CHAPTER 3

ROLE OF FATE AND DESTINY

One of the most occurring themes in the novels of Ann Patchett is that of fate and destiny. In all of her novels both the minor as well as the major characters have to do what has been written in their destiny. Especially, her chief protagonists have to face undesirable and uneasy situations because of having wrong fate. *The Magician's Assistant*, for example, has a great number of scenes where future course of action is decided not only as per the wishes and actions of the characters but also as per the will of the unseen. Like her first novel *The Patron Saint of Liars*, this novel also has a female protagonist namely Sabine who falls in love with a person about whom she knows nothing and thus suffers very much throughout her life. It is a love story and a luminous depiction of reinvention about a magician who dies leaving his assistant to discern the lies he has told about his past. Parsifal, the magician, is a gay, and has a Vietnamese lover, Phan. After
Phan’s death he marries Sabine, the woman who has always respected him and who has lived with them both for 20 years. Before his death in California, Parsifal always said that he had no living family and that he came from wealthy upscale Connecticut stock. The reality is very different, as Sabine learns from his lawyer that he came from a poor Nebraska family and the family is still alive. What Sabine must deal with now is coming to terms with her husband’s horrendous past and the reason he isolated himself from his family and birth place.

The starting line of the novel that, ‘Parsifal is dead. That is the end of the story’ (3), signals the barrage of blows that Sabine, the protagonist, would have to face throughout her journey for reconciliation and reconstruction. This devastating news of the death of Parsifal, the husband of Sabine, instantly grips the attention of the readers and persuade them to believe that fate will have commanding position in shaping the future course of action for Sabine. At the very outset of the book, the erroneously fated and beleaguered Sabine is sitting beside her master magician, Parsifal who is gradually inching towards tears causing fatality. The hand she has been holding for decades is now limp. It has no more strength to buttress her in magical performances. Whatever destitution comes her way now, she will have to face alone. She stands there against the massive MRI machine, her
arms around her chest, waiting- God knows for what; because her mentor is no more leaving her almost dead. This appalling and untimely death of Parsifal from aneurism throws Sabine into an altogether new and full of desperation situation. She is left with no option but to accept life as it comes to her. She, at the same time, feels a little bit happy because her lover’s sufferings are now over. But as she thinks of him, she becomes somewhat exasperated and hopeless and starts mulling and squeezing the silver dollar given by Parsifal till the time she feels the metal edge cut painfully into her palm.

Sabine, with her heart torn apart to pieces because of the loss of her lover, goes back to the days when she along with Parsifal used to enjoy life. She recalls the time when Phan, the gay friend of Parsifal, had died and the later had become nervous and confused. During this critical time Sabine played the role of the redeemer by loving and ultimately marrying Parsifal. Now she is left alone only to embark on the journey of unraveling the mysteries and secrets of the life of her departed husband. She, after the funeral, enters Phan and Parsifal’s room in order to keep their memories alive. She sleeps endlessly by pushing her head beneath their feather pillows, and even after waking up; she keeps on lying in the bed thinking about the bygone days. She uses their daily use items like shampoo, soap, towels,
hairbrushes, etc. Every item she uses here has significance in her life. She is of course the last stop for all of the accumulations and memorabilia, all the achievements and sentimentality of two lives. Fate has taken its toll on her, but Sabine’s destiny gives her power to move forward and go on discovering new relations in life. The audio CD on this book sounds right that ‘Sabine's extraordinary tale captures the hearts of its readers just as Sabine is captured by her quest.’ While flipping through Parsifal’s letter box, she finds a postcard from Nebraska addressed to Guy Fetters/NBRF/Lowell, Nebraska. The letter reads:

Dear Guy,

Just to say you have a beautiful baby sister waiting for you at home, very healthy, as am I. Kitty says come home soon.

Sent with Love from your mother. (33)

After reading the card, Sabine turns it over and over again. All of a sudden, she hears the phone ringing and in a flush of her love for Parsifal thinks that it was a call from the latter. But on the second ring she remembers that he is dead. Here comes a twist in her fate when she answers the fifth ring of the phone and comes to know about Parsifal’s mother Mrs. Fetters and that of his family, a thing Parsifal always kept secret. Such emotional and heart tearing circumstances brought by bad luck embolden Sabine to fight against all kinds of odds. It results into her firm decision of
compensating Parsifal’s family for the loss they have suffered because of Parsifal’s negligence. Without putting it to thought, she offers her help to Mrs. Fetters. The conversation between Sabine and Mrs. Fetters bears testimony to her caring nature:

SABINE. Mrs. Fetters. You’ve received the information from the lawyer. I’m assuring that’s why you’re calling me.
MRS. FETTERS. Yes.
SABINE. Then tell me how I can help you. (36)

After this offer of help from Sabine, the time and place for meeting is fixed, and Sabine promises to pick up Mrs. Fetters. The never ending and unbreakable chain of fear and confusion continues tightening its noose on Sabine and disallows her to sleep. In order to keep Parsifal’s memories quite alive in her inward eye she drinks coffee and plays Parsifal’s Edith Piaf records loud. The questions about Parsifal’s identity are always surrounding her. She asks herself whether the person in photograph was Guy Fetters. Whether Guy Fetters lived in Nebraska and worked at a Shell station; whether his name was embroidered over his heart in a cursive and script; whether he wore fingerless gloves in the winter as he stood at the window of his car, counting out change. The cruel fate has told its decree and only time and destiny can help Sabine to recover from this dilemma. She has no way out but to grin and bear it. It is one thing to spend one’s life in love with a
man who cannot return the favour, but it is another thing entirely to love a 
man one does not even know. The poor protagonist has become the victim of 
the second kind of love. It is not any coincidence or accident but sheer fate 
that has been conspiring against Sabine’s good luck. The irony of fate is that 
Sabine takes Parsifal, though now dead, to be a liar because, in spite of her 
true love, he concealed most of the things from her.

