



I Know This Much Is True

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Thomas and Dominick Birdsey are identical twins born to an unmarried, thirty-three-year-old mother. Twenty years after Thomas develops schizophrenia, he cuts off his right hand as a personal sacrifice to prevent the Gulf War between the United States and Iraq. His brother Dominick struggles to have him transferred from the maximum security ward at the state hospital to a less threatening environment. Dominick's life is further complicated by flashbacks to their troubled childhood, unresolved grief over the death of his baby daughter, and continued problems with his irresponsible girlfriend Joy.

Initially an unsympathetic character, Dominick has developed a nasty sarcasm which is both his weapon and his shield. He has learned to withdraw emotionally, to hold himself in check. Under rigid control except for his anger, he nearly self-destructs. The discovery of his Sicilian grandfathers handwritten autobiography, together with counseling from Dr. Rubina Patel, his brother's psychologist, ultimately enables him to understand and make peace with his family's history.

I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE is a huge book with three major plot lines involving secrets and silence, but the story belongs to Dominick. The novel's real strength lies in Wally Lamb's complex portrait of this private man, scarred by his stepfather's brutality, the responsibility for his gentle mother and increasingly erratic brother, and a divorce from Dessa, the woman he still loves. The book too often verges on melodrama, but its heart is in the right place. It offers a compassionate treatment of the intimate relationship between twins, survival of the death of a twin, and the heartache of living with a schizophrenic loved one.

Sources for Further Study

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