

# **Picture Perfect Study Guide**

## **Picture Perfect by Jodi Picoult**

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## Plot Summary

In a fascinating Cinderella tale that goes awry, anthropologist Cassandra Barrett falls in love with and marries a Hollywood legend. Alex Rivers is a prince in the world of movies; people sift through his garbage and prowl around to find anything they can touch, photograph, or gossip about that is associated with his life. In turn, Alex gives his fans what they want—the facade of a pleasant, highly-talented man, devoted to his work and his wife. They own several residences and possess more than they could possibly want. Alex and Cassie seem made for each other, their love forming such a strong bond that it takes on an almost-spiritual quality. What could go wrong? Both Cassie and Alex are products of damaged childhoods, where neglect and alcohol shaped their extreme need for love at all costs. Married on a movie set in Tanzania after a brief courtship, Cassie and Alex face a marriage that will always be plagued with paparazzi and the facade required of Hollywood's elite.

Cassie is haunted by the memory of her dearest childhood friend, Connor, whom she may have married had he not been killed by his own father. Connor visits her in her dreams and seems to try to warn her about the circumstances she is in. She has learned to pray to him when life gets too difficult. Cassie's mother was a drunk, and her childhood was devoted to taking care of her. Alex grew up in the Louisiana bayou, neglected and mistreated by his alcoholic parents.

A noted professional in her field, Cassie has made major strides in her career. She loves Alex, but learns very quickly to tread lightly, since his lightning temper can turn violent in an instant. Convinced she can help Alex with his demons, Cassie forgives him each time for his abuse, rationalizing and making excuses for him. But, when she finds she is pregnant, something shifts inside of her, and Cassie realizes that she must leave Alex to save her child.

William Flying Horse, an LA policeman newly relocated from his Native American reservation in Arizona, finds Cassie in a state of amnesia in the cemetery of an old church. She has no idea who she is and what her life has been about, but throughout this story, she eventually pieces together the sequence of events that brought her to this state. Alex is overjoyed to find her alive, and she returns to her old life, where everything seems new but vaguely familiar. When Alex turns violent again, her memory returns, and Cassie turns to William Flying Horse for refuge on his reservation. She spends her pregnancy in Will's world, an extremely different culture from the one she knows, and Cassie learns to love these people. Because of her, Will learns to love himself. Trying, once more, to return to Alex, who tells the press she has been away having their child in private, Cassie finally realizes that she must leave him forever.



# Preface and Chapter One

## Preface and Chapter One Summary

An Algonquin Indian legend tells how one honest woman was able to see the mystical qualities of a great chief, and was rewarded forever, while those who only pretended to see him for their own benefit were punished.

A woman wakes up lying on a gravestone at a church cemetery in Los Angeles. She has no memory of how she got there, and assumes she was mugged. Her head is throbbing painfully, she does not know her name. She recognizes certain things, such as the name of a famous actor, Alex Rivers, that appears on a billboard.

William Flying Horse is driving his truck in California, having seen the ocean for the first time. Here from his native reservation in South Dakota, the half-Sioux has lost his sense of direction and finds himself back in the Beverly Hills area, hoping to see the ocean. He is half white, and half Lakota, and blames his inability to find his way on the white half. Having been judged by whites as lazy alcoholics, this man is indifferent, and has decided to be a white man. He has come to California to start his new job as an LA police officer, but when he stops to ask other officers for directions, one knocks him to the ground. They are cruel, calling him a spic and "Pedro". Will does not like LA and remembers he is not white.

Stopping for a sound that reminds him of an owl, Will sees the woman, blood dried on her head. She faints. He puts her in his car. When she comes to he tells her he is actually a cop. She introduces herself as Jane Doe.

## Preface and Chapter One Analysis

This woman has a bad case of amnesia. Waking up near a church is foreign to her, but she thinks she may have seen it before. The billboard with Alex Rivers causes some small reaction in her, but is fleeting. She wakes up in a stranger's car and for some reason feels perfectly comfortable with him, but she has no idea who she is. Their bond, it seems, is that they both have injuries to their heads—hers from something the reader is yet unaware, and his from being brutalized by his colleagues. But Will, thinking of an Indian story of an owl, thinks she belongs to him, like a gift "dropped into his arms".



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Will has taken the woman to the ER, and she is still unable to remember anything. She is discharged with Will, who says he is from LAPD. The woman does not feel married, but she has a wedding band. She trusts Will to take her to his house so she can rest. Will wishes he could discard his past as easily as she has.

The Sioux in earlier days would cut off a woman's nose for adultery, which seems odd, because they did not understand the concept of ownership when it came to land, money, food or clothing.

"Jane" Doe is pretty in a simple way. Will recalls his white mother bailing his father out of jail, calling him one of her employees. He learned that his father had only tried to help someone, but was unfairly discriminated against by the police. Will leaves for his new job the next morning, leaving Jane some money, toothpaste, and a key. In exchange for his kindness, Jane unpacks his things and arranges his apartment, carefully handling his unique assortment of possessions.

Will tells his new boss, Captain Watkins, about Jane. Watkins tells him he should have brought her into the police station immediately. When Will returns to the apartment, he is enraged over seeing his Indian things hanging on the walls, wanting to put that life behind him. He tells Jane over dinner that his mother died when he was nine, and he lived after that with his father on the reservation. He tells her the story of his father scooping his mother onto a horse and wrapping her with a blanket when they first met. As he talks, she is arranging chicken bones from dinner into a skeletal structure. Playing with the bones causes her to suddenly remember that she is a physical anthropologist, who has traveled around the world on excavations, tracking the history of man.

## Chapter Two Analysis

Jane Doe is making progress. It is not clear yet whether she has known Will before, since they seem quite comfortable together. He has already experienced so much prejudice since he arrived in California that he realizes the Indian part of him is what causes him the most trouble and does not want it on display.

The concept of ownership of women is foreboding, since Will feels that Jane is a gift to him. He is intelligent enough to analyze the inconsistency of the Sioux's attitude toward women, but it may be ingrained in him too deeply.

Dressed in his clothes and cooking him dinner, she is quite presumptuous in unpacking his boxes and arranging his apartment, given that she has only known him a few hours. She feels lucky that he is kind and not a threat, since she is so vulnerable. Her cowering at his anger may be a clue.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Jane tries to tell Will everything about anthropology. She remembers making an important discovery of ancient hand bones, and goes to the library for information. She found the 2.8 million-year-old hand in Tanzania and remembers finding, labeling and cleaning the bones. She sees the name Barrett, and thinks it might be hers but is not sure.

Herb Silver, an agent, makes a phone call to a movie set in Scotland and tells the starring actor his wife has been found, that her picture is in the paper. Her husband tells Herb he will be home the next morning and shuts down the set.

Will wakes Jane to take her to the police station where her husband is waiting. The press is waiting in hoards when they arrive because Jane is married to the famous Alex Rivers. Alex calls her Cassie and she knows him from the movies, but not from real life. He shows her their wedding photo; she is amazed he wants her. He confirms that she is an anthropologist. When she hugs Will, he notices Alex Rivers' eyes glinting. Will gives her his address and phone numbers, and Alex steers her through the paparazzi. She willingly goes with Alex, comforted by his calling her "pichouette".

## Chapter Three Analysis

The reader gets several hints in this chapter about Cassie's life with Alex. Alex is very devoted to her, but he is in Scotland while she is missing, which seems strange. She notices at the police station that when Alex is calmer, she relaxes, too. The icy look that crosses Alex's eyes when Cassie hugs Will is telling, as well. That she "sacrifices" herself to him is another clue.

Cassie is at the mercy of Will, Alex, and the police, since she does not know who she is. She senses Alex loves her, but has no feelings for him, except that she seems pleased to be making progress.

Will is obviously sad to let her go, but the connection is made with the piece of paper he gives her and his suggestion to call him if she needs anything.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Jane is now clearly identified as Cassie Rivers. Back in their extravagant Malibu apartment, Cassie is still seeing Alex as a movie star. She still stiffens at his touch and can only see him through memories of him in the media. Herb, apparently a friend, wants to see her. Alex is on the phone with him while Cassie looks at the apartment, seeing photos of herself.

Her Silver is a Brooklyn Jew who is obviously fond of Cassie. As Herb and Alex talk, Cassie tries to find things and familiarize herself with the apartment. Herb wants to milk the media coverage about Cassie to help Alex win an Oscar for his movie, *Taboo*, which exposes Alex's temper. He pulls Cassie to his lap, but she is shaking and uncomfortable.

He tells her that UCLA will give her a sabbatical from her teaching job and she will go to Scotland with him. Cassie is angry, shouting at Alex for not telling her of this until now, and is angry that he is making decisions for her. Neither Alex nor Herb has ever seen her that way.

Cassie remembers being with her childhood friend, Connor, in Maine. Their parents saw them as inseparable, and so did they. She remembers him teaching her to dive, and, after receiving a blow to her head, calling Connor her other half. She remembers going with Connor into her house and finding her mother unconscious in her own vomit, drunk and late for work.

Cassie wakes up sunburned on the beach, having slept in the sun six hours. She and Alex see an elderly neighbor whom Cassie recognizes as a screen legend. Alex apologizes for not telling her about UCLA and she realizes he is acting. He asks for forgiveness, and she gives it, like always. He has brought her a Rice Krispie treat, the only thing he knows how to cook. She asks about their respective parents, and he realizes she still does not know him. He says his parents are in New Orleans and that they don't see them much, and says Cassie's mother deceased. He tells her Connor was her best friend.

They go to separate rooms and, when she goes looking for toothpaste, she hears him practicing *Macbeth*. She recognizes pain in him and knows she has come to help. When they begin to get intimate, she again realizes he is acting, but she allows herself to enjoy the connection between them, and he tells her she is his other half. She does not know why she is crying.





## Chapter Four Analysis

Cassie has a blank slate to work from, and her intuition is trying to warn her about Alex. But he is charismatic and she is vulnerable. From this blank state, her true anger and fear surfaces, but she does not understand the reason for those feelings. Instead, she gives in to their mutual attraction. It is interesting that he is taking care of business and lets her lie in the sun for six hours, since the reader has learned that she is freckled and obviously fair-skinned.