Sabine, because of her good attitude, has to some extent been able to 
live happily with her dead lover’s family. Her strong sense of destiny gives 
her strength to face the world. The Fetters have also accepted her as the 
member of their family. When Sabine cuts her hand, the Fetters attend to her 
in the hospital. When the doctor gives her an injection to cause numbness in 
her body, Mrs. Fetters stands up and takes hold of Sabine’s other hand to 
show the part that hurts her. The crusader’s fate turns again when she along 
with Mrs. Fetters is sitting at a bar. The bar stays open until two A.M. It is 
quiet now, no piano player, only one waitress. The bartender waves them 
back into the fold like lost friends, brings them the same drinks without 
being asked. This meeting between Sabine and Mrs. Fetters provides Sabine 
with some hope to live. This talk makes Parsifal’s mother sorry about her 
dead son. She expresses her grief and opens one of the incalculable secrets
of her son’s life. She tells Sabine that Parsifal was a homosexual. The mother in her pours out:

I know nothing about Parsifal. I’ve been out of the picture for a long time. But I know one true thing about my son, Guy, one thing that is making all of this difficult to figure. Guy was a homosexual. (74)

The story reaches its culmination when Mrs. Fetters requests Sabine not to fake her prettiness for somebody. The trail of suffering is again picked up in Sabine’s confession of love for Parsifal. Now Mrs. Fetters behaves like a satisfied detective and asks Sabine where she finds herself now. She sympathizes with Sabine by calling her pretty. Sabine in reply to Fetter’s question confesses that she was very close to Parsifal and that they both worked together as friends. She also tells her that the reason of their getting married was Phan’s death. The paradox is that even after Sabine’s confession of her love for Parsifal; Mrs. Fetters does not yield and keeps on asking tough and awkward questions. Sabine confirms her love for Parsifal when Mrs. Fetters asks her why she had not married somebody else. Mrs. Fetters’ investigation about Sabine and Parsifal ever being together further increases the former’s afflictions. The torturing questioning embarrasses Sabine even now, and Parsifal is dead.

It is not Sabine alone who has got wrong fate, but Mrs. Fetters has also been suffering from the same. After telling about Parsifal’s birth and
childhood days, Mrs. Fetters comes to the crux of the story. She explains how she sent Parsifal to the Nebraska Boys Reformatory Facility up in Lowell to get him cured. She repents for the strict decisions she used to take in order to bring improvement in her child. She curses herself. Macci’s observation of the characters seems to be authentic:

The focus of this story is the loss that Sabine feels after Parsifal's death and how she begins to live again. The characters are deep and intriguing, wounded and lost. *(Librarything)*

It is true about both Sabine and Mrs. Fetters who tells Sabine that Parsifal did not pay much attention to the sufferings the family used to face in his absence. Though he used to send them money, he did not write to her mother and his younger sister Kitty. Sabine having heard about this irresponsible attitude of her departed lover tries some of her drink; but now it tastes spoiled in the glass. Then, for the last time that night, Mrs. Fetters surprises Sabine. She reaches across the table and picks up Sabine’s good hand and holds it tight inside her own. She smiles at Sabine like a mother and says, “It’s a long winter out there, you know, lots of time to think” (77). Sabine looks down at the table where her hand is swallowed up. Suddenly she is tired enough to cry, tired enough to sleep. She knew it would come sooner or later. She requests Mrs. Fetters for some time to think before taking any decision. When Mrs. Fetters pressurizes her, she promises to tell
her in the morning. Mrs. Fetters gives her time to think by calling her ‘honey’. Sabine pushes back from the table and stands up to leave the place, but Mrs. Fetters plans to stay for a while, contemplating last call. She says ‘thank you’ to Sabine for coming there. Sabine nods and gets to the door before she stops. There is no one left at the bar, just the bartender. The music is off. It is like speaking across a dining room. She does not raise her voice. “Thank you for going with me,” she says, and holds up her hand. “That?” Mrs. Fetters says, “That’s nothing” (78). The meeting gives some consolation to the otherwise broken hearts of Sabine and Mrs. Fetters. But this consolation does not last long because,

Magicians all across the world managed quite well without assistants, but without magicians, the assistants were lost. (98)

Even if Sabine had never loved magic the way she loved Parsifal; she realized that it was one more thing that was over for her. She had been a brightly labeled, a well made box, a bottle cap. She was never the reason. The author illustrates:

What a night it had been when Parsifal first took Sabine to the Castle, how impossible it was to think that something they would perform there. Inconceivable that one day they would get tired of performing there. (99)

The chronicle of miseries and unwelcome goings-on continues for the poor Sabine even at the time when she along with the Fetters (Dot Fetters, Bertie Fetters, and Mrs. Fetters) goes to mourn at the Castle bar where she
used to perform with her husband Parsifal. Spender (Parsifal’s companion in magic) begins the patter, the Ladies- and- gentlemen, to attract the attention of the audience to Sabine. He starts introducing her to the people present there, “Ladies and gentlemen, Sabine Parsifal one of the truly great magician’s assistant,” he says (101). He invites her to the stage but Sabine holds the armrests of her chair firmly. She does not want to perform again. When, Sam Spender puts the hoop on her hand, she finds no place to go but to stand there still on the stage. She cannot walk off the stage; all she can do is check the hood, and so, over and over again, she does. Mrs. Fetters encourages her to perform but for no response from Sabine as she (Sabine) feels emptiness. The hoop all of a sudden goes out of her hand. The situation becomes so pathetic that Sabine starts weeping unstoppably. Mrs. Fetters and Bertie rush on to the stage to stop her crumple up; and the three of them leave the magic parlour. Mrs. Fetters consoles her by saying ‘sorry’. She recognizes her fault and promises never to ask her again to reach this place and perform. 

This sympathetic promise from Mrs. Fetters brings new confidence in Sabine to live. The story of the death of Mrs. Fetters’ husband in an accident reduces Sabine’s grief to some extent. The cruelty of fate has dazed Mrs. Fetters too; as she describes the death of her husband, “He was in an
accident. It was a real shock. One minute he’s there, the next minute…” “Gone” (105).

Another character that undergoes ruthless miseries in the novel is Phan. Since his birth, he had been facing terrible things. In his childhood he was sent off alone because of the death of his parents and sisters in the Vietnam. He lost almost everything in his life and lived the life by himself until he found Parsifal. When unaccompanied, he used to sleep next to the swimming pool without any tentativeness on his face. He was always nonviolent. When he came home from work in the evenings, there was always something in his pocket for the rabbit, a carrot stick from lunch, a cluster of green grapes. He made elaborate birth-day cakes with thin layers of jam in the middle. He ironed Parsifal’s handkerchiefs. But what about night! Did they hold each other tightly? Did Parsifal whisper in his ear, “My love, my father put me in the refrigerator and left me there to suffocate?” Did Phan then bury his face against Parsifal’s neck and say, “Darling, they killed my mother? They killed the boys who sat next to me in school. They killed even the birds in the trees.” Did they rock one another then? Was there comfort? Did they stay up until dawn, recounting things too unbelievable to say with lights on, and then decide in the morning to keep it all a secret? Was there always a brave face for Sabine?
These questions remain unanswered and the story of despondency continues to overshadow the relations among so many persons of incongruent nature and attitude. The secrets Parsifal hid from his beloved and wife are open now. Sabine joins the family of her dead husband. The cruelties of fate are overcome by the positivity of destiny as Sabine is now enjoying a beautiful feast with the Fetters. She feels great when Bertie, the bride, brings her a piece of cake. She compares her with the cake itself, shining white and in every way decorated. She cuts a piece with a frosting rose on top just like Parsifal used to do. The novel ends with a small discussion on the tricks Parsifal used to play. Jawin rightly reviews:

