

ANATOMY OF RELEASE

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

AmberLee Fuller

An Echo Effect Novel • SoulWorks Print House

“Release (n.): The body’s surrender. The ache before the softening. The moment you stop holding what was never yours to keep — and feel it echo through every part of you that loved anyway.”

— *Anatomy of Release*

01 | WELCOME TO THE CHAOS

You have just finished — or are about to begin — a book that was never intended to be quiet. *Anatomy of Release* was written in twenty-one days, born from loss, survival, and the stubborn insistence that grief and desire can coexist inside the same body. It is a novel about movement and stillness, about the way we love when we are still learning how to live.

Ryan Callahan is a photographer, a daughter, an orphan, a woman who has spent her whole life living by a set of rules she built to keep herself safe. Then her father dies, and the rules stop working. This is the story of what happens when she drives away from everything familiar and straight into a life she never let herself want.

This guide is designed to help you and your book club move through this story with the same emotional honesty Ryan herself is learning to practice. The questions here will pull you into the text, into yourselves, and into the conversations that great books make possible. There is no wrong way to discuss this novel. Only honest ones.

About AmberLee Fuller

AmberLee Fuller is a Florida-raised, Oklahoma-rooted creative living at the intersection of grief and grit. She is a survivor, photographer, brand strategist, and the founder of The Archetype Method™ — a framework for identity-rooted storytelling. She writes to release what her body no longer wishes to carry.

Her work as a fine art photographer informs every page of this novel — she understands how images hold memory, how a lens can expose what words alone cannot say. That eye for light, shadow, and negative space lives in Ryan's character and in the book's emotional architecture.

Anatomy of Release was written in the aftermath of her father's death — a loss she did not share publicly for nearly a year. In his honor, one dollar from every copy sold is donated to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. That grief, and that love, is present on every page.

Her debut imprint, SoulWorks Print House, was built with a promise: Stories That Cut to the Soul. This is the first of them.

"She writes what hurts. And what heals.

She writes for the ones who were told to sit down and be quiet."

02 | BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A Suggested Mindset

This novel asks something of you. It asks that you bring your whole self — your grief, your desire, your complicated feelings about love and freedom and what safety actually looks like. It will not reward emotional distance. It rewards presence.

Read it the way Ryan photographs: slowly, with attention to light and shadow, trusting that what you almost miss matters most.

Content & Theme Awareness

This novel explores the following themes with emotional depth and frankness. Readers may wish to approach with awareness:

- Parental loss and active grief processing
- Ethical non-monogamy and relationship anarchy
- Sexual intimacy (explicit in places)
- Childhood abandonment and its adult echoes
- Complex emotional healing and trauma
- Discussions of death and end-of-life care
- Mental health and therapy (framed positively)

Spoiler-Free Reflection Prompts

Before your first page, or your first discussion, sit with these questions:

What does freedom mean to you — and is it the same as independence?

Can healing exist without reinvention? Or is reinvention always a form of grief?

What makes a relationship feel safe? Is safety the same as love?

Have you ever built a rule for yourself that was really a wall?

What would it take for you to finally stop holding on to what was never yours to keep?

03 | HOW TO HOST YOUR DISCUSSION

Opening Icebreakers

Start here. These are low-stakes and warm — they ease your group into the emotional depth ahead.

- On a scale of 1–10, how deeply did this book wreck you? (1 = mildly inconvenienced; 10 = I called my best friend at midnight crying)
- Which character did you relate to most — and was that relationship comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Share one quote, scene, or line you highlighted or photographed. What made you reach for your pen?
- What emotion did you feel most often while reading? What do you think triggered it?
- Did this book make you rethink anything about yourself, your relationships, or your definitions of love?

Suggested Discussion Flow (60–90 Minutes)

0–10 min — Icebreakers & First Reactions

Use the icebreakers above. Keep it light and open. Let everyone speak before the analysis begins.

10–35 min — Character Deep Dives

Focus on Ryan's arc first, then bring in Silas and Caleb/CJ. Use the Character Section questions.

35–60 min — Themes & Big Questions

Move into the open-ended discussion questions. Choose 4–6 based on what your group responds to.

60–75 min — Personal Reflection

Invite the group to connect the story to their own lives. Use the final reflection prompts.

75–90 min — The Constellation Round

Each person shares one word that describes what this book released in them. End there.

Tips for Navigating Emotionally Intense Conversations

- Name the room early: “This book goes to hard places. We don't have to go there alone.”
- Give people permission to pass on any question without explanation.
- If grief comes up — and it may — don't rush past it. Let it breathe.
- Disagreements about relationship ethics are healthy. Make room for multiple truths.
- If someone has complicated feelings about the non-monogamy, treat it as curiosity, not correction.

