Safe Keeping

by Barbara Taylor Sissel



About the Book

At the heart of every crime, there?s a family?

Emily Lebay had always thought of her family as ordinary. Sure, they?ve endured their share of problems, even a time of great trouble --- what family hasn?t? But when a woman?s body turns up in the dense woods near their home, and Emily?s grown son, Tucker, is accused of murder, Emily is forced to confront the unfathomable, and everything she believed about her life is called into question.

This isn?t the first time Tucker has been targeted by the police; a year ago he was a person of interest when another woman was found dead in the same stretch of woods. Still, neither Emily nor her daughter, Lissa, can reconcile their Tucker with these brutal crimes. Terrified, convinced there?s been a tragic mistake, Emily and Lissa set out to learn the truth about Tucker, once and for all. And while his life hangs in the balance, what they discover proves far more shocking than their darkest fears?

Discussion Guide

1. Emily regrets that she didn?t put a stop to Tucker?s relation-ship with Miranda when it began in high school. How would you handle it if your son or daughter became romantically involved with someone you believed to be a bad influence?

2. Emily and Roy are at odds over how to handle Tucker?s lin-gering dependency on them. In their situation, which side would you choose? Would you be inclined to give Tucker more latitude as Emily does, or do you think Roy?s ?tough love? approach would be more effective?

3. As siblings, Lissa and Tucker seem close, although she doesn?t claim to know and understand her brother on every

level. In fact, he mystifies her in certain ways. Do you share a bond with your sibling? Did the bond survive childhood or did you drift apart once you were grown and left home? Discuss the ways you might have kept this bond intact. Discuss the ways the bond may have been broken and the rea-sons for that.

4. Do you feel a mother can share as tight a bond with her grown son as she might with her grown daughter? How much do you feel gender is a factor in the context of creating tightly knit family relationships?

5. How do you feel about Roy?s gun collection? He kept it locked in a cabinet, but do you feel that was sufficiently safe gun practice? Would the tragedy at the story?s end have been avoided if guns hadn?t been in the Lebay home?

6. Emily does a lot of cooking, finding relief from stress in the occupation. Lissa paints. What do you do when you?re under pressure, when your heart is troubled, to find peace?

7. Emily shares a deep bond of friendship with Joe Merchant, a lover from her past, and while she doesn?t conceal her friendship with Joe from Roy, she doesn?t talk to him about it, either. Do you feel it?s a betrayal of Roy and their mar-riage vows? Does the nature of Emily and Joe?s relationship feel morally ambiguous to you or do you feel she has a right to have whomever she chooses as a friend, man or woman?

8. Lissa is deeply conflicted about her pregnancy, concerned her baby will be born with psychological and emotional is-sues, in essence that the baby might turn out to be troubled in the way Tucker is. Do you feel her concerns are valid? What are your thoughts about nature versus nurture?

9. Lissa and Emily are uncertain where to lay the blame for Tucker?s issues. Are they the result of the tremendous fear he experienced as a child when in the throes of an episode of post-traumatic stress? Or is Tucker?s troubled nature the result of faulty genes? Do you believe a person can simply be evil and there is no explanation?

10. The difficulty of forgiveness is a theme in this story. Could you forgive a family member who had committed a heinous crime?

11. Emily and Roy make tremendous sacrifices in order to keep Tucker safe. Discuss some of those sacrifices. How far would you go to protect your own child? Would you act as Roy does in the final scene?

12. Discuss the significance of the title.

Author Bio

Barbara Taylor Sissel is the author of EVIDENCE OF LIFE, THE NINTH STEP and THE VOLUNTEER. She once lived on the grounds of a prison facility in Kentucky, which inspired her interest in the families behind the crimes about which she writes. An avid gardener and the mother of two sons, Barbara currently resides in the beautiful Texas Hill Country.

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