

The Magician's Assistant Study Guide

The Magician's Assistant by Ann Patchett

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Plot Summary

The Magician's Assistant by Ann Patchett is a fascinating novel that explores how well people may know someone without knowing their history. After Parsifal's death, Sabine learns the truth about many things in his past that he had lied about. The Magician's Assistant is an interesting novel that investigates the importance of secrets from the past.

After Parsifal's death, Sabine learns that his family is not dead as he had always told her. When Parsifal's mother, Dot, asks to visit with her daughter, Bertie, Sabine agrees. Although the visit is awkward at first and Sabine is afraid to question Dot about Parsifal, she grows more comfortable with them as she takes them to see sites in Los Angeles that Parsifal frequented, as well as the cemetery where both Parsifal and Phan are buried. Sabine grows despondent after they leave and considers visiting them.

At Dot's invitation, Sabine agrees to visit the Fetters' home in Alliance, Nebraska where Parsifal was born. In Alliance, Sabine meets Kitty, Parsifal's sister, who greatly resembles him. From Kitty, Sabine learns that Parsifal was sent to the Nebraska Boys Reformatory after killing his father, not for being homosexual as Dot had told her. While she is in Alliance, Sabine learns a lot about Parsifal's past as Guy Fetters, which she analyzes in comparison to the man she was in love with. She develops a close relationship with Kitty, who she invites to live with her when Kitty has marital problems.

Throughout the novel, Phan and Parsifal visit Sabine in her dreams to encourage and comfort her, and the night before Bertie's wedding, Parsifal shows Sabine a card trick that is true magic. Sabine performs the card trick at Gertie's reception, though no one except her assistant realizes that it is truly magic. Bertie thinks that the trick is perfect, and as the only member of the family that was not all that familiar with Guy, she thinks it is the one he would have chosen, and in a way, that is exactly what he did.



Section 1: Pages 1 Through 25

Section 1: Pages 1 Through 25 Summary

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Parsifal, Sabine's husband, best friend, and employer has just died on the MRI table at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. He suffered a terrible headache which turned out to be an aneurism that caused his death. Sabine replays the day's events from Parsifal waking up and telling her all about a dream he had about Phan, his recently deceased lover, to the headache that arrived around the same time as the dream to the gentleness of the nurse that was attending him at the MRI where he died.

Parsifal's death was not unexpected, but it was not expected so soon. Phan recently died from AIDS, and Sabine married Parsifal for the convenience of avoiding inheritance issues once Parsifal succumbed to the illness. Sabine leaves the hospital and wanders aimlessly, recounting the instructions Parsifal had given her for when his time came. She ponders the entirety of conversations, including her own protests against them at the time.

Sabine returns home, calls her parents to inform them of Parsifal's death, and goes to bed in Parsifal and Phan's bedroom. She begins to take account of their belongings, placing sentiment to everything. She stays in bed for several days. Parsifal's attorney, Roger, calls to invite her to lunch. Sabine agrees, but goes back to bed.

Sabine dreams of Phan, who apologizes for taking Parsifal away. He says he caused the aneurism so Parsifal would not suffer because he knew of her hopes for a quick and painless death. Phan also tells Sabine that Parsifal is not ready to come visit her because he is embarrassed about what he left unknown. Phan admits that he does not know about Parsifal's unknown things either. The thing that is unknown is left unknown. Roger calls back when she has not arrived and offers to come visit because he has important news.

Sabine is still trying to hold onto the dream about Phan when Roger arrives. Roger's visit reveals that Parsifal left a portion of money to his family, who Sabine had thought was dead. All through Roger's explanation, Sabine has fragmented flashes of the conversation in her dream and is only half paying attention to what Roger is saying. As Roger proceeds to tell Sabine that Parsifal's real name was Guy Fethers and that he has a mother and two sisters alive in Nebraska, contrary to what Parsifal had told her for the past twenty-two years, Sabine slips into a quiet denial.



Section 1: Pages 1 Through 25 Analysis

Sabine is a woman surviving on autopilot from the moment that Parsifal dies. She knows her duties and begins the arrangements that he requested. She meticulously replays the conversations they had about how he was to be buried in her head. She fixates on his wishes, his belongings, memories, and in her depression, Sabine does not break down and allow her grief to overcome her duties as Parsifal's wife. Sabine was in love with Parsifal, who was in love with Phan, so her being Parsifal's wife was out of family love and friendship than romantic love, so she takes being his wife very seriously, almost like a job. She, herself, though has fallen into a deep depression and is unable to get of bed. The reader is left with a sense that they want to comfort her, advise her, or even give her distance. The timeline is filled with momentary accounts of her memories of conversations, places, or items that she encounters. It is a quiet longing and dutiful remembrance.

Sabine's dream conversation with Phan, where he tells her that Parsifal had not told him either, is an oddly ominous comment. The reader is aware the marriage was one of friendship instead of romance, but the inference that he was not honest with her leaves the one questioning as to why the attorney has called. Roger's revealing that Parsifal has a living family he had told Sabine was dead, and that Parsifal was named Guy Fetters, are shocks she isn't ready to take. Between her dream conversation with Phan implying that her years with Parsifal were cut short because of a thought she had, as well as loosing Parsifal himself, she is not ready to give up her idea of the man she loved.



Section 2: Pages 26 Through 49

Section 2: Pages 26 Through 49 Summary

Roger proceeds to explain to Sabine that Parsifal left a Trust and letter of instructions for him at the time of his death. Roger gives Sabine the option of contacting the family herself, but she decides to think it over during the night. As she reads the letter, she assesses every conversation she and Parsifal ever had about his family. His story that they were from Connecticut and died in a car accident was the only story he had always stuck to, but the topic was one that he avoided and did not enjoy discussing.

The following day, Sabine meets her parents for lunch at a restaurant named Canter's. She explains about the letter and the family that Parsifal had never mentioned. Both her mother and father explore reasons why Parsifal would lie about his family, and they agree that whatever the reason was, the family must not have been very good to him for him to go out of his way to not acknowledge them as living and advise her to respect that choice.

Later, Sabine ponders the conversation she and her parents had about Parsifal's family and decides to have Roger call the family. When he asks her if he is allowed to provide her contact information to them if requested, she agrees. She thinks that after twenty-two years of not speaking to Parsifal, they will not want to call her. Sabine spends the next days going through a box of old letters, diaries and folders. She finds an log of Phan's decline and daily history, a less detailed one Parsifal attempted to keep of his own decline, her letters and cards to him, and a postcard addressed to Guy Feters NBRF, from 1966.

On the ninth day, Dorothy Feters, Parsifal's mother, calls. Not sure how to handle the call, Sabine assumes it must be due to the money Parsifal left to them. Eventually, Mrs. Feters requests to visit in order to see where Parsifal is buried and to meet his wife. Sabine reluctantly agrees and even offers to pick them up from the airport. However, she spends the next nights comparing the Parsifal she loved to Guy Feters that she had only recently learned existed. She alternates between thinking of Parsifal as an abused victim and a tyrant who thought of her as foolish enough to believe whatever he told her. On Saturday, which marks the arrival of the Feters, Sabine drives to the airport to pick up Parsifal's mother and sister, and she is shocked to discover that they recognize her from her and Parsifal's appearance on the Tonight Show from so many years before.

