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The Secret Club

by Rebecca Hayes

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

EARL, 11, friends with Sara and Ben; founder of the club

SARA, 10, member of the club; friends with Ben and Earl

SETTING:

The action occurs in the present and in the summer one Saturday afternoon in the attic of EARL's garage where meetings of the Secret Club are held weekly.

The garage attic has an entrance from the lower level, denoted by an opening in the floor in the left front part of the stage. Steps lead up to the attic from this entrance. No other exits are visible. A tattered red couch is in the stage's center with an antique nightstand positioned next to it. A radio sits atop the nightstand. Strewn about the attic are tied newspaper stacks, labeled boxes, kitschy furniture, a tennis racquet, instrument cases, a clothes rack, and a full-length oblong mirror. Three small windows, very dusty, look out to the neighborhood.
(In the darkness, radio static can be heard. Lights up and Earl is seen, his back to the audience. He is adjusting the dial and settles on Frank Sinatra singing "Stormy Weather." Earl throws himself onto the couch and lets his leg hang down. Sara is heard climbing the stairs.)

Earl: Hi, Sara.

Sara: Sorry I'm late. (Fingers inside of her mouth.) Had to get my wires changed. Ouch. (Earl is ignoring her. He is now sitting up and lip synching to the song. Sara's hands are still in her mouth.) I can't wait until you hafta get braces.

Earl: Is Ben coming?

Sara: Ben?

Earl: Yeah. Ben. Where is he?

Sara: I dunno. I'm not his babysitter.

Earl: I hate it when he's late.

Sara: We've only had three meetings.

Earl: He's been late twice.

Sara: So maybe he's sick or something.

Earl: Who gets sick in the summer?

Sara: Your brother was sick right after school got out.

Earl: Kip had his appendix out. That's different.
SARA: Everything's different with Kip.

EARL: What's that s'posed to mean?

SARA: Hey! I think he's cool too.

EARL: He's not, okay? He's just my brother.

SARA: Oh, come on. You like him. Remember that time he gave you that baseball card and--

EARL: It was a Cal Ripken. It was a good card.

SARA: I know. It's just that you bragged about how much Kip liked it and then he gave it to you. And how you always say, 'My big brother's older than yours and he can come and beat you up!' to Brendan Price on the bus.

EARL: Excuse me for not being an only child.

SARA: Oh, who cares. I'm just saying maybe Ben's sick. (Goes to radio and slaps it off.) That's all. We should just start the meeting.

EARL: You don't have to make excuses for him.

SARA: Someone's in a bad mood today.

EARL: Am not.

(SARA shrugs, imagines a balance beam in front of her and begins a routine.)

SARA: Let's just start without him.
EARL: What if he just quit?

SARA: You want to call him?

EARL: I shouldn’t have to.

SARA: *(Split leap.)* Maybe he forgot.

EARL: Didn’t you talk to him yesterday?

SARA: Yeah.

EARL: Did he look sick?

SARA: *(From handstand.)* I don’t know.

EARL: Did he say he’d be here?

SARA: I think so.

EARL: So why isn’t he here?

SARA: *(Cartwheel.)* I don’t know, stupid. He’s just ... late or something.

EARL: He just better be here in five minutes—or else he’s out of the club.

SARA: Why are you making such a big deal about it?

EARL: I can do what I want.

SARA: You’re being dumb.

EARL: *(Turns radio back on, tries to find a station.)* Shut up.
SARA: *(Pauses.)* Want me to tell Kip you like Gina? He'd really like that.

EARL: *(Not finding a station.)* Shut up.

SARA: *(Giggling.)* 'Kip! Kip! Guess who likes your girlfriend!'

EARL: Shut up. I never liked her.

SARA: Oh, come on. I know you like somebody.

EARL: Do not.

SARA: I'm not gonna *tell.*

EARL: I don't like anybody, okay?

SARA: Not even ... me? *(Cartwheel.)*

EARL: What is it with you? *(To himself.)* Ben just better get here.

SARA: *(Goes to radio, turns to frenetic violin duet.)* So what are we gonna do until then?

EARL: I don't know.

