



MAN WITH A SEAGULL ON HIS HEAD

BY *Harriet Paige*

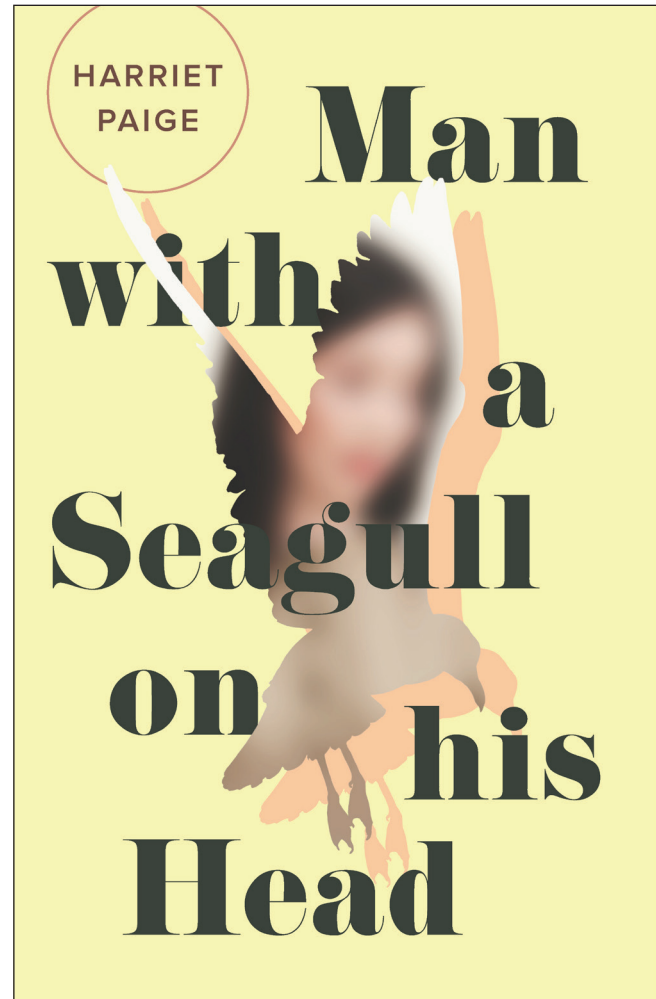
READING GUIDE

“Elegiac ... emotionally precise ... not only pleasing to the eye, but also profoundly engaging to the heart. A gentle fable about the mystery of artistic creativity.”—*Kirkus*

“A bona fide gem.” —*The Guardian*

When office drone Ray Eccles is struck on the head by a dying seagull on a hot summer beach, he awakens compelled to obsessively paint the unknown woman he saw at the moment of impact. Discovered by an eccentric and powerful couple, Ray’s paintings suddenly light the art world on fire. Meanwhile, the unknown woman, observing from afar, begins to wonder if this stranger is the only person who has ever really seen her.

Beautiful, elegant, quietly profound, Harriet Paige’s *Man with a Seagull on His Head* captures the small, shared moments that connect disparate lives and create artistry out of the everyday.



Man with a Seagull on His Head

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ABOUT HARRIET PAIGE

Harriet Paige was born in 1979 and grew up in Devon, in the south west of England. She studied English and American Literature at the University of Warwick and returned in 2004 to do an MA in Writing. After completing the programme she continued to develop her writing alongside working as an interiors journalist and bringing up her three children. *Man With a Seagull on His Head* is her debut novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ray is a cryptic character, especially for a protagonist. As readers, do we ever truly know him?
2. Early in the book, Ray is described as being “past the age when anything interesting was likely to happen to him.” The same might be said of Jennifer when we rejoin her in Chapter 6--the moment when something extremely interesting happens to her. What do you think the author is trying to tell us via the similarities of these characters, and what else do they have in common?
3. Ray has, to say the least, an unorthodox relationship with George and Grace. But right up until Grace turns violent, it never seems to affect Ray’s art. Why do you think this says about the couple’s interest in him—or about the art itself?
4. The main characters have very little interaction. This is particularly drawn into focus at the end, where Ray and Jennifer very nearly meet and interact, but then miss each other. Why do you think the author ends the book with this missed connection?
5. At the end of the novel, the narrator addresses the reader, writing of Ray’s aspirations, “If that sounds crazy to you, then I suspect you have not seen the paintings themselves. For anyone who has, and has been touched by their beauty, will surely recognise the truth of it: that what you are seeing is not just a woman standing on a beach, but a spirit soaring, a man attempting to fly.” Having not seen the fictive paintings, does it sound “crazy” to you? Do you think Ray achieves flight—and, if so, what kind?
6. If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?