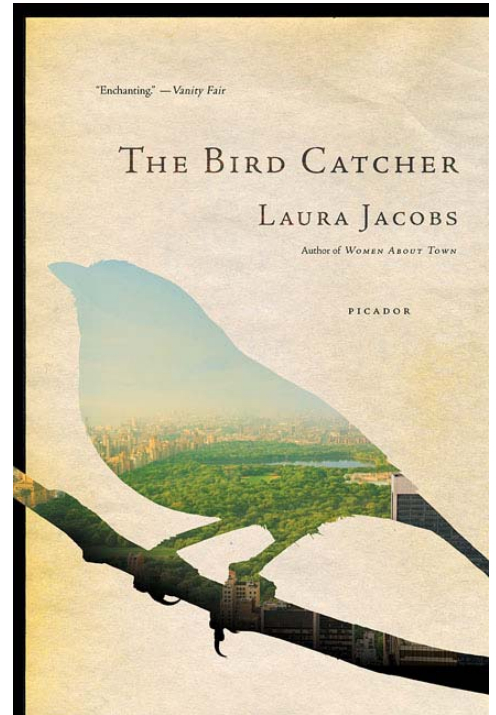


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Bird Catcher A Novel

by Laura Jacobs

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Bird Catcher* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Bird Catcher*.

About the Book

Margret, a thirty-one-year-old artist, and Charles, a professor, are a happily married couple who enjoy a lifelong hobby of bird watching against the landscape of Central Park, the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue, an endless round of gallery openings and weekends at their Chesapeake Bay home.

Margret's well-ordered Manhattan life, however, suffers a violent upheaval that pushes her beyond the boundaries of her hobby and she begins illegally collecting the bodies of dead birds to create elaborate dioramas. Overnight, she becomes an art world sensation and just as

suddenly has fame ripped from her. In *The Bird Catcher*, Laura Jacobs gives us a novel with a quietly explosive soul about women in New York.

About the Author

Laura Jacobs is an award-winning contributing editor at *Vanity Fair* and the dance critic for *The New Criterion*. She has also written for *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Village Voice* and the *New Republic*. She lives in New York City with her husband, writer James Wolcott.

Discussion Questions

1. The first chapter is an introduction to the novel's heroine, Margret Snow. What do you learn about her during this walk in a wooded area of Riverside Park? What is her relationship with her husband?
2. What is your first impression of the dynamic between Margret and her best friend Emily Edwards? Is the friendship balanced? And does your perception of its dynamic change as the novel progresses? Is one of these women stronger than the other?
3. Milton Beecham, Margret's maternal grandfather, is an influential presence in her life. What has she learned from him? Near the end of the book Charlotte tells Margret that she is like Milton; do you agree? If so, in what ways?
4. In some ways Margret is under-employed as a free-lance window-dresser. Why has she stayed so long in this job? Are windows a hiding place for her, or a form of freedom?
5. Milton tells Margret that "beauty is a trap," and later in the novel she thinks to herself that "desire is like a cage." Are these comments on love or sex or art?
6. Margret rarely fails to notice a man's hands. Why do you think this is?
7. *The Bird Catcher* contains a number of marriages. And works of art that portray marriages (Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Massacio's *Expulsion*) are particular touchstones for Margret. What does marriage mean to Margret?
8. It is bird watching that brought Margret and Charles together, but in the wake of his death, she is driven to connect with birds in a visceral way. Why?
9. After his drunken assault on Margret in the Boiler Room, Joe silently hands her the shopping bag "as if it were a gift." What has passed between them?
10. How does one grieve in this new century, which has no time for the rituals of mourning, and doesn't want to believe that death is a part of life? Were the Victorians more honest about sorrow and loss than we are, despite our ironic and existential stances?

11. There are at least two turning points in the novel, events that feel like disasters but actually open the way toward rebirth. What do you think these turning points are, and is one more important than the other?

12. The novel is titled *The Bird Catcher*, but it isn't really birds that Margret is trying to catch. What is she reaching for? Are her boxes reaching for the same thing?

13. In the first chapter, Margret kneels down to look at a dead woodcock in the grass. In the last chapter she kneels so that she can plant a small pine in the ground. What kind of progress has she made between these two moments? How has she grown?

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