



Dark Secrets 1: Legacy of Lies and Don't Tell

By Elizabeth Chandler

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In *Don't Tell*, Lauren knows that by returning to the town where her mother drowned seven years ago, she'll be reliving one of her most haunting memories. When she arrives, she is propelled into a series of mysterious events that mimic the days leading up to her mother's death. Maybe her mother's drowning wasn't an accident after all...and maybe Lauren is next.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Elizabeth Chandler is a pseudonym for Mary Claire Helldorfer. She is the author of the Kissed by an Angel and Dark Secrets series. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

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one

LAST NIGHT I visited the house again. It looked as it did ten years ago, when I dreamed about it often. I've never seen the house in real life, at least not that I can remember. It is tall, three stories of paned windows, all brick with a shingle roof. The part I remember most clearly is the covered porch. No wider than the front steps, it has facing benches that I like to sit on. I guess I was never shy, not even at six; in the dream I always opened the door, walked inside, and played with the toys.

Last night the door was locked. That's how I awoke, trying with all my strength to open it, desperate to get inside. Something was wrong, but now I can't say what. Was there something dangerous outside the house from which I was fleeing? Was there a person in the house who needed my help? It was as if the first part of my dream was missing. But one thing I knew for sure: Someone on the other side of the door was trying hard to keep me out.

"I'm not going," I had told my father back in June. "She's a mean old lady. She disowned Mom and won't speak to you. She has never had anything to do with Pete, Dave, or me. Why should I have anything to do with her?"

"For your mother's sake," he'd said.

Several months later I was on a flight from Arizona to Maryland, still resisting my grandmother's royal command to visit. I took out her invitation, the first message I'd received from her in my life, and reread it—two sentences, sounding as stiff as a textbook exercise.

Dear Megan,

This summer I will see you at Scarborough House.

I have enclosed a check to cover airfare.

Regards,

Helen Scarborough Barnes

Well, I hadn't expected "love and kisses" from a woman who cut off her only daughter when she had decided to marry someone of a different race. My mother, coming from a deep-rooted Eastern Shore family, has more English blood in her than Prince Charles. My father, also from an old Maryland family, is African-American. After trying to have children of their own, they adopted me, then my two brothers. It would be naive to expect warmth from a person who refused to consider adopted kids her grandchildren.

Now that I thought about it, the meaning of my dream the night before was pretty obvious, even the feeling that something was wrong. The door to my mother's family had always been closed to me; when a door kept locked for sixteen years suddenly, without explanation, opens, you can't help but wonder what you're

walking into.

“Megan? You made it!” the woman said, crumpling up the sign with my name on it, then giving me a big hug. “I’m Ginny Lloyd, your mother’s best old friend.” She laughed. “I guess you figured that out.”

When Ginny heard I was coming, she’d insisted on meeting me at the airport close to Baltimore. That October day we loaded my luggage into the back of her ancient green station wagon, pushing aside bags of old sweaters, skirts, shoes, and purses—items she had picked up to sell in her vintage clothes shop.

“I hope you don’t mind the smell of mothballs,” Ginny said.

“No problem,” I replied.

“How about the smell of a car burning oil?”

“That’s okay, too.”

“We can open the windows,” she told me. “Of course, the muffler’s near gone.”

I laughed. Blond and freckled, she had the same southernish accent as my mother. I felt comfortable with her right away.

When I was buckled in, Ginny handed me a map so I could follow our progress toward Wisteria, which is on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay.

“It’s about a two-hour drive,” she said. “I told Mrs. Barnes I’d have you at Scarborough House well before dark.”

“I’m getting curious,” I told her. “When Mom left Maryland, she didn’t bring any pictures with her. I’ve seen a few photos that my uncle Paul sent, showing him and Mom playing when they were little, but you can’t see the house in them. What’s it like?”

“What has your mother told you about it?” Ginny asked.

“Not much. There’s a main house with a back wing. It’s old.”

“That’s about it,” Ginny said.

It was a short answer from a person who had spent a lot of time there as a child and teenager—nearly as short as my mother’s answers about the place.

“Oh, and it’s haunted,” I added.

“People say that,” Ginny replied.

I looked at her, surprised. I had been joking.

“Of course, every old house on the Shore has its ghost stories,” she added quickly. “Just keep the lights on if it feels spooky.”

This trip might turn out to be more interesting than I thought.

Ginny turned on the radio, punching in a country station. I opened the map she had given me and studied it. The Sycamore River cut into the Eastern Shore at an angle. If you were traveling up the Chesapeake Bay, you'd enter the wide river mouth of the Sycamore and head in a northeasterly direction. On the right, close to the mouth, you'd see a large creek named Wist. The next creek up is Oyster. The town of Wisteria sits between them, nearly surrounded by water, the Sycamore River on one side and the creeks on the other two. As for my grandmother's property, it was the large point of land below the town, washed on one side by Wist Creek and on the other side by the Sycamore.

We crossed two sets of railroad tracks. I watched the scenery change from outlet stores to fields of corn and soy and low horizons of trees. The sky was half the world on the Eastern Shore. Ginny asked a lot of questions and seemed more interested in talking about life in Tucson than life in Wisteria.

"What's my grandmother like?" I asked at last.

For a full minute the only response was the roar of the car engine.

"She's, uh, different," Ginny said. "We're coming up on Oyster Creek. Wisteria's just on the other side."

"Different how?" I persisted.

"She has her own way of seeing things. She can be fierce at times."

"Do people like her?"

Ginny hesitated. "Have you spent much time in a small town?" she asked.