04 | OPEN-ENDED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to go deep. Choose those that resonate with your group's energy, or move through them all. There are no right answers — only honest ones.

1. Ryan's "Catch and Release" rules exist because of Caleb's early abandonment, yet she clings to them even as they fail her. What is the relationship between the rules we make to protect ourselves and the damage those rules ultimately cause? Do any of Ryan's rules feel familiar to you?
2. Grief is not a backdrop in this novel — it is a character. How does Ryan's grief for her father shape her capacity for intimacy? Does losing him make her more open to love, or does it make openness more terrifying?
3. Silas defines his approach to relationships by the distinction between "rigid control" (fear in a mask) and intentional steadiness. How does Ryan challenge this distinction in him? And how does Silas's steadiness challenge Ryan's lifelong belief that she will always be left?
4. Ellis delivers the line: "Often, sex tangled up in unresolved trauma functions as a bonding agent for pain — it creates the illusion of safety, of connection, even when the underlying pattern is harmful." How does this frame Ryan's relationship history? And what does it mean for her relationship with Caleb versus Silas?
5. The constellation metaphor — Ellis's description of their polycule as "connections between us, not just leading back to him" — reframes what love and partnership can look like. Did the constellation dynamic in this novel challenge or expand your own ideas about love? What would it take for you to believe that love doesn't get divided, it expands?
6. Caleb's arc in the final chapters culminates in a painful admission: "I wasn't trusting her. I was waiting for her to fail." He names this as "Control. Dressed up as concern." How often do we mistake monitoring our loved ones for loving them? What does it cost both people?
7. Photography operates as both Ryan's profession and her emotional language throughout the novel. She doesn't just capture images — she frames, exposes, and releases them. How is this a metaphor for her emotional process? In what ways is Ryan's lens also her armor?
8. The prologue opens with Ryan at five years old, learning that her mother has left without explanation, and being shielded by her father and Marlowe. How does this originating wound echo through every relationship Ryan builds as an adult? What did you notice about how she responds to being loved versus being left?
9. Ryan's father called himself a "guidepost." AmberLee Fuller writes her own father into the emotional DNA of this novel. How does the parent-child loss at the center of this story complicate, deepen, or transform Ryan's capacity to receive love from Silas? Can grief make us more open, or does it always ask us to close first?
10. Caleb tells Ryan, "You called me CJ... you've never done that before." She responds that maybe it's time to "stop dragging that poor son-of-a-bitch into my bed and see what this CJ guy is actually made of." What does it mean to love a person versus a memory of a person? Have you ever had to let go of a version of someone in order to truly see them?
11. Ellis's closing letter defines compersion as "the most difficult to understand and even harder to practice." By the novel's final pages, Caleb experiences compersion when he sees Ryan and Silas through the window. Do you believe he truly feels it, or is it resignation? What is the difference?
12. The title holds multiple meanings: the physical release of desire, the emotional release of grief, the spiritual release of what we hold beyond its season. By the final page, what has Ryan released? What has Silas? What has Caleb? And what — if anything — do you think each of them is still holding?

13. Silas Thatcher is introduced as a man whose control is “not rigid” but “intentional” — built with care, not fear. Yet Ryan cracks something open in him before she even speaks to him. What does it say about the limits of our systems when the right person walks through the door?
14. Ryan says to Caleb near the end: “I don’t need rescuing anymore. And the two of you are behaving like idiots in tinfoil.” How does Ryan’s relationship to being saved evolve across the novel? And what does it mean to love someone who has stopped needing you in the way you once imagined?
15. This novel ends not with resolution, but with possibility — a pot pie, a declaration of love, two voicemails, and a door left open. What does an ending like this ask of the reader? Did you find it satisfying, uncomfortable, or both?

05 | CHARACTER DEEP DIVES

Ryan Ellery Callahan

Ryan's emotional wound is foundational and compounded: abandoned by her mother at five, she becomes the child who learns that love leaves. Her father's death strips away the last person who made staying feel safe. She builds the Catch and Release rules — a scaffolding of preemptive exits — to survive this certainty that everyone goes.

- ✦✦ They Want: to be free of grief without having to be free of love
- ✦✦ They Need: to believe she is worthy of staying, not in spite of who she is but because of it
- ✦✦ Their Role in Ryan's Journey: Ryan is the fulcrum. Every relationship in the novel pivots on her capacity to receive love without destroying it. Her emotional evolution — from a woman who ghosts her way out of intimacy to one who walks through a door and says “I love you” — is the entire novel.
- ✦✦ Why Readers Connect: Readers will recognize Ryan's rules, her self-deprecating humor, and the way she disappears just before she might be truly seen. She is every woman who has ever been too much and not enough at the same time.