Section 2: Pages 26 Through 49 Analysis

Sabine is both shocked and curious about this other family that Parsifal had that she had not heard of. She is hurt and confused at his omission from her, but yet cannot help but feel that the people that Parsifal had run from and lied about must not be anyone



who were loving if he had cut them out of his life, and that she should respect his wishes for her not to know anything of them. For a short time she digs through the records in the house to find a letter or photograph, something to validate this past life that she can't quite embrace. All she finds is a postcard dated 1966 that is marked with only two lines. She begins to wonder what kind of woman sends her son only a two-line postcard. Sabine realizes that the woman she is now imagining as Parsifal's mother is much different than the one she had always imagined in her head, which in turn makes Parsifal a much different man than she had imagined. Her wondering drives her to question how much of the man that she has loved for twenty-two years was all imagination.



Section 3: Pages 50 Through 74

Section 3: Pages 50 Through 74 Summary

Sabine takes the Fetters to the cemetery where Parsifal is buried and purchases two bouquets for Parsifal and Phan. Both the woman comment on the beauty of the cemetery, while Sabine's mind wanders back to when Phan and Parsifal purchased the plots. At that time, Phan had slipped aside to tell her that he had purchased one for her as well because she is family and should be with them, even though she thought the place crass. Dot's visit with the grave is conversational. She tells Guy all about how they learned of his death, and amid her chatting, she notices Phan's grave. When Sabine explains that Phan bought the plots, Dot places a flower on his grave for being so kind to her son. At Sabine's house, the Fetters are taken with everything in the house as they rush through it as if seeking something. Dot discovers Parsifal and Sabine's wedding picture in the bedroom and also notices the photographs of Phan all over the house.

The parting at the hotel is uncomfortable. Sabine has so many questions she wants to ask but does not, and these questions plague her on her return home, though a project she is working on and distracts her into cutting her hand just before Dot Fetters calls. Dot invites her the hotel bar for a couple of drinks. Seizing her second chance, Sabine accepts the invitation. After a drink, Dot notices her hand. After unwrapping half of the bandage, Dot insists on taking Sabine to the hospital. Once there, Dot tells Sabine stories of Parsifal's childhood injuries and of how he really received the scar on his face. While Sabine gets her stitches, Dot finally asks what Parsifal had told her of his family. Sabine answers that Parsifal had told her that they were dead, making Dot realize that Sabine must think the worst of them.

Returning from the hospital to the bar, Dot confesses she knew Parsifal was gay and she is puzzled about the marriage. Sabine explains she was in love, but the marriage was of friendship. Finally, Sabine asks why Parsifal would say his family was dead. Dot explains that in Alliance in 1966 she knew nothing of what being gay meant and sent her boy to the Nebraska Boys Reformatory Facility. He returned at the age of eighteen, packed his bag and left. That was the last she knew of her son for fifteen years until she saw him with Sabine on the Johnny Carson show. She had written him a letter, but he had requested that she not do so again. Phan returns in Sabine's dreams that night and tells her that Parsifal is coming around but she must be patient and that Parsifal needs her help in forgiving his mother.

Section 3: Pages 50 Through 74 Analysis

Sabine has a reluctant acceptance of what Dot Fetters wants from her: not forgiveness for her actions, but to know the man that Guy Fetters had become, the man that Sabine had known and loved. Sabine finds the strength to comply. The actions of this section are a bare foreshadow of the upcoming sections where Sabine takes this adventure



herself to find and know the man that Parsifal was before he became the man that she knew. Due to this, Sabine has a bonding moment with Dot that becomes the foundation of the healing and forgiveness that Phan eludes to with his request for Sabine to assist Parsifal with peace in the afterlife. Although there are moments when this is difficult for Sabine to address, she also sees the importance of what these actions are to the woman that lost her son years before his death.



Section 4: Pages 75 Through 99

Section 4: Pages 75 Through 99 Summary

The next morning, Sabine calls the women because she is taking them out to the places that Parsifal liked to go in order to show them who he was when he lived in Los Angeles. Sabine first takes the Fetters to the rug store that Parsifal owned where she introduces them to Salvio, who runs the store. Salvio tells the Fetters of the time that Parsifal and Phan met. After that, Sabine takes them to lunch at the Magic Castle where Sabine and Parsifal had appeared several times and enjoyed hanging out.

Monty, the owner, immediately makes them welcome and questions Sabine about possibly returning on her own. Sabine remembers when Parsifal had told her to take over the act and to continue with the tricks after he passed. Sally, the hostess, brings Sabine back to reality when she tells Sabine and the others to come up to the show after they finish lunch because Sam Spender is finishing up the show today. Throughout lunch, several magicians come to the table to meet the Fetters and pay Sabine their respects, and although Sabine is glad to have the Fetters see how much Parsifal was loved, she is quickly sinking into a hole of reminders that he will not be back.

After lunch, Sabine and the Fetters go to see the show, where Sam calls Sabine up on stage, and she has a panic attack. Sabine is surrounded with everything that her life was before Parsifal died, and now it is all closing in on her. Dot takes Sabine off of the stage and out of the Magic Castle, but once she has had a moment to calm down, she suggests going back to the cemetery. Against Dot and Bertie's protest, Sabine finally wants to go. Dot reveals that Mr. Fetters died in an accident and that she should have been thinking more of Sabine than herself with all the sight-seeing. Returning to the cemetery, Sabine tells the women of how she met Parsifal and how taken she was with him. She tells them about the wedding and the party they had after.

Afterwards, Sabine takes the Fetters back to her house, and they spend the following morning going through photos from a box. Dot finds one photo of Kitty, Parsifal's other sister, which thrills her. Bertie takes some new photos of Dot, Sabine and Rabbit before Sabine takes them to the airport where this time good bye is not uncomfortable but difficult. Bertie invites Sabine to her wedding, and Dot opens the invitation.

Section 4: Pages 75 Through 99 Analysis

Sabine's decision to take the Fetters out, to show them all the places that Parsifal loved and visited, places her in the same places she had spend with him for the last twenty-two years. Up until now in the story, Sabine has been depressed by Parsifal's passing and been task minded to complete her duties as his wife, but has not grieved his loss. In taking the Fetters to the Magic Castle, several magicians remind her of what she has lost and in Sam calling her to the stage, she reaches the point where she cannot look

past what she has been ignoring. That she is alone and will need to move on with her life on her own. Having Dot and Bertie at the house for the night, going through the photos, gives her a sense of togetherness in her grief that she didn't know she needed, so when they invite her to come to Nebraska, she considers the offer and foreshadows the coming story for Sabine to learn about Parsifal when he was Guy Fethers.



