not been hysterical at the start, she was hysterical now. But finally after her bowels were emptied, she was ready to proceed with what they called feedings. And during the first week, all she had was milk. She was restricted to a milk-only diet, sort of like a baby. And after that week of milk feedings, her day began really early and it was very stringent. At 7:30, she had cocoa or coffee or hot milk or beef broth or whatever the doctor ordered. At 8:30, she ate breakfast in bed. And at first, it was light breakfast, toast and juice, but later she might have eaten eggs or steak or mutton or potatoes or coffee. But she was absolutely required to clean her plate. After breakfast from 10 to 11, she received a Swedish massage to stimulate the blood flow. And that lasted for an hour. And generally patients like that part. After the massage, patients

received another 30 minutes of electrotherapy with currents strong enough to contract the muscles because obviously they weren't getting any exercise. So the massage and the electrotherapy helped keep their muscles intact because they weren't going anywhere. At noon, the patient could actually get dressed. Toward the end of her stay, if she was behaving properly and was getting better, she could see visitors or read her mail. Letter writing was still forbidden. And constantly she was being force-fed. At 3:00, she got a snack, supper was at seven and she drank hot milk at bedtime at 10 p.m. And this happened usually for six to eight weeks.

Once she was fattened up, the doctor began what they called her moral re-education, which taught her how to keep her emotions in check. The doctor would tell her that women should not share their feelings with others, that it was a bad habit that only made things worse and always bored their listeners which was usually their husband. To address women's emotional shortcomings, the doctor promoted order, control and self-restraint. They taught her how to schedule every minute of her day including sleep and leisure time. In this modern household that the rest cure embodied, there was no room for expressing your feelings or spontaneity or whimsy. Since her behavior was ultimately guided by her all-knowing doctor, who always reported to her husband, she didn't have to take any responsibility for her life. So she sublimated all of her needs. The demure patient who cleaned her plate every day and never complained was normally treated pretty well at these clinics. But if a patient became obstinate or argued with the doctor, she would receive basically threats and sometimes physical punishment like a spanking or even a strong electric shock.

The one essential ingredient to all these rescuers was the dominant male physician who took kind of a father-like or even god-like position to ensure that her belief in his opinions resulted in obedience and kind of a childlike acquiescence, especially if they had strong wills that needed breaking and that was part of their task. So after weeks of being fed and massaged and morally rejiggered, the doctors sent the women back to the exact same home life situation that had caused the hysterical symptoms in the first place and that is basically what the rest cure was.

AT: I think it really speaks to the impact that a deeply incompetent, I would say very stupid and frankly absurd, like as an individual person he was absurd, but how a man like that can gain power and effectively ruin a lot of people's lives. And so with that in mind, can you tell us a bit more about S. Weir Mitchell?

LR: Yes, S. Weir Mitchell was actually very tall and quite good-looking. He did graduate from one of the best medical schools in the country and he had these piercing blue eyes that was often described, so he knew how to present himself. He was known as a very distinguished doctor. He was from Philadelphia, that's where he lived. And he became known as a pioneer in the study of the female nervous system. And he had a very powerful charisma that attracted a following from both women and men and they referred to him as the Benjamin Franklin of his time. His research had been cited by Charles Darwin and William James and one admiring journalist described him as God's gift to women. Obviously his confidence was immense. He also saw himself as a very, very talented writer, sort of a renaissance man, and he created works that ranged from his medical case studies to writing children's books and romantic novels and also these lengthy narrative poems. He wrote stories about courageous young heroes. And his romance novels were full of these ultra-feminine women with really small hands and very delicate feet, which is strange. He often compared his poetry to Walt Whitman, who was a patient of his. And Whitman, who appreciated Mitchell's medical care, but Whitman once said that he found Mitchell's writing to be "non-vital, so stiff at the knees that his words don't quite float along freely with the fundamental of life or passion." In other words, it was all kind of BS. Mitchell also took hallucinatory drugs like mescal and peyote when he wrote his story, so you can just imagine what they were like. Also, the only person he ever looked up to in his entire life was his father, so as a result, he had what people described as a pathological obstinacy that led to nervous breakdowns and required long camping trips to restore his vigor, which I found, okay.

