

*This is a story about the combustion of all a woman's relationships, which she has been juggling by sacrificing herself to them all her life. Hopefully, Alternate Endings has inspired you to visit with your own relationships, including most importantly the one you have with yourself. **Warning: spoilers ahead.***

A story usually begins with a scene involving the lead character, but Alternate Endings starts instead with Catherine's hike up Angels Landing in Zion National Park. Why do you think the author did this?

The book is built on small bites of Calyce's daily professional and personal life, rather than from longer scenes, until the climax. How did you respond to the short cuts?

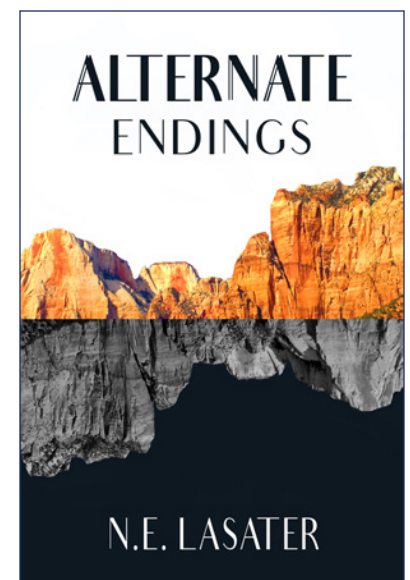
Why is Calyce the way she is? In what ways does her family depend on her being exactly that way and promote it?

Alternate Endings twines separate stories about Calyce and Catherine that are similar but different, which don't connect until the very end. In the Author's Note, Lasater explains why she structured the novel this way, but independent of that explanation, does the dual structure work?

They say that everyone is a combination of good and bad. How is Damion both? How is Calyce? What about Effie?

As parents, we tend to blame ourselves for our adult children's failures. If you were Calyce's friend, what advice would you give her about Damion's "failure to launch"? Has he failed?

Have you ever been so lonely that the only voices you heard were on the computer screen or TV? Were you able to find positive in that situation? What was it?



When did you first realize that Calyce is African-American? The author, who is White, writes on her website about how Calyce appeared to her one day fully formed, insisting that Lasater tell her story. What do you think about a writer of one race writing a novel about someone of another?

What levers does Damion use to manipulate his mother? Has a loved one ever callously manipulated you for their own benefit, using your love for them against you? How did you realize what was happening? What did you do?

How does Catherine's relationship with her son Ryan compare to Calyce's with Damion? How do her interactions with Mike compare to Calyce's with Roger? What about her relationship with her mother at the end, versus Calyce's with Effie? How do these shed light on Calyce's journey?

Have you ever had to place a family member into a senior living situation they did not want? Have you been abandoned by your siblings to deal with it, as Calyce is? How does your experience compare to hers?

Have you ever cycled in a futile dynamic with a loved one, like Calyce cycles with Damion about his job search? How did you finally register that you were cycling? Once you changed the old dynamic, what happened? How did your loved one respond?

Is Calyce's decision not to date outside her race racist?

The story states its premise in November, when Calyce says to her English class, "My point is that we're all looking for role models of how to be. It's a key task of literature, and it's failed middle-aged women like me. Libraries are filled with boys becoming men by not doing what they're told and being rewarded for it, but where are the books for me, to teach me that I can choose myself and I won't be punished?" What other novels besides *Alternate Endings* tell middle-aged women they can choose themselves and not be punished? Why do you think there's such a paucity of such stories in our society? Who benefits from that absence?

Calyce begins to take small actions that end up changing her life. Have you ever taken a step that you had no idea would do the same?

In December, Catherine is cowed by the power plays of her department boss, Frank. Have you ever been controlled in the same way? If you identify as female, have you ever lowered your eyes or smiled deferentially when passing a man on the street? Have you moved aside to let him walk straight ahead? Why did you do it? Have you ever tried walking straight ahead, to see what would happen?

Did you see Dan coming?

How do the referenced short stories advance the plot?

At Christmas, Damion talks about how difficult things are economically for millennials. Do you agree?

January is the novel's midpoint, where in most stories the protagonist makes a key pivot. What pivots on what aspects of her life does Calyce make in this chapter? How do her "wants" change? What about her "needs"?

In January, Effie tells Calyce, "Sometimes our children get mad at us and they don't give a reason. Sometimes they even hate us and won't say why." Have you ever experienced that with your own children?

As Effie is wheeled away for heart surgery, she and Calyce exchange a joke about Calyce's hair. Have you ever had a surprisingly light moment in the midst of life-and-death circumstances?

At the end of January, what finally makes Calyce take action is how badly Damion treats his grandmother, not how he mistreats her. Have you ever had such an experience, where it took someone else being mistreated for you to see the truth about what was happening to you?

What does the flash fiction Calyce writes in January tell us about her that we didn't know? How does this piece differ from the story she's writing about Aeolus?

Most stories have an "All Is Lost" point, where the protagonist is defeated in every way before she rallies for the big climax. When are things most "lost" for Calyce? Is there only one moment or are there multiple events?

We don't learn much about Calyce's backstory until far into the second half of the book. Why do you think the author did that? Don't you think knowing more, earlier would have made Calyce more sympathetic?

Who would you cast to play Calyce, Damion, Selene, and Effie in the movie of Alternate Endings?

Could you ever choose yourself, over the needs and wants of your family?