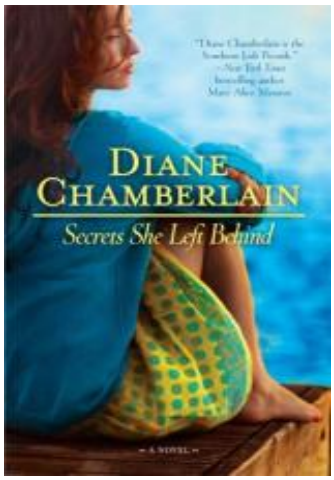
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Secrets She Left Behind

by Diane Chamberlain



About the Book

One afternoon, single mother Sara Weston says that she's going to the store --- and never returns. In her absence, she leaves her teenaged son alone with his damaged past and a legacy of secrets.

Keith Weston nearly lost his life in an act of arson. He survived --- but with devastating physical and emotional scars. Without his mother, he has no one to help him heal, no money, nothing to live for but the medications that numb his pain. Isolated and angry, his hatred has one tight focus: his half-sister, Maggie Lockwood.

Nineteen-year-old Maggie Lockwood spent a year in prison for the acts that led up to the fire. Now she's back home. But her release cannot free her from the burden of guilt she carries. She grew up with Keith Weston, played with him as a child... and recently learned they share the same father.

Now the person Keith despises most is the closest thing he has to family --- until Sara returns. *If* Sara returns....

Discussion Guide

1. Keith wears his scars on the outside, while Maggie's are invisible, yet every bit as present. How are these two teenagers' plights similar or different?

2. Keith is a hurt, sour and profane seventeen-year-old. His tough exterior is off-putting to the people around him, yet it hides a softness inside him. When --- if ever --- did Keith begin to win your sympathy? Can you think of people you know whose exteriors are nothing like their inner selves? Do you think that dichotomy takes a toll on a person? If so, how?

3. Maggie is reluctant to begin counseling and she takes an instant dislike to Dr. Jakes. Discuss the evolution of their

relationship. When and how did Dr. Jakes begin to win Maggie's trust? Maggie tells him that she's basically a normal person. Do you agree? If not, what about her is "abnormal" and why do you think she is that way?

4. Dr. Jakes tells Maggie he believes her mother is doing too much to help her. Do you agree? If you were in Laurel's position, how would you treat your daughter? Do you believe Maggie's sentence was appropriate? If not, how would you like to see her have to pay for her actions?

5. Sara and Laurel are both fiercely protective mothers. Discuss their motivations for protecting their children with such determination. How are these two women similar to --- and different from --- one another in their approaches to motherhood?

6. Maggie adores her younger brother and quickly comes to believe that Kimmie is exactly the sort of girlfriend Andy needs. Why does she believe that? Do you think Andy and Kimmie's relationship will last? Why or why not?

7. Sara's memoir sheds light not only on her own past, but on that of the other characters as well. Her multi-layered attraction to Jamie is intense from the first time she lays eye on him. What draws her to him? How did you feel about her growing relationship with him? Could you sympathize with her? At what point could she have ended it? Do you think she should have?

8. In her memoir, Sara writes that she'd always thought a physical affair would be more devastating and destructive than an emotional affair, but during her relationship with Jamie, she comes to feel the opposite. What are your thoughts on the differences and similarities between emotional and physical affairs? Which do you feel is more dangerous and why?

9. Jamie clearly had conflicted feelings about his relationship with Sara. Do you think he was fair to her? What hold did Laurel have on him that kept him from leaving her for Sara?

10. Discuss Sara's complicated relationship with Laurel. At one point in her memoir, Sara writes that she loved Laurel deeply. Was that friendship genuine? How did her motivation for friendship with Laurel change over time?

11. Keith and Maggie, both cut off from their former friends, are initially thrilled with their relationships with Jen. What did you make of Jen's attraction to Keith in the grocery store? What did you think when she showed up at the library where Maggie was working? How did your feelings about Jen change throughout the story?

12. Dr. Jakes reframes Maggie's guilt as grief for the girl she used to be and the life she used to have. He suggests she doesn't need to get over that grief as much as she needs to embrace it. Does his philosophy for coping with tough times match yours? If not, do you have a different sort of philosophy? How did that philosophy develop over time for you?

13. Maggie has a revelation when she realizes that her attraction to Dr. Britten and her previous attraction to Ben were connected to her feelings for her father. How common do you think this sort of attraction is? What in Maggie's relationship with her father made it likely for her to experience a transference of warm feelings from him to other men?

14. Dr. Jakes encourages Maggie to connect with her father's spirit. What do you think he was hoping to accomplish by doing this? How did he help Maggie by encouraging her to do this?

15. Maggie says she felt lucky to be with Madison when the little girl died. Why do you think she felt that way? What does it say about Maggie? What do you think she learned from that experience?

16. Marcus is a firefighter who saves people from burning buildings. How else does Marcus save people throughout the story? What motivates him to be a "rescuer"?

17. Before Jen leaves Marcus's tower near the end of the book, she tells Keith that he's beautiful. Does she mean it? Why do you think she says this to him?

18. "What constitutes a family" is a theme that runs throughout the story. What do you see in the future for these characters who've been drawn together by blood and circumstance? Where do you see them in ten years?

Author Bio

Diane Chamberlain is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of 28 novels published in over 15 languages. Her books include BIG LIES IN A SMALL TOWN, THE STOLEN MARRIAGE and THE DREAM DAUGHTER. She lives in North Carolina with her partner, photographer John Pagliuca, and her sheltie, Cole.

Critical Praise

"Diane Chamberlain is the Southern Jodi Picoult."

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