Silas Grant Thatcher

Silas carries the quiet wound of a failed marriage and the identity fragmentation that follows: a man who built his entire self around intentionality and consent, only to discover that love does not always cooperate. He is also, beneath his steady exterior, terrified of loving someone who cannot or will not stay.

- ✦✦ They Want: to love well without losing himself in the process
- ✦✦ They Need: to understand that loving Ryan requires witnessing her grief, not fixing it — and that the love itself is the safety, not the structure
- ✦✦ Their Role in Ryan's Journey: Silas provides the novel's emotional shelter. He is steadiness, care, and restraint. He holds space for Ryan in a way that challenges her belief that love always costs her something. His POV chapters — spare, controlled, achingly honest — offer a rare male interiority in romance fiction.
- ✦✦ Why Readers Connect: Readers who have ever loved someone cautiously, who wanted to be the safe harbor but feared they were not enough, will see themselves in Silas.

Caleb / CJ Jones

Caleb is Ryan's original wound and her oldest comfort — the boy who loved her first and left without explanation. He spent decades believing love was something you earned by being the most devoted, only to realize he had been collecting evidence instead of offering trust. His arc is about the difference between loving someone and loving the idea of being the one who loves them.

- ✦✦ They Want: to be chosen — not as a constellation point, but as a true north
- ✦✦ They Need: to understand that being necessary is not the same as being loved, and that growth requires him to stop keeping score
- ✦✦ Their Role in Ryan's Journey: Caleb functions as Ryan's past, her wound, and eventually her witness. His final voicemail — choosing to let go while remaining in — is one of the novel's most emotionally sophisticated moments.

✦✦ Why Readers Connect: Readers who have loved someone through multiple versions of themselves, who have felt both the pull of history and the weight of its damage, will feel seen in Caleb's struggle.

Ellis Sharma

Ellis carries the particular loneliness of someone whose emotional labor is invisible — the one who holds the room together, names the feeling no one can identify, and waits with steadiness for everyone else to catch up. Their wound is the lifelong assumption that being steady means you don't need to be held.

✦✦ They Want: to be in the constellation without being its invisible infrastructure

✦✦ They Need: to be known beyond their role, not just as Silas's anchor or the group's therapist, but as someone capable of being undone

✦✦ Their Role in Ryan's Journey: Ellis is the novel's moral and emotional compass. They translate the world for Ryan without judgment. Their closing letter on compersion is one of the most illuminating pieces of writing in the book.

✦✦ Why Readers Connect: Readers who identify as “the strong one” in their relationships — the one everyone leans on — will find profound recognition in Ellis.

The Constellation Dynamic

Silas, Ellis, Mandy, and David form a kitchen-table polycule — a chosen family built on radical honesty, compersion, and the belief that love is not a finite resource. When Ryan enters this constellation, she is not replacing anyone. She is rearranging the gravitational field.

The constellation is the novel's answer to the question it keeps asking: What if love didn't have to be a competition? What if “chosen family” was something you could build after everything you thought was family was gone?

06 | THEMES & SYMBOLISM

Grief as Architecture

Grief in this novel is not a phase. It is a structural element. It shapes Ryan's apartment, her rules, her running, her photography. Her father's death does not send her into healing — it sends her into motion, which is how she has always grieved. The novel asks: what if grief is not something to get through, but something you have to learn to carry differently?

Ethical Non-Monogamy & Emotional Honesty

The novel does not present ethical non-monogamy as a lifestyle choice to be explained or defended. It presents it as a vocabulary — a set of tools (compersion, metamour, anchor partner) that ask everyone involved to do something rare: tell the truth about what they want and what they feel. Ryan's discomfort with this vocabulary, and her eventual fluency in it, mirrors her larger journey into emotional honesty.

Found Family

Ryan loses both parents before this novel begins. What she builds across these pages — slowly, imperfectly, in kitchens and hospital waiting rooms and living rooms with too much soup on the counter — is a family of her own choosing. The constellation is the novel's answer to the girl who grew up knowing that family can leave.

Photography as Metaphor

Ryan photographs the way she loves: with intention, with patience, by waiting for the right light. The camera is also her armor — something to stand behind when being seen feels dangerous. Crucially, she puts it down when she is most fully herself. The moments of deepest intimacy in the novel are the moments where she is not looking through a lens.

