



FLATIRON
BOOKS
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Acts of Violet

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Acts of Violet*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Acts of Violet*, we respectfully suggest that you wait before reviewing this guide.

1. In addition to Sasha’s narrated sections and Cameron’s podcast episodes, there are a variety of documents included in the novel that shed light on Violet Volk, from interviews to news items to letters. What kind of reading experience did this less-conventional story structure offer you? How do the different sections work to complement and/or contradict each other?
2. While much of the story centers around Violet, we hear from her in her own words only a handful of times. How much of “the puzzle of Violet Volk” do you feel is solved by the end of the novel? Is there anything you still want to know about her?
3. Superstition is a recurrent theme in the novel. How does Sasha’s more pragmatic nature affect her relationships with her more superstitious family members, past and present? What do you make of her subconscious adoption of certain superstitions (like knocking on wood)? How superstitious are you?
4. In the second podcast episode, we hear very different takes on Violet’s legacy, as a magician, feminist, and member of the LGBTQ+ community. What’s your view on her contributions to these three areas? Do you believe she was obligated to serve as a role model or social activist? How worthy is she of her enduring status as a pop culture and feminist icon?
5. Sasha struggles to describe her feelings about Violet’s disappearance: “They call themselves survivors, the loved ones of those who went missing. . . . Usually, I don’t think of myself as surviving anything. Usually, I see myself as someone who was left behind.” What is your interpretation of this? How does this sentiment echo other moments in Sasha’s life?
6. Discuss Sasha’s complex feelings leading up to the candlelight vigil. While she outwardly dreads the event, how much do you think she secretly hopes Violet will make a return? How does she cope with her conflicting emotions and ongoing lack of closure?
7. Which podcast episode did you find most surprising? Which was your favorite and why?
8. In the author’s note to *You Are Magic*, Violet writes: “Don’t settle for being content. . . . Your best self will emerge from the strife that accompanies chasing glory, from the climb to greatness, the quest for astonishment. Dream bigger, aspire harder, pursue the impossible,

and find that fucking magic.” Do you believe Violet is genuinely sharing her personal philosophy here? How has this line of thinking helped and hindered her over the course of her life? What do you think drives her?

9. How does Sasha’s relationship with her therapist, Renatta, change over the course of the book? How do their sessions together help shift Sasha’s perspective?
10. What do you make of the synchronicities in the book? Do you tend to notice synchronicities or dismiss them as coincidences? What (if any) significance do you assign them in your own life?
11. Discuss the adversarial dynamic between Sasha and Violet. Why do you think Violet treated her sister as an opponent? When Sasha expresses frustration at this in therapy, Renatta challenges her by saying, “Is it possible you set up your own competition for the two of you, one you got to win by taking the moral high ground?” Is there merit to this idea?
12. There’s an ongoing theme of secrecy in the novel—Gabriel hides things from Sasha about her sister, Quinn’s parents shield her from certain dark truths about her aunt, Sasha doesn’t fully open up to her therapist, etc. How much of this obfuscation is self-serving versus helpful to the person they’re withholding from? Who is being protected more in each of these situations?
13. Despite their limited interactions during Quinn’s early years, what kind of lasting impact has Violet left on her? How does Quinn’s adoration of her aunt impact her relationship with her mother?
14. Discuss how Violet’s relationship with Gabriel evolves over the years. What do you make of her “proposition”? Do you sympathize at all with her actions toward him?
15. In the “Checkmate” podcast episode, Cameron describes his ambivalence about sharing the interview, given the lack of outside verification. Ultimately, though, he decides to let listeners be the judge: “As much as my journalistic roots urge me to be rational, there’s something about this conversation I can’t discard. I can’t explain it any better other than to say *it feels true*.” Does any of it feel true to you? What do you make of Checkmate?
16. Antoinette Stranger is another character who introduces some outlandish ideas in *Strange Exits* with respect to Violet’s disappearance and her broader research of anomalous phenomena. What is your take on the ideas Antoinette presents, and the more paranormal and speculative elements of the story in general?
17. When Sasha finally sits down with Cameron for an interview, he asks her what she wants people to know about Violet. She responds, “How painfully *human* she was. There’s this contingent of people who want to see her as a heroine or some kind of . . . ultraterrestrial. . . . But when you mistake a trick for the real thing, you’re not being taken with an artist, you’re being taken in by a con artist.” What are the pros and cons of “demystifying” an icon like Violet, as Sasha attempts to do? Do you think Violet was more artist or con artist?

18. The novel presents multiple theories regarding Violet's disappearance. How did your interpretation of these theories change over the course of the story, and which one do you ultimately find most convincing? Do you believe the reason Violet herself gives for disappearing?
19. How do Violet and Sasha come to a clearer understanding of each other over the course of the novel? What do you make of the final conversation between the sisters? What light is shed on their years of conflict during this reunion? Do you think they will ever meet again, in this or any other dimension?
20. What was your reaction to the final scene on the plane, when Sasha sees her face in the mirror? How do you think this moment changes Sasha and her notions about magic?