This story isn’t just about a magician’s assistant, but the everyday magic that people work on each other to improve their outlook on life. The magic of everyday miracles, that people become so accustomed to that they overlook--the magic of friendship and family. (*Librarything*)

Another novel that deals with the theme of fate and destiny is *The Patron Saint of Liars*. Among the three narrators in the novel, Rose, the chief narrator, remains at the front. It is she who becomes the reason of all kinds of events and happenings in the novel. The fickle character of Rose is guided by some force that always pushes her into a situation of doldrums. As we turn the second page of the novel, we see that the Clatterbucks family suffers because of their livestock coming down with a fatal disease. All the
family members undergo the severest problems they have ever faced in their lives. Anticipating something ominous to happen, the family finally decides to help poor people by serving them platters of fried mush with sorghum, which are received with heartfelt prayers and thanks by the old Catholics. The prologue gets over with the message that Hotel Louisa has been made into a home for pregnant girls. This is the place Rose leaves for and most of the action takes place here. There is no unity of action and place in the novel as the action shifts from Ludlow, California to Habit, Kentucky. Rose stumbles many a time because of her fate not being on her side. It is all executed because of her being ill-fated. She takes wrong direction in her life. Initially, she tries her best to muddle through the problems in her family; but finds it quite difficult to appease her own wandering mind. She feels the brunt of it; but it is impossible for her to back down her determination to join St. Elizabeth’s. What she thinks at this bizarre moment is put out by her:

I reworked it two dozen times but it was still not a good note. Writing is not my talent. It was stiff and formal, given the fact that we had been married for almost three years and that he was, at every turn, a good man. But I thought the smallest bit of kindness would send him out looking for me, and since he would not be able to find me, what kind of life would that be for him. Wandering in the desert, showing a picture in gas stations, pinning fliers that gave my height and weight, the place I was last seen, onto telephone poles. The hardest part was knowing how to sign the note,
because Love wasn’t right and anything less (Sincerely, All best) was worse than nothing. So I went with nothing. (11)

Rose’s botheration is not about her own life, but about leaving so many good people behind her. But ignoring the call of her heart, she starts her journey with omission. She forgets her duty of informing her husband about her being pregnant. So many ideas preoccupy her mind but for no use. She gets no chance for her to be forgiven by God or by her husband. Her inability to confess her guilt further intensifies her problems:

Forgiveness was at the heart of everything. Because I could not ask, I could not be forgiven. What would be the point in confessing a sin for which you had guilt but no remorse? Bless me, father, for I have sinned, I have lied to my husband, left him never knowing he will have a child, and would do it all again in a heartbeat. Bless me for I will continue to lie until I go the way of all the earth. Bless me in my absence of remorse. (12)

Rose has firm belief in Destiny. In her childhood and teenage she used to pray to God every morning when on her way to school. It is perhaps this belief that has helped her in becoming a well built lady of unyielding nature. Though she has already set on a way that leads to nowhere, she is frequently disturbed by the memories of Thomas. The sweetness of that time always hangs around in her fluctuating mind. Those were of course the golden days of her life. But now she has nothing but a long road with trees on either side. The romance of that time is just a distant dream for her now. Those moments recur and recur in her mind just to torture her and compel her to repent her
decision of leaving her home. Life is not a cakewalk for her now because the blossomy days are over. She recollects those days:

May be it was just that I had waited such a long time to hear someone say those thing to me. It was romantic. What a thought to be nineteen and be willing to give up everything in your life because someone says something to you on a dark beach that sounds romantic. (22)

The reason for Rose’s suffering is not only her own decision of not giving birth to Thomas’s child, but also the hardships her family has already suffered. The stars have always been against her at every stage of life. The death of her father in her early age in a car accident always pricks her mind. This incident has also affected her mother who even knowing driving does not even like now to ride a car. But Rose is not a lady of submissive nature. She can go against any faith or tradition. It may be good or bad for her but she loves to lead a life of her own. She loves driving; just like the way people love forbidden things. This haughty attitude may be one of the reasons of her tough life. Another reason she does not find herself satisfied maybe her suspicion about her husband’s character. She, sometimes, thinks that maybe her husband has a good number of high school girls who love him and who write their names next to his in a notebook during his math classes. She is not sure even of her love for Thomas, “I was married a man I
did not love. I was mistaken in my sign. I would have something else because this could not possibly be my life” (29).

What can actually destiny or God do for a person who herself has lost all hopes in life. Rose is so complex to understand that even she herself is not able to justify her own decision of getting married in her teenage. She calls it just an infatuation, an immature decision taken without much consideration of the outcomes. The decision taken by Rose to meet Father O’ Donnell for suggestion brings some hope of her recovery from her dilemma. Father O’ Donnell is a kind hearted and religious person who addresses the problems of unfortunate Catholic girls. Words like comfort and prayer are scattered through the texts, along with moral guidance. He suggests Rose to wait until tomorrow but she is adamant to leave today:

FATHER O’ DONNELL. Tell me you’ll wait until tomorrow. Go home to Thomas, just for tonight, or go to your mother’s. This isn’t a decision to make quickly.

ROSE. I have to go today. I’ve made a mistake and if I don’t leave now I might not be able to straighten things out.

FATHER O’ DONNELL. Divorce is a sin Rose. I can’t tell you otherwise. People today think that whatever they want, right at that moment, will be fine. But there are larger things to consider. Can you not see that?

ROSE. I’m doing the only thing I can do. (31)

Such a strict step cannot be taken by a person like Rose. It seems here that there is some unseen power working behind all this. This invisible
power is not of that kind as we find in the works of Shakespeare or Milton but it is just as we find in the works of Thomas hardy. It all happens with Rose because of her haughtiness and premature decision; or it may be that this unique character of Patchett is erroneously fated. Sometimes we have to do what we do not want to do and that is the time when the signs are conspiring against us. Patchett’s protagonist is having the same wrong signs otherwise she might not have defied Father O’ Donnell’s advice against going to Saint Elizabeth’s home in Kentucky. She herself speaks against her decision:

When I wrote down the address of Saint Elizabeth’s, my hand was shaking. I asked if he would write a letter, telling them I was coming.”
Don’t tell them about Thomas,” I said. I thought the fact that I was married might disqualify me from a home for unwed mothers. (31)