Section 5: Pages 99 Through 124

Section 5: Pages 99 Through 124 Summary

In the days after the Fetters leave for Nebraska, Sabine returns to bed. On the eighth day, a letter comes from Dot with four photos, three from out back that Bertie had taken and one of Parsifal as a boy. She tries to imagine his life then. The next day, Sabine meets her parents at Canter's. They voice their concern that meeting the Fetters was bad for her and that they have made her loss worse. Sabine, however, cannot seem to get the idea of visiting the Fetters out of her mind. When she goes home, the house feels bigger, emptier, and she acknowledges that she cannot stay there any longer as all she remembers is the last day she was with Parsifal. She relives that last day in every detail from the machine, Parsifal's fear and then his death.

Sabine finally calls Dot to talk, but Dot immediately suspects that she is coming to visit and gets Bertie on the phone to help convince her. Sabine reveals that she has decided to visit and will be there the next day. Sabine's flight in the smaller aircraft from Denver to Scottsbluff is horribly turbulent, and the lone flight attendant becomes hysterical. Sabine mentally lists off all the belongings that are now hers that would go to her parents on her death. She thinks of how her parents had left Israel for her sake, how they had gone to Montreal, but that the snow was too much for them to bear with the fear of what might take Sabine. The attendant begins to rant about how she had taken the job to get out of a little town she was from and see the world, but all she was on were these little flights that were too dangerous and crashed all the time. The captain finally silences her as they begin the decent to the Scottsbluff airport where Sabine is immediately escorted through the falling snow to safety inside.

Section 5: Pages 99 Through 124 Analysis

Sabine cannot get the idea of visiting the Fetters' home out of her mind. As they had come to visit Los Angeles to find out what kind of man Parsifal was in his life, she longs to know what kind of boy he had been. Sabine makes hasty arrangements to leave for Nebraska, not because of eagerness to be near the Fetters, but to be away from her house that now seems too large and too much to handle. On Sabine's trip, the plane hits turbulence that has Sabine thinking that she may die on this trip, and she mentally catalogs the belonging that she inherited from Phan and Parsifal that would now be inherited by her parents. Oddly, she is comforted by the fact that her parents will go on with their lives should she die, that they will not be rendered immobile from her death as she has by Parsifal's.



Section 6: Pages 124 Through 148

Section 6: Pages 124 Through 148 Summary

Dot and Bertie are waiting for Sabine once she arrives along with Bertie's fiancé, Haas. Haas is quiet, almost seeming shy, but he clearly dotes on Bertie, and Sabine feels a sense of joy for her. When she arrives at the Fetters home, she is immediately reminded of a comment that Parsifal had made about how much he hated paintings of covered bridges and prints made of them as she stares at a huge print of just such a painting hanging over the couch. Once she spies the photos hanging on the wall, she remembers Dot looking through her home for photos and feels the same compulsion. The Fetters are concerned about Kitty, the other sister, not being at the house to make supper and are embarrassed about having to send out for pizza but will not go into any further detail on the topic. Clearly, it is continuing issue.

Sabine asks to see Parsifal's room and is taken with the Tartan rug on the floor. She thinks of a boy in his room, imagining the hand tied knots of rugs. She thinks of pulling up the rug to see if there is a secret spot, a trap door or a clue, to who the boy was inside this room when he was alone. While Sabine is looking at a family photo, Dot reveals that she told a bit of a lie to Kitty, that she told her that Parsifal had her photo in his room and not in a box of old photos. She explains that Kitty and Guy were very close and that it would hurt her to know she was not thought of every day as she had thought of him. Sabine agrees not to tell. Shortly after dinner, Sabine heads to bed thinking that she will be in the same bed that Parsifal slept in as a child, and she awakens to find herself in the snow with Phan. He has come to her in a dream again, and she is happy to see him. Phan holds her tightly within his coat and lets her know that she is not alone because he watches her always.

Section 6: Pages 124 Through 148 Analysis

Sabine is surprised by the excitement the Fetters have over her having arrived, as they might not believe she were coming. She also has an odd sense of being out of place, where the Fetters fit in and almost blend into the same as all the other people in the airport, but that she found them to appear more confident than they had in Los Angeles. On the way to their home, she notes that all the houses look the same. Where in Los Angeles it is important to stand out, here it seems as though it is more important to blend in. Sabine becomes aware of an issue regarding Kitty, the sister that Parsifal was supposedly the closest to, but everyone seems to make it clear that they do not wish to discuss it. Since Sabine is so caught up in finding out the story of Parsifal as a child, she lets the issue go. The visit that she receives from Phan reminds her that she is not alone with these people, that she did not make a mistake in coming and that this is something that she agreed to do to help Parsifal, but mostly is happy for the company of someone she knows.



Section 7: Pages 149 Through 173

Section 7: Pages 149 Through 173 Summary

Sabine wakes from her restless sleep to discover a woman with Parsifal's face in the kitchen. She resembles the woman Sabine had made up in her mind as Parsifal's mother. Kitty tells her about how Guy wanted to leave so badly that he had a list of names for an alias and claimed that was the best part of the plan. Kitty told her how she was supposed to be the magician's assistant back then. As they talk, Kitty reveals that Parsifal had killed his father one night when he was beating her mother in the kitchen as she lay on the floor trying to protect Bertie in her stomach. Guy took a baseball bat and hit him over the head, and the blow to the neck killed him. This is the reason that Guy was sent to the Reformatory. Sabine is so shocked that she drops her cigarette and burns the floor. Kitty assumes Sabine had known about the event and tells Sabine the entire story. She shows Sabine the spot where her father died and tells her how she wanted him to be dead the moment he hit the floor so that he would not get up and kill her brother instead. Sabine returns to bed, thinking if the stories had been about her past, then she would not have told Parsifal that she had done such a thing. She imagines him holding Phan in the last night that he was alive, and she can see how escaping Alliance Nebraska was what saved him. Sabine even thinks how in life she was not entitled to the family she received or to the loving home she was raised in, but she was dealt those cards, just as Guy Fetters was dealt his.

Section 7: Pages 149 Through 173 Analysis

Seeing Kitty for the first time prompts Sabine to think maybe she is still dreaming, that Parsifal is coming to her as a woman. Kitty's resemblance to Parsifal has Sabine confused and curious. Kitty seems shaken, not just by her brother's death, or not having been there, but by her life in general. She takes a liking to the woman and feels the guilt of having Parsifal to herself when this woman longed to be with her brother.



Section 8: Pages 174 Through 197

Section 8: Pages 174 Through 197 Summary

The next morning, Dot meets Sabine in the kitchen, prepared to take her to the airport if she asks to leave. When Sabine declines to leave, Dot tells her how poorly she had dealt with the entire affair, how she had named Bertie after her father and how she thought now that it sent the wrong message to Guy, that it told him that she missed her abusive husband more than the son that had protected her. Once Dot had been properly assured that Sabine was not going to leave over the family revelation, she leaves for work, and Sabine gets a chance to call her family and tell them that she arrived safe, that she felt closer to Parsifal in Alliance and that she was finding what she came to. Although they are happy to hear it, they want her home.

