



The Unwitting: A Novel

Ellen Feldman

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In CIA parlance, those who knew were “witting.” Everyone else was among the “unwitting.”

On a bright November day in 1963, President Kennedy is shot. That same day, Nell Benjamin receives a phone call with news about her husband, the influential young editor of a literary magazine. As the nation mourns its public loss, Nell has her private grief to reckon with, as well as a revelation about Charlie that turns her understanding of her marriage on its head, along with the world she thought she knew.

With the Cold War looming ominously over the lives of American citizens in a battle of the Free World against the Communist powers, the blurry lines between what is true, what is good, and what is right tangle with issues of loyalty and love. As the truths Nell discovers about her beloved husband upend the narrative of her life, she must question her own allegiance: to her career as a journalist, to her country, but most of all to the people she loves.

Set in the literary Manhattan of the 1950s, at a journal much like the *Paris Review*, *The Unwitting* evokes a bygone era of burgeoning sexual awareness and intrigue and an exuberance of ideas that had the power to change the world. Resonant, illuminating, and utterly absorbing, *The Unwitting* is about the lies we tell, the secrets we keep, and the power of love in the face of both.

Praise for *The Unwitting*

“Much of the fun comes from the literary cameos (think: Mary McCarthy, Richard Wright and Robert Lowell), but it’s [Ellen Feldman’s] haunting portrait of a marriage that make this Cold War novel so resonant for readers of any time period, including our own.”—**O: *The Oprah Magazine***

“The first notable thing about this book is the narrator’s voice: it is snappish, confident, argumentative, literate. I fell for it from the beginning. . . . *The Unwitting* is vibrant, sassy, informative, a page-turner, absorbing, and swift. I am a woman, so maybe it is a women’s book, but I seriously doubt it, and hope that male readers will give it a shot. Surely they too will appreciate the research that went into it. Surely they too will be fascinated by its bold and thorough review of the American twentieth century.”—**Kelly Cherry, *The Los Angeles Review of Books***

“Compelling enough to take its place with the best of crime fiction, Feldman’s language is loving, bright and sharp while her storytelling abilities are unquestionable. . . . *The Unwitting* cuts us into an interesting time, then ramps things up. . . . Feldman is clearly a writer who is going places, [and] *The Unwitting* brings that home: it’s a terrific book.”—**January Magazine**

“A story of love and intrigue during the Cold War, *The Unwitting* plumbs not only the secrets of spies, but those of the human heart. Moving, witty, and thoroughly intelligent, it is an absorbing and deeply satisfying read.”—**Kevin Baker, author of *The Big Crowd***

“Unforgettable . . . *The Unwitting* compelled me from the first page and through every unexpected twist and turn. This look into the dark places in human nature cries out to be read, re-read, and discussed.”—**Lynn Cullen, author of the national bestseller *Mrs. Poe***

“Through the lens of a passionate, complex marriage, Ellen Feldman brings the Cold War back to life. *The Unwitting* is a wise and irresistible portrait of fascinating people in a tumultuous time.”—**Roger Straus III, former managing director, Farrar, Straus and Giroux**

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Livia Wilder:

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Laura Burke:

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