She does what she decided to do by ultimately reaching St. Elizabeth’s Home in Kentucky. It is at this point that the title of the novel, *The Patron Saint of Liars*, is justified by the author. Rose tells a lot of lies to the nuns at the Elizabeth’s. She hides almost everything from them. The fact that she already has a husband is simply glossed over. This is a woman who does not want to be bothered about details. She sees a long line of pregnant ladies, each more pregnant than the last. One girl’s size seems only to exaggerate another’s. Their bellies are so uniformly large that they overwhelm the room. Seeing such a scene, Rose gets confused and thinks
that she has reached a wrong place. But Sister Bernadette, one of the senior sisters at the Elizabeth’s, pulls Rose through without any consideration of the harm it may cause to Rose. By this treatment, Rose feels very sad and pale; but this is the rule of the nature that once one has taken a wrong move, one has to pay for that. Same rule is going to apply on Rose. The fortune has been inscribed and none can rub it off. Rose’s internal conflict comes out:

I knew now what was coming, my body was going to rebel, take on a life of its own, make decisions without me. All of this leaving, this sadness, this driving, had been about having a baby. Until that exact moment I hadn’t understood this fact at all. (40)

Patchett has drawn her main character’s sketch so vividly and clearly that the reader can see it before their eyes. The beauty of concrete words has made every scene pictorial and visible. She also uses her dream technique when Rose sees her mother in her dream standing at the cosmetics counter. When she wakes up, she bursts into tears by remembering her mother. Though far enough from her native place, she cannot avoid the feel of her past that always pinches her. Fate does not take any chance while punishing the people. Rose, too, has been a victim of it. In spite of all these bad things happening in Rose’s life, she does not buckle down under pressure, and goes on with her plan. As every cloud has a silver lining; she has also got a helping hand in the form Angie, her roommate. It is Angie who gives Rose
support when the latter is in need of anything. “Hey,” Angie says quietly. “You okay?” “You don’t need to do that. Here, look here,” she hands Rose a box of Kleenex and she takes one (49).

It is the point in the novel from which onwards Rose’s destiny comes ahead of her fate. She has so many people to be looked after by. The result of this care is that Rose changes her mind of leaving her child for adoption and decides to marry again in order to raise her child in a family environment. God has the ultimate power as we see here how a person who was a destroyer suddenly becomes a protector. Such is the miracle of the unseen that changes the mind of any person. Patchett’s protagonist is a common person. The ups and downs she faces in her life can be felt by anybody. The author puts the story of a very complex character to a simple end. The stars come heavily in favour of this lady and she gets another gentle life partner in Wilson Abbot (nicknamed Son), the groundskeeper at the Elizabeth’s. This second marriage of Rose with Son is again the result of her irresponsible nature. It is an evidence of her fragile character and her inability to have control over her senses. She is easily deceived by her fate. Claire Steigner has rightly written on his weblog:

Rose does not take control over her life in Kentucky. Instead she passively falls into another loveless marriage. Again, she doesn’t try to salvage this marriage and take control of her fate. (Amazon)
What brings something affirmative to the mind of the reader in this heartbreaking story is the birth of Cecilia to Rose by Son. This beautiful girl becomes a live medium of entertainment for all the ladies present at the Elizabeth’s. Rose’s fate leaves no stone unturned in bringing troubles in her life but her destiny wins the race in her favour as all the wounds get healed up soon. The most mystifying situation in the novel comes when Rose decides to leave both Son and her pretty daughter Cecilia. The readers are left baffled with this inattentive decision of the chief protagonist. Patricia Caiozzo doubts Rose’s character:

> Ultimately, Rose abandons both Son and daughter Cecilia both physically and emotionally, but the reader never gets a handle on the reasons for Rose’s inability to make meaningful and emotional connections with others. Other than the fact that Rose is physically beautiful, it is a mystery why Thomas, Son and Sister Evangeline have all fallen in love with her. (Amazon)

Patchett’s delineation of Rose’s character is like Thomas Hardy’s depiction of Tess. Like Tess, Rose sets on a long journey discovering altogether new things in her life. But the difference between the lives of these characters is of the intensity of sufferings. Rose doesn’t suffer to the extent; Tess suffers in the 18th century fiction.

The same subject matter of fate and destiny is found in Patchett’s another novel Taft. What Patchett has focused on in this novel is the
untoward results a man has to accept after so much sincerity and allegiance to the cause of becoming a successful father. It has been deliberated on how a poor parent falls short of courage in front of his faultily inscribed fate. The novel is about the passion of a father who has been deprived of his biological son. This separation from his own son always pinches him deep inside. He is too desperate to be a father to any deserving child—a girl or a boy. Although his fate has played its cruel role by sending him off into a life of solitude; his destiny works in some constructive way by bringing Fay Taft and her tainted brother Carl Taft in his life. In spite of the strong opposition put up by his staff working at his hotel for a long time, he embraces these adolescents. He does not heed even to Cyndi who has been his favourite for a number of years.

What Nickel has actually been fated to do throughout his life is ‘playing a game of hide and seek’. He had a handsome boy in the past but lost him because of his infatuation to playing band. Now he has found two children to be worried about. But the question that always runs through his mind is whether he will be the right man for these stranded children. Finding no answer to this question he moves on the path of reconstruction of the Taft family. What is discovered here is the reminiscence of Patchett’s first novel The Patron Saint of Liars. There it is Rose who is handled by fate and wants
to destroy her pregnancy or at least to give up her child after the birth. This novel has been written in the same fashion where a man’s ignorance towards his family duties leaves him alone with nothing but a business of taking care of unknown and even dead people. It is sheer irony of fate that a man who has been ultra successful in his youth is now searching for the time he has already dedicated to the cause of bright career. This all has been achieved at the cost of his beautiful son Franklin and lovely wife Marian, both too innocent to be punished. Now, when the recovery is too far away, he repents and recalls the days he lost because of his haughty attitude:

I took the job managing Muddy’s at a time when things with Marian had come all the way around, from her doing everything to please me to me doing everything to please her. I said I’d stop playing and take on a regular job to show how steady I could be. I thought it was just for a while, like you always think something bad is for just a while. I figured I’d get her settled down and then I could go back to the band. I don’t take into account that I might lose my nerve, all those nights in a bar when I was watching instead of the one up there playing. I didn’t imagine how that could undermine a person. Once you thought about a beat instead of playing it you were as good as dead. Nothing came naturally anymore. I could play at home when I was by myself, but as soon as somebody else was there my hands started to sweat. Then I just ditched it altogether. After Marion and Franklin were gone, long past any hope I had of them coming home, I kept my regular job as manager I was all I knew how to do. (6-7)
The whole life of this deserted man has been about protection and loyalty. When with his own child and beloved, he missed the opportunity of living together happily; and now when they are out of the state, he craves for their love and affection. It may be his fortune that has tricked him into folly. 

