



The Language of Secrets

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Detective Esa Khattak heads up Canada's Community Policing Section, which handles minority-sensitive cases across all levels of law enforcement. Khattak is still under scrutiny for his last case, so he's surprised when INSET, Canada's federal intelligence agency, calls him in on another potentially hot button issue. For months, INSET has been investigating a local terrorist cell which is planning an attack on New Year's Day. INSET had an informant, Mohsin Dar, undercover inside the cell. But now, just weeks before the attack, Mohsin has been murdered at the group's training camp deep in the woods.

INSET wants Khattak to give the appearance of investigating Mohsin's death, and then to bury the lead. They can't risk exposing their operation, or Mohsin's role in it. But Khattak used to know Mohsin, and he knows he can't just let this murder slide. So Khattak sends his partner, Detective Rachel Getty, undercover into the small-town mosque which houses the terrorist cell. As Rachel tentatively reaches out into the unfamiliar world of Islam, and begins developing relationships with the people of the mosque and the terrorist cell within it, the potential reasons for Mohsin's murder only seem to multiply, from the political and ideological to the intensely personal.

The Unquiet Dead author Ausma Zehanat Khan once again dazzles with a brilliant mystery carefully woven into a profound and intimate story of humanity.

The Language of Secrets Details

Date : Published February 2nd 2016 by St. Martin's Griffin

ISBN : 9781250055125

Author : Ausma Zehanat Khan

Format : Hardcover 329 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review The Language of Secrets for online ebook

Judy Collins says

A special thank you to St. Martin's Press/Minotaur Books and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Talented author, *Ausma Zehanat Khan* returns following her debut, *The Unquiet Dead*, (an emotional, and haunting mystery of horrific crimes committed against Muslims in Bosnia, based on Srebrenica massacre of 1995.). She heats up the intensity with a new murder-mystery thriller, featuring Canadian dynamic duo (Rachel Getty & Esa Khattak #2) caught up into a complex world, where loyalties are tested.

THE LANGUAGE OF SECRETS—another enthralling well researched political mystery thriller--of controversy, terrorism, religion, social issues, violence, culture, suspicion, and humanity; infused with history, poetry, and the classics. (*Inspired by true, Canadian Toronto 18*).

Toronto-based Muslim detective, Esa Khattak heads up Canada's Community Policing Section, which handles minority-sensitive cases across all levels of law enforcement. Khattak is tested, torn divided by his devotion to his Muslim faith and community and his role as a police detective. He is constantly being scrutinized, suspected of being a traitor by both his Muslim community and by the police force.

He was assigned to investigate the murder of Moshin, by INSET, Canada's federal intelligence agency. After investigating a local terrorist cell, planning an attack on New Year's Day, their informant, Moshin now has been murdered. They cannot risk exposing the operation; however, Khattak is divided, since this was his friend.

His partner, hockey-loving Detective Rachel Getty, goes undercover in the mosque, claiming she is considering converting. An unfamiliar world of Islam--developing relationships and things get complicated—both professionally and personally.

Well-researched (based on a real-life scheme by the so-called "Toronto 18," an extremist group that intended to attack Canadian Parliament in 2006)—and to behead parliamentarians as part of a plan to force the recall of Canadian troops from Afghanistan.

In the summer of 2007 Canadian law enforcement carried out a major anti-terrorism operation that resulted in the arrest of eighteen suspects on terrorism charges. This group would later become known as the Toronto 18. Even though the participants in the plot were ill-equipped and poorly trained, they nevertheless attempted to make their plot a reality.

As the author mentions in her notes:

“As I researched the Toronto 18 case, I became aware of how closely the jihadist ideology of the Toronto 18 was tied to other issues: the conflation of Islam with violence, the perception that the actions of an extremist fringe inescapably taint and implicate an entire faith community, and the necessity of moving beyond reductive notions of (us and them) to achieve a deeper understanding of the present moment in history—one that might suggest a way forward.”

