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What Happened To The Show The Lying Game

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The Brief but Bright Run of ABC Family's Mystery Drama

For a generation of television fans who came of age in the early 2010s, ABC Family (now Freeform) was a treasure trove of addictive, twist-filled dramas. Shows like *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *Switched at Birth* dominated the conversation. Among these beloved series was a lesser-known but fiercely loyal fan favorite: *The Lying Game*. Based on the book series of the same name by Sara Shepard—the same author behind *Pretty Little Liars*—the show premiered in August 2011 with high hopes and a built-in audience. But by 2013, it had vanished from the airwaves, leaving fans with a massive cliffhanger and a burning question: **What happened to the show The Lying Game**?

The story of *The Lying Game*is one of promise, timing, network shifts, and ultimately, the harsh realities of television production. To understand its cancellation and legacy, we must look at the show's premise, its performance, and the circumstances that led to its untimely end. This article explores every facet of the show's journey, from its thrilling debut to its abrupt conclusion, and what the cast and creators have said in the years since.

The Premise That Hooked Viewers

*The Lying Game*centered on Emma Becker, a kind-hearted foster teen living in Las Vegas, who discovers she has a long-lost identical twin sister named Sutton Mercer. The two sisters were separated at birth, with Sutton being adopted by a wealthy family in Phoenix, Arizona. When Emma travels to meet Sutton, she is thrown into a world of privilege, secrets, and danger. The core mystery revolves around Sutton's sudden disappearance. Emma must impersonate her sister to uncover the truth, all while navigating a web of lies involving family, friends, and a dangerous conspiracy.

The series starred Alexandra Chando in the dual role of Emma and Sutton, a demanding performance that showcased her range. The supporting cast included Allie Gonino as Laurel Mercer (Sutton's adoptive sister), Blair Redford as Ethan Whitehorse (Emma's love interest), Helen Slater and Andy Buckley as the adoptive parents Kristen and Ted Mercer, and Charisma Carpenter as the antagonist Annie "Lillian" Sawyer. The show also featured Kirsten Prout as Charlotte "Charlie" Mercer, the twins' biological half-sister, and Adrian Pasdar as the mysterious Alec Rybak.

The premise was incredibly compelling. It combined family drama, mystery, romance, and thriller elements in a way that felt fresh for the network. Much like *Pretty Little Liars*, it was based on a popular book series, which gave it an immediate fanbase. However, the show quickly deviated from the source material, taking its own creative liberties to extend the mystery and deepen character arcs.

ABC Family ordered *The Lying Game* to series in early 2011, with the pilot airing on August 15, 2011. The premiere drew in 1.38 million viewers, a solid number for a summer cable debut. The network had a proven formula with Sara Shepard's other adaptation, and executives were optimistic that lightning could strike twice. The show's first season consisted of 10 episodes, which aired from August to September 2011. It later received an additional 10 episodes for its second season, which premiered in January 2012 and concluded in March 2012.

During its first season, *The Lying Game* developed a passionate, if modest, following. Fans were captivated by the central mystery of Sutton's disappearance and the growing romance between Emma and Ethan. The show also tackled deeper themes like identity, class differences, and the meaning of family. The chemistry among the cast was palpable, and the cliffhangers kept viewers coming back week after week.

However, the show's ratings, while respectable for a cable drama at the time, never reached the stratospheric heights of *Pretty Little Liars*. *The Lying Game* averaged around 1.1 to 1.3 million viewers per episode, while *Pretty Little Liars* was pulling in 2.5 to 3 million viewers. This gap, while not dire, placed the show in a precarious position as the network began to evolve its strategy.

The Cancellation: What Went Wrong?

The question "**What happened to the show The Lying Game**" is most urgently answered by the events of 2013. In January 2013, ABC Family announced that the show would be cancelled after just two seasons. The decision was met with shock and disappointment from the fanbase, who had been eagerly awaiting a third season to resolve the cliffhanger ending of Season 2.

Several key factors contributed to the cancellation:

3. Network Shift in Branding and Audience

By early 2013, ABC Family was undergoing a significant transformation. The network was moving away from its "family-friendly" image toward a more mature, young adult focus, which would eventually lead to its rebranding as Freeform in 2016. This shift meant that the network was looking for shows with broader appeal and higher ratings potential. While *The Lying Game* was popular, it was perceived as a "safe" drama compared to edgier programming like *Pretty Little Liars* or the newly acquired *Bunheads*.

The network's executives were reportedly looking for shows that could drive larger social media engagement and cross-platform viewership. At the time, *The Lying Game* had a dedicated but relatively small online presence compared to its sister shows.

4. Ratings Decline and Scheduling Challenges

While the first season performed reasonably well, the second season saw a modest decline in live viewership. The show was also scheduled in a difficult time slot, airing on Monday nights at 9 PM, where it faced stiff competition from other cable dramas and network programming. The show's mid-season premiere in January 2012 also meant it had a fragmented airing pattern, making it harder for viewers to maintain consistent engagement.

