ReadingGroupGuides
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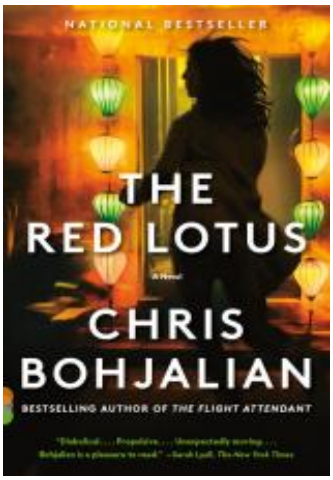
The Red Lotus

by Chris Bohjalian



About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of MIDWIVES and THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT comes a twisting story of love and deceit. An American man vanishes on a rural road in Vietnam, and his girlfriend, an emergency room doctor trained to ask questions, follows a path that leads her home to the very hospital where they met.

The first time Alexis saw Austin, it was a Saturday night. Not in a bar, but in the emergency room where Alexis sutured a bullet wound in Austin's arm. Six months later, on the brink of falling in love, they travel to Vietnam on a bike tour so that Austin can show her his passion for cycling and he can pay his respects to the place where his father and uncle fought in the war. But as Alexis sips white wine and waits at the hotel for him to return from his solo ride, two men emerge from the tall grass and Austin vanishes into thin air. The only clue he leaves behind is a bright yellow energy gel dropped on the road.

As Alexis grapples with this bewildering loss, and deals with the FBI, Austin's prickly family, and her colleagues at the hospital, Alexis uncovers a series of strange lies that force her to wonder: Where did Austin go? Why did he really bring her to Vietnam? And how much danger has he left her in?

Set amidst the adrenaline-fueled world of the emergency room, THE RED LOTUS is a global thriller about those who dedicate their lives to saving people, and those who peddle death to the highest bidder.

Discussion Guide

1. Alexis? work as an emergency room doctor has shown her that life is short --- and full of unexpected horrors. How do you think the trauma she?s seen in her career affects the choices she makes early in her relationship with Austin?

2. What initially attracts Alexis to Austin? How does their ?meet-cute? in the ER set the tone for their relationship even before Austin disappears?

3. The Vietnam that Alexis experiences on the bike trip is full of natural beauty and thriving cities, but references are made often to the destruction that the country faced during the war. How do events of the Vietnam War loom over the action of the book despite it being set in the present? Have you ever traveled somewhere that felt deeply immersed in its past?

4. Rats are a recurring motif throughout the narrative and noted for their ability to survive chemical warfare and wreak havoc by carrying pathogens. They?re also a common --- albeit loathed --- aspect of life in cities like New York and Ho Chi Minh City. How are rats being used as a metaphor in this story? What ?rat-like? qualities do characters like Austin and Douglas possess?

5. Why do you think Alexis insists on investigating Austin?s death when she returns home from Vietnam? What reasons might she have for trying to solve the mystery beyond the fact that the victim was her boyfriend?

6. Ken Sarafian connects personally to different aspects of Austin?s murder: he?s a Vietnam vet, and his daughter was the same age as Alexis. Do you think these personal connections help or hinder him more as he moves through the investigation?

7. Alexis? relationship with her mother is complicated, but loving. How do you think Alexis grows to understand her mother more after Austin?s death?

8. Taleen Sarafian observes that the ?red lotus? plague is named after a beautiful flower that ?sinks at night? and ?rises again at dawn.? Where else in the novel do you see themes of resurrection?

9. Can you think of recent health crises or pandemics that you found particularly frightening? Why do you think stories about biological warfare and ?new plagues? are so consistently scary?

10. How did you understand the motivation behind the creation of the ?red lotus? pathogen? Do you think it was solely about money, or was there another reason so many doctors and scientists might have collaborated on something so dangerous?

11. THE RED LOTUS is Chris Bohjalian?s 20th novel. It?s a diverse collection. What qualities --- of plot, character, theme, mood and style --- make his novels uniquely ?Bohjalian??

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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