As we see in Patchett’s third novel *The Magician’s Assistant* that Sabine, the assistant to a magician for twenty years, finds out new relations in order to heal her own wounds; same thing we find in this novel where John Nickel forgets the wounds he has sustained as a result of his break up with his wife and son. He finds some hope in Fay and her brother Carl who have just joined him in his journey of re-enactment of the lost. He still gets angry with himself when he recounts his mistakes in the past:

> If I had to narrow myself down to one mistake I’ve made in my life, it would be that I didn’t marry Marion as soon as I found out she was pregnant. She was eighteen and I was twenty five. She was still pretty much under the impression that I had hung the moon… I had been faithful to Marion because she was right, I loved her. But I didn’t need her. It was her need of me that made me turn cruel. (8-9)

This penitence of Nickel sends a clear message that what one does is done not because of one’s intention to do it; but sometimes it is done because of man’s helplessness to control it. Sometimes it is not the result of a person’s desire to do it, but the result of the desire of an undetected power that keeps on pushing him to the direction of destruction. Relations are born,
broken, and then reconstructed. But the case with Patchett’s hero is totally different. He receives too much punishment for committing a too little crime. Marion, his one time lover rejects his plea for reunion. She prefers to live with her parents. Though his destiny favours him but his fate does not allow anything good to happen in his life. Once it was Marion who requested him to accept her, and now it is he who goes to her parent’s house to bring her back into his life. The treatment he is meted out to is hugely embarrassing for him:

MARION’S MOTHER. Can’t believe you’re even standing in my living room. I’m going to have to vacuum for an hour just to get your smell off the carpet.
MARION. Let me talk to him a minute.
MARION’S FATHER. We’ll be right in the kitchen if you need anything.
MARION’S MOTHER. Don’t let him hold that baby. (11)

His seriousness and big talk about himself while Marion was standing beside him like a forgotten creature drove her to take a decision that was not in favour of any of them. He used to give her money but he made her ask for it. The male superiority ate him up like white ants eat up the roots of a big tree and thus ultimately bring it down. It is not only Nickel, the hero, who suffers the heavy blows of fate; Marion and Franklin also undergo the same misery. Nickel tells how Marion was interested in exposing her pregnancy to him:
She had to leave her parents’ cool house after working all day and ride a crowded bus downtown, not to talk to me or be with me, but just to sit in front of me in an empty bar so I wouldn’t forget she was going to have my baby. (42)

It was not just in the past that Nickel suffered from terrible emotional jerks; his present is also full of chaos. The arrival of Fay and Carl in his life is not at all a sign of relaxation; it rather deepens his bruises. Fay is ok but as far as Carl is concerned, he is not at all a good boy. He has friends who are vagabonds; and who do all kinds of late night sort of things, like attending rave parties and creating hullabaloo on roads because of being habitual of over drinking. The entry of these two drifters in Nickel’s life gets him involved in unnecessary business of reinventing the life of their (Fay and Carl’s) dead father. His superfluous caring attitude towards Carl accelerates the speed of sufferings in his life. When he serves a glass of water to Carl while sitting at a bar table, the latter feels blessed without doing anything. Nickel’s inability to understand Carl’s nature drags him deeper and deeper into the mud of ignorance. His unwonted interference in others’ lives causes him enormous loss. Though Fay tries to awake him and be aware of Carl’s moves; he, out of his fatherly passion, does not pay any attention to her. He even ignores Carl’s getting messed up with drugs. “You don’t mind him?” Fay asks Nickel. “Carl? No, he’s fine”, says Nickel (43).
It may be Nickel’s over protective nature that misguides Carl to the level of getting lost one day. He does not come back till late night. This leaves Fay confused having no way to go. This is the most crucial point in Nickel’s life when he agrees to Fay’s suggestion of finding Carl by going place to place all over the region. This sudden departure of Carl brings a turn in the lives of Nickel and Fay. The search for him is endless yielding no results. The narrator describes how they meander around in search of Carl:

Fay didn’t talk going over to her house. She just gave me directions and none of them in advance. She told me to get on Union and keep going. We went through downtown, past long stretches of sleeping auto body shops and use car lots, past Sun studios and the Baptist hospital, where Marion used to work. The only bright thing that time of night was the occasional Jim Dandy store, lit up in a firestorm of electric lights. (50)

The pathetic story of the Taft family grips Nickel so tightly that he finds it nearly impossible to unknot himself. The fact how Taft, the head of the family died while building a deck, and how Mrs. Taft left her job as the secretary in Fay’s school for having a good funeral, leaves ineradicable imprints on Nickel’s mind. Though Carl and Taft did much to survive the blows suffered due to the untimely death of their father, it was not enough. This story of Taft further strengthens Nickel’s desire to protect them against any problem whatsoever. His heart-felt desire is fulfilled now and he starts thinking about how their father would have been heading the family before
he died. When Carl steals some stuff including six hundred and fifty dollars in cash and eleven bits of glossy magazine paper from Nickel’s bar, Nickel scolds him and threatens him to beat. Carl goes out of sorts and says that it has all happened because of his father’s untimely death. This emotional outburst of Carl affects Nickel to the deepest core of his heart and he gets lost in day dreaming. He sees Fay and Carl in their childhood. He sees Carl fumbling with Taft’s keys. He also thinks that when Taft was alive he would have never slept until both of his children were home. This intervention by Nickel in a dead person’s life further deepens the former’s sorrow caused by the loss of his own son and his beloved. After a great deal of deliberation about the Taft family, he comes out of his trance and thinks of his own life. He declares himself responsible for all the wrong doings that have ruined his family:

There were other reasons, hundreds of them that made me so sure that all I was wondering was why I hadn’t been more firm with her in the restaurant. I won’t deny caring for her. I won’t deny that the sight of her little hands folded over each other on the table top while she spoke thrilled me in a way I couldn’t fully account for. But thoughts like that was not the kind that led a man to marriage. I was sure. I was flattered, but there was no doubt in my mind. (204)

The author has beautifully highlighted the irony of a person’s life who, because of not taking right decision regarding his own family, suffers hugely at the hand of his fate. John Nickel’s character resembles the
character of King Lear in Shakespeare’s sixteenth century play *King Lear*. King Lear too commits the same mistake while taking his decision about his most loyal daughter Goneril. The delineation of the chief character in the novel is vibrant and full of happenings. At no place in the book the story gets loose, as it revolves around the main theme of the novel. Sometimes the writer mixes the past with the present; but the ultimate purpose of recuperation never gets diminished.

