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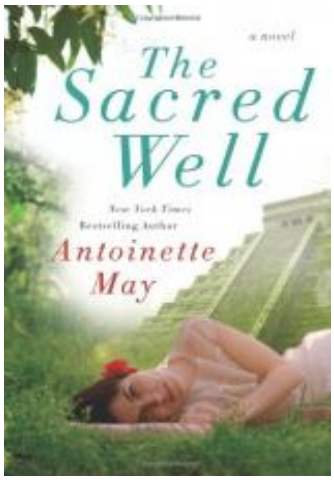
The Sacred Well

by Antoinette May



About the Book

A young reporter in 1923, Alma Reed accompanies archaeologists to the ruins of Chichen Itza, where a fortune in Mayan artifacts has been stolen from a sacrificial well. It's believed a curse was unleashed by the theft --- yet the career-making story it offers the ambitious journalist seems a godsend. It also leads her to a passionate love affair with revolutionary governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto. But when fate darkens their lives and damns them as doomed political pawns, Alma can't help but wonder if the curse is not, in fact, very real.

In another century, another writer is fascinated by Alma's tragic story. Drawn restlessly to Yucatán --- and away from the stifling needs of her desperately ill partner --- Sage Sanborn is tempted by her growing feelings for David, a scientist who encourages her to delve deeper into Alma's history. And in this ancient place of mystery and spirits, Sage must make an impossible decision that will forever change the course of her life.

Discussion Guide

1. Did you like the protagonist Alma Reed? Did you like Sage Sanborn? The author avoided the limitation of a one-voice narrative by revealing Reed's early 20th century dilemma through the nuanced eyes of Sage Sanborn, her 21st century counterpart. Did this approach work for you? Without the contemporary perspective, would Reed's story have had the same meaning?

2. Were women of Alma Reed's day truly more constrained than we are today? If so, how did those restraints effect Reed's choices? What --- if anything --- has changed? Did the mores of her time deepen or lesson the tragedy of Reed's life? How did the more subtle expectations of today's society challenge Sage?

3. Felipe Carrillo Puerto is frequently referred to as the Abraham Lincoln of Mexico. Is this description valid? Do you draw an inference from the fact that both were assassinated?

4. What do you think of Felipe? Do you see parallels with John Kennedy, or Bill Clinton? How would you compare Alma Reed to Monica Lewinsky?

5. What adjectives would you use to describe a cenote? What does the cenote at Chichen Itza represent to Alma? What does it mean to Sage? Why do you think the author named the book **The Sacred Well**?

6. Why was Sage driven to write the story of Alma Reed? What lessons did she learn from her? How are the two protagonists alike? How do they differ?

7. What lessons does Sage learn from her two key men in her life, Mark and David?

8. Though living in very different times, Sage and Alma were each driven to explore the Yucatan. What fascinated them? Whatmotivations did they share?

9. Do you believe that Don Eduardo was a hero for retrieving artifacts from the well, or was he guilty of theft? What about the museum who secretly accepted the artifacts that he had salvaged at such a great personal cost?

10. Do you believe that Mark asked too much of Sage? Did Sage make the right choice? What is the nature of sacrifice? Where do the responsibilities of a caregiver begin and end? How much is too much? What of the responsibility to one's self?

Author Bio

Antoinette May reads Tarot cards, chases ghosts, and collects myths. Her fascination with the unknown led her to write the bestselling **Adventures of a Psychic**, a biography of clairvoyant Sylvia Browne, which spent 42 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list.

Antoinette's love of legend inspired her debut novel, **Pilate's Wife**, which has been translated into 17 languages, and the upcoming Sacred Well, a story centered around the Maya ruins of Chichen Itza.

A former newspaper editor, Antoinette writes a weekly column for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Her articles have appeared in *Cosmopolitan, Self, Country Living*, and *Ms.* magazines. She's a native of La Jolla, California, and later resided in Palo Alto, California, where she spent six years researching the historical background for **Pilate's Wife** at Stanford University. An award-winning travel writer, Antoinette and her husband, Charles Herndon, have "settled" in the historic California Gold Rush town of Mokelumne Hill.

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