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SummerHill Secrets • 1
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BEVERLY
LEWIS



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About the Author

Beverly Lewis, born in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country, is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than ninety books. Her stories have been published in twelve languages worldwide. A keen interest in her mother's Plain heritage has inspired Beverly to write many Amish-related novels, beginning with *The Shunning*, which has sold more than one million copies and is an Original Hallmark Channel movie. In 2007, *The Brethren* was honored with a Christy Award.

Beverly has been interviewed by both national and international media, including *Time* magazine, the Associated Press, and the BBC. She lives with her husband, David, in Colorado.

Visit her website at www.beverlylewis.com or www.facebook.com/officialbeverlylewis for more information.

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Whispers Down the Lane



To
my aunt Ada Reba,
who held my little hand
long ago ...
and whispered a prayer.

Happy is the house that shelters a friend.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Whispers Down the Lane One

A cry rang out in the stillness.

“Merry Hanson!”

I jerked into consciousness, tense and trembling. Sitting up, I peered out at my moonlit bedroom through sleep-filled eyes, listening. The gentle, steady purr of kittens filled the peaceful quiet. Their soft, warm bodies snuggled close on top of the comforter as I moved my feet.

Must be a dream. I leaned back onto my pillow, my body stiff from the rude awakening.

Then in the silence, I heard it again. A determined voice, quivering with desperation. “Merry, please wake up!”

Stumbling from the bed, I dashed to the window and looked out. Shadows played beneath the white light of a full November moon. One shadow stood out from the others and moved slowly toward the house.

I bumped my nose against the cold window as I stared down at a fragile-looking figure. Light from the moon had turned her wheat-colored hair almost white. I drew in a quick breath. *Lissa Vynner!*

Straining, I lifted the storm window and poked my head out into the frosty Pennsylvania night. Squinting down from the second story of our hundred-year-old farmhouse, I tried to brush the sleep away. My school friend was crouched near the old maple.

“Lissa, what are you doing out there?” I called to her in a hushed voice. Shivers danced up and down my arms.

She pulled her jacket against her body. “C-can I sp-spend the n-n-night?” she pleaded, tears in her voice.

“Meet me around back.” I closed the window and scrambled for my fleece-lined slippers and robe. Shadrach and Meshach, my two golden-haired kittens, were curled up on it. “Sorry, little boys,” I whispered, pulling it out from under their drowsy heads. “Where’s Abednego?” *That ornery cat is always missing*, I thought.

Silently, I slipped down the hallway and past my older brother’s room to the stairs. I didn’t dare let Skip in on this thing with Lissa, especially since he was in charge while Mom and Dad were overseas on a mission trip.

I stopped in my tracks as I came within a few feet of the kitchen. Shafts of light streamed into the hallway. It meant only one thing. My know-it-all brother was still up—the last person I wanted to bump into on a night like this!

Tiptoeing closer, I peeked around the door. He was stuffing his face with the leftovers from supper. This could be tricky—smuggling Lissa into the house without Skip knowing.

He glanced up. “Hey, feline freak. Can’t ya sleep?”

I ignored him, heading for the back door.

“Sleepwalking, Mer?” he persisted.

“What?” I muttered, pulling the curtains to one side and peering out. Skip smacked disgustingly on a meat loaf sandwich while I devised a way to distract him.

“You should be in bed,” he demanded.

I whirled around. “*You’re* still up!”

“Don’t get smart, cat breath.” Skip gulped down half a glass of milk in one swallow.

In a flash, I remembered Abednego, my wayward kitten. Genius! I turned the doorknob and stepped outside.

“Hey, close that door!” Skip yelled.

“Lost my cat,” I said, pulling the door shut. Casting a fleeting glance over my shoulder, I went in search of Lissa. Around the side of the house, near a stack of firewood, I found her.

“I s-saw the l-light in the k-kitchen,” she stammered. “D-Didn’t want t-to—”

“C’mon, it’s awful cold.” I led her around to the long front porch. “Wait here—I’ll go through the house and open the door.”

Meow!

I leaned over and spotted two shining eyes under the porch.

Then I heard Skip calling, “Merry, get your cat tail in here!”

My heart pounded as I scooped Abednego into my arms. Lifting his black furry body to my face, I darted around the house and into the kitchen.

“That’s one fat cat,” Skip said, casting a scornful look my way. “Too bad you found him.”

I shot him a fake smile. No time to argue; Lissa was waiting, half frozen to death on the front porch.

Cuddling Abednego, I spoke in my best baby talk. “Hello, my pwecious little boy.”

Skip groaned. “Are there any strays that *don’t* live here?”

“Good night,” I snapped, turning to go. When I was safely out of Skip’s sight, I dashed for the front door with Abednego still in my arms.

Lissa moaned softly as I let her in.

“Follow me,” I whispered.

We sneaked up the stairs to my room. This wasn’t going to be a typical sleepover. Lissa’s eyes were swollen from crying, her bottom lip cracked and bleeding. And she was limping!