*(SARA dismounts beam and presents to where the judges would be. EARL turns radio off. SARA lies on the floor and does knee kicks into the air.)*

SARA: I know.

EARL: What?

SARA: Well ... I've got a secret.
EARL: The meeting hasn’t started yet, Sara.

SARA: So?

EARL: So you can’t tell the secret yet. Remember when we made the rules?

SARA: You made up most of them. I can’t remember them all. Me and Ben just made up the secret kick. Come on, Earl. You need to practice this ... *(Stands on one leg.)* Come on, Earl. You need to practice this. Don’t you want us to be a real club, where we all know the secret stuff? This kick is really pretty easy.

EARL: Come on! Wait till Ben gets here.

SARA: Oh...

EARL: What?

SARA: *(Flops on couch next to EARL.)* Earl, we’ve gotta start the meeting.

EARL: How come?

SARA: Because we gotta.

EARL: *(To himself.)* Stupid Ben.

SARA: Yeah, stupid Ben. But we gotta start.

EARL: I guess so. He’s had enough time.

SARA: Yeah...

EARL: So it’s started.
SARA: You hafta start it like always, so it’s for real.

EARL: Okay, fine. I call the meeting of the Secret Club in order--

SARA: No! You hafta say ‘to order.’

EARL: Okay, I call this meeting to order. Now you do that flip thing.

SARA: It’s called a back walkover.

EARL: Whatever.

SARA: It’s important, Earl. You have to pay attention to these things if we’re gonna be a good club. (Gets in the stance, puts arms over head, then looks back to EARL.) So you remember why I’m doing this?

EARL: I know why. It’s so the secrets don’t get out.

SARA: Right. (Arches into backbend.) Okay, Earl, go under. (EARL pushes himself on the ground, slides under SARA’S arc.) Good. (SARA kicks her legs up and over, completing the walkover.)

EARL: Now we can start.

SARA: Earl! You forgot the kick. You’ve gotta get the kick. I promise I won’t make fun. Come on! See. (Goes to mirror.) Just stand here and practice. I’m the only one here. Come on.

EARL: And if Ben comes--

SARA: Then you can show him how good you can do it. Come on, I’ll practice with you.
(SARA stands in front of mirror, raises one knee, swings it up and left, kicking leg out, then swings it down and to the right, kicking it out again. Her hips twist; effect is hilarious.)

EARL: Wow, Sara, do you think you could teach me to do it just like that?

SARA: (Unaware of his sarcasm.) Of course, Earl! Then me and you and Ben can do it in front of other people and they won't even know--(Turns away from the mirror to face EARL. He is now dissolved in laughter.) Thanks a lot, Earl.

EARL: What?

SARA: I do a lot for the club and then you have to go and make fun of me. Thanks a lot.

EARL: I'm sorry. It's just that it looks so funny when you do it, when you get so in to it.

SARA: I don't see you trying to do it. Before you make fun of me, I'd like to see you try to do it. I think you're just jealous of how flexible I am. (Pause.) I can do the splits all three ways.

EARL: Hey, I never said you couldn't.

SARA: I still think you should try it.

EARL: I'll just wait until Ben comes. He's not so good at it either. We can look dumb together.

SARA: (Looks out window.) Just stop it, Earl.... He's not coming.

EARL: (Moving to window.) How do you know?
SARA: I just do.

EARL: Sara...

SARA: You’re gonna be mad if I tell.

EARL: Just tell.

SARA: (Faces EARL.) Ben’s not sick. He’s fine. He’s just not gonna come anymore. He’s not coming and he says he quits.

EARL: He quit? Why did he quit?

SARA: (Kicking floor.) Just ’cause.

EARL: (Sits on couch.) I don’t care.

SARA: (Sits on opposite end of couch.) Yes, you do.

EARL: Just forget it.

SARA: Why did he quit, Earl?

EARL: We don’t need Ben.

SARA: Come on, Earl. You care.

EARL: Forget about Ben, Sara. (Pause.) Did he say anything else to you?

SARA: He just said to tell you he quits. Honest.

EARL: He didn’t say why?