Additionally, the show's production costs were relatively high due to the location shooting in Phoenix, Arizona (the show was filmed in the Phoenix area to capture the authentic desert and suburban landscape). These costs, combined with the moderate ratings, made it a less attractive investment for the network.

5. Creative Direction and Story Tensions

There were also reports of creative differences between the showrunners and the network. The series was

developed by Charles Pratt Jr., who had a clear vision for the story arc, but some sources indicated that the network wanted to steer the show in a different direction. The second season ended with a massive cliffhanger involving the twins' biological mother being alive, a major shift from the original books. This cliffhanger was designed to set up a third season, but when the cancellation came, it left fans without closure.

The show's writing team also struggled to balance the central mystery with the romantic subplots and character development. Some critics noted that the second season felt slower than the first, with more focus on relationship drama than the core mystery. This may have contributed to a gradual loss of viewer interest.

The Cliffhanger That Haunts Fans

Perhaps the most painful aspect of *The Lying Game*'s cancellation is its unresolved ending. The Season 2 finale, titled "Till Death Do Us Part," ended with Emma and Sutton learning that their biological mother, whom they believed to be dead, is actually alive. Meanwhile, Sutton decides to reveal her true identity to the world, and Emma is finally free from the lie. However, in the final moments, a mysterious figure—implied to be someone close to the family—shows up at the Mercer house with a gun, leaving the twins' fate unknown.

This cliffhanger was originally intended to launch a larger, more dramatic third season. Showrunner Charles Pratt Jr. later revealed in interviews that he had planned a third season that would explore the twins' dynamic with their mother, the identity of the gunman, and the deeper secrets of the Mercer family. Unfortunately, viewers never got to see those plans realized.

What the Cast and Creators Have Said

In the years since the show ended, many cast members have spoken about their experiences and the disappointment of the cancellation. Alexandra Chando, who played both twins, has mentioned in multiple interviews that she was "heartbroken" when the show was cancelled. She had poured immense effort into playing dual roles and was invested in where the story was headed. She also noted that the plot had been written to fulfill a larger arc, and the abrupt ending was a loss for both the cast and the fans.

Blair Redford, who played Ethan, expressed similar sentiments, calling the show "a special experience" and praising the fan community that kept the spirit of the show alive. Allie Gonino, who played Laurel, has occasionally shared behind-the-scenes memories on social media, and Charisma Carpenter, who played Annie, remains a beloved figure in the fan community, often interacting with fans at conventions.

Interestingly, Charles Pratt Jr. also addressed the cancellation in a 2013 interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, stating that the show "had a lot more story to tell" and that the network's decision was "a business one." He expressed gratitude to the fans for their support and hinted that he would have loved to continue the story in some form, though no revival has materialized.

Fan Reactions and the Show's Legacy

Despite its short run, *The Lying Game*developed a fervent fanbase that remains active to this day. Online forums, social media groups, and fan sites continue to discuss the show, create fan art, and speculate about what could have been. The show's cancellation has become a case study in the perils of network television, where passionate fan support is not always enough to secure a renewal.

In the years since 2013, there have been periodic calls from fans for a revival, either as a third season on a streaming platform or a movie to wrap up the story. Shows like *Veronica Mars* and *Psych* have proven that fan campaigns can sometimes bring back beloved series, but so far, no official movement has gained the necessary traction for *The Lying Game*.

The show's legacy also lives on through its cast's subsequent careers. Alexandra Chando has continued acting, appearing in shows like *The Good Doctor* and *Quantico*. Allie Gonino has focused on her music career and independent films. Charisma Carpenter remains a fan favorite from her days on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, and her role in *The Lying Game* is fondly remembered by her fans. Blair Redford has appeared in various TV series, including *The Gifted* and *Being Mary Jane*.

Could The Lying Game Ever Return?

In today's streaming landscape, revivals and reboots are more common than ever. With the rise of platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, many cancelled shows have found new life. Could *The Lying Game* be one of them?

While there has been no official announcement, several factors make a revival possible but unlikely. First, the show's book series has already concluded, and the TV adaptation diverged significantly, so there is no "natural" ending to adapt for a streaming revival. Second, the cast members have moved on to other projects, and reuniting them would require significant coordination and financial investment. Third, the show's fanbase, while passionate, is relatively small compared to other revived series.

However, the nostalgia for early 2010s television is strong, and streaming platforms are constantly looking for content that appeals to millennial audiences. If a producer were to champion the project, and if a platform saw value in the show's built-in identity, a limited-series revival or a TV movie could be possible. Show creator Charles Pratt Jr. has not ruled out the idea, and some cast members have expressed interest in returning to their roles.

For now, though, *The Lying Game* remains a beloved artifact of a bygone era of cable television. It stands as a testament to the power of a great premise, a dedicated cast, and a

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