Cassie is star-struck as she might have been had she never known Alex, and somewhat innocent in the fancy surroundings. The apartment has "natural spotlights", which may be a clue about Alex's arrogance.

Cassie's memories of Connor are vivid, and it is ironic that Alex calls her his other half when she has just dreamed of saying that to Connor when they were children.

# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

As a child, Will Flying Horse had dreamed of thunder and lightning, so his grandfather, Cyrus, took him to see a shaman about becoming a Dreamer. A hundred years ago he would have been a crazy holy man. But in 1969, he had a peyote experience with the shaman and went on a vision quest. An eagle told him he has chosen a difficult life. Wishing he were back in reality and cursing himself for doing this, he almost starves to death, but first has a vision of a girl in a snowstorm that he needs to help. His world is split in two by lightning.

Blissful, Cassie knows now that she has history with Alex. The words, "It is a good day to die", come back to her mind, and she touches her swollen lower lip, remembering it was a lecture in a Native American class.

Alex has a huge, extensive wardrobe, organized perfectly. Cassie feels she is losing her mind as she cries, observing his huge sweater collection arranged by color. Cassie remembers a blizzard coming in Maine; her mother is from Georgia and terrified of snow and resented having been moved to Maine by her husband, when he had promised they would be there only ten years. Her parents' bakery is losing money and her mother is drinking her life away. Ten-year-old Cassie makes her mother get out of bed and forces her outside into the snow to have a snowball fight, forcing her mother to fight back.

Will gets a call from the library that was intended for Cassie. He goes to look at the materials they have pulled for her, and sees photos of Cassie in Tanzania. He is missing her and wonders about her life. He takes a page with a photo of her and goes home.

## Chapter Five Analysis

This chapter fills in some blanks, primarily about Will. His life with his Sioux father provided many experiences for him and, even though he rejects their validity to some degree, their effects are still with him through things like his thunder dreams. Cassie is now reviewing what she knows about Native Americans.

Cassie apparently had to be the backbone of her household, since her father was working hard and her mother was a helpless alcoholic. The touching scene of her forcing her mother to throw snowballs when she is deathly afraid of snow is an indication that she had to be very strong at a very young age. Her early memories are returning to her, and she is becoming more comfortable with Alex because she is certain she has history with him.

His astonishingly huge, expensive wardrobe is another indication of his egocentric nature, as well as his wealth, and is a cue that Cassie has lived two totally different

kinds of lives—one in Maine living a simple life with dependent parents, one in the dirt, digging for bones, and now this one in refined luxury.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

A beautiful woman comes to Cassie's door and makes herself at home. She learns that this is her friend and former roommate, Ophelia, who has a slightly toxic relationship with Alex, who refers to her as Cassie's only character flaw. Ophelia is a self-obsessed hand model trying to break into show business; she has a cast on her forearm from having slipped in the mud. She suggests that Cassie losing her memory is convenient for Alex and asks him if he has re-portrayed himself as a saint to her.

Cassie was supposed to go to Kenya with a class. Ophelia thinks Alex decided she will go to Scotland, and feels Alex has always been trying to swallow Cassie whole.

Later, Cassie asks Alex why she does not see Connor but Alex says he doesn't know. He has brought her a box of bones to put together, bringing supplies from her home laboratory. Alex clearly loves and adores Cassie, but does not know how to express his feelings, being used to expressing what others have written.

Cassie asks Alex to help him glue the bones together. Alex remembers his father withholding the parts of a treasured model of a Conestoga wagon, doling out each one only when Alex did something his father considered manly. When he was thirteen and finally finished the model, he smashed it to pieces with a branch. As this memory unfolds, he accidentally smashes a piece of the bone that would complete the skull Cassie is constructing.

Cassie remembers robbing a graveyard of a dog skeleton with Connor, fascinated with putting the bone pieces back together. Connor was rough with her—the only one who normally did not hurt her. She remembers kissing Connor and that he tasted the same as her. She doesn't know now whether she decided on anthropology because of the bones they found, or the kiss under the moonlight, or because that was the last night she saw him alive.

## Chapter Six Analysis

Ophelia seems to know things about Alex that Cassie does not remember, and they are not positive, such as his self-centeredness. She sees herself as a sister figure to Cassie, and helps herself to the kitchen as if they were still roommates.

The reader is now informed that Connor is dead, although it is not yet clear why or how. Robbing a dog skeleton is a little strange as a childhood activity, but Cassie has obviously always been interested in bones. Her trust and bonding with Connor is solid and certain.

The amnesia device is one that allows the author to unfold the story as the protagonist's memory returns, like puzzle pieces that methodically begin to fill in the frame of what the reader already knows.



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Cassie learns that Alex always picks out what she is going to wear. Before going out to dinner, they make love in the shower and Cassie sees them in the mirror, wondering if this is really her.

In the restaurant Alex gets a lot of attention and says this is why they do not go out much. A beautiful woman named Miranda sidles up to Alex; Cassie remembers the tabloids had placed her in his trailer, naked. A photographer who snaps a shot of them is led out the door, his film confiscated.

Alex explains to Cassie that they decided to wait on having children because she goes to Africa every year. She realizes they could well afford a nanny, and that this was probably his decision, not hers, but she goes along with him.

An actor named Nick LaRue joins Cassie while Alex is in the restroom; he says he has been waiting all night. Alex comes back, sees Nick touching her arm, and goes into a rage. He is a co-actor, but one with whom Alex has been competitive. Cassie remembers trying to make him feel better when he was making a film with Nick. Alex and Nick begin to fight.

Will and his partner get called to the disturbance at the restaurant. He pulls Alex off of Nick and sees Cassie. When Will speaks to her, Alex glares with suspicion. Alex accuses Cassie of letting Nick sit with her and says she is dressed like a whore. Their driver comes in, and Alex apologizes to Cassie, who apparently forgives him.

The fracas is over, and the two officers leave, but Will, who has been taught there is no such thing as a coincidence, stops by the church and prays for help for Cassie. He knows she is one of the special people who will be woven in and out of his life.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

More and more the reader sees that Alex is a controlling personality and that, somehow, Cassie has allowed herself to be drawn into his web. However, since she does not remember, she is re-experiencing these things about him. Although she responds as she always has, one can assume she is gaining a new awareness of his personality traits.

Obviously in love with Cassie, Will knows she is in trouble.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

Although he does not speak to her the rest of the night, Alex puts aside the restaurant incident. Being quite objective, Cassie cannot imagine a world where one was not condemned for the consequences of their actions.

Alex's public relations woman, Michaela, has arranged for him to be at the hospital for a photo opportunity with pediatric leukemia patients. She has done this in an effort to balance the bad press, so close to Oscar time, surrounding his fight in the restaurant. He apologizes again for exploding, and she realizes how relieved she is.

A maid that Cassie remembers, Mrs. Alvarez, comes in and offers to help her pack for Scotland. Cassie reads in the paper about Alex's fight, and realizes that he had been bothered by something other than her that caused him to go over the edge.

Cassie goes by herself to the Westwood Community Center to see an Alex Rivers film festival. Since he is up for an Oscar for best actor in the movie called *The Story of His Life*, a marathon of his movies is being shown for senior citizens. An earlier movie Alex made, *Desperado*, was intended to star the female lead actress, but he apparently stole the show. The movie had caused controversy, but at least Native Americans were portrayed as real people rather than the stereotyped image. Cassie is proud to be married to him but, unlike the fans, realizes he is just another person.

Will buys new furniture and watches *Desperado* on his new VCR. The portrayal of Indians disgusts Will. He pulls out his medicine bundle which he had as a child. Elk Dreamers gave advice to the Sioux about love. Will knew an officer on the reservation who wore one, and the one day he didn't have it on he was shot. On the reservation it is not odd; he hangs it where he thinks Cassie had hung it.

Watching *Antony and Cleopatra* with Alex Rivers, Cassie remembers coming home and finding him entrenched and obsessed with his role as Antony, sweeping his breakfast from the table and demanding sweetmeats and ambrosia—a feast for a god. When he came home that night, they made love and he referred to her as his conqueror; she secretly read the play and found the line he had spoken to her in bed. He became so fixated on himself as Antony, it was easy to see the similarities. Cassie wants to go home and see the real man she married.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

It is starting to be clear that Alex is a bit of a maniac with a hot temper and a touch of sociopath. He has been enthralled with himself and quick to lose his temper from the beginning of the story, but now there are flashes of memories that make the reader realize he has always been like this, and perhaps, even worse. Cassie's memory of him



as Antony is ugly; even in their most intimate moments, he thought he was Antony, or at least thought it was alright to pretend to be.

Alex is quick to try to mend his public image through the hospital photo shoot, and thinks he can get by with bad behavior by just apologizing. Cassie is fascinated with finding out who he is. She wants to be in love with him and excuse his flaws.

Will, on the other hand, is becoming more comfortable with himself. Being away from the reservation is giving him a different perspective about his upbringing, and he starts feeling maybe the medicine bag is not so stupid. He is getting settled in to his new life, turning his house into a home.





# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Alex meets Michaela at the hospital. A freelance makeup artist touches up his bruised face. Alex is having to act normal, since the hospital brought back memories of being a patient in a pediatric ward. Alex had been born with a hole in his heart, which kept him from being a normal child; as a boy, he imagined all of his loving having spilled out, and he began to become other people in his mind. By the time he was well at age eight, he had a full range of masks to wear, and was not sure what was underneath, due to his "mother's indifference and his father's taunting". The sight of the ill children is difficult for him. He tried to kiss a little girl on the cheek, but she turned and kissed him on the mouth, to the flash of cameras. He sees himself as "a man whose apparent health hid a soul that had died years before".

Alex bribes John, his driver, to tell him where Cassie had gone. When they pick Cassie up, Alex has immersed himself in some role, not acting like himself. Realizing he is acting, she makes him stop, but Cassie wonders if his Alex role is even real.

