

# **The Bridges of Madison County Study Guide**

**The Bridges of Madison County by Robert James Waller**

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# Plot Summary

The Bridges of Madison County by Robert James Waller is the story of two star-crossed lovers, Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson. Robert was a lonely figure as much by desire as by circumstance. Even as a child, his teachers recognized how intelligent the young boy was. However, they also noticed that Robert was a remote child who was difficult to reach. His mother knew that what the teachers told her was the truth. Robert often played alone and didn't seem to need companionship.

Despite his brilliance, there was no money for college for the eighteen-year-old Robert. His father died shortly after Robert graduated from high school. With the Great Depression looming, there weren't many options for a young man who had to support his mother. Robert joined the military to fight in World War II. He became a photographer's assistant and it was then that he discovered what would prove to be his life's passion. While he loved the technical aspects of photography, he most enjoyed the artistry that he immediately saw as integral in becoming a successful photographer.

After he served his four years, he returned to New York City and became a fashion photographer's assistant. He became involved with some of the beautiful models but no long term relationships developed. Some years later, he married Marian. However, Robert was a photographer for National Geographic and had assignments all over the world. Marion told him that she knew there was something within him but that she couldn't reach it. After five years, the marriage ended under the strain of his remoteness and his lengthy absences.

Francesca was a young school teacher in Naples, Italy. She longed to fall in love and be married. Unfortunately, many of the young men her age had been killed in war or were POWs. When she met American soldier Richard Johnson she was vulnerable to his attentions. Soon after they met, they married and moved to a rural area in Madison County, Iowa. They had two children, Michael and Carolyn, but Richard feared intimacy and a deep, rich relationship never developed.

Robert was fifty-two when he drove from his home in the state of Washington to Madison County in Iowa. His assignment from National Geographic was to photograph the famous covered bridges of the area. Robert had trouble locating one of the bridges and stopped at a home along a rural road to ask for directions. The young woman on the porch watching him walk up the drive was Francesca. Her husband and kids were gone for the week to the State Fair. The attraction between the two was immediate.

The two fell in love over the four days that her family was gone. It seemed to be destiny that the two met at what were vulnerable and needy times in their lives. Robert asked her to go with him but she could not leave her responsibilities behind. When he drove off, it would be the last time they would ever see each other. The two both left behind legacies of love and sacrifice. Robert and Francesca never stopped loving each other and the love that they shared during those few days was powerful and all-consuming and enough to last a life time.



# Preface and Chapter 1: Robert Kincaid

## Preface and Chapter 1: Robert Kincaid Summary

### Preface: The Beginning

Robert James Waller received a call from Michael Johnson who lived in Florida. Michael told him that he had a story he'd like to tell him, a story worth writing. He and his sister, Carolyn, arranged to meet him in Des Moines, Iowa. If Waller decided not to write the story, he promised not to reveal the details to anyone. The brother and sister told the emotional story of their mother, Francesca, and her lover, Robert. He agreed that the story was worth telling. They met another three times during the writing process. He used other resources including the notebooks that Francesca had written. There were still some gaps in the story which the author filled in by using his best judgment. The most challenging aspect of the work was capturing the essence of the elusive Robert Kincaid. Writing the story of Francesca and Robert transformed the way Waller thought and reduced the level of cynicism he had about human relationships.

### Chapter 1: Robert Kincaid

On August 8, 1965, Robert Kincaid left his small apartment located in a large house in Bellingham, Washington, carrying with him his photography equipment. He placed the equipment in his truck which he dubbed "Harry" and which was already partially filled with other equipment, supplies and personal items. He left the driveway and was soon driving down the coast of Puget Sound and then through the Cascades. He loved the area that was rife with choices for beautiful shots. But he was leaving the area behind for the time being and heading for Duluth, Minnesota.

Robert mused to himself about getting a dog. It would be good companionship but he was away overseas too much. Perhaps when he retired in a few years—he was fifty-two now—he'd get a golden retriever. Robert was alone. He had no family and no friends. His marriage to Marian many years before ended after a few brief years. The strain of his being gone so much became too much for her.

Along the way, Robert stopped in North Dakota to take some black and whites of old farm buildings. Nearing Duluth, he took photos of wildlife he spotted in the Superior National Forest. The thought went through his mind that it would be nice to have a woman. He dated a woman he met in Bellingham on a job occasionally. But it wasn't love and never would be. They were two lonely people. The woman once told him that she felt she couldn't reach him, couldn't bring out the best in him. He knew what she was talking about. He'd always been remote—in his own world—even as a kid.

Robert was a gifted child. His high IQ compelled his teachers to encourage his school work. He could do anything he wanted to do. His teachers met with his mother who admitted herself that Robert marched to the beat of a different drum. As a child, Robert



did a lot of things alone. He loved the outdoors and swam and fished and read all the adventure books he could get his hands on. There was no money for college and no desire on Robert's part to attend.

Robert's father died when Robert was eighteen. It was during the Great Depression and there weren't many options for young men. He joined the military to support himself and his mother. It was in the military that he discovered photography. He was assigned to be a photographer's assistant and learned the technical processes as well as the art of photography. He studied art—the works of the French impressionists—to learn the use of light.

After Robert served his four years in the military, he went to New York and became an assistant fashion photographer. The models were beautiful and Robert even got involved with a few but no long term relationships developed. After his mother died, he used the money he got from selling their modest house to buy his own photography equipment. Some of Robert's photographs were featured in National Geographic. In 1943, he did another stint for the military as a cameraman in the South Pacific. He saw the frightened faces of young soldiers landing on the shore in amphibious craft. He witnessed some being cut down by machine gun fire. After two years in the military, he was offered a position with National Geographic. He started in San Francisco but eventually wound his way up the coast to Washington. He liked it there and decided to stay.

After checking out some views along Lake Superior, he headed to Iowa and to Madison County. He asked a clerk at a filling station where he could find some of the covered bridges that the area was famous for. He found six of the bridges but the seventh one he was told about eluded him. He decided to pull into a driveway and ask one of the locals where the bridge was. He saw that the mailbox at the end of the drive read, "Richard Johnson." A woman was sitting on the porch drinking a tall, cool drink. He thought she was lovely or that she probably was lovely at one time.

## **Preface and Chapter 1: Robert Kincaid Analysis**

### Preface: The Beginning

The author describes how Michael Johnson contacted him about the story of his mother, Francesca, and her lover Robert Kincaid. Michael thought that the story was worth telling. After meeting with Michael and Carolyn, the author agreed. The author tells how the story impacted him. He claims to have been transformed by the story and that his level of cynicism was reduced greatly by it. The question lingers as to why the author was so cynical. Perhaps he related to the story on a personal level.