"No."

"Small-town folks are like a big family living in one house. They can be real friendly and helpful, but they can also say nasty things about each other and squabble a lot."

She hadn't answered my question about how others saw my grandmother, but I could figure it out. She wasn't the town favorite.

We rumbled over the metal grating of the drawbridge. I hung my head out the window for a moment. In Tucson, creeks were often just trickles. This one was the width of a river.

"We're on Scarborough Street now," Ginny said. "The streets off to our right lead down to the commercial docks, where the oyster and crab boats are. The streets to the left border the college. In a few blocks we'll be crossing over High Street, which is Main Street for us. Want to drive down it?"

"Sure."

We passed a school, went a block farther, then took a right onto High. The street had a mix of houses, churches, and small shops, all of the buildings made of brick or wood. Some of the houses edged right up to the sidewalk; a few had tiny plots of grass in front of them. Pots of bright chrysanthemums perched on windowsills and steps. The sidewalks on both sides of High Street were brick and ripply, especially around

the roots of the sycamore trees that lined the street. But even where there weren't roots, the brick looked softened, as if the footprints of two and a half centuries had been worn into it.

"It's pretty," I said. "Are there a lot of wisteria vines around here?"

"People grow it," she said, "but actually, the parcel of land that became the town was won in a card game called whist. That was the town's original name. Some upright folks in the 1800s, who didn't approve of gambling, added to it. I guess we're lucky they weren't playing Crazy Eights."

I laughed.

"There's my shop, Yesterdaze," Ginny slowed down and pointed to a storefront with a large, paned window that bowed out over the sidewalk. "Next door is Tea Leaves. Jamie, the owner, makes pastries to die for.

"The town harbor is ahead of us," she went on. "Only pleasure boats dock there now. I'm going to swing around to Bayview Avenue and show you where I live. You know you're welcome to stay with me if things get difficult."

"Difficult how?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I find it isolated out there on the other side of the Wist. And Scarborough House seems awfully big without a family to fill it up."

"Is that why my grandmother invited me? She can't get anybody else to come?"

"I doubt *that's* the reason. Mrs. Barnes has never liked company—whoa!" Ginny exclaimed, hitting her brakes hard, sending shoe boxes tumbling over the seat from the back of the station wagon.

A guy in an open-topped Jeep, impatient to get around a car making a turn, had suddenly cut in front of us. The backseat passengers of the red Jeep, two girls and a guy, held on to one another and hooted. The girl in the front seat turned briefly to look at us, laughing and tossing her long hair. The driver didn't acknowledge his near miss.

"Jerk," I said aloud.

Ginny looked amused. "That was your cousin."

"My cousin?" I twisted in my seat, to look down the side street where the Jeep had made another sudden turn.

"Matt Barnes," she replied.

"I thought he was in Chicago."

"Your uncle moved there, and Matt's mother is somewhere in the North, I believe."

"Boston," I told her. It had been an ugly divorce, I knew that much.

"Matt has spent nearly every summer in Wisteria. He transferred to the high school here last winter and is

living full-time with your grandmother. You didn't know that?"

I shook my head.

"She bought him the Jeep this past summer. Rumor has it he's getting his own boat. Matt's usually carting around jocks or girls."

Spoiled and wild, I thought. But things were looking up. No matter what he was like, spending two weeks with a guy my own age was better than being alone with a fierce seventy-six-year-old. I'd just fasten my seat belt and go along for the ride.

"Does my grandmother drive?" I asked.

"Pretty much like Matt," Ginny replied, laughing.

When we got to Bayview, she pointed out her house, a soft yellow cottage with gray shutters, then returned to Scarborough Road.

We crossed the Wist, rumbling over an old bridge, drove about a quarter mile more, then turned right between two brick pillars. The private road that led to my grandmother's started out paved, but crumbled into gravel and dirt. Tall, conical cedar trees lined both sides. They did not bend gracefully over the drive, as trees do in pictures of southern mansions, but stood upright, like giant green game pieces. At the end of the double row of trees I saw sections of sloping gray roof and brick chimneys, four of them.

"We're coming up behind the house," Ginny said. "The driveway loops around to the front. You're seeing the back wing. That picket fence runs along the herb garden by the kitchen."

"The house is huge."

"Remember that you are welcome to stay with me," she said.

"Thanks, but I'll be fine."

Now that I was here, I was looking forward to the next two weeks. I mean, how much of a terror could one little old woman be? It'd be fun to explore the old house and its land, especially with a cousin my age. Four hundred acres of fields and woods and waterfront—it seemed unbelievable that I didn't have to share them with other hikers in a state park. A wave of excitement and confidence washed over me. Then Ginny circled the house and parked in front.

"Megan," she said, after a moment of silence, "Megan, are you all right?"

I nodded.

"I'll help you with your luggage."

"Thanks."

I climbed out of the car slowly, staring up at Grandmother's house. Three stories of paned windows, brick with a shingled roof, a small covered porch with facing benches—it was the house in my dreams.

I took my luggage from Ginny, feeling a little shaky. For the second time in twenty-four hours, I walked up the steps of the house. This time the door swung open.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Odessa Currie:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something different to fill your own free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book may be option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the reserve untitled Dark Secrets 1: Legacy of Lies and Don't Tell can be good book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

Paul Erdmann:

Dark Secrets 1: Legacy of Lies and Don't Tell can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The article writer giving his/her effort to get every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Dark Secrets 1: Legacy of Lies and Don't Tell although doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource data that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial thinking.

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