Thought-provoking! Khan creates an eye-opening look into the world of Muslim faith, often misunderstood. An education for those ill-informed and uneducated into this world—the author’s passion is reflected throughout the pages with history, research, and her characters. A top notch, action-packed cop procedural, and a powerful insightful look into the Muslim community.

Khan, equipped with a Ph.D. in international human-rights law, specializing in military intervention and war crimes in the Balkans, drew on her expertise and background for her debut novel, *The Unquiet Dead* a mystery-thriller connected to the 1995 Srebrenica genocide—highly recommend reading prior to **THE LANGUAGE OF SECRETS**.

Beyond wanting to celebrate and share Eastern art, Khan had another personal reason for incorporating poetry into a whodunit murder. She says,

“If you look at Arab or Persian traditions, you’ll see poetry is very much at their heart. I thought a very beautiful way to temper the ugliness of the jihadist ideology is also to express the beauty of those traditions.”

JDCMustReadBooks

Mark Stevens says

Esa Khattak is just too cool.

He’s thoughtful, careful and analytical. He sees the world in subtle, complex ways. Best of all, he knows who he is and what he’s up against. He’s a Muslim. He’s a detective. He works in multi-cultural Toronto. And he just happens to work in the special community policing division, handling sensitive cases. And he’s coming off a rough outing for how he managed the investigation of the murder of Christopher Drayton (in “The Unquiet Dead”). That case required diving into a tight community of survivors of the war in Bosnia and, more specifically, the massacre in Srebrenica.

Licking his wounds, and fully aware of his shaky reputation among his superiors, Khattak is handed a new case in “The Language of Secrets.” Again, Khattak wades into tricky, prickly turf. The murder victim, Moshin Dar, was an estranged friend. Moshin “believed in the Islamic nation, a supernatural community whose faith transcended language, sect, ethnicity, and borders, tied together by a spiritual commonality.”

But when he was murdered, Moshin Dar was on an undercover mission for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. And Khattak is asked by the federal intelligence agency to figure out what happened all while not disrupting or giving away the ongoing undercover work into a terrorist cell that operates out of a Mosque and is running commando training in the suburban woods. To make matters worse, few cops trust Khattak. He’s constantly being reminded of his missteps and, occasionally, being baited into “anger and indiscretion.” Oh, and one more thing. Khattak’s sister is involved with the erstwhile leader of the Muslim cell.

These are just a few elements that frame this layered novel. As in the first installment, Khattak works with his partner Rachel Getty, as purebred Canadian as they come. But agnostic Rachel must first go undercover to the mosque as a potential new recruit, as someone who is thinking about converting to Islam. The only religion Rachel cares about is ice hockey. While Khattak turns to prayer to ease the “ferment of his

thoughts,” the only thing she’ll pray for is to have her cherished Toronto Maple Leafs win the Stanley Cup.

Khattak and Getty are a terrific pair. One of my favorite things about these two is how considerate they are of each other. The cliché approach requires tension between odd-couple protagonists. The cliché approach requires quick-fire repartee and rapid retorts, but Khan avoids the tired tropes and puts two real people on the page who are struggling with their own self-doubts and struggles. She admires Khattak’s “understated elegance” and hopes to emulate it. He wants to expand their relationship to genuine friends—just because. He shows her a few things about how to approach the case, but he would never ask her to moderate her partiality to the “young and dispossessed.” They like each other, get along. The point is to see this case from two different vantage points and Khan slips effortlessly back and forth, alternating chapters as we absorb Khattak’s more nuanced intake of the clues and as Getty bounces, more youthful and a touch wide-eyed, into the heart of the fray.

It’s Khattak’s ongoing struggle with his identity that gives “The Language of Secrets” its weight. It’s also his ethics and his interest in simple truths about how the story of his people (his faith) is being skewed and skewered in public. Khattak is fully aware of his secret fears. He has ample reason to sink into an abyss of cynicism and anger, but he remains a believer in peace even as his dusk prayer breaks his heart anew each night. Ultimately, of course, it’s Khattak’s keen knowledge of the culture that begins to break the case and soon Rachel Getty finds herself in deep jeopardy. In the tense finish, Khan takes full advantage of the rugged Canadian winter and Rachel’s familiarity with ice.