AT: I think that was actually a broader pattern of the time where men who were considered to have neurasthenia, while the women were having to do this awful rest cure, the men were told to go out west and

spend some time on a ranch and bro it up, I guess.

LR: Bro it up is the right word. You could become a cowboy, at least for a little while. Basically, it was getting away from everything, but there was a fad maybe about 20 years ago where men would go out and act like manly men in front of a campfire. I think that's what these guys were doing. That's what was recommended for men and after World War II, men had PTSD and so in that way, it did help them, but for women, it was "just get back into birthing children." Now, what S. Weir Mitchell did after graduating medical school to exert his manliness, he began to study snake venom, especially rattlesnakes, and so he collected dozens of snakes and injected their venom into various animals like dogs and cats and birds and muskrats and frogs and and he documented all of their painful deaths in research and he probably killed hundreds and hundreds of animals. But eventually his research, and I can't remember if he was the one that discovered it, but his research ultimately led to the development of the anti-venom for rattlesnake bites, but he also mistreated the rattlesnakes. It was an all-around, it would never be done today, let's just say.

AT: Just to tie that back to our conversation about Mary Putnam Jacobi, whose work he ripped off without citing her, by the way, this was still very early days when it came to medical research, so I would be very curious how much of what he was doing was methodical versus just being a sadist, with that thin veneer of science?

LR: I think sadism was equated with being manly, in a way, and Mary Putnam Jacobi also experimented on animals, but not like that. And back in the 19th century there were no laws that protected animals or said that you had to treat them humanely.

AT: Because you say in the book that some of these animals, it would take them hours of suffering, which I'm a huge animal lover, anybody who knows me knows I have too many cats in this house, and that was deeply painful. That was actually more painful to me to read than what he was doing to humans because the animals have no power in that situation and it just hurt.

LR: It did, and to me, in a way, I talked about that in the book because I saw a correlation between his doing that to animals and to the snakes and what he eventually started doing with his rest cure. It was in a way very sadistic with lots of gaslighting and not treating women as complete humans or individuals. So I think he graduated from animals to people in a way.

AT: It's also important to keep in mind that at this time, like we were saying in our previous conversation, medical research was still in its infancy and pseudoscience was rampant at this time. And when you say that, okay, he graduated from one of the best medical colleges, the educational bar for male doctors in the US was incredibly low at this time. And I think you even mentioned in the book that there were schools where they did oral exams because you didn't even have to be fully literate to become a doctor. So this is not the MD of today.

LR: No, it's certainly not the MD of today. Most medical schools before the late 1800s were very underfunded and accepted almost anyone. Medical students could barely write sometimes and so that's why they had oral examinations. Failing an oral examination rarely prevented a student from graduating. Before medical schools arose to become a doctor, you just followed somebody around and worked for them, worked for a doctor. And entry requirements were just not strict at all. You didn't have to have a degree to be admitted to medical school. They were more like trade schools back then. And at the time, before 1880 and later, there was really no scientific medicine, medicine based on scientific research. So they didn't know about bacteria, so doctors didn't wash their hands. Writing about women's medical school, when Elizabeth Blackwell and other women started their own medical schools, they made them actually much more difficult than men's medical schools because obviously, women had to be better educated than men in order to just be accepted.

AT: And yet, despite that, women's medical schools were often looked down upon by virtue of being for women, even though they were probably better than a lot of these men's schools.

LR: Yes, exactly. Well, and they had to have women's medical schools because they were not allowed to attend regular medical schools. But even in America, the best medical schools at the time were in France and Germany. And Mary Putnam Jacobi, was the first woman accepted into the Sorbonne, the Paris Medical School, which was the best medical school in the world at the time. And that's where she was in on the first inklings of scientific medicine. She worked in the laboratories of these great scientists who started basing evidence on medical practice. So what they found through their experiments, they started applying to medicine. So when she came back, she was better educated than a lot of men in medical school. So that's part of it.