### Chapter 1: Robert Kincaid

Robert Kincaid is a solitary figure who is a professional photographer. While he purports to be looking for the best next spot to photograph, he's really looking for a woman to love. He is lonely but doesn't know how to reach out to anyone and he doesn't allow



anyone to draw too close. Robert probably selected a career as a photographer because it was something he could do alone—something that required little interaction with others. Like many introverted individuals, Robert longed for someone to love but had a difficult time making it happen.

From the time he was a young child, Robert was introspective and remote. His teachers noticed his brilliance but saw his recalcitrant personality as standing in the way of success. Rather than change, Robert pursued a career which required little interaction with others. And, it was his choice of careers that led him to Madison County in Iowa, where he spots a lovely woman to whom he is immediately attracted. It is a hot day and the alluring woman on the porch where he stops is drinking a tall, cool drink. He is drawn to both the woman and the drink because he is hot and weary and needs both. Robert's age is a factor in the story. At fifty-two he is looking forward to his retirement. What will he do with more time on his hands with no one to share it with? He thinks about getting a dog but knows he needs more.



# Chapter 2: Francesca

## Chapter 2: Francesca Summary

Richard had died on a stormy day like this day eight years before. He was a solid fellow who had given her a good life. Her children had called on her sixty-seventh birthday which just occurred recently. They didn't come to see her but she had her own celebration with neighbors. Her kids were busy with their lives and careers. She understood. They each wanted her to move closer to them but she preferred Iowa.

Francesca met Richard when she was twenty-five and a school teacher in Naples. Most of the Italian boys were dead from the war or were POWs. She had an unsatisfactory affair with a professor of art at the university. Her prospects looked bleak until she noticed the American soldier who was kind and offered her a future in America. She went with him and had his children, Michael and Carolyn. She had only returned to Naples twice when each of her parents died. But Madison County was her home now and she had no desire to return to Italy.

Inside the house, Francesca opened Richard's roll-top desk and took out a large envelope that was postmarked Bellingham, Washington, twenty-two years ago. Inside were three letters, a manuscript, several photos—one large black and white of her—and a National Geographic magazine. She took out the letter dated September 10, 1965. It was from Robert Kincaid. He recalled their time together and although he had returned to Washington she was in his every thought. He wrote of the time they met and his certainty that they were heading for each other even before they knew each other existed. He signed his letter, "I Love You," and told her of his wish that they be together again.

The photo was an image of Francesca twenty-two years before. In that photo, Robert had captured how in love she was with him. She remembered every detail about Robert's face that day and his silvery hair that was long and ever disheveled. She remembered how he focused the camera, circling around her to get just the right angle. She looked closely at her photo. She never looked that good before or since.

That day when Robert walked up her driveway, her husband and children were at the state fair. He told her he was looking for a covered bridge. His physicality, his voice and the way he looked at her completely captivated her. Francesca made a bold move, a bold move for her. She offered to go with the stranger and show him where the bridge was. Robert Kincaid had drawn her to him. He was a bit surprised and had to move the equipment around to make a place for her.

Robert handed Francesca his business card. He explained that he was on assignment from National Geographic to shoot photos of covered bridges. She told him she was taking him to the bridge called Roseman Bridge. She felt giddy like a young girl as she watched the muscles in Robert's arm flex as he drove. She noticed his scratched



equipment, his watch and his silver bracelet which needed polishing. She admonished herself for noticing, for being petty and small-town, a label she had grown to hate over the years. She took the cigarette he offered. She hadn't smoked in years.

Robert walked all around the bridge and along the creek beneath it. When he returned, he handed Francesca a bouquet of wild flowers. She clung to them on the way back. When they returned to the house, she offered him ice tea. Robert sized Francesca up. She was forty or a little older. She was pretty and warm. He didn't like young women because they didn't have the spirit and intelligence of older women.

Francesca asked and Robert told her about his career. He asked and she told him about her life as a farm wife. When he asked if she liked it, at first she said it was fine. But then, the truth that had not been spoken for years for some reason came out. She said her life was not what she dreamed it would be. He understood how she felt. She invited him to stay for dinner. Her family was away.

Francesca took a shower while Robert washed off and shaved using pump water outside. She watched him from the bathroom window. She dabbed on some of her new perfume. When they met back in the kitchen, he offered her a beer from his ice chest and she accepted. As they prepared the vegetables for dinner, Robert told her how he "makes" pictures not "takes" them. The picture of the bridge will look totally different in his photos he told her. His work reflects his spirit. The media likes the safe pictures though, he continued. They kill the passion for art. Francesca liked how he talked. People in Madison County didn't talk about art and passion.

Francesca told Robert about her early life in Italy. The private Catholic schools and about her working class parents. She told him how she met her husband while he was in the military and stationed there. She prepared stew for dinner and had watermelon for dessert. It was a pleasant evening.

## Chapter 2: Francesca Analysis

There was a destiny about Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson. They were each individually missing something in their lives. And, they were also at mid-life points in their lives. They were both, independent of one another, evaluating where they were in life. Francesca seemed to have settled for Richard. She was Italian and recalled how so many young Italian men had been killed in WWII or were POWs. She was vulnerable to the attentions of the American soldier, although it seemed that she had no deep emotional connection to him.

For Robert's part, he looked back on his life which included a marriage that ended because of his remoteness and lengthy times away. It seemed that Robert's marriage was similar to Francesca's in that there did not seem to be a deep emotional foundation in the relationship. A mid-life crisis is often associated with men; however, in this story that frenetic reaction to reality seems to have struck both Robert and Francesca.





So it was timing as well as time in life that sparked an attraction between the two middle-aged people. The timing for Robert was his decision to drive to Iowa on an assignment from the company he worked for. For Francesca, her husband and children are away for the day and night when this attractive man just happened to stumble upon her house while he was searching for one of the noted bridges of Madison County. It was not only kismet—it was timing and time of life. Had Francesca's husband been home, there would have been no chance for a relationship. And, had Robert been able to find the covered bridge he was looking for, he would have never stopped at Francesca's house to ask for directions.



## Chapter 3: Ancient Evenings, Distant Music

### Chapter 3: Ancient Evenings, Distant Music Summary

Following dinner, Robert and Francesca took a walk in the meadow. Robert brought along one of his cameras. It had been a while since she had taken a walk after dinner. Richard usually watched TV after they ate while she read. She hated TV. Robert quoted Yeats and she knew the passage. She recalled how the teen boys that she taught pooh-pooed poetry as less than masculine. The boys snickered about the references to the phrase "golden apples of the sun" while the girls blushed.

