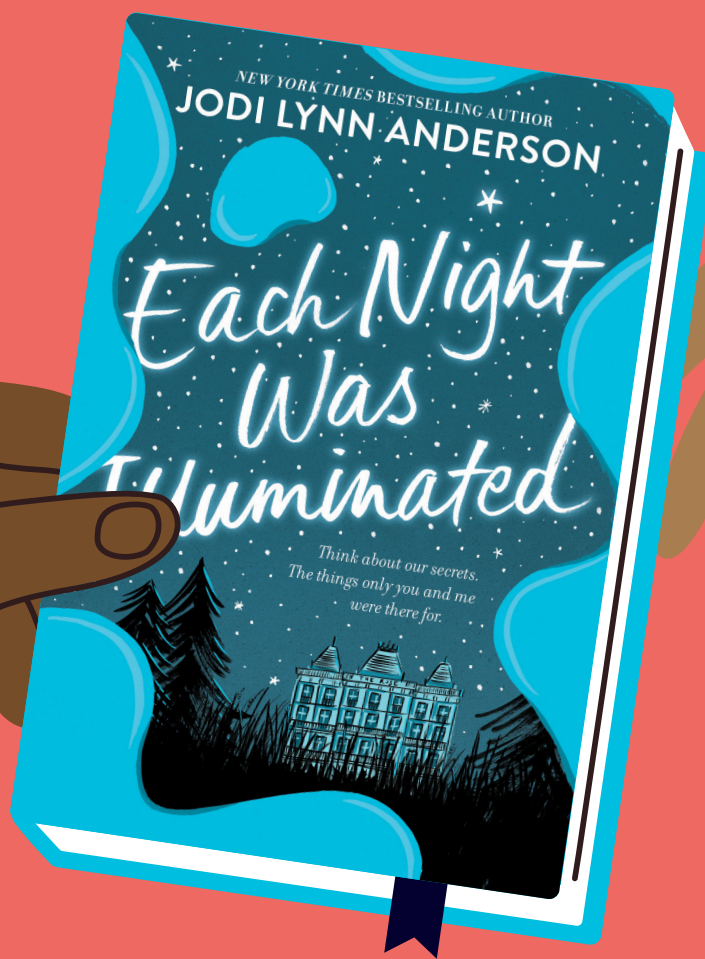
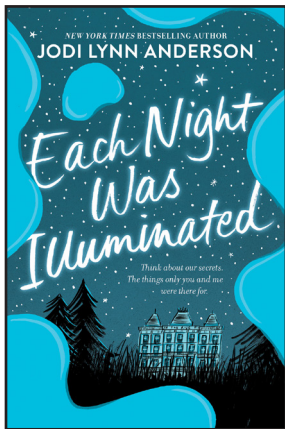


# Book Club Guide



Includes a letter from the author,  
book club playlist, conversation starters,  
reading recommendations, and more!



## About the Book

The day Cassie meets Elias, the strange boy visiting from Australia, they witness a horrific train crash. The shock of that moment bonds them in ways they cannot foresee, until years later Elias returns and the pair set out to find the ghosts of the people who died in the accident. Cautious, fearful Cassie and brave, rebellious Elias begin to grow closer over the course of the summer, until a confluence of events upends their nightly ghost hunts and sends Elias home forever. Cassie seeks to uncover a message Elias left for her in an abandoned hotel, a decision that puts her in mortal danger and challenges her to confront her deepest fears—and what she truly believes in.

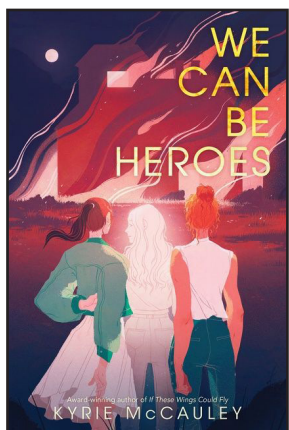
## About the Author

Jodi Lynn Anderson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Peaches*, *Midnight at the Electric*, *The Vanishing Season*, *Tiger Lily*, and the popular *May Bird* and *Thirteen Witches* trilogies. She holds an MFA in writing and literature from Bennington College and has taught for the Great Smoky Mountains Writing Program at UNC Asheville. She lives in Senegal, West Africa, with her husband and their children. You can visit her online at [jodilynnanderson.net](http://jodilynnanderson.net).



## Your next book club pick awaits!

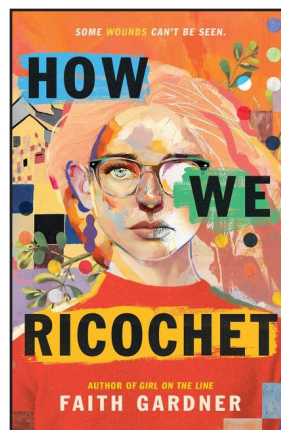
If you loved *Each Night Was Illuminated*, don't miss these beautiful reads tackling grief, mental health, friendship, and love.