They arrive at their home in Bel-Air, which looks like a southern mansion. Cassie meets her staff of servants, including Alex's secretary named Arbuster. The house is huge and elaborately decorated, with large gardens and a view of the mountains. Cassie locates a pink quartz that she remembers hiding under a boxwood hedge, which is evidence to her that she really did live here. The rock has the initials CMM and the year 1976 chiseled into it. She thinks of Connor. The morning after Halloween, Connor's father shot Connor, his mother, and himself. Cassie found them and ran to get the police. She sat with his ruined body, and when they let the ashes of the three blow over Moosehead Lake, Cassie screamed because he disappeared as if he had never existed. She ran around the lake and fell, digging with her fingers. Taking the rock home, she used her father's tools to make a headstone for Connor.

Will's electricity in his apartment has gone out, but his breakers have not tripped. It is not quite dark, so he lights candles and waits, the fringes of his medicine bundle stirring.

As Cassie attempts to get packed, she accidentally makes a mess of shoes in her massive closet. She discovers the hiding space where her romance novels are kept, and then sees a hidden pregnancy test box that she remembers had shown positive. She remembers crying at the results, holding onto the cold gold bathroom fixtures. Memories of that day begin to enter her mind. She remembers Alex coming home grouchy, scheduled to fly to Scotland for on-location shooting. He is agitated, and she wants to tell him about the baby before he leaves. She has become good at staying out of his way, but this night watches him pack in the bedroom and offers to help. She knows she is the only one who can help him with his pain, but that she is also underfoot because of it. Alex is having a small tantrum because he has heard his interview with Barbara Walters will be aired second, and along with two interviews of other



entertainers, one of whom is also nominated for an Oscar. He reminds Cassie that the third interview slot has traditionally been the nominee who has won; he doesn't think he is going to win. She tries to reassure him, but shakes her violently and throws her to the floor; she is concerned about her baby. She is starting to be angry, but knows she will not risk the safety of her child. Alex apologizes and kisses her and leaves. She leaves the house, thinking that if she leaves while he is gone it won't hurt him as much.

Back in the present, she realizes that she is not going with him to Scotland. After walking a distance, she stops and makes herself remember.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

The hospital scene is distasteful; the sick children are made to seem like monsters, one kissing Alex on the mouth, another asking a question with sexual innuendos, and all of them looking awful to Alex in their illness.

Cassie's memory is returning and it is not pleasant. She is realizing that the man she loves has more than one personality and, at least one of them, is brutal and violent, if not schizophrenic. She is apparently pregnant and is realizing that is why she left the first time—she will not expose her baby to danger.

Clearly, Cassie's memory disappeared because it has been too painful and confusing to keep. Now, the stark truth has hit her once again—this is a sick man who cannot stop himself from abusing her. Her love for him has kept her in conflict, but she realizes now that, if she had not lost her memory, she would have been able to successfully stay a step ahead of Alex. She leaves now with a sense of panic, knowing that she must not let him find her again.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

An Eskimo Indian legend of a woman who was enchanted by a bird disguised as a man precedes this chapter. A beautiful woman is promised comfort, but eventually realizes that her living conditions are very painful. When she tries to escape the petrel in her father's boat, the petrel causes a storm so powerful even her father must throw her overboard.

Cassie admits that when she was five and Connor moved in next door she planned to be a boy, her mother having trained her to be a proper young lady. Connor inspired her to become an archeologist, and his spirit visits her at important times in her life. Cassie is a physical anthropologist, while her department head is a cultural anthropologist; she feels he does not like her. Rather than give her an associate professorship, he forces her to take a sabbatical, sending her to prepare a site for a field expedition in Tanzania for ten weeks. Cassie is addicted to dime-store romance novels, and feels shame over this, fearing her vice will be discovered. It is her only vice.

When a movie director asks her to remove the tent she has constructed, she finds out there is a movie being filmed on location in the area. The movie people offer her money to be a technical advisor on the movie set, teaching the famous Alex Rivers about anthropology. She agrees, and takes down the awning, and calls Ophelia to tell her about this development. Ophelia has been her close friend since they were roommates in college. She is a model and a drama queen, but Cassie knows about the abuse in her childhood. Ophelia is excited and star-struck, and wants to send Cassie her nice clothing just in case she becomes intimate with Alex Rivers. Cassie recalls that love, to her, is nothing more than planned seduction.

On the movie set Cassie is introduced to the lavish food and accoutrements which seem out of place for the desert of Africa. She meets the director, Bernie Roth, and finally meets Alex Rivers, the superstar of the movie. Alex mistakes her for an assistant and asks her to get him a drink, which she does. However, Cassie, finding him arrogant and unlikeable, pours the juice in his lap.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

The Native American fable implies that once one is captured by the powerful being who is pretending to be something else, there is no way to save her, and she will eventually be destroyed.

Ophelia seems to sense that something is going to take place with Cassie and Alex; however, Cassie does not share her star struck attitude. The movie set is the picture of inertia, with highly paid people milling around waiting for something to do. Cassie describes Alex's chair as his "throne", and she is not buying into his superior attitude.

However, she cannot help but be effected by his charisma. Ophelia's excitement foreshadows Cassie's involvement with the glamorous Alex Rivers, but there is also a sense of foreboding, since Alex is already proving to be somewhat unlikeable.



# Chapters Eleven and Twelve

## Chapters Eleven and Twelve Summary

Instead of firing her, Alex laughs at the juice in his lap. Alex asks her to dig something up so he can watch her, to observe her movements. She learns that Alex makes it his business to be friendly and personal with his co-workers because it gets better results. Cassie watches Alex acting just like he had seen her act when she demonstrated a dig for him.

Alex invites her to an elaborately presented meal in his tent, and she makes it clear to him she does not like that he stole her emotions, that it made her feel used. He admits he steals people's reactions as part of his art and that acting is the only thing he is good at. He tells her about his past, as compared to the Hollywood version. He grew up with gambling father who sold his alcoholic mother to other men for money. Alex was ridiculed for being studious and vulnerable, but he finally unleashed his anger by striking his father.

Alex is obviously attracted to Cassie, but she is very reluctant and knows he is not used to being rejected. When he tells her she is beautiful, she becomes angry because she feels he is lying. He tries to convince her otherwise, and reveals a little more of the real truth about his ugly childhood.

In Chapter Twelve, Cassie is seeing Alex regularly and dreaming about sharing this with Connor, who is frequently with her, especially when she is in trouble. Alex wonders about the moral dilemma of the public's belief in a false story of his childhood. Alex admits to Cassie he is tired of acting, and tells her of the hole in his heart that prevented him from being a normal child. She feels she is the only one who can save him. Cassie tells Alex her mother was a drunk. Out in the Serengeti they watch elephants, giraffes, and lions.

With Cassie watching, Alex performs a sex scene with his co-star on the same cot where he and Cassie had made love the night before. She becomes jealous that he is aroused, and realizes she does not want a one-night stand.

Alex relives being caught shoplifting as a child, and waiting in jail to be picked up by his father, who never arrived. He was comforted by a prostitute who sang to him.

He has disappeared from the movie set for a few days, and when he reappears, he has a jar of melted snow for Cassie, as well as a diamond ring.

## Chapters Eleven and Twelve Analysis

Cassie is probably right to be mistrustful of Alex. He is slick and seems somewhat phony, and she knows he has access to every beautiful woman he could want, so she is



suspicious of his attraction to her. He explains that he cannot go anywhere without being recognized and, since he is fabulously rich, he has to have everything done for him. What he sees in Cassie is her honesty, and it may be the quality he would like to have himself. She digs in the dirt, is naturally lovely, and has a lot of class (i.e., having a black dress to wear to dinner in the desert). The fact that he backtracks and tells her more of the truth makes her think he might really be okay, but she still knows he is acting.

Alex is a man of dramatic flair and sweeping gestures. With his childhood having been exceptionally awful, he has over-compensated in many ways. This intensity and dire need for Cassie is a sure sign of trouble in the future, but she has convinced herself that he needs her and she likes to be needed. He also is treating her like royalty, with the exception of his anger, and she has not experienced that before, either. It is worth noting that, although he has spilled his guts to her about his childhood, he has not asked about hers, and she ends up volunteering the information.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

Cassie is preparing to marry Alex on the movie set to avoid media attention, which is fine with Cassie, who wants only to please him. She dreams that Connor is warning her about making a big mistake and being blind to the truth, seeing Alex as a wounded bird. He warns her that she collects others' problems, and that wounded birds never get better. She insists that she loves Alex.

Alex and Cassie take a camping and fishing trip into the woods, where his background in the bayou becomes evident. He reminisces about the hot Louisiana summers in his papa's pirogue catching crawfish. He recalls his father's neglect of him, and the necessity to learn how to catch fish to stave off his hunger, a feat which made his father proud enough to repeat the act of isolating Alex in the woods to force him to fend for himself. Alex learned how to act as though he enjoyed this, but secretly imagined strangling his father.

Alex tries to strangle Cassie in the middle of a nightmare, but she is sure he didn't mean to do it. She covers her bruises and gets fitted for her lavish wedding, but has a panic attack at the last moment. She confesses to Alex that she really does not know him, and he agrees that he is a lot of people rolled into one. She loves him, and gives in.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

The first time Cassie felt Alex's hands strangling her, one would think she would run as fast as possible. However, apparently Cassie is not only star-struck herself, but she also believes she can nurture and help Alex recover from the damage of his difficult past. She has let go of Connor's memory so that she can marry this disturbed man, whose charisma is overwhelming and whose need for her is too much of a magnet for her to see her situation logically.



# Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

## Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Summary

Returning to the US, Cassie faces the intense scrutiny of the press as Alex's new wife. She meets Michaela Snow, Alex's press agent, who magically appears and keeps him from striking a nosy photographer. Cassie observes Alex as he performs for the press. When Ophelia arrives, she sees the bruises on Cassie's neck, and Cassie feels the energy spark between Ophelia and Alex. Ophelia feels Alex will hurt Cassie, and she realizes that Cassie will always get more attention than her, now that she is married to Alex.