Patchett’s *Bel Canto* is another novel in which course of action is largely affected by fate and destiny. The author has highlighted several issues that have huge impact on day today life of a common man. But the things that always stay at the centre of all these issues are the strangeness of fate and the healing power of destiny. At the very onset of the novel, it can be assumed that fate will have an imposing position in the lives of all the towering figures. It has been discussed here how human beings are sometimes left with no option but to repent the past decisions. As the narrative progresses, it becomes obvious how auto run powers plot Patchett’s characters into unwelcome conditions. It is not only the negative aspect of such sinister powers that has been discussed here; but their positivity has also been given equal space.
Though the charming kissing scene at the beginning of the novel is symbolic of something good to happen, this kiss is not taken in the light; it is taken when the lights are off and there pervades complete darkness all over the place. This darkness becomes a sign of the ensuing unpleasant and somber incidents that unfold as the story progresses. The first victim who suffers massively at the hand of his fate is Ketsumi Hosokawa, one of the three protagonists in the novel. He has been invited as the chief guest at the party. The attack by the terrorists on the celebrating people leaves Hosokawa and others in an indeterminate state. Ruben Iglesias, the Vice President; Roxane, the great soprano; and Gen, the translator of Hosokawa all are here to undergo the same demise. The terror grips all the people by forcing them lie down on the floor. Those who resist are beaten up and compelled to obey the generals of the terrorist group. The picture we see here reflects the true nature of suppression and torture. The time is really hard for both the hosts and the guests who would have never thought of such a grim situation. No humanity is shown by the terrorists. The agony the people have to endure here has been well explained by the author:

The few who had done it wrong rolled over now. Two of the Germans and a man from Argentina would not lie down at all until the soldiers went and poked them sharply in the backs of their knees with rifles. (20)
The depiction of this scene reminds the reader of the terror attacks happening all over the world now-a-days. Everything is done by force and mere manifestation of horror. The most crushing story is of Simon Thibault from Paris. He has come here as the ambassador of France. He has come along with his wife, Edith Thibauld. They, at the initial stage, do not show any pressure and keeps on enjoying by loving each other. The reference of their past life in Paris attracts the attention of the reader. As the time drags on, the other hostages become active and start talking to one another. This disturbance created by them enrages the terrorists and General Alfredo shoots another hole in the ceiling which puts an end to all kinds of interactions amongst the hostages- ‘a few high-pitched yelps and then pin drop silence’. The Vice President keeps looking at the ceiling, afraid that last bullet might have nicked a pipe; that would be a hell of a thing to cope up with now. The right side of his face, which changes and grows hourly, is now swollen into a meaty yellow red and his right eye is shut tight. As the situation grows tougher and tougher someone knocks at the front door from outside. The generals and terrorist boys all become alert as they were ready to kill someone now. The Vice President is forced by General Benjamin to open the door and responding the call from outside. The cruel general nudges the Vice President’s shoulder with the rounded edge of his boot,
making him get up. When the Vice President stands still and aching, General Benjamin puts the slender broomstick of the rifle’s barrel between his shoulder blades and steers him forward. His own condition, always exacerbated by stress, begins to bloom one tiny pustule at the end of every nerve and he longs for hot compress almost as much as he longs for revolution. The knock repeats itself:

RUBEN IGLESIAS. I’m coming. I know where my door is.
GENERAL BENJAMIN. Slowly.
RUBEN IGLESIAS. Slowly, slowly, yes, tell me, please. I’ve never opened a door. (38)

The Vice President Iglesias might have never thought of such an insult and embarrassment in his life. He being the most prominent figure is the most vulnerable person to receive the maximum share of the punishment. It is nothing but Iglesias’s own bad luck that has brought him to this death offering place. The party was to be addressed by the country’s president, Masuda; but because of his decision of staying back at his home to enjoy his favourite soap opera on television, he deputed Iglesias to precede the meeting. If Iglesias had already known about this unwonted incident, he would have never come to attend it. But nobody can avoid what God wants to happen and what has been written in one’s destiny.
What is of greatest concern here is the release of the big names like Roxane and Hosokawa who have got potential to damage the image of the country if not saved well in time. Roxane is one of the most innocent persons here. The decision of the generals to hold this lady back rouses pity and sympathy in the hearts of all, especially Hosakawa. General’s refusal to Roxane’s release makes her angry, and she reacts to it very strongly. General Hector’s word “Espera”, meaning “wait” confuses her and she pulls her arm back sharply and the jolt causes the General’s glasses to slip from his nose. “Look”, she says to General Hector, no longer willing to tolerate his hand on her skin, “Enough is enough. I came here to do a job, to sing for a party, and I did that. I was told to sleep on the floor with all of these people you have some reason to keep, and I did that, too. But now it’s over” (93).

The hostages share what has been inflicted on to them. The moment when Gen brings Roxane to Hosokawa serves as the time of sharing of emotions between the two. “Mr. Hosokawa,” Roxane says, and holds out her hand to him. “Miss Coss”, he says, and bows (93). He talks to her with great sincerity the kind two people use after a lifetime of knowing one another. But what is a lifetime? This afternoon? This evening? The kidnappers have reset the clocks and no one knows anything about time anymore. Better this once to be inappropriate and honest as the burden of his guilt is tightening a
noose around his throat. He accepts before her that he likes her singing and has been a great admirer of her; and that he is some part responsible for the death of her accompanist. Both Roxane and Hosokawa think that they have committed a mistake by coming to this place. For Hosokawa, it is a very tough situation because he has never led a static life. He is treated like a child who has to ask for every second thing. He has to take permission for sitting, for standing, and for everything whatever he wants to do. Life has really become somewhat hellish for him.

As time and tide waits for none, same thing happens here with the hostages. As the time passes, the situation turns from bad to worse. Roxane gets confused thinking what will be the result of this long lingering crisis. She looks across the room as if she were looking for her accompanist; but he is already half a world away, his grave now covered by an early Swedish frost. The talk among Roxane, Gen and Hosokawa elucidates how people feel while in captivity:

HOSOKAWA. I keep telling myself that this is going to be over soon, that I’m just taking a vacation from work.
ROXANE. Not that I think this is a vacation.
GEN. Of course.
ROXANE. We’ve been in this miserable place nearly two weeks. I’ve never gone a week without singing unless I was sick. I’m going to have to start practicing soon. I really don’t want to sing here. I don’t want to give
them the satisfaction. Do you think it would be worth it to wait another
couple of days? Do you think they’ll let us go by then?
GEN. Surely someone here must play.
ROXANE. The piano is very great. I can play a little but not to accompany
myself. I somehow doubt they’d go out and kidnap a new accompanist for
me. I don’t know what to do with myself when I’m not singing. I don’t
have any talent for vocations.
HOSOKAWA. I feel very much the same way when I am not able to listen
to opera. (123)

