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Secrets of Eden by Chris Bohjalian, Crown, 2010

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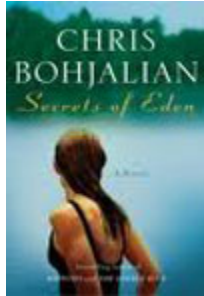
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Recommended Readings



Secrets of Eden

by Chris Bohjalian, Crown, 2010

Reviewed by Judi Morrel

Chris Bohjalian, winner of the 2002 New England Book Award, tackles social issues (midwifery in *Midwives*, homeopathic medicine in *The Law of Similars*, homelessness in *The Double Bind*), about which his readers often have passionate feelings. He is a master at turning those feelings upside down through well-drawn characters and intricate layers of plot. In this novel, set in Haverill, Vermont (the "Eden" of the title), the issue is domestic abuse, and the plot layers are revealed through the voices of four characters: Stephen Drew, a minister who is plagued with wavering faith, Catherine Benincasa, a deputy state attorney who is driven to succeed, Heather Laurent, a new age author who believes fervently in angels, and Katie Hayward, the 15-year-old who is orphaned at the outset of the novel by the apparent murder-suicide of her parents. The novel begins with the Reverend Drew baptizing Katie's mother, Alice, in the river. Later that very day Alice is strangled by her husband who then turns a gun on himself. Bohjalian uses the various voices to describe the aftermath of the tragedy and is especially adept at creating nuanced, entirely believable female characters. The novel is well written, horrifying without being melodramatic. As is often the case with Bohjalian, there is a surprising plot twist in the last pages of the novel, and nothing is what it seems.

- Judi Morrel is associate professor of mathematics at Butler University.