Section 8: Pages 174 Through 197 Analysis

Sabine's being told that Parsifal had killed his father was like ice on her nice cozy vision of what his life had been like when she had dreamed up his past, but at the same time it explained that question she had wanted answered since the moment she found out that his family was alive. He had not necessarily been persecuted by his family, but by the living memories that they were to him. She could see why his escaping his past was such a necessity to him, not to have it be a topic that was not talked about, but one that did not exist to him.



Section 9: Pages 197 Through 222

Section 9: Pages 197 Through 222 Summary

Sabine cannot help spending the day playing detective in Parsifal's room. She checks out just about everything under the bed, in the books, and in the closet. She is mildly surprised to see the magic kit and tries to read the instructions that would not make anyone that good at the tricks that were in the box. She is still playing when Dot comes home from work with Kitty's sons, Howard and Guy. The boys seem to be more interested in the fact that she has a big home in Los Angeles than the fact that she is a relative now or that she is the best connection to the lost uncle they never knew.

That night, the family holds a viewing of the tape of the Tonight Show that they had watched every night. Sabine remembers back to the night they had gotten the invitation, and while the family sits back to watch the tape, she replays the events in her head. She watches herself do the trick and thinks of the facts of it rather than how Parsifal had looked, how young and full of life he appeared. The boys distract her by asking how the trick was done, and she amuses herself by thinking of Parsifal's reaction to her response that she cannot tell due to the honor code of magicians. As the boys try to convince her to tell the answer, Howard Plate, Kitty's husband makes an entrance. He is clearly not pleased that his wife and children are not home. His first accusation is that he was out looking for his family in the cold, but then he comes around to saying that he knew they had company and wanted to say hello. Once he is settled, however, he asks how the trick was done, and the boys burst out laughing. Then, the family dresses to go, and Howard pulls her to the side to be sure that it was not real magic. She notes the disappointment on his face when she tells him that it was just a trick.

Section 9: Pages 197 Through 222 Analysis

Sabine is disappointed to find no clues of Parsifal as a boy in his room. It's as though she expected to find a secret letter addressed to her from the past. But then again, with the dreams she has been having about Phan, the reader almost expected it was well, so her disappointment is shared. When the viewing of the Tonight Show was done, the memory embarrassed Sabine. To Sabine the memory was filled with the joy and anticipation of the invitation, then to the fear as they took the stage and then to the irritation as Carson solicited her to join him for dinner. As the family is awed that she had never seen the tape herself, Sabine hid from them about the party, full of friends, that she and Parsifal had the night it aired.

The entrance of Howard Plate, Kitty's husband, brings only a little more light to the issue that the family clearly likes to avoid. Howard's entrance is loud and paints him to be a bully and a man that has to have things his own way. Within the first two lines that come from Howard Plate, the reader would suspect that Kitty has taken an abusive husband like her mother had.



Section 10: Pages 223 Through 246

Section 10: Pages 223 Through 246 Summary

Once the Plate family clears out of the Fetter house, Dot pulls out two glasses and pours them each a drink. Dot sits there thinking out loud how she had always expected Guy to come home, that there were days when her palms would itch and she would speed home from the grocery store expecting to see him there, that the expectation that he would come to her was what had cost her her son. During the next few days, Sabine spends her time cleaning the house, shoveling the walkway and keeping herself busy until someone comes home. Finally, Kitty takes her to Wal-Mart. Sabine has never been to a Wal-Mart. They encounter Haas, and Sabine wonders how he is to Bertie, but Kitty calms her by commenting that he is picking Bertie up a present that he was hiding in the basket. Sabine discovers what can be purchased at Wal-Mart and buys some art supplies.

Back at the house, Kitty asks Sabine to pull an egg out of her ear, but Sabine settles for a card trick. She shuffles the deck shamelessly, knowing she can make the deck do just about anything she wants it to do. When she finishes with the trick, Kitty insists that she is wasting her talent. As Kitty and Sabine chat at the table, Kitty asks Sabine if Parsifal ever sawed her in half. Sabine tells her about plenty of tricks that they did along those lines, and Kitty comments on Guy hating to be locked up due to the refrigerator incident. Sabine knew he had been locked in a refrigerator, but she did not know that his own father was the one that did it. Kitty tells the story of how her father made Guy take out all the food and the shelves and get in the refrigerator, before shutting the door. She does not remember how long he was in there, only that she let him out and helped him put the food away.

Section 10: Pages 223 Through 246 Analysis

Sabine equates Wal-Mart to a market in Bangkok and is expecting to find live rabbits and chickens around one of the corners. Sabine settles into her vacation of constant reminders and daily chores in Los Angeles. She can see a living Parsifal in every member of the family and enjoys the comfort of being around. She has adopted her schedule and daily routine to suit these as she had once done for Parsifal. The more Sabine hears about Albert Fetters the more she can not imagine anyone, especially her husband, having gone through such things. The reader begins to relate to Parsifal in a way that makes makes one understand how killing your father and lying to your wife could not only be what they would do, but that it was the right thing to do for Parsifal to survive and not be criminal. After the story of the refrigerator, Sabine is overcome with wariness. She had known this was another of the stories that she really didn't want to hear but made herself listen. Afterward, she goes to bed and tells Kitty of the sale of the rug that had started his rug company and thinks back to the fact that at the time she

thought he was so lucky, but now sees that maybe he had paid his dues long before she had ever met him.



Section 11: Pages 247 Through 271

Section 11: Pages 247 Through 271 Summary

Sabine thinks of Phan, all that he had gone through in his life, and how none of it had showed on his face. She recalls how happy he seemed to be in the life that he built for himself, and she wonders if Parsifal and Phan found solace with each other when the night came. Sabine, worn out by the stories and the horrors in the past of the lives of the ones that she loved, wonders if they all put on a brave face for her. She is tired, and Kitty trails her to bed. They lay down in the bed, and Sabine tells Kitty of how Parsifal bought a rug at a flea market, sold it for much more and had built his business from the sale. She had thought him the luckiest man alive at the time. Sabine falls asleep and dreams of Phan. They are in Paris, and it is so cold. Phan tells her about working as a dressmaker and how he sewed for a living when he was there, and then tells her to turn around. Slowly, she sees Kitty coming toward her and then realizes that it is Parsifal. She runs to him and holds him, but then she hears a click. Someone checks in on her and Kitty, waking her from Parsifal's arms.

Sabine and Kitty walk out to the kitchen to discover the entire family, including Howard. Bertie decides to leave the living room because of Howard. In the kitchen, all the others gather for coffee and dinner. The women talk about the invitations and the upcoming wedding until Howard makes an entrance into the kitchen. Then, the conversation becomes filled with tension. Bertie clears the boys out to the living room now that Howard has come to the kitchen. Kitty changes the subject to asking Sabine to do a card trick that they all want to see. Sabine shuffles the deck of cards to be showy, to mesmerize them and take their attention off the exuding animosity. She needs a volunteer and chooses Howard. The trick is simple, to discover if he has ESP by having him tell her which cards are black and which are red, and she makes two piles based on his choices. She goes through the entire deck, and when she flips the cards, he is amazed to find out that he had gotten them all correct. When he realizes that he had been tricked, Howard blindly strikes out at the table and flips it, causing Bertie to fall into the wall and crack her head open among the debris of the flipped table.