Alex and Cassie arrive at his mansion, and he leaves her alone in her new, magnificent bedroom to rest. Her few belongings, including her toothbrush and the jar of snow Alex brought her, seem meager. She does not recognize herself in this elaborate setting and does not wish to be alone, remembering their simple existence in Kenya.

The newlyweds enjoy playing games and spending time with one another, Cassie's fears having dissolved. Alex offers support to the university where Cassie works, and she, in turn, receives a promotion. With no pre-nuptial agreement, Cassie realizes she is rich with property, art, furniture, and servants. They spend most of their time at home. Ophelia breaches security and arrives unexpectedly for a visit, and apologizes for her attitude about Alex. Cassie notices that Ophelia and Alex have the same talent for smooth, polished small talk. She senses that people here are on a big stage, always acting.

Cassie and Ophelia discuss their intimate relationships, but Cassie does not talk about how adored and worshiped Alex makes her feel. Alex agrees to take Cassie and Ophelia to a celebrity restaurant, against his better judgment. When they leave the restaurant together, Alex's arms around both women, the paparazzi is waiting for them, and Cassie realizes that Ophelia has planned this opportunity to be photographed with Alex. The tabloids will now brand him as unfaithful. Cassie is furious with Ophelia, and Alex is furious with them both, saying he will not be used as a circus animal.

Later that night, Cassie finds Alex drunk at the pool, and helps him through another dark episode. He recalls wishing as a child that someone cared for him. He wishes his life were more normal.

## Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen Analysis

This fairy-tale transition is not as wonderful for Cassie as it would seem to be for most people. She is suddenly extremely wealthy and still feels like a country mouse in this huge house. Alex's life is nowhere near as simple as her own life has been, and she is suddenly feeling out on a limb, with Ophelia's cool welcome and Alex leaving her so he can get some work done. She is, understandably, frightened, since there is nothing





about her new life that is familiar. With this contrast between the amazing setting and Cassie's trepidation, Picoult lets her reader know that all is not well in Cassie's world, as the sun creates a "spreading fire, an accusation", foreshadowing trouble.

Cassie's life could not be better. She and Alex are happy and content, but Ophelia, as always, has put her own ambitions ahead of everything else, and now Alex suspects Cassie of being involved with the restaurant setup. The reader learns that Ophelia has never been much of a friend to Cassie, particularly if her own interests were at stake.

Alex's darkened eyes and shaking body, that Cassie is able to soothe away, again informs the reader that he is a pressure cooker waiting to explode. He is again too rough with Cassie. He has gone from neglectful, abusive parents to being under a public microscope, without much nurturing or caring in between, and his old rage bubbles up frequently.



# Chapter Sixteen

## Chapter Sixteen Summary

Cassie reviews her recent classroom lesson, when Alex had come to sit in and wish her happy anniversary. The students were more interested in getting his autograph than her fascinating unit on bones. She is sitting on the veranda, bruised, and eventually reveals that during a coastal storm, Alex had been abusive to her again, and then made his usual remorseful apologies. She had forgiven him and told him it was alright.

Cassie finds a groundbreaking fossil in Tanzania and when she calls Alex, exhilarated, he is cold and uncongratulatory. But he appears at the dig with gourmet food, apologetic about his behavior, proud of her for her discovery. She tells Alex she forgot to take her birth control pills to Tanzania, and he is angry, saying he does not want children. She feels she can change his mind eventually, since she truly does want children.

When Cassie returns to the states, she goes on a lecture circuit to discuss her findings while Alex is filming Antony and Cleopatra, which is rumored to be an expensive flop in the making. Cassie is eager to see him to tell him the news of her pregnancy, but he is consumed in his role of Antony, almost out of touch with reality.

He accuses her of lying about the delayed flight, and says he does not trust her. He accuses her of cheating, and beats her brutally, then says he didn't mean to. Cassie has a miscarriage from the beating, but does not tell Alex. Cassie is sure this outburst is her fault, that she has done something wrong or missed something. She attends a premiere with him in a dress that covers her bruises.

## Chapter Sixteen Analysis

Domestic violence is not something that magically disappears, and it seems that Alex's stress over his faltering movie is escalating his violence toward Cassie. His personality splits when he is stressed or upset and he turns into an accusing, cruel monster. Because she knows the sweeter, softer side of him so well and is able to bring it out in him, Cassie feels she has failed in her job to keep him happy.

It is interesting to note that the press is calling Cassie "Cassandra", a name she gave up as a young girl because of its mythological implications. Alex is in total charge of her wardrobe and everything about their lives, and occasionally seems to resent her professional success as an anthropologist. It is obvious that Cassie is going to break, at some point, with the increasing abuse, but at this point she is still hanging on to her own version of the truth.



# Chapter Seventeen

## Chapter Seventeen Summary

Afraid that Alex will think she has nothing to do, Cassie, although very tired, makes herself look busy. Alex has had a private laboratory built for her, has had her portrait painted, attended her lectures, and has been a model husband. He still gets angry, but she is not afraid of him and is more concerned for his feelings than her own pain.

When he finds his sneakers full of cat pee, he rages and shoves her, but leaves for a run before doing any further damage. Cassie is left with Herb Silver at the premiere of Alex's movie; Ophelia is his date, dressed, as usual, in one of Cassie's dresses. Cassie has not had time to read the script, and the movie turns out to be about an abusive spouse. Alex promises her he is acting.

They go to their home in Colorado where they have horses. When Cassie's horse gets loose and Alex rides off to catch her, Cassie expects him to be angry. They both realize that she is afraid of him, but she changes the subject and gets him to teach her how to catch a fish with her hands.

Back at their home, during another violent episode, Cassie's jar of melted snow breaks. She tells Alex that if he ever touches her like this again she will leave, and she walks out to spend some time at the local church. When she returns, she realizes she would never have really left.

## Chapter Seventeen Analysis

Their relationship has become for Cassie like walking a tightrope. She now knows he is capable of hurting her whenever things go wrong, and she is prepared for his violence. But she continues to believe in the love between them, and continues to try to help him, in spite of his brutality.

At this point in the story, Picoult's reader is fed up with Alex, who is clearly unstable mentally. But Cassie seems addicted to him, unable to see the situation objectively. Cassie, as narrator, speaks directly to the reader, saying that she doesn't expect us to understand. The trout disappeared as "quickly as a doubt".



# Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen

## Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Summary

Cassie thinks she has found the perfect screenplay for Alex, involving the resolution of a relationship between a father and son. Although she knows now that he would take out his rage on her physically if he does this film, she feels doing the film might cure him of the emotional illness that is related to his father. After reading the screenplay, entitled *The Story of His Life*, Alex delivers and Cassie accepts the expected beating, including a blow to her face. Later that night, he tells her he wants to direct and produce the film.

Filming the scenes with an older actor named Jack Green, the process seems cathartic for Alex. The movie is up for several Academy awards. Alex is scheduled to go to Scotland to film *Macbeth*. Cassie's doctor confirms her twelve-week pregnancy. Returning home with a baby outfit, Alex beats Cassie for being late. For the first time, she cries and secretly hopes the baby will hate him.

In a Barbara Walters interview, Alex tells the usual story about his childhood and Cassie, still in pain from being beaten, bravely answers questions without telling the truth.

In chapter eighteen, now speaking to William Flying Horse, Cassie is bringing him up to date on that night when she received the head injury and he found her in the cemetery. Cassie contemplates what her suicide note might have been, and realizes she loves Alex and still wants to spend her life with him. She is sure nobody would believe the truth about him. But she realizes that if he threatens the child inside her once more, she will leave.

Now, having given herself this ultimatum, she has left again, fleeing to the one friend she feels might help her. She feels welcome, safe, and protected with William, who holds her gently, sensing the spots where she has been injured.

## Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen Analysis

Now the story has come to the point where the beatings are so expected and seem so much worse that there is real danger involved, especially given the fact that Cassie is pregnant. That she can still smile and pretend that everything is alright is a typical behavior of an abused wife; there are so many emotions tangled up in this sick relationship, but Cassie continues to forgive Alex, and continues to hope he will heal, taking the beatings as her contribution to his therapy, somehow. She is too afraid to tell him she is pregnant. Making the movie has not healed him.

The story is in the present tense again at this point, and Cassie is safely back with William, escaping the cruelty of Alex's beatings. She is definitely pregnant, and William has listened to the entire series of events which have led her to him. This is a very short



chapter which brings the reader to 1993, when Cassie goes with William to his home and has told him her entire story of her life with Alex. William is superstitious, but it seems to work for him as he rationalizes leaving the state to hide Cassie.



# Chapter Twenty

## Chapter Twenty Summary

An Indian legend tells how seven women and a girl fled to the sky from their husbands, who followed after them, forming the Pleiades star formation.

Needing to hide in a place where Alex would never think to look, Will realizes he needs to take Cassie to his Sioux reservation. Will has only been in Los Angeles two weeks, but now understands that this is why he met her. He is not comfortable in the self-centered society of Los Angeles, but plans to return and continue with his career.

William's grandfather, Cyrus, is a simple, hard-working old man who has done a little of everything to keep his family fed. He is working on a crossword puzzle that has already been worked and had the answers erased. His wife Dorothea brings home leftovers, and tells him Uyelo is coming today. These two are deeply and forever in love with one another.

Alex cancels the shoot in Scotland, and after searching for her, feels deep remorse over losing Cassie again. She is the only thing in his life that made him feel good about himself. When Cassie's department head comes looking for her, Alex tells him she has gone to Maine because her father is ill. Alex barges into Ophelia's apartment, telling her he cannot find Cassie.

Cassie rides with William from Rapid City to Pine Ridge in a rental truck. He tells her of a rough childhood. Will is miserable, returning to his old squalid environment. He explains her predicament to his grandparents; they do not seem pleased. Their home is one large room and a separate bathroom. Cyrus knits; Cassie tries to busy herself and converse with them. Cyrus tells her that the specimens of history she speaks of are still their grandfathers. Will remembers his days as a Kit Fox Warrior; he dreams of Cassie being abused by Alex.

