

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# SANDRA BROWN

A NOVEL

# OUT OF NOWHERE

ENHANCED READING  
GROUP GUIDE

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. The day of the fair, Elle did laundry and other light housekeeping before settling into her home office to work, all while taking care of Charlie. Discuss the idea of women doing it all versus having it all and how Elle's situation in this scene was very recently experienced by many parents during the pandemic.
2. In *Out of Nowhere*, Brown covers a mass shooting and its reverberations from a deeply human angle. How does the novel comment on the issue of gun violence in America?
3. Several conversations in the novel focus on the shooter's motivation. Compton, in chapter 5, lists a number of potential factors, such as radicalization, mental illness, and rage resulting from ridicule, shaming, or romantic rejection. Compare these fictional discussions to other contributing factors often discussed in current events, such as social media and anxiety.
4. Do you believe that we, as a society, can predict or prevent violent acts? Why or why not?
5. Calder refuses to recognize himself as a hero, while others reiterate again and again that his actions were not



only valiant but also selfless. Discuss where this hesitancy stems from in Calder's eyes and the concept of survivors' guilt.

6. After the shooting, Elle says that the only thing she wants is justice. In the aftermath of such a horrific event, knowing how much is often at play in these kinds of situations, what does justice look like in your eyes? Compare and contrast "punitive justice" with "restorative justice."

7. At the police precinct, Calder doesn't know what to say to Elle—he's afraid that whatever condolence he tries to convey will sound insensitive and insincere. Have you ever found yourself at a loss for words while trying to express grief or sympathy? Do you believe words alone can express comfort, sorrow, or regret? Why or why not?

8. Calder's relationship with Shauna falls apart after the shooting. Calder feels that Shauna lacks empathy for his situation, while Shauna feels that Calder is intentionally sabotaging any and all attempts to "return to normal." Have you ever had a viscerally different reaction to a delicate emotional situation than someone close to you? If so, how did the conflict—or resolution—affect your relationship?

9. Calder refuses to go on camera to discuss what happened at the county fair. Shauna, by contrast, claims that through story, she can humanize those who have been harmed rather than group victims together as “grim statistics.” Did you agree with Calder’s decision here? Or did you, in principle, agree with Shauna’s argument?

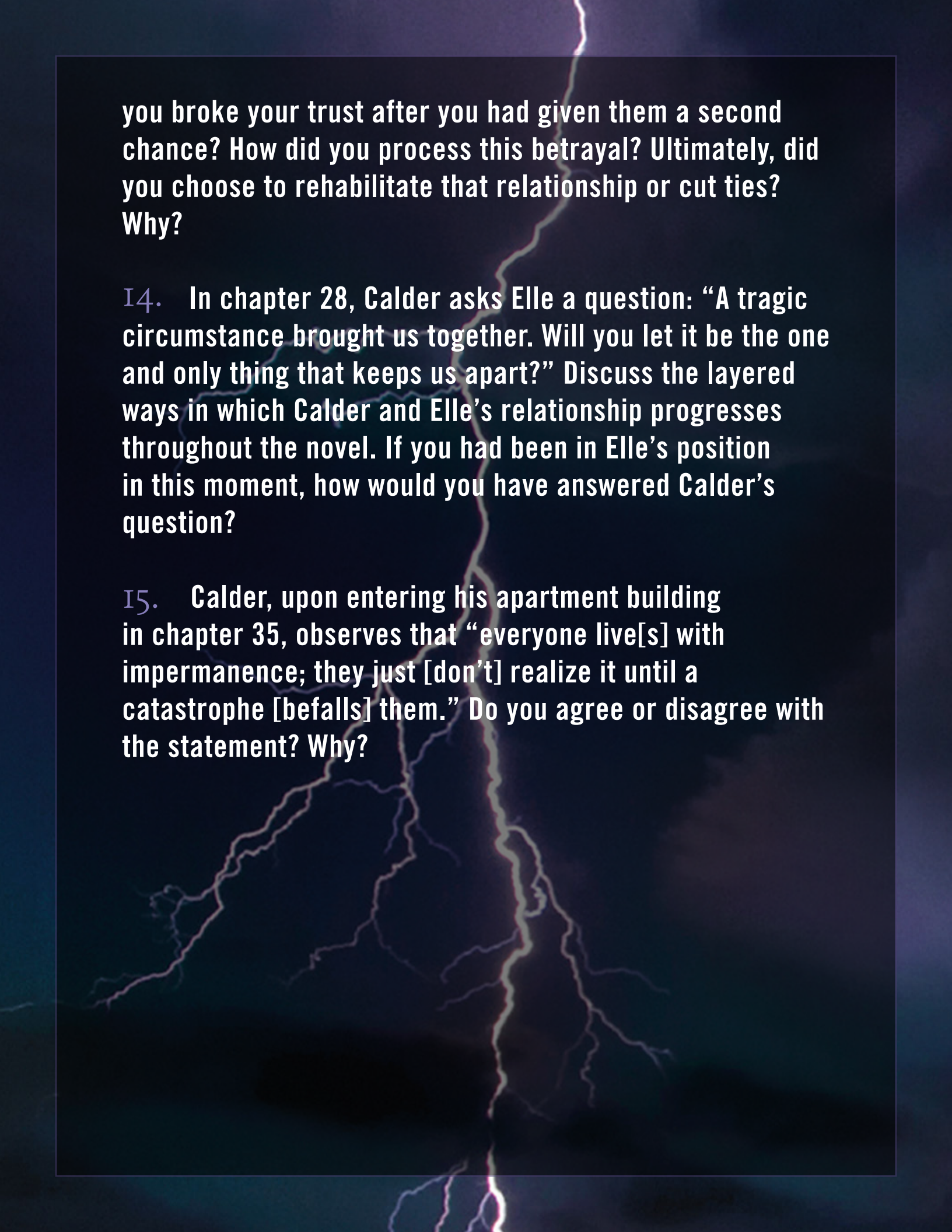
10. Discuss Shauna as a character. Did you admire her relentlessness, as a journalist, in trying to break a story? Or do you feel that Shauna ethically crossed a line in her efforts to report on the Fairground shooting?