Section 11: Pages 247 Through 271 Analysis

Sabine wakes to find the family awake in the kitchen and as they all attempt to avoid Howard, Sabine realizes that there is something that she has overlooked about Howard Plate. Hoodlums were the ones that would have seemed tough when they were young, and never stayed to take care of or marry the girl, but Howard had. For that moment she found a respect for him that she did not know she could have found. When she is asked to perform the card trick, she chooses Howard to include him in the family moment, but the instant she realizes her mistake it is too late. Howard's anger at being fooled becomes more than she was prepared for. Howard had flipped the table in an action

that was not aimed at anyone, but Bertie's movement to avoid the table caused her injury.



Section 12: Pages 272 Through 295

Section 12: Pages 272 Through 295 Summary

Bertie's first words are for Howard to leave. She has no intention of attempting to get up until he is gone. Howard protests that they are going to blame on him, but he leaves. They realize it is Bertie's barrette that had caused the injury. Bertie will need a few stitches, but she will be fine. They all pile into the car and take Bertie to the emergency room, while discussing how Bertie was the one that never had stitches, as Sabine's mind wanders to all the houses that looked alike. She wonders if the people who live there had come here on purpose or if their cars broken down and they had been stuck, never to leave.

Once at the hospital, Haas is at the door, helping Bertie inside. The two lean into each other as one. Dot comments on it, and Sabine recognizes the scene, not from her and her husband but from Parsifal and Phan. Sabine and Dot chat in the waiting room of the hospital. Sabine suggests going to the boys' reformatory where Guy was sentenced, but Dot talks her out of it. Howard arrives at the hospital to check on Bertie, and Haas goes out to him. Haas flatly tells Howard to stay away from Bertie, that if he was at the house and she arrived, he better leave. Once Bertie receives her stitches, she decides to go Haas' house for the night, and Dot is ecstatic since this is the first time. Dot takes Sabine to the top of a knoll where the kids go to park. She says that it gives her perspective. The perspective is that no matter where you go there are people all over that have problems, not just people in little towns.

Section 12: Pages 272 Through 295 Analysis

Bertie's moment to make Howard Plate leave the house arrives, and she takes it. On the way to the hospital, Sabine could see that Alliance Nebraska was a place that you just got stuck in one day, that getting out was a lot harder than getting in. Dot's perspective on the world is not one that Sabine agrees with. She thinks that there are places that make people happy and while Dot may look out from her spot she may see the world at large, she knew Parsifal had seen the options that were in every direction for him to explore. She though of Kitty and how she had the same potential Parsifal had, how he should have brought her along, how she deserved to have been the magician's assistant.



Section 13: Pages 296 Through 320

Section 13: Pages 296 Through 320 Summary

Sabine calls her parents to tell them that she is staying for the wedding though she is ready to come home. Bertie seems to have practically disappeared, having moved her things to Haas's house, her room becoming the guest room. Howard stays away and that means that Kitty comes by less. Sabine misses her. Dot starts checking out books from the library for her. Sabine is just about to go stir-crazy when Kitty stops by to tell her mother that she is coming home for a while with the boys. Sabine is thrilled for the company, but Dot is a bit put out as she loses the prospect of having her house to herself for the first time ever. Sabine volunteers to help Kitty pick up her and the boys' belongings, and Kitty breaks down. She divulges that she has wished for her brother to return and that having Sabine around is like having him there, only that she has presented a terrible picture of their life and Sabine will never want to see them again. Sabine consoles her by telling her that she thinks that the Fetters must think that she is the odd one who married the gay brother with all the money and invaded their lives.

Sabine thinks of her father, the way he raised her, what a good role model he was, and how he involved her in things. Kitty states how her boys had missed out on having Guy around to show them things that a good father would have taught them. Sabine can only think of her father then. Sabine decides to make a model house for the boys. Kitty suggests Sabine make it look like her house, so she sets to work making the model to show the boys what her home looks like as well as what she really does for a living. Kitty tells the boys when they get home, and they note that she thought she was a magician's assistant. Just then, the group realizes that they have not watched the tape in about two weeks. They are almost embarrassed that they could have forgotten. Guy decides for them all that they are going to watch then and heads to the living room. Sabine's second viewing of the tape does not hold the same memories that it had the first time she had watched it with them. She does not run over statistics in her head; she watches and sees the man that she loved in bright shining health, happy and doing what he loved with her at his side and loving him for it.

Section 13: Pages 296 Through 320 Analysis

Sabine knows the story of how her parents met, but she really wonders is if they are happy, do they regret, do they put on the brave face for her. Sabine's mind wanders so often in the story that maybe she is a bother, that people were treating her with kid gloves, or what they could be thinking of her, and Kitty's breakdown finally gives her the opportunity to be the insecure one in the story. Although the reader is already aware of her inner thoughts, the other characters are working hard to please her because she has the strength that that they admire but that she can not see for herself. Until this point in the story they try very hard to present their best face, when what Sabine had come to Nebraska seeking was the life that they had with Parsifal in it, not the best

version of it, but the truth of it. Sabine doesn't understand the ritual with watching the tape of the Tonight Show. But this time in watching it she saw the love that was between them, showing live on national television, and she wondered how she had not seen it that way before.



Section 14: Pages 321 Through 345

Section 14: Pages 321 Through 345 Summary

In the family gathering after the show, Sabine finally mentions that she is ready to leave. The Fetter family is all shocked to hear the news, but Sabine is insistent that she is ready to face her life again and deal with her responsibilities. Kitty even comments that Sabine is over Parsifal, and they all become quiet. Sabine goes back to work on the model home that she is building for the boys, but just as she is beginning the project, there is not that much for them to watch. As the night winds down and everyone goes to bed, Sabine finds trouble sleeping in the larger bed in Bertie's room. When Kitty knocks, Sabine is not really sleeping yet. Kitty apologizes for the comment about Sabine being over her brother and then kisses Sabine, gently and purposely on the mouth, leaving Sabine to spend the rest of the night without sleep.

The next morning everyone is awake and bustling around with their morning routines while Sabine sits quietly, thinking about the kiss the night before. Once she is certain that there was no recollection about it from Kitty, she leans over, lets her hand slip into Kitty's hair and pulls an egg out of her ear. The boys are amazed and ask to be taught a trick. Sabine agrees, goes to Parsifal's room and returns with the magic kit she had found in there. She shows the boys how to make the balls disappear and reappear before they leave for school. Then, Dot gives Sabine a talking to that basically involves Kitty and Howard and how Sabine cannot get too involved with Kitty's home life because there is no telling how or when Kitty will make her own decision.

Dot leaves for work, and Sabine goes back to work on the model of her home for the boys. When the mail comes, Sabine retrieves it, just to leave the house. Howard is waiting outside, across the street. He makes it clear that Kitty is too fixated on her and that he does not like it. He tells Sabine to leave his wife and children alone. It is clearly a threat. Sabine does not tell him she is going to leave; instead, she walks away from him and quietly whispers that she had kissed his wife. Sabine spends the rest of the day cleaning up the house while Howard Plate sits outside, across the street, trying to maintain the presence of the threat.