Language across cultures (meaning, emphasis, subtleties, nuance) and secrets (between people and within both Rachel and Essa) play critical roles in unraveling the conspiracy, which is based on a real-life case from 2006. Esa Khattak, in a beautifully written scene, isn’t afraid to whisper to an “unseen presence.” He’s also not afraid to listen—and observe—with care. The whole issue of subordination to existing authority versus a higher spirit, in Esa’s case, is fascinating. What makes these first two Khattak-Getty novels click is the space between two interesting, contrasting characters who model thoughtful, mutual respect.

Q & A with Ausma Khan on my blog and review of the first novel, too:
<https://markhstevens.wordpress.com/20...>

Meggy says

Justice must not only be done. It must be seen to be done.

I read to escape my reality and if a book is done right, I dive right into a parallel world. This happened when I met Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty in *The Unquiet Dead*. **I was eagerly waiting for another story from the author.** I was right to be eager, and I was right to feel in good hands before even opening the second book.

Esa and Rachel have suffered the consequences of their last investigation, and I immediately felt all

emotions from the first installment in the series coming back; **my friendly feelings for Rachel, my curiosity and fascination for Esa. Two worlds colliding, two faces of a coin. This time again, the team works in such harmony it makes anyone who has ever worked as a team drool with envy.**

The tea was for her nerves. The familiarity was that of a friend.

Their relationship is at the heart of the story, the author exploring how well people can trust each other, rely on each other, and most of all, confront their different opinions without fear or judgment. I admire the balance Ausma Zehanat Khan puts in her books to give the reader the biggest view possible, not leaving out any angle on any subject, using her characters as channels to explore and discover, to learn and to open minds.

The rallies in Germany, the rise of Le Pen, the minarets of Switzerland, the discriminatory laws, the Charter of Values, the hallowed ground. The divulgation of Maher Arar.

Escapism takes another definition with Ausma Zehanat Khan's narration. I was scared to recognized the name of Le Pen, and it was like a slap in the face, a reminder things are happening in the world, and no one seems to be able to stop it. Oh, racism and glances have always been around, anyone and anything different or new is treated the same way, but the world has changed and the issues that were once far from our preoccupations are now at the heart of our lives. It is sad to think so much has happened without the world doing anything.

Esa's religion is a barrier between him and his own workforce, but the story goes so much further than this.

The Language of Secrets starts as a crime investigation quite hampered by a bigger terrorist operation and takes you all the way through common preconceptions, faith, loyalty, and fear. The author doesn't "play" with current themes, she gives a masterfully researched, detailed, and unbiased view about how things turned out the way they did, why people do the things they do, and don't we look up to books for answers? I know I do, and I am in love with the perfect writing style that takes me to unknown territories, explains to me notions I barely know, and gives me the opportunity to think twice before making any assumption.

Poetry – winding you up with its archive of questions, its vainglorious phrases.

The other fabulous aspect of this book is its musicality. **The Language of Secrets is a door to another sphere of language, something I usually am not fond of, but found myself completely falling for between the beautifully filled pages of a book that expresses actions, emotions, plans, and life, through words you can interpret in so many ways.** The author plays with words, I simply loved getting to know Arabic poetry and a bit of its history. **Most books you can love but won't actually learn from, but not those books. This series is a well of information, no info dumping here, only sentences taking you far away, keeping you on your toes, awake, both ready for the action of the actual investigation and the amazing story enveloping the narration.** Because Ausma's tales are of another world. **A world where the balance between characterization, plot, and context all collide to give you an experience bound to make you feel and THINK.**

The splintered past, the crippled future, nothing to gain, less to give.

No moralization here, no lessons given, only a door to a world so many of us don't understand. I'll say it again, what makes **this series different is how religion is handled, how the cases serve a bigger purpose without losing the appeal of a strong crime story, and how the past and present come together to give the reader a better understanding of what has been lived, is being lived, and how everything can be twisted, interpreted, and used.**

Ausma Zehanat Khan possesses the kind of poetic and powerful style which can convey any message with authenticity and beauty.

