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SummerHill Secrets • 2
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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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House of Secrets



To
Verna Flower,
whose loving hospitality
eased my homesickness
during college days . . .
and
who read
my first book manuscript
with editorial encouragement.
Thanks, Aunt Verna,
for your prayers
and love
all these years.

You spread out our sins before you—
our secret sins—and see them all.

—PSALM 90:8 TLB

House of Secrets One

Eerie and still, the study hall classroom echoed my words. “What do you mean your mom’s disappeared?”

I stared at my friend Chelsea Davis. Her thick auburn hair fell around her shoulders.

Her voice trembled as she searched in her schoolbag. “Some-time in the night . . . she . . . Mom must’ve written this note. And now . . .” Chelsea paused, staring at the folded paper in her hand. “Now she’s gone.”

She scanned the study hall cautiously, waiting until the last student vacated the room. Then she handed me the note.

“Do you really want me to read this?” I said, noticing how very pale her face had become.

Chelsea nodded, and slowly, I unfolded the paper.

*Before you wake up, I’ll be gone. Don’t try to find me.
I’m happy where I’ll be.*

My throat felt tight as I read the frightful words. Startled, I refolded the note.

I’m happy where I’ll be. . . . Questions nagged at me, but I said nothing.

Chelsea’s voice cracked, breaking the silence. “I guess you never know how important your family is until one of them is gone.”

Her words struck a chord. I, too, had experienced the loss of a family member. My twin sister, Faithie, had died of leukemia at age seven.

But this? This was far different. Surely Mrs. Davis would return to her family. Maybe she and Mr. Davis had argued; maybe she needed space—time to sort things out.

“Give it a few days,” I said almost without thinking. “I mean, your mom’s got to come back home.”

Chelsea sighed. “I hope you’re right, but this morning I poked around in Mom’s closet. She didn’t take much with her, but she’s definitely gone.” Chelsea stared at the underside of her watch. “For no reason, she just walked out . . . left Dad and me.”

I slipped my assignment notebook into my schoolbag. “How’s your dad handling things?”

“Well, we talked at breakfast.” She had a faraway look in her eyes. “You see, Mom had these new friends . . . a superweird guy and his wife. They were always whispering with her the few times they came to our house. They were into some of the same stuff Mom likes—astrological charts, seances, and stuff like that. Anyway, Mom went with them for coffee several times about a month ago, around the time she got laid off from work. Next thing I knew, she was going to their house for supper, and a couple of times the three of them went to some metaphysical fair in Philadelphia.”

“Did they invite your dad along?”

Chelsea nodded. “Mom and Dad both went to a secret meeting with them at a hotel once.” A frown crept between her eyes. “The thing is, Mom seemed awfully excited about these people—about their mysterious activities.”

“What about the meeting? What was *that* all about?”

“Beats me, but after the first time, Dad refused to go again. Mom was furious. I heard them talking in the kitchen late one night, and I crawled out of bed to listen at the top of the steps. Mom was beside herself—nearly hysterical—trying to get Dad

to see what she said was ‘the true light.’ Over and over she kept saying it—that he was resisting ‘the true light.’ ”

Describing the scene really seemed to bug my friend—the crimped sound in her usually mellow voice and the way she blinked back angry tears told me more than her words. Somewhere along the line, Chelsea Davis had declared herself an atheist. I wondered if she resented her mom for this spiritual encounter—or whatever was going on.

I took a deep breath. “Do you think your mom’s friends influenced her to leave?”

Chelsea shook her head. “All I know is that Mom seemed desperate to make some sort of pledge or oath, but she couldn’t get Dad interested. From what I overheard, he thought the whole thing was ridiculous.”

“An oath? What for?”

“I don’t know exactly,” she replied. “Mom wanted to keep attending the meetings. She pleaded with Dad, trying to persuade him, but he wouldn’t go back.”

“Did your mom ever go again?” I asked, wondering what on earth had really happened with Chelsea’s mother.

“Three or four more times, I think. In fact, Mom was hardly home all last week. Oh, and something else . . .”

I cringed. There was more?

“She suddenly started cooking up these vegetarian meals for us—wouldn’t allow red meat or pork in the house. And she refused to drink water or anything else with her meal. Crazy stuff like that with no word of explanation.”

This was beginning to sound truly strange.

“But the weirdest thing about it—Mom seemed super relaxed. Content, I guess you’d say,” Chelsea added. “And she’d been horribly miserable before and depressed about losing her position at the hospital.”

I’d heard about the cutback. “Too bad her job was phased out. Your mom loved her work.”

“The hospital only needs so many administrative nurses, and she had worked there the fewest years.” Chelsea puffed out her cheeks, then forced the air out. “Then these people, this couple, seemed to appear out of nowhere.”

“What do you think they wanted—I mean, isn’t it a little bizarre?”

Chelsea gathered up her books and we headed for the hallway. “I wish I knew.”

My heart went out to my friend. “I’ll do whatever I can to help you,” I volunteered, keeping pace with her.

“Thanks.” She gave me a pained smile. “And, uh, Merry, if you don’t mind, could you keep it quiet—you know, all the stuff I told you?”

“Count on me,” I reassured her.

We walked down the hushed hallway to the long row of lockers. It was late. We’d missed the school bus, yet Chelsea took her time opening her combination lock, and I found myself deep in thought as I did the same. *How would I feel if my mom vanished into thin air?*

We dropped off our books and sorted out only what we needed for homework. I cast a rueful glance at my friend several lockers away. Chelsea had just confided a deep secret, not knowing I’d been praying for her all through junior high and now as a sophomore in high school. Sometimes she put up with my talk about God—the God she said didn’t exist. Most of the time, she wasn’t interested.

But what Chelsea said next really rattled me. Shook me straight to my heart.

“I’m . . . I’m scared, Mer,” she cried, standing in front of her locker. “I’m afraid I’ll never see my mom again!”

I ran to her and let her bury her face in the shoulder of my jacket. “Oh, Chelsea, you will. You will.” I hoped it was true.

She clung to me, her body heaving with sobs. “I have to find her . . . I want her back,” her muffled voice said into my shoulder.

I could almost feel the autumn chill, the cold, damp rawness, seeping through the cracks in the windowpanes as Chelsea cried.

Silently, I prayed.