Section 14: Pages 321 Through 345 Analysis

Sabine spent a great deal of time wondering about the kiss Kitty had given her and how it was meant. She ponders if it was just an action of the craziness that had been filling their lives. Her mind swam with the thoughts of what it was and what it was not. When Kitty seemed to have no further comment or action on the matter in the morning light, Sabine let the subject go, instead of pursuing it. Sabine still ponders the kiss throughout the day and when Howard Plate comes to visit her with the threat to leave, she thinks in her head of telling him about the kiss. Instead, she walks away, satisfied that she has

that over him and continues about her day with Howard outside. Still, she lets her mind wander back to the kiss as she cleans the house.



Section 15: Pages 345 Through 368

Section 15: Pages 345 Through 368 Summary

That night, Sabine dreams of Parsifal and Phan. They are at the Magic Castle, and Parsifal is performing a new act for all of Phan's departed family. Sabine is concerned because she does not know the trick, but Parsifal assures her that she does not need to. He pulls out a brand new deck of cards, she shuffles them, and he taps the deck four times. Sabine flips the top four cards which are all Aces. The crowd loves it, and they carry Parsifal on their shoulders. Suddenly, Sabine is awakened and Howard is in the kitchen with Kitty. Sabine walks into the scene, and the boys are convinced that their dad will kill their mom. He has a knife, but Sabine is sure that it is a fake until she sees the cut on Kitty's cheek. She walks into the room. Howard throws a fit in front of the boys and then leaves. They all go back to bed. Sabine invites Kitty and the boys to come live with her, and they curl up in bed together, holding each other while Sabine tells Kitty about her dream.

The next day they all get ready for the wedding, and at the reception, Bertie asks Sabine to perform a trick. Sabine decides to perform the one Parsifal did for Phan's family, and each time, it comes out perfect. At the reception, Sabine picks a young girl named Laney Cole to assist her. She sets up the trick, shuffles the deck, and taps the deck four times. As Laney turns over the cards one by one, the top four are all aces. No one really seems to get that it is more than a good trick, except for Laney, who sits there stunned, because she knows she is witnessing really magic, not a trick. Bertie thinks that the trick is perfect, and as the only member of the family that was not all that familiar with Guy, she thinks it is the one he would have chosen, and in a way, that is exactly what he did.

Section 15: Pages 345 Through 368 Analysis

Sabine's encounter with Howard Plate and Kitty in the kitchen, makes her realize that until something changes the course that the family is on, then they will follow the same pattern that Guy and his father did, so she invites Kitty and the boys to come live with her in Los Angeles. She is also very fond of Kitty, and is a bit too attached for it to be a similarity to Parsifal. Sabine feels at home with Kitty in her arms and realizes what she had missed out on by waiting for Parsifal to come around. She wants a friend and companion that knows her the way that Phan knew Parsifal, the way that she did not. And now, whether with Kitty, or without, Sabine can face what she wants in the world.



Characters

Sabine Parsifal

At the age of nineteen, Sabine falls in love with Parsifal the Magician but is saddened that he would never feel the same way about her. After twenty-two years, Sabine is still in love with Parsifal, but she has learned to take what she can get from their relationship. He is her best friend, her employer, her family, and her husband. Their marriage is one of convenience, and it lasts less than a year before his death. Sabine is lost without Parsifal, and her depression keeps her in bed most of the time, so when the attorney tells her of her husband's family, she is shocked that they are alive since Parsifal had told her that they were killed in a car accident.

Sabine struggles to understand Parsifal's reason for lying to her about his family. She flounders between justifying it as a horrible past where he was victimized to envisioning him making a fool of her for his own fun. When her husband's family contacts her, she agrees to meet with them to quell her own curiosity about the people that her husband did not acknowledge in his life, and is surprised to find that they are not the monsters she had pictured. Sabine soon finds herself enjoying their company and travels to Nebraska to rediscover the man that she had loved. She quickly becomes a member of their family and uncovers the reasons for her husband's remaking himself, even his past. Throughout the tale, Sabine heals the wounds that both Parsifal and his family had inflicted on each other and reunites the family that he was once a part of.

Parsifal the Magician

Parsifal is born Guy Fetters in Alliance, Nebraska. At the age of fifteen, he accidentally kills his father while trying to protect his mother and is sent to the Nebraska Boys Reformatory. After his release, he travels to California, changes his name to Parsifal the Magician and opens a rug store. Parsifal lives in a huge house with his lover, Phan and their dearest friend, Sabine. Once Phan passes away from AIDS, Parsifal knows that his time is drawing to a close so he marries Sabine to ensure that she will inherit all that he and Phan had without incurring inheritance taxes. He wants to make Sabine comfortable once he is gone.

On the day of his death, Parsifal dreams that he is with Phan and tells Sabine all about it, but he suffers a terrible headache and is rushed to the hospital for an MRI. It is at the hospital that he suffers an aneurism that takes his life. Parsifal leaves some money to his mother and two sisters in Nebraska in his will. After this death, he sends Phan to check on Sabine in her dreams because he is too ashamed of the burden he has left on her by not telling her the truth of his family. Eventually, he comes to her in her dreams and apologizes for the obligation her has left on her and asks that she help his family forgive him.



Phan

Phan is a Vietnamese and French man who is Parsifal's lover. He works as a programmer and becomes wealthy with one of his programs designed for gaming. Although he is Parsifal's lover, he is always making sure that Sabine is not left out of their life. After his death, Phan often comes to visit Parsifal in his dreams, and later, he comes to Sabine in hers as a messenger for Parsifal. In his first encounter with Sabine in the dream world, Phan admits to causing Parsifal's aneurism because he did not want him to suffer out the two years that he had left. He tells Sabine that he did it for her so that she would not have such sad memories of the end of his life.

Dorothy Feters

Dot Feters is the mother of Albertine, Kitty and Guy Feters, who is later known as Parsifal. Dot is a strong willed woman who raises her three children in Alliance Nebraska. Her son kills her husband, Albert, when he jumps into the middle of a fight between his mother and father in his attempt to save his pregnant mother from being beaten. She goes to visit her son once in this time of incarceration at the Nebraska Boys reformatory, and he asks her not to come again. Dot holds a nightly vigil for her son by watching his appearance on the Johnny Carson show. Her guilt over her son's departure from her life is one that she respects, but she holds the guilt close to her and carries it proudly. When Parsifal leaves her some money in his will, she takes a trip to Los Angeles to meet his widow, Sabine, and takes to her immediately. She invites Sabine to come to Nebraska to visit, and during the visit, she reveals every part of Parsifal's past in an attempt to keep Sabine around. She often thinks that this is a way that she can be closer to her son and also gain a part of his unknown life. She takes Sabine under her wing and admits to the faults that she believes are the reasons that she and her son were no longer in contact.