Through this somber discussion among the major characters the
author wants to send a clear message to the reader that the sufferings at the
hand of the terrorists have reached the extreme point. Nobody is spared here.
Not a single minute of their life is useful for them. Circumstances are so
hard-hitting not only for the major characters; the simpletons also undergo
the same misfortune. Messner, the Red Cross representative tells Gen that
they are just the puppets of luck and chance. “We are the handmaidens of
circumstances, you and I,” he says. “Yes, slave, of course, but it doesn’t
sound as nice. I think I’ll stay with handmaidens. I don’t mind that” (146).
Fate does play a big role not only in the lives of the captured ones but also in
the lives of their capturers. It is Patchett’s expertise in writing that she makes
her characters types not individuals. What they feel is felt by all the people
all over the world. The scene when General Alfredo stops the box carrying
some articles for Roxane at the gate, reflects the general feeling about being
helpless in certain circumstances. General Alfredo’s infatuation for music and Roxane’s entreat to hand over the box to her compels him to pinch the bridge of his nose to push down the headache; but it does not work. The music has confused him to the point of senselessness. He cannot hold on to his convictions and starts thinking of his sister who died of scarlet fever when he was just a boy. The problem General Alfredo is enduring now is articulated by the novelist:

> These hostages were like terrible children, always wanting more for themselves. They knew nothing of what it meant to suffer. He would have been glad to walk out of the house at that moment and take whatever fate was waiting for him on the other side of the wall, a lifetime in prison or a bullet in the head. (153)

Alfredo with so little sleep finds himself unable to make any decision. He turns and leaves the room. The time has been torturous all through the incident; but before the controversial box it was more dangerous and unbearable, particularly for the hostages. Even though not being directly threatened, they mull over the inevitability of their own death. Even if by stroke of great good fortune no one shoots them in their sleep, they now understand exactly what is in the cards, be it before their release or after. They will each and every one of them die. Surely they have always known this, but now death comes and sits on their chests at night, peers cold and hungry into their eyes. The world is a dangerous place; notions of personal
safety are a fairy story told to children at bedtime. They think about the senseless death of the solitary pianist in their company. They miss him, and yet look how simply, how brilliantly he has been replaced. They missed their daughters and their wives. They are alone in this house but what difference does it make? Death has already sucked the air from the bottom of their lungs, leaving them weak and listless. The bloodshed after a very long siege of the innocent people is extremely tragic. Alex Clark’s review of the book is very much relevant:

Like that of her heroine, Patchett’s great talent in Bel Canto is one of range. With bravura confidence and inventiveness she varies her pace to encompass both lightning flashes of brutality and terror and long stretches of incarcerated ennui. The novel’s sensibilities extend from the sly wit of observational humour to subtle, mournful insights into the nature of yearning and desire. Like the blueprint of operatic performance that she has imported, Patchett slides from strutting camp to high tragedy, minute social comedy to sublime romanticism. (The Guardian)

In this hair stirring novel, the author has brilliantly narrated how circumstances and sufferings make people stronger even in the face of death. Even the ugly aspect of one’s fate can be avoided if one is determined to do so. Through her most prominent protagonist Roxane, Patchett leaves a message that change is expected from anywhere and in any situation. Though luck may not be in favour of the characters, they keep on clinging,
and finally get out of the histrionic situation. Their unity and positive thinking about life steer them out of troubled waters.

The interference caused by the presence of undetectable powers in the lives of Patchett’s characters in her another novel *Run* differs from what we see in her earlier works. The novel presents a detailed account of how the desire for having a big family gets fulfilled. The prevailing issues the author has focused on in this book are- adoption, parenthood, race, politics and generation gap. After Bernadette’s early death, Doyle, the chief protagonist in the novel, had a huge responsibility to bring up the children. He did it with great conviction and honesty, and helped them grow into well built up personalities. Though he never did anything wrong with regard to their upbringing, he could not stop himself from expecting them to be politicians like him. The mistake Doyle committed was that he, without discussing with his adopted sons, took a decision about their future. He, being a retired mayor of Boston tried to impose his own interest on them. His dream of having at least one of his sons in politics gets shattered when he comes to know that their interests lie elsewhere. The determination of Tip and Teddy about their career is innovative enough until it is marred by their fate. Professor Donald Mitchell’s take on the role of fate in this novel is apt enough:
You can see their future spread out ahead of them…. as they will inevitably grow further apart. But fate steps in, and none of them will ever be the same. *(Amazon)*

The clash between the thoughts of two different generations has been highlighted upon in a proficient way. The opposition put up by Tip and Teddy is not against the imposition of thought. They want freedom of choice in their career. It is not only Tip and Teddy who are against Doyle’s political life, Bernadette, too, did not like it when she was alive. Though she did never oppose it directly, she did it secretly in her prayer to God:

> She did not pray for Doyle to be elected to the City Council, though sometimes she prayed unconsciously for the speeches and the fund-raising dinners to come to an end. She did not understand her husband’s love of politics but she prayed for him to have what he wanted because she loved him. (21)

What actually has brought disturbance to this sophisticated Boston family is Doyle’s bad luck. His fate has never been on his side. He thinks right, but his family members always take him to be wrong. In spite of his intensive efforts, he finds himself unable to cajole his sons for the occupation he wants to see them in. Tip’s interest in ichthyology and Teddy’s affection for Church make Doyle damaged. He resents Tip’s love of fishes because he thinks that the fishes and possibly even science are a waste of Tip’s serious consideration. Doyle’s thinking about Tip’s interest may not be called helpful because Tip knows the exact point of origin of the interest
and his father is completely to blame. Patchett has made Doyle a typical character who represents the true nature of an over caring father. It is deeply ironical that Doyle has not been able to bridge the gulf of differences between his sons and himself. In spite of the boys having been with him since their babyhood, he has never understood what they actually want to be. The argumentation between Doyle and his sons at the Kennedy Centre echoes the clear divide between the ideologies of the two camps. These light skirmishes between them will have a huge impact on the career of Tip and Teddy. Bernard Doyle, a sixty three years old and five feet nine inches tall tries very hard to think of ways to keep ahead of his sons. It may be his superiority complex that has misled him regarding the future of his adopted sons. His denial to the freedom to his sons endangers his position as a true father. It is not only Tip and Teddy’s late coming that worsens the things here; but small issues like Tip not wearing a coat become a cause for concern:

DOYLE. You’re frozen. Why aren’t you wearing a coat?
TIP. It wasn’t all that cold this morning.
DOYLE. Didn’t you know the weather was going to be bad?
TIP. If the weather was going to be so bad then what are we doing here?
DOYLE. You’d think I was dragging you to Providence for a boat show.
TIP. I need to finish my work.
DOYLE. Work never gets finished. I walked out on a stack of incorporation papers. My secretary chased me down to the elevator with
letters to sign. I imagine it will all still be there tomorrow. Jesse Jackson will not be. (30)

Jesse Jackson’s speech may mesmerize Doyle, but his sons are not impressed by any of his political rhetoric. For example, Tip is physically here but mentally he is still in the MCZ, reviewing the notes he took this afternoon on the jaw structure of regional fishes. Jackson’s voice is nothing but a metronome in the background, the steady ticking that regulates the artistry of science in his head. Politicians will always be talking. They have been talking forever. If Tip has chosen to listen to them every time, they choose to tell him something he would have gone out of his mind by the seventh grade. Tip completely ignores what Jackson says regarding politics. He reviews the material that will certainly be included in his advanced marine biology exam.

