

# **All the Winters After Study Guide**

**All the Winters After by Seré Halverson**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Halverson, Seré Prince. *All the Winters After*. Sourcebooks, 2016.

Kache Winkel lives a life of quiet repression in Austin, Texas, until his girlfriend breaks up with him and he is let go from his job. Suddenly rudderless, Kache returns to his hometown of Caboose, Alaska to catch up with the only family he has left, his aunt “Snag” and his grandmother, Lettie. Kache's mother, father, and brother all perished in a plane crash 20 years before, and Kache has not been home since.

Upon his arrival, Aunt Snag admits that she has not been taking care of the family's cabin and its surrounding land because she, like Kache, found it too painful to return. As it turns out, the reason it is too painful for Snag is that she was in love with Kache's mother, a situation that had caused a terrible fight between her and Kache's father the night before the accident. She blames herself, presuming that Kache's father was distracted when he crashed their plane.

When Kache learns that the cabin and homestead have been vacant for 20 years, he rushes out to investigate and finds a young Russian woman named Nadia living there. Nadia is escaping her own tragic past. She was a member of the local sect of “Old Believers” with strict, regressive ideas about women. She had been married as a teenager to an older man who violently abused her. She staged a fake death scene so it would appear she had drowned, and ran away from the village where the Old Believers lived. She is hiding out in the cabin with the permission of Kache's grandmother Lettie.

Lettie, meanwhile, is in a nursing home reflecting on her life. As a young woman, she longed for Alaska, finally convincing her husband A.R to move there from Kansas. Though she had thought herself infertile, upon arrival in Caboose, then “Herring Town,” Lettie immediately conceived twins, Snag and Kache's father Glenn. Lettie devoted her life to cultivating the land and raising her children. Still, she regrets that she was not more helpful to Snag when she was growing up confused about her sexuality, and she feels guilty for taking A.R away from the home he loved to pursue her own dreams.

Kache and Nadia spend time together working on the land and things quickly turn romantic. Nadia helps Kache to rethink his troubled relationship with his father. They never got along because Kache was a sensitive musician, not a rugged outdoorsman like Glenn. Nadia is in a unique position to help because she has read Kache's mother's journals, which were left behind in the cabin after the plane crash. Kache tries to help Nadia in return by asking around about her abusive husband. The rumor is that he left the Old Believers' village long ago. Kache convinces Nadia to return to visit her family. He cannot get his family back, but perhaps she can get hers. She returns, but they will not accept her, as she no longer adheres to their faith.

A flourishing relationship with an attendant at her mother's nursing home allows Snag to let go of the pain of the past and move forward. She tells Kache the whole truth about



the fight the night before the plane crash, and that she had been in love with his mother. He has a hard time accepting this at first, he is very angry, but when he gets in a fight with Nadia about her desire to go away to art school, he realizes that love can cause people to act selfishly sometimes.

Kache has been regularly performing with his high school band at the local dive bar. The night of the fight with Nadia, he sings a song about heartache, and he is heckled by a Russian man in the audience who he has spoken to at the bar several times before. The man makes a reference to a goat that was killed on the homestead's property recently, Kache and Nadia assumed by a predatory animal. Kache realizes that the man is Vladimir, Nadia's violent husband, but when he jumps down from the stage to find him, he is already gone.

Racing back to the homestead, Kache has to stop for gas, putting him several minutes behind Vladimir. When he arrives, Vladimir is holding Nadia hostage with a knife near a canyon on the property. The tense standoff ends when Nadia's dog attacks, and he tumbles over the side of the canyon. Kache descends after him to make sure he is dead, and sees his father's ghost, guiding him forward. It is a moment of redemption and reconciliation. Vladimir is mortally wounded, but not dead, and Kache shoots him.

Finally, Kache realizes he must let Nadia go on her own journey, he belongs on the homestead now, and she belongs at art school. They say their goodbyes. Shortly after Nadia leaves, Lettie passes away peacefully on the property of the homestead.



# Chapters 1-6

## Summary

Chapter 1 – The book begins with an omniscient narrator observing an unnamed female character in a cabin. She has carved marks on the walls to indicate the passage of days, and there are many, many marks. We are told about the woman's rustic daily routines, being awakened by her dog, fishing, raising livestock, foraging, and hunting. At night she reads the books that line the walls of the cabin and the “yellowed magazines from 1985” (4). With the exception of the dog, Leo, she is alone. Suddenly she hears a sound. With her gun out of reach, she must make do with the knife she has used to carve the marks. She pulls the dog upstairs to a bedroom and under the bed with her. She is concerned about a specific potential intruder, the narrator cryptically notes, “It was him, she was sure of it” (6).

Chapter 2 – We are introduced to Kachemak Winkel, a 38-year-old Austin, Texas man who has just been let go from his job as an accountant and broken up with by his girlfriend. He is flying home on the 20th anniversary of the plane crash that killed his father, mother, and brother Denny. Home is a small Alaskan town nicknamed “Caboose,” which he has not visited since the crash. Kachemak, nicknamed “Kache,” is anxious to see his grandmother, Lettie, and Aunt Snag, his father's twin sister. Grandma Lettie is very old and unwell. He looks out the window at the Cook Inlet and Kenai mountain range, remembering his mother's excitement to point out the landmarks from the height of their Cessna.

Chapter 3 – We shift focus to a third character, Kache's Aunt Snag, a.k.a Eleanor, who is busily preparing her home for his arrival. She remembers Kache as a young man in the kitchen, strumming his guitar. Her house is filled with Amway, Mary Kay, and JaFra products, she is a successful “pyramid” sales representative. She is anxious to see her nephew, but worried about something she has to tell him.

Chapter 4 – Returning to Kache's point of view, he is picked up at the airport by Snag who tells him that his grandmother is “not herself” (17). On the ride through town, he recalls childhood memories with his family, a hardware store he visited with his father, a liquor store where his brother bought him beer. They go to the nursing home to visit Grandma Lettie, who is not entirely lucid. When she sees Kache, she is momentarily confused. She asks Snag if Kache knows about the plane crash (20 years ago), and mentions that he was supposed to be on that plane. Kache wants to know about the state of the family cabin, but beyond stating that it is being rented, Snag is not forthcoming with information. On a trip to the store, Kache runs into an old family friend who mentions a Russian village on the far edge of town where the “Old Believers” live (21).



Chapter 5 – Snag dodges questions about the cabin from Kache, finally admitting she has never returned to it in the 20 years since the accident. She feels extremely guilty. Kache says he understands, but she worries he is upset because he leaves in a hurry.

Chapter 6 – Kache drives out to the cabin, worrying all the while about what he will find. Will it be ruined, all the family's possessions lost? He recalls some family history, how his grandparents, Lettie and A.R Winkel built the cabin in the 1940s, and how his mother Elizabeth, a.k.a “Bets” was a civilizing influence on his rugged father, Glenn. Kache feels his father was always disappointed with him because he was a sensitive musician, not fond of hard labor. Kache's path to the cabin is blocked by downed trees and overgrown bushes, he exits the car and continues on foot. To his surprise, not only is the cabin still standing, smoke is rising from the chimney.

## Analysis

The first words of the novel set an ominous tone, as author Seré Prince Halverson tells us only that someone is going to get their knife, however we learn quickly that the knife in question is being used not as a weapon, but to mark the passage of time. This tone of vague apprehension or dread is a cornerstone of the novel. It is heightened by the author's slow pacing and dissemination of facts, we learn there is a girl, there is a “him,” there was a plane crash, etc., piece by piece. The alternating point of views also make it difficult to establish the full range of the narrative, as each character is in possession of different information, and Halverson switches quickly back and forth. Often throughout the book, this withholding of information from one person to another will cause grief.

Halverson also uses her setting, the unruly frontier of Alaska, to great effect. While flying overhead, Kache observes ash and soot from dormant volcanoes, symbolic of the slow-churning turmoil at the center of the plot. The red caboose for which Kache's hometown is named lies at the end of the defunct railroad, a potent metaphor for the insularity of small-town life. The narrator mentions that Aunt Snag would like to get the caboose moving again, but for the moment it is literally going nowhere, and to add a touch of menace, from the air it looks like a “smear of blood on the tip of a knife” (12).

Aunt Snag is a fishing savant, “Snag” is a reference to her first catch as a child. It should be noted that the female characters are depicted as strong and capable women of action, a requirement for Alaskan living, and another thing that sets Kache apart, he is an artist, not an outdoorsman.

Halverson uses fishing imagery when phrasing Kache's memories, a suitable choice for a narrative about Alaska. He feels the “pull and release of resistance and surrender” as he is “lured” back in (17). Kache also notes that it is “breakup” time in Alaska, this is a reference to the dawning of spring, when the ice begins to break apart and melt on the river and over the land. Though Kache describes this as a “depressing” time of year, it is the cusp of rebirth signaling new beginnings for Halverson's characters.



When Kache meets a family friend at the grocery store, Halverson uses foreshadowing to reference the existence of the Old Believers, a group of backwoods Russian immigrants living on the edge of Caboose. In another instance of foreshadowing, Kache, notes a wide canyon that provides a boundary for the homestead, and thinks “Nobody with a brain would descend that canyon” (27).

As Kache heads through the wilderness toward the cabin, he also provides the first references to wild animal predators that play a largely metaphorical purpose in the novel. The reader is consistently told that bears, moose, wolves, etc. are a dangerous presence, but these are actually symbolic – most of the menace in the novel is man-made.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the author use foreshadowing in the first few chapters of the book?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the town's red caboose symbolize?

## Discussion Question 3

Why was Snag dishonest with Kache about the status of the cabin?

## Vocabulary

camaraderie, irony, anesthetizing, tethered, homestead, chenille, finesse, emanating, decay, mementos, vulnerability, negligent, marooned, deterrent, hermit, loamy



# Chapters 7-12

## Summary

Chapter 7 – Kache imagines for a moment that the plane crash was just a bad dream and his family is safely inside the cabin. Snapping out of this fantasy, he arms himself with a rake and climbs in through a window. He hears a dog bark. He turns on a light and takes in the surroundings, his family's life preserved just as it had been before the crash, including the family photos and the posters on the walls of his teenage bedroom. He sees an arm emerge from underneath his bed, clothed in one of his mother's shirts, along with the dog's nose. He succumbs to fantasy again, whispering, "Mom?" Instead, a young blond woman emerges. She expresses her surprise to see Kache alive, and calls him by name.

Chapter 8 – The young woman's name is Nadia. She is living in the cabin with permission from Kache's Grandma Lettie. She knows Kache from Lettie's stories and the photographs around the cabin, but she thought the whole family was dead. Lettie had described Kache as a sensitive musician who often quarreled with his father. They introduce themselves and Nadia begins to cry because she has not spoken to another person in four years, the last time Lettie had been to the cabin. Kache is confused by her tears and assures her he will not hurt her. She makes an enigmatic reference to her own death as she continues to weep.

Chapter 9 – Meanwhile, Snag is still feeling guilty. She digs through a drawer to unearth a photograph of Bets, Kache's mother. The photo is from a fishing trip, Snag recalls, the first time they met. Shortly thereafter, Bets met Snag's brother Glenn, who promptly fell in love with her "too" (41), the implication being that Snag loved her first.

Chapter 10 – Nadia, terrified, locks herself in the bathroom. Kache, shocked and angry, goes back outside to collect himself. There is a hawk owl circling the nearby canyon, its call echoing. It occurs to Kache that Nadia's presence may, in fact, be the only reason the cabin is still standing.

Chapter 11 – Inside the bathroom, Nadia talks herself into bravery in front of the mirror. She is trying to decide whether she should be frightened or angry or apologetic. She does not know Kache, but she knows Lettie, and she seems to know a lot about Kache's mother, so she decides to trust him.

Chapter 12 – Back inside the cabin, it occurs to Kache that Nadia is an Old Believer. In the seventeenth century, there was a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Old Believers emigrated, first to China and Brazil, then Oregon, then Alaska, back when Caboose was still calling Herring Town. Eventually this group had a falling out among themselves for religious reasons, separating into two camps. Kache and Nadia make awkward conversation. She tells him that Leo the dog is named after Tolstoy, that she is 28-years-old and she has been at the cabin for ten years. As Kache continues to look





around the house, it occurs to him that it is like a museum, containing the artifacts of youth. He pays particular interest to an old trunk that once contained his mother's journals, before Snag came to take them away, as she had been instructed to do by Bets in the case of her death. He has had enough for one day, and leaves the cabin.