Carol says

Vacillating between 4 and 5 stars, which is a positive indicator in itself. Review to come.

Book Riot Community says

I raced through Khan's first mystery novel, *The Unquiet Dead*, so I've been eagerly awaiting its sequel. Khan builds on and further develops the themes and characters from the first novel, but tells an entirely new

and exciting story. *The Language of Secrets* beautifully balances social commentary, religion, poetry, and mystery—it's an exciting, insightful look at Muslim culture in the West. Though it deals with religious extremism, it never falls into the trap of stereotyping religions or cultures; readers encounter many different representations in this novel. This is a series I think everyone should pick up immediately. — Swapna Krishna

from The Best Books We Read In January: <http://bookriot.com/2016/02/01/riot-r...>

Deborah says

2.5 stars

A little over a year ago, I wrote probably one of my most glowing reviews ever for *The Unquiet Dead*, Ausma Zehanat Khan's spectacular launch of her Rachel Getty and Esa Khattak series. I concluded that review with an expectation that this would be "a terrific new mystery series." I am sorry to say that the second entry, *The Language of Secrets*, crushed my expectations.

The Unquiet Dead centered around the Bosnian war, and Khan's expertise as a scholar of international human rights law, for whose dissertation the 1995 Srebrenica massacre served as a main focus, was evident in every scene. In contrast, *The Language of Secrets* revolves around a terrorist cell composed of your standard, run-of-the-mill, radical Muslim extremists. The plot is confusing, the characters wooden, and the tone that of a moderate Muslim stridently distancing himself from the barbaric acts of his co-religionists:

He knew what he was, what his community was. So different from what he saw on the news nightly—the lone wolves, the well-armed gunmen, the rabid mobs, the blistering flags, the overturned tanks, the rocket launchers, the blood-doomed faces, the cries in the street, the slogans of death chanted by those with nothing to lose.

The titular "language of secrets" is that of poetry, but Khan's attempts to import poetry into her own writing are both clunky and trite:

This was the missing context for the spreading scourge of enmity and hate, the broken and sprawling politics of the Middle East.

The generations mislaid by decades of war, by centuries of struggle.

The splintered past, the crippled future, nothing to gain, less to give.

A bruised carnation planted in a cup.

A rose exchanged for a rifle.

And the round of bread traded for both, in a fleeting moment of innocence.

I am not inherently opposed to police detectives who wax philosophic or lyrical; Batya Gur's Israeli Chief Superintendent Michael Ohayon is a superb example of the breed. Unfortunately, Khattak's episodes of "deep thinking" feel inauthentic; Khan uses him to repeatedly expound upon her theme, explicitly set forth in her Author's Note, that "[t]here is no inherent connection between Islam and terrorism," to the detriment of both her character development and her story.

Khan is hardly the first author to fall into this trap; I was constantly reminded of Josh Bazell and his Peter Brown series, in which the intriguing protagonist of *Beat the Reaper* abruptly became, in *Wild Thing*, a ventriloquist's dummy for his creator's diatribe on the environment. I had hoped for better from Khan.

I received a free copy of *The Language of Secrets* through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sue says

This second mystery featuring Esa Khattuck and Rachel Getty involves a terrorist plot loosely based on a fictional follow up to the Toronto 18 plot of a decade ago. In this instance Khattuck has become somewhat marginalized in spite of his described role of dealing with ethnically sensitive criminal matters. Here he is assigned tasks but with his hands tied--if he leaves them so. And his community, and even family, are vitally involved.

As in the first book, there is excellent writing and portrayals of the emotional costs of trying to be a thoughtful, lawful Muslim in a Western country, while there are many forces pulling in other directions are on prominent display. There is also much detail about assimilation and how it happens or does not happen in varying ways. Khan is writing such timely novels that happen to be mysteries...but they are so much more since they involve the intersection of contemporary Muslim life in a Western country (Canada), policing with sensitivity (or sometimes not) in an age of terrorism, and the inevitable misunderstandings that can arise. Esa Khattak and Rachel Getty are an exciting team.

