

The
Catch

BOOK CLUB KIT

Alison

Fairbrother

a novel

“THE CATCH” by James Adler

but,
if time could kneel, as a catcher
shifts to his knees when the pitch is wild

For the summer we played in ruffled green grass,
or indoors if the sky shivered with rain,

Tossing the ball from end to end
In dusty store aisles.

Would the solid walls still echo with the hollow
slaps of our hands to leather mitts,

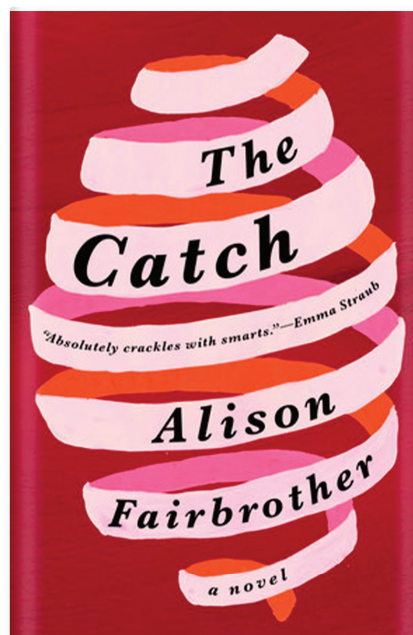
Or would I leave you there
your arms outstretched

as if to receive me.



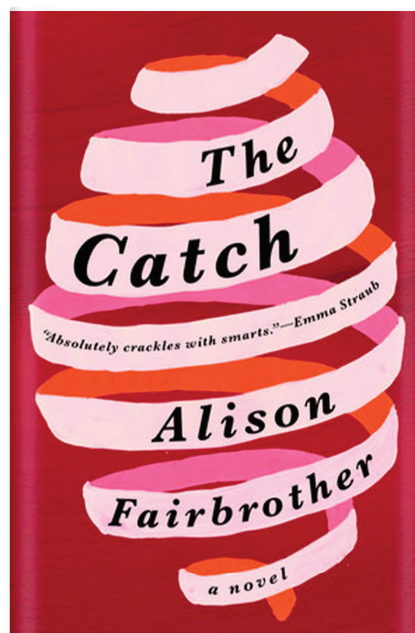
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you interpret Jim's poem, "The Catch," when you first read it? (If you need a refresher, turn to the previous page of this kit!) How did you interpret the poem by the end of the book?
2. Describe Ellie's relationship with her half-siblings. What traits do the kids share? How are they different?
3. In what ways does Ellie look up to her father? As she learns more about him after his death, how does her opinion of him change?
4. What does the baseball symbolize for Ellie? How does its meaning evolve over the course of the novel?
5. "When you were a child of divorce you had to be two versions of yourself, one at your mother's house and one at your father's. But neither one was your real self," Ellie says. Who is she with each of her parents? How would you describe her "real self"?
6. Discuss Ellie's grieving process. Where does she turn? What does she think will make her feel better? What does she find that actually does?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. Ellie says of her grief: “That’s another thing I was learning—I had to read how much people could handle; I had to tuck in my sadness when too much of it showed.” Have you ever experienced this? Why do you think topics like death and grief are so difficult for people to face? How could the people around her have supported her better?
8. Discuss Ellie’s relationship with Lucas. Do you think they belong together? Why or why not?
9. How did Larry’s story make you think differently about Jim? Do you think Jim did regret his actions, decades later?
10. How does Ellie feel when she finally talks to her mother about the tie rack? What revelations does this bring?
11. Is this a coming-of-age novel? If so, how does it confirm or challenge your understanding of what it means to “come-of-age”?
12. What do you think the title “The Catch” means, besides it being the title of Ellie’s father’s poem?
13. What do you imagine Ellie’s life could look like after the end of the book? Who will she be?



Razzleberry Fring Frongs

Whether you're celebrating summer, New Year, or just jazzing up your book club meeting, no party is complete without a Razzleberry Fring Frong.