## Analysis

When Kache comes upon the cabin, it seems to stare back at him, a bit of personification. The cabin is like a character in the book for all it represents, a symbol of the other characters' guilt and shame, and the vessel that holds all memories of the dead, both positive and negative. As he approaches, he forgets for a moment that he is not the intruder, he is the rightful owner. This is symbolic of Kache's feelings about Alaska and his old life, he never felt like he fit into the frontier lifestyle, he was an outsider. If the cabin is a museum to Kache's old life and family, Nadia is its conscientious curator. She is almost worshipful of the objects in the home, particularly things that belonged to Kache's mother Bets. Kache's decision to accept Nadia and her presence is also a decision to allow the past back in.

Leo acclimates to Kache's presence in the cabin right away, causing Nadia to wonder "How could a dog get used to having another human around so quickly?" (37). This is another instance where we see that animals can be more civilized than people. Both Nadia and Kache have grown accustomed to being alone, emotionally if not physically, and they will take longer than Leo to change their ways. Nadia's emotional outburst and shut-in lifestyle mark her as something "wild" to Kache, she is perfectly at home in the Alaskan tundra, with its moose, bears, birds, and so forth. Almost more animal than human herself (or so he thinks).

The sounds of the hawk owl's call echoing through the canyon is symbolic of the vastness of Kache's feelings and his loneliness. There is also more foreshadowing in this reference to the canyon, it is described as a "plunge" (43).

The shifting of the point of view serves another function here, as we are allowed a window into Kache's story through Nadia's memories of Lettie's stories about him. In a book that is all about secrets, we get our first bombshell, Aunt Snag was in love with Kache's mother Bets. This section also contains the first mention of Bets' journals, which Snag was instructed to burn, but did not.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Kache so angry when he discovers Nadia in the cabin, when he has not cared to return there for 20 years?



## Discussion Question 2

Kache thinks of Nadia as an Old Believer, a group mired in the past. Is he right? Is she really more stuck in the past than he is?

## Discussion Question 3

Why has Nadia been so careful with the Winkel family's possessions despite believing them all to be dead?

## Vocabulary

mysticism, synchronicity, boondocks, fluctuated, wariness, authoritative, schism, malamute, reverence, heirlooms



# Chapters 13-18

## Summary

Chapter 13 – Once Kache is gone, Nadia thinks over her options. She worries that Lettie, who she has not seen in years, is dead. She thinks she should leave the cabin, but she has nowhere to go. She is afraid of someone named Vladimir. She wants to see her family, but she feels like she cannot return to them. She remembers the first time she saw Lettie, after she had already been staying in the cabin for months, she had been frightened and hid, but Lettie called out to her, invited her inside, and fed her soup.

Chapter 14 – With Kache driving her truck, Snag needs a ride to the community chamber meeting where she plans to argue in favor of getting the railroad traveling through Caboose again. She recalls some town history, a brief boom in tourism and industry from a wealth of herring in the area. When the herring depleted, so did the town's popularity, and the name "Herring Town" became a misnomer. The reopening of the railroad is on track, but the community is at odds over the red cabooses still occupying the end of the line. Snag would like it to take its rightful place back on the train, but it has become a little "museum" to the town, a tourist destination that much of the community would like to keep in place. She starts to walk to the meeting, but then she begins to worry about the cabin again, perhaps Kache found it in ruins and went to tell Lettie how bad Snag had messed up. She decides to go to the nursing home instead.

Chapter 15 – Lettie daydreams at the nursing home, recalling her fascination with Alaska, how she had carried around a photograph of an Alaskan mountain range in her pocket. It became an obsession, fueled partly by her feelings of frustration at being unable to conceive a child. She convinced her husband A.R (who is no longer living) to sell their Kansas farm and move to Herring Town, where she fell instantly in love with the land and wildlife. Snag arrives and snaps Lettie out of her reverie. Lettie reminds herself that she must tell Kache about Nadia.

Chapter 16 – Kache does not want to evict Nadia from the property. She has been responsible for its upkeep for ten years. He is making plans for the cabin's future when he pulls into a coffee shop's drive-thru and encounters his high school girlfriend, Marion. She is still playing with their old band at a bar called the Spit Tune. He recalls being back in Austin, a few days before, watching a Do-it-Yourself construction show and remembering how his father used to tease him about not being handy. No one in Austin, except his recent ex-girlfriend Janie, knew anything about the plane crash or Kache's former interest in music, or anything at all of his interior life.

Chapter 17 – Still dwelling on his failed relationship with his father, Kache goes to the Spit Tune for a beer, where he chats with a Russian stranger. When Kache mentions the plane crash, the stranger commiserates, having lost his parents in a bear attack. Kache flashes back again to Austin, the night Janie broke up with him. He had



discovered a blog she was writing called “Happenings from Our Happy Home” where she had created a fantasy life involving a marriage with a much more capable and accomplished man she called “Mr. Happenings.” When he confronted her, she admitted that she was unhappy and did not believe he would ever change, and then she left him. Kache snaps out of the memory and leaves the bar, with the Russian stranger calling out to him to go “find [a] beautiful woman” (80).

Chapter 18 – Back at the cabin, Nadia makes no preparations to leave, as she had briefly considered doing. She looks at a photo of Kache as a boy, noting that his nose did not always have the bump on it she had noticed the night before. She recalls the split among the Old Believers that caused her family to leave the larger Russian village of Ural to settle in the new village of Altai, a difference of opinion over a bishop's authority. She was 13 and had planned to marry a boy named Niko in Ural, and she was crushed over the separation.

## Analysis

With the issue of the caboose, Snag sees an opportunity for the town to move forward in a way that she is unable to do herself. She knows that she is psychologically “stuck” - in the past, in Caboose, in dishonesty about who she is, so she has focused her efforts on this seemingly attainable thing. She wants to sweep history under the rug, this is why she could not go back to the cabin for all those years; she is unable to confront what she has lost. However, like most repressive coping mechanisms, it does not entirely work. She still misses Bets, as we see by her hanging on to the photograph, and, as we later learn, her inability to burn Bets' journals.

Nadia is stuck as well, certain she must leave, but unsure where to go. Lettie, meanwhile, is stuck in the nursing home, pining for the freedom of the open land. Kache is also stuck, though perhaps more metaphorically than the other characters. It is a great irony that he spent his unemployed days in Austin watching the Do-it-Yourself Network, while being frozen in time, unable to “do” anything at all for himself.

Halverson notes the reversal of traditional gender roles in A.R and Lettie's relationship, that it was she who steered the ship of their relationship toward Alaska. She felt most drawn to the land and the labor it required.

We learn from Nadia's thoughts and memories that she is not, ideologically, an Old Believer, that she is curious about the people in town and the outside world. Her observation of the bump on Kache's nose is indicative of her sharp eye, and her obsessive catalog of facts and details about the Winkel family. The bump, we learn later, is evidence of the last quarrel Kache had with his father before the plane crash.

## Discussion Question 1

What symbolic similarities exist between the cabin and the red caboose?



## Discussion Question 2

Nadia's father's favorite adage was "one must get used to it." How does Nadia subvert this proscription?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Janie create the Mr. Happenings blog? What role does Janie play in the narrative?

## Vocabulary

palpable, harrumphed, nori, lovage, negligence, refurbished, psychobabble, osmosis, kinship, dictum



# Chapters 19-24

## Summary

Chapter 19 – At the nursing home, Kache is led to his grandmother's room by the nurse, Gilly. Snag is there, and she tries to admit to Lettie that she has not been to the homestead in 20 years, but Kache interrupts her to say that the cabin is fine. Lettie already knows this, of course, because she knew Nadia was there to act as caretaker, a fact she had never shared with Snag.

Chapter 20 – Lettie explains how she had discovered Nadia living in the cabin and invited her to stay. Snag briefly recalls meeting an Old Believer on the beach as a young girl. Snag tells Kache to make sure Lettie takes her pills, and steps out into the hall to collect herself for a moment. The nurse, Gilly, observes that she is upset. Gilly asks if Snag would like to talk about it over a drink sometime, and Snag agrees, though she has no real intention of opening up to Gilly or anyone else.

Chapter 21 – Back inside the room, Lettie refuses to take one of her pills, claiming it makes her confused. Kache agrees to look the other way on this issue for now and talk to her doctor about changing her medication. She also makes Kache promise not to evict Nadia from the property. Later that day, Kache goes to the grocery store and purchases food and supplies for Nadia. He wonders if she will eat meat from an animal she has not killed herself, and is overwhelmed by a distressing memory from his childhood. His father had taken him out to shoot his first moose, but when they found one, Kache was unable to pull the trigger. Afterward, they quarreled, Glenn argued that Kache needed to learn these skills, and that it was important to know where your food came from.

Chapter 22 – Nadia sits in her canoe on the Bay and anxiously contemplates leaving the homestead. She makes a passing reference to having “falsely accused the water of killing her” (97). She realizes she has nowhere else to go, and decides to return to the cabin and see how the situation plays out when Kache returns.

Chapter 23 – Upon approaching the cabin with his supplies, Kache observes Nadia calling to, and then dancing with, a flock of sandhill cranes. He is transfixed. He decides he will stay longer than the two weeks he had originally planned in order to help her with the land. In conversation, Kache assures Nadia that Lettie is still alive and tries unsuccessfully to get more information about her past.

Chapter 24 – Kache is excited to be able to provide for Nadia, even if he knows she can provide for herself, and he is thrilled when she smiles at him. They talk a little about the Old Believers and she asserts that she is not faithful to their archaic practices. After dinner, he watches her walk off down the beach. He remembers his mother's smile and compares it to Nadia's. He realizes he is being a bit romantic, just as he hears a gunshot fired nearby.



## Analysis

This is the first extended look at Glenn Winkel that Halverson provides, and the first hint that he was trying to prepare Kache to be a man the only way he knew how. Glenn was not an insensitive boor; while skinning the moose, he remarked that the process was akin to “stepping inside a confessional” to ask forgiveness from the animal for taking its life (96). At the time, Kache was angry and embarrassed about the hunt and paid no mind to these remarks, but the incident seems to have acquired additional weight over the years.

Meanwhile, Nadia thinks of her own father and the family adage that “one must get used to it” (98). When it comes to living in solitary, Nadia has gotten too used to it. She does not know if she can handle another person's presence. This is one of the central conflicts of the novel, how does one master the fear of letting another person into one's life and heart, particularly when so much time has passed and the heart feels atrophied from lack of use? Nadia, Kache, and Snag are all dealing with the process of leaving the past behind and moving on, giving life and love another chance.

When Kache returns to the cabin with supplies for Nadia, he wonders if she will hide from him again, exhibiting his continued belief that she is unpredictable, almost like a feral animal. This feeling is supported by her dance with the sandhill cranes, an animal that he comes to associate with her, representing a sort of cryptic beauty. This is the first blatant indication that he finds her attractive. It is also the first time Kache compares Nadia to his mother. This will have interesting implications as their relationship evolves and he discovers that Nadia has her own close relationship with his mother through the journals, perhaps knowing her even better than he does. While he is attracted to Nadia, he still does not quite understand her or know what to expect from her. When the gun goes off at the end of Chapter 24, he wonders if she shot somebody.

### Discussion Question 1

How does Nadia's dance with the sandhill cranes serve as a turning point in the novel?

### Discussion Question 2

What has Kache's inability to shoot the moose come to symbolize for him?

### Discussion Question 3

What similar issues are Kache and Nadia trying to overcome?

## Vocabulary

finagling, fathom





# Chapters 25-30

## Summary

Chapter 25 – Nadia is on the beach, collecting clams and thinking about how strange it is to be in the presence of another person. She flashes back to a month after her family left Ural, when she stole away from Altai in the middle of the night, planning to return to Niko, but the very day she arrived he had married someone else. She has a cryptic thought about how this led to her "death." A crashing sound wrests Nadia from this memory and she fires her gun in the air, thinking a bear is near. Kache finds her and they head back toward the cabin. When Kache leaves, he promises to return the next day.

Chapter 26 – Back at the nursing home, Lettie lectures Snag about her inertia, relating a story from when the twins were babies, that Glenn started crawling right away, but Snag had to be coaxed with shiny objects to move across the floor. Snag is still feeling bad about never going out to the homestead, but Lettie says she understands why she could not. She knows Snag feels like she bears some responsibility for the plane crash, and tells her that she must stop feeling this way.

Chapter 27 – As Part 2 begins, over a month has passed and Kache is still in Caboose. Ostensibly he is helping Nadia around the homestead, but really she is teaching him about how to take care of the property. Spring has turned into summer, the landscape is bursting with life, and Kache feels happy, a large part of which, he knows, is being with Nadia. One day he asks her where she would like to go if she left Alaska, and she replies that she would go to San Francisco. He notes that she cannot even go into town, and asks her why this is, but she avoids the question. He considers having internet installed in the cabin. Nadia turns on a Neil Young record, and Kache has a memory of listening to it with his family, his father asking him to play along on his guitar. While he is lost in the memory, Nadia asks, "Can you play me this song?" - quoting his father's request word-for-word. He is alarmed and angered by the synchronicity and he abruptly leaves the cabin.

