



The Tell

By Hester Kaplan
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Introduction

An elegant and haunting novel of love and family, *The Tell* demands that we reconsider our notions of marriage, duty, compromise, betrayal, and the choice to stand by or leave the ones we love.

Mira and Owen's marriage is less stable than they know when Wilton Deere, an aging, no longer famous TV star moves in to the grand house next door. With plenty of money and plenty of time to kill, Wilton is charming but ruthless as he inserts himself into the couple's life in a quest for distraction, friendship and most urgently a connection with Anya, the daughter he abandoned years earlier. Facing stresses at home and work, Mira begins to accompany Wilton to a casino and is drawn to the slot machines. Escapism soon turns to full-on addiction and a growing tangle of lies and shame that threatens her fraying marriage and home. Betrayed and confused, Owen turns to the mysterious Anya, who is testing her own ability to trust her father after many years apart.

The Tell is a finely-wrought novel about risk: of dependence, of responsibility, of addiction, of trust, of violence. Told with equal parts suspense, sympathy, and psychological complexity, it shows us the intimate and shifting ways in which we reveal ourselves before we act, and what we assume but don't know about those closest to us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Wilton Deere was once a well-known television actor who now has an ambivalent attitude towards his celebrity. He wants to be recognized, but he knows he is remembered not for who he is, but for the role he played in a sitcom. What does Mira and Owen's attention to Wilton suggest about our current fascination and exorciation of celebrities?
2. Years after a traumatic event in his life, Owen still suffers the aftereffects of violence. What is his relationship to violence? Does his statement that "violence's upper hand" is everywhere ring true? How does Owen feel about the fact that his height is often viewed as threatening?
3. Mira and Wilton quickly develop a very close relationship. Owen sees this early on, and remarks that Mira was "not usually won over so soon." Why is Mira so drawn to Wilton? And why is Wilton so drawn to her? Can Wilton be a friend to both Mira and Owen separately?
4. Mira and Owen work with disadvantaged children. Mira believes her work makes a difference, while Owen is not so sure about his own effectiveness in the classroom. Wilton says, "Good work must make all the difference in life." What does he mean by "good work"?
5. What role do secrets play in Mira and Owen's marriage and in any marriage? Are some secrets best not revealed? Is Mira right when she says, "you should always detest a liar"?
6. Mira's addiction to the slot machines is as surprising to her as it is to Owen. No one believed it could happen "to a woman like her." Why is she drawn to the slot machines? What is she getting from going to the casino? Do casinos capitalize on people's addictive proclivities, or should the notion of personal responsibility prevail?
7. When Owen says, "everything is an addiction these days," is he saying that we've let ourselves off the hook by medicalizing desire? Does he ever fully accept that Mira is addicted?
8. Mira's house, its contents and history, are important to her sense of self. How does Mira's hold on the past shape her present? Owen believes that Mira's responsibility to the place keeps her captive there. What are his feelings about the house and its objects?
9. Mira created Brindle, her art school, because she believes in the power of art to change lives. Owen veers away from the curriculum and has his students write about their lives and their dreams. They both work with children and know it's essential for those who aren't usually heard from to express themselves and be heard. How is it Mira and Owen hide their true stories from each other?
10. Wilton's focus in the novel is reconnecting with his daughter Anya. He's lived with the shame of his recklessness with her when she was a small child, and now he wants to be forgiven. How do Anya's mixed feelings about Wilton affect him? How does this father-daughter relationship make Mira and Owen reassess their relationships with their own parents?

About the Author

Hester Kaplan is the author of *The Edge of Marriage*, which won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and *Kinship Theory*, a novel. Her short stories have been included in *The Best American Short Stories* series. She teaches in Lesley University's MFA Program in Creative Writing and lives in Rhode Island.