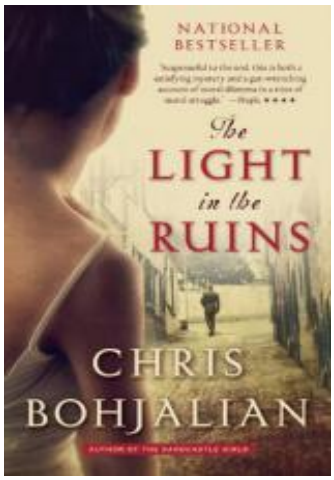
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Light in the Ruins

by Chris Bohjalian



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of MIDWIVES and THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS comes a spellbinding novel of love, despair, and revenge ---- set in war-ravaged Tuscany.

1943: Tucked away in the idyllic hills south of Florence, the Rosatis, an Italian family of noble lineage, believe that the walls of their ancient villa will keep them safe from the war raging across Europe. Eighteen-year-old Cristina spends her days swimming in the pool, playing with her young niece and nephew, and wandering aimlessly amid the estate?s gardens and olive groves. But when two soldiers, a German and an Italian, arrive at the villa asking to see an ancient Etruscan burial site, the Rosatis? bucolic tranquility is shattered. A young German lieutenant begins to court Cristina, the Nazis descend upon the estate demanding hospitality, and what was once their sanctuary becomes their prison.

1955: Serafina Bettini, an investigator with the Florence police department, has her own demons. A beautiful woman, Serafina carefully hides her scars along with her haunting memories of the war. But when she is assigned to a gruesome new case --- a serial killer targeting the Rosatis, murdering the remnants of the family one-by-one in cold blood --- Serafina finds herself digging into a past that involves both the victims and her own tragic history.

Set against an exquisitely rendered Italian countryside, THE LIGHT IN THE RUINS unveils a breathtaking story of moral paradox, human frailty, and the mysterious ways of the heart.

Discussion Guide

1. Before reading THE LIGHT IN THE RUINS, how much did you know about the Nazi occupation of Italy and the rise of fascism? Which historical aspects of the novel surprised you the most?

2. If you had been in Antonio and Beatrice?s position, would you have shown any hospitality to the Germans? How

would you have navigated the grim choices such families were forced to make?

3. Chris Bohjalian is known for creating unique narrators. What sort of person did you picture when you read the italicized passages? How did your theories about the killer shift?

4. How did love flourish between Cristina and Friedrich despite their circumstances? How did they rise above their cultural differences? What does their romance say about the human experience?

5. What does Enrico and Teresa?s story illustrate about the emotional cost of war? Who are the novels heroes?

6. Discuss Serafina?s relationship to the past. Why is she able to ignore those who accuse the Rosatis of colluding with the enemy?

7. How did you react to Friedrich?s compassion and sensitivity? What was it like to experience a character who so strongly defies stereotypes?

8. What does Vittore?s interest in archaeology say about his personality? What timeless aspects of life are captured in the novel?s artifacts? How do antiquities provide a form of immortality to the people who created them?

9. Discuss the novel?s title. How is it reflected in the theme of survival, albeit with physical or emotional scars? How could someone like Francesca --- who was criticized for making waves --- find meaning in life after so many tragic losses? Why is Villa Chimera ultimately an appropriate name for the estate?

10. Compare Marco and Vittore. Which one uses power more effectively? How do they perceive their heritage and their responsibilities to their families?

11. What are your theories about the making of a soldier like Erhard Decher? What does it take for someone to become as ruthless and as loyal as he? In what ways did his supposed strengths lead to his downfall?

12. In the closing scenes, when Muller orders Cristina to take him to the hideout of the partisans, would you have done as she did? Could you give your life to protect another?

13. Which aspects of THE LIGHT IN THE RUINS echo the storytelling in previous Bohjalian novels you have enjoyed?

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.

Critical Praise

"Thoroughly gripping, beautiful, and astonishingly vengeful, this novel is a heartbreaker. Bohjalian's latest turn to historical fiction is immensely rewarding."

? *Library Journal*, starred review

"Mastering matters subtle and grotesque, Bohjalian combines intricate plotting and bewitching sensuality with historical insight and a profound sense of place to create an exceptional work of suspense rooted in the tragic aberrations of war."

? *Booklist*, starred review

"An exploration of post-WWII Italy doubles as a murder mystery in this well-crafted novel...an entertaining historical whodunit."

? *Publishers Weekly*

"A literary thriller...a soulful why-done-it."

? *Kirkus Reviews*

"A must-read...stunning.... Bohjalian specializes in the suspense created when people are cut off, physically and emotionally, from society (as he did in his bestselling MIDWIVES). Here he goes back in time to create that suspense, with a compelling female detective running from demons of her own as his heroine."

? Mary Duan, *Tucson Weekly*

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