AT: So we've got all that context. Now can you introduce us to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her life and how she ended up in this situation? And what came out of that, shall we say?

LR: Charlotte Perkins, as she was born, had a tough childhood. Her father abandoned his family when she was very young. So she grew up in poverty and felt like an outsider, relying on the support of her family. But it's pretty interesting. She came from a family of some notable figures. Her great-grandfather was a famous pastor called Lyman Beecher, and her great-aunts were Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. And they were famous in their own right at the time. But still, sadly, her father's family pushed her aside, so she missed out on the high education that she really wanted. But she was still, as a young girl, influenced by the popularity of her Beecher aunts, and she decided, like them, to devote herself to social reform. She was an avid reader, and she studied anatomy and physiology and geology and history. When she was 15, she realized she needed to curb her rebellious tendencies and decided to adopt a restricted series of self-disciplines. She took calisthenics and hygiene classes, and she would run a mile a day and vault and climb a knotted rope and walk on her hands. She could fly through the traveling ring. She was very, very athletic. And by the time she turned 19, she still visited the gym and still ran a mile, but she had started attending classes at the Rhode Island School of Design, which had just opened up. And she also got really active in the women's movement at this time. She became friends with Alice Stone Blackwell, who was the assistant editor of the Women's Journal, and they would exchange letters, and she would publish her poetry and her drawings in the journal. Charlotte met a very charming and very handsome bohemian artist whose name was Walter Stetson, and after three weeks of romance, they got married. He said he was madly in love with her. And after they got married, they were happy, and he was affectionate, and he was a nice guy. He was attentive. He helped with the cooking. He helped with the cleaning. But then Charlotte got pregnant and experienced really severe morning sickness throughout her entire pregnancy. And before giving birth, she wrote in her diary that she was hysterical on two occasions, and she made every effort to enjoy being pregnant and appreciate her family and friends, but she just got sicker. Nevertheless, she gave birth to a healthy daughter in 1885. But after giving birth, she fell into a really, really, really deep depression that she really never came out of. She had everything that she was supposed to want. A nice loving husband, a healthy baby, a nice home, she even had a servant, and yet Charlotte wrote, "I lay all day on the lounge and cry." For two years, she remained depressed. She felt hopeless. She would wake up and just not want to be around anybody, not her baby, not her husband. But she ended up blaming herself because her mother kept telling her to stop being lazy and learn to endure it. The only time she felt normal was when she was traveling away from home. She would visit friends in California and she would feel much better. But finally, her crying fits and her frenzies and her physical exhaustion made it clear to her husband and her mother that she needed help. And so a friend offered to pay her travel expenses to Philadelphia to seek help from S. Weir Mitchell at his clinic there. And before leaving, she wrote a very lengthy letter that she sent to Mitchell describing her symptoms and expressing her respect for him as the first authority on nervous disease. She described her own symptoms and her deepest fears about herself. And I really loved what she wrote. She said, "This agony of mind set in with the child's coming. I nursed her in slow tears. All that summer, I did nothing but cry, save for times when the

pain was unbearable and I grew wild, hysterical, almost imbecilic at times.” She said, “I beg of you not to laugh as everyone else does,” which was really sad. And then she talks about her life and that she's an artist and that she can earn a living as an artist and as a writer and that she wants to get better. And she even says she doesn't want to die, which is really sad. She pours out her heart in this letter. And so when she arrived at Mitchell's clinic and he did his initial examination, which he always did, and he told her that she of course had neurasthenia, in other words, hysteria, but that it was a curable mental disease. And when he told her that, she felt a lot of relief because she didn't know what was wrong with her and everybody was telling her that nothing was wrong with her. Other doctors were telling her, you need to take care of your baby. There's nothing wrong with you. They didn't believe her.