Chapter 28 – Snag meets Gilly at the Spit Tune for a drink. At the bar, Gilly is approached by a man, and Snag feels a twinge of jealousy. She reminds herself that she spent 20 years being jealous, followed by 20 years of remorse, and no good can come of these feelings. The two women talk about the red caboose. The bartender comes over and they all discuss the man at the bar, a Russian drifter who had once been married to a local Old Believer woman. Snag confesses to Gilly that she loved Elizabeth, that she had fantasized about Glenn dying so she could take his place, and thus she felt she had caused the plane crash. Gilly tells her that this is ridiculous, admonishing her to move on with her life. Through Snag's internal monologue, we learn she has not told Gilly the whole truth.



Chapter 29 – Kache sees a note from Snag, asking him to meet her at the Spit Tune. He thinks about his abandoned passion for music and flashes back to the last night he saw his parents alive. Snag had been there, and the adults had been drinking. There was another quarrel, this one ending with Glenn punching Kache in the nose, and Kache telling his father that he hated him. The next morning, his parents and his brother Denny departed on a camping trip, leaving Kache behind to cool off, and they died in the plane crash. Kache touches the bump on his nose as he remembers, then he goes to the music store to buy strings for his guitar.

Chapter 30 – We learn that Nadia has read Elizabeth's journals repeatedly, so she did know about the evening when Glenn asked Kache to play along to Neil Young. She is worried that Kache is staying away because he is angry with her. As she checks her fishing nets, she recalls the arrival of Vladimir in Altai. He was blue-eyed and handsome, and the two were quickly married, though she was 15 and he was in his 30s. She was confused when he did not initiate sex for several nights after the wedding, but when he finally did, he insisted on holding a knife to her throat during the act.

## Analysis

Nadia makes another reference to her “death.” Though she is referring to faking her death to escape an abusive situation, metaphorically she has been dead for ten years, in the sense that she has had no contact with the outside world. When Nadia fires the shotgun, she thinks she is scaring away a bear. Frequently when a bear is mentioned, Vladimir is not far behind. He is the menace lurking at the edges, both literally and symbolically an animal. He is a predator and, we learn later, an expert trapper. This is reiterated when Nadia expresses a feeling of kinship to the animals she slaughters for food, because she was once Vladimir's prey. There is an irony to setting a story in an environment known for its dangerous wildlife where the most menacing element is a man.

When Lettie admonishes Snag for her prolonged guilt over the plane crash, she says, “We can't help who we love,” a pointed insinuation that she knows about her daughter's sexuality, though it is still subtext at this point in the narrative (117). When Snag meets Gilly for a drink, she is fighting the onset of romantic feelings because love has never caused her anything but pain, having only really loved Kache's mother Elizabeth. They discuss the caboose, which is symbolic of many things in the book, but in this instance when Snag says that it has been “sitting there for decades, a pitiful museum to its former life” (130), she could be talking about herself, and her desire to get the train moving is a sublimated desire to change her own life.

In Chapter 27, we get another glimpse into Kache's relationship with his father, and again, it appears that Kache was perhaps overly critical of the man. Though Glenn and Kache had different interests and temperaments, Glenn's love for his son is evident when he asks him to play the guitar. It is a touching overture, and Kache recognizes this in retrospect. It is likely that his anger at Nadia in the moment is displaced anger at himself. This is confirmed by the inclusion of the scene of the last night before the crash



from Kache's perspective. He is not privy to all of the facts, so we are left trying to put the pieces together, just as in the narrative as a whole. Later, Snag's perspective from this evening will provide illumination. Obviously, Kache feels guilty that his last words to his father were "I hate you" (136).

We also learn that the bump in Kache's nose, which Nadia observed, is a scar from this incident with his father. Nadia, we will learn, has scars of her own, another trait the two characters share. Halverson introduces an epistolary aspect to the narrative by including Elizabeth's journal entries.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Lettie tell Snag the story about her and Glenn learning to crawl?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Kache become angry when Nadia asks him to play along to the Neil Young song?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is Snag fixated on moving the red caboose?

## **Vocabulary**

arduous, feigned, incessant, crevice, eradicated, unprecedented, entrenched, kernel, rampant, confounded, transpose, encroaching



# Chapters 31-36

## Summary

Chapter 31 – Still checking the fishing nets, Nadia thinks she hears a bear again, but it is Kache returning. He is playing guitar and singing a song about her. He asks if she would like him to have the internet connected and she affirms that she would. She is excited at the prospect of experiencing the outside world, and she imagines the Golden Gate Bridge. After dinner, they walk the property and Kache relates a story from his childhood. His dog Walter had fallen into the canyon while chasing a butterfly. Kache had tried to get his father to go down and see if the dog survived, but he refused. Nadia suggests that perhaps Glenn did go down to check after all, but Kache says this is impossible, it would have been too dangerous.

Chapter 32 – Snag arrives home and hears Kache playing the song about Nadia through the door. Once inside, she mentions to Kache that she has been spending a lot of time with Gilly at the Spit Tune. Kache is planning a short trip back to Austin to tie up loose ends. He bought a cell phone for Nadia so they can stay in touch. Kache tells Snag about his guilty feelings related to the night before the crash and she tries to comfort him. She remembers her own “screwup” that night and feels her own overwhelming guilt (153).

Chapter 33 – Nadia and Kache keep in touch by phone while he is away in Austin. When he returns, he has grown a beard, and Nadia recoils because it reminds her of Vladimir. He allows her to shave him with his grandfather's razor.

Chapter 34 – Kache installs the internet connection. He has decided to stay in Alaska permanently. He wants to help Nadia overcome her fears, so he asks her to go into town with him. She agrees, on the condition that they go to the nursing home to see Lettie.

Chapter 35 – At the nursing home, Nadia is happily reunited with Lettie. She is also moved by Kache's kindness toward his grandmother. Nadia wants to see more of the town, so they explore the museum in the red caboose, which features a display with quotes from Lettie and A.R. Nadia thinks of San Francisco again. Kache takes her to a hair salon and she gets her hair cut short. The hairstylist assumes that Nadia and Kache are a couple.

Chapter 36 – Kache finds himself adjusting happily to life on the homestead. He feels very close to Nadia, but he continues to worry that he, or she, will end up getting hurt. He suddenly asks her why she made those prior comments about his dad possibly going into the canyon after Walter and she admits to reading his mother's journals. Kache is confused because he thought Snag had burned them. Then he is angry because he feels that she has been manipulating him and that it is unfair for her to have so much knowledge of him without his consent. Nadia says the journals kept her alive.



## Analysis

When Kache asks Nadia if she would like to have access to the internet, she daydreams about the Golden Gate Bridge, which seems to be a symbol of freedom and excitement for her. Later, inside the caboose, Nadia thinks briefly of San Francisco while standing before a quote from Lettie Winkel about her devotion to Alaska. Halverson is drawing a parallel between the two characters. In Kansas, Lettie longed for Alaska, in Alaska Nadia longs for California. When Nadia has her hair cut, it symbolizes rebirth for her. She is taking her first steps back into civilization and into a life in which she can make decisions for herself. In a reversal of the biblical Samson, Nadia's haircut gives her strength.

The Walter story provides another opportunity for Kache to look at his father in a new way. He had been wounded by his father's unwillingness to go into the canyon after the dog, and continued to carry around that pain and anger throughout his life. Upon more measured consideration, he understands that his expectations were unrealistic. Of course, as Nadia is insinuating, Glenn did go down into the canyon. As the novel unfolds, Kache is able to reassess his relationship with his father, through Nadia's intercessions, and a new, more adult perspective of the memories he has been suppressing all of these years.

It is evident that Kache's relationship with Nadia, and Snag's relationship with Gilly, are doing the two emotional good, as they begin to feel their way toward honest communication with each other about their guilt. This is a turning point that will lead to further disclosures. Nadia's shaving Kache's face is a symbol of their increased intimacy. Permitting her to place a razor directly to his throat is an indication of trust. She is aware of this, and wonders if she is "too ruined" for him (157). It is also a direct flip of Nadia's assault by Vladimir. She is holding the knife now, and the moment is benign, not hostile. Kache, Nadia, and Snag are all trying to come to grips with the depths of their feelings after being closed off for so long. When Kache learns that Nadia has read his mother's journals, he is angry - not so much at the invasion of privacy, but at the sudden glut of intimate knowledge he was unaware she possessed.

While Kache is outside chopping wood, he senses a flash of movement, more foreshadowing (in addition to the sound Nadia mistook for a bear) that something or someone is prowling around the perimeter of the homestead.

## Discussion Question 1

What qualities do Lettie and Nadia have in common? How are they different?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Nadia say that Elizabeth's journals kept her alive?



## Discussion Question 3

Why is Nadia's haircut significant?

## Vocabulary

forlorn, metropolis, feigned, intuitive, explicit, voyeur, stagnant, peripheral



# Chapters 37-42

## Summary

Chapter 37 – Lettie remembers her first year in Alaska, finishing the cabin with A.R, and the seemingly miraculous conception of the twins, the feeling of finally having everything she had ever wanted.

Chapter 38 – As Snag watches her mother sleep at the nursing home, she reflects on Lettie's devotion to Alaska. When Lettie wakes, they talk about Snag's sexuality, Lettie says she wishes she could have told her daughter that it was nothing to be ashamed of when she was growing up, but she did not know how. She also confesses that she knew Snag was in love with Elizabeth. Snag asks Lettie if she has stopped taking the pill that was causing her disorientation and Lettie admits that she has.

Chapter 39 – Kache reads a poem written by his mother in her journal. It occurs to him that he never really knew her as a woman, only as his mother. Kache and Nadia go back into town and stop at the Spit Tune. While Nadia is in the restroom, Kache runs into the Russian again, who introduces himself as "Tol." Kache and Nadia catch a ferry to Halibut Cove, an artist's colony. Kache recalls a miserable fishing trip with his father and brother Denny where he had been disgusted as they shot the flailing fish they lugged on board the boat. A fonder memory soon follows, of having dinner with his family at a nice restaurant in Halibut Cove. He apologizes to Nadia for his outburst over the journals.

Chapter 40 – Nadia is enchanted with Halibut Cove and everything she sees there. Kache buys her a painting made out of octopus ink for her to hang in the cabin. She is touched that he would allow her to make a change in the cabin, even such a small one. Nadia finally tells Kache her last name, Oleska, they have a romantic dinner, and when they go home, they make love for the first time.

Chapter 41 – Snag visits Gilly to drop off some bath products she purchased, and Gilly invites her to go hiking the following day. They discuss recent bear sightings along the trail. That night, when Kache does not come home, Snag is worried that he has gotten romantically involved with Nadia.

Chapter 42 – When Kache slides out of bed, he notes that Nadia has an unusual scar on her buttocks resembling the letter "B." He briefly wonders if she was branded in some Old Believer ritual, and realizes there is a lot he still does not know about her. When they make love again in daylight, he sees she has many more small scars all over her chest. He asks about them and she seems finally ready to open up.



## Analysis

Lettie feels a spiritual connection to Alaska – she even believes that her pregnancy was a result of its magic. Nadia, meanwhile, recalls that when she ran away, “The homestead had pulled her to it” (190) like a gravitational force. Both women assign a sort of mystical energy to the land. Snag is surprised that Lettie still feels so fond of Alaska when her son and his family died there. Lettie does not think of it this way, though it may be wild and untamed, its forces are benevolent. In this section, however, we learn that even Lettie is not untouched by regret, wishing she could have been more helpful to her daughter when she was growing up confused and suffering over her sexual identity.

Ugly fishing trip memory aside, Kache finds his memories drifting back to fonder times, like the family dinner at Halibut Cove. These memories probably would have been too painful before he met Nadia and began the healing process, but we can see the narrative he clung to about not fitting in with his family is beginning to unravel. Just as this new perspective has allowed him to amend his views on his father, he begins to learn more about his mother from reading her journals.

Nadia expresses her desire to go “far, far away” (185), and she fantasizes about the Golden Gate Bridge again on the ferry into Halibut Cove. Her wanderlust and interest in San Francisco will play an important role in how the rest of the novel unfolds.

