

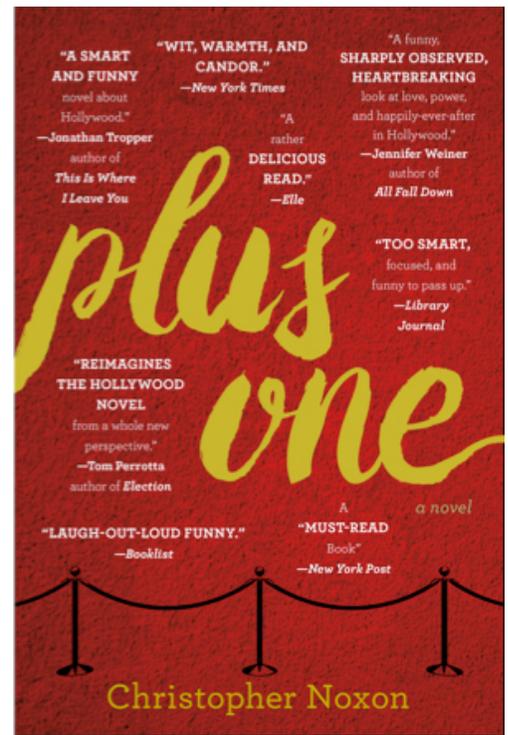
## Readers Group Guide

### PLUS ONE

By Christopher Noxon

#### 9 Conversation Starters

1. As a character, Alex is deeply conflicted about his role as a father, husband, and man. Did you sympathize with his struggle? Or were you put off by his insecurities and infidelities—did you find yourself growing weary of the woes of a privileged white guy with a successful wife and a big house?
2. Alex has misgivings about the excesses and absurdities of Hollywood. Why do you think Alex can't fully embrace his role as a Hollywood support spouse?
3. While PLUS ONE is a novel about marriage, Figgy is depicted at a distance, the narrative focused on Alex's point of view. Did you feel Figgy was fully portrayed? Did you "take sides" in their conflict?
4. Alex uses a cell-phone location app to track his wife and initiates a relationship with Miranda the butcher via a food blog (and later trades suggestive texts with her). How does the depiction of technology in PLUS ONE reflect the new ways people relate?
5. Alex is tempted by Miranda the butcher; what do you think he sees in her? Does his relationship with Miranda count as infidelity?
6. Midway through the book, Alex considers rewriting his "punk rock memoir" as fiction, creating "an alter ego who'd be free to do all the stupid, risky, impulsive things Alex himself never did." Why do you think the author included this at this point in the book?
7. PLUS ONE is the story of caretaking men and breadwinning women and how they confront forces that can feel conspired against them. How do you think men handle caretaking differently than women? What challenges do women uniquely face when juggling career and family?
8. The author of PLUS ONE is married to a successful television producer and the novel resembles his actual life in many ways. Why do you think he decided to fictionalize his story rather than write a memoir? Would you have rather read a nonfiction version?



9. At the end of the book, Alex describes a plan for a new business and appears to be over the worst of his midlife meltdown. How do you imagine that plan panning out? Do you think Alex and Figgy will stay together?

### **Christopher Noxon on the backstory of PLUS ONE**

A few years ago, I had a tiny bit of a midlife crisis. I had three incredible kids and a relatively successful career in the unstable field of journalism. Things were great... and then my wife's TV career took off. I did what many partners of successful spouses do: I got domestic. I handled carpools and home repairs and travel plans. I helped out at school and got serious about diet and exercise. I spent many blissful mornings at a coffee roaster on Sunset Boulevard with that relatively small and exotic cohort of men married to women whose success, income and public recognition surpasses their own.

I was having fun and enjoying my time with the kids, but I found myself dogged by insecurities. I felt embarrassed that my wife bore the burden to support our family. I got twitchy and defensive when people asked what I "did." I was prone to odd outbursts of aggression—peeling out in the minivan at carpool, mowing down kids at a Lasertag birthday party, getting whiplash after leaping off a rooftop into a swimming pool.

Then I did something really stupid: I considered opening a bead store.