But Mitchell told her that she had reached a state of cerebral exhaustion. And for many patients like her, this statement alone, acknowledging the legitimacy of their ailments, restored their self-confidence and helped them recover. But then Charlotte decided to check in with Mitchell about the letter she sent him, where she vulnerably laid out her symptoms in the history of her condition. And she thought maybe it would give him insight into her condition, but his response was really shocking to her. He told her that he found the letter totally useless. He even suggested that her belief that her observations would interest him at all exhibited serious arrogance on her part. And that was that. He never talked about the letter with her again. (AT: To be fair, he does know a lot about baseless arrogance.) Not that he would ever admit that about himself.

And at this point in his career, Mitchell had seen hundreds of young women like Charlotte, but he always organized them into two different categories. The first category, it was selfishness and disobedience that led to malingering and hysteria. And the second category was mental and physical overwork, followed by exhaustion, breakdown, and finally hysteria. So, it was kind of like the Madonna/whore principle. There were these women who worked hard and they were just overworked and exhausted. And then there were these women who were selfish and disobedient. And there wasn't really anything, they were just making it all up. And so he had already placed Charlotte in the first group. A young frivolous woman who had flouted the rules of her sex and must now pay the price. And so she went through the entire rest cure.

And it was fairly uneventful. She reported that she liked the massages and had no problem with eating all the food. She gained weight. She stayed agreeable. She was just there to get well. So after a month, Mitchell pronounced her cured and sent her home with his final instructions: Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you at all time. Lie down an hour after each meal. Have but two hours intellectual life a day and never touch a pen or a brush or a pencil as long as you live. And he told this to a woman who was trained as a commercial artist and wanted to be a professional writer. But for Charlotte, she had somewhat recovered. She was away from home. She had gotten massages. She felt okay. So she returned home determined to follow Mitchell's advice. And for months afterwards, she ignored her intellectual life. She hid her pens and papers and was determined to live only as a wife and a mother. She did this to feel better, but she didn't feel better. She continued to get worse. Kind of during those months, the ghost of Dr. Mitchell commanding her to behave started to haunt her subconscious. She wanted to be well, and she wanted to be a good wife and mother, but she just wanted to pick up her paintbrush or write a story. She had told everyone that the famous doctor had cured her, but in reality, trying to follow Mitchell's rules, Charlotte came perilously close to psychosis herself. She dreamed of traveling to Pasadena, California to be with her best friend, a woman named Grace Channing. She tried to shop and cook and clean, but she just got worse. She became more paranoid, and she started crawling into closets and hunkering under beds trying to get away from the overwhelming stress of her obedience to Mitchell's rules.

Finally, it all came to a head in the fall of 1887. She realized she wouldn't survive if she stayed married, so she was trying to live up to the cultural demands placed on women by Mitchell that were driving them crazy. As a strong effort towards self-preservation, she separated from her husband and decided to do exactly as she pleased, so she took her child and went to California. Walter, her husband, was very sad, but for the first time in her life, she felt like she was doing what she needed to do for herself. That's when everything changed for her, and a very interesting thing occurred. She lived in California for a while with her best friend, and after a while, her husband joined them, and over time, she encouraged a romantic relationship between her husband

and her best friend. After she and Walter divorced, he married Grace, and Charlotte gave them custody to her daughter Katherine, and she was really, really happy. She was happy for the couple, and she felt like Katherine had a second mother, and she wrote that they were all better off in many ways.

So that kind of completed her journey from the rest cure to the time before she had to make a living as a writer. And so she struggled for a while, and she was still experiencing her depression. Finally, one night, it was so overwhelming that she began writing her autobiographical story that would make her famous, the story titled *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It's a very intriguing story. It's narrated by a young married woman suffering from nervous depression and a slight hysterical tendency. And her husband, John, was a doctor who decided that he was going to cure her by taking her away from her family and taking her to the countryside, renting a large house, and locking her in the upstairs bedroom, where there were bars on the window, and the walls were covered with a hideous yellow wallpaper. And the wife begged her husband that confinement was not good for her, that she believed that working outside and congenial company would make her better. And similar to Mitchell, her husband imposed a strictly regimented treatment, commanding her to not even think about her condition, and his sister acted as Charlotte's nurse and watched over her constantly.