The hot discussion between Doyle and his sons goes on even after the speech has been finished. This results into a fatal accident in which Tip has a narrow escape because of his real mother Tennessee blindsiding him with the full force of her body. The reader finds here the intermingling of fate and destiny in the life of the Doyle family. Tip’s fate drives him towards a death causing accident but his destiny saves him from that. It takes heavy toll on his real mother as she herself gets hit in order to save her son. Through this encounter between a wretched mother and her sons whom she had donated
decades, ago the author stirs up plethora of emotions in the hearts of the readers. Ann Lewis’s assessment of this scene is appropriate:

Patchett takes the reader through the mechanisms of confusion, doubt, anger, and mourning these boys feel when confronted with this lost birth mother, and together with their father Doyle they surprise the reader with the coldly practical worry that the boys have been "stalked" all their lives by this silent watcher. *(Amazon)*

Tennessee is not alone who becomes the victim of this bad time, her 12 year old daughter Kenya receives the greatest share of sufferings. This child would have never thought of such a horrifying moment in her life. But the bell has already gone and she is left with no option but to show courage in these unseemly circumstances. She gathers herself and moves forward to take her mother out of the mess:

Kenya, who was capable of moving like lightning, of leaping, of vaulting, of being her mother’s little gazelle, was there, beside her, before the coat had settled out across the snow. Not only was Kenya fast, she had trained her young reflexes to snap like springs. Crack the starting gun and she was off the blocks. She ran. She was down on her hands and knees, calling, “Mama, Mama,” but it didn’t come out anything like the word. It was just a long, high sound that started with the letter M. She put her hand beneath her mother’s cheek to turn her head. She needed to see her face when did her mother’s head get to be so heavy? *(46)*

Though the evil power of fate has been unleashed on this young creature, she refuses to change her mind and continues showing boldness even in the face of great torment. As we flip through the initial part of the
book, the hardships of the characters get intensified. It all is seen by Erika Borsos as a result of the characters’ being wrongly fated:

On the night when the Doyles ended up caring for Kenya, clues surfaced which made the "accident" seem more like fate. The story unfolds unique details which are tightly woven together revealing a highly engaging story in which a young black mother gave up her sons for adoption to the Mayor of Boston and his wife. *(Amazon)*

There comes a sudden change in Kenya’s life when Sullivan, Doyle’s eldest and real son comes back from Africa. He reacts very sarcastically to the inclusion of another child in the family. “On my calendar it was three weeks ago,” Doyle says. “Could you turn the stereo down?” “And now you’ve adopted another child,” Sullivan says to his father. “I think that’s marvelous” (93). Sullivan’s unsympathetic approach reflects his frustration because he never got true love from his father. Since Doyle came to know that Sullivan was not interested in politics, he has been ignoring him in every respect. It was Doyle’s rough handling of his real son that had compelled the latter to leave for Africa. He paid more attention to the adopted sons than the real one. Despite Bernadette’s efforts to give equal treatment to Sullivan, Doyle was not affected even a bit. Doyle tried to focus his attention on his first son for a moment, but it was only an effort not earnest desire to do so. Bernadette was always telling him to think about Sullivan. “You can’t make everything about the little boys,” she would say.
But right from the beginning Doyle saw the little boys as a fresh start, a chance to do a better job. It was remarkable in retrospect, seeing as how Sullivan was at that point still more than a decade away from complete ruin. Once death put its icy hands on Bernadette, Sullivan did his best to destroy everything that was not already lost. He had stood by Sullivan, even if Sullivan would never acknowledge it. He had been an imperfect father to an imperfect son; and as far as he was concerned they were even. Now, that Sullivan is back, Doyle will do his best to walk the line between extending himself and playing the fool. He tries to make his voice sound kind. “You know, we expected you home three weeks ago, and I can’t remember the last time you picked up your phone when I called,” (109).

This sudden change in Doyle’s attitude gives some solace to Sullivan. But Sullivan, too, like his father is fated to suffer. While staying with his parents on Union Park, he stays awake till late night. He blinks into the darkness of his childhood room, makes out the shape of his oak dresser and the narrow door of his closet, and realizes that coming home has been a mistake. This is another reshuffling of life, a complete reinvention that calls for some time and a little peace, neither of which has ever been afforded to him in his father’s house. Sullivan kicks off his covers, closes his eyes, and for a brief moment tries again. But sleep is a mirage, a wavy, blue line in the
desert that you never actually get to. He pulls himself out of bed and goes to
the window. He finds himself stranded again in his own house. He is so
unlucky that even his real father considers him secondary to the adopted
sons. It sounds very unfortunate to Tennessee that Sullivan left his house
because of her sons-Tip and Teddy. When she asks him question after
question, he replies in detail:

I left because my father gave up on me as soon as there were those other
boys for him to bank on, and I hated those other boys, your sons, because
they took his attention and his love without any effort at all. Besides,
everything reminds me of my mother. That was reason enough to go. Every
day I am in Boston I think of how she died I will tell you that the
Christ to whom you pray knew nothing of suffering compared to what she
endured at the end. Outside of Boston I do not see her face on a daily
basis. (170)

Sullivan’s character has been given a self explanatory delineation in
the novel. He is perhaps the most harassed figure. Through this character
Patchett has tried to tell the reader how innocent persons are generally
ignored even by their near and dear ones. One by one almost all the
characters become victims of their fate. Not even the most sacred soul of
father Sullivan is left untouched by sorrows. At the end of the novel, we see
that Father Sullivan, who has been treating people by his spiritual powers, is
himself on the verge of death. Author’s account of Father Sullivan’s death is
extremely vivid and concrete:
When Father Sullivan woke up again he was in a bed himself, a bed that was unfamiliar. There was a plastic tube lying flat across his body blowing oxygen into his nose, another tube dripping something into his arm, and Teddy was there sitting beside him. (320)

The force of fate and destiny we perceive in this novel is shockingly amazing. In spite of so many things being discussed, the role of fate and destiny remains in the driving seat. What actually disturbs the mind of the reader is the plight of the adopted boys and their little sister. Richard Nelson precisely penetrates through the theme of the novel:

Run tackles so many different issues so effortlessly--interracial families, adoption, the untimely death of a parent or spouse, a crisis of faith, and the question of what to do with one's life--that one wonders whether Ann Patchett started out to write an "issue novel" and came up with this pretty meditation on an unconventional family instead. (Amazon)

The study of Pachett’s novels shows that fate and destiny play a major role in shaping the lives of all of her characters. It is not always probable that they achieve what they want. Sometimes, they are guided by some unobserved powers which are not always in their favour.
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