I like beads. They're nice. But at the time I was creating an imaginary artisanal beading empire, I had never once actually beaded. I had to face facts: I had no business opening a bead store. The bead store was my rock bottom, my cry for help.

And so I started writing again. For the first time in my life I wrote without an assignment or editor. I just knew there were funny, true and deep stories to be told about men learning how to hold a house, women who win the bread, what it's like to be arm candy at the Emmys and how it feels to ease off the professional pedal and settle into a support role. I wrote about men who cook and caretake and sing backup for their front-and-center provider wives.

I wrote with pleasure—it felt raw and real and revealing. Almost immediately, the story moved far beyond my own experience. I embellished and condensed and unspooled every strand of insecurity I'd ever felt to its most dramatic conclusion. I asked myself: what would happen if I acted on all my worst impulses? How do men in my position act out against the societal and even biological pressures that can feel conspired against them?

In the end, I charted a course for Alex to overcome his insecurities and find a kind of peace. It wasn't enough simply to reveal the weaknesses and worries of the househusband – doing so would only reinforce the reactionary and entirely false assumption that men are basically unfit for support roles. I have seen and experienced the exact opposite. My hope is that this book shows first of all how hard a journey

toward a new domestic arrangement can be but how fulfilling it is when honestly achieved.

## Praise for Plus One

"Noxon reveals the inner workings of that [Plus One] role with wit, warmth and candor."

— ***New York Times***

"Behind every great man there's a great woman... and in Noxon's telling, behind every great woman there's a charming, deeply conflicted guy (sometimes holding a very expensive handbag). Hilarious and unflinching, *Plus One* is a funny, sharply observed, heartbreaking look at love, power, and happily-ever-after in Hollywood."

— **Jennifer Weiner**, author of *All Fall Down*, *The Next Best Thing*, and *Good in Bed*

"A rather delicious read." — ***Elle***

"A funny, sharply observed novel about a guy with a first-world problem—a wife who's a hugely successful TV writer and producer—and the identity crisis that goes along with it. Christopher Noxon has reimagined the Hollywood novel from a whole new perspective." — **Tom Perrotta**, author of *Election*, *Little Children*, and *The Leftovers*

"A smart and funny novel about Hollywood, but where it truly shines is in Noxon's stunning and painfully accurate depiction of the complex rhythms and growing pains of a marriage." — **Jonathan Tropper**, author of *This Is Where I Leave You* and *One Last Thing Before I Go*

"A brisk romp that's sometimes laugh-out-loud funny as it deals with the serious issues of roles and communication in marriage. And just picture this on the big screen, with Jason Bateman as the lead." — ***Booklist***

"For fans of Rainbow Rowell and similar keenly insightful truth tellers, this fresh male take on modern relationships is too smart, focused, and funny to pass up."

— ***Library Journal***

"It's a laugh-out-loud, big-hearted novel of a marriage threatened by the success of the wife while the husband scrambles to find his place." — ***Foreword Reviews***

"Well observed, honest, and laugh-out-loud funny, *Plus One* deftly tells a story from the inside of show business about being on the outside." — **Matthew Weiner**, creator of *Mad Men*

"Hilarious and whip-smart, with a big, beating heart at its center. I love this book, and so will you." — **Dana Reinhardt**, author of *We Are the Goldens*

"So many hilarious moments." — ***Los Angeles Times***

"A page-turning peek into the world of TV and families and money... built convincingly by Noxon's gift with scenes and voices." — **Aimee Bender**, author of *The Color Master* and *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

"Rich with pitch-perfect details and social satire that sings. You'll laugh, you'll cringe, and you'll never look at a man on the red carpet holding a Judith Leiber bag in the same way." — **Lian Dolan**, author of *Elizabeth the First Wife* and *Helen of Pasadena*

"A lot of fun...very well written and funny, but also touching" — ***Hollywood Reporter***

"The emotional and socio-demographic details are so rich and hilarious, it's almost as if Noxon himself had some kind of incredibly successful Hollywood wife." — **Joel Stein**, *Time* columnist and author of *Man Made*

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