So the character in the story spent days and days alone in the room staring at the walls, staring through the bars of the windows and then staring at the yellow wallpaper. And she would plead with her husband to let her out to go for a walk, and he said, "but you're beginning to gain weight, you're getting better." After a while, she became obsessed with the yellow wallpaper. At one point, her husband, when she was begging him to be let out, her husband threatened to send her to S. Weir Mitchell. That calmed her down real fast and made her say, "okay, okay, I'll stay here." And so of course, her condition continued to deteriorate. She began to actually see figures of women within this yellow wallpaper, and then one day, the narrator of the story noticed that there were many women slithering like snakes behind the shapes in the wallpaper, and in a frantic way to escape her condition, she began to scratch at the terrifying wallpaper, peeling it away. She wanted to commit suicide, but there was no way because there wasn't anything she could do it with, so her only escape was madness. And so, like the creepy women in the wallpaper, she begins crawling in circles around the edges of the room, and when her husband breaks into the room, he sees her crawling along the floor, and the condition that she's in causes him to faint, so he faints to the floor, and the story ends with her continuing to crawl over him and crawl around the room with the other creeping women.

Nothing like that had ever been written by a woman before, and when she wanted to publish it, she sent a copy to the famous author, editor, and literary critic William Dean Howells, and William Howells had his own connection. He was a friend of Dr. Mitchell's, and Howells had at one point sent his 25-year-old daughter Winifred to Mitchell for care. Like Charlotte, Winifred was a very imaginative young woman. She was a good student who loved to write poetry, but when she was in her mid-teens, she got really sick and supposedly had a mental breakdown. And so she started losing weight, and all these doctors came to see her, and they couldn't do anything, so despite his wife's objections, Howells sent her to S. Weir Mitchell. When she arrived at Mitchell's hospital, she weighed 57 pounds, but Mitchell, despite that fact, started the same treatment for her that he used for all those patients. She didn't get to see her family. He tried to force feed her, but Winifred, even though she was feeble, she had a very strong will, and from the very beginning she told Dr. Mitchell that she was in great pain, and that her illness had a different cause. She repeatedly described her pain to Mitchell, but he never listened to her. She refused to eat, and he would force feed her, and then he would go see William Dean Howells and say, we're progressing, she gained five pounds, she's getting better, but she was in his care for months without any change, and so finally Mitchell shipped her to another one of his treatment centers. By this time he had several around town, and most of them were run by nurses that he had trained, and one week after she was transferred, her heart just stopped, and she died. To Mitchell's surprise, she died, and this just proves that he didn't monitor his patients at all. And supposedly he performed an autopsy on her and found an organic element that he hadn't found, that caused her death. Maybe she had a bad heart, who knows.

When William Dean Howells got Charlotte Perkins' story, he may have known who she was, but she was writing about Mitchell. And I don't know if Charlotte ever knew about Winifred, Howells' daughter, but Howells took *The Yellow Wallpaper* and made sure that it got published. That's what actually made her famous, and it

received very interesting reviews. It received a lot of good publicity. One reviewer wrote that the story read like the scrappy reminiscences of an opium debauché. She also got fan letters. One man wrote that it entirely described a mental condition very well. To me, it was a very interesting story how Charlotte Perkins Gilman, eventually Gilman, published *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* was not recognized as a revolutionary feminist work until decades later, and as fate would have it, the story that Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote and that Howells helped to popularize would ultimately destroy the once stellar reputation of S. Weir Mitchell and his rest cure. Decades later, people would tear down statues of him because of that, but I found that quite interesting.

