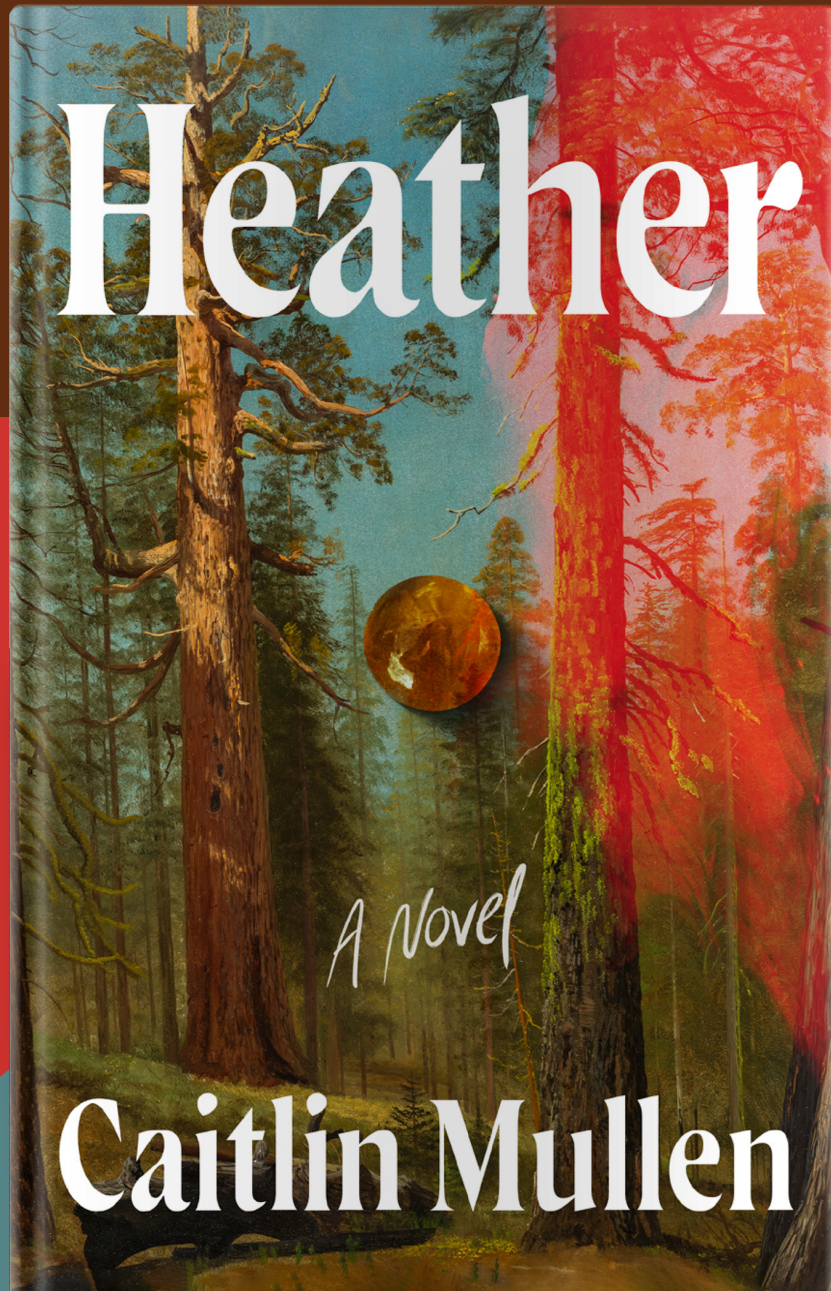


# BOOK CLUB KIT



“Book clubs should get ready for some intense discussions. ”

—PAMELA KLINGER-HORN, VALLEY BOOKSELLER

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**\*spoilers\***

*Heather* is structured as a police procedural with good guys and bad guys. Who, in your opinion, is good and who is bad? Who is neither or both? How do the moral gray areas subvert your expectations of *Heather* as a mystery novel?

Nearly every character in *Heather* harbors a secret. Which character's secret shocked you the most, and whose lies do you think were justified, if any?

What did you know about the Pine Barrens in New Jersey before reading *Heather*? How does the setting function as a character, and how does it impact the people in the story?

Compare the intense sisterhood between Annabelle and Sabrina to the chosen family friendship between Callie and Jane. How has the strength of female friendship fortified the characters in the novel? How has it hurt them?

Several men in the novel — Luke, Damien, Frank, and Billy Fauver — perpetuate violence against women in various ways. Discuss the different types of male toxicity represented by these characters. Then discuss Adrian as a contrast to the other men.

Discuss the different models of motherhood presented in the book: Jenna's struggles with addiction, Jane's fierce protection of Opal, and Iris's reinvention as a "perfect" PTA mom in the suburbs. What is the author saying about the societal expectations placed on mothers?

Once Annabelle discovered she was pregnant, is there anything she could have done differently to avoid the events that played out? What do you think the author is saying about women's bodily autonomy by showing how Annabelle's plans are thwarted at the Women-First Pregnancy Crisis Center?