After their walk, they came in for coffee and brandy. Robert watched as she had to stretch and reach for the brandy and glasses which had been shoved to the rear of the cabinet. The attraction between them was intensifying but Robert tried to suppress the desire he was beginning to feel. Francesca was wondering how many women Robert had in his time. When he left to go she was at once relieved and disappointed. After he left, Francesca got in her truck and drove to Roseman Bridge. She tacked a note on the bridge for Robert.

### Chapter 3: Ancient Evenings, Distant Music Analysis

Robert is trying to fight his attraction to Francesca but Francesca is not willing to let him go. When they have brandy, she opens a new bottle and has to reach to the back of the cabinet for the brandy glasses. From that, he knows that she is not having intimate drinks with her husband at night and assumes that her husband doesn't appreciate her.



# Chapter 4: The Bridges of Tuesday

## Chapter 4: The Bridges of Tuesday Summary

Francesca heard Harry, Robert's out-of-tune truck, pass by the house early the next morning on his way to the bridge. Once there, Robert pulled on a pair of knee-high boots in preparation for walking around the muddy earth seeking out the best angles for his shoot. He had to get in the perfect position in order to include the creek, avoid including graffiti near the entrance and be sure to omit the telephone wires. As the sun surfaced, the red sky brightened. Just when Robert had the perfect angle, he peered into his camera's viewfinder and frowned. Why in the world was there a little white piece of paper hanging on the entrance, he wondered. He ran up and retrieved the piece of paper and stuck it in his vest pocket. He didn't have time to read it right then. He had to take advantage of the current light and get his shots. After much maneuvering and set-up, Robert got his shots and moved on to the next bridge, Hogback Bridge about fifteen minutes away.

On his way to the next bridge, he passed Francesca's house. He told himself to forget her. She was so lovely but she was taken. Francesca was in the barn and heard the unique sound of Harry as he passed by. Things went well at Robert's second shoot. He took a long shot of a farmer driving his wagon with a team of Belgian horses. It was the kind of image that could make the cover. He'd forgotten about the note until he finished his work. He fished it out of his pocket. It was an invitation from Francesca to come for dinner again. Robert found a phone booth in the nearby small town, Winterset. He found her number and called. He'd like to come, he told her, but it would be late perhaps not until 9:30. She didn't want to wait that long to see him but she told him it would be fine. He added that if she wanted to come with him on the rest of his shoots, he could pick her up around 5:30. He'd be going to Cedar Bridge next. Someone could see her with Robert but she couldn't resist and accepted his invitation. She'd drive there herself and meet him, she told him.

Robert stopped by the newspaper office to read up on the covered bridges. He was a stranger and everyone noticed him and was curious about him. He felt their focus and thought he might have been putting Francesca in a bad spot by inviting her along. He called her back and they discussed the problem with the nosy townsfolk. She didn't care if he didn't care. Francesca arrived at the Cedar Bridge before Robert. She was leaning up against her truck when he pulled up. She was anxious to see him at work. He was glad she came.

Francesca helped him carry his equipment and handed him the cameras and other equipment when he needed them. She blushed when he called her a first-class assistant. She was astonished by his artistry in being able to coax nature into his vision, into what he wanted to portray. After crossing back over the creek, he caught her unawares and snapped a photo of her. He promised not to use it without her permission. After he completed his work, she told him he could take a shower at the



house. She led him to the bathroom that could only be accessed through her bedroom. She was downstairs while he took his shower. The thought that he was naked ran through her mind. She had driven to Des Moines and bought wine and a new summer dress that was cut low in the front and back. She had made stuffed peppers that afternoon.

After Robert came down after his shower, Francesca headed up to take a bath. She took the beer Robert offered her with her. As she took her bath and drank her beer she felt a sense of eroticism. Why didn't she and Richard live like this she wondered to herself. Richard didn't like to talk about intimate matters like sex and emotions. It was a dangerous way to talk. Art and poetry fell in that category, too. It wasn't just Richard. It was being raised and living in the rural community of Madison County. When she came down in her new pink dress that contrasted nicely with her tanned skin, Robert was bowled over. He told her she was stunning and she reveled in his words. They fell in love with each other that very moment.

## Chapter 4: The Bridges of Tuesday Analysis

Francesca cannot let the thought of Robert go. She invites him back to dinner, a bold move for a married woman in Madison County. Francesca has only known this man for a day but her attraction for him is intense and something she is not able to ignore. Francesca has become the aggressor in the relationship. Although Robert is just as attracted to Francesca, he is willing to face reality. She is not available. She is a married woman with children. Getting involved with her could lead to trouble for both of them.

Just when he's willing to let go, Francesca draws him back in. The attraction between them is real. They are both vulnerable and lonely. Francesca has never really been in love with her husband. She describes him as giving her a good life. Richard fears intimacy and their sex life has declined but it's a subject that he is not comfortable taking about. Thus, Francesca who is obviously a romantic, is frustrated and unsatisfied.

Francesca realizes that it's not just Richard, her husband, who is conservative and fears intimacy. It is the entirety of Madison County. Richard was raised in a closed-minded community where talk of sex and eroticism is taboo. He is a product of his conservative upbringing. Being European, she was raised in a more liberal environment. Robert, being a seasoned world traveler, is a more cosmopolitan man who has traveled the world and appreciates art as does Francesca. To Richard, art and poetry is as taboo as talk of sex. In the most unexpected time and place, Robert and Francesca have each met their soul mate.



## Chapter 5: Room to Dance Again

### Chapter 5: Room to Dance Again Summary

Robert and Francesca were having a beer before dinner. She received a call from a neighbor who was nosy about the green truck parked at her house. It was a photographer who was looking for the Roseman Bridge, she told Marge. Francesca also told her that her husband and kids would be gone until Friday. She turned down Marge's invitation to get together on Thursday. All the while she talked on the phone, she rested her hand gently on Robert's shoulder as he sat at the table and she stood behind him talking on the phone.

When she hung up, there was music playing on the radio. He suggested that they dance even though he wasn't much of a dancer. She lit two candles and turned out the overhead light. They drew close to one another and began to dance to "Autumn Leaves." He pulled her close to him, their cheeks touching. They danced through several songs and never let go of one another. He told her how he was one of the last cowboys. The modern world with robots and computers was becoming too organized for him. Soon, there would be no need for man to exist. Even procreation could be accomplished through sperm banks. Robert liked his job because it gave him free range. With bombs and missiles man was more powerful than ever before but he was bound to destroy nature. Robert placed the blame on men as opposed to women for the wars, the destruction of nature and the decline of mankind.

