



## Last One Home, Reading Guide

1. Cassie has been estranged from her sisters for so long that she's afraid their relationships are too fractured to ever mend. But when she finally reunites with Karen, and later Nichole, she realizes they've both been carrying around guilt over their falling out years ago, and that the bad blood between them was largely a result of misunderstanding and miscommunication, made all the worse by time and distance. Do you think the sisters were right to have let so much time pass while the chasm between them grew wider? Might it have been possible for them to make amends sooner, or did they have to go on their own separate journeys in order to accept each other in the end? Is there anyone in your life you've been inspired to mend fences with as a result of this story?

2. Steve became involved with Habitat for Humanity in an effort to cope with his grief after Alicia's death. Have you ever taken a similar approach, investing in others in order to work through a difficult issue? How did the process give you a new perspective and/or something you needed in return? Did Steve's experience motivate you to consider volunteer work in your own community?

3. Not having any siblings herself, Amiee is constantly asking Cassie what it's like to have sisters. This is a topic Cassie tends to shy away from and struggle with for a good portion of the novel. Do you think Cassie has shown her daughter the true meaning of sisterhood by the end? What does the book as a whole seem to be saying about the special bond between sisters? If you have sisters yourself, did you see any of your own experiences mirrored in the relationships between Cassie, Karen and Nichole?

4. Despite all of her hardships, Cassie is somehow able to let go of animosity, maintain a positive outlook, and express an appreciation for small blessings that others generally take for granted. What enables her to have such strength, resolve and a bright disposition when she has been continually beaten down? Do you know anyone like Cassie? There are other characters in the book for which second chances are just as important. Discuss how you see these individuals starting over and rebuilding their lives. Does there seem to be a process one must go through to come out on the other side? Which character do you admire the most in his/her efforts to move away from a difficult past and embrace a new future?

5. When Cassie's mother's illness was worsening, Cassie claimed that she had wanted to call her, but Karen had convinced her not to; that "hearing from her at this point would be more upsetting than comforting." Do you think Cassie should have contacted her mother anyway? Was Karen right to have drawn such lines between Cassie and her family? By the end, has Cassie succeeded in making peace with her parents' deaths even though she didn't have the opportunity to formally say goodbye? If so, what made it possible for her to heal and move on?

6. Cassie says that because of her dark past with Duke, she'd consequently "had to relearn what it meant to be a friend and to have friends." Can you cite any instances where this played out in the narrative? What does Cassie have to give of herself or relinquish control of in relearning how to be a friend/have friends?

7. In her counseling of Maureen, Cassie "felt like she should be the one thanking [her]; the other woman had helped show her how far she'd come." Have you ever been in a similar position, in which you learned a more valuable lesson from the person you're supposed to be advising? If so, share the miracle of this relationship and how it impacted your life.

8. Cassie says that forsaking the cameo that once belonged to her grandmother "seemed to symbolize everything she had lost when she became estranged from her family." How so? How does she go about regaining not only the cameo itself, but those intangible things she lost? Is there a family heirloom that you cherish and if so, what does it symbolize to you?

9. Why do you think Steve is anxious to get serious with Cassie and move things along so quickly? Were you surprised that he was impervious to her requests to take their relationship day-by-day, especially considering that this is his first real romantic involvement since Alicia's death? Were you shocked/impressed/disappointed by Cassie's reaction to Steve's enthusiasm?

10. Steve is highly offended that Cassie would compare him to her lowlife ex-husband when making a decision about whether she can commit to him. Do you think it was fair of Cassie to have put Steve and Duke side-by-side in such a way?

11. After meeting her aunts for the first time, Amiee says they're exactly as she pictured them, to which, Cassie says, "They really haven't changed that much." Amiee responds, "You have." From what you know of Karen and Nichole, do you agree with Cassie that they haven't changed much? As for Amiee's observation of her mother, in what ways has Cassie grown and developed over the course of the story?

12. Nichole says that until Cassie's return, she "hadn't fully appreciated the importance of family connections." Considering that Nichole has always had her parents and Karen, and recently started a family of her own, what does Cassie teach her or contribute to her life that she might have been missing before?

13. Compare and contrast Cassie's and Leanne's marriages with unloving husbands. Why do you think Leanne tolerated her unhappy circumstances for decades while Cassie was finally driven to take action and reclaim her life? What do you think Nichole will decide to do about her own marriage? What do you hope her future has in store?

14. The concept of home is not only a component of the title, but a major theme throughout the novel. What does home mean for the main characters, and how is it different – or similar – for each of them? How does Habitat for Humanity, and the physical act of building houses, parallel those underlying ideas? What does home mean to you?