Why do you think Annabelle pretended to be her twin sister when she met the Coyote? What does she gain and what does she lose from taking on Sabrina's identity?

Jenna and Annabelle both endure profound trauma at the hands of the same man, but they cope in drastically different ways. Both characters keep their trauma a secret from those closest to them — in doing so, what do they seem to gain and what do they sacrifice?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Did you have guesses about the identity of the Coyote? What does it mean about the world of this novel that he was able to keep his crimes undiscovered for so many years?

What was your reaction to the crime Annabelle was arrested for? Did the novel challenge your judgments about her as the truth was slowly revealed to you?

At-home DNA kits and true-crime TikTok play significant roles in exposing Annabelle's identity to the public. Has reading this novel changed the way you think about these technology trends that make information accessible to everyone?

At the end of the book, Annabelle names the baby Heather after the resilient, rare flowers that bloom in the acidic, inhospitable soil of the Pine Barrens. Why is this an appropriate name?

The note Annabelle left behind in the brick factory simply reads "I love you. Forgive me." Who do you think this note was meant for?

Does the novel offer a satisfying sense of justice? If not, what do you think true justice would look like for Annabelle, Sabrina, and Jenna?



CELADON  
BOOKS

# AN INTERVIEW

with Caitlin Mullen

**CAITLIN MULLEN** is the author of *Please See Us*, which won the 2021 Edgar Award for Best First Novel and was named a *New York Times* best crime novel in 2020. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and children.



**The Pine Barrens, a sparsely populated wilderness in southern New Jersey, is central to the plot of *Heather*. What drew you to set the story there?**

I spent much of my life in southern New Jersey, and I always found the Pine Barrens both fascinating and a little unnerving. That sense of contradiction is always so interesting to me and is so ripe for exploration in fiction. The woods are beautiful, home to streams and cedar-water lakes and a diverse wildlife population, but there's also something a little ominous about how remote and isolated it all feels. There's so much rich history to the Pine Barrens, too. It's studded by the remnants of ghost towns and abandoned mills and factories that date back to the Colonial era — another thing that makes the area feel both interesting and eerie. For many years I felt like all of these elements would make the Pine Barrens the perfect setting for a crime novel and I just needed to find the right story to tell.

**Callie Hauser, the book's main character, is a police chief in a rural town who becomes invested in solving a decades-old cold case about an abandoned baby and two missing teen girls. Why was it important that this story be told from the perspective of a woman in law enforcement?**

The male officers who report to Callie joke that these cold cases might require a “woman's touch” — but in the novel, there is some truth to that. When Callie first takes up the case of the abandoned baby, she does it because she feels everyone else has looked away or shrugged it off as something strange and sad that happened that they'll never be able to solve. Callie isn't the type of character who will accept that kind of reasoning, and she throws herself into the case, which leads her to the story of two teenage sisters who disappeared without a trace in the '90s. The deeper she gets into these girls' histories, the more she sees parts of herself and the women she knows in them. She's able to look at their stories with a degree of empathy and understanding that the male officers did not bring to the table. Ultimately this empathy makes her better at her job but also adds a layer of moral complication to things that drives her to question the nature of her work.

**Superstitions tend to run high in small towns. How did you first learn about the Jersey Devil, and why did you incorporate this mythical folklore into your story?**

My dad loved to fish in the Pine Barrens and was a superstitious person, to be sure, so I heard stories of the Jersey Devil pretty young — probably too young! I grew up with that mythology, and it was something my cousins and I used to talk about as kids, trying to outdo one another with stories of this winged creature that might appear from the depths of the woods.

As one of the characters in the novel says, folklore is an important part of the identity of a place. One of the stories that is told to explain the origins of the Jersey Devil is a birth story, when it comes down to it: A woman already burdened with too many children curses upon learning of her 13th pregnancy. As a result, her baby was born as this winged, hooved creature that went on to haunt the woods. In a book that is very much concerned with motherhood, it seemed germane to include that version of the myth as another way to dig more deeply into both the sense of place and those themes around pregnancy, birth, and raising children.

**Callie's best friend, Jane, watches TikTok cold case "detectives," one of whom becomes involved in Callie's open criminal investigation. What is your view on the cultural trend of true crime as entertainment?**

Crimes are always about departures from the norm, departures from the rules of society. So it makes sense that we're all fascinated and drawn in by these kinds of stories and that we're telling them across many mediums. Novelists, myself included, often borrow the bones of real-life stories and turn them into tales for public consumption. For me, things start to feel tricky when the storytelling forgets the victims and the families at the center of these stories, when we lose the sense of shared humanity that makes them tragic and worth talking about to begin with. TikTok and most social media in general are concerned with telling a story in the quickest, most simplistic, and often most provocative way, when stories of true crimes often deserve to be told with nuance and compassion.

If you decide to adopt *Heather* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at [reader@celadonbooks.com](mailto:reader@celadonbooks.com) or post on social media using the hashtag #CeladonBookClub.