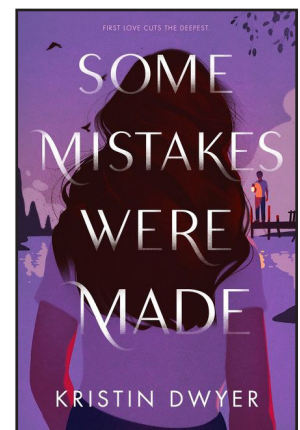
Two strangers are brought together after the murder of a mutual friend for one thing: vengeance.



A girl is forced to decide whether she wants to take up her mother's activist mantle after her mom is shot by the police.



After surviving a mass shooting, one teen struggles to find answers by befriendng the shooter's brother.



A moving exploration of messy and complicated relationships told in alternating timelines.

Visit [HC.com/bookclub](http://HC.com/bookclub) for more book recommendations and discussion starters.

## A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

This is a book about a storm, and it seems fitting that it began in my mind the way storms do: with strange wisps of things swirling around each other and picking up speed.

The year I started it, insomnia had come into my life like a lightning bolt. Most of the time I was half awake and half asleep, and at night I'd lie in bed envisioning scenes that felt like dreams: ghosts in a small town, an angel watching children cross a stream, a girl in the stacks of the New York Public Library, the glow of the Dark Ages. I knew a story was forming that I needed to tell, and to know why, I had to find out how these images were linked . . . what pulsed beneath them that tied them to my heart (because they were already tied, for reasons I didn't know).

And so I started writing what turned out to be a story about fear and rage, magic and faith. It begins with a girl and a boy—Cassie and Elias—who see a sudden accident as children and are changed by it in very different ways: Cassie loses her belief in God . . . and Elias sees ghosts rising from the wreckage. By the time the two reunite as teens, Cassie is spending sleepless nights reading about a saint from the Dark Ages whose faith she envies, and Elias is hunting for ghosts: in the town cemetery, in the river, in a crumbling, abandoned hotel. Amid a summer of endless rain sparked by climate change, the two embark on a nighttime friendship: Elias looking for the spirits Cassie doesn't believe in . . . and Cassie looking for something to believe.

I followed the growing intimacy of these two imaginary people through a year of wild weather and a pandemic and personal loss. At the time, there was so much anger around me it threatened to swallow me up. I had so many questions, and Cassie—witty and wise, but also guarded and drifting—was trying to find the answers: When the world and its weather hang in the balance, how do we get being angry right? And how do we listen for the faint whisper of faith when so many want to define it for us?

My hope for Cassie was that she could find a way to walk in the dark toward something unknown and possibly magic, as I was doing alongside her—to try to use her two hands to plant small seeds, and to reach for unpromised things. My books are—at the bottom of it—letters to someone I don't know yet but want to find. I hope that across these figments—half-dreamt cities and rainy summer nights and abandoned hotels and first love—you and I connect, and spur each other on. I hope the ghosts you find here bring you strength.