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 oz. ginger ale
- 2 oz. gin (optional)
- 4 oz. Cran-raspberry juice or other fruit juice of your choice
- Ice cubes
- Fresh raspberries for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine the ginger ale, gin (if you're making adult drinks), and juice into a glass, stirring lightly. The fancier the glass, the better!
2. Add ice.
3. Top with as many fresh raspberries as you please.

Summer Thanksgiving Turkey Burger

Celebrate Summer Thanksgiving with the Adlers by indulging in a hot-weather staple—a burger—made with the flavors of the holiday, like cranberry sauce and turkey.

CRANBERRY SAUCE

- 1 lb. fresh cranberries
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- Juice from half an orange
- Splash of rum
- Pinch of cayenne pepper
- Pinch of black pepper
- 1 tsp. orange zest
- Coarse sea salt

In a saucepan over high heat, dissolve the sugar into water. Add the cranberries, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla extract, orange juice, rum, cayenne pepper, black pepper, and bring to a rapid boil. Stir occasionally until mixture has cooked down to desired consistency. This can take anywhere between 12–20 minutes, depending on how you like your cranberry sauce. I cooked mine for about 20 minutes. When you’ve reached your desired consistency, remove from heat and add the orange zest. Mix everything together and set aside to cool slightly.

ONION STRAWS

- ½ onion, sliced into thin rings
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- ½ tsp. Hungarian paprika (regular is also fine)
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 4 cups vegetable oil for frying

Soak the onion rings in the buttermilk for at least 30 minutes or up to 24 hours. Mix the flour, baking powder, and remaining seasonings together. Place the buttermilk-soaked onions into the flour mixture. Don’t let too much of the buttermilk drip off the onions before flouring them because this is what will give us a nice crust. Dredge the onions into the flour mixture well to make sure they are evenly coated. Place in the refrigerator or freezer for about 20 minutes to let the flour set and adhere. Heat the vegetable oil to 360°F and fry the onions until golden brown, about 3–5 minutes. Remove from fryer to drain on a paper towel and immediately season with sea salt.

TURKEY BURGERS



- 1 lb. ground turkey, 85% lean
- 3 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp. granulated onion
- ½ tsp. granulated garlic
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme
- 1 tsp. fresh sage, chopped fine, plus 8–12 whole sage leaves for frying
- Generous pinch of red pepper flakes
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Sea salt
- 6 slices applewood-smoked bacon, cooked to desired crispness
- Brie cheese
- Dijon mustard
- Mayonnaise
- 3 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 3 hamburger buns

1. Heat your oven to 400°F.
2. Mix the ground turkey, Worcestershire, melted butter, fresh herbs, and seasonings in a large bowl until evenly combined. Form the mixture into 3 equal sized patties. I use a large biscuit cutter to help form my patties and keep them from turning into meatballs. If you experience this problem, use this method.
3. In a large oven-proof skillet or cast-iron pan, heat 3 tablespoons of vegetable oil over medium heat, just until you start to see wisps of smoke (if it's totally smoking, you've gone too far). Place each patty into the skillet and cook for about 4 to 6 minutes on each side or until juices run clear. **DO NOT PRESS DOWN ON YOUR BURGER!** We don't want all of that delicious flavor to seep out and leave us with a dry patty. While the burgers are cooking, place the whole sage leaves into the oil inside of the pan so they can fry up crisp, about 2 minutes.
4. Remove skillet from heat and let's start building this monster.
5. Separate and butter the insides of your hamburger buns lightly. Toast them in the 400°F oven until golden brown, about 5 minutes or so. Keep an eye on it so that it doesn't burn. Remove and set aside.
6. With the burgers still in the skillet, place the bacon on top of the burger first. Then top with creamy brie cheese. Place the skillet into the oven on the middle rack so that the cheese can melt beautifully and dramatically, about 2 to 3 minutes. Pull the skillet out of the oven, and pile on the crispy onions and 3 to 4 fried sage leaves per burger.
7. Spread cranberry sauce on the bottom bun and put the burger on top of that. Then spread a thin layer of mayo and Dijon mustard on the top bun.



PLAY:
ASTRAL WEEKS
BY VAN MORRISON

Listen to the album straight through—
ideally on vinyl. Feel free to repeat it multiple times;
Jim would be proud.