



Secrets of the Sea

By Nicholas Shakespeare
ISBN: 9780061474705

Introduction

After his parents died in a car crash, eleven-year-old Alex Dove was torn from his life on a remote farm in Tasmania and shipped off to boarding school in England. Now, twelve years later, he has returned to Australia to deal with his inheritance, and to finally come to terms with his tangled memories of his boyhood home. It isn't long before a chance encounter with a tantalizing, melancholy young visitor, Merridy Bowman—an enigmatic beauty whose own life has been deeply marked by tragedy—convinces Alex to give up his life in London, no matter what the cost, to pursue a future on the coast of the Tasman Sea.

As Alex and Merridy struggle to build a family and a home, they find themselves drawn further and further into the unpredictable dynamics of small-town island life—including into the unpleasant orbit of sleazy real-estate agent Ray Grogan, whose secretive hold over each of them threatens to tear them

apart. When a sudden shipwreck off the shore of their farm disrupts the Doves' tenuously forged happiness, forcing them to take in a fierce teenage castaway with a dangerous past, all at once Alex and Merridy find themselves facing much deeper questions about what fulfillment truly means . . .

Questions for Discussion

1. Would you describe Merridy as a treacherous wife? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the way in which the sea affects Merridy and Alex's lives, both as a force of nature and as something magical.
3. Looking at the central characters in *Secrets of the Sea*. What is the difference between a secret and a lie?
4. What do Tildy and Merridy each ultimately want out of their lives? Are there any similarities? How is this reflected in who they end up with?
5. What is it about the oysters that fulfills Merridy? Consider this in light of the David Hume quote on p. 50.
6. How do you think Ray really felt about Tildy? What are his true feelings about Merridy?
7. Discuss Merridy's feelings about her lost brother—how do those feelings change over the course of her life?
8. How does Kish help the Doves? How does he hurt them? How is he involved in Merridy's pregnancy?
9. In the small community of Wellington Point, everyone is watching everyone else . . . and being watched at the same time . . . with the exception of Albert Talbot and Joseph Silkleigh (Merridy's *deus ex aqua* (192)). How are these two observers different from everyone else in Wellington Point? Different from each other? What role do they play in the novel?

About the Author

Novelist and biographer Nicholas Shakespeare has worked as a journalist and was literary editor of both the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers between 1988 and 1991. He is the author of seven novels, including *The Vision of Elena Silves* (1989), *The High Flyer* (1993), *The Dancer Upstairs* (1995), and *Snowleg* (2004). He has also written a highly acclaimed biography of the writer Bruce Chatwin (1999). He splits his time between England and Tasmania.