But it was Robert's very maleness and an inner intensity that he seemed to control and rein in that attracted her. Francesca wanted the dancing to go on forever. She felt like a woman again. Finally, he pressed his lips on hers and she kissed him back—a long passionate kiss.

In her advancing age, Francesca only allowed herself to recall her time with Robert once a year. It would be too emotionally draining to do so more often. It was difficult for Francesca to think of Robert to be 75 years old. That first night together, she recalled how she had led him upstairs to her bedroom and how they made love for hours. For Francesca, there was so much more than the sexual pleasure she enjoyed—it was the raw power of the man. The next morning he told her that he finally knew why he was on earth. It wasn't to travel great distances to take photographs, he was on earth to love her. He asked her to slip on a pair of jeans and a plain shirt. He wanted to take a picture of her outside. It was the black and white photograph that she kept with the letters he sent her.

### Chapter 5: Room to Dance Again Analysis

Although the reader knows that Robert and Francesca do not wind up together, it is obvious that they did share true love and intimacy during their brief time together. The



attraction was so strong between them that they finally stopped trying to fight it. Robert tells Francesca that he was put on earth to love her. For a man who found it almost impossible to connect with people, it had to be a very strong emotion that compelled him to speak with such conviction and emotionalism. Francesca feels the love as well. But part of the excitement they feel is the clandestine nature of their affair. No one will ever know about their love and their time together other than the two of them. Francesca has hidden her involvement with Robert for twenty-two years. She only looks at his letters and photographs once a year—more than that would be unbearable for her. What will her children think when she passes away and they find the envelope? Surely she had to consider that. Perhaps she wants to leave behind evidence that she loved and was loved.



# Chapter 6: The Highway and the Peregrine

## Chapter 6: The Highway and the Peregrine Summary

The next two days, Robert and Francesca spend every minute together. They talk and make love. He plays the guitar and sings to her. Robert brings up the inevitable question that threatens their idyll. What will they do? She feels he owns her—he hadn't intended to but it just happened. He is willing to talk to Richard and tell him that the two of them had fallen in love. He could move to the nearby town. He was willing to do anything. She tells him that Richard couldn't handle it. Thoughts of husband and children and propriety are working their way into Francesca's dream.

Robert asks her to travel with him. He tells her of all the exciting places they could see together and all the wonderful times they'd have together. Robert tells Francesca, "I am the highway and a peregrine and all the sails that ever went to sea." (114) Francesca understood his words. He was the road and the road was him. She expressed her fear that she would just get in the way, impede him in his artistry were she to leave with him. And, Francesca was certain that Robert would understand her sense of responsibility to her family. Leaving her husband would leave him and her children prey to the town gossips for the rest of their lives. Since Robert "owned" her he could force her to go or talk her into going with him. Robert understood his power but would never force her to do anything against her will. He told her that neither would ever find what they had with another.

It was Friday morning, their last time together, and Robert was dressed and ready to leave. There were tears in both their eyes. Robert asked if he could write to her. He wanted to send her some photos. He told her to call him collect anywhere in the world he might be. They had a tearful goodbye and Robert Kincaid drove off but stopped at the end of the drive and stepped out of his truck. They just stared at one another. He climbed back in Harry and drove out of Francesca's life.

Richard and the kids came back that night. After Richard was finished watching TV, he joined Francesca on the front porch. He was so happy to be home he told her. She seemed a little distant or dreamy, he thought. He said he was turning in but she would stay on the porch for a while longer, she told him. A few days later, Francesca and Richard went to Winterset to shop. On their way out of town, she spotted Robert pulling out of the filling station. Richard noted the license plate on his truck and noted that the man was a long way from home. He commented on the man's long hair then realized it was the photographer who the men at the cafe had been talking about. Francesca's feelings for Robert were stronger than she realized. She thought of leaping from the truck and running to him. But thoughts of her responsibilities stopped her. As he drove off in the rain, Francesca began to cry. Richard demanded to know what was wrong with her. She just needed some time to herself, she told him.



## Chapter 6: The Highway and the Peregrine Analysis

Francesca and Robert are deeply in love. He tells her, "I am the highway and a peregrine and all the sails that ever went to sea." (114) She understands his words. He is the "road" and the only pathway to her happiness and that she should go with him. But Francesca's feeling of responsibility for her family trumps her love for Richard. She rejects the opportunity to take the pathway that promises romance and excitement. Francesca is a martyred figure in that she is sacrificing her personal happiness for her husband to whom she feels duty-bound and for her children whom she loves. There is part of her that suspects if she did go with Robert, her misery in leaving her family could destroy him and the career he loves. Robert has the power to force her to go with him because, as she told him, he owns her. But he loves Francesca enough to not place her in that position.

Francesca has lived a life without love and knows what to expect and what not to expect. With Robert, there are all the delicious unknowns of what life could be like with him. She has blamed the conservative community in which Richard was raised for his inability to develop a deeply emotional relationship with her. But she, too, has fallen victim to that conservatism. The Italian girl of years ago would have gone with Robert. The wife and mother of Madison County could not.





# Chapter 7: Ashes

## Chapter 7: Ashes Summary

On her sixty-seventh birthday, the memories of watching Robert drive away haunted Francesca. Her love for him was stronger than ever. She sat at the kitchen table where they had eaten and drank. She lit two candles and found soft music on the radio, recalling every detail of their first night together. While Richard was still alive, she never returned Robert's letter. She subscribed to the National Geographic and saw the article on the covered bridges which he also wrote. His name appeared in the back of the magazine with the list of contributors. She was able to see him grow older from the photos of him they featured in the magazine once in a while. Once there was a photo of Robert in a faraway place, standing near a creek with his shirt off. She noticed there was a medallion around his neck. With a magnifying glass she peered closely at the medallion and could barely make out that it was inscribed with "Francesca."

After 1975, Robert no longer appeared in the magazine. He would have been 62 then. Francesca figured he retired. After Richard died in 1979, she tried calling Robert. The number he gave her many years before now belonged to an insurance company. She talked with an editor at National Geographic. The man remembered Robert. He was artistic but kind of strange, the man recalled. He had the same number she had. After that she gave up trying to find him—a little afraid of what she would learn.

Once in a while she'd go to town and have lunch where Robert had taken her. Winterset was improving. People had longer hair and an art guild had been established by some of the young women. Sometimes she'd be spotted standing by Roseman Bridge or Cedar Bridge. In February 1982, she received a package from UPS. The package was from a law firm in Seattle. Inside the package was a letter telling her that they represented the estate of Robert Kincaid who had recently passed away. She was destroyed. She walked away and didn't return to the package for hours.

