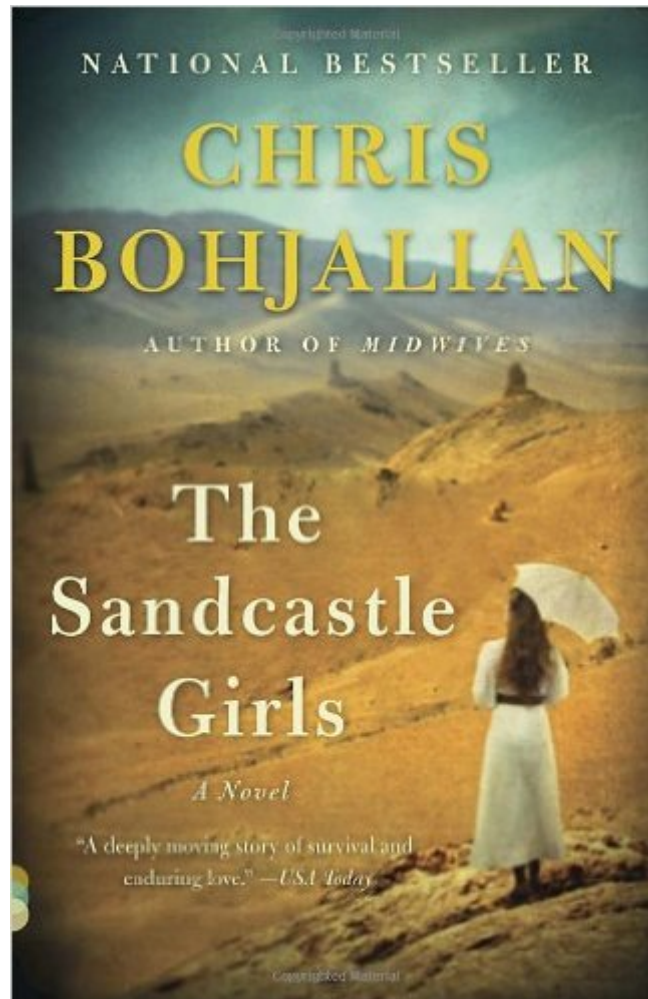


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# The Sandcastle Girls (Vintage Contemporaries)



## Synopsis

When Elizabeth Endicott arrives in Aleppo, Syria, she has a diploma from Mount Holyoke, a crash course in nursing, and only the most basic grasp of the Armenian language. It's 1915, and Elizabeth has volunteered to help deliver food and medical aid to refugees of the Armenian Genocide during the First World War. There she meets Armen, a young Armenian engineer who has already lost his wife and infant daughter. After leaving Aleppo and traveling into Egypt to join the British Army, he begins to write Elizabeth letters, realizing that he has fallen in love with the wealthy young American. Years later, their American granddaughter, Laura, embarks on a journey back through her family's history, uncovering a story of love, loss, and a wrenching secret that has been buried for generations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chris Bohjalian seeks out difficult subjects. His novels are unique. His novels are passionate. His novels make the horror of violence in the world a series of human interactions. He does not use gratuitous violence. Instead, he puts forth the truth, offsetting the sickening carnage with characters who are changed and strengthened by bearing witness to man's inhumanity to man. In "The Sandcastle Girls," Bohjalian takes us to Aleppo in 1915. A young American, Elizabeth Endicott, has come to assist the Armenian League of America with the thousands of refugees pouring into Syria from the genocide in Turkey. The Armenians who arrive are nearly dead. Elizabeth possesses few practical skills, except that she can write a discrete report and she is capable of handling some

nursing duties, not flinching at blood or bed pans. Elizabeth lives somewhat isolated in the American compound. In the city, the orphanage houses wild children who feed off those younger and weaker. The town square fills with women who have walked, now naked, across the desert. They are to be "relocated." No one can be trusted. The officials who say they will help, the quiet readers on a train, the casual guard in the street--danger is everywhere. From this mind-numbing situation, Elizabeth grows into a new woman. She finds a man she loves. She journeys into primitive conditions to try to help those taken to the desert to die of starvation and the lack of water. She makes a foray into becoming a maternal figure, sheltering one woman and one child from the chaos all around her. As the narrator says in "The Sandcastle Girls," "How do a million and a half people die with nobody knowing? -- You kill them in the middle of nowhere.

THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS, Chris Bohjalian's 15th novel, covers a different territory from most of his other books, which usually feature his home state of Vermont. This moving multi-generational saga of an Armenian family is set on multiple continents and encompasses a century of tumultuous change and upheaval both in the world at large and in the lives of its protagonists. Like Bohjalian's previous works, THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS features ordinary, relatable characters caught up in events beyond their control. Laura Petrosian, an obvious stand-in for the author himself, is a successful fortysomething American novelist in search of her roots, in particular those of her ancestors who fled the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide at the hands of the Turks. The Armenians know this event as "Meds Yeghern," the Great Catastrophe. Laura's search is prompted by the discovery of a photograph of an emaciated woman in an exhibit of Armenian victims of the ethnic cleansing. She bears Laura's family name, so perhaps she is a relative of some sort. Laura, who has basically tolerated but has not embraced her grandfather's ethnic heritage thus far, is suddenly inspired to learn more about the events that shaped her Armenian ancestors' lives. The novel travels back and forth in time between Laura's current-day search for her family's history and her American grandmother Elizabeth's introduction to Armenia nearly a century ago. Twenty-one-year-old Elizabeth Endicott lands in Aleppo in what would become modern-day Syria in 1915 as World War I rages around the globe. She is freshly armed with a degree from Mt.

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