William tells Cassie he needs to return to Los Angeles and she cries. He needs to leave this place that represents so much shame and hardship. He wonders what it is about Cassie that makes her so lovable. He tells her she will not be alone.

## Chapter Twenty Analysis

Clearly, William Flying Horse is in love with Cassie, but he is also dealing with issues that she has inadvertently brought to the forefront for him. His half-white blood on the reservation caused him much grief and shame as a child, and his life has been extremely difficult. He now has a chance to break away from the depressing life of the reservation and knows that he cannot stay there with Cassie.



The sad life on the Native American reservation is delicately revealed by Picoult, who portrays these tough Sioux characters with a sweet sense of love and humanity, in just a few paragraphs.

Alex is depressed over Cassie's disappearance, but remains the consummate actor.



# Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two

## Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Summary

Cassie is becoming more comfortable with the Lakotas, and goes out hunting herbs with Dorothea now that the snow has melted. Cassie learns that their word for white, "wasicun", means fat greedy person in Lakota. Dorothea tells her some people are born with a disease in their soul; Cassie silently defends Alex. Dorothea values "hybrids" for their endurance, making a subtle reference to William.

Alex has been lying to people, saying he has been in touch with Cassie. Attending the Academy Awards with his co-star, who would like to be friendlier with him, Alex is missing Cassie. Will returns to Pine Ridge on leave to take Cassie to watch the Oscars at a local bar. Cassie has fit into the tribe more easily than Will had. They watch the Barbara Walters interview with Alex, which was aired last instead of second. Cassie cries, feeling she should be there with Alex, as he wins the Oscar for best actor. Will is furious to realize how much she still loves Alex, and Alex makes sure to mention her lovingly as he accepts each of his three awards. Will assures her that she cannot have the best of both worlds and in his anger, kisses her.

Alex is in pain and feels he is nobody without Cassie. She sneaks away from the reservation and calls Alex, not telling him where she is, but that she is proud of him, and will call him again when she is ready.

Cyrus and Cassie become friends. He tells her stories and knits and takes her fossil hunting. Cyrus explains the ghost dance shirt that was thought to bring invisibility, and a new world without white men. He tells her the story of Sitting Bull's circus pony that danced its routine at the sound of the shot that killed its owner. Cassie questions the need to dig up the ground to excavate a culture.

Cassie's father tells the tabloids that he has not heard from his daughter all year and that Alex is covering something up. Alex keeps his silence to the press, but is forced to tell Herb and Michaela that Cassie left him.

Cassie has begun sketching images of people and animals. Cassie wants to observe a sweat in the lodge, but Cyrus refuses to let her. Cyrus shows her where young Will had built his own sweat lodge. Cassie learns that Will quit his tribal police job when a bad accident took an entire family. Will, whose parents were killed in an accident, attacked the drunk Lakota driver, and was fired from the force. The tribe remembered that Will was half white, and wanted him gone. Will did not blend in with LA any more than he did here.

Alex's silence over Cassie's disappearance is causing his career to crumble. Will is on duty at a garish charity ball, and when a fifty-year-old model comes on to him, he realizes this is not his world.





The Macbeth film is terrible; Alex is drinking, reliving terrible memories from his childhood. He places a call to Cassie's father, who then lies to the press and says he has seen Cassie. Ophelia pays a visit to the deteriorating Alex and learns he has talked to Cassie.

Cassie and Will attend a wedding where the couple seal their vows in their sweat lodge. Will has left LA, but will also be leaving the reservation when Cassie's baby is born. William Flying Horse visits the medicine man, Joseph Stands in Sun, to ask him how to take away Cassie's pain. He knows he has saved her from pain, but wants to remove it.

## Chapters Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Analysis

Cassie has made the best of her situation and is appreciating Will's people, who adore her. Will has gone out of his way to help her see the Oscars, but is totally frustrated over her feelings for her abuser, since he loves her, too. Cassie is so addicted to Alex, and apparently to her former lifestyle, she still sees herself in a beautiful gown sitting next to him as the camera passes over him. She is weakening now, and has already promised to call him back and to send for him.

Cassie could be said to be leading Will on in this chapter. She is happy for his company but is too affectionate toward him, knowing that he is in love with her. There is growing taking place, not only in Cassie as she shares her self with these people and learns to draw, but also in Will, who is re-thinking his dreams and his childhood problems as he tries to determine what to do next.

The intimate wedding ceremony is sad and sweet; Cassie is thinking only of Alex and Will is thinking of her; Cassie makes a cloaked remark that mildly suggests there might be something between her and Will.

Alex clearly paid Cassie's father to reissue a statement to the press to take the pressure off of Alex. But, it does not keep his career together.



# Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four

## Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Summary

Cassie is learning to make moccasins with the elderly women of the village. Her time in Pine Ridge has been free from the stress of Alex's temper and violence, but she has become withdrawn. Will has returned to the reservation and is learning from Joseph Stands in Sun. Will interrupts the sewing party and dances Cassie out into the rain. Dorothea remembers obsessing over her son Zachary's white wife, Anne, and how love comes down to blended shades of gray.

At a pow-wow celebration, William participates in a dance of self-mutilation in order to take Cassie's pain for himself. As his skin splits and bleeds, she tells Will that it still hurts, even if you are suffering for someone else, and tells him he is acting like "some Big Indian".

Cassie gives birth to her son with Dorothea and Will's help, and contemplates being needed by him. She names him Connor. She wants the baby to be strong before he travels. When the baby cries, Dorothea puts her hand over his mouth to silence him; Cassie considers that someday this is a skill he might need.

Cassie calls Alex and tells him where she is, but makes him promise to give her one more month before he comes to get her.

Connor is sick and in the hospital. Will and Cyrus are there, with bad memories of the family they lost there. With Cassie's permission, Will takes the baby from the hospital and they go to Cyrus's home, where a ceremony is held to help the baby get well. Cyrus determines that Connor's father is coming and that his body was burning with fear of the unknown. Cassie reaches out for Will's comfort. The baby's fever breaks, and he is fine. Cyrus and Dorothea are worried about Cassie and Connor, and go to sleep reminiscing about it being easier when they were young.

Breaking his promise, Alex arrives two weeks early, but Cassie has been alerted. Alex offers her anything, even celibacy, begging her to come home. Alex cries, and Cassie feels optimistic. She shows him the baby, reassuring Alex that he is not like his own father. Alex goes back to his motel, and Cassie looks for Will.

Cassie tells Will that Alex has changed and is going to get help. Will asks what she will do when Alex goes after the baby. He tells her she cannot erase her past any more than he could erase his, but she is going back to pick up the pieces.

Alex thanks Will for taking care of his family, and recognizes Will from the restaurant brawl.

Will gets drunk after they leave and wishes he would have stayed in LA to keep an eye on her. He does an old giving-away ritual, giving his jacket, his truck and his old



shotgun, as well as all of his clothing and shoes to neighbors. Naked, he cries to the spirits to take him.

## Chapters Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Analysis

Cassie could, at this time, forget about her former life and simply blend into tribal life. But, she cannot let go of Alex, and even though the baby fills much of her need to be needed, she cannot help herself. She is conscious of the peace and rest she is getting, but feels forced to call Alex regardless. She seems to be enjoying the ability to control him with these phone calls, and is also in charge in the sense that she has not told him about the baby. In this way she is regaining her power and strength to face him.

The miraculous healing of little Connor does not involve medicines, but simply the clearing of fear. The fact that Cassie throws his Tylenol out the car window signifies her faith in Will.

Cassie and Will have such a strong bond that is made of real caring, it is difficult to see her leave him now and go back to the insanity of being Alex Rivers' wife.

Cassie knows, as her baby is being born, that it is so difficult to move from one life into the other, which foreshadowed what is to come for her, again. Will has changed his entire life because of her, and is now without her. His caring for her is not a way to fill his own needs as much it is for Alex, but is unselfish and giving. Picoult makes one sad for Will, who is a much more lovable character than Alex.



# Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six

## Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six Summary

Cassie prepares to meet the media again; Alex makes a statement that he sent her away to give birth to their son, and chastises the press for damaging peoples' lives with their constant scrutiny. Alex now looks like a hero again, who has endured false scandal to protect his wife's privacy.

Friends and staff are distant and cool to Cassie. Alex asks her not to mention his problems or therapy to anyone, and she asks him if they can go to bed. They are happy again, and Cassie can only think of them together and this new beginning.

Alex is back on top, with screenplays and offers and gifts for the baby. He seems to enjoy Connor and they are both at home more. They see a therapist together who explains that they will need to understand the impulses that lead them both to the abusive situations. They are also told that they will follow this pattern with others, even if they separate. They both agree to group therapy; Alex does not seem impressed with her.

The other women in the group also spent time taking care of their parents, and went on to find husbands to care for. They believe that it is their fault their husbands abuse them. But Cassie also understands that it is not all her fault.

The baby interrupts their lovemaking for the second time, and Alex wonders if Cassie can't make him shut up, calling Connor "that kid", and threatening to move to another room if Cassie won't hire a nanny. Cassie has learned that abusers want their spouses entirely to themselves; she agrees to hire a night nurse.

Cassie receives a letter from Will. Alex begins missing his therapy sessions and Cassie comes home and finds him drinking. The newest tabloid says that the baby is a half-breed love child, showing a photo of Will. The paper quotes from the recent letter she received from Will. Alex tells her he would kill her before she could leave again. He begins abusing her again, kicking her, and she loses the hearing in one ear. Connor is screaming, and Cassie realizes Alex cannot keep his promises. Cassie allowed John to see the blood on her face. In bed, she holds Alex's hand and silently tells him goodbye.

## Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six Analysis

Obviously, this reunion is too good to be true. Alex has finessed his way through his damaged image, and comes out on top again, while Cassie will have to earn her way back to her friends and acquaintances. Although he has put their apartment on the market, they are not poor by any means, and everything, including his career, promises to turn out fine. But Picoult makes sure it is too good—things gone so badly cannot heal



up so perfectly, especially after the awakening and healing that Cassie has done over these past months.

