

A NOVEL BY TERVEEN GILL

COBRA ORCHARD

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Ten questions for your reading group

COMPLETELY SPOILER FREE

Safe to read and discuss before or after the novel

terveengill.com

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A note from the author

Cobra Orchard is a novel about three women in a family that has agreed, without ever discussing it, not to say certain things out loud.

I wrote it over ten years. In all that time the question I kept returning to was never what happened in the orchard. It was why a family would rather carry something for thirty years than name it once.

These ten questions are about that. They are not plot questions and they give nothing away. Every one of them can be answered by someone who has finished the novel and by someone who has never opened it. That is deliberate. The most interesting conversations I have had about this book have not been about my characters at all. They have been about the people sitting in the room.

Use them in any order. Skip the ones that do not land. And if a question makes the room go quiet, stay in that silence a moment before moving on. It is usually the most honest thing in the discussion.

Terveen Gill

FOR THE PERSON LEADING THE DISCUSSION

How to use this guide

- For a session of sixty to ninety minutes, choose six questions rather than attempting all ten. Ten is more than any group can do well.
- Question ten is written to be asked twice. Ask it at the very start, write down what people say, and return to it at the end.
- There are no correct answers here, and the novel does not supply any either.
- Nothing in this guide reveals the ending, so members who have not finished can still take part without being spoiled.
- These work as well over a video call as they do around a table.

THE QUESTIONS

One to five

- 01** Every family has a rule that no one ever states out loud. What is the rule in yours, and who is most punished by it?
- 02** What does a family gain by refusing to name something, and who ends up carrying the cost of that silence?
- 03** Indian families have a particular way of calling a woman strong when what they mean is that she suffered quietly and did not complain. What does that word protect, and what does it hide?
- 04** Where is the line between protecting someone and controlling them? Is that line visible from inside a family, or only from outside it?
- 05** To be someone's favourite, and to know that you are not, are two of the earliest wounds a person can carry. How does a family decide who is loved most, and does anyone ever say it aloud?

THE QUESTIONS

Six to ten

- 06** Cobra Orchard turns on a prophecy. What is the difference between a curse and a frightened person making something come true? Is there one?
- 07** Communities regularly place enormous trust in a person who arrives with certainty and charm. What makes that kind of figure so persuasive, and what does it say about what the people around him needed?
- 08** Can a woman be both a victim of her circumstances and the author of real harm at the same time? Does holding both of those together make her more forgivable, or less?
- 09** The novel moves between the 1970s and the early 2000s. Do you believe families inherit debt across generations, and can that debt ever actually be paid?
- 10** What is a life well lived? Ask this at the start of your discussion, then again at the end, and see whether the answers in the room have moved.

AN INVITATION

A conversation with the author

If your book club chooses *Cobra Orchard*, I will join you for twenty minutes over Zoom or Instagram Live and answer whatever the group wants to ask, including all the questions this guide has deliberately avoided.

There is no charge and no catch. Write to me with a rough date and the size of your group and we will find a time that works.

Email authorterveengill@gmail.com

Instagram @terveengill

Website terveengill.com

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cobra Orchard

A Dark Psychological Thriller of Secrets, Betrayal, and Women Who Survive

In the dust-choked villages of rural Uttar Pradesh, three women are running out of time and out of people to trust. None of them chose this. None of them are innocent. And none of them see the man in the kaftan coming, charming and dangerous, who has been watching far longer than any of them know.

Told through multiple voices and an unreliable narrator, *Cobra Orchard* is set against the raw beauty of rural India, where silence is survival, trust is a weapon, and the women who bend the furthest are not always the ones who break.

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