Years later, Charlotte married her cousin, Mr. Gilman, in New York and moved to New York City where he lived, and she was very happy, but she still suffered from depression, and since she found herself living just a few blocks away from Mary Putnam Jacobi, she went to visit Dr. Jacobi, who gladly agreed to treat her because Mary Putnam Jacobi had her own issues with S. Weir Mitchell, and Gilman was considered now to be one of his failures. So Jacobi really wanted to look into it, and she told Gilman after her examination that she wanted to treat her experimentally, and I guess back then it was new. Charlotte had put together what she called her own fever chart. She once again brought her own recordings of her illness with her to see Mary Putnam Jacobi, and over the years, she had charted out her bad days and her good days just to see if there was a pattern. And even though Jacobi thought that getting emotionally involved with patients could lead to mistakes and diagnosis and treatments, she was a pretty strict doctor in that way. She really admired Charlotte's careful record keeping and said, "of course, let's work together as partners," and that made Charlotte really happy, so they seemed to enter into this symbiotic relationship, and Gilman later wrote that Jacobi was the most patient physician that she had ever known, and that she seemed to enter into the mind of the sufferer, which I thought was very complementary. But basically her treatment was, instead of making her drink milk all the time, she started her out by just putting together children's blocks and starting with very, very simple tasks and moving slowly to reading textbooks on cellular biology, and then she had her play basketball. And it was just a very interesting treatment. But in the end, Charlotte said that it was really helpful and considered it a very successful treatment, and that was toward the end of Mary Putnam Jacobi's career, and I thought that was really interesting, the circular way that that came about.

AT: Now, I feel like this is one of those parts of history that people look at and are like, "oh, well, that's just so ridiculous," and they think it has no relevance to today, but I actually see a lot of corollaries here with pseudoscience wellness trends that are at best ineffective, at worst, actively harmful, and often, not always, there are definitely true believers out there, but often come back to people wanting to make money and have a positive reputation without really caring about the impact on vulnerable people who are seeking help.

LR: For S. Weir Mitchell and these groups of male physicians back then, it was making money, but it was even more than that. The data-backed science ultimately proved that hysteria, which they were basing all these treatments on, was a fabricated illness. It was definitely a pseudoscience. Mitchell must have known that his treatments really weren't helping, but Mitchell believed at the time, and a lot of doctors believed at the time, in eugenics and social Darwinism, and Darwin thought that in the struggle for existence, and especially for the possession of women, men acquire their, he called it, vigor and courage. So women's total dependence on men, along with their desire to be attractive, had to be maintained by these men. Otherwise, these men would not continue to evolve and be the highest creatures on the evolutionary totem pole. Mitchell viewed the rest cure as a means to preserve the white man's superior status in evolutionary existence. So yes, there's a lot of making money out of it, but also in this case, they were true believers in this desire to keep women in their little corners so that they couldn't get out and become self-fulfilled human beings, and that was part of the reason that they did that. And we're even seeing that here today in America with the Christian nationalist takeover of the U.S. government. These mediocre, cruel white men trying to stuff women back into their 19th century roles as reproducers and husband worshippers. It kind of never goes away. It's very truly a pseudoscience.

AT: And so with that in mind, what do you think modern audiences can take away from stories like Gilman's and works like *The Yellow Wallpaper*?

LR: I've been thinking a lot lately about the trad wife movement. And here in America, at least, it's kind of like the social media implementation of the rescuer, kind of. Their message is basically that having babies is all that women are meant for, and that's all you need, and that you don't really have to make decisions about your life, that your husband will fulfill your every need. Don't read books or think for yourself. Just sublimate all your own desires for your husbands. It's the same thing. And in the long run, it's terrible for both men and women. So the takeaway is, pay attention to history. Learn from the women who experienced this life firsthand and fought against it, and just be vigilant because things happen over and over and over again, just in different ways. I think that people do pay attention to history, and the trad wives movement is just a minor thing here, but it's very interesting to me. And then you see the ex-trad wives are coming out now, who are saying, no, it didn't quite work out for them. And I think things are hopeful. It's just a continuing ebb and flow. And in these days, we're seeing the pushback against women and people of color and the LGBTQ movement gaining more power. This is just the pushback to it, but we'll figure out how to fight back. And I think it's already happening right now. When I wrote my book, to tell you the truth, I was kind of angry the whole time I was writing it, and it all seemed quite familiar as to what's going on today. But look, what happened. Women got the vote, and things slowly over time got better. We just have to give it time, and history shows us how to do that.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women Podcast, and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.