

# A PRIVATE SORCERY

## READING GROUP GUIDE

Although *A Private Sorcery* is narrated through both Rena and Leonard's voices, the same events are not retold. Instead, the story progresses like a relay race with Rena and Leonard each picking up the tale where the other left off. How does this impact the way we come to understand the events of the story and the characters involved?

In portions of the book, Leonard speaks in the second person to Saul. What are the different meanings of this "you," and what effect does this device have on the reader?

How do Rena and Leonard each respond to Saul's arrest?

When Leonard volunteers to help Rena paint her apartment, she recalls something he'd said the first time they'd met: "Our personal history begins with the memories of our grandparents." (p. 107) What did Leonard mean by this, and what does the comment set off in Rena?

Leonard's father was a garment worker, a fact that his wife, Klara, whose own father was a neurosurgeon, lords over him. Rena is born out of wedlock to the daughter of a fishmonger. She grows up living over the Italian restaurant where her mother works as a waitress -- a past that Rena hides when she goes on to Yale and moves into a high-powered job as a political consultant. Why is the issue of class central to a story that is not explicitly political?

Leonard is working on a psychobiography of Carmelita Gomez, a Mexican peasant girl who was accused in 1955 of murdering her newborn baby and was then found dead in her jail cell. Why is Leonard's interest in this project so important to the story?

The book begins on Rena's 34th birthday, and concludes on her 37th birthday. How does she change during these three years?

In the novel, Saul had a mentor, Santiago Domingo, a Cuban exile who had been a professor of political science in Havana. After Santiago's son "disappears" in Guatemala, Rena goes with Leonard to retrieve his body. Why do Rena and Leonard undertake this quest and how does the trip affect them?

The title of the book is referred to in the epigraph at the beginning: "As for the symptoms, they are a private sorcery. They transform one thing into another." To whom is this applicable in the novel?

Why does Rena go to find Reed? How do you understand their relationship?

Were you surprised by Rena's decision at the end of the book to have a baby with Saul?