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The Swan Thieves by Elizabeth Kostova, Little,
Brown and Company

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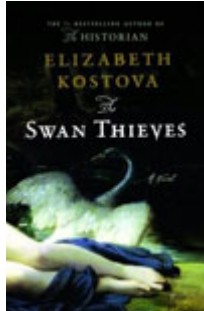
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Recommended Readings



The Swan Thieves

by Elizabeth Kostova, Little, Brown and Company, 2010

Reviewed by Judi Morrel

If you are an admirer of Elizabeth Kostova's best-selling 2005 novel *The Historian*, you will be pleased as punch with her latest offering, *The Swan Thieves*. And if you haven't read either one, you've missed the delightful opportunity to transport yourself back and forth temporally and range hither and yon geographically, all the while trying to unravel some historically based mystery. In *The Historian*, Kostova's unifying theme is the Dracula legend; in this book, it's painting. The story revolves around a contemporary American painter, Robert Oliver, who has been hospitalized after attacking a painting in the National Gallery. Robert, who refuses to talk and obsessively sketches and paints portraits of the same woman over and over, is being treated by psychiatrist Andrew Marlow, himself a painter. In attempting to help his patient, Marlow himself becomes obsessed with finding out who the woman is. In his quest, he pursues an unconventional path, along the way encountering a series of love letters written in France during the 19th century. Using the voices in these letters and with assistance from Oliver's former wife, Marlow is finally able to understand the tragedy and mystery surrounding a group of French impressionist painters. In a rich style similar to that employed in *The Historian*, Kostova brings to life several locales, both old and new, and uses a set of narratives, all of which converge to help solve the central mystery, one whose resolution is unclear until the final pages.

- Judi Morrel is Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Butler University.