I found this episode slightly more fractured during reading--I believe because so much was being covered. But I still found it an excellent story and am looking forward to the next book which I hope to read very soon.

I highly recommend this series.

Liz Barnsley says

Another 5* read for this week. Again a review will appear nearer publication (I'm getting ahead!) but this is another example of an excellent literary crime novel with a strong social and relevant theme. A great follow up to the debut.

Diane S ? says

I know so little about the events in this book, so little about the Muslim religion as a whole. So this was a very eye opening book for me and one that is very different. A Muslim Detective in Toronto and his younger partner Rachel and an inside look at a radical cell that is based on an actual event called the Toronto 18, who intended to blow up Parliament in the summer of 2006. When Detective Khattack's friend is killed in Arlington Park after camping with a group from a mosque, Khattack is brought on to find the shooter. There are of course political agendas, family involvement and some young people in the mosque that may be innocent.

The characters, all of them are very well fleshed out. The ending of this book has a very frantic and

suspenseful pace. I learned a little and with the author's note learned a little more. But this book is very smartly written and though a few things left me a bit doubtful on the whole this was an excellent read. The second in the series, I now need to go back and read the first. This is a new series I will be following.

ARC from Netgalley.

Roman Clodia says

It wasn't enough to say that the same faith that had produced Hassan Ashkouri had also produced Esa Khattak, good and evil sketched out in broad strokes. It wasn't easy and two-dimensional like that.

Look, this is why Khan is such a good writer: she tackles difficult, complicated topics and she doesn't dumb down or over-simplify; instead, she embraces nuance and complexity with a rigorous and graceful intellectual force.

Wrapped up in a story that, on the surface, might appear to be yet another terrorist thriller is an absorbing narrative that thinks about big questions of identity politics, religion, compassion, violence, humanity, family. There are no easy options here and even our troubled hero Esa Khattak does things of which he's not proud. But the alternatives are worse. And amidst all the large issues at stake, are the petty prejudices and maneuverings of personal status and power in the Canadian security services.

This topical book doesn't perhaps have quite the emotionally stunning effect of Khan's first book *The Unquiet Dead*, but it opens up at least a part of Toronto's Muslim community to a wider audience, and does it with understanding and knowledge. I particularly enjoyed the part played in this book by Arabic poetry, something which I know practically nothing about.

Khan's writing is never flashy but it's wonderfully fluent and precise, disappearing behind the story she's telling. There is a driving 'thriller' compulsion behind this but really the book is better than that, and uses the genre to say important things about the fractured world we live in today.

Esil says

3 1/2 stars. *The Language of Secrets* had a bit of a messy and overly dense plot, but I still liked this mystery well enough because of the characters, topic and setting. It's the second mystery featuring Detective Esa Khattak. Set in contemporary Toronto, it is loosely based on a fictional follow up to the Toronto 18, which involved a terrorist plot that led to the arrest of 18 individuals in 2006. In this story, another group is fomenting a similar act of terrorism, and one of their members is killed in Algonquin Park during the work up to the act of terrorism. Khattak and his partner Rachel are brought in to provide some assistance in the investigation -- mostly to manage the PR side of the case. Khattak is on the outs with the head detective in the case, and he feels a need to play a much more active role in the investigation which impacts directly on some people he knows. So there are plenty of internal police politics. There are also plenty of issues between the cell members, and between Khattak and members of the Muslim community in the book. At times, I felt like I was missing some background to Khattak and Rachel that may have been provided in the first book. But this does work as a stand alone book. I liked the characters, the Toronto setting and how the plot slowly

moves toward a tense and well done ending. The depiction of the internal politics within the Toronto police were a bit over the top, but -- who knows -- maybe I'm just being naive. And the author includes a great note at the end to remind readers not to equate Islam with violence and terrorism. I will definitely look for her first book in the series. Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Claire says

“Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done”

Oh my! Canada is so set up for the snow! 200 salt trucks and 600 ploughs for Toronto alone!! I'm a slight obsessive when it comes to snow as I've always been a bit of a nervous driver. I've got better over the years, even managing to correct a skid whilst on my own earlier this year. But anyway back to The Language of Secrets.