Halverson uses descriptive, atmospheric details to paint a picture of Nadia and Kache's domestic bliss after the evening in Halibut Cove. Kache feels like an emotional weight has been lifted. As they lie in bed with Leo at their feet, there is a pattering of rain and a “dove-gray light” (198) from the window, a fire “sizzles” in the fireplace, and even Nadia's scars look to Kache like “bird footprints in the snow” (200).

## Discussion Question 1

What does Kache mean when he says he missed “the idea” of his mother?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is the octopus ink painting significant to Nadia, beyond being a nice gift?

## Discussion Question 3

How are Kache's feelings about his family evolving?

## Vocabulary

singularity, plethora, elusive





# Chapters 43-48

## Summary

Chapter 43 – Nadia opens up to Kache about her past, about the move to Altai, the disappointment with Niko, and Vladimir's arrival. Vladimir continued to sexually assault her at knife point, cutting her frequently where it would not be visible to others. The “B” he carved into her was to symbolize the first initial of his name in Russian. He threatened to burn down the village if she told anyone about the abuse. Two years passed before she found the courage to run, leaving her clothing and jewelry strewn along the shore of the bay so it would appear she had drowned. After six nights of wandering through the woods, she came upon the cabin, “abandoned as my own life, waiting for me to step inside” (204).

Chapter 44 – Shocked and angered by this story, Kache asks Nadia if her family thinks that she is dead. They do. He suggests they go back to the village together to find out if Vladimir is still there. She refuses and invokes the family motto, “one must get used to it” (206). Kache imagines what it would be like if his family simply walked back into his life, the way Nadia could for hers. He asks her to help him hang the painting from Halibut Cove.

Chapter 45 – On the hiking trail, Snag is wearing ill-fitting boots that are digging into her feet, and she worries the smell of her blood will attract bears. Gilly and Snag hear a crashing sound in the underbrush, and again think of bears, when a man emerges, shouting at them not to shoot. He is the blue-eyed Russian who had approached Gilly at the Spit Tune. Snag remembers her jealousy and reminds herself that it is better to tamp down her feelings for Gilly. Back at Snag's house, Gilly insists on examining Snag's obviously wounded feet, and rubs ointment on them. Snag admits her feelings and they kiss.

Chapter 46 – Nadia muses over recent changes with Kache, noting that she feels happy and sad at the same time. She looks up information about the Old Believers online and reads about the original schism in Russia. She recalls a poem she read in Elizabeth's journal.

Chapter 47 – The beginning of Part Three is titled “The Fall.” Kache has bought Nadia a video camera because she expressed an interest in learning to make films. He takes her on an overnight trip to Anchorage where she is thrilled by the skyscrapers and throngs of people, and pleased to try out her new camera. Nadia talks Kache into performing with his guitar in the park and he attracts an audience. On the way back to Caboose, Kache gets a phone call from a friend who knows some Old Believers. They claim Vladimir is long gone from the village. He then stops at the grocery store and leaves Nadia sleeping in the car.



Chapter 48 – Nadia dreams that she is flying, and when she wakes up she observes two Old Believer women talking in the parking lot. She thinks of her sisters. When Kache returns, she is angry that he left her alone where anyone could have seen her. He apologizes and tells her that Vladimir is gone. He tries to talk her into returning to Altai, if only because she will need her birth certificate and school transcripts if she wants to apply to college.

## Analysis

The parallels between Kache and Nadia's situations are more distinct than ever before. They have both lost their families, but Kache cannot fathom why Nadia would not want to try to see hers again, as he fantasizes about seeing Glenn, Elizabeth, and Denny. His suggestion to hang the painting comes as he observes the “time-warped capsule” (207) of their surroundings in the cabin – he is possessed by the need to do something, anything, to make a change and propel time forward.

When Gilly and Snag are on the trail, there is yet another reference to bears in the vicinity of Vladimir (the Russian man crashing through the brush). Later, while Gilly attends to Snag's feet, Snag recounts her memory of an earthquake in 1964 and the chaos and wreckage it left behind – a metaphor for all of the confusion she felt about her sexual identity at the time. This moment of vulnerability between them is similar to the scene where Kache allows Nadia to shave his beard.

Being intimate with Kache has brought up a lot of old feelings that Nadia had been stifling, this is why she feels sad as well as happy. She contemplates the life cycles of nature, governed by the seasons, and compares them to all of the changes that have governed this newly blossoming relationship, the internet, the trips into town, Halibut Cove – their relationship evolves like the seasons. It is currently summer, but fall is coming. The fact that she reads about the schism in the church at this moment is also ominous, as it refers to a breaking apart (or “breaking up” in the Alaskan vernacular).

Nadia then thinks of a poem of Elizabeth's she had read about the desire to be beautiful and adored, it mentions a black dress that Nadia has apparently tried on many times, though she notes that no one had ever seen her in it but Leo the dog, that Kache is just as happy for her to wear jeans and a T-shirt. This speaks to the coming “schism” between them – Nadia wants more for herself, a wider more glamorous world, just as Elizabeth did, whereas Kache has been out in the world, he does not need to go back. In the hotel, she laughs when he explains that there is no 13th floor for superstitious reasons. It is ironic because she comes from a world of “backward” Old Believers, and she finds this policy embraced by the wider world to be utterly absurd.

Part Three begins with the portentous words “The fall came on quickly,” and almost immediately we get a glimpse of the coming conflict (223). Nadia wants to explore the university campus and pines for the time she has lost, and Kache realizes that her dreams may require her to leave the homestead. In the very next chapter, Nadia is dreaming about flying – a not very subtle manifestation of her growing ambition.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Nadia feel sad and happy at the same time?

## Discussion Question 2

What purpose does the inclusion of Elizabeth's poem "Devoured" serve in the narrative at this moment? What does the black dress symbolize?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Nadia laughs about the lack of a 13th floor at the hotel?

## Vocabulary

dullard, decimated, eschew



# Chapters 49-55

## Summary

Chapter 49 – Snag wants to organize a dinner for the whole family, including Nadia and Gilly. She remembers an encounter she had with an Old Believer when she was 13. She was collecting mussels on the beach when she was approached by a girl about her age with an accent. The girl asked if Snag would kiss her, and she did. The girl's name was Agafia. In a synchronous turn of events, Kache calls and invites Snag and Lettie to Thanksgiving dinner. She agrees, and, summoning courage, asks if it would be alright for her to bring Gilly, not merely to look after Lettie, but because she is Snag's girlfriend. Kache is happy for her and readily agrees. Snag is relieved, but also wary, she still has not told Kache the whole truth.

Chapter 50 – This chapter begins with an entry from Elizabeth's journal, which Kache is reading. Glenn had descended into the canyon and found Walter mortally wounded but not dead, forcing Glenn to put him out of his misery. Naturally, his parents had chosen to protect him from these upsetting details. Nadia tells Kache she is ready to go to Altai and see her family.

Chapter 51 – Nadia worries that her family will not accept the changes she has made to her appearance or her relationship with Kache. She brings a handgun in case rumors of Vladimir's departure were erroneous. She reminisces fondly about the village, but she no longer shares the inhabitants' belief system. She gets increasingly anxious as they get closer, and Kache takes the handgun from her. In the village, Nadia is reunited with her parents, grandmother, and ten siblings, who pepper her with questions about where she has been. They confirm that Vladimir has departed from the village.

Chapter 52 – One of Nadia's brothers tells Kache that they doubt Vladimir will return, he was not a true Old Believer, he did not attend services, he drank heavily, and possessed violent pornography. Two of Nadia's brothers are visibly displeased with Nadia's presence.

Chapter 53 – After telling an abridged version of her troubles with Vladimir to her family, Nadia is forced by her two angry brothers to admit that she is no longer adhering to the Old Believer faith. The family responds by grievously expelling her. Only her grandmother offers words of encouragement.

Chapter 54 – Lettie dreams of the land, the cabin, her husband, and her children when they were babies. After the twins' birth, the doctor told Lettie she would not conceive again, and she was fine with this, preferring to extend her efforts to the land. Still, she always worried that A.R was unhappy in Alaska, that he merely went along with all of it to please her. She recalls Glenn running off to fight in Vietnam and returning, and he and Eleanor both falling for Bets. She wishes she could have taken A.R back to Kansas



before he died and hopes to be able to visit the homestead once more before she passes as well.

Chapter 55 – After leaving Altai, Nadia realizes she forgot to get her birth certificate and school records. Since this chapter is being told from Kache's point of view, we know that he did not forget, but he did not remind her when he could have. He knows he did this because he does not want her to leave, and he feels guilty. Later on at the cabin, Kache feels like he is being watched.

## Analysis

Halverson provides a formative moment in Snag's life, her kiss on the beach with the Old Believer girl, which will resonate later on when she visits Altai. It is also an interesting parallel to the first time she met Elizabeth, as this also occurred on the beach.

We learn from another one of Elizabeth's journal entries that Glenn did go down into the canyon after Kache's dog Walter. This is a callback to Kache's immediate thought on re-entering the homestead for the first time months earlier, that it would be foolish to try to climb down there. It is also foreshadowing of a later event, when Kache must go down after Vladimir. For the sake of love, Halverson implies, nothing is too treacherous. At this point in the novel, however, the canyon (and the deep feelings it represents) is still frightening to Kache. Nonetheless, Kache hopes that Nadia's college ambitions are more theoretical than genuine. Just after the journal entry, it is noted that the harvest has ended on the homestead and cold weather is setting in. This relationship is running parallel to the seasons and winter is fast approaching.

Nadia recalls trying to make the trip to Altai several times before Kache's arrival, but being too frightened. Each time she would fail, she would talk to a birch tree in the yard commiserating in loneliness, Nadia without a family, the tree without a grove. Then, on the shore where she had once shed her clothing and disappeared, she touches a sea anemone that holds onto her finger, until she pulls back and it lets go. This is a symbolic reminder to Nadia that she can return to the village without getting stuck there. She observes that her mother used the dishes the Old Believers keep for serving outsiders – not only for Kache, but for her, as she is an outsider to them now. When she is ejected from the village, she sees a solitary gull flying over the beach, another symbol of her loneliness.

As Lettie regrets, to some extent, taking A.R out of Kansas, Nadia will not let the same thing happen to Kache later on, refusing to allow him to follow her to San Francisco, and refusing to abandon her dreams to stay behind with him.

As Part three ends, Kache has an ominous feeling that he is being watched by something outside, that he is exposed sitting so near the window. This is foreshadowing of the dangerous direction the story will soon be taking, as it turns out that the homestead is, in fact, under surveillance by Vladimir.



## Discussion Question 1

What purpose does Elizabeth's journal entry about Walter the dog serve in the narrative?

## Discussion Question 2

What symbols does Halverson employ to represent Nadia's loneliness?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Kache fail to remind Nadia to get her important documents while they are in Altai?

## Vocabulary

rendezvous, cormorants, reverie, stoically, divulge, penance, diligence, ambivalence, sacrificial



## Chapters 56-60

### Summary

Chapter 56 – Nadia is feeling emotionally exhausted and she would like to be alone, but she spends time with Kache anyway, as they are snowed in. Finally, he goes out to shovel and Nadia looks at pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge on her computer. She thinks that her grandmother, out of all of her family members, might understand her. She reads another one of Elizabeth's journal entries in which Elizabeth admitted that Glenn was always jealous of Kache, as well as afraid for him because of the violent things he had seen in Vietnam.

Chapter 57 – Snag realizes she has missed the last two chamber meetings about the caboose's fate, and that she does not even care. She goes swimming at the gym and thinks about Agafia again, the Russian woman from the beach, wondering if Nadia knows her.

Chapter 58 – Hearing a shot fired in the woods, Kache knows that Nadia is killing something, likely for their Thanksgiving dinner. Kache rifles through his mother's recipe cards and discovers a stain on the entry for cranberry sauce. Nadia worries about the family gathering approaching, that she will not be liked or accepted. Kache daydreams about the future and having children with Nadia.

Chapter 59 – The guests arrive for Thanksgiving. Lettie asks Nadia if she still dreams of going to San Francisco, and we learn that the origin of this dream was a picture of the city in one of the Winkels' photography books. Lettie explicitly makes the connection between this fantasy, and her own fantasy of moving to Alaska, which also started with a photograph. Nadia tells Lettie she would like to go to film school in San Francisco, and in her interior monologue, she admits to herself that Kache is a part of the land now, and should not go with her. Snag asks if Nadia knows an "Agafia," and she responds that she knows two, one is her grandmother, the other lives in Ural.

