

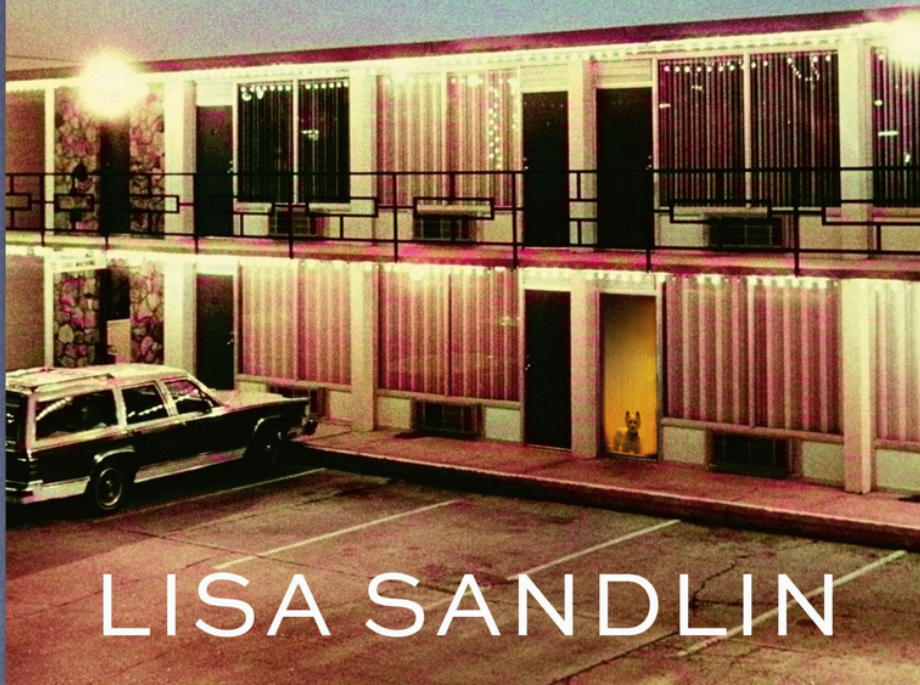
Sweet Vidalia Book Club Kit

"A true gem that will remain in readers' hearts long after the final page."

—SHELLEY READ, author of *GO AS A RIVER*

Sweet Vidalia

A NOVEL



LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

I've been out of a job before. I've had my eye on a job I know I could do, that I'd be good at—but first, I needed to get hired. Needed to get past the gatekeepers of the interview—and then that second or third level of gatekeepers, who often required some special speech or performance. Tension, nerves, fright! As a single mother, I had to take some jobs I didn't love: at an organization begging people to donate blood; at a florist's reigned over by a raunchy parrot; in a bar where the owner made surprise visits through a hidden door; in a wood shop plastered with posters featuring naked women and "Penises of the Animal Kingdom."

It wasn't tough to imagine Eliza Kratke. Not difficult to pile on disasters that stretched her to breaking. She did break for a while, by retreating to her bed and covers. And oh my, what a comfort that can be—especially if you've got 80 episodes of "The Great British Baking Show" to disappear into. What interested me was what forces pulled Eliza out of her bed. What did it take and how did she endure those forces? How did she face failure? How did all this change her? What did she have to let go and what did she hold onto?

I've had to start over a number of times. I bet you have, too. Moved for a job into a community where you know no one. Where you find yourself learning the new work and trying to make friends, at a somewhat later age, because you need friends. You also meet people who pass through your life and out, as Eliza does at the Sweet Vidalia Residence Inn. They may leave a mark on you, too. The hero's journey is not confined to swords and dragons, but is much wider and more common—and during our one life, we all enter into it many times. That's how we end up being who we are.

I hope you find something to like, to identify with, in Eliza Kratke, and that you enjoy the book. And good luck on your next journey!

Warmly,
Lisa Sandlin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PLEASE NOTE: THESE QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS FOR *SWEET VIDALIA*

1. What do you learn about Eliza Kratke's character in the first dramatic scene?
2. What role does Eliza's car, the Fairlane, play in the novel?
3. How do Eliza's problems spiral after her husband's death? What is the effect on Eliza? If you've encountered a spiraling problem(s), how did you react?
4. What would you say happens to Eliza during the interactions with the repo boss, Ray Paley?
5. How do Eliza's children handle the revelations about their father? Which response, if either, do you relate to?
6. What advice does the young pastor, Mr. Henney, give Eliza and how does she take it? What is different when, at novel's end, she remembers Mr. Henney?
7. What roles does Louise, Eliza's fellow student, play in *Sweet Vidalia*? Do the two rub off on each other in any ways?
8. How does Morton act as a stabilizer to Eliza? What are other stabilizers for her?
9. What is the culture of the Sweet Vidalia Residence Inn like? How is it different than Eliza's previous life?



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10. How does the interlude on the Greyhound bus reflect on Eliza's story?
11. How do you explain Robert's bigamy? How do you assess him?
12. How do the interactions with Terry, another business student, affect Eliza and vice versa?
13. What do Eliza and Mrs. Jordan offer each other?
14. Is Eliza suitable (or not) for the job she finds finally? Why?
15. At book's end, what has Eliza created for herself? Contrast the actions and moods of the beginning and ending chapters.
16. "It's never too late to come of age," said one reviewer about this book. Do you agree? In what ways does 57 year old Eliza "come of age"? In what ways has she stayed the same? Have you come of age more than once?