Kitty Plate

Kitty Plate is Guy Feters' sister who he was very close with in his early years. Kitty has become a living memory for Sabine in the story as the brother and sister look so much alike. Kitty has an abusive husband with whom she seems to be in a precarious relationship that keeps her leaving him but always returning back to him as well.

Albertine Feters

Albertine Feters is the youngest sister of Guy Feters who he had not seen since she was a baby. Bertie is named for her father since she is born two months after his death. She is shy and quiet but very considerate. She is about to marry a man named Haas when the story takes place, and it is their wedding that opens the opportunity for Sabine to visit Nebraska and the lives of the family of her departed husband.



Howard Plate

Howard Plate, once a hoodlum but now the husband of Kitty, is abusive to his wife. He has a scarred face from falling from a train as a young man, and due to this accident, Kitty married him in the hospital. Howard is the person that is the most threatened by Sabine being in Nebraska as she represents an independent woman that Howard cannot control or intimidate. Howard often harasses his wife Kitty that her brother Guy was a murder.

Guy Plate

Guy Plate is the youngest son of Kitty and Howard Plate. Guy was named after Kitty's bother Guy Fetters, the man that later became Parsifal. Guy Plate has his uncle's good looks and outgoing personality, but it is often matched with his fathers tough guy attitude that has his mother worried at times.

Howard Plate Jr.

Howard Plate Jr. is the oldest son of Howard and Kitty Plate. He has inherited his father's large stature a darker coloring, but he has a much more quiet and shy personality that he seems to have inherited from his aunt Bertie.

Eugene Haas

Eugene Haas has been Bertie Fetters' fiancé for the last six years. Haas is a quiet schoolteacher who dotes on his future wife. Haas seems to be a very calm, unobtrusive person until the night the Bertie is hurt by the actions of Howard Plate when he makes it perfectly clear that Howard is not to be near Bertie at any point in the future.

Laney Cole

Laney Cole is the young girl at Bertie and Haas's wedding that Sabine chooses to be the volunteer for the card trick that she performs. Laney is the only one in the crowd that realizes that the magic trick that Sabine performed is not just a trick but for once was actual magic.

Sabine's Parents

Sabine's parents are not named in the story and do not have any moments where they are not presented together, so they come off in the story as a unitary single character. They often provide her with advice and obvious concerns for her once Parsifal has passed away. They are originally against Sabine speaking to or even visiting the Fetters; however, there is a reference that once long ago they were not all too pleased



that their daughter was in love with a gay man who would not return her feelings, and whom they had had since come to love him as a son. The reference is a symbolic metaphor for the love that they have for their daughter and the understanding that these people hold.



Objects/Places

Alliance, Nebraska

Alliance, Nebraska is the town where Parsifal is born and where Sabine visits after his death to learn the truth of his past.

Nebraska Boys Reformatory

Parsifal is sent to the Nebraska Boys Reformatory at age fifteen after accidentally killing his father.

Los Angeles, California

After his release from the Nebraska Boys Reformatory, Parsifal moves to Los Angeles where he lives with Phan and Sabine. Parsifal's family visits Los Angeles after his death.

Parsifal's Last Dream

On the day of his death, Parsifal dreams that he is with Phan. He tells Sabine about his dream when he wakes up.

Sabine's Dreams

Throughout the novel, Sabine frequently dreams that Phan visits her as she is discovering the truth of Parsifal's past.

Cedars Sinai Hospital

Parsifal dies on the MRI table at Cedars Sinai Hospital after suffering a brain aneurism.

Guy Fetters

Guy Fetters is Parsifal's birth name which he changes when he moves to Los Angeles.

Parsifal's Letter to Sabine

Upon his death, Parsifal leaves Sabine a letter of instructions regarding his trust.



Cemetery

When the Fetters visit Los Angeles, Sabine takes them to the cemetery where Parsifal is buried. She also buys two bouquets to place on the graves of Parsifal and Phan.

Magic Castle

Magic Castle is a restaurant in Los Angeles where Sabine and Parsifal had performed several times and where they enjoyed hanging out. Sabine takes the Fetters to Magic Castle when they visit her in Los Angeles after Parsifal's death.



Themes

Imaginary Love

One of the main themes of *The Magician's Assistant* is imaginary love as demonstrated by Sabine's love for Parsifal, who she does not truly know. Sabine is shocked to find that Parsifal, her husband, best friend and boss for the last twenty-two years, has lied to her when he told her that his family was dead. Now, Sabine has to take a journey to discover the reasons for his lies in order to equate the story that she was told by Parsifal to the reality that is living in Alliance, Nebraska. Sabine has to deal with not only recreating the ideas that she had made up in her head of what Parsifal's life had been like and the people that had raised him, but she also has to separate the parts of Parsifal since she now holds doubts about his character as a man. She is plagued with the question "what if" that continues to creep into her mind, not just about the man that she thought she knew and loved, but the implications that this doubt has caused her to feel about the other relationships in her life.

Once the news of the living mother and two sisters is revealed early in the story, Sabine spends time thinking that Parsifal had lied to her as some internal joke and that he may have lied to her about many more things in her life; however, when she first meets them, she is instantly comparing them to the images she had made up in her head. She also finds herself trying to present herself as unshakable as possible, no matter what she really feels inside. She even spends some time thinking his family is a horrible group that must have abused Parsifal so badly that he had to run from them. With all these possibilities running through her mind from the moment that she hears of them, Sabine is driven to spend time with them in order to find out for herself what is the truth and what is it that she is hoping to be the truth. This topic appears later in the story when Sabine finds how similar to Parsifal Kitty looks. She becomes drawn to Kitty in a way that she had not thought possible, so when Kitty kisses her one night, Sabine cannot stop thinking of the kiss but does make the comment to herself that she had already spent twenty-two years waiting for one of the unobtainable Fetters. This leaves the reader wondering if she is fixating on Kitty out of companionship, love for Parsifal, or a deeper friendship.

The Dream World

Another recurring theme in *The Magician's Assistant* is seen through the dream world as Sabine escapes the reality of her discoveries through her dreams. Throughout the story, Phan, who had passed away eighteen months before the opening of the story, visits Sabine in her dreams. She finds a great deal of comfort from these visits, even when he is not bringing her joyous news. She is glad to have him with her but is frequently irritated by his brief and cryptic messages. Phan is often the bringer of forewarning in the tale. He comes to Sabine for the first time just before the attorney arrives to tell her that Parsifal's family is alive, but he only says that Parsifal is not ready to see her



because he is embarrassed over what he left her. He even tries to comfort her by telling her that he did not know either.

Phan's part in the story is easier to piece together after the first visit, which shows that he did always consider her as family and does watch over her the best that he can. So with each visit, Phan becomes closer and closer to Sabine as she wades her way through the mysteries of Parsifal's past to help him with the forgiveness that she is seeking, not just for him, but for herself as well. In this, Sabine develops a deeper love for the man that held the heart of Parsifal, and she shares this love for Phan with him. Several of these dreams take place in another place than the one that Sabine is physically in, to indicate that this is a dream, but several of the dreams are meant to bring Sabine from the reality that she is currently enduring to a more peaceful surrounding in an attempt to comfort her. Phan had even comments that this is specifically why he had brought her to Paris, since it is the opposite of Alliance, Nebraska.

