

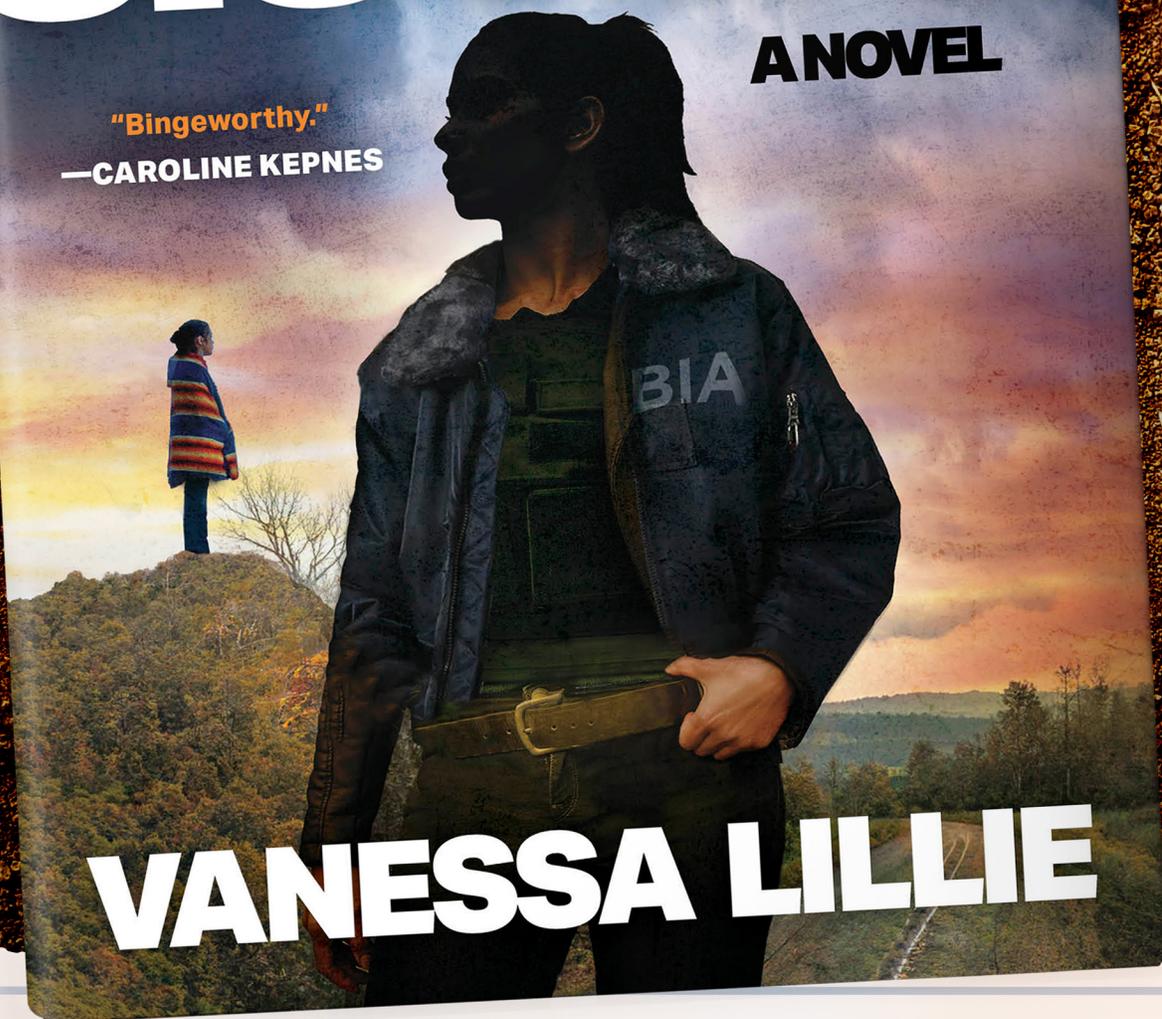
**"Sets its hooks on page one and then pulls relentlessly and colorfully through buried secrets and rediscovered Native heritage."**

**—#1 New York Times bestselling author C. J. BOX**

# BLOOD SISTERS

**A NOVEL**

**"Bingeworthy."**  
**—CAROLINE KEPNES**



**VANESSA LILLIE**

**BOOK CLUB KIT**

BERKLEY

Dear Reader,

If I could, I'd show you around Northeastern Oklahoma in my grandpa Ernie's lime-green pickup (we're pretending here, so I can drive a stick shift). We'd obviously get slushies from Sonic before cruising main street in my hometown of Miami's (Mi-am-MUH).