SARA: Uh-uh.
EARL: I don't care.

(Pause.)

SARA: Earl?

EARL: Huh?

SARA: Promise not to be mad?

EARL: About what?

SARA: I'm not saying I think it's true or anything, it's just what Ben said. (Pause.) He said you broke a rule.

EARL: You said he didn't say anything.

SARA: He said you broke a rule.

EARL: What rule?

SARA: Just a rule. He said you broke a rule and the club was stupid if you weren't gonna follow the rules.

EARL: "He said that?"

SARA: Yeah.

EARL: He's a liar. He's a liar and a cheater and I hate him.

SARA: What happened, Earl? Why did Ben quit?

EARL: I can't believe he told you. (Gets up, kicks the floor, finds a baseball bat in the rummage and tries grips out, swinging it around.)
SARA: What’s wrong?

EARL: I can’t believe he told you.

SARA: It’s a secret.

EARL: But it’s not. It was just an accident.

SARA: Oh.

EARL: I told him not to say anything. I was gonna tell it today. And Ben was gonna be here.

SARA: Uh-huh.

EARL: (Swings at some boxes, knocking them over.) And he quit.

SARA: Yeah. He quit.

EARL: (Swings at the clothes rack. Some dresses fall limply out of their hangers.) He quit the stupid club and he’s probably telling everybody.

SARA: He was with Joey when I saw him. But I don’t think Joey’d tell... I mean, I don’t think Ben would tell, but--

EARL: (Releases bat into the pile of dresses.) Who cares.

SARA: So was that your secret today? What you already told Ben?

EARL: I didn’t mean to tell him.

SARA: But was it?

EARL: It was just an accident.
SARA: (Pause.) What did you tell Ben, Earl?

EARL: It's nothing, Sara. (SARA goes to clothes rack and places one hand on the top bar for balance and begins going through ballet positions. EARL has found a lighter and is on the couch, trying to get it to catch.) It's not a secret.

SARA: So what is it?

EARL: It's just ... a thing.

SARA: (Stops, frozen with her knee held horizontal.) It's a secret, Earl. I'm not stupid.

EARL: Is not, okay?

SARA: (Moves away from bar.) If you're scared to tell, it's a secret.

EARL: I told you! I was gonna tell.

SARA: (Walks in front of couch, presents to audience and mounts beam.) But you're not.

EARL: I didn't think Ben would quit.

SARA: You don't trust me.

EARL: Sara--

SARA: It was your idea to have a club.

EARL: Yeah, so?

SARA: (Pauses to face EARL.) So you should follow your own stupid rules
and keep the secrets in the club. You should listen to Ben!

EARL: And you should leave me alone. If you’d told me maybe I could’ve talked to Ben before now, before the meeting.

SARA: *(Tries to resume routine, looks confused, can’t remember what to do next.)* You wouldn’t go talk to him. You’re afraid of him ’cause now he’s got your secret. You let it out of the club where we kept them safe. *(Walks away from beam to behind couch.)*

EARL: *(Turning to face SARA over couch’s back.)* It’s not a secret!

SARA: Is too!

EARL: Is not!

SARA: Is too!

EARL: Is not!

SARA: Is too! Is too! Is too, and you know it.

EARL: Shut up! Why don’t you go play with Ben since he’s your best friend.

SARA: Maybe I will.

EARL: *(Throws down lighter.)* Go ahead. I don’t care.

SARA: *(Crosses arms.)* Alright, I will. I’ll ask him to tell me the secret. And he’ll tell me. And I’ll tell everyone.

*(Pause.)*
EARL: You wanna know? Fine. I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you the secret. But you can’t tell everyone. And you won’t like it.

SARA: What do you mean?

EARL: I’m just warning you.

SARA: Did you warn Ben?

EARL: I didn’t have to, he just asked me a question and I just answered him.

SARA: What did he ask you?

(Earl bends over and pulls up the back of his shirt, craning his arms to point out the scars—mainly cigarette burns but also infected welts, scabs.)

EARL: See it? See the secret?

SARA: (Backs away.) What happened, Earl?

EARL: It’s what happens when I go to Maryland.