Robert's will left instructions that the contents of the package be delivered to her. His ashes had been scattered. He wanted no grave or grave marker. Robert was gone. Inside the package was the medallion with her name inscribed upon it. The silver bracelet he wore was also there along with the note she had written and left on the bridge inviting him to dinner. Also enclosed was the photo of her. In another box in the package were his best cameras. A letter from him explained that he wanted her to have his cameras because they were the most precious things he owned. He told her how she was always on his mind and that there were literally thousands of times that he wanted to return to her. After he retired, he pursued photographing subjects of his own liking including many sites around the Puget Sound. He got a dog he named Highway who traveled around with him. He remembered everything about her. He still loved her profoundly and wanted her every moment. He signed the letter, "The last cowboy, Robert." (141)



Reading the letter and looking at his cameras was part of her yearly ritual, as was reading his manuscript entitled, "Falling from Dimension Z," in which he described the life of a lonely, traveling man whose consciousness was caught between reality and dreams. Afterward, she would put everything away again for the next year. She'd sit on the swing on her porch alone with her memories.

## Chapter 7: Ashes Analysis

Francesca and Robert continued to love each other the rest of their days even though they never saw each other again. Just as there was a destiny that the two met, there was also a destiny that they could not be together. Although Francesca was haunted by her love for Robert the rest of her life, she chose propriety over love and desire. She had regrets at times that she hadn't gone with Robert. But deep down she knew she did the right thing. Robert was such a free spirit that had they been together, she may have changed him and perhaps a long-term relationship with such an unusual, artistic man would have been difficult and may have eventually failed. Francesca was a lover but she was a mother first and maintained her loyalties to that role above all others.

Although Francesca was shaken and desolate when she learned that Robert had passed away, she actually felt even closer to him than when he was alive. She had the cameras he loved and a beautiful letter in which he described his undying love for her. In his manuscript he poured out his heart and soul to her. She took special care of the package he sent her—it had become the most important thing in her life. Francesca was waiting for the time she could join him. Perhaps she would see him again in another time and space, one that had no bounds and no end.



# Chapter 8: A Letter from Francesca

## Chapter 8: A Letter from Francesca Summary

Francesca died two years later at the age of 69. The doctor said she "just died." She had been in good health and he could find no cause. In her will, she requested that her ashes be scattered at the Roseman Bridge. Cremation was not common in Madison County and hers caused quite a stir among the town gossips in Winterset. Michael and Carolyn took her ashes to the Roseman Bridge and scattered them as she had wished. They couldn't remember any family connection to the bridge and they found her request strange.

It was Carolyn who ran across the letters from Robert Kincaid. Michael took the letters and read them, too. They were both shocked that their mother was in love with another man. They looked around her other possessions and found a custom-made walnut box containing Robert's cameras. Also in the box were several spiral notebooks and a sealed envelope with their names on it. Carolyn read the letter out loud as Michael listened. In the letter addressed to them, Francesca explained that she wanted her children to know who she was. She didn't want what she and Robert Kincaid had to die with her. She loved their father in a "quiet way" and she was ever grateful because he gave her her children. She explained that Robert was the photographer who took the photos of the covered bridges that appeared in the National Geographic and were the talk of the town. She had written their story out in the notebooks she enclosed in the box. It would explain, at least in part, their relationship.

Francesca wrote about how she met Robert and how she helped carry his equipment. She also told them how they danced in their kitchen and how they fell in love. She told her children how powerful and intense their lovemaking was. She told them that had it not been for Richard and them, she would have left with him. She made the right decision for her family but she wasn't so sure she made the right decision for herself. Most of all she wanted her children to know that she loved Robert Kincaid and that he loved her. When he had left after their few days together, she realized how little she knew about him. He was a world traveler and a wartime photographer.

Carolyn and Michael were stunned. They realized what their mother had given up for them. They could see how in love their mother looked to be in the photo that was in the envelope. Michael looked around in the kitchen and found the bottle of brandy and two glasses. He poured Carolyn and himself a glass of brandy. They sat at the kitchen table where Francesca and Robert had sat and began to read the notebooks that described their mother's love for Robert Kincaid.



## Chapter 8: A Letter from Francesca Analysis

Francesca died of a broken heart. The doctor could find no reason for her death. Francesca apparently could find no reason to live. Although Francesca could not reveal her real self to her children while she lived, she wanted them to know who she really was after her death. By doing so, the children realize what she gave up for them and that their mother's life had been a tragic one. Her selflessness strikes Michael and Carolyn and through her words they are able to fully appreciate their mother and understand some of the strange requests she made. They had wondered why she wanted her ashes scattered at the Roseman Bridge. They wondered why she wanted an old kitchen table moved back in the kitchen after their father died. They learn that it was the table where she and Robert ate and drank. Now, after Carolyn and Michael read her letter and journals, they understand. Francesca wanted them to know that she loved and was loved and, perhaps most importantly, that an ideal love was possible. That was her legacy to her children.



# Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk

## Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk Summary

The author traveled to Seattle a few weeks before the book went to the printer. He wanted to see if he could find out more information about the elusive Robert Kincaid. The arts editor of the Seattle Times provided him access to the newspaper from 1975 through 1982. He found a photo of a musician named John "Nighthawk" Cummings. Robert Kincaid was credited as the photographer. The author learned where the retired musician lived and visited him.

Interview with "Nighthawk Cummings"

Nighthawk was playing at a bar called Shorty's in Seattle and needed a current publicity photo of himself. Someone gave him Robert's name and he commissioned him to take the photo. Robert had Nighthawk play his sax while he took shots. He asked Nighthawk to play "Autumn Leaves." The next day Robert brought the pictures over and Nighthawk was blown away by their artistry. Robert started coming into Shorty's about once a week. Nighthawk would have a drink or two with him. Robert always requested that he play "Autumn Leaves." They became friends and would sometimes go sit down by the harbor and watch the ships come in. He'd bring his dog, Highway, with him.

Robert never told him much about his personal life until one day when he noticed the medallion around his neck with the name "Francesca" on it. He asked him about it and Robert poured his heart out to Nighthawk about the woman. He was so inspired by Robert's story that he wrote a new song. One night when Robert was in the audience, Nighthawk announced the new song he had written for a friend. It was called "Francesca." Robert gave Nighthawk a framed photo of a bridge he called Roseman Bridge to thank him for the song. Nighthawk would play "Francesca" every time Robert came in. Suddenly, Robert stopped coming in and Nighthawk learned that he had died. He found Highway at the pound, adopted him and gave him to his nephew who immediately loved the dog. Not long after, Nighthawk retired. He'd often get the photograph of the bridge out while he played "Francesca" on his sax.

## Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk Analysis

The reader learns a little about Robert's life after his affair with Francesca. Although he was denied the passion he felt for Francesca, Robert was able to pursue his passion for photography and continue to develop his artistry. While Francesca was able to leave a legacy of love to her children, Robert left his first to Francesca and then to a friend he made late in life. Nighthawk was so inspired by Robert's story about his affair with Francesca that he wrote a song dedicated to their love. He never played more beautiful music before in his life. Robert's only living survivor, the dog which he loved, was given to a child who fell in love with Highway.



# Characters

## Robert Kincaid

From a youngster on, Robert Kincaid was recognized as exceptional. His mother saw it as did his teachers. But they also saw that there was a remoteness about him, a part of him that was powerful yet unreachable. There was no money for college so the eighteen-year-old Robert, who had to support his mother after his father died, joined the military. There were few options for young men with the Great Depression looming.

Robert was assigned to be a photographer's assistant. Robert, who was a solitary figure, admired the technical aspect of taking pictures but he loved the artistry that it took to make extraordinary photos. Photography became his passion and career for the rest of his life. After the military, Robert became a photographer for National Geographic and had assignments all over the globe. The strain from his being away so often and his remoteness led to a failed marriage after just five years.

At fifty-two, Robert drove from his home in Washington State to Madison County, Iowa. His assignment from National Geographic was to photograph the famous covered bridges of the area. Having problems finding one of the bridges, Robert stopped at a house on a rural road for directions. It was there that he met Francesca Johnson. There was an immediate and lasting attraction.

Although the two star-crossed lovers would spend only four days together, their love endured over more than twenty years before his death. After he passed away, his lawyers sent Francesca a manuscript in which he attempted to describe himself, his precious cameras and a letter telling her that he never stopped loving her.

## Francesca Johnson

Francesca Johnson was born and raised in Naples, Italy. She was a twenty-five year-old school teacher who wanted to fall in love and get married. Unfortunately, at the time many of the young men her age had either been killed in the war or were POWs. Therefore, she was very vulnerable to the attentions of American soldier Richard Johnson who was serving in the military and stationed in Italy. It was not long before they married and moved to Madison County, a rural area in the state of Iowa. They had two children, Carolyn and Michael.

Francesca adjusted to life in America and enjoyed her role as a farm wife. As her children matured, it was obvious that her relationship with her husband had deteriorated from neglect. Richard was raised in the conservative community of rural Iowa and was taught that some things are just not discussed—like intimacy and feelings. As the years wore on, it was apparent that the couple had less and less in common. She loved art and he thought it unmanly to admire it. She loved poetry and he would never entertain a



notion to read it. Although she cared for Richard, she never had a deep love for him. As she put it she had a "quiet" love for him.

Francesca was lonely and feeling neglected and unsatisfied when Robert Kincaid stopped by her house to ask for directions. There was an immediate attraction between the two. Richard and the kids were away for four days while they attended the State Fair. Over that span of time, Francesca and Robert fell deeply in love. Although Robert pleaded with her to go with him, she could not leave her family behind. Francesca spent the rest of her days loving Robert although she never saw him again.

## **Robert's Mother**

Robert's mother recognized that her son, Robert, was very bright from a young age on. She also recognized that he was emotionally detached and difficult to reach. He joined the military at age eighteen to help support himself and his widowed mother.

## **Marion Kincaid**

Robert was married for a brief time to Marion. She told him she knew there was something within him that she could not bring out. Their relationship deteriorated because of his many lengthy absences while on assignment with his job.

## **Richard Johnson**

Richard Johnson met Francesca when she was a school teacher in Naples, Italy. He was stationed in the service there during WWII. The two married and relocated to his family home in Madison County, Iowa.

## **Carolyn Johnson**

Carolyn Johnson was Francesca's daughter. Carolyn discovered a love letter from Robert to her mother after Francesca died.

## **Michael Johnson**

Michael Johnson contacted author Robert James Waller, telling him that he had a story that should be written. After Waller heard the story about Robert and Francesca he agreed to write the story.



## John

John "Nighthawk" Cummings was a jazz musician and friend of Robert Kincaid. He was so inspired by Robert's story about his love for Francesca that he wrote a song for his friend entitled "Francesca."

## Highway

When Robert retired, he got a dog and named him Highway. After Robert passed away, Nighthawk gave Highway to his nephew.

## Robert James Waller

Robert James Waller is the author of *The Bridges of Madison County* and is also part of the story. He was contacted by Michael Johnson who wanted Waller to write the love story of his mother and Robert Kincaid.





# Objects/Places

## Madison County, Iowa

Francesca Johnson lives in a rural setting in Madison County, Iowa. Photographer Robert Kincaid, her star-crossed lover, travels there on assignment from the magazine he works for.

## The Covered Bridges

Robert Kincaid is in Madison County to photograph the famous covered bridges the area is known for. When he cannot locate one of the bridges, he stops by Francesca's house to ask for directions.

## Francesca Johnson's Home

Francesca invites Robert to her home for dinner on two subsequent nights. They drink brandy at the kitchen table, dance together to "Autumn Leaves" on the radio and fall in love.

## Bellingham, Washington

Robert Kincaid leaves his home in Bellingham, Washington, and drives to Madison County on assignment from the magazine he works for.

## National Geographic

Robert Kincaid is a photographer for the magazine, National Geographic. He worked for the magazine for many years and traveled the world on assignments for magazine.

## Puget Sound

After Robert Kincaid retired as a photographer for National Geographic, he continued his personal pursuit of photographic subjects. One of his favorite locations to shoot was Puget Sound.

## Naples, Italy

Francesca was a twenty-five year-old school teacher in Naples, Italy, during World War II when she met her husband-to-be who was an American soldier stationed in Italy.



## **The Walnut Box**

After Robert died, he bequeathed his precious cameras to Francesca. She wanted to preserve them in their pristine condition and had a custom walnut box made in which to store them.

## **The Medallion**

After Robert fell in love with Francesca, he wore a medallion on a chain around his neck with Francesca's name inscribed on it.

## **Harry**

Robert drove his truck from Bellingham, Washington, to Madison County on assignment with his magazine. Robert affectionately named his old truck, "Harry."



