

The Lioness by Chris Bohjalian

Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:

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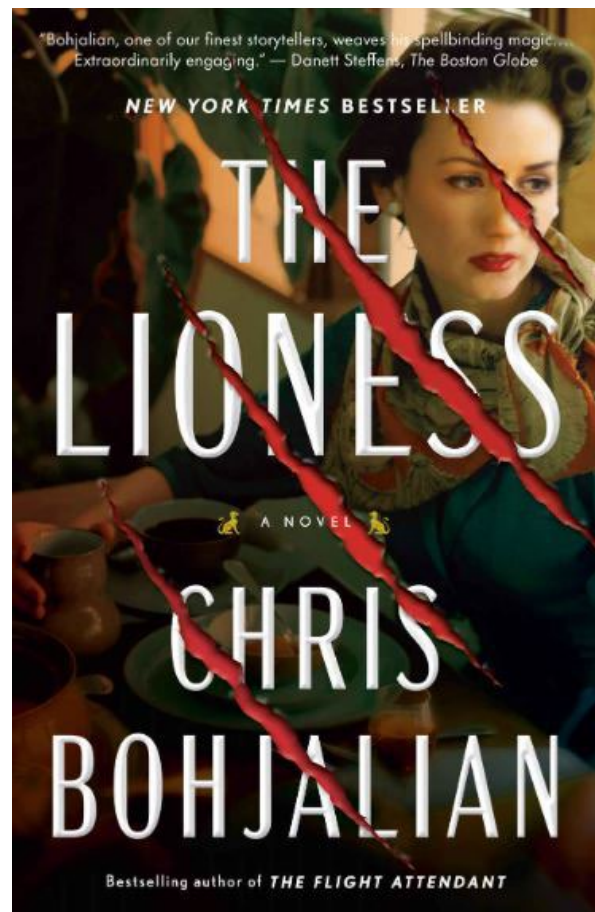
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Book summary

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



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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.

Source: Reading Group Guides. (readinggroupguides.com)



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Meet the Author

Chris Bohjalian was born to an Armenian father and Swedish mother. His Armenian grandparents were survivors of the Armenian genocide. He graduated from Amherst College summa cum laude, where he was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. In the mid-1980s, he worked as an account representative for J. Walter Thompson, an ad agency located in New York City. On October 13, 1984, Bohjalian married Victoria Schaeffer Blewer during a ceremony at the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. Chris and Victoria live in Vermont. Bohjalian moved with his wife Victoria Blewer to Lincoln, Vermont in 1988. In Lincoln, Bohjalian began writing weekly columns for the local newspaper and magazine about living in the small town, which had a population of about 975 residents. The column ran in *The Burlington Free Press* from 1992 through 2015 and won a Best Lifestyle Column from the Vermont Press Association. Bohjalian has written for *Cosmopolitan*, *Reader's Digest*, *The New York Times*, and the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*. Bohjalian's first novel, *A Killing in the Real World*, was released in 1988.



Source: Wikipedia



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Discussion Questions

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?



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10. In the last line of chapter thirteen, 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 Bahjalian’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 of Chris Bohjalian that you have read? What is unique about his ability to create characters who reveal the complexities of being human?

Source: “Reading Group Guide.” Penguin Random House.
(penguinrandomhouse.com/books/550986/the-lioness-by-chris-bahjalian/readers-guide/#)

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Recipes

Palmiers (Elephant Ears)

- Lots of granulated sugar
- Puff Pastry
- Spices like cinnamon (optional)
- Parchment Paper or a Silpat baking sheet

Roll out the puff pastry, sprinkle with sugar: Preheat oven to 400°F. Sprinkle about 1/4 cup of sugar over your workstation. Roll out the puff pastry to about 10X12 inches. Sprinkle another 1/4 cup of sugar (and spices if using) over the dough.



Roll left and right edges inward to meet in the middle: Roll up the left vertical side inward, stopping in the middle of the dough. Roll up the right side of the dough. The two rolls should be meeting at the middle and touching. Press the two sides together gently. Repeat with any more puff pastry you may have. Chill the dough in the refrigerator for at least half an hour.

Slice cookie forms from dough logs, sprinkle with sugar: Starting at one end, cut off pieces of the log, in slices about 1/2 inch in thickness. Lightly sprinkle sugar onto each side. Pinch and press the sides of the two rolls together to ensure that they don't unroll during baking.

Place on lined baking sheets: The palmiers will increase size dramatically, so leave plenty of room between each cookie and only bake a dozen at a time.

Bake: Set the tray in the middle of the oven. Bake at 400°F for about 10-15 minutes or until the sugar has caramelized. Cool on rack: Allow them to cool on a rack for 10 minutes. Serve and enjoy!

Source: Simply Recipes ([simplyrecipes.com/recipes/palmiers_elephant_ears/](https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/palmiers_elephant_ears/))

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Sweet Sunrise Drink

- 4 to 6 oz. Orange Juice (Fresh squeezed if possible)
- 1/2 to 1 oz. Grenadine, to taste
- Orange slice, for garnish

(These are amounts per drink.)

Prep Time: 3 min. Cook Time: 0 min. Serving: 1

Gather the ingredients. Fill a tall glass with ice and orange juice leaving a little room at the top.

Slowly pour grenadine over the juice. It will sink to the bottom, and slowly rise to the top as you drink. Garnish with an orange slice. Serve and enjoy.

Notes:

Make it ahead of time in a pitcher for larger portions. Just add grenadine into each individual glass before serving.

Source: The Spruce Eats. (thespruceeats.com/sweet-sunrise-brunch-mocktail-760380)



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