At dinner, Snag spills the whole story of the night before the plane crash. All of the adults had been drinking, and Snag had kissed Elizabeth. Glenn had walked in on this indiscretion, and then immediately taken his anger out on Kache. Snag blames herself for this argument, Kache's guilt over it, and the plane crash itself, claiming that he must have been preoccupied and lost control while flying. Nadia fetches Elizabeth's journal and shows Snag the final entry, where Elizabeth declares that if she could have loved another woman, it would have been Snag. Nadia tells her she has to move on. Kache leaves the cabin to collect himself.

Chapter 60 – Gilly tells Snag that if she will not let go of the past, they cannot continue to be together. Snag decides she will go on a mission of atonement to get Nadia's documents from her family in Altai. Once there, Snag finds Nadia's grandmother. Agafia warns her not to try to talk to Nadia's parents, they want nothing to do with her. Snag



tries hinting around to find out if this is the same Agafia from the beach all those years ago, but Agafia's responses are inconclusive. On the way home, Snag stops at a gas station, where she goes inside to use the restroom. When she comes out, she finds the Russian man from the Spit Tune and the hiking trail hanging conspicuously around her car. Nadia's documents are sitting on the front seat, with her name on the outside of the manila envelope. When she exits the gas station to return to the homestead with the documents, she notices the man follows her for some distance on his motorcycle.

## Analysis

As the weather coincides with phases of Nadia and Kache's relationship, it is now winter, and Nadia would much rather be alone to grieve her family in peace. She would like to climb under the covers and wait out the cold weather “like the garden under the snow,” an apt simile (273). San Francisco, and the Golden Gate Bridge in particular, continue to represent all of Nadia's hopes and plans for the future. She reflects on Elizabeth's love for her family and decides that it must be possible to care for those you love, while still taking care of yourself – a delicate tightrope walk which she calls “the narrowest bridge of all” (277). This is similar to Lettie's line of thinking about her own happiness regarding the move to Alaska. Nadia also thinks of the sea anemone again, the tendrils grasping and letting go, and imagines there might have been one red tendril amid the green, representing her grandmother's disagreement with the rest of the family's judgment.

As Snag is finally confronting her feelings of dissatisfaction with her life head-on and doing something productive about them, the caboose no longer functions as a symbol of her frustrations. She provides another symbol in its place, imagining the swimming pool's lane dividers to be like the chain of events that led her from Agafia to Gilly, and Kache to Nadia. Later, the fact that Snag is able to let go of the need to know whether Nadia's grandmother is the Agafia she kissed on the beach as a young girl is similar to her dismissal of the caboose controversy. Now that she has Gilly, now that her life is turning around, these things are inconsequential.

When Kache finds the recipe card with the stain on it, he marvels that it had been there all these years, untouched, just as Kache's feelings (and Snag's) have been stagnantly awaiting their acknowledgment. In addition to making an overt comparison between Nadia and herself, Lettie worries again that A.R was never happy in Alaska, a concern she voices and Nadia takes to heart when she later refuses to allow Kache to come to San Francisco with her. Another instance of foreshadowing occurs as Nadia admonishes Kache for still being unable to shoot a gun. Kache developing this skill will be more important than either of them know now, when he must confront Vladimir. Meanwhile, when Snag runs into Vladimir at the gas station, she observes his “lupine” eyes, another reference to his feral nature.

When Nadia tells everyone at Thanksgiving that it is time to move on from the past, she compares everyone present to Old Believers, putting an ironic spin on the sect's name, and making a very astute connection. All of the major characters are living in the past,





continuing to “believe” in “old” patterns of thought, long after they have ceased being relevant or useful.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Snag no longer care about the fate of the red caboose?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Nadia think she cannot take Kache with her to San Francisco?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Nadia mean when she says that they are all like the Old Believers?

## **Vocabulary**

transfixed, euphemism, penance, transgression, hoarfrost, heritage, appraising, lupine



# Chapters 61-65

## Summary

Chapter 61 – In the morning, Kache finds one of their goats dead, presumably attacked by a wild animal. With this evidence of a potential threat nearby, Nadia gives Kache shooting lessons. Kache reminds Nadia to charge her cell phone, and watches her editing a video clip on the computer. She encourages him to sing with his old band again at the Spit Tune so that she can film it, which he agrees to do. He and Marion sing an old song from when they were young and in love and Nadia is a little jealous afterward, but admires his capacity to love.

Chapter 62 – While editing her video, Nadia hears a sound outside the cabin and assumes it is an animal. Kache comes to get her and they look at the northern lights together. He tells her an anecdote about goofing around with his brother, trying to frighten tourists with a stuffed bear's head.

Chapter 63 – Part five begins, and Kache is shoveling snow, admiring the beauty of the sun's rays over the landscape, and thinking about the coming spring. He has Nadia's response from the Academy of Art in San Francisco in his pocket. He still believes that she will ultimately choose not to go, but he is quickly disabused of this notion by her level of excitement at being accepted. He says he will go with her, and she says he cannot, he belongs on the homestead. They quarrel, Nadia tries to explain that she needs her own life, she has been living in the Winkels' shadows for too long. He accuses her of being disloyal, and leaves her weeping and alone in the cabin.

Chapter 64 – Kache goes to Snag's house and she tells him a story about going clamming with his mother. Elizabeth had gotten stuck in the sand when the tide was coming in and for a moment it looked really perilous, but Snag had fetched a ladder and rescued her just in time. Snag tells Kache she knows he did not “forget” to get Nadia's papers from Altai, that he did not want her to go away. He realizes he was wrong and calls to apologize, but of course her cell phone is dead. He is going to sing at the Spit Tune that evening, and he hopes he will see her there.

Chapter 65 – Outside the cabin, Nadia sees a sandhill crane. She goes back in and watches her video clip again, she has yet to show Kache the finished version. She hears another sound outside, and brushes it off as a prowling animal. She decides to go meet Kache at the Spit Tune.

## Analysis

When Kache finds the dead goat, he assumes a bear or wolf is responsible, both of which are animals that Halverson has associated with Vladimir previously in the text. When Nadia hears something outside, she wonders if it is a wolf. It is also mentioned in this section that Vladimir is an expert trapper, which will be relevant later when he



sneaks onto the homestead undetected, likely not for the first time, to abduct Nadia. The image of the dead goat in the snow in a pool of blood recalls Kache's view of Alaska from the plane upon his arrival, the red caboose looking like a "smear of blood on the tip of a knife" (12). As Nadia is teaching him to shoot, he reflects that, with the change in season coming, the bears will be waking from hibernation. Kache notes that Nadia never charges her cell phone, obviously foreshadowing that when she needs it in the future, she will not have it.

Part five is called "Breakup," an obvious reference to the coming end of Nadia and Kache's relationship, and again, it signifies the connection between the phases of this relationship and the seasons, "breakup" being Alaskan vernacular for the melting of ice just before Spring. As the ice and snow "break up," Kache can feel shifts within himself, new feelings replacing the old and creating peace out of discord, he can think of his family now without feeling shattered. He thinks of how his relationship with his father had been an "endless winter" that is just now thawing out (322).

In another instance of making the subtext concrete, Nadia tells Kache that she will not do to him what Lettie did to A.R, bringing him to live somewhere that he did not belong to satisfy her desires. Later, with the sight of the sandhill crane and the lone birch tree, two life forms she greatly identifies with, her resolve is cemented.

The anecdote Snag relays about Kache's mother is a useful pretext to remind both of them, as well as the reader, what kind of woman Elizabeth was, that she would not have wanted either of them to feel regret about how things happened. She also tells Kache that his father used to sit in his car outside of the Spit Tune to listen to Kache's band play. Providing these two new perspectives to Kache of his parents is another opportunity for Snag to atone for the pain she has caused, and it serves to heal the rift between them that started at Thanksgiving.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the symbolic significance of the title of Part five, "Breakup"?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Nadia mean when she says "I have no me to know" (325)?

## Discussion Question 3

How are Kache's feelings about his parents continuing to shift as he considers the prospect of Nadia leaving?

## Vocabulary

bereft, acquiescence, subtleties, tenaciously, serotonin, voyeur



# Chapters 66-71

## Summary

Chapter 66 – At the Spit Tune, Kache sings a song he has just written about his heartache over Nadia. Afterward, “Tol,” the Russian man Kache has seen at the bar several times before, asks him to play the “Nadia” song and then tells him he should sing a song called “Poor White Goat” - at which point it becomes clear to him that this man is Vladimir, that he had been to the homestead and killed their goat. He jumps down from the stage, searches for Vladimir and, not finding him, gets in his truck and races home. He has to stop and get gas, and he tries to call Nadia again, still with no response. When he arrives at the cabin, Leo is barking inside. Kache retrieves the gun from the glove compartment, where it has been since the visit to Altai, and runs inside to get Leo. Leo leads him to the beach where Vladimir is holding Nadia hostage with a knife on the edge of the canyon. Both men know Kache is not a good enough shot to avoid hitting Nadia.

Chapter 67 – From Nadia's perspective we see she is not shaken. Finding the strength to leave him in the first place, making a new life with Kache, refusing to fear him, she has already had her revenge. Nadia makes eye contact with Leo, and when the time is right, gives him a nod. Leo attacks, causing Vladimir to lose his grip and his footing, then Nadia shoves him into the canyon.

Chapter 68 – Kache and Nadia do not want to call the police, as they worry that there will be media attention and that Nadia could be charged with murder. In a reprisal of Glenn's descent to determine the fate of Walter the dog, Kache will go into the canyon to make sure that Vladimir is dead, taking Leo with him for protection. He tells Nadia to call Snag, who comes right over. She agrees, for the time being, not to call the police.

Chapter 69 – As he descends the canyon, Kache is led by a vision of his father, who first shows him where he found Walter, and then guides him to Vladimir. Vladimir begs Kache to shoot him. Kache remembers the hunting trip with his father, how he had been unable to kill the moose. This time he pulls the trigger. On the way back up, Leo trips and injures his leg, and Kache must carry him the rest of the way. As he climbs with Leo draped over his shoulders, he sees the vision of his father again, in war fatigues, carrying an injured soldier on his own shoulders. Kache and Leo make it out of the canyon.

Chapter 70 – A few days later, Kache has gotten an email from his ex-girlfriend Janie informing him that he is the star of a viral video that is circulating – it is Nadia's video showing Kache singing and working on the homestead. He is impressed with the video, and with himself. He comes to terms with the fact that she must go, to cultivate her talent and see the world, and he must stay, because this is his home now.



Chapter 71 – Kache is milking the cow when he sees a group of sandhill cranes. He approaches and begins to dance with them, as he witnessed Nadia doing shortly after they first met. She comes outside and joins them. At the airport, Kache gives Nadia a scarf that belonged to his mother and a blank journal for her to write in. Lettie, Snag, and Gilly are all staying with Kache at the homestead, and Lettie passes away there, on the property that meant so much to her. Meanwhile, Nadia is finally on the Golden Gate Bridge. A passerby notices her camera and asks if Nadia would like her to film her for a moment. She comments that, with the scarf blowing in the wind, Nadia looks like she has wings.

## Analysis

The knife that has been hanging over this narrative metaphorically has finally come into play literally. The novel opened with Nadia fetching her knife to mark the passage of the day on the cabin's wall, just before Kache observed the caboose from above, looking like blood on the end of a knife. These were portents of the villain's weapon of choice, but Kache and Nadia's salvation has been there all along as well, the canyon that is intricately tied to Kache's childhood memories and his feelings about his father in particular. Descending the canyon, killing Vladimir, and rescuing Leo, Kache retraces his father's steps when he had gone after Walter the dog all those years ago. This is why Kache sees a vision of his father, they are finally linked in a way they never were when Glenn was alive.

Amid Vladimir's mutterings about how he has been wronged, Nadia overhears him say something about "how the bear must always be fed," (342) referring to himself overtly in the way Halverson has been depicting him metaphorically throughout the book, as a bear. When Kache discovers Vladimir, he has been impaled by the limb of a birch tree, a tree we have previously come to associate with Nadia (she describes resting her face against the birch tree outside of the cabin when she was sad). Halverson also reminds the reader of the moment Kache had been unable to shoot the moose on the hunt with his father. Now, with his father's ghost nearby, there will be no mercy for this other kind of animal.

It is left open to the reader's interpretation whether Kache's vision of his father is a spiritual manifestation guiding him to Vladimir, or a trick of his addled and exhausted subconscious mind. He does come upon Walter's burial site, the location of which he could not have known. The implication is that the reality of the situation is irrelevant, all that matters is that Kache now feels a connection to his father that he never felt before.

