



The Red Lotus, by Chris Bohjalian
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy

Several of prolific writer Chris Bohjalian's novels have been made into movies. This winter, HBO aired a mini-series version of his thriller, *The Flight Attendant*. Mr. Bohjalian's latest novel, *The Red Lotus*, with its suspenseful storyline and exotic setting, is ripe for a screen adaptation as well.

The Red Lotus begins in the ER of an Upper East Side hospital in Manhattan. Dr. Alexis Remnick has seen her share of trauma patients. Late one Saturday night, Austin Harper, a man with a bullet wound in his right arm, rushes in. Austin had been tossing darts in bar when a junkie randomly shot him with a handgun. As Alexis tends to Austin's injury, he tells her that he too works at the hospital, albeit in the fund-raising sector. In their conversation, Alexis also learns that Austin is an avid biker. The two are attracted to one another, and soon they begin dating.

Six months into their relationship, Austin and Alexis go on a biking tour of central Vietnam. Austin had said he wants to ride along the Hai Van Pass north of Da Nang, "because of the pilgrimage" and that "the road would take him near where his father had been wounded and his uncle killed in what the Americans called the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese called the American War."

The thirty-five-mile mountainous route would be the most arduous ride of the trip, and Austin is the only tourist interested in attempting the grueling trek. Giang, their local guide, offers to accompany him, but Austin, an experienced biker, insists on riding solo. However, when Austin does not return to their hotel in Hue by sunset, Alexis and the tour group fear for his safety. A search party the next day finds no trace of him.

As Alexis sits by the hotel's pool, anxiously waiting for Austin, a kindly waiter brings her a pot of tea. He points out the lotus flowers in the decorative pond, noting that they are Vietnam's national flower. "We have white ones and red ones," he

explains. "My grandmother thinks they're sacred. She grows only the red ones. They heal a broken heart."

Returning to New York City, Alexis tries to make sense of Austin's fate, wondering how well she knew her boyfriend. Alexis hires private detective Ken Sarafian, a retired NYPD cop, who is a Vietnam veteran with demons of his own. Central to Ken's investigation is the key question: *What was Austin's real motivation for going to Vietnam?* Readers of this page-turning thriller are kept guessing until the very end.