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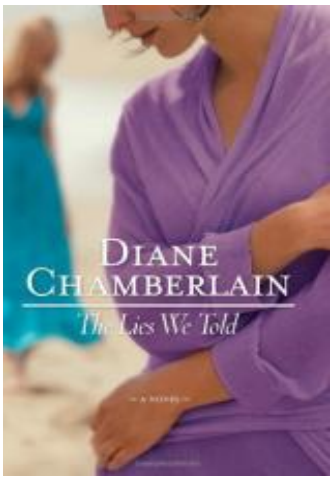
The Lies We Told

by Diane Chamberlain



About the Book

Maya and Rebecca Ward are both accomplished physicians, but that's where the sisters' similarities end. As teenagers, they witnessed their parents' murder, but it was Rebecca who saved Maya from becoming another of the gunman's victims. The tragedy left Maya cautious and timid, settling for a sedate medical practice with her husband, Adam, while Rebecca became the risk taker.

After a devastating hurricane hits the coast of North Carolina, Rebecca and Adam urge Maya to join them in the relief effort. To please her husband, Maya finally agrees. She loses herself in the care and transport of victims, but when her helicopter crashes into raging floodwaters, there appear to be no survivors.

Forced to accept Maya is gone, Rebecca and Adam turn to one another --- first for comfort, then in passion --- unaware that, miles from civilization, Maya is injured and trapped with strangers she's not certain she can trust. Away from the sister who has always been there to save her, now Maya must find the courage to save herself --- unaware that the life she knew has changed forever.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think originally attracted Maya and Adam to one another? When the book opens, Maya hopes that the baby she's expecting will change her marriage for the better. Do you think she really believes that? Do you think Adam feels the same way? Do you think the baby could change their relationships and if so, how?

2. How do you feel about Maya keeping her abortion a secret from Adam? Is there room for secrets in a marriage? Where do you draw the line?

3. Why do you think Maya was slow to reveal her marital problems to Rebecca?

4. If Rebecca had never been in the picture, do you think Maya and Adam's marriage could have worked out? Why or why not?

5. What role did Maya and Rebecca's relationships with their parents play in their adult lives?

6. What were the roots of Rebecca's resentment of Maya? Do you think Maya was aware of that resentment? Do you think Maya had resentments of her own? How did the relationship between Maya and Rebecca differ for each of them? Discuss Rebecca's love/hate feelings toward Maya. What hints did you have into the true nature of Rebecca's feelings for Maya? How do you think she felt when she learned Maya was alive? Which emotion was stronger?

7. Relationships between sisters-indeed, between siblings-are often complex. Could you relate to the relationship between Maya and Rebecca?

8. Maya is described at one point as having been a happy-go-lucky child who changed dramatically after the murder of her parents. Do you think it's possible for one event to have such a strong influence on the rest of someone's life? Could you relate to an event having such a strong impact on someone's future?

9. Rebecca is drawn as an athlete, while Maya is the brain in the family. Yet Rebecca was first to enter medical school. What do you think prompted her to become a doctor? Rebecca begins to question her motivation for joining DIDA, wondering if it was altruism, a need for excitement, or something else. What do you think was her motivation?

10. At one point in the story, Rebecca thinks that Maya is a better person than she is despite Rebecca's altruistic work with DIDA. Why do you think she feels that way and what sort of impact does that belief have on Rebecca?

11. One of the strongest themes in the book is that of self-forgiveness. What does each sister have to forgive herself for in order to move on? Do you think either of them is able to do that successfully?

12. Who would you rather have for a friend, Rebecca or Maya? Why? Which sister would mesh most easily with your personality?

13. A yearning for a child is another central theme in the story. Adam, the last in his family line, longs for a biological child. Maya longs for any child to nurture. And Rebecca, who never wanted a child to begin with, suddenly finds herself experiencing a baby hunger of her own.

A. Can you understand Adam's longing for a biological child and the extent he's willing to go to have one? Do you think he's being fair to Maya in his quest?

B. Discuss Maya's decision to end her fight for a biological child. What is the push/pull that went into that decision? How did her time at Last Run Shelter help her make that decision?

C. Rebecca's baby hunger is perhaps most striking, since her true feelings seemed to creep up on her. She is a classic example of having made a decision about something important when she was younger and not acknowledging the

change in herself over the years until it suddenly hits her in the face. Can you relate to that? How and why do people hide their true yearnings from themselves?

14. Few things are as horrific as not knowing what has become of someone you love. Rebecca wonders if Maya is dead or alive, if her death came quickly, if she's wandering in the woods alone. What impact does this not knowing have on her? Does it change the core of who she is and if so, in what way?

15. Families can get comfortable with the status quo, with each person carrying out the role they have played since they were young. When one person changes, it can throw the entire family into turmoil and the family may subconsciously try to keep that person from changing. This is sometimes true, for example, in families in which one parent is an alcoholic. It's the devil the family knows, and members of the family may subconsciously sabotage the alcoholic's recovery. How does this concept come into play with Rebecca and Maya? Do you think Rebecca wanted Maya to succeed in her DIDA work at the airport? What did Rebecca have to gain by Maya remaining fearful? Does this also hold true for Maya? If Rebecca changes, how might that change impact Maya?

16. Did you know that Rebecca was falling in love with Adam even before she realized it herself? At what point did you become aware that her feelings for him had deepened into something more than the familial love of a woman for her brother-in-law? Were you hoping Maya and Adam would end up back together? Discuss any tension you felt as you read about Rebecca and Adam's growing closeness. In chapter 41, Rebecca and Adam come close to making love. Would your feelings about either or both of them have changed if they'd given into that desire?

17. Simmee came to represent certain things for Maya. Maya talks about Simmee as sister, mother, and friend. Describe the evolution of their relationship from Maya's perspective.

18. Simmee's initial motivation for keeping Maya at Last Run Shelter was to have an outsider there to help her get the baby away. She didn't expect to have feelings for Maya. Discuss how those feelings developed and if they changed Simmee's motivation for keeping her there.

19. Why do you think neither Tully nor Lady Alice told Larry that Maya needed to leave Last Run Shelter? Did they have the same motivation or were they each operating from a different need to keep her there? What do you believe were Tully's true feelings for Simmee?

20. Discuss Rebecca's mounting ambivalence about taking over the helm of DIDA when Dorothea retires. Do you think she'll do it or not? What do you predict in the future for her and Adam? For Maya?

21. At one point, Maya wonders what Simmee might have accomplished if she'd been given better opportunities in life. What do you think she might have accomplished? What do you see in her future?

22. The sisters ultimately reverse their roles, in sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic ways, with Rebecca becoming weaker and Maya becoming stronger. Where do you see this happening? What is the cause of this change in each of them and what impact does it have on them?

23. The word "lies" in the title is used both literally and figuratively. Discuss all the lies referred to in the title.

24. Who do you think is the most resourceful of all the characters in the story? Why?

25. In the opening of the book, Maya says that every family has a story. The author implies that, not only every family has a story, but each individual in that family does as well. How does this fit for you and your family? Do you think a person can ever truly change his or her family story? How might that come about?

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.

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