

Yours Until Niagara Falls
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From Scene 1: Letters from Camp – Telling Secrets

IZZY and LINA are ten years old. They should be played by performers older than that. It's not an easy scene.

(IZZY is writing a letter. July 5, 1962)

IZZY

Dear Izzy,

I am writing to your house because I don't know your address in the Poconos. The Fourth of July was boring. We didn't see the fireworks because of the rain. And I had to clean my room twice to stop my mother from yelling. I went to Aunt's Maria's a lot. My cousins watched "The Three Stooges Meet Some Kind of Monsters" ALL weekend. I saw it three times and still don't know the title. And now you are going straight to sleepaway camp for two weeks! Suppose something happens in July and we aren't best friends anymore? Suppose I got hit by a bus - my mother says that a lot. Or my father decided he hated his job and took us to live in a swamp and we'd never see each other?

I've been thinking. I am going to tell you my most secretest secret ever. So you know how much you mean to me. It's something I have never shared. I read that if you do that, it shows that you care about the other person a lot. My family knows my secret because have you ever tried keeping a secret in your family? They find out everything.

Here it is. Remember Puddles? You saw her under my pillows and thought she was a stuffed rat. She's really my stuffed duck. She used to have a beak which came off. And then her cute, webbed feet fell off and now I guess she is a duck-rat. I can't go to sleep unless I sleep with Puddles. That's why I don't go to sleepovers. I stay up all night if I don't have Puddles. I have to brush her fur over my lips to sleep. It makes me feel snuggly and when her fur touches my lips, I can finally fall asleep. I know it's babyish and my mom hates Puddles but I need her.

If you want to share a secret with me, I would never tell a soul. Please keep this somewhere like in your dirty socks and underwear where nobody would peek.

Tell me about camp. Write a really long letter.

Yours until Niagara Falls (Isn't that cute? I saw that in a book and liked it),

Izzy

(LINA writes a letter. July 1962)

Dear Izzy,

Happy Birthday! I wish I could be there with you. Thank-you for sharing your secret. It's fizzy and fuzzy and cute like you.

My parents brought your letter up. And I do have a secret. You know the birthday present my mom dropped off at your house? That's my secret. After you read it, I will tell you more.

I will not keep your letter with my dirty socks and underwear. Sheesh! It's safe inside my shirt with all the stripes in different colors that I hate and will never wear. Don't tell my mother.

Yours.... until the chocolate chips (A counselor made it up.)

Lina

IZZY

Dear Lina,

I just finished "The Diary of Anne Frank" and am crying. Thank-you for giving the book to me. I wondered about a lot of things so I will go to the library to find out more. I have stuff in common with Anne. She did not get along with her mother, did she? It sounds like me and my mother. I have a lot of questions. Hundreds. What does the book have to do with you? I don't know the secret.

I am sitting here in my cement backyard thinking of how you are having fun at camp. You could play "Wizard of Oz" "in the woods" or "Peter Pan" down by the lake. They should have a pirate ship in the lake. Wouldn't that be fun?

I miss you. I wish my parents would get me a dog so I could have someone to talk to. Sometimes I talk to my cousin's dog and he really listens – like you do. My mother is nagging me to go outside and "play." I'd rather stay inside and read. I listen to "The Wizard of Oz" a lot. I got really good at doing the witch laugh. I will teach it to you.

Maybe you can get the music to it and you can play the piano while I sing. I want to be the Scarecrow. Dorothy would be fun but I'm not cute enough. We could enter talent shows. *That* would be fun.

Yours Until Niagara Falls,

Izzy

(LINA writes a letter.)

LINA

Dear Izzy,

I am glad that you read "The Diary of Anne Frank."

The woods have lots of poison stuff in them. I itch all over. Also, all the bugs bite. They have a piano in the rec center so sometimes I still practice. Or play pong. Ping pong balls don't bite.

LINA (cont'd)

I don't think the counselors want a pirate ship. The boys would start pirate fights. Arrrgh!

I don't want to be in a talent show. Sorry.

And please don't compare me to a dog.

If I learned the witch laugh, would it scare Ari?

I will send you the “secret” when I am alone.
Yours until the chocolate chips,
Lina

Dear Lina,

It’s been two days and I still don’t know your secret. If you don’t want to tell me, that’s okay. But I really hope you tell me. I am good about keeping secrets.

I scared my sister with the witch laugh so you could probably scare your brother. Nothing has happened in the last two days. Because nothing ever happens to me. I have to make-believe something happens to me.
Please write!!!!
Yours until Niagara Falls,
Izzy.

LINA

TOP SECRET! FOR YOUR EYES ONLY! DON’T SHOW THIS TO ANYONE

THE SECRET. It’s funny that you started this secret-stuff - because before I left, my mother said I could tell you some things. She said if we were going to be together all the time, there are things you should know. And I should give you The Diary for your birthday. But I didn’t know how to tell you. I am glad I am writing this to you because whenever we talk about it at home, I cry. I’m crying now. I am writing this in the shower where no one can see me. I bet you went to the library and took out a hundred books about this. I bet you know about the camps and the gas chambers. Which were worse than dying in quicksand. I know you worry about quicksand.

MY FATHER. He wanted to be a doctor. He couldn’t finish medical school because the Nazis threw all the Jews out of all the schools. He was in a Russian prison. That’s all I know – he won’t talk about it and I don’t ask. And you can never, ever ask!!! Okay? If they ever talk about this stuff to you, just listen. I think he would have been a good doctor.

MY MOTHER. My mother and her family were arrested from their home in Hungary because they were Jewish. They really arrested you for that. There was no time to go into hiding like Anne Frank. They were told they would be going on a train ride. And they could take one suitcase each. My mother took her father’s medicine, and they all took lots of sweaters and socks. They were put on a train for a whole week – with no water. A week later they arrived at

LINA (cont’d)

Auschwitz - where Anne was. And no, they never met and no, no questions about that. There were nine people in my mother’s family. At Auschwitz, they were put into two lines. The slave line and the gas chamber line. Her mother and father and all five of her little brothers were put in the gas chamber line. My mother and my aunt were on the slave line.

My mother says they knew everything. The guards said, “Stop crying. You’ll all be dead soon.” My mother had a little brother who was two. My mother was fifteen so she used to babysit him a lot. Right after “the selection,” my mother ran to my grandmother and offered to bring her brother into the gas chamber. Some guard said, “Stay. We’ll be happy to kill you, too.” My grandmother said, “No, my hertzeleh,* it is not your time yet. Live.” So my mother and her sister watched their family get murdered.

*(translation: *little heart)*

No one is left from my father’s family. My mother has her sister. Before I go to sleep, sometimes I see my grandmother on a line carrying my baby uncle and she looks at me and I - look away. This is my most secretest secret ever and I am trusting it with you. BUT WE WON’T TALK ABOUT IT. Now I am going to shower so no one will know I was crying. I will be home soon and we will do all the stuff we always did. Listen to music, dance and do fun stuff. My mother says that’s important.

Yours until the chocolate chips,

Lina

Dear Lina,

I’m crying. I want to say things. Really important things. But I don’t know what to say. Except, I’m sorry and I will never tell anyone ever ever. I won’t even tell my diary. Or my cousin’s dog or Puddles – and I tell them everything.

Love,

Izzy