11. At the therapy session for family members, Dr. Sinclair discusses what survivors of traumatic events typically experience, such as depression, nightmares, and mood swings. Discuss the many ways in which people react to trauma and why they often vary from person to person.

12. In Elle, Calder finds a sense of peace he’s never felt before in his life. What is the number one quality you feel is important to have in (or receive from) a life partner? Why?

13. In chapter 31, when Glenda and Elle are with Perkins and Compton, Elle has a very emotional moment in the bathroom, feeling gullible and taken advantage of, wondering why she ever let herself trust Calder. Have you ever been in a similar situation, where someone close to





you broke your trust after you had given them a second chance? How did you process this betrayal? Ultimately, did you choose to rehabilitate that relationship or cut ties? Why?

14. In chapter 28, Calder asks Elle a question: “A tragic circumstance brought us together. Will you let it be the one and only thing that keeps us apart?” Discuss the layered ways in which Calder and Elle’s relationship progresses throughout the novel. If you had been in Elle’s position in this moment, how would you have answered Calder’s question?

15. Calder, upon entering his apartment building in chapter 35, observes that “everyone live[s] with impermanence; they just [don’t] realize it until a catastrophe [befalls] them.” Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

# BACKSTORY

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For every book, I write an “in a nutshell” synopsis of the story, a basic “What’s it about?” It’s a tool I use to hone down four hundred plus pages into one concise sentence that will arouse readers’ curiosity, plant in their minds subliminal questions, and leave them wanting to know what’s going to happen and to whom.

Writing that summarized storyline for *Out of Nowhere* was difficult because the book begins with the most unspeakable occurrence in our society’s new reality: a mass shooting.

Yes...it involves an egregious loss. But let me emphasize that this isn’t a story about death. It’s about *survival*.

So, the nutshell for *Out of Nowhere*: in an instant of unthinkable tragedy, the destinies of two strangers collide.

Allow me to add three more words: collide *and become entwined*.

That raises the question of who these strangers are.

**Calder Hudson:** age thirty-seven, overachiever, successful, affluent, charming, and self-confident to the point of arrogance. He has a storehouse of grown-up toys, an expensive wardrobe, and a gorgeous girlfriend who lives with him in a glitzy high-rise condo in downtown Dallas. His life couldn’t possibly be more charmed.

**Elle Portman:** midthirties, author and illustrator of children’s books, a stay-at-home single mom to the love of





her life, her two-year-old son, Charlie. They live quietly and contentedly in a suburban neighborhood of Fort Worth, thirty miles west of, but a world apart from, Calder.

The “unthinkable tragedy” that causes that fateful collision?

A mass shooting at a county fair.

To say that’s a distressing subject is an understatement. It’s a topic I would ordinarily avoid. As I’m sure you do, I react to hearing of yet another with dismay and abject sadness. I can’t even imagine what it would be like to find oneself in that terrifying circumstance, to miraculously survive it, and then to endure the strife-embroiled aftermath.

But, as storytellers are wont to do, I did. Imagine, that is.

Did I want to write about a mass shooting? Not really. But I was compelled to write about people trying to pick up where their lives suddenly had left off. How do they go about rebuilding when crucial pieces of the past are now fractured or missing?

And characters waiting restlessly in the wings have a way of applying pressure to the author to tell their story. Elle and Calder emerged from my subconscious as individuals whose worlds had entirely different landscapes...until those worlds were upended by a shared horrific experience. Now, each is struggling to reshape their here-and-now into some form of normalcy.

If not for that unpredictable, inexplicable, and tragic occurrence at the fairground, it’s unlikely that they ever

would have crossed paths. But because of the ruthless act of another, their destinies intersected. Because of a caprice of physics, they became intertwined.

Now, you're asking, How so? What happened?

I can go no further here without giving away too much. Much of the conflict revolves around Calder and Elle trying to reconcile their unfathomable connection with a most untimely attraction to each other. But *Out of Nowhere* is also a novel of suspense. A clear and present danger is bearing down on them. The resultant mind game leads to a wild chase that culminates in a twist that I hope you won't see coming. Yes, this story packs an emotional punch, but it contains all the elements that readers of Sandra Brown have come to expect.

If you take nothing else away from reading this backstory, please note this: I don't presume to know what it's like to suffer through a tragic experience like the one portrayed in this work of fiction. Many do, though. They're living their stories, and those are brutally real.

I did my best, with as much authenticity and empathy as I could, to depict their heartbreak, despair, and anger. I acknowledge that I fell short of capturing on paper the enormity of their struggle to stay afloat in the wake of a catastrophe.

I wrote this book in observance of those killed or injured in mass shootings—and those who have survived, whom I rank among the casualties.

Sandra Brown