Now the reader knows that there is absolutely nothing Cassie can do to stop Alex from abusing her. He is going to blame her for every failure and she will always take the brunt of his rage if she stays with him. She sees that Connor will grow up watching this abuse and will end up being just like Alex. She has finally had enough.



# Chapter Twenty-Seven

## Chapter Twenty-Seven Summary

On her way out, Cassie stops in her laboratory. She considers how little one can tell from looking at the scars on bones. Arriving at Ophelia's, Cassie tells her friend the story of her marriage. Ophelia calls a divorce attorney and gets cash from Cassie's accounts for her. Cassie contacts Will to tell him she is divorcing, and that she is scared. He is angry at Alex, but assures her that she is brave.

Cassie is at an arranged press conference. Ophelia is with her, holding the baby. Cassie announces to the press that she has filed for divorce on the grounds of extreme cruelty, and inquiries should be directed to her lawyer. A reporter asks her if she can prove that he has abused her; she pulls aside her clothing and lets them see her bruises and welts. This is the course she had decided on the night before, not to hurt him but to free herself and her baby. During the press conference, Cassie sees Alex in the back of the room in disguise. He does not stop her, and she has no desire to hurt him with her announcement.

In the sunshine outside, Cassie sees an eagle circling her and, sure-footed, turns Connor's face so that he can see it, too.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven Analysis

Finally, Cassie feels strong enough to break away from this disastrous relationship and strike out on her own. She has obviously been very affected by Will and his culture, and one can assume she will expose her son to the Lakota ways, as well. One can also assume that she might not have left Alex if Will had not come along and exposed her to the genuineness of the real people in his family. This is a story of triumph and scars that will never go away, but will fade, in time.



# Characters

## Cassandra Barrett Rivers

Cassie Barrett is an anthropologist whose talents are slowly helping her gain status in her academic field. She teaches anthropology at the college level, but until Alex intervenes for her, is not offered an assistant professorship because her academic interests do not coincide with those of her department head. She is an intelligent, seemingly self-assured woman who is not beautiful in the classic sense, but is fair-haired and well built, with a certain type of genuineness and refinement of the well-educated. Cassie has not had many serious relationships, and her best friend, Ophelia, is an opportunistic social climber who seems the exact opposite of Cassie. They are both in competitive fields, but Ophelia's field requires a more devious approach.

Cassie meets super-star Alex Rivers in Africa and is not only enchanted by his manners and elegance, but also by the fact that he appears to break down his facade and tell her honestly who he really is, and the true story of his background. She believes that she and Alex are made for each other, because Alex has had such a difficult time with trust and rage. Cassie, in turn, had a difficult childhood and had to be caretaker of an alcoholic mother. The only person who really knew about her family's problems was her close friend Connor, whose father murdered the entire family. Cassie and Connor had not reached the age where their relationship had become physical, but it was heading there, since they were the closest, most intimate friends either one had.

Alex begins to physically abuse Cassie, and Cassie excuses his behavior, rationalizing that he does not mean to rage out of control, and that he will get better. However, it eventually becomes clear to her that the abuse will not end, nor will her child be spared from it, either. An intelligent woman, Cassie learns in therapy that these patterns tend to continue, and she finally exposes Alex's behavior to the public—the only way that she can speak her truth and be vindicated for leaving him.

Cassie is braver and stronger than she gives herself credit for; leaving Alex Rivers is a brave thing to do, since his life is under a microscope constantly and he is rich and powerful. The most difficult aspect, however, is that Cassie loves him, but ultimately realizes that their marriage is doomed based on their personal emotional damage.

## Alex Rivers

An extremely abused and neglected child, Alex learned at an early age how to pretend to be other people. Due to a heart problem, he was unable to be the macho boy his father wanted and expected. His mother was a hopeless alcoholic, and his father an obsessed, unscrupulous gambler who was willing to sell Alex's mother to resolve his gambling debts. Alex was left alone in dangerous situations and forced to pretend that he liked it in order to avoid his father's abuse.



However, as an adult, the rage he stored up against his father flashes through him unexpectedly, and he takes it out physically on his wife, whom he loves more than anything. The reader wants to sympathize with him, like Cassie does, because he is so damaged from his childhood and has been forced to meticulously assume hundreds of facades to be as successful as he is. However, when he breaks all of his promises in therapy, and even seems threatening to his own child, Cassie realizes the hopelessness of his illness and is forced to leave him.

Alex is slick and polished, and knows how to be on his toes with colleagues and the press. He has learned to say the right thing at the right time, and no one, except Cassie, knows how deeply ill he is. He is a controller, and is allowed to be, since he wields so much power due to his great wealth. The quick temper he has shown in public always seems to be due to what a great, protective guy he is, but his true nature he keeps well-hidden until Cassie exposes him at a press conference.

Alex is a sad example of how all the money in the world does not make people healthy or wholesome, and that no one is really what they seem.

## **William Flying Horse**

A half-breed Sioux Indian whose mother was white, William lost his entire family in a car accident caused by a drunk driver when he was small. He was raised by his grandparents, and suffered from the bullying of other children on the reservation who did not respect his mixed heritage. Desperate to get off the reservation after having beat up a drunk Indian driver and being fired from his police job on the reservation, Will takes a position with the Los Angeles Police Department. However, before he starts his first day at work, he sees Cassie face down in the cemetery, and brings her to his home to help her, since she has no idea who she is and has obviously suffered some kind of trauma. Cassie tries to help him acknowledge and honor his Indian heritage, but instead, he is ashamed, and wants to leave it behind.

Will's more superstitious culture has also made him a deep thinker and a conscientious, good man. He understands the value of giving, which sharply contrasts with the selfish, artificial culture of Los Angeles. Will falls in love with Cassie's good nature and her strength, and knows that her addiction to Alex and her pain over her marriage will keep her separated from him emotionally. He leaves Los Angeles, knowing he will never fit in there, and returns to the reservation, where he never fit in as a child. But he begins to learn a new respect for the tribal customs, and performs a ritual sun dance that tears his flesh as a way to take Cassie's pain for her.

Having rescued Cassie more than once, one can assume that Will will be there for her when she makes her final move from her abusive marriage. He ultimately takes a police job in Tacoma, Washington and invites her to bring her child there.





## Ophelia Fox

Ophelia (actually named Olivera Frug) is Cassie's former college roommate, and is a hard-driving career woman who has been a hand-model and played other lightweight acting roles. She is struggling to be recognized in Hollywood, is continually in therapy, and makes sure she looks beautiful at all times. She does not like Alex, and suspects him of not being the right mate for Cassie, but goes ahead and uses him for press coverage for herself. She enjoys borrowing Cassie's beautiful clothes, and makes herself at home with Cassie, but is not comfortable around Alex. Ophelia turns out to be a good friend. She shows up and tries to help Alex get himself together when Cassie has disappeared. In the end, she is the one who supports and helps Cassie make her break from Alex. She was a sexually abused child, and in adulthood might seem a bit sleazy, but is a good person.

## Connor

Connor was a neighbor to Cassie in Maine where she lived as a child with her parents near a lake. Connor knew all about her mother's drunkenness, and she knew all about his family's terrible state of dysfunction. Together, they were the best and closest kind of friends before Connor's father murdered the entire family, including himself. Cassie feels Connor's presence even years later, and he talks to her in her dreams, guiding her; or at least, that is what she thinks. In a sense, she was a caretaker for Connor, a trait which became enmeshed in her personality. When Cassie's son is born, she names him Connor. The reader assumes that, had Connor lived, he and Cassie would have been life partners. Instead, she carries his memory with her throughout adulthood.

## John

John is Alex's personal assistant and his discrete confidante. He drives the Rivers' car and accompanies Alex in his travels. John never lets anyone see his emotions. He tells Alex where Cassie has gone when he drives her to the senior theatre to watch Alex's movies, ever-loyal to his boss. When Cassie returns after having disappeared, John is cool toward her, as are the other servants, due to their loyalty to Alex. John arranges for all of Alex's logistical needs, such as providing the picnic basket in the Serengeti and protecting Alex from fans and the press.

## Jack Green

A famous, older actor, Jack Green is the co-star of Alex's Academy-award winning movie, *The Story of His Life*. Jack takes the brunt of Alex's heartfelt rage and sadness, as they act out the poignant scenes of a movie that hits very close to home for Alex. Jack is a nice man who is a lot of fun, and is Cassie's favorite person on this set, besides Alex. He commands respect from the other actors because he is such a well-known veteran actor, but he is very down to earth and kind.



## **Dorothea Flying Horse**

Grandmother to Will and wife of Cyrus, Dorothea is an interesting character. She does not show much emotion toward Cassie, and is guarded around her, since Cassie is white. She reminds Cassie that the historical artifacts on the reservation represent her ancestors.

Dorothea's son and daughter-in-law were killed, along with Will's sisters, by a drunk driver in a car accident. She has raised Will, and remembers that she did not like her white daughter-in-law in the beginning. But over time she grows to admire and love her, and hopes that Cassie will love Will. She teaches Cassie how to find and brew herbs and medicines, and how to embroider and bead moccasins.

## **Cyrus Flying Horse**

Partly in love with Cassie, Cyrus is the sweet elderly grandfather of Will Flying Horse. He is a simple man who enjoys telling Cassie stories and legends of his people and their history. He allows Cassie to stay with him during her pregnancy and obviously becomes very fond of her. He takes her to the badlands where she plans to excavate some fossils, and takes along meatloaf for them both. This is when Cassie realizes that reading the signs in bones do not tell one the nature of one's spirit.

## **Herb Silver**

Herb is Alex's agent. He is a nice man, very identified with his Jewish culture, and very businesslike. He sees Alex as his responsibility and is also concerned for Cassie when she comes home with amnesia. He is present on the film set in Tanzania when Alex and Cassie meet, and is a fixture in Alex's life. He is involved in steering Alex's public relations efforts and is negotiates his deals for him.

