ReadingGroupGuides
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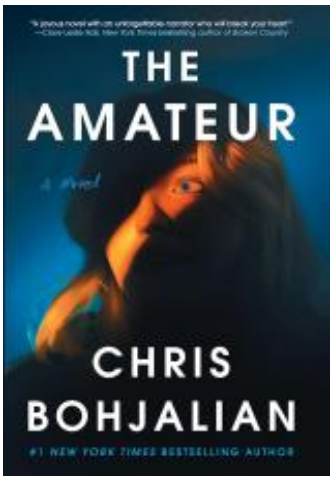
The Amateur

by Chris Bohjalian



About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of MIDWIVES and THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT: When a young woman, a golf prodigy, kills a caddie with a stray ball at the country club, the investigation of this freak accident reveals a dark and shocking tale of secret affairs, predatory men and a teenager on trial.

1978: It is the first Thursday in August, and temperatures are flirting with 90 when 18-year-old Mira Winston drives a golf ball from her tee toward the practice net near the clubhouse and caddy shack. The golf ball, weighing 1.6 ounces, tears through the net, traveling 150 miles per hour and slams, with sickening force, into the temple of a high school junior named Kenny Foster, rupturing an artery and unleashing a torrent of blood. Kenny brings his hand to the side of his head, then topples onto his side. He?s dead before the ambulance even arrives.

In the wake of this terrible accident --- and everyone, at first, agrees it was an accident --- Mira looks for comfort in all the wrong places: In her lover, Theo Catton, a married man three decades her senior. In her mother, a well-kept woman with secrets of her own. In the dead caddie?s little sisters, girls bewildered by grief. But when the investigators look more closely at the torn net, when a detective recalls Mira?s history of recklessness, and when Kenny?s father spies Mira with her married lover, the affluent and mannered community turns on this once-promising young woman.

A gripping story that takes the reader from the sun-soaked greens of a tony Westchester country club to the fluorescent-lit stand of a county courtroom, THE AMATEUR asks: What happens when one small moment --- a swing, a ball, a piece of string --- changes the course of an entire life?

Discussion Guide

1. ?It is chance that pulls the strings,? Mira tells us at the end of the prologue (p. 10). To what degree is her situation not only the result of chance but also the result of decisions made by the adults in her life?

2. How does the Foster family (parents Nick and Sharon, daughters Olivia and Jane) compare with the Winston family (parents Peter and Alexis, brother Spencer, devoted dog Harvey, and Mira)? What do Spencer and Mira need that their parents? wealth can?t buy?

3. As you watched Mira grapple with unspeakable emotional pain, including surviving an attempted rape by Frank Pendleton, what did she help you understand about the nature of trauma and addiction? Did her months living and working in Manhattan provide any healing, or did that phase in her life leave her only in a more fragile state? Does her inherently fiery personality provide protection, or does it make her vulnerable?

4. Through impeccable details, THE AMATEUR brings to life the late 1970s and early ?80s in America. Which aspects of that period would you want to experience (or reexperience)? Which aspects are abhorrent to you, undermining the spirit of liberation?

5. The Tallmadge Country Club is a place with rigid social expectations. How does Mira?s skill as a fierce athlete affect the way she is treated by the club?s male power brokers? How does the wealth gap between the Foster and Winston families affect the aftermath of Kenny?s death?

6. Chapter 12 ends with these lines: ?It wasn?t that I was drawn to older men. It?s that a certain type of middle-aged creep was always going to be drawn to young girls like me.? (p. 169) What does it take for Mira to finally vindicate herself in her own mind? When is she no longer an amateur?

7. Although Mira Winston and Chris Bohjalian are both bestselling authors (each of them acclaimed for some 25 novels, three plays, and adaptations for TV and film), they have little else in common. What makes this narrator?s voice so convincing? Did you forget that you were not reading a memoir? Which other aspects of the craft and structure, including Mira?s wry sense of humor, enhanced your reading of THE AMATEUR?

8. In what ways is Ethan different from all others in Mira?s world? Why is he able to not only save her life but also to see the value in her life?

9. In chapter 4, Mira tells us that she?s a reliable narrator, even offering reassurance specifically to book clubs that they can trust her. Did you trust her? Based on the courtroom testimony up to page 303, if you had been a juror, would you have voted to convict?

10. When you were reading the epilogue, what came to mind? How did those closing words give voice to the heart of the novel, and to the purity of wanting to be seen and loved for your true self?

11. How does THE AMATEUR amplify aspects of the human experience explored in previous novels by Chris Bohjalian that you have read?

Author Bio

Chris Bohjalian is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of 26 books, including THE AMATEUR, THE JACKAL'S MISTRESS, THE PRINCESS OF LAS VEGAS, THE LIONESS, HOUR OF THE WITCH, MIDWIVES and THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT, which has been made into a MAX limited series starring Kaley Cuoco. His other books include THE RED LOTUS; THE GUEST ROOM; CLOSE YOUR EYES, HOLD HANDS; THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS; SKELETONS AT THE FEAST; and THE DOUBLE BIND. His novels SECRETS OF EDEN, MIDWIVES and PAST THE BLEACHERS were made into movies, and his work has been translated into more than 35 languages. He is also a playwright (*Wingspan* and *Midwives*). He lives in Vermont.

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