I'd show off Chapters bookstore; the beloved Miami Public Library, where I've clocked a lot of hours; and the Coleman Theatre, almost one hundred years old, which hosted the likes of Mo, Larry and Curly.

We could go by my childhood home on D Street and see the creek I grew up next to that would sometimes turn orange, leaving the banks stained a bright rust.

This is where our tour takes a turn, I'm afraid. That creek leads to a polluted river fed by thousands of miles of abandoned underground mines that run through Northeastern Oklahoma.

Following the water leads us to the town—ghost town—of Picher, which once belonged to the Quapaw tribe. When minerals were discovered in 1913, however, the land and mineral rights were stolen by the government and big mining companies. For thirty years, billions of dollars were made; in fact, half the lead and zinc used in World War I came from those mines. Once the industry went bust, the Quapaw tribe and the people who'd moved to Picher were stuck in what many in the media dubbed "the most toxic town in America."

Along the dirt road, we pass memorials on wooden lampposts and others just on a barbed-wire fence. Placed by hands that once held those they honor, we see ribbons, photos, and



artificial flowers as reminders that something terrible happened to someone who is still loved and missed. Mostly it's women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who have gone missing or have been found murdered—many Native, their cases unsolved, often, without remains to bury.

We end the tour in the heart of Picher, where piles of chat—toxic whiteish-gray chipped rocks—loom over us like a mountain range grown on the prairie. While dangerous, they are oddly beautiful in the pinkish purple Oklahoma sunset, though they make this land as uninhabitable as the surface of the moon.

While I can't drive you around my hometown in real life, I'm honored to share my new suspense novel set there—*Blood Sisters*—and introduce you to Syd Walker, a main character who not only shares my family's Cherokee surname but also carries the heart of the book with her purpose: seeking justice.

*Blood Sisters* is a story of sisterhood—in all the forms—by blood and by love, the bonds that extend all our life and beyond it. I'm honored to share the parts of Northeastern Oklahoma that live and breathe in my memory and imagination, to explore real places and enduring injustices, all within the pages of fiction.

I'm so grateful you've chosen *Blood Sisters* for your book club and look forward to sharing Syd's story with you.

Vanessa Lillie



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Syd has used distance (both emotional and literal) to create boundaries with her sister, Emma Lou, and to some degree with her whole family. Do you think this approach is working for her, or is there an approach you think would have been better?
2. There's a lot of research and discussion online and in the media about the concept of trauma living in our bodies and even in our DNA. Did you see such trauma in Syd? And in what ways did it manifest?
3. While Syd works for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the US government, there's a long history of injustice toward Native people by those entities. How do you think Syd reconciles her job and her heritage?
4. Syd is trying to identify remains and find her sister, both cases echoing real issues of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S). What stood in Syd's way of finding the truth, and does that resonate with what you know of current MMIWG2S cases?
5. Syd's pursuit of justice at any cost put her into some dangerous situations. Were there moments you might have put yourself at similar risk? Do you think she was too influenced by her past trauma and connection to the cases? Did Jo make a mistake in sending her to Oklahoma?
6. Syd's mother, June, and sister, Emma Lou, start to work for a local methadone and prescription business. These were the early days of what would be called "pill mills," but there are arguments that they kept some people from more dangerous drugs as well as provided jobs in communities that needed them. Did you see only Syd's side of the argument? Was she too dismissive?
7. While Syd was born and raised in Northeast Oklahoma, there's still a lot of history—Native and otherwise—she's learning as she goes. Did her dig into the truth resonate with you? Have you investigated the history of the land you live on or on which you were born? What did you find, and does any of that echo Syd's own journey?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. While Syd is in Oklahoma, her wife, Mal, is giving them some space to see if motherhood is really something Syd wants. Did you see changes in Syd that indicate she is ready to be a parent, or was it more her fear of losing Mal that motivated her?
9. Cody is the father of Syd's niece and Emma Lou's partner, but from the beginning, Syd is dismissive of his capacity for change. Yet Syd eventually realizes that she and Cody have much more in common than she was willing to see. Did you notice this as well, and do you think it's a fair assessment of their relationship? If she'd been more open or kinder to him earlier, could she have found her sister sooner?
10. Guilt toward and connection to Luna as demonstrated by being blood sisters haunts Syd (almost literally) throughout the story. How does the loss of Luna impact Syd's relationships, and what could having her back mean?

