
Fates and Traitors: A Novel of John Wilkes Booth and the Women Who Loved Him

by Jennifer Chiaverini



About the Book

The *New York Times* bestselling author of *MRS. LINCOLN'S DRESSMAKER* returns with a riveting work of historical fiction following the notorious John Wilkes Booth and the four women who kept his perilous confidence.

John Wilkes Booth, the mercurial son of an acclaimed British stage actor and a Covent Garden flower girl, committed one of the most notorious acts in American history --- the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

The subject of more than a century of scholarship, speculation, and even obsession, Booth is often portrayed as a shadowy figure, a violent loner whose single murderous act made him the most hated man in America. Lost to history until now is the story of the four women whom he loved and who loved him in return: Mary Ann, the steadfast matriarch of the Booth family; Asia, his loyal sister and confidante; Lucy Lambert Hale, the senator's daughter who adored Booth yet tragically misunderstood the intensity of his wrath; and Mary Surratt, the Confederate widow entrusted with the secrets of his vengeful plot.

FATES AND TRAITORS brings to life pivotal actors --- some willing, others unwitting --- who made an indelible mark on the history of our nation. Chiaverini portrays not just a soul in turmoil but a country at the precipice of immense change.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think of the author's choice to begin the story with John Wilkes Booth's death and end it with Lucy's point of view? Did this authorial choice make the assassin's story more poignant for you?

2. What do you think of Junius's unconventional views on marriage as "lifelong enslavement" and an "iron yoke that crushes all who submit to it"? How does this compare to his abolitionist views?
3. When Junius decides to elope to America with Mary Ann, he tells her that "Americans are individualists, tolerant and free-thinking. They wouldn't care." How has this view of Americans withstood the test of time?
4. While Junius spirals into alcoholism, Mary Ann feels she might "burst from the strain of repressing her anger and disappointment. She would not become a shrew, complaining and criticizing" their home must remain his safe haven, free of judgement and recriminations, or he might grow despondent and decide not to return to it.? Discuss the roles of wives during the early 19th century.
5. Why do you think Mary Ann destroys Junius's letters? What about them makes her want to destroy these personal relics from her husband's past?
6. John is heavily inspired by his father's writings that "fame and glory are marvelous prizes." How does Booth change after the death of his father, the strongest advocate of abolitionism he had known, while he became a Confederate sympathizer? Was there always a potential for Booth to follow the path he chose, or would things have been different had his father, and his influence, not died prematurely?
7. Introverted and meek Edwin becomes a legendary stage actor by accident whereas Booth eagerly strives to become one. Booth also often finds himself overshadowed and at odds with Edwin. Compare and contrast the two brothers, their personalities, acting careers and political beliefs.
8. Booth is strongly against Asia marrying Clarke. Why do you think he was so protective of his younger sister? Do you think his misgivings were later found to be true? Why or why not?
9. What other options did Asia have aside from marrying Clarke? Discuss the role of young women in society during the mid-nineteenth century.
10. Booth sympathized with the character of Brutus from *Julius Caesar*. How do you think, if at all, Booth's love of theater and drama influenced his decision to assassinate Lincoln?
11. Compare and contrast the lives and hardships of widows Mary Ann Booth and Mary Surratt and their abiding love for their children, including their troubled sons.
12. Mary conspired with Booth, Herold, Atzerodt, and Powell to kidnap the president. However, when Booth assassinated Lincoln, she denied culpability. In what ways do you agree or disagree with the sentence that was given to her for housing the conspirators?

Author Bio

Jennifer Chiaverini is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 36 novels, including critically acclaimed historical

fiction and the beloved *Elm Creek Quilts* series. She, her husband and their two sons call Madison, Wisconsin, home.

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