SARA: To visit your dad? (Earl nods.) Earl ... this is really bad. Your dad does this to you?

EARL: I only see him once a year! This time Mom let me stay longer because Kip got a job. I stayed all of June and until after the Fourth of July—that was when me and dad took the boat out in the bay to get a better view than anybody else. I wasn’t s’posed to get scared but I thought those fireworks were going to crash into us... He was mad about me being scared.

SARA: (Backing further away.) Earl ...
EARL: What? I told you the secret, dummy. What more do you want?

SARA: You’re right, Earl. It’s not a secret.

EARL: Okay, fine. Who cares?

SARA: Ben does. He’s upset.

EARL: He just saw my back when we were on the tire swing. I didn’t think he saw but he started talking about how my back was all funny-looking and like I had chicken pox or something. But worse, he said. And this was in front of everybody—Casey, Pat, Kelly, Joey. so I took him over by the slides and told him to shut up about it, that it’s from my dad and just shut up about it. Then he just shut up for real ... didn’t say anything. So I had to make him promise not to tell. He wouldn’t even look at me. Acted all scared like I was gonna hurt him or something.

SARA: Earl ...

EARL: I wish Ben didn’t know.

SARA: You were going to tell anyway.

EARL: I don’t know if I was or not. I’m just sick of this. (Curls up on couch.)

SARA: (Mounts imaginary beam again, arms are limp at her side, points her toes and walks the beam, staring blankly ahead.) I wish I didn’t know your secret. It’s a bad secret.

EARL: I told you, it’s just stupid! I only go to my dad’s once a year!

SARA: I hafta find Ben.
EARL: No, you can’t! You can’t! I mean it, Sara! It’s not a bad secret! You don’t have to get all worried.

SARA: It’s a million times worse than a bad secret.

EARL: I thought I could trust you.

SARA: It’s not my fault you didn’t tell on him sooner.

EARL: If you tell, they’ll never let me see my dad again.

SARA: I’ve gotta find Ben.

EARL: (Grabs her arm.) Don’t, Sara! Okay! It’s a bad secret, I know, but please! Just stay.

SARA: Let go of me! I’m gonna get your mom!

EARL: She’s not home.

SARA: (Breaks free.) I don’t care.

EARL: Sara, I’m sorry. Please just stay. The meeting’s not over.

SARA: You shouldn’t have told anybody, Earl. Not if you wanted to keep it a secret.

EARL: (Breaking into tears.) It was an accident. He doesn’t really mean to. He gets mad. That’s all. He gets mad and then he tells me I have to take it like a man. But then it doesn’t stop. I hate it! I hate it!

(EARL buries his face in the couch, crying. SARA moves next to him and puts her arm around him. EARL shrugs her off. SARA stares out the window. EARL continues crying and swings his fists at the couch;
consequently, the radio falls off the nightstand and static is heard, caught exactly between two stations.)

SARA: Earl, does Kip know?

EARL: No.

SARA: I think we should tell Kip.

EARL: You can’t. I mean it, Sara, you can’t tell. Besides, you’d be breaking the rules. You’re always making such a big deal about how we have to keep the secrets in the club. The meeting isn’t over, Sara, and this is a secret. You can’t just break the rules.


EARL: So what if I did? Would you still want to tell? ...

SARA: Earl, this isn’t fair.

EARL: You can’t tell. If you told, we wouldn’t be a club anymore. You want to keep the club, don’t you?

SARA: Earl, this isn’t going to stop, is it? Your dad’s going to keep hurting you.

EARL: ... I only see him once a year.... I hafta learn to be a man.... It won’t happen again. He just got mad. (SARA kicks at the floor slowly.) So you can’t tell, okay?

SARA: (Looking at floor.) Okay, Earl.

EARL: I know what you think, and I know about Ben and--
SARA: I won't tell, okay?

EARL: Okay.

SARA: I think the meeting's over, Earl. I've gotta go.

EARL: I know. The meeting's over. I know.

(As SARA exits, EARL picks up cigarette lighter from floor, tries getting it to catch again; it does. Lights out, the flame is seen in the dark.)

end of play