Shortly before her death, Lettie reminds Kache that the homestead is his inheritance, literally and metaphorically. They bond over their mutual devotion to the land. This is the first time we get a real sense of the similarity between grandmother and grandson, made all the more poignant as she passed away shortly thereafter. With this, Kache's cycle of learning to understand his family is seemingly complete. While singing at her funeral, Kache comes to the realization that love is beautiful and significant, even when the object of that love is no longer present. Love is a learning process of self-discovery



and personal growth. Finally, Nadia has reached the location of her hopes and dreams, and she has sprouted the “wings” (symbolized throughout the narrative by the sandhill cranes and Kache's mother's scarf) that she needed to fly.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Nadia unafraid of Vladimir when he is holding her at knife point?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why is it significant that Vladimir says “the bear must always be fed”?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What symbolic purpose does Kache's dance with the sandhill cranes serve?

## **Vocabulary**

precipice, feigning, scythe, cavalier, subconscious



# Characters

## Kachemak “Kache” Winkel

Kache is a 38-year-old man trapped in his tragic past. His mother, father, and brother died in a plane crash 20 years ago and he has never recovered. He feels hurt because his father never understood him, and guilty because they had quarreled the night before the plane crash. The last words he said to his father were "I hate you." Afterward, he abandoned his musical ambitions to be an accountant, but when he loses his job and returns to his hometown of Caboose, Alaska, he goes on a journey of self-discovery with the help of Nadia, the Russian woman living on his family's old homestead.

Nadia teaches Kache how to tend to the land, giving him a new sense of purpose in life. She also inspires him to start playing music again and opens his heart to the prospect of a deep romantic connection with another person. Perhaps most importantly, she helps him rethink his relationships with his mother and father. As his preconceived notions of these relationships changes, Kache is able to move on and heal from the tragedy that he had been mired in for 20 years.

In addition to these mental and emotional hurdles, Kache is faced with the physical trial of descending into the canyon on the homestead's property after Nadia's abusive former husband Vladimir plummets to the bottom. Kache's newly acquired skills help, but it is the ghost of his father spurring him on that ensures this mission is a success, and makes him feel like his father is proud of him at last. In his final lesson, Kache learns that he loves Nadia so much he must set her free to go on her own journey while he stays on the homestead, as he is part of the land now.

Kache is the son of Elizabeth and Glenn Winkel, grandson of Lettie, and nephew of Snag.

## Nadia Oleska

Nadia is originally from Ural, a town of Russian immigrants of a dogmatic Orthodox religious sect called the "Old Believers." After a rift in the congregation, Nadia's family moves her to nearby Altai, causing her to lose the boy she loved. Instead Nadia marries Vladimir when she is just a teenager and quickly learns that he is a violently abusive man. She fakes her own drowning and runs from him, leaving her family behind. She comes upon the Winkels' cabin and hides out there, with Lettie's permission. When Kache discovers Nadia, she has been living there for ten years. Nadia is comfortable in the wilds of nature, she shoots a gun, raises livestock, and dances with sandhill cranes, but she wants something more for herself.

During her isolation, Nadia has taken in every iota of her surroundings, reading all of Elizabeth Winkel's books, and even her journals. This puts her in the perfect position to help Kache overcome the pain surrounding his past with his family, she knows his





mother's private thoughts and details of events he was not made aware of in his childhood. In exchange, Kache gives Nadia a taste of the outside world, taking her into town, neighboring Halibut Cove, and Anchorage. She fantasizes about moving to San Francisco (a city she saw in a book from the Winkel's bookshelf) and going to art school. When she expresses interest in making films, Kache buys her a video camera. However, when he tries to help her reunite with her family, they banish her for no longer being of the Old Believer faith.

When Vladimir returns and tries to abduct Nadia, Kache distracts him, but she is ultimately able to save herself, she is no damsel in distress. Finally, she leaves Kache to pursue her dreams of art school in San Francisco. She loves him enough to know that he belongs on the homestead, he must not sacrifice his own happiness for hers.

## Eleanor “Snag” Winkel

Like her nephew Kache, Snag has been living 20 years in the past, because she has a terrible secret. She was in love with Kache's mother Elizabeth, her brother Glenn's wife. On the night before the crash, Glenn walked in on Snag kissing Elizabeth and she is convinced he was distracted by this incident the next day, causing him to lose control of the plane. She has never been in any kind of serious romantic relationship because she equates those feelings with all of the guilt and tragedy of the accident. When Kache comes home to Caboose, she is happy to see him, but worried about the how she will tell him about the kiss, and that she has never been back to the Winkel family's cabin.

At the beginning of the novel, Snag is caught up in a campaign to help get the railroad traveling to Caboose again, and she wants the car for which the town is named, sitting at the end of the tracks, to be put back to use. Other people in town disagree, they have made the caboose into a town museum and they would like to keep it that way. Focusing all of her energy on such a trivial issue allows her to keep her demons at bay. She has recently moved her mother, Lettie, into a nursing home where she meets Gilly, a member of the staff. As the two get to know each other, the relationship turns romantic. With Gilly's support, Snag is able to slowly start moving on from the past.

At Thanksgiving, Snag tells Kache everything about the night before the crash, and he takes it badly. Nadia tells them they are all acting like "Old Believers" - trapped in the past. Afterwards, Snag goes to Altai to retrieve the documents Nadia will need to start school. She meets Nadia's grandmother Agafia. Snag remembers kissing a Russian girl named Agafia on the beach when she was a teenager, and she tries to ascertain whether this woman is that girl, but ultimately decides it does not matter. Her ability to let this go is an indication of the personal growth she has achieved, with the help of Nadia and Gilly.

## Lettie Winkel

Lettie, Kache's grandmother and Snag's mother, found herself captivated by a photograph of Alaska as a young woman, and she ultimately convinced her husband



A.R. to move there with her from their home in Kansas in the 1940s. They bought the homestead and built the cabin, and raised their twins, Glenn and Eleanor, a.k.a. Snag. Lettie never regrets this decision, as she is and was completely devoted to the land. She is in a nursing home now, and spends most of her time reflecting on her life. She is a tough woman, mentally and physically. When her medication makes her confused, she refuses to continue taking it. She would rather be lucid, even at risk to her health.

What Lettie does regret is that A.R. died before ever going back to Kansas. She feels that he never loved Alaska the way she did and that he only went along with the endeavor to make her happy. She also regrets that she was not more helpful to her daughter when she was growing up confused about her sexuality, she just did not know how to approach the subject at the time. She tries to help Snag now by encouraging her to move on from the past.

Unlike Snag and Kache, Lettie does not blame anything or anyone for the crash that killed her son, grandson, and daughter-in-law. Only she understands that it was just a freak accident. Lettie and Nadia have a lot in common, and it is partially through hearing of Lettie's regrets that Nadia decides she must leave Kache behind in Alaska while she pursues her dreams in San Francisco.

Lettie dies peacefully on the homestead property, exactly as she wanted, at the end of the novel.

## Vladimir Tolov

Vladimir married Nadia when she was a teenager and he was in his thirties. To her horror, she discovered he had violent sexual proclivities, frequently holding a knife to her throat, even carving his initial into her skin. She runs away to escape him, finding shelter in the Winkels' cabin.

Kache, Snag, and Gilly all have interactions with Vladimir - at the local bar, on the hiking trail, and at a gas station - before they know who he is. He is a seemingly friendly handsome stranger. It is not entirely clear when he learns that Nadia is living on the Winkels' property, but when he does, he begins stalking her, even killing one of their goats. The author frequently associates Vladimir with wild animals, the topic of "bears" often comes up in his presence and his "lupine" eyes are noted.

While Kache is performing with his band at the bar, Vladimir goes to the homestead and holds Nadia hostage with a knife on the edge of a canyon. When Kache approaches with Nadia's dog Leo, the two of them are able to distract Vladimir while Nadia pushes him over the edge. Kache descends the canyon and finds Vladimir mortally wounded. He then shoots him to end his suffering.



## Elizabeth “Bets” Winkel

Elizabeth is Kache's mother and, though she is dead at the start of the novel, her journals play an important role in the narrative. Through these journals we learn that Kache's father Glenn loved him and cared for him a lot more than Kache knew at the time. The journals kept Nadia company in her long years of isolation and she found words of encouragement in them to pursue her dreams. Through the journals we also know that Elizabeth knew Snag was in love with her, and, while she did not return the romantic feelings, she cared for Snag very deeply.

## Glenn Winkel

Glenn is Kache's father, a hardy fisherman who bristled at his son's sensitive and artistic temperament, causing a lot of conflict in Kache's youth. He was the husband of Elizabeth, son of Lettie, and twin brother of Snag. Through Elizabeth's journal entries, and Snag's memories, Kache learns that his father's feelings about him were much deeper and more caring than he knew. When Kache must descend the canyon after Vladimir, a vision of Glenn guides him to safety.

## Gilly Sawyer

Gilly is an attendant at the nursing home where Lettie lives and, after seeing Snag upset during a visit, she asks her out for a drink. They start spending time together and the relationship turns romantic. After a Thanksgiving speech where Snag tells all of her secrets about the night before the plane crash, Gilly tells her that she must move on from the past if she wants them to continue seeing each other, and this is just the motivation Snag needs.

## Denny Winkel

Denny is Kache's older brother. They had a fun and cordial relationship, though Kache was always jealous that Denny was more skilled at the rustic activities that earned their father's respect.

## Janie

Janie is Kache's recent ex-girlfriend from Austin. She was so dissatisfied with his total paralysis that she invented a fake life for herself online. Her breakup with Kache facilitates his departure from Texas and arrival in Caboose.



## Marion Tilloko

Marion is Kache's high school girlfriend. She still plays with their old band at a bar called the "Spit Tune," and she encourages him to come perform with them again.

## Agafia

Agafia is Nadia's grandmother, and possibly the girl that Snag kissed on the beach when they were teenagers, it is unclear. Agafia disagrees with Nadia's family's decision to expel her because of her change in faith, and she sends her love to Nadia when Snag comes to collect her school records.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Wild Animals

Wild animals are used to symbolize fear, danger, or failure in *All the Winters After*. Alaska is known for its wild animal population. We are told about the bears, wolves, moose, etc. but these play a largely symbolic function in the novel. Vladimir is compared indirectly to a bear or wolf – he has “lupine” eyes, he tells Kache that his parents were killed in a bear attack, and when Snag and Gilly run into him on the hiking trail, they mistake him for a bear at first. In Kache's story about being unable to kill a moose while hunting with his father, this failure is symbolic of all of the many ways he feels like he failed to live up to his father's expectations.

## The Alaskan Terrain

The Alaskan Terrain is used throughout the novel as a metaphor for the character's feelings and relationships.

Alaska is also known for its rugged terrain and the tremendous effort required by inhabitants to propagate the land. In Chapter two, on his flight over the Bay, Kache takes note of the giant glaciers and dormant volcanoes “darkening the sky with soot” (11), a prelude to the dangers, both physical and intangible, in the coming year. In Part five, Kache is trying to break up the sheets of ice that have taken over their garden during the winter, “cutting the hillside loose from its winter acquiescence” (321). This is a physical manifestation of the emotional work he has been doing throughout the novel, breaking apart the ice that had enclosed his heart for so many years after the plane crash. In this same passage, Kache notes that “Breakup was ugly” - this piece of Alaskan vernacular is a portent of the end of Nadia and Kache's relationship as they know it.

## The Red Caboose

The Red Caboose symbolizes Snag's emotional baggage in the novel.

The town of Caboose gets its name from the red caboose that sits at the end of the railroad line that used to travel there when it was still a booming fishing mecca called Herring Town. When the herring dried up and the train stopped coming, the caboose was abandoned and the townspeople turned it into a little museum. To pessimistic Snag, this is a depressing sight that symbolizes the town's lowly status and recalls all of its commercial woes. She wants to get the caboose reattached to the train and moving again. Since she feels unable to change anything about her own life, she fixates on the caboose, allowing it to become the surrogate sum total of all her problems, and one she can actually solve. Later, when she has worked through some of her emotional baggage, the fate of the caboose no longer seems important.



## The Canyon

There is a canyon on the homestead property that serves a number of purposes for driving the narrative forward, but from a symbolic perspective, the canyon represents the wide gulf that existed between Kache and his father and the deep chasm of Kache's feelings of shame and guilt about the plane crash. When Kache tells Nadia about his dog, Walter, falling into the canyon and his father refusing to go in after him, Nadia helps him discover what really happened, and the chasm is narrowed a little. At the end of the story, when Kache descends the canyon after Vladimir, he sees his father's ghost guiding him, a spiritual manifestation of the final healing of this rift.