The Echo

The word “echo” runs through every layer of this story. Ryan hears her father's voice, still. She relives Caleb's leaving in every man who gets close. The novel's very structure — the dual-POV chapters labeled “Echo” — suggests that we are all haunted by the versions of ourselves we couldn't save. An echo is not an ending. It is a sound that has not yet found its wall.

Water, Ocean, & The Inlet

The novel begins at the ocean and returns to it. Water in this story is both source and threat: Ryan grew up watching her father cast nets at the jetties, and the ocean is where she scatters what she can no longer carry. Water resists being held. So does Ryan. So does grief.

Home Versus Escape

Ryan leaves Florida not to find something but to outrun something. The novel tracks the slow discovery that home is not a place — it is a feeling, and it lives inside the people who wait for you without demanding that you explain the length of your absence. By the end, Ryan doesn't return to Florida. She walks through a door that was always open and says: here. This is enough.

Being Desired vs. Being Chosen

This is the novel's sharpest knife. Ryan knows how to be desired — she is fluent in it, strategic about it, protected by it. What she does not know how to do is be chosen: consistently, completely, in the ordinary moments that do not look like romance. Silas offers exactly this. It is the thing she runs from most. It is also the thing that finally makes her stop running.

07 | PASSAGES WORTH REVISITING

These are the lines your book club will reach for, post online, and return to in quiet moments. Use them as entry points or as places to end.

“The first verse dropped like a dare. It wasn’t just music — it was confrontation, memory, and release all rolled into one. I screamed every word until my chest burned, like the sound alone could break every chain that held me back.”

— Ryan, Chapter Two

“I built my life on control. Quiet. Steady. Not rigid control — I know the difference. Rigid control is fear wearing a mask of confidence. What I built was something softer. A life where I know what I want, I ask for it clearly, and I hold space for the people I love to do the same. And she’d cracked something open without even touching me.”

— Silas, Echo I

“You don’t realize how long you’ve been in pieces until someone waits for permission.”

— Ryan, Chapter Twelve

“Thank you for calling me bébé, like it meant something sacred. Thank you for letting me catch you, and now, for letting me release you.”

— Ryan’s note to Langston

“It’s more like a constellation, with connections between us, not just leading back to him.”

— Ellis, Chapter Fifteen

“People really need to start using their words instead of their genitals to talk to each other.”

— Ellis, Chapter Nineteen

“Often, sex tangled up in unresolved trauma functions as a bonding agent for pain. It creates an illusion of safety, of connection, even when the underlying pattern is harmful. And unless you recognize it, you can mistake intensity for intimacy. Familiarity with love.”

— Ellis, Chapter Nineteen

“I’m in love with you.”

— Ryan to Silas, Chapter Thirty-Eight

“Being chosen is only magic when you’re not the consolation prize.”

— Caleb, Chapter Thirty-Seven

“She doesn’t need saving. And as annoying as it might be for me, you can hold those pieces too.”

— Caleb’s voicemail to Silas

“Don’t shame a version of you that kept you alive.”

— Ellis to Ryan, Chapter Thirty-Eight

“We’re made of stories we’re still trying to forgive.”

— Ellis, Chapter Thirty-Eight

“Release (n.): The body’s surrender. The ache before the softening. The moment you stop holding what was never yours to keep — and feel it echo through every part of you that loved anyway.”

— Anatomy of Release, Closing Definition

08 | THE FULL EXPERIENCE

Set the Mood

Atmosphere matters. This is a novel about desire, grief, found family, and the courage to stay. Your space should feel like all of that.

- Deep navy, warm gold, and candlelight
- Scatter bookmarks with your favorite quotes on the table
- Ask everyone to bring the line they would tattoo on their wrist
- Dim, intimate lighting — nothing overhead, nothing clinical

Food & Drink Inspired by the Novel

Silas Thatcher is a Viridian Medal-winning chef. The meal he makes when Ryan finally crosses the threshold? Chicken pot pie. Start there.

