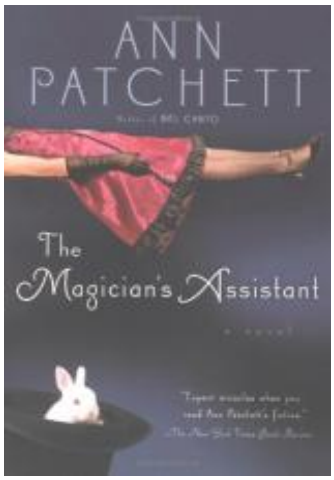
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The Magician's Assistant

by Ann Patchett



About the Book

A secretive magician's death becomes the catalyst for his partner's journey of self-discovery in this "enchanting" book (*San Francisco Chronicle*) "that is something of a magic trick in itself-a 1990s love story with the grace and charm of a nineteenth-century novel" (*Newsweek*).

Discussion Guide

1. Sabine never had the kind of passionate love with Parsifal that her mother has with her father and that Bertie has with Haas. Is it possible to be happy in a marriage without it? Was Sabine genuinely happy with Parsifal? Dot tells Sabine she has never experienced this kind of passion either. Do you think finding your true love is destiny or luck?

2. The settings of this novel play an important role in defining the characters. Los Angeles is a city where "there are no laws against pre-tending to be something you weren't." Considering that he was born in a conservative Midwestern town and that he killed his father there, was the illusion Parsifal created about his past understandable or was he selfish? If Parsifal had been born and raised in New York City or Chicago, would his illusion have been necessary?

3. Sabine's dreams help her journey through her grief. She believes that "sometimes it was possible for someone to come back." Do you think Phan and Parsifal are really coming back from the "beyond" in her dreams? Why is it Phan and not Parsifal whom she dreams about first? Why do you think Sabine was able to have such a good relationship with her husband's lover when he was alive?

4. On the plane to Nebraska, Sabine looks out of the window and reflects that "it looked like a world she would build herself, the order and neatness of miniature." What is she revealing about herself? Are the miniature buildings she creates saying something important about her personality or is that just her job? When her airplane is struck by violent turbulence, she thinks dying then wouldn't be so terrible. Do you think Sabine really wants to die?

5. The first magic trick that Sabine performs in Nebraska is when she pulls an egg out from behind Dots ear. What is significant about her doing this trick at this very moment? Gradually, Sabine performs more and more magic tricks. What is happening to her emotionally that the magic reveals? Is she discovering something about her own ability or is she simply carrying on for Parsifal?

6. Watching the Johnny Carson video is like a religion for Dot's family. Why is it so important to them? Sabine watches it with them twice. While watching it the first time what does she realize about their magic act and her role as the magician's assistant? How is her reaction different the second time she watches it, and why?

7. Sabine finally dreams about Parsifal. But at first she thinks that he is Kitty. Was this just a mistake because they look so much alike or is it more meaningful? Do you think that Sabine and Kitty are really gay? Do you think they would have fallen in love had each of them not loved Parsifal? Kitty says that she dreams of Parsifal and Phan too. Are we supposed to think that Parsifal has somehow brought them together?

8. A big part of a magician's trick is the skillful manipulation of the audience. Is Sabine manipulating the Fetters? When she performs the card trick that enrages Howard, do you think it was an honest mistake? Do you think Kitty leaves him simply because he hurts Bertie? Do you think that if Howard had been a better husband and father Kitty and Sabine would have fallen in love?

9. At Bertie's wedding, Sabine does Parsifal's card trick from her dream. Is there a secret to this trick or is it really "magic"? She tells her assistant at the wedding that she doesn't know how she pulled it off. Is Sabine telling the truth? In her dream Parsifal's card trick causes great excitement, but at the wedding the guests are more impressed by how she shuffles the cards. Why doesn't this disappoint Sabine?

10. The Magician's Assistant begins, "Parsifal is dead. That is the end of the story." Is Parsifal s death really the end of the story? In her last dream, Sabine waves goodbye to him. Do you think she will dream about Parsifal again? Do you think Kitty will finally leave Al and go to Los Angeles with Sabine?

Author Bio

Ann Patchett is the author of novels, works of nonfiction and children's books. She has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the PEN/Faulkner, the Women's Prize in the UK, and the Book Sense Book of the Year. Her novel, THE DUTCH HOUSE, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Her work has been translated into more than 30 languages, and *Time* magazine named her one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. President Biden awarded her the National Humanities Medal in recognition of her contributions to American culture. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where she is the owner of Parnassus Books.

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