## The Cabin

The cabin on the Winkel's homestead property represents different things to different people: to Lettie, it is a symbol of her hard work and happiness, her family, and her ability to achieve her dreams; to Kache and Snag, it is something else entirely - a museum housing a million reminders of their shame. This is why neither of them could bear to return to it for so long. When Kache finally does go back, he marvels at the books, bathroom and kitchen sundries, his mother's perfume, all of these relics seemingly preserved and untouched. And if the cabin is a museum, Nadia is its careful curator, keeping the environment pristine, reading and rereading its historical documents, Elizabeth's books and journals. At the beginning of the story Nadia views the Winkel family with reverence, because she respects Lettie, and because she believes them all to be dead. In that way, the cabin is also like a tomb.

## The Golden Gate Bridge

Nadia has seen pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge in one of the Winkel family's photography books and it has come to represent the pinnacle of her hopes and dreams. If such a remarkable architectural achievement is within mankind's purview, then surely anything is possible. Just like Lettie and her photograph of Alaska, Nadia holds onto this image, pining for the realization of the happiness it promises. When she finally gets there at the end of the novel, she is truly free, Kache's mother's scarf flapping in the breeze like wings.

## The Old Believers

Though Nadia was fleeing Vladimir when she left Altai, it is the rigid, dogmatic proscriptions of the Old Believers that represent everything she is truly trying to escape. She wants to become an educated and informed member of the modern world and make her own choices. The name of the sect also has ironic connotations because each of the characters, in their own way, is living in the past - relying on old beliefs that need to be reexamined. Nadia astutely points this out at Thanksgiving, admonishing



Snag and Kache to stop blaming themselves for the plane crash, "Twenty years is too long. Living in the past, like we are all of us Old Believers" (293).

## The Birch Tree

For Nadia, the tree is a symbol of strength, it is alone, like she was for so many years, separated from its "family" in the grove, yet it continues to stand tall.

Nadia recalls trying to summon the courage to return to Altai several times during her ten-year stay at the cabin. Each time she find herself unable to go, she would visit the solitary birch tree in the yard and speak to it, "'You understand,' she would say. 'You are not in the grove with your brothers and sisters...we can ease each other's sorrow'" (249). Later, when she has told Kache that she must leave him to go San Francisco, the presence of the tree shores up her resolve. Incidentally, when Kache finds Vladimir at the bottom of the canyon, he has been impaled by the limb of a birch tree.

## The Sea Anemone

When Nadia returns with Kache to Altai to attempt a reunion with her family, she finds a sea anemone on the beach. When she touches it, its tentacles attach to her finger. When she pulls back, it lets go. This represents the pull of family and the community of Old Believers, and Nadia's release from them which, though it is painful when it occurs, is ultimately what she wants. Later, when she thinks again of the sea anemone, she imagines one tentacle is a different color than the rest, representing her grandmother's disagreement with the rest of the family to banish her from the village.

## Sandhill Cranes

The Sandhill cranes symbolize being in touch with Nature and caring for the land.

Nadia is frequently associated with the sandhill crane throughout the novel. Early on, when Kache returns to the cabin to bring her supplies, he finds her dancing with a flock of the cranes and he is entranced by this graceful display. After her first quarrel with Kache about the future of their relationship, she is calmed by the sight of a crane outside the cabin. At the end of the book, just before Nadia leaves for San Francisco, Kache joins a flock of sandhill cranes for a dance of his own, symbolizing that Nadia is a part of him now, and he has officially taken over for her as caretaker of the land.



# Settings

## Caboose

Caboose, Alaska is the small hometown of Kache Winkel where most of the story takes place. It used to be called Herring Town because of the booming fishing industry. It is in central Southern Alaska, near Kachemak Bay. When the herring dried up, the train stopped serving the area, and a caboose was dumped there at the end of the line, hence the new name. The caboose serves as a museum devoted to the town's history. A.R and Lettie Winkel settled in Caboose when it was still Herring Town and established their homestead. Lettie loved Alaska since the moment she first laid eyes on it, in a photograph, until she died, peacefully, on the homestead at the end of the novel. When the story begins, Kache, who was named after the Bay, has not returned to his hometown for 20 years, though his remaining family all live in the area. His aunt Snag is trying to convince the railroad company to extend the line back out to Caboose and to get the old car put back in its rightful place at the end of the train.

## Altai

Altai is a small village of Russian Old Believers where Nadia moved with her family when she was a teenager, shortly before marrying Vladimir. It is on Kachemak Bay, northeast of the Winkels' homestead and the other Old Believer village, Ural. Nadia returns to Altai with Kache to try to reunite with her family, but they refuse to accept her when they learn that she no longer adheres to the faith. Snag returns to Altai to get Nadia's school documents and meets her grandmother, Agafia.

## Halibut Cove

Halibut Cove is an artist's colony that lies across the Kachemak Bay from Caboose. Kache takes Nadia there on what turns out to be their first date. At a gallery, he buys her a painting made of octopus ink. They eat dinner there and the evening turns romantic. Kache also remembers having dinner there with his family when they were still alive, one of the few altogether positive memories he has of them.

## San Francisco

Though only the final scenes take place in San Francisco, the city plays a symbolic purpose in the novel. After seeing a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge in a book on the Winkels' bookshelf, it became the focus of Nadia's intense desire to leave Alaska and branch out into the wider world. Gradually, as she gets to know Kache and he shows her things on the internet, her focus is narrowed to film school, and then the Academy of Art in San Francisco. At the end of the book, Nadia is on the Golden Gate Bridge with





her scarf flapping in the wind like wings, a symbol of the freedom she has finally achieved.

## Ural

Ural is a community of Russian Old Believers slightly larger than Altai. When Nadia was a young girl, there was a rift in the congregation and a group of settlers branched off to form Altai, including the Oleska family. Nadia returns to Ural as a teenager in hopes of being reunited with a boy she loved named Niko, though when she returned, he was already marrying someone else. The original Russian settlers established Ural in the 1960s, just beyond the end of the railroad line. It lies between Altai and the homestead, northeast of Caboose.

## Anchorage

Kache takes Nadia to Anchorage shortly after the trip to Halibut Cove, as he tries to reintroduce her to civilization bit by bit. She is enchanted by the college campus and amused by the hotel's superstitious lack of a 13th floor. She makes films with the video camera Kache bought her and convinces him to perform with his guitar in the park.

## Austin

Kache had been living in Austin, Texas since the plane crash that killed his family. He went to college there, where he studied to be an accountant. When he is let go from his job and dumped by his girlfriend Janie, he leaves Austin and returns to Caboose. The only scene that occurs in Austin is a flashback, when Kache remembers the last argument he had with Janie.



# Themes and Motifs

## Regret and Forgiveness

Halverson uses the plight of her characters to provide a lesson on the importance of self-forgiveness and the potential for regret to be transformed into a learning experience. Most of the main characters in *All the Winters After* are suffering from regret for various reasons, it is one of the fundamental conflicts of the novel. As events unfold, each must learn to overcome their regret, and/or help others to not make the same mistakes.

When we meet Kache, he regrets that he has not been back to Alaska to visit his family in 20 years, but this is just the consequence of a deeper regret. The night before the plane crash that killed his family, he had an argument with his father, Glenn. His last words had been “I hate you” (136). Kache is sure that this quarrel had been a distraction for Glenn the next day when he was flying the plane. There is an element of survivor's guilt to this remorse, were it not for the argument, Kache would have been on that plane and died with his family. This regret is ultimately overcome when he reconciles posthumously with his father by rethinking the events of the past in a new light and building a new connection with Glenn through his activities on the homestead. Seeing Glenn's ghost in the canyon is the final demonstration of this.

Snag also feels regret about what happened the night before the crash, because Glenn had walked in on her kissing Elizabeth, his wife, and she also assumes he must have been distracted when flying the next day. She further regrets that Glenn took out his frustration on Kache that night, and that Kache consequently feels guilt and regret. She admits all of this at Thanksgiving. Lettie tells her that it was not her fault, accidents happen all the time, but it is Nadia's words that resonate most. She reads from Elizabeth's journal where she had written how much she loved Snag, even if her feelings were not romantic, and that Glenn was upset but he would get over it. Nadia tells everyone they are being like the Old Believers, “living in the past” (293).

As Lettie's life comes to a close, she reflects on two regrets, that she was not more open and communicative with Snag, her daughter, when she was young and confused about her sexuality, and that she allowed her husband A.R to sacrifice his personal happiness to move to Alaska for her. Her expression of the latter regret helps Nadia come to the conclusion that she must leave Kache behind when she moves to San Francisco. The author is pointing out how unresolved regrets can serve an educational purpose.

Kache and Snag both feel personal responsibility for the plane crash that killed their family 20 years ago. Lettie feels regret that she allowed her husband A.R to sacrifice his personal happiness in order to move to Alaska for her, and that she was not more open and communicative with Snag, her daughter, when she was young and confused about her sexuality. Nadia has perhaps the most healthy outlook on her regret, she wishes



she had not had to leave her family behind in Altai when she fled from Vladimir, and she wishes she could have returned to them at some point, but she knows things could not have gone any differently.

## Secrets and Repression

Through the metamorphosis of Snag and Kache, the author indicates that secrets and the repression of feelings are poisonous to a fulfilling life. At the beginning of the novel, neither Snag nor Kache have explicitly told anyone about their regret regarding the night before the plane crash. Consequently, these unresolved feelings have grown like weeds around their hearts to suffocate any chance at happiness.

Kache is living in Austin where no one except his girlfriend even knows about the plane crash, or anything remotely personal about him. He is emotionally closed off. He cannot return to Alaska because he does not want to work through the feelings of sorrow and regret that would inevitably come up. When he loses his job while still in Austin, he sits on the couch all day watching television because he is afraid to engage with life. All of this changes when he meets Nadia. The change is first manifest in his decision to start playing music again, he had stopped because it was impossible to play without feeling something, and because it had been a source of contention in his relationship with his father. Through open communication, and with the help of his mother's journals, Nadia helps Kache work through his feelings instead of repressing them, allowing him to posthumously repair his relationship with his father, rediscover his passion, and finally move on from his tragic loss.

Snag's repression is more complex. She thinks that no one knows she is gay, and that she was in love with her sister-in-law, but her mother does know this. Lettie does not know, nor does anyone else, about the kiss, and Snag's consequent feelings of complicity. Like Kache, Snag has suffered under the weight of this secret for 20 years. Like Kache's relationship with Nadia, Snag's relationship with Gilly helps her move on. After Snag tells her secret at Thanksgiving, Gilly says she must find a way to get past it or they can no longer be together. Having freed herself from the burden of her guilty feelings, this is exactly the wake-up call Snag needs.

For both characters, repressing and/or keeping their feelings secret has resulted in years of pain and stasis that could only be ended by attempting honest communication.

## Second Chances

The author offers a hopeful message through the journey of her characters, that no matter how discouraging the circumstances of life may be, there is always possibility for a second chance, a reinvention. Nadia, Kache, and Snag have all weathered serious traumas. Snag and Kache are still dealing with the emotional repercussions of the plane crash 20 years ago, whereas Nadia has escaped her violently abusive husband and remained in total isolation for a decade. They are all at home in their pain, no one is



particularly looking for redemption or another chance at happiness, but all three of them find it by the end of the novel.

Nadia has tried several times to return to visit her family in Altai, but she was always too frightened that Vladimir might still be around. Lettie is the only person Nadia has seen in the entire decade she has been in hiding, and even she has not been to the homestead for several years. When Kache finds her in the cabin, Nadia behaves like a feral animal, hiding under the bed and clutching her knife, unsure of who he is or what he wants. Given her past, it would be perfectly understandable for her to never open her heart and/or trust a man again, but as she gets to know Kache, she discovers that he is a kind soul and he would never hurt her. With his gentle prodding she is able to slowly reenter the world, from short trips into town, to Anchorage, to Altai to see her family again. Even when that does not go as well as she would have liked, she perseveres. He shows her things on the internet that open her mind up to what she wants to do and where she wants to go. She ultimately has to leave Kache behind to pursue her dreams, but he understands why – she deserves her second chance at life.

Kache and Nadia's relationship also reinvents his life and perception of happiness. With her guidance, he is able to achieve closure from the terrible tragedy, his poor relationship with his father, and the guilt he feels, and open his heart to another person again. On a more tangible level, she rekindles his passion for music and teaches him how satisfying it can be to work on the land. This is why he is able to let her go at the end of the novel – he has other things to sustain him, and he belongs on the homestead.

Snag assumed that she would never love again after Elizabeth, or at least she would never act on it. She truly believed that her feelings for her sister-in-law inadvertently caused the plane crash, but with the help of the infinitely patient Gilly, and Nadia's words of wisdom, she too is able to put the past behind her. When we leave Snag at the end of the novel, she is going by "Eleanor," her given name, creating a new, identity for herself beyond her tragic loss.