Warmly,  
Jodi



## Questions to Get the Conversation Started

1. In the prologue, Cassie reflects on something Elias said to her: *Think about our secrets. The things only you and me were there for.* Why do you think the shared secret of witnessing the train crash bonded Cassie and Elias? Discuss the secrets she keeps from her family. How do these secrets protect and also harm her?
2. Trauma is woven throughout *Each Night Was Illuminated*. Examples include the abandonment of the family by Cassie's mother, witnessing the train crash, nearly losing Gabe, and the loss of home and habitat. Discuss the trauma of loss in Cassie's life. How does she cope? How does she also avoid her underlying feelings of the traumatic events she has experienced? Likewise, how does Elias manage the trauma that climate change has brought to his homeland? How are his search for ghosts and the horror of witnessing people die interconnected?
3. Discuss the role of faith and religion in the story. Why do Father James Copper's attitudes about the world make Cassie bristle? Why do you think Cassie is so drawn to Sister Suzanne? After Cassie witnesses the train crash, she ceases to believe in God, although she continues to pray. Why do you think she is of two minds? Besides family expectations, why do you think Cassie stays connected to the church?
4. Discuss the evolution of Cassie and Elias's relationship. What were your thoughts as they became closer? Why does Cassie ultimately leave her family to join Elias?
5. The ravages of climate change play an important role in the story, ultimately culminating in a devastating hurricane reminiscent of Hurricane Sandy, which devastated the Atlantic coast, from the Caribbean to Canada, in 2012. For Elias, the changing climate in his native Australia has already forced his family to relocate. When Elias shares with Cassie his plan to join an effort to reconstruct dunes on an eroding Australian beach, Cassie says, "You can't fight the ocean, it's futile. Like . . . it's the *ocean* and you're . . . *a guy*" (p. 92). Do you agree with Cassie? Do you think that human beings can undo the damages of climate change? Discuss your thoughts and feelings about the climate crisis and how you think it will affect your future.
6. Cassie is often wracked with fear and anxiety. One manifestation of her anxiety is her insomnia. Anxiety among children, adolescents, and young adults is at an all-time high. Discuss examples of Cassie's anxiety and how you can or cannot relate to her feelings.
7. Cassie has assumed the role of surrogate mother to her brother, Gabe. How does this role simultaneously mature and stress her? Why do you think that Cassie feels responsible for mothering her little brother? The mother who abandoned the family is referred to only a few times in the text. How does the loss of her mother color Cassie's sense of fear and dread?
8. Ever since Cassie stopped believing in God, she feels like an outsider in her very devout Catholic family. Cassie observes that her sister, Thea, is "suspicious of anything ,weird, which was basically anything that made her uncomfortable" (p. 36). Discuss aspects of the "us against them" mentality of Cassie's dad, her sister, Father James, and many of the community members. What do you think makes these people receptive to Father James's message? How does he exploit and conflate both valid and invalid fears?
9. After Elias comes back to town and reconnects with Cassie, he invites her to accompany him on ghost-hunting missions to locate the spirits of the Van Doren family, who perished in the train crash. Discuss what ghosts mean to both Cassie and Elias. Why does Elias believe he can find the Van Doren ghosts, while Cassie thinks that is magical thinking? When Cassie encounters Mrs. Van Doren's ghost in chapter 24, she must make a decision stay in the hotel as it collapses or attempt to swim underwater to safety. The ghost says, "Look. Cassie, I'm sorry about all of it. The world is full of terrors; there's no way around it. There's nothing more foolish than taking that on. But you have to decide whether to be foolish. Weirder things have happened than that it turns out there's something to believe in anyway" (p. 212). How does this statement relate to decisions you've made in the past?
10. On page 72, Cassie and Elias encounter the Van Doren tomb. Inscribed on the headstone is AD MELIORA, Latin for "toward better things." What makes Cassie realize that she must move toward better things in her own life? By leaving home and reuniting with Elias, what is Cassie ultimately deciding to believe in? How is the act one of hope?

# Each Night Was Illuminated: The Playlist

Get your club on the same page with a custom playlist curated by the author.

Listen on Apple Music here

Click here for a ready-made soundtrack!

## 1. The Night We Met // Lord Huron

Perfectly embodies what it feels like to want—even need—so badly to go back in time . . . and the unbearableness of not being able to.

## 2. Love Is All I Am // Dawes

This band has been close to my heart since I stumbled onto them playing in a tiny club when they were just beginning to make it big. (They looked so surprised people showed up that it was forever endearing.) Their lyrics are so honest and authentic, and the feel of this song embodies the effortlessness and simplicity Cassie and Elias feel with each other.

## 3. Magic // Coldplay

I don't know what it is about this song that feels like crushing on someone specifically at night—but that's what it brought to the story: the nighttime infatuation feel. Plus any song with the word *magic* in it is always going to be my jam.

## 4. Mad World // Michael Andrews and Gary Jules

I first heard this song in one of my favorite-ever movies, *Donnie-Darko*, and for me it captures the disillusionment and strangeness and eeriness and magic of the world as Cassie sees it.

## 5. The Letter // Natalie Merchant

Embodies what it feels like to be full of important things you haven't said to someone. As Cassie and I are both introverts, it resonated.

## 6. Flugufrelsarinn // Sigur Rós

The restless thrum of this reminds me of insomnia while at the same time sounding kind of sexy. So in my mind it's the background of Cassie's struggles to sleep and her physical attraction to Elias.

## 7. Monsters // Band of Horses

It's hard to put into words what this song means to me and what difficult things it has carried me through! It embodies so much of what this book is about and where it came from: the ugliness that sometimes surrounds us and, at the same time, how shockingly beautiful people can be.

## 8. Seasons (Waiting on You) // Future Islands


My husband introduced me to this song when I was feeling helpless . . . it's about doing what you can in the face of enormous events beyond your control. I wanted to give the courage to Cassie that this song gives to me.

## 9. Vertigo // Khalid

To me this sounds like faith: magical, questioning, surreal, otherworldly. Khalid is on constant rotation in my life!

## 10. We Can't Stop // Miley Cyrus

I don't think this book would have existed if it weren't for this song. When I met the man who first inspired Cassie's nemesis, Father James, he was complaining about Miley Cyrus dressing too sexy (as you do when you're a judgey patriarch). And I got fixated on how absurd this was and soon started listening to this song on my daily jogs to feel my feelings. Father James came from those jogs with Miley.

 I almost always make a playlist to help me write a book—and some playlists I follow pretty obsessively, trying to match the tone and tempo and atmosphere of the music in what I write. So playlists are an essential part of the process for me, like guideposts for when I can't feel my way inside the story on my own. Here's the one I made and listened to again and again while writing this novel. 