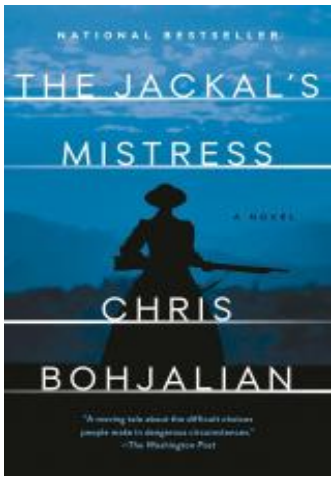
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Jackal's Mistress

by Chris Bohjalian



About the Book

In this Civil War love story, inspired by a real-life friendship across enemy lines, the wife of a missing Confederate soldier discovers a wounded Yankee officer and must decide what she?s willing to risk for the life of a stranger, from the *New York Times* bestselling author of such acclaimed historical fiction as HOUR OF THE WITCH and THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS.

Virginia, 1864. Libby Steadman?s husband has been away for so long that she can barely conjure his voice in her dreams. While she longs for him in the night, fearing him dead in a Union prison camp, her days are spent running a gristmill with her teenage niece, a hired hand and his wife, all the grain they can produce requisitioned by the Confederate Army. It?s an uneasy life in the Shenandoah Valley, the territory frequently changing hands, control swinging back and forth like a pendulum between North and South, and Libby awakens every morning expecting to see her land a battlefield.

And then she finds a gravely injured Union officer left for dead in a neighbor?s house, the bones of his hand and leg shattered. Captain Jonathan Weybridge of the Vermont Brigade is her enemy --- but he?s also a human being, and Libby must make a terrible decision: Does she leave him to die alone? Or does she risk treason and try to nurse him back to health? And if she succeeds, does she try to secretly bring him across Union lines, where she might negotiate a trade for news of her own husband?

A vivid and sweeping story of two people navigating the boundaries of love and humanity in a landscape of brutal violence, THE JACKAL'S MISTRESS is a heart-stopping new novel, based on a largely unknown piece of American history, from one of our greatest storytellers.

Discussion Guide

1. In the novel?s opening scene, Libby and Joseph survive in part because the intruder underestimates them. In the many daring encounters they experience together, how do they turn their vulnerable identities into an advantage? How do they disguise their strength?

2. Libby excels in the men?s world --- from running the mill and defending her loved ones to negotiating with Union troops. As a newcomer and an interloper, what made her a good match for her husband, Peter?

3. How do Sally and Joseph endure the traumas of their past and the constant threats they face throughout the novel? What sustains their devotion to each other?

4. How did literature prepare Weybridge for the horrors and contradictions he would witness as a soldier? How did he maintain stamina in both mind and body?

5. In chapter 14, Weybridge tries to help Jubilee understand the abolitionist cause, while in chapter 20, Joseph gives Weybridge a grim dose of reality about what life will be like after the war. What perpetuated the system that kept Joseph and Sally from being truly free?

6. Jubilee nicknames Weybridge ?Jackal? because she is wary of the enemy?s cunning ways. How does their relationship reflect the precarious balance of trust that teeters in other aspects of the storyline, on land, where dominance and control kept changing hands?

7. In the novel and in the true story that inspired it, what do we discover about the human capacity for kindness and healing, and the ability to rise above the destructive roar of the crowd (even when the roar is stoked by power brokers who benefit from the discord)? Ultimately, what do you think Libby?s real motivation was in protecting Weybridge? Would you have been willing to take that risk? Was Dr. Norton willing to take the risk only because he was being self-serving?

8. Libby, Emily and Jubilee all must endure months of not knowing the fates of their loved ones who are at war. In their situation, is hope a positive force, or is it a liability?

9. What transformations does Libby undergo during the final showdown in chapter 23? What does the scene reveal about her essence and the essence of the community she married into?

10. Who are the Henry Morgans and John Mosbys of the modern world, waging brutality under the guise of civility?

11. As you read the epilogue, how did you react? What was erased in the aftermath of the Civil War? What persisted?

12. What surprising details did you learn about this chapter in history? What family stories of war and survival have been passed down to you? How do those lives and stories compare with the ones portrayed in the novel? In what ways can fiction sometimes reveal the truth more fully than nonfiction?

13. How does Chris Bohjalian?s storytelling --- in THE JACKAL'S MISTRESS and in his other novels that you have read --- bring to life the intersection of chance and choice in a unique way?

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.

The Jackal's Mistress

by Chris Bohjalian

Publication Date: January 13, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Historical Thriller, Suspense, Thriller
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN-10: 0593315014
ISBN-13: 9780593315019