

"An idyllic setting turns deadly in Ally Condie's smart and twisty debut adult thriller." —Megan Miranda

# THE UNWEDDING

A Novel



# ALLY CONDIE

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

# BOOK CLUB KIT

# A NOTE FROM ALLY CONDIE

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I think that we've all had our worlds pulled out from under us at some point in our life. Have you ever found yourself—either literally or figuratively—at the limit of your known world? Looking out, and not knowing what comes next?

In **THE UNWEDDING**, the main character, Ellery, is doing exactly that. After the dissolution of her marriage, she's come to Broken Point, a gorgeous resort in Big Sur, California. It was supposed to be her twentieth anniversary trip. Instead, she's alone at the end of the world in one of its most beautiful places.

Loss brings you to the edge. And when you jump—or fall—you might find new friends, new experiences, new food, new life—or you might die.



Photo © Erin Summerill

I've always loved places where nature and humanity intersect—where the most striking parts of the world are available to us as people, and how we try to make sense of them, capture them in art, and/or attempt to tame them (the latter of which we do at our own risk). I think this love stems from growing up in the high desert of southern Utah, where red rock is beautiful, flash floods are common, and you underestimate nature at your own risk. After the end of my own marriage, I went to Big Sur. The cliff edges, the landslides, the ocean—it was all profoundly beautiful. And I felt profoundly lonely. Traveling without my children or my former husband felt strange. I found myself looking at the other guests, wondering about them, making up stories in my mind to distract myself from all the people I was missing. Was that couple really as happy as they seemed? Who were the lovely young people at the next table, and what was in store for them? Were those people traveling together as lovers, or as friends? Everyone seemed fascinating. And, alone as no one else was, I was in a perfect position to observe. To notice. A lifetime of reading Agatha Christie novels kicked in. If anyone died, I thought, I'd be the one the police would ask about all the others.

I've always loved murder mysteries, but I thought they would be the one thing I'd never write. I've written and published young adult novels (like **MATCHED**) middle grade novels, picture books, and short stories. Then, a few years ago, my middle grade novel **SUMMERLOST** was nominated by the Mystery Writers of America as the Best Juvenile Mystery in the year it was published. I was beyond honored. Had I written a mystery?!?

And there, in Big Sur, I thought, Maybe I can do it again.

Writing **THE UNWEDDING** was—as strange as it might sound—some of the most fun I've ever had as an author. I got to write about love and loss and nature and art and death and life. I hope that there is something in these pages for you, and I am deeply grateful to you for spending some of your time with my book.

Ally

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Big Sur, California, sets the stage for this enticing mystery and provides a stunning landscape for our cast of characters to lose themselves in. In what ways was this setting an asset to the storytelling by providing more than a backdrop for the story to unfold?
2. A recurring theme that is explored throughout the narrative is that of grand loneliness. What is the story saying about these emotions and how are they explored through the various characters?
3. Ellery is going through a tremendous life change with the divorce from Luke, the man she thought she would spend the rest of her life with. In what ways does the story handle the topic of beginning again and starting a new chapter later in life? How does that impact the story and Ellery's growth as a character?
4. Ravi and Nina at first appear to be polar opposites to Ellery, as glamorous and carefree individuals who often indulge in the finer things life has to offer. How does their relationship evolve throughout the course of the novel? In what ways have they saved Ellery, both literally and figuratively?
5. Motherhood is a central topic of the novel and plays a big part in many of the characters' lives. Which iteration of motherhood felt most significant to your reading and how did it impact the overall narrative?
6. There are many different forms of relationships that play out in the narrative, including platonic, familial, and romantic. Which characters relationship felt the most consequential to the story?
7. *The Unwedding* is a nightmare scenario for a day that is meant to be joyous and filled with love. Describe a time that you went to a wedding that was less than ideal.
8. There is a clear class disparity between many of the characters throughout the story. For some luxury is easily accessible, for others this is the opportunity of a lifetime. In what ways does the novel address this issue of economic divide between the characters and how does it propel the story?
9. Ellery's past traumas resurface in the face of this new horror, but she is keen on discovering the truth behind Ben and Matt's deaths. In what way has this new experience allowed Ellery to face her fears and set her on the road towards healing?
10. The cards presented to the guests at Broken Point provide important details on the conditions of the day, and not just in terms of the weather. The quotations on the cards work as markers throughout the story. How did this help guide the narrative, and did these quotes set expectations for the story's progression?

# THE “AIDAN STONE”

## WHITE CHOCOLATE COCONUT BUNDT CAKE

Credited to [Cake by Courtney](#)

This cake was made famous by the fictional celebrity Aidan Stone, who sends it to his fabulous celeb friends for Christmas. (Similar to another blockbuster star who enjoys jumping out of airplanes and jumping on sofas... if you catch our drift.)

