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The Distance Between Us

by Bart Yates



About the Book

Hester is a brilliant, witty, and sharp-tongued seventy-one year old concert pianist in the midst of a bitter divorce from her equally renowned and ill-tempered violinist husband, Arthur Donovan. The Donovan?s are a family of troubled prima donnas: Paul, their oldest child, is a top-notch cellist, but also neurotic and unstable; Caitlin is a world-class literary critic and teacher, but suffers from a lack of the musical talent the rest of the family possesses in spades; and Jeremy, the precocious and sensitive middle child, now dead, having taken his own life some years ago. When Hester decides to rent out the attic apartment in her house to a vulnerable young man with ample problems of his own, she unwittingly exposes all the old wounds and grievances in her entire family, and the result is a month of anguish and heartache, ugly open warfare and painful, revealing memories. But through it all, her budding friendship with Alex slowly allows her to come to terms with herself and her family, and provides her the strength to fix what she can, and open her heart once again to love.

Discussion Guide

1. Hester Parker is articulate and perceptive, but is she reliable as a narrator? Can we trust her version of her family?s history?

2. The friendship between Hester and Alex is unusual, largely because of the difference in their ages. Why is Hester more comfortable with Alex than with anyone else? Why is Alex willing to trust her?

3. Jeremy Donovan blames much of his unhappiness on the exceptional nature of his musical talent. Is this a legitimate complaint?

4. The Donovan family falls apart after Jeremy?s suicide. What are the reasons for this? Could this rift have been avoided?

5. Hester?s less appealing qualities (vanity, anger, bitterness) are offset, at least in part, by her sense of humor and her kindness to Alex. But is she a likeable character? How does she change over the course of the novel?

6. Caitlin and Paul blame Hester for Jeremy?s death. Are they right to do so?

7. Hester chooses to portray Jeremy?s suicide as an accidental death to the police and the press. Why do you suppose she does this? Is she embarrassed? Ashamed?

8. How does Alex help Hester come to terms with losing Arthur?

9. All of the main characters are emotionally damaged individuals, but who suffers the most? Why do you think this is the case?

10. In the epilogue Hester says that ?the secret of life? is gratitude, and forgiveness. What kind of gratitude is she speaking of? What kind of forgiveness?

Author Bio

Bart Yates (aka Noah Bly) is the award-winning author of seven novels, including LEAVE MYSELF BEHIND, THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE AND LOSS, THE THIRD HILL NORTH OF TOWN, and THE VERY LONG, VERY STRANGE LIFE OF ISAAC DAHL. He is also a professional musician, and plays clarinet, saxophone and bass guitar.

Critical Praise

"Absorbing?brims with quiet intensity."

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