Flashbacks

Throughout *The Magician's Assistant*, flashbacks frequently occur. Because of this, flashbacks can be seen as one of the most recurring themes in the novel. The reader would have known nothing of the life that Sabine had had with Parsifal and Phan if not for her flashbacks to the past. The author uses the flashbacks to include the reader into the world that Sabine had been involved with and loved during her life with Parsifal and Phan. It is through this flashback story that we can find the love that had developed for Parsifal and the reason as to why a straight woman would have married a gay man with whom she could only have a limited relationship.

The flashbacks that take place in this story tell an entirely different story, a story that becomes one entity that the reader begins to dissect as the full story plays out while Sabine and the reader learn of the secret past of Parsifal. In this aspect, each flashback becomes a matter of reference and something to be analyzed. An example of this is that Parsifal had told Sabine that he was locked in a refrigerator as a child and that is the reason for his claustrophobia. When the reader comes to learn that his father had locked him in a refrigerator as punishment, both Sabine and the reader have to decide if Parsifal was really lying. Because of this aspect of the story, the author engages the reader to share the discovery process with Sabine as the story unfolds.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of *The Magician's Assistant* is third person. This point of view is limited and unreliable. The fact that the point of view is limited is proven by the fact that the narrator knows not only the actions that occur during the novel but also the thoughts and feelings of Sabine; however, the narrator cannot report upon the thoughts and feelings of the other characters within the novel. This point of view is important to the novel since the focus of the novel is on Sabine and her reactions to the many things that she learns about Parsifal while she is visiting his family in Nebraska. If the narrator could not provide Sabine's thoughts and feelings, then the reader would not understand the significance of many of Sabine's discoveries.

The story is told through a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue, which allows the distinction of characters by their dialogue while the exposition provides the reader with information about the characters' surroundings as well as flashbacks. Throughout the novel, about a month passes during which Sabine's emotional state is a large focus of the plot development. The events of the novel are seen through Sabine's eyes as she uncovers the secrets of Parsifal's past.

Setting

This novel is set in the real world in the United States of America in modern times. Mostly, *The Magician's Assistant* is set in Los Angeles, California and Alliance, Nebraska, providing two different cultures: the urban and the rural. Additionally, a small part of the novel occurs in the dream world as Phan and Parsifal visit Sabine in her dreams at night in order to encourage her and to provide her with solace. On the day of his death, Parsifal dreams of being with Phan, and after Parsifal's death, Phan visits Sabine in a dream to apologize for taking Parsifal from her. Additionally, he mentions that Parsifal will not visit her because he is embarrassed at leaving her with learning the unknown about his family. Later, Phan assures Sabine that Parsifal is coming around, and eventually, Parsifal visits Sabine in the dream world to apologize for leaving her alone to discover the secrets of his past.

Parsifal dies in Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles on the MRI table when he suffers from a brain aneurism. After Parsifal's death, his mother and sister travel to Los Angeles in order to meet Parsifal's wife and see his grave. Sabine takes them around Los Angeles to show them the places that she and Parsifal frequently went. Parsifal and his family are from Alliance, Nebraska, and this is where Sabine travels in order to uncover the truths of Parsifal's past. During Sabine's trip, she becomes very close to Parsifal's sister, Kitty.



Language and Meaning

The language of *The Magician's Assistant* tends to be casual and informal. The sentences are constructed in a manner that is used in modern speech. This casual and common language allows the reader to easily understand what is going on which aids comprehension of the novel. This language actually allows the reader to be completely comfortable with the characters and the events of the novel since the language is modern and extremely common in everyday language.

The language of the novel tends to characterize the different cultures involved in the story as far as differentiating between characters from the urban area of Los Angeles, California and the rural area of Alliance, Nebraska. The story is told by utilizing a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue, which distinguishes the characters while providing plenty of background information in the form of flashbacks. The entire action of the novel takes place in approximately a month, and the simple language allows the passage of time to seem completely natural. Overall, the language is very easy to understand while also acting toward distinguishing characters and cultures.

Structure

This novel is 368 pages long, but it is not separated into sections or chapters. The fact that the novel is not separated into chapters, combined with the fact that several stories take place at once, makes it very difficult at times to understand what is happening at any given point. As a whole, the novel is very descriptive and somewhat long, especially as only approximately a month passes during the course of *The Magician's Assistant*.

The plot of the novel is very complex and has several subplots. The novel focuses on the death of Parsifal and his widow's recovery. After his death, Sabine learns that his family lives in Alliance, Nebraska, though Parsifal had told her that his family is dead. Through her interactions with Parsifal's family, Sabine learns the secrets of Parsifal's past and comes to grasp with losing him. There are frequent flashbacks in the novel as Sabine recalls her history with Parsifal. The novel is easy to read and very interesting.

Quotes

"When he left he took a picture of Kitty. That's proof. He leaves everything behind, but he takes a picture of his sister." Dorothy Feters, p. 114

"I'm not more depressed, I am depressed same as before." Sabine, p. 122

"Nineteen sixty-six was not the Dark Ages. We were all alive in 1966. We are all held accountable for our actions." Sabine's mother, p. 123

"Don't pursue dead men. I don't think I have any advise clearer than that." Sabine's mother, p. 124

"When I'm king...my first edict will to be to outlaw all covered bridge paintings and reproductions." Sabine (recalling something Parsifal said), p.148

"There's a real high price for getting out of a place like this." Kitty Plate, p.167

"That mark on the floor...that was the moment that Sabine knew." p. 67

"Plenty more where that came from." Sabine (quoting Parsifal), p.178

"My Love, I cannot be reminded by the snow." Sabine , p. 240

"Did you tell him how you felt, not hearing from your parents anymore, being alone, having to work? Did you talk about the things you were afraid of then?" Sabine, p. 245

"What fortune." Sabine's father, p. 298

"I should be crying. Pinch me. Make me cry." Dorothy Feters, p. 352



Topics for Discussion

This story tells about several relationships. Which do you relate to the most and why?

In this story, Sabine is placed in several places and situations that are vastly different from the others. How do you think she adapts to these?

Why do you think that Parsifal wanted to leave Alliance?

The story's drop-off ending leaves several possibilities for the reader to add their own ending. What do you imagine becomes of the characters?

Which character in the story do you most relate to, and why?

In this tale, Dorothy Fetters carries a lot of guilt over her decisions. What decision do you agree with the most? Which one did you agree with the least?

If you found out that someone you thought you knew had been making up their past, do you think that you would agree to try to rectify the matter the way that Sabine did?

Throughout the story, there are several reasons that Parsifal left his home and never wanted contact with his family, but none are confirmed by Parsifal. Explain why you think he made this choice.

There are several personal items that each character feels a certain attachment to as a result of Parsifal's passing. Which item catches your attention the most, and why?

What do you think of Sabine and Phan's relationship and how would you describe it?