# Themes

## Intimacy

Many people have internal barriers that keep them from truly intimate relationships. Intimacy encompasses a closeness at all levels, not merely at a physical one. True intimacy between two people means that all pretenses are suspended and that genuine honesty is shared and is never abandoned or sacrificed. The raw emotions and fears of one another in such a relationship are exposed with no chance of judgment or rebuke. The spirit and the soul are able to flourish with no worries of betrayal or belittlement.

Francesca is suffering in a relationship with Richard who was raised in a conservative and strict environment in which the expression of one's private thoughts and hopes and dreams is not appropriate. Richard was taught that speaking of emotions was wrong and effeminate as was reading poetry and admiring art. Perhaps there was a fundamental and profound difference in Francesca and Richard that doomed their relationship from the very beginning. Francesca was raised in Italy where undoubtedly the mores and culture leaned more liberal than that in rural Madison County, Iowa.

For twenty years, Francesca was able to suppress her desire and need for more than Richard was equipped to give her. Yet that flame never was extinguished. That yearning was immediately met the moment she set eyes on Robert.

As for Robert, he too had his problems with intimacy. The emotions were deep in Robert and his love for poetry and art were part of him. He was an artist himself. The photographs he created were works of art and the images he produced were ethereal and other-worldly. But from a young boy on, Robert was remote and unreachable. He reined his passion in not because he was taught to like Richard; rather, he did so out of stubbornness and an intrinsic need for privacy. His ex-wife Marion said as much. She knew there was so much more inside but she couldn't reach it.

So, it was the perfect storm when Francesca met Robert. The enormous attraction and desire that exploded between them unleashed Robert's passion and completed Francesca who was the catalyst for the eruption within Robert. All obstacles were abandoned and the enormous magnetism between the two brought forth a fountain of emotion from within Robert that fulfilled the empty receptacle that was Francesca. Francesca and Robert became part of each other and the bond that was established in their few days together was so powerful that it lasted forever.

## Legacy

Most people have a sense of legacy, especially as they grow older and know that their days are numbered. Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson, the main characters in *The Bridges of Madison County*, were no exceptions. While they were alive, no one knew about the love affair that blossomed between Robert and Francesca over four



days that her husband and children were away at the State Fair. It is understandable that they would keep their relationship a secret, especially Francesca who was married.

However, as the years passed a desire for her children to know about the affair and thus know more about their mother began to stir within her. Francesca knew that her son and daughter would go through her papers when she passed away. She left an envelope with a love letter from Robert, photographs and other personal items from him. After reading the letter, Francesca's children understood that their mother had been in love with another man and they realized the sacrifice she had made for them. What she left for them, what her real legacy was for them, was the knowledge that their mother was loved and that she loved someone completely and forever. Francesca left her children a legacy of love and the reality that pure and ideal love existed.

Robert had no children to whom he could leave memories or remnants from his life. Since he died before Francesca, he bequeathed the most precious items he owned—his cameras—to Francesca. He had almost as much passion for his cameras as he had for Francesca. During the last year of his life he befriended a jazz musician nicknamed Nighthawk. Robert told him the story of his love for Francesca and Nighthawk was so inspired that he wrote a song called "Francesca." Robert gave Nighthawk a framed photo of one of the covered bridges to show his gratitude. Nighthawk was inspired by Robert and his story of love. After Robert died, Nighthawk would often play "Francesca" on his sax and at those times, his music never sounded so pure and melodic. Like Francesca, Robert left a legacy of love and inspiration for his friend Nighthawk and to Nighthawk's nephew who was the recipient of Robert's dog, Highway. As soon as the boy saw the dog, he immediately fell in love with him.

## Propriety

One of the problems in Francesca's relationship with her husband, Richard, was his fear of intimacy. Although Francesca stayed in her marriage and as she said, her husband "gave her a good life," the passion and eroticism within her was abandoned and neglected throughout their long marriage. Richard was raised in a conservative community in Madison County, Iowa, where he learned the important proprieties in life. He was raised that it wasn't proper to discuss things like love and passion. It wasn't manly to read poetry and admire art. It was this influence that made Francesca vulnerable to a chance for love that was exciting and passionate.

As much as Robert represented what Francesca needed, she was not able to break away from her life. She didn't despise her husband but, as she wrote in a letter to her children, she loved him in a "quiet way." Francesca loved her children and acknowledged the responsibilities that she had to her family. It was propriety that stood in the way of the chance for Francesca to have a life of romance and adventure with the exciting man who swept into her life. But Francesca had to choose duty and responsibility over romance and excitement. When Francesca grew old, she felt she made the right decision for her family but perhaps the wrong one for herself.



Not only did Francesca feel that her family needed her and that Richard could never recover if she left, she worried about the impression it would make on the townspeople. Although she was born and raised in what surely was a more liberal environment than rural Iowa, Francesca had made Madison County her home for twenty years. She had become part of the conservative society and thus a victim of their propensities. Francesca feared that had she left, the small town gossips would bring shame and humiliation upon her husband and children. Francesca was not able to leave them in that position—not even for the sake of being with the one true love of her life.

# Style

## Point of View

The heart of the story *The Bridges of Madison County* by Robert James Waller is told in the third person perspective with limited omniscience. Using this point of view, the reader is able to know the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the two main characters, Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson.

There is a slight deviation from third person perspective to first person perspective in the preface and in the postscript of the work. In these two sections, Waller, using a form of authorial intrusion, inserts himself into the story in the preface which is entitled "Beginnings." Waller explains how he learned of the love story of Robert and Francesca. He explains that he was contacted by Francesca's son, Michael, and met with him and his sister, Carolyn. They told him of their mother's romance and Waller agreed to write the story.

In the final entry, which is entitled "Postscript: The Tacoma Nighthawk," the story once again is told in the first-person. Waller explains how he attempted to find someone who knew Robert during the last years of his life. After locating his friend, a musician named John "Nighthawk" Cummings, he interviews him about his relationship with Robert. That interview is included in the postscript.

Robert James Waller is an author and photographer. The author obviously has a close association with the protagonist in *The Bridges of Madison County* who is named Robert and who is a photographer. The author's knowledge of photography is apparent in some of the episodes that describe Robert Kincaid's work.

## Setting

As the title would suggest, *The Bridges of Madison County* features bridges. The bridges are of the covered variety and were considered landmarks in Madison County, Iowa. Much of the story takes place in the rural area of Iowa. There are many antiquated covered bridges. One is called "Roseman Bridge" and another is called "Cedar Bridge." The protagonist, Robert Kincaid, is a photographer for *National Geographic* and is assigned to shoot the bridges of Madison County for an upcoming issue of the magazine.

