

TELL HER EVERYTHING

Mirza Waheed

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“

Tell Her Everything is a layered recital of intricately woven hauntings, decisions, and confessions ... A story that is at once haunting, tender, and gripping.” —**Chicago Review of Books**

“

An eloquent and powerful testament to the fragility of our moral codes—and especially resonant at a time when those codes are being violated like never before.”

—**Pankaj Mishra**, author of *The Age of Anger*

INTRODUCTION

A doctor working in a prosperous Middle Eastern city finds himself placed in an unconscionable situation ...

As he prepares for a visit from his long-estranged daughter, Dr K., a retired surgeon enjoying the comforts of retirement in London, rehearses the conversation he will finally have with her. It’s been years since he has seen her, and he has spent much of that time polishing the confession he wants to make to her.

But as her visit draws closer, he finds his memories to be freshly torturous. He recalls leaving his childhood home in India to accept a dream job, working for a state hospital in a prosperous oil monarchy. Suddenly, he’d had access to a lifestyle that he would never have had back home. Money and success came quickly . . . as long as he performed certain tasks for the state. The price for that proved steep and often unbearable, especially to a wife and daughter who watch him walk the perilous path of lifelong ambition.

Tell Her Everything is a tense, visceral, and moving novel about a father’s love for his daughter, and about a medical professional grappling with remorse, shame and despair. Recalling the work of Ishiguro, Coetzee and Kafka, it asks: Where does one draw the line between empathy and sacrifice? Between integrity and survival? Between prosperity and love?

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Are Dr. K’s motivations for deciding to tell Sara everything, at this point in time, clear? Is he a reliable narrator?
2. How do Kaiser’s “punishment cases” affect our perception of him? How do his morals evolve the more we learn about his participation in these cases?
3. Regarding his emigration experience, Dr. K recalls, “You see, a fresh immigrant’s mind is in a state of perennial confusion, pulled as it is in various directions. You want to look ahead, but you find yourself looking over your shoulder” (43). What image do Dr. K’s stories paint of Atiya? Similarly, how does Dr. K describe his experience with assimilation in England?

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4. Dr. K plans to tell Sara that he sent her away for her protection and to make sure she would have a good life. He remarks, "Why do you think I sent you away? Surely, you understand why I never let you visit the place where you spent a lot of your childhood. When you have children of your own you'll understand how hard, how devastating, how ... painful it is to willfully keep your child away. But now you're home and thank god for that." (116). Should she believe him?
5. How does Bijou's character evolve throughout the story? What is his character representative of?
6. How has losing her mother impacted Sara? In what ways did her father's response in the moment inform that impact? Kaiser says, "I just didn't know what the right thing to do was. I simply couldn't decide, so I let things happen" (93). Do you think his reaction and subsequent actions were justified?
7. How does Sara's letter alter our understanding of her conversation with her father? Of their relationship?
8. What does the train represent for Sara? What does it mean to experience an ever-shifting landscape?
9. Where do you see Sara and Dr. K's relationship heading in the future? Do you think her visit will turn out as Kaiser predicts it?
10. In Sara's letter, she writes, "You are, certainly were, a great father. A good man, a good father. But not good enough" (211). Do you think Dr. K is a good father?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mirza Waheed was born and brought up in Kashmir. His debut novel, *The Collaborator*, was an international bestseller, a finalist for the Guardian First Book Award and the Shakti Bhatt Prize, and long listed for the Desmond Elliot Prize. It was also a Book of the Year for *The Daily Telegraph*, *New Statesman*, *Financial Times*, *Business Standard* and *The Telegraph (India)*, among others.

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