



# *The Book of X*

A NOVEL

**Sarah Rose Etter**

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**Reader Guide: Questions and Topics for Discussion**  
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1. Much of *The Book of X* is focused on Cassie, the main character, being born in the shape of a knot, a hereditary condition passed down from the female side of her family. What parallels can you draw between this surreal physical condition and your body? Do you find the idea of the knot to be effective as a literary device? Why or why not?
2. Cassie's relationship with her mother is marked with difficulty, as her mother constantly attempts to "improve" her—whether through weight loss, dresses, or new makeup. How would you have improved or distanced yourself from this relationship if you were Cassie? Are the actions of the mother enough to warrant the ending of that relationship? Do Cassie and her mother love each other?
3. The Meat Quarry represents a forbidden place to Cassie for much of the book. When she's finally allowed into the Meat Quarry, it turns out she's excellent at harvesting. What did you think the Meat Quarry represented? How did the Meat Quarry function as both a place and a character in the novel?
4. Cassie's relationship with her father is much warmer than that with her mother. They laugh and joke, despite his drinking. Does Cassie have a real relationship with her father, or are they more like friends? What role does his death play—and why does it impact her so greatly?
5. Throughout the book, Cassie is haunted by visions of another life—one which she describes as better than her current life. However, those visions often veer into the horrifying. How did her visions drive the story for you? What impact did they have on your understanding of her as a character? Which visions were the most impactful?



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6. After Cassie moves to the city, she is forced to adjust her understanding of the world. How does this change in location impact her mentality? What does the city represent to Cassie? Have you ever moved to a new place and felt the same displacement Cassie faces?
7. Cassie's relationship with men throughout the book is marked with assault, rejection, and finally love. How do these different experiences shape her as a person? Does her relationship with Henry represent real love, imaginary love, or flawed love? How does love function throughout the book as a part of Cassie's life? Do you relate to her experiences? Are there right or wrong ways to love someone?
8. After her surgery, Cassie believes her life will improve. How does Cassie's relationship to her body change or stay the same after surgery? Is there any marked difference in her life? How is her surgery a rejection of her lineage? How are our bodies a reflection of ourselves—and how are they not?
9. Surrealism plays a major part in the portrayal of Cassie's life. How did you respond to this technique? What imagery or scenes resonated with you? How did surrealism help or hurt the plot of the novel?
10. The death of Cassie's father leads to the final outcome of the book. Why was his death such a pivotal moment for her? How could she have faced her own pain differently?