



★ **Twisted Tree** Kent Meyers. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$24 (304p) ISBN 978-0-15-101389-0

In his beautiful and unsettling new novel, Meyers (*The Work of Wolves*) examines the effects of a murder on the residents of a small South Dakota town. In an opening sequence that is so disturbing it's difficult to read, teen Hayley Jo Zimmerman is stalked and abducted by a serial killer. The rest of the novel uses the rippling consequences of Hayley Jo's murder to explore the smaller rural tragedies in Twisted Tree, S.D.: Elise, a forlorn grocery clerk, judges everyone by their purchases and hides the secret terrors of her past as a missionary; Sophie Lawrence cares for her invalid stepfather while losing her sanity; Angela Morrison learns to accept the harsh realities of being a rancher's wife; Stanley, Haley Jo's father, channels his grief into a desperate need to connect with a stranger. The novel is brimming with arresting descriptions, and the western setting is employed to surprising effect, as in a sequence contrasting the removal of an invasive salt cedar bush with a father's awareness of his son's first crush. Meyers's small masterpiece deserves comparison to the work of Raymond Carver, Joy Williams and Peter Matthiessen. (Sept.)