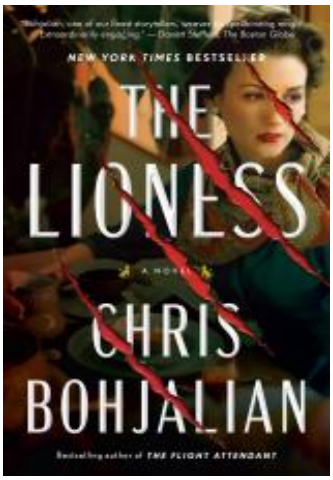
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Lioness

by Chris Bohjalian



About the Book

A luxurious African safari turns deadly for a Hollywood starlet and her entourage in this riveting historical thriller from the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

Tanzania, 1964. When Katie Barstow, A-list actress, and her new husband, David Hill, decide to bring their Hollywood friends to the Serengeti for their honeymoon, they envision giraffes gently eating leaves from the tall acacia trees, great swarms of wildebeests crossing the Mara River, and herds of zebras storming the sandy plains. Their glamorous guests --- including Katie?s best friend, Carmen Tedesco, and Terrance Dutton, the celebrated Black actor who stars alongside Katie in the highly controversial film *Tender Madness* --- will spend their days taking photos, and their evenings drinking chilled gin and tonics back at camp, as the local Tanzanian guides warm water for their baths. The wealthy Americans expect civilized adventure: fresh ice from the kerosene-powered ice maker, dinners of cooked gazelle meat, and plenty of stories to tell over lunch back on Rodeo Drive.

What Katie and her glittering entourage do not expect is this: a kidnapping gone wrong, their guides bleeding out in the dirt, and a team of Russian mercenaries herding their hostages into Land Rovers, guns to their heads. As the powerful sun gives way to night, the gunmen shove them into abandoned huts, and Katie Barstow, Hollywood royalty, prays for a simple thing: to see the sun rise one more time.

A blistering story of fame, race, love and death set in a world on the cusp of great change, THE LIONESS is a vibrant masterpiece from one of our finest storytellers.

Discussion Guide

Note to readers: This Reading Group Guide includes spoilers. Be sure you have finished the novel before diving in.

1. What does THE LIONESS demonstrate about the nature of survival? What role do fate, temperament, life experience and other factors play in determining the probability of perishing?

2. As you read about the three married couples (David and Katie, Billy and Margie, Felix and Carmen), what did you observe about their relationship styles? Which partnership seemed to be the strongest one? Did the single travelers (Terrance, Reggie and Peter) have any advantages by being solo?

3. In what ways do Juma, Muema and Benjamin give voice to multiple generations in the period of sweeping social change in their homeland? How does the concept of wisdom shift as their circumstances change?

4. Are Katie?s wealth and fame worth the price? How does her ability to bankroll the experiences of her guests affect the relationships --- romantic, platonic and familial --- she forms with them?

5. How did you react to the scene on page 89 when a lioness preys on a wildebeest? Is the lioness?s behavior much different from that of the kidnappers? If you have housecats, do they share any of the lioness?s traits, or are they more like wildebeests?

6. How was Terrance?s sense of self transformed by the safari team? Throughout his life, when was he able to feel most at home? When was he forced to play a role, even off-camera?

7. Katie and Billy clearly have different personalities. How did this shape the way they endured their parents? abuse? How did their childhood prepare them for the tragedies that lay ahead in their adult lives?

8. On page 246, Reggie calls Carmen a lioness, saying it with ?reverence and awe.? In what ways does she earn this title? At the same time, does Reggie qualify as a lion?

9. How were your impressions shaped by the shifting points of view that you were able to see across the chapters? As you read about the key turning points in the characters? life stories, which ones resonated with you the most? Which character would be your favorite traveling companion?

10. In the last line of chapter 13, Benjamin says, ?I?d rather die charging like a rhino than bleating like a goat.? What does the novel say about the impact of death itself, both on the person (or other creature) who is dying and on those who are left behind in the aftermath?

11. The time period of the early 1960s is itself a character in THE LIONESS. What are the most beautiful aspects of this liberating character? What fuels the sinister side of that decade? How did shifting attitudes about gender, race and sexuality make the 1960s an ideal backdrop for Katie Barstow?s tale?

12. What is the effect of the media snippets at the beginning of the chapters? What is special about the fact that Katie and her entourage are almost all artists in some form? Is their profession a liability or an asset? Which characters are best equipped to cope with the brutal realities of the kidnapping?

13. Much of Chris Bohjalian?s fiction is interwoven with carefully researched historical fact. What did you learn about the history of the Soviet Union, the CIA and postcolonial Africa by reading THE LIONESS? What were your initial

theories about the motives of the kidnappers in the novel?

14. How does THE LIONESS enhance your impressions of previous novels by Chris Bohjalian that you have read? What is unique about his ability to create characters who reveal the complexities of being human?

Guide written by Amy Root Clements

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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