

KEY TO IT ALL

BETSY BUTTERS BOOKS

Book 3

Jenifer Rubloff

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Chapter 1

GOOD TO BE BACK

The willowy, long legged teen stopped to inhale deep breaths of the chocolate scented air that engulfed Château Mont Blanc. The elegant château in Montreux, Switzerland, was a historic residence and home to an established pensionnat, or boarding school, that the students referred to as CMB.

“Ah, this air is so delicious. I never get tired of it; and it’s calorie free,” Betsy joked to her friend, Maria, about the rich chocolate aroma from the Nestlé chocolate factory upwind. For the first time since her first day at the school, Betsy Butters eagerly pushed open the heavy front door to her boarding school with a sense of comforting familiarity. She recalled the cold and foreign impression the building had made on her only seven months earlier. Fourteen-year-old Betsy had just lost her parents in a tragic car accident and been quickly shuttled off from her suburban Chicago home to her French speaking boarding school by her not very warm or comforting guardian, Dr. Finkleman. Betsy preferred to call her Dr. Frankenstein.

Betsy scanned the ornately decorated vestibule as she sailed through to the school’s grand foyer. Immediately, she noticed that her favorite portrait of a young woman that resembled one of her favorite Frans Hals masterpieces, *The Gypsy Girl*, was no longer hanging on the wall to greet her. A still life of sunflowers, extremely Van Gogh like in technique, now hung in its place.

Betsy took a moment to inspect the still life up close. “Now that I’m more educated in the work of Frans Hals and Van Gogh, I’m even more impressed with how so many of the paintings in this school so closely resemble the work of those master painters.

“Looks like I have a lot of investigating to do.”

“Didn’t you have enough of looking at art during vacation?” Maria Dias asked. “All you and Alex wanted to do in Paris was visit museums. If I had a French boyfriend like Alex, I’d have him take me to boutiques and cafés, not to museums.”

Betsy and Maria hurried into the grand entrance hall with its soaring height, walls laden with exquisite oil paintings, and natural light restricted to what filtered through

cathedral-like stained glass windows. The students were just returning from spring break and it had been super fabulous for Betsy. She had stayed at the Paris home of her classmate, Maria Dias, and the two of them had continued the fun times