- Chef's Table Spread: charcuterie, fresh bread, something that smells like a kitchen someone actually cooks in
- Ryan's Road Trip Snacks: gas station worthy — Takis, road mix, something from a diner counter
- The Constellation Cocktail: something layered, something with champagne — because Mandy sold four pieces at the gallery
- Mocktail Option: sparkling water with elderflower and a squeeze of citrus — crisp, clean, unexpectedly elegant
- Beignets — for the New Orleans scenes and for anyone who deserves something warm and dusted in something sweet

Playlist

Ryan's playlists are emotional architecture. Build your own with these guideposts:

- Ray LaMontagne — for the grief, for the grit, for Silas's presence in a room
- Amos Lee — slow burn, all tenderness
- Phoebe Bridgers — for the road, for the loss, for the coming home
- Hozier — for the sacred, the unholy, the moments that feel like both
- Noah Kahan — for the running, the returning, the “stick season” of grief
- Adrienne Lenker — for the intimacy that hurts
- Gregory Alan Isakov — for the constellation, for the night sky, for the long exhale

Optional Journaling Prompts

Invite members to bring a journal entry or free write prompt response to the meeting:

- Write about a rule you made to protect yourself that ended up protecting you from something you actually wanted.

- Write about a person who loved you steadily, without drama — and whether you let them.
- What does your constellation look like? Who is in it? Who do you wish was?

Companion Books, Films & Shows

For the reader who wants to stay in this emotional frequency:

- Books: Beach Read — Emily Henry • Conversations with Friends — Sally Rooney • She Drives Me Crazy — Kelly Quindlen • The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo — Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Films: Fleabag (series) • A Beautiful Boy • Portrait of a Lady on Fire • Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
- For the Grief Thread: Wild (Reese Witherspoon) • The Vast of Night • Pieces of a Woman
- For the ENM/Found Family Thread: You Me Her (Starz) • Wanderlust (Netflix) • Trigonometry (BBC)

09 | SHARE THE STORY

If You Loved This Book Because...

- ... you needed a book that understood grief without reducing it — read Anatomy of Release.
- ... you have rules you made for yourself that you're ready to question — read Anatomy of Release.
- ... you want a love story that doesn't ask you to choose between freedom and intimacy — read Anatomy of Release.
- ... you were told to sit down and be quiet and you never forgave them for it — read Anatomy of Release.
- ... you believe the best love stories are also the most honest ones — read Anatomy of Release.
- ... **you are still figuring out what release feels like — this book was written for you.**

Suggested Hashtags

- #AnatomyOfRelease
- #TheEchoEffect
- #AmberLeeFuller
- #SoulWorksPrintHouse
- #EmotionalSmut
- #TheEchoEffectTour
- #WhereIsAmberLee
- #FoundFamily #EthicalNonMonogamy #LiteraryRomance

BookTok & Instagram Discussion Prompts

- POV: You just finished Anatomy of Release and you are not okay. (Describe the specific scene that did it to you.)
- Which character are you — Ryan, Silas, Caleb, or Ellis — and are you proud of your answer?
- The “chicken noodle soup” scene. You know the one. Say it.
- Tell me you read Anatomy of Release without telling me you read Anatomy of Release.
- Hot take: Caleb’s voicemail to Silas is one of the best character moments in recent romance fiction. Discuss.
- Share your highlighted pages. We know you have them.

Shareable Quote Cards

Pull any of the quotes from Section 7 and pair with:

- A photograph of an open road, an ocean, or a candle burning low
- Navy and gold color palette
- Tag @amberleefuller and use #AnatomyOfRelease

10 | THE FINAL QUESTION

At its deepest, *Anatomy of Release* is not a book about love. It is a book about permission. The permission to grieve without apology. To want without shame. To build a life that looks nothing like the one you were handed, and to believe — fully, finally — that you deserve to live in it.

Ryan Callahan spends thirty-eight chapters running, and one chapter stopping. She doesn't arrive at some polished version of herself. She arrives breathless, imperfect, still carrying her camera and her grief and her love of laundry day. She arrives as herself.

The author wrote this novel in twenty-one days while sitting with the most profound loss of her life. She did not know, then, that it would become a series. She did not know it would find you. She only knew it needed to exist, and she was willing to be the one to write it.

You made it here. However this story landed — gently or like a door opening in a hurricane — you made it to the last page. That is not nothing.

Final Reflection Questions

1. What did you hold onto while reading this book that you are now ready to release?
2. Ryan finds her constellation — a chosen family built from honest love. Who is in yours?
3. Which version of yourself has been keeping you alive? Have you thanked them?
4. What does the word “release” mean to you — now, after this story?
5. If you were to write yourself a note like the one Ryan leaves on the nightstand, what would it say?

“Release (n): The body’s surrender. The ache before the softening. The moment you stop holding what was never yours to keep — and feel it echo through every part of you that loved anyway.”

— *Anatomy of Release*, AmberLee Fuller

Welcome to the Chaos, Sunshine.

— AmberLee Fuller

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In honor of Tilton Lee Fuller Jr. • \$1 from every sale donated to the Michael J. Fox Foundation