Robert does not live in Madison County. He travels there from his home in Bellingham, Washington. He decides to make the drive and take in the scenery between Washington and Iowa. He stops along the way and takes some shots of Puget Sound, the Cascade Mountains, and the plains of North Dakota. Once Robert arrives in Madison County, he meets Francesca Johnson when he loses his way and cannot find one of the bridges. Francesca is a transplant herself. She was originally from Naples where she met her American husband when he was there during WWII.



Robert and Francesca fall in love and spend the next four days together. They spend much of their time in her roomy farmhouse and in the surrounding area as Robert shoots photos of the bridges of Madison County. Their time is limited because her husband and children are due to return from the State Fair. Francesca takes him to Roseman Bridge where he takes shots of the old bridge. The next day, knowing that Robert is heading for Cedar Bridge, Francesca leaves a note on the bridge inviting him for dinner.

The closest town is a small community called Winterset. It is where Robert goes to call Francesca to accept her invitation to dinner. The townspeople notice the stranger who doesn't look like one of them. His hair is too long and his manner too cosmopolitan.

Francesca cannot leave her husband and children and turns down Robert's plea to go with him so Robert has no option but to return alone to Washington. Although their love endures, Francesca and Robert spend the rest of their days apart—he in Bellingham and she in Madison County.

## Language and Meaning

In *The Bridges of Madison County*, author Robert James Waller intersperses the story's narrative with splashes of lyrical imagery. For example, when Francesca and Robert are falling in love, she feels powerless in his presence which the author describes in this manner: "The leopard swept over her, again and again and yet again, like a long prairie wind, and rolling beneath him, she rode on that wind like some temple virgin toward the sweet, compliant fires marking the soft curve of oblivion." (107) The words indicate her inability to resist him and the strength of his being.

When Robert asks Francesca to leave her family and go with him he tempts her by telling her, "I am the highway and a peregrine and all the sails that ever went to sea." (114) In these words, he indicates to Francesca that he is the only way out for her—the only escape from her misery and loveless marriage. The words also hint at the excitement and adventure that awaits them in a life together.

Robert has two passions. One, of course, is for Francesca and the other is for photography. It is his art and he has used it as a vehicle to express the emotions that he held within him before meeting Francesca. There are passages that indicate his love for photography but there are equally as many instances in which the technical nature of photography is described. There are descriptions of angles and lighting and lenses as well as mention of the depth of field and the hyperfocal technique. Such descriptions indicate the author's technical knowledge of photography.

## Structure

*The Bridges of Madison County* by Robert James Waller has nine short to medium chapters. The story itself is prefaced by a section entitled, "Beginnings." In this section,



author Robert James Waller explains how he heard about the story of Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson and then pursued the story.

The actual story begins with the fifty-two-year old Robert driving to Madison County for a photographic assignment from his magazine. The story proceeds in a chronological order initially; however, the story flashes ahead to when the forty-five year old Francesca has just celebrated her sixty-seventh birthday. The story then switches between the present and twenty-two years before when Robert and Francesca first met.

The final chapters describes when the aged Francesca learns of Robert's death and then her death two years later. She leaves a legacy of love and sacrifice for his children so that they have a full understanding of their mother and the enduring love she shared with a man she knew for only four days. The story ends with the author locating a friend of Robert's who knew him during his last days.

Waller has employed a unique literary device in that he made himself a part of the story. Although he portrays his work as a true story based on the preface and last chapter, the story was fiction. But by inserting himself into the story, a form of authorial intrusion, he was able to portray the story as real. Many who have read the book and know it to be a work of fiction, persist in believing that it was based on a true story. Presumably, that was just the effect the author wanted to achieve.





## Quotes

"Robert Kincaid was as alone as it's possible to be—an only child, parents both dead, distant relatives who had lost track of him and he of them, no close friends." (Chapter 1, page 3)

"Robert, there's a creature inside of you that I'm not good enough to bring out, not strong enough to reach. I sometimes have the feeling you've been here a long time, more than one lifetime, and that you've dwelt in private places none of the rest of us has even dreamed about." (Chapter 1, page 7)

"Iowans have their faults, but one of them is not lack of caring." (Chapter 2, page 19)

"Analysis destroys wholes. Some things, magic things, are meant to stay whole. If you look at their pieces, they go away." (Chapter 2, page 39)

"Francesca said nothing, wondering about a man to whom the difference between a pasture and a meadow seemed important, who got excited about sky color, who wrote a little poetry but not much fiction. Who played the guitar, who earned his living by images and carried his tools in knapsacks. Who seemed like the wind. And moved like it." (Chapter 3, page 59)

"He didn't just wait for nature, he took it over in a gentle way, shaping it to his vision, making it fit what he saw in his mind." (Chapter 4, page 83)

"The leopard swept over her, again and again and yet again, like a long prairie wind, and rolling beneath him, she rode on that wind like some temple virgin toward the sweet, compliant fires marking the soft curve of oblivion." (Chapter 5, page 107)

"Come travel with me, Francesca. That's not a problem. We'll make love in desert sand and drink brandy on balconies in Mombasa, watching dhows from Arabia run up their sails in the first wind of morning." (Chapter 6, page 114)

"God, she loved him so. Loved him then, more than she thought possible, loved him now even more. She would have done anything for him except destroy her family and maybe him as well." (Chapter 7, page 128)

"I live with dust on my heart. That's as well as I can put it. There were women before you, a few, but none after." (Chapter 7, page 140)

"In a way, he was not of this earth. . . I've always thought of him as a leopard like creature who rode in on the tail of a comet." (Chapter 8, page 151)

"He understood magic. Jazz musicians understand it, too. . . You're playing some tune you've played a thousand times before, and suddenly there's a whole new set of ideas

coming straight out of your horn without ever going through your conscious mind."  
(Chapter 9, page 166)



## Topics for Discussion

How did the author learn of the story of Francesca and Robert? What impact did the story have on Robert Waller and why?

Why did Robert Kincaid have difficulty relating to people on an intimate basis? What destroyed his marriage? Why did photography appeal to him as a profession?

Why was Francesca vulnerable when she met Richard Johnson? What were her true feelings about her husband? Why did her husband have a problem with intimacy?

Why did the relationship that developed between Francesca and Robert seem to be destiny? What evidence is there in the story that their feelings for one another were true love? What did Robert's statement, "I am the highway and a peregrine and all the sails that ever went to sea," mean?

Why didn't Francesca go with Robert? How did she feel about her decision? How was it both the right and wrong decision?

What legacy did Francesca leave behind for her children? What legacy did Robert leave behind and to whom did he leave it?

Was the story of Robert and Francesca a true story? Explain.