How personal is this case for Khattak? His old friend murdered, his rival and his ex partner involved in the investigation, and then his sister! I thought The Unquiet Ones was personal but this cuts close to the bone for Khattak. Can he keep his personal feelings separate to his professional logic and investigation? I don't want to talk too much about the plot as I really don't want to spoil the story. No one likes a review that even if it gives a hint of what is to happen.

As the book's blurb suggests, Getty plays a key part in the investigation of Mohsin's death. She has to grasp her inner strength to play the part in her undercover mission, gaining the trust of the suspicious members of the cell. I did fear for Getty as she got herself deeper into the group. Would she be rumbled?

And don't you love it when the title of the book suddenly makes sense? The Language of Secrets definitely fits into that category. The title has a multitude of possible meanings and as the story progresses, there are plenty of secrets to be uncovered!

Yet again, Ausma Zehanat Khan has written a fictional crime thriller inspired by real life events making the story feel rather real and feasible. This is a murder mystery intertwined with a terrorist plot and what would seem a group heading towards a kind of cult status.

It was a proper whodunnit and it kept me guessing right to the end. Sinister themes running through an addictive follow up to The Unquiet Ones. And I for one am glad to see that Khattak and Getty will be back next year!!

Mackey says

The Language of Secrets is the second in a series featuring Esa Khattak and Rachel Gerry, members of Canada's Community Policing Section. This book is loosely based on the actual events that occurred in 2006 called "Toronto 18" in which a group of 18 young men and women were thwarted in an attempt to blow up the Canadian Parliament. However - a huge pause here - while that is the mystery and plot of the storyline, Khan's books always are more about the characters, their lives, their emotions and, yes, their religion. In this instance Islam is front and center - from its history, the wars against its people, it's poetry to so much more. Reading Khan's writings is an experience that is both enjoyable and educational. I could, at this point, go into detail about the story but like with any other mystery it is a complicated murder that must be solved. What sets this book apart are its marvelous characters, the author's exquisite prose and

the unique and timely subject matter that she brings to the table each and every time. Obviously I highly recommend this book.

Jennifer says

loosely based on the real story of the 'toronto 18', *the language of secrets* examines radicalization. again, khan is smart, nuanced and sensitive in her storytelling. i found that this second book in the series was a little more emotionally charged than the first book, *The Unquiet Dead*. though both deal with very difficult subject matter, we are given more connections to esa khattak's and rachel getty's personal lives, their work histories, and their relationship with one another. the feelings of trust and protectiveness have grown in this book. i enjoyed how well khan portrays her diverse cast, and i love how i feel like i am learning so much more about khan's chosen subjects when i read her stories. with the books mostly set in toronto and the GTA (and algonquin park in this installation), it's also very cool to picture so clearly the places referenced.

Beverly says

This stunningly complex police procedural set in Canada is told with grace and poignancy grabbing the reader's attention from first page to the last word. The storyline is loosely based on a terrorist attempt in Canada in 2006 and feels very current based on recent headlines. But the strength of this novel is the characters and the author's skillful development of the multi-dimensional characters and emotionally perceptive skill of the motives, reasoning, and the group and individual objectives of the situations. For me mystery series are also about the lead investigators of the crime/puzzle/mystery to be solved and building what we know about them from book to book. This is the second book in the series and I so enjoyed what was revealed to us about Esa and Rachel. This case becomes very personal to Esa on both a professional and personal level as he is often pawn between two opposing groups and needs to figure out how best justice, fairness, and doing the right thing is best served. The language is poetic and lyrical yet reveals the tension and suspense as the dialogue is often jabbing at the characters to provoke them into action. Overall I found this book to be immensely satisfying and a splendid addition to the series. This book will appeal to mystery readers looking for a compelling diverse read. I am so looking forward to the next book in the series. While it is not necessary to read the first book in the series, *The Unquiet Dead*, it is highly recommended that readers to savor the full experience of the atmosphere and characters.