## Religion vs. Spirituality

The author makes a philosophical point about spiritual beliefs by juxtaposing the stringent dogma of the Old Believers with the reverence for nature that some of the other characters feel, making the latter seem like a more sensible approach to spirituality.

Nadia's family are "Old Believers." These Russian immigrants are the product of a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century regarding proposed reforms. After leaving Russia, many Old Believers moved around Eastern Europe before establishing communities in South America, Canada, and Alaska. In the novel, there is a second schism among these Alaskan Old Believers, causing Nadia's family and some others to leave the village of Ural and establish a second settlement called Altai. We are told this disagreement involved the scope of authority for bishops. When



Nadia is forced to move, she loses her childhood love, Niko, and this is still a source of pain for her.

The author does not ridicule the religion or its belief system, but she does offer critiques. For example, Nadia is only sixteen when she is betrothed to Vladimir, and Kache remarks that this is much too young. Later, when Nadia returns to Altai to see her family for the first time in ten years, they disown her when they find out she is no longer abiding by the rules of the faith. Kache is furious that they would be so rigid in their thinking, and Nadia is deeply hurt. Her grandmother Agafia is the only member of the family to disagree, her love for her granddaughter is more important to her than Old Believer dogma.

These stringent beliefs are shown in contrast to the more spiritually-oriented sentiments of some of the other characters. Lettie feels a deep connection to the land/nature, an appreciation that Kache cultivates as well, as he spends more time on the homestead. Glenn felt this way too, Kache recalls him comparing the skinning of a moose to the religious ritual of confession. At the end of the book, just before Lettie's passing, Kache observes a beautiful sunset on the homestead and thinks, "It was the kind of sky that might make a devout atheist reconsider the possibility of heaven" (358). The Old Believers are shown to cause harm – dissolving families and marrying young girls to grown men, whereas the spiritual beauty of nature is a benevolent wonder.

## Hard Choices

Sometimes the best choice for a fulfilling life requires making a painful sacrifice, and this is true for Kache and Nadia when it comes to their romantic relationship. Though they love each other, Nadia knows that she must leave Kache behind when she goes to San Francisco. She knows that Lettie feels guilty for bringing A.R to Alaska, and that he was never able to return to Kansas before he died. Nadia will not let Kache become A.R, resigned to sacrifice his own happiness for hers, and she is determined to make herself happy. She has been confined to the grounds of the homestead for ten years, but now that she has seen what the outside world has to offer, she knows exactly what she wants and how to get it. Her place is in San Francisco, in art school, and Kache's place is on the homestead.

This is not the first hard choice Nadia has had to make. When she faked her own death and fled from Vladimir, she had to leave her family behind for her own safety and theirs. When she returns to Altai after Kache's urging, she could choose to be dishonest about her beliefs and her relationship with Kache to foster a reconciliation with them, but she makes the more difficult decision to be honest, even though it means losing them all over again. She has to be true to herself.

Kache does not accept the necessity of his and Nadia's separation right away. He wants to go with her to San Francisco and make the relationship work. By the end of the novel, though, after he has seen the viral video, he knows she must go and he must stay. In the clip he has seen evidence of his own happiness on the land, and evidence of



Nadia's artistic gifts. He is deeply saddened to lose her, but it is the right choice. In the last chapter, as he reflects on her leaving, he is certain that “there would be good moments – and they would no be wasted on him” (356). In a way, he no longer needs Nadia because he has become her, as illustrated by his dance with the sandhill cranes that mimics hers from the beginning of the book.



# Styles

## Point of View

While the entire novel is told in a third person omniscient narrative style, the chapters alternate between the perspectives of the four main characters, Kache, Nadia, Snag, and Lettie. The final chapter, however, as it serves the purpose of an epilogue, moves among the perspectives of Kache, Nadia, and Snag to capture the mental state of each as the story comes to a close (Lettie has passed away).

These changing perspectives throughout the book allow the reader to gain new insight little by little and better understand the motivations of the main characters, as we are frequently provided with their interior monologues. For example, there are several instances where Snag has thought about her secrets long before they were brought out into the open to discuss, and when Kache and Nadia go to Altai to retrieve her documents, we know he forgot to ask for them on purpose, to forestall her leaving, while she has no idea. We also know prior to Kache and Nadia's argument about their future, that she has already decided to leave him, as she has thought about it before, and knows that he will be happier staying on the homestead, rather than following her to San Francisco.

At the very beginning of the book, the perspective shifts lend a hint of menace to the story, as we are not told right away who Nadia is, only that she is a woman hiding out in a cabin with a knife, worried that someone is after her. The earlier shifts also allow the author to describe her characters and their situations indirectly, for example when Lettie reflects on her grandson's troubled relationship with his father.

## Language and Meaning

The author uses metaphor and foreshadowing to a great extent in the novel, most notably when comparing Vladimir, the story's villain, to dangerous animals like the wolf and bear, and comparing Nadia to the more gentle and free-spirited sandhill crane. She aptly compares the Winkel's cabin, left in the same state since the plane crash 20 years earlier, to a museum full of relics, with Nadia acting as the careful curator.

She uses the setting of Alaska as a metaphor for the wilderness of the human heart, and it becomes more pleasing to Kache as his own heart opens up to Nadia, he admires the gold leaves on the trees, "glowing with exaggerated promise, as if the hillside had flipped open to reveal layers and layers of shimmering treasure" (224). The canyon on the homestead's property is a physical representation of the chasm between Kache and his father Glenn. When he descends into it after Vladimir, and he sees his father's spirit there to guide him, he feels a reconciliation and finds the closure he so desperately needed.



Foreshadowing abounds in the frequent references to knives – Vladimir's weapon of choice. The novel begins with the phrase “Evening crept its way into the cabin, and she went to get her knife,” and shortly thereafter, Kache observes the town's namesake caboose from the height of an airplane, looking like a “smear of blood on the tip of a knife” (12). The author also provides repeated hints that the cabin is under surveillance and plants careful references to the gun and cell phone that play pivotal roles in the novel's climax, noting that the gun remained in the car after Kache and Nadia's trip to Altai, and that she never remembered to charge her cell phone, so she would be unable to call for help when she needed it.

## Structure

The novel is structured in five parts of 71 chapters. This allows for some very quick pacing, as many chapters are only a page or two in length. The perspectives shift back-and-forth between characters quickly. Oftentimes, one chapter picks up right where the other left off, but with a different viewpoint in order to move the story along. The longer chapters tend to contain more dialogue and explication, whereas the shortest chapters contain plot developing action. For example, the chapters containing Vladimir's abduction of Nadia are about two pages each, and the alternating perspectives add suspense to the situation.

The Winkel family history is provided not only from different perspectives, but in limited pieces that are finally collected into a whole at the Thanksgiving scene. For example, we learn early on that Kache had a fight with his father Glenn the night before the plane crash, later on we learn that Snag had done something to upset Glenn, and then later we learn that she had kissed his wife. This allows us to look back on the Glenn's quarrel with Kache in a different (and more sympathetic) light.

The five parts of the book are named (roughly) after the seasons, with the first and last sharing the name “Breakup” which, in Alaskan vernacular, is the dawn of Spring, when the ice begins to thaw and “break up.” The author uses the seasons to symbolic effect within Nadia and Kache's relationship. They grow closer together through Summer and Fall, but in the Winter things become complicated by Nadia's increasing desire to be alone and build her own life for herself. Part five's “Breakup” references both the dawning Spring, and the end of the relationship as Nadia and Kache know it.



## Quotes

Evening crept its way into the cabin, and she went to get the knife.

-- Nadia (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Using the words "crept" and "knife" creates an ominous and suspenseful tone for the start of the book, and the reference to the knife is a reference to the villain, Vladimir, as this is his preferred weapon. It also opens up a lot of questions to capture the reader's interest, as we do not know who is getting the knife or why.

Kache did not know how to rewind his life, how to undo the one thing that had undone him.

-- Kache (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Right away the author tells us that Kache is stuck in the past and unable to move forward because of something that happened to him. This is Kache's defining characteristic for at least the first half of the book. There is a parallel between the language used here, "undo," and "undone," and Kache's title for the song he wrote about Nadia - "Nadia You Unknotted Me."

There is no getting around grief. Even if you turned your back on it, diligently refused to answer its call, it would badger you, forever demanding payment.

-- Kache (chapter 12 paragraph 1-2)

**Importance:** Kache had been under the false impression that if he stayed away from Caboose and the cabin in particular, his grief would eventually go away. This is not the case, of course, his grief has merely been hibernating, waiting for the opportunity to make itself known, which it does as Kache looks around the cabin at his family's possessions and smelling his mother's perfume.

His mom always did love family heirlooms. Little did she know the whole house would one day be a museum full of them.

-- Kache (chapter 12 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** In the bathroom, Kache sees his grandfather's razor (which Nadia will use later to shave his beard when he returns from Austin) and reflects on his mother's fondness for these family relics. After the accident, with Kache's entire family dead, the whole house became a museum full of heirlooms, possessions of the dead that he has inherited.

Damn the land. It called to her, first in a whisper, its name Alaska, soft down the nape of her neck while she hung out the clothes.

-- Lettie (chapter 15 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This is from the first chapter that provides Lettie's perspective. It is a very evocative description of her infatuation with Alaska with its connotations of a lover's



tenderness. In a way, Alaska was the love of Lettie's life. It is a prudent choice by the author to note Lettie's total preoccupation with the land immediately upon introducing her point-of-view, because this is her defining characteristic.

It was crazy, he knew, to desperately need approval and understanding from a dead man. But he did.

-- Kache (chapter 17 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Aside from unresolved grief, Kache's angst over his dysfunctional relationship with his father Glenn is his defining characteristic and the major conflict he must overcome. In this instance, he is watching a show on the DIY network about a father and son construction duo and comparing his father unfavorably to the one on screen. Gradually, with help from Nadia and Snag, Kache learns that he had made some judgmental assumptions about his father that were not entirely true.

...her smile came through like determined sunlight working its way down through spruce and aspen branches, and he wanted to close his eyes and tilt back, expose his face to the unexpected warmth of it.

-- Kache (chapter 24 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** The first time Kache sees Nadia, she is hiding from him under a bed and brandishing a knife. They are slowly making progress at this point in the book. She is beginning to trust him enough to smile, and he is beginning to have romantic feelings for her, as evidenced by this flowery description of him basking in her glow.

Life can tie a person up in knots. Talking can loosen those knots, sometimes even set us free.

-- Gilly (chapter 28 paragraph 15)

**Importance:** At their first meeting at the Spit Tune, Gilly says this to Snag to try to convince her to open up about her pain. It is an astute statement that applies to the problems of Snag, Kache, and Nadia as well, though Snag is not quite ready to take the advice at this point. Later in the novel, Kache's song "Nadia, You Unknotted Me" expresses this same concept.

She identified with each fish tangled in the net, with each rabbit she trapped, each chicken whose neck she wrung, each spruce hen she shot. She was the Vladimir in their story.

-- Nadia (chapter 30 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Nadia does not relish the violence required of her lifestyle, cut off as she is from society, and here she imagines herself in the role of Vladimir, the predator who victimized her, as she is the predator to these creatures who occupy lower levels of the food chain. The difference is that Vladimir was a sadist, torturing her for pleasure, whereas she is humanely killing animals for her own survival.



Contentment. The way hard physical work let you sleep easily through the night, the way a woman who understood loneliness made you feel less alone.

-- Kache (chapter 42 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** After his first night with Nadia, Kache is beginning to feel the change in his situation. He feels a ray of happiness for the first time in a long time. Working on the land has helped give him a sense of purpose, and his relationship with Nadia is blossoming, partly because they understand each other so well, both having acclimated to years of loneliness.

Alaska does not forgive mistakes”

-- Elizabeth (chapter 56 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This is a quote from Elizabeth's journal, she is writing about her husband Glenn's fears about his sons' safety, but these words seem hauntingly prescient, given that the author of them died in a plane crash in Alaska. The untamed nature of Alaska, its rough terrain and abundance of wild animals is used by the author as a metaphor for the wilderness that lies at the center of our protagonists' troubled hearts.

...maybe it wasn't the actual person who helped you across whatever you needed to cross over. Maybe it was simply your love for that person.

-- Kache (chapter 71 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Kache sings a song at his grandmother Lettie's funeral about two people rowing a boat, and he reinterprets the lyrics to express the idea that the other person helping to row the boat is not as important as actually reaching the destination. What this means is that, though he truly loves Nadia, the significance is not in the relationship itself, or the fact that it is over, but the fact that it helped him get to the other side of his grief. This is the essential message of the novel.