When Ellery receives this beautiful cake from an anonymous sender, she's not sure what to think. But we know you'll think it's delicious!

### INGREDIENTS

- **FOR THE COCONUT CAKE**

- 3 cups (360 g) all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons (8 g) baking powder
- 1 teaspoon (6 g) salt
- ½ cup (125 g) canned coconut milk, mixed before measuring
- ½ cup (120 g) buttermilk, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon (16 g) coconut emulsion or extract
- 1 ¾ cups (350 g) granulated sugar
- 1 cup (226 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 4 ounces white chocolate, melted
- 3 eggs, at room temperature
- 2 egg whites, at room temperature

- **FOR THE COCONUT BUTTERCREAM**

- ½ cup (113 g) unsalted butter, slightly cold
- 4 ounces cream cheese
- 2 ½ cups (312.5 g) powdered sugar, measured then sifted
- 1 teaspoon (5.3 g) coconut emulsion
- Pinch of salt

- **GARNISH**

- 1 cup (95 g) sweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup (95 g) toasted coconut, I buy mine pre-toasted from Orson Gygi
- 1 cup toffee baking bits

# THE “AIDAN STONE” WHITE CHOCOLATE COCONUT BUNDT CAKE

## DIRECTIONS

### 1. FOR THE WHITE CHOCOLATE COCONUT CAKE

- a. Preheat your oven to 325 degrees F. Spray a 12-cup bundt pan with nonstick spray. Dust with granulated sugar. Set aside.
- b. In a medium size bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
- c. In a small mixing bowl, stir together the coconut milk, buttermilk, and coconut emulsion. Set aside.
- d. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until light in color and fluffy in texture, about 2 to 3 minutes.
- e. Stir in the melted white chocolate, followed by the eggs and egg whites, making sure to scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl in between additions.
- f. Continue to beat on medium-high speed for about 2 minutes, until the mixture gets smooth in texture and slightly bigger in volume.
- g. With the mixer on low speed, add  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the flour mixture, followed by  $\frac{1}{2}$  the coconut mixture, another  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the flour, the second  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the coconut mixture, and then the remaining flour mixture. Stir until just combined.
- h. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Sprinkle the top of the cake (which turns into the bottom) with the toasted coconut and then cover with the toffee bits (the coconut flakes need to go first so you can cover them with the toffee to help prevent the flakes from browning too much). Bake for 50 to 55 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out with a few moist crumbs on it.
- i. Remove from oven and place the bundt pan on a cooling rack to cool completely. Allow the cake to cool for about an hour, until it's room temperature, before inverting the cake on a cake stand. Allowing the cake to cool completely in the pan helps the cake to release from the sides cleanly when it's time to take the cake out

### • FOR THE COCONUT BUTTERCREAM

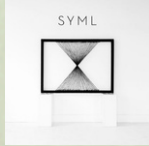
- In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter and cream cheese for about 2 minutes, until lighter in color and fluffier in texture.
- With the mixer on low, gradually add the sifted powdered sugar, one cup at a time, mixing a little in between each addition.
- Stir in the coconut emulsion and salt.
- Turn the mixer to medium-high speed and beat for an additional 3 to 5 minutes. The buttercream will become lighter in color and texture.

### • ASSEMBLY

- Spread or pipe the buttercream on top of the cake. Cover with shredded coconut.

# THE UNWEDDING PLAYLIST

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**Where's My Love**  
SYML



**Gimme Love**  
Sia



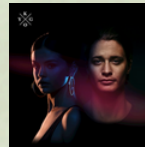
**Nothing Breaks Like a Heart**  
Mark Ronson, Miley Cyrus)



**The Last Goodbye**  
The Kills



**Light Years**  
The National



**It Ain't Me**  
Kygo, Selena Gomez



**Runaway Horses**  
The Killers, Phoebe  
Bridgers



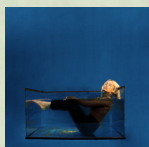
**Deep Water**  
American Authors



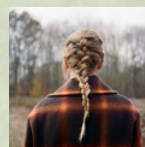
**Where Are You Now**  
Lost Frequencies, Calum  
Scott



**PROTECTOR**  
Beyoncé, Rumi Carter



**Save Myself**  
Ashe



**no body, no crime**  
Taylor Swift, HAIM



**Meet Me in the Woods**  
Lord Huron



**Lost and Found**  
Ellie Goulding

**LISTEN ON SPOTIFY HERE**