## **Joseph Stands in Sun**

In Alex's Lakota tribe, Joseph is a seer and shaman who appears to have no irises, only "black, fathomess pupils". He is called a Heyoka, and is one who can withstand harsh weather and boiling water unscathed. Heyoka they receive nothing for themselves. He took young Will out to his vision quest when Will was a child. Later, he trained Will in how to manage the punishing sun dance that Will did for Cassie.

## **Michaela Snow**

Michaela is Alex's very large PR woman who sets him up with a visit to the pediatric ward at the hospital after his fight in a restaurant as a way to try to smooth over his potentially damaged public image. She is the creator and protector of his image and it is

her greatest concern. When Cassie shows up again with the baby, Michaela is cold to her for tarnishing Alex's reputation.



## Objects/Places

### Tanzania, Kenya, Africa

Cassie Barrett is an anthropologist who has been sent to prepare for an excavation in Tanzania. At the same time, Alex Rivers is in the area filming a movie. Cassie is hired to be the technical advisor for the movie, since she has expertise about discovering ancient bones and artifacts. She meets the star of the movie and she and Alex Rivers fall in love as they work together. They get married on the movie set in Tanzania before returning to his home in Los Angeles. Cassie travels to this area yearly for her work, living simply in tents with the barest necessities. Alex Rivers lavishly provides luxury all around himself, including champagne, chilled shrimp, and candlelight, even in these sparse, hot surroundings.

### Bel Air, Los Angeles

Alex Rivers' southern mansion is located in Bel Air in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles. The home is magnificent, with endless bedrooms and bathrooms, gold fixtures, luxurious pools, and everything a very wealthy person can afford. Cassie arrives at her new home and is stunned at the luxury, having been used to living in an apartment with a roommate. She now has a full staff of servants, a driver, and a huge closet full of expensive clothes.

### Malibu Beach, California

This is the location of Alex Rivers' glassed-in, luxury condo/apartment on the beach. When a storm hits the beach, Alex tries to sandbag the banks, and later beats Cassie for her ineptness in trying to help him. She likes this place and likes her Hispanic maid who spends her days there.

### Pine Ridge, South Dakota

The Lakota Sioux reservation where William Flying Horse was raised is located here. It is a flat, dry, dusty area with undefined roads and squalid housing. The reservation brings back bitter memories to William, who is half-white and was raised here by his grandparents. He has never felt as though he fit in here, and was bullied by other children because he was a half-breed. The conditions here are simple and quite poor, but Cassie learns to love these people and their customs. They teach her to find herbs and to embroider and do beadwork, and give her shelter and sustenance while she waits for her baby to be born.



## Tacoma, WA

William Flying Horse, toward the end of the story, has taken a job as a police officer in Tacoma and hopes Cassie might join him there. The reader is led to believe, at the end, that she might do so. He has not enjoyed being in Los Angeles, and is not comfortable staying on the reservation in South Dakota, and one can assume that he will settle in Tacoma.

## Scotland

Alex Rivers is shooting Macbeth in Scotland. The night before the two are set to leave, Cassie leaves home. The first time, she has sustained a head injury and is found in a cemetery with amnesia. They again prepare to leave for Scotland, and once again she is beaten by Alex. This time, she finds William Flying Horse, who provides her a safe refuge on his reservation while she is pregnant.

## Maine

Where Cassie grew up with her parents who owned a bakery. Her mother was a displaced southern woman who resented the harsh Maine weather and always wanted to go back to Georgia. Her father still resides there, and when Cassie disappeared, Alex told the press she was in Maine with her father, who later refuted the statement. It was in Maine where Cassie and Connor became close friends.

## Sweat Lodge

A lodge built by Sioux boys where they hope to have a vision of their life's purpose. Each Lakota Indian boy builds his own lodge made out of bent willow branches. William Flying Horse's lodge is still standing near his grandparents' home on the reservation.

## Sun Dance

A ritual tribal dance in which the Lakotas deliberately take pain upon themselves in order to relieve someone else of pain. Will Flying Horse did a sun dance to relieve Cassie from her pain.

## Anthropology

The study of ancient civilizations, anthropology is both cultural and physical. While Cassie Barrett was mostly interested in the physical aspects of finding and dating bones and tools, her interests turned more to cultural anthropology as she listened to stories of the Lakota people in Pine Ridge. She realized that one cannot really understand someone's life by looking at their bones.

## Oscar

The name for the golden statuette given at the Academy Awards for various aspects of the movie industry.



# Themes

## Co-dependency

Cassie's troubled relationship with Alex Rivers can be traced back to her childhood, or at least that is the implication intended by this author. Her mother being a helpless alcoholic put Cassie in the position of being a caregiver, and she repeats this behavior with Alex Rivers, thinking that she can help him and heal him if she just loves him enough. Cassie is also in the position of caregiver with Connor, due to Connor's terrible life at home.

Cassie allows Alex to brutally hit and kick her, and waits until he is finished; she then soothes him and comforts him, telling him it is not his fault. She understands his childhood pain and thinks that if she can give him enough time, space, and love, he will heal from his low self-esteem and will stop being abusive. Children of alcoholics so often feel helpless to fix or change their situation, they go on to find other dependent people whom they think they can help. Cassie wanted to bring out Alex's potential, since she knew the soft and sweet side of him. However, the damage to him as a child was far too advanced to be fixed by a loving partner, and his rage cannot be healed by Cassie.

## Love Involves Pain

Cassie's first love, Connor, is killed by his own father along with the rest of Connor's family. Cassie is the one who finds them, and she holds Connor while he dies. She grieves for him for the rest of her life.

She loves her mother, but her mother is addicted to alcohol and thus is distant and preoccupied. Even her friend Ophelia, whom Cassie loves, is focused on her own gains and uses Cassie and Alex. Cassie has very few other close relationships in her life until she meets Alex. Her relationship with him is fairy-tale happy and they are a perfect match, except that he injures her regularly with his fists and feet.

Even giving birth to her baby, Cassie is gripped with unrelenting pain, but it is associated with the deep love she feels for him after he is born.

William Flying Horse is in quite a bit of emotional pain throughout the story, first from his difficult childhood, but mostly over his love for Cassie. In order to take her pain associated with Alex, William does a Sun Dance that mutilates his body and causes tremendous pain, tearing his flesh. He does this out of love for Cassie. Will's immediate family are all killed by a drunk driver when he is young, which creates a life of pain and grief for him.

Alex, for whom the reader tends to have less sympathy, is also a victim of pain related to his love for his parents and their absolute neglect and abuse of him as a child.



## Tinsel Town is Just That

The ugly underpinnings of Hollywood life are partially exposed in this story. Ophelia spends her time competing for roles, and trying to rise on the ladder of success by using other people and every opportunity to expose herself to the media and those she thinks are important. All of the wealth, the beautiful gowns, the extravagant homes and lavish parties are a facade for people who are forced to play roles they did or did not choose. Everything Alex Rivers says in public can be twisted and somehow held against him, forcing him to always be acting and lying. Even being seen with Ophelia at the restaurant results in tabloid trash, in spite of the fact that his wife was also next to him. It seems that people in show business tend to spend an exorbitant amount of time gossiping and trying to outdo one another, whether it is with wealth, being seen with the right people, or making sure that their physical appearance is artificially perfect.

The fame that makes a horde of paparazzi track and trail a human being is not desirable or pleasant, but is dangerous and tends toward twisting the truth in order to sell a story.

It is ironic that Alex Rivers' eyes are described as "silver" many times, mostly when he is at his most intense, either heading toward a violent episode or lost being the character whose role he is playing. The mirage completes itself in the description of his eyeballs—beautiful, shiny, and hiding the truth.

## Things Are Not What They Seem

Alex Rivers is perhaps the most desirable man in the world. He is mega-rich, gorgeous and charming, with an irresistible charisma and a beautiful smile. He is wanted by millions of women and his work is in demand by the movie industry. He seems to be kind, is very generous and gregarious, perfectly dressed and groomed, and has the ability to do anything his heart desires. He clearly has a boiling demon inside, however, and it only rears its head when it is safe to do so. Marrying Cassie so quickly seems very romantic, but the truth is that men like this want to get things formally established because they know that if the woman knows the truth about him, she would not be likely to marry him.

Ophelia's transparency almost goes without saying. At least Ophelia is honest about her ambition, and does not try to convince anyone it is real. But Ophelia has changed her name, had plastic surgery, and wears other peoples' clothing, living in a certain degree of squalor in a small apartment.

Cassie, as it turns out, is not who she seems to be, either. She does not see herself as an enabler, and therefore has no real understanding about why she is attracted to Alex Rivers.

Will Flying Horse has always seen himself as a half-breed and has always acted as a white man. He finds out that he really does have an interest in and respect for his culture, even though he has rebelled against it his entire life.



The title of the book, "Picture Perfect", reveals this theme. Nothing is perfect, and even though from the outside, this relationship seems perfect, it is far from it. Picoult makes this point in many ways throughout the story.

# Style

## Point of View

Jodi Picoult's narrator changes throughout this story. Much of her narration is omniscient, as she describes the scenes and the characters through dialogue and description. However, Picoult also has Cassie Barrett Rivers, her protagonist, become the narrator, as one realizes that Cassie is telling her story to Will Flying Horse when she escapes from Alex's abuse to South Dakota. However, the story is written primarily from the omniscient view of the author, and the deviations into other narrators are only for effect. For instance, there are several entries preceding the chapters that are simply old Indian legends, told from an omniscient viewpoint. It is clear that these are not Picoult's or Cassie Barrett's stories, but just come out of nowhere and relay a poignant message that is relative to that part of the story.

Weaving in and out of past and present timeframes allows Picoult to show what it is like for Cassie to have amnesia and slowly wake up to her past, and to tell her story which brings the reader to her present, and then to continue on to the end of her story. The reader is allowed to peek in at Cassie's childhood, and later at events from Alex's childhood, which shape their personalities and lead them to the kind of relationship that develops between them. There is also an interlude when the reader is able to look back into William Flying Horse's past, but it is more limited to his dialogue with Cassie.

## Setting

The story is primarily set in Los Angeles, California, around the Hollywood area where Alex Rivers resides. It is easy to mostly sense the tinselled, busy nature of the city with its absurd social events, movie premieres, and hungry media. Will Flying Horse's experience at a pretentious, absurd charity event helps him decide that he cannot stay in Los Angeles. It is a sleazy, pretentious, and hollow existence as it is presented in this story.

Alex and Cassie meet in the Serengeti in Tanzania, where Alex is shooting a movie and Cassie is on an excavation. It is hot, dusty, and amazing in Africa, and the two go camping near a creek where they are able to watch wild animals.

There is a scene in Malibu Beach when a storm is threatening their beach home, and Cassie and Alex try to sandbag the bank to keep it from falling from heavy rain. Cassie and Alex own a ranch in Montana, where they ride horses and Alex teaches Cassie to catch trout from the stream in her hands.

Perhaps the most compelling setting of the story is that of the Lakota Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota. It is barren, snow-covered, stark, and borders on the edge of being uncivilized. The Indian housing is a one-room, one bathroom box, and, although Dorothea keeps her kitchen clean and tidy, their living conditions are simple



and quite poor. Geographically the area is described as vast and flat, without well-defined roads. However, over time, Cassie finds a sense of comfort and beauty in the simplicity and barrenness of the area.

The beatings Cassie endures from Alex generally take place in the luxurious bedroom of their home, where Alex is able to close the doors and not be heard. The bedroom has gigantic walk-in closets full of perfectly organized clothing, and a bathroom with emerald green marble and gold fixtures.

## Language and Meaning

Jodi Picoult is a contemporary American author. Her language is strictly American English, although she does include a few words in French, as well as Lakota to add flavor to her story. In spite of switching back and forth among the different people who happen to be "narrating" different sections of the story, the writing is clear and simple and the book reads very quickly.

Picoult's meaning is clearly that a value that Americans seem to hold dear often cloaks the very lowest kind of problems. Domestic violence is a theme that everyone should be educated in. In this story, Picoult shows us that Alex Rivers is actually a very nice man and, in his good moments, as sweet and gentle as they come. His success is not due to his being cruel to others or stepping over others to climb the ladder, but due to his heavily practiced, highly polished ability to act. There are moments when one feels sorry for Alex because his problems can be directly laid in the lap of his parents, who neglected and abused him. But, his rage is intolerable and he does not seem real excited about changing himself.

Another part of Picoult's intent is to show one that people like Cassie do not deserve to be physically abused, but that they have lived in a specific type of pattern from childhood on which makes them want to be protected, to want to protect someone else, and to enable bad behavior out of love. This subject is covered in every psychology course, and Picoult gives one a fascinating fictitious tale to help one learn that domestic violence is complicated.

## Structure

Description



## Quotes

"To them, to everyone who lived around him, he would always be *iyeska*, a mixed-blood. He had spent the next twenty-five years acting as white as he could, figuring if he could not be like his father's people, he would be like his mother's. He threw himself into his schoolwork so that he'd be able to go to college. He spoke only English, even at his grandparents' home where Lakota was the primary language. He nodded when his white bosses described the Sioux as lazy alcoholics and when the words ran cold through his blood; he wrapped his indifference around him like a cloak." p. 9

"Setting her lips in a tight line, Casie knelt beside her mother with a wet dishrag, wiping her cheek and her mouth and the collar of her shirt. From the corner of her eye, she saw Connor silently retrieve the bottle of gin that had rolled underneath the radiator. Her mother was supposed to be at the bakery, since it was only three o'clock. There must have been another fight. Which meant she didn't know when to or whether, to expect her father home." p. 42

"She glanced outside the closet, into the stunning green bathroom. She could clearly see herself bent over the vanity of the sink, waiting the requisite three minutes. She recalled the way the small pink circle had crept its way upward from the swab of the test kit. Pink, Pregnant. White, Not Pregnant. She had cried into the sink, her hands on the fourteen-karat fixtures, surprised by how cold real gold could be." p. 105

"Alex Rivers was still sitting on his royal throne, leaning toward a woman who was dusting his face with a light powder. When he noticed me, he reached out his hand for his drink and awarded me a second smile. 'Ah,' he said, 'I was beginning to think I'd never see you again.' I smiled at him and dumped the juice and the ice, even the cup, into his lap. For a moment, I watched the stain spread over his trousers. 'No such luck,' I said, and then I turned and walked away." p. 131

"It was an ordinary jelly jar, the kind Connor's mother had used every summer for canning the wild grape jam she boiled down. It was filled halfway with a clear liquid that looked like nothing more exotic than water. Alex took a step forward and touched the jar. 'It's not cold anymore,' he said. He sat down on the edge of the bed. 'I flew to New York and then got on a puddle jumper to Bangor, but there aren't any mountains in Maine cold enough in September. And I couldn't come back empty-handed, so I took a plane to the only place I could be sure of finding it — I know people who've heli-skied in the Canadian Rockies in August.' He propped his elbows on his knees and rested his face in his hands. 'Alex,' I said quietly. 'What exactly did you bring me?' He looked up at me. 'Snow,' he said. 'I brought you your snow.'" p. 165

""There's something wrong here., She glanced up at me from beneath lowered lashes, and suddenly I understood just what Ophelia felt was wrong: In the natural order of the movie industry, Alex Rivers should have been matched with a woman who was stunning and ostentatious and larger than life; a woman who would never have agreed to a quiet



ceremony; a woman who understood intuitively that a kiss was also a photo opportunity. Alex Rivers should have married someone like Ophelia herself." p. 186

"I was rich. Back in Tanzania, Alex had refused my offer of a pre-nuptial agreement, saying that he meant this marriage to be for life. I now owned half a ranch in Colorado; half of a Monet, a Kandinsky, and two van Goghs; half of a hand-carved cherry dining room set that seated thirty and cost more than my undergraduate education. But even the most beautiful furniture in the world couldn't keep me from missing my old red leather wing chair, the first piece I'd bought in California; or from picturing the Salvation Army bureau Ophelia had bought me for Christmas one year, and then painted with peace symbols and daisy chains. My old furniture was worth nothing, did not fit in this house; but when the Goodwill trucks came to pick it up, I cried." p. 191

"I didn't think there were words, really, to explain the connections and dependency Alex and I had between us." p. 196

"In many ways, playing Antony wasn't much of a stretch for Alex, which is what I think made the role so attractive to him in the first place. Antony was driven by power and ambition, a man who had chosen a queen; a man who, in Shakespeare's words, could 'stand up peerless.' But Antony was also obsessive, judgmental and paranoid. It was his fixation with Cleopatra that created a chink in his armor — jealousy — which made it that much easier for his enemies to bring them down. Convince Antony that Cleopatra has betrayed him for Caesar and his world will come crumbling." p. 209

"Finally Jack Green stepped forward. 'Cut, goddammit,' he yelled. After a second of silence, the crew burst into applause, realizing that they had just seen something very rare and fine. 'You better wrap that one,' Jack called to Alex, 'because I don't get any better.'" p. 239

"When he started to kick at me I rolled away from him, feeling his shoe strike me in the back, the kidneys and the ribs. I crossed my arms protectively over my stomach and when Alex came to his senses and knelt down beside me I would not look at him. I rubbed my palms over this life I was holding like a good-luck charm. I listened to his whispered pleas, his apologies, and I thought, I hope this baby hates you." p. 241

"'She says you should remember something while you are with the People,' he translated. 'What you consider these specimens of history are still our great-great grandfathers.' He did not turn from the window, but he held up his hand, beckoning Cassie. She stood and walked over to Cyrus, and he settled his arm around her shoulders in a gesture that was not an embrace, but more of a prodding. His long, straight fingers rested on her collarbone. Cassie gazed at the vast landscape with Cyrus, knowing he did not notice the oceans of snow, the corpses of abandoned trucks, and the tattered tarpaulins blowing off a neighbor's hut. Instead he saw the place where his ancestors' footsteps lay beneath his own, the place that — because of this — he would call home." p. 267



"They were something, those dolls. And what I remember was that each year while my sisters were trying to find a smooth green squash without bumps on its face, I would look for the particolored ones, the ones that streaked yellow and green, half and half.' Dorothea suddenly grasped Cassie's hand, and Cassie was amazed at the power in her thick brown fingers. 'Hybrids are strong, you know. They last longer. And in their own way, they are beautiful, Cassie han?' The women walked carefully, both unwilling to break this gossamer thread that Dorothea had netted between them by speaking, for the first time, Cassie's given name." p. 273

"The woman sniffed delicately, and then seemed to notice him. She smiled seductively, stretching the skin of her face-lifted cheeks to its limit. 'Well, hello there,' she said, deliberately slipping her thigh between his legs. And that was how Will knew he'd be going home." p. 299



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the reasons an intelligent, educated woman like Cassie would stay in an abusive relationship.

How does Cassie's past play into her willingness to stay with Alex?

Is Alex mentally ill? If so, what might some of his options be, given his career and lifestyle?

Discuss the character of Ophelia. Is she ultimately a friend to Cassie?

William Flying Horse plays an interesting role in Cassie's life. Compare him to Connor, Cassie's childhood friend.

Had Connor lived, would he and Cassie have married? What kind of a relationship might they have had?

Discuss the facade that is portrayed in this story that is maintained by people in "the industry". What are the reasons for this constant pretense?

Discuss the irony of Alex's portrayal of a wife abuser in his movie, *The Story of His Life*.

Discuss the reasons that might account for Alex's need to dominate and control Cassie. What does he gain from this behavior?

Is Cassie weak? Does she have a motive for conceiving a child when she knows Alex does not want children?

Why do Cyrus and Dorothea Flying Horse remain on the reservation in such harsh conditions?

Discuss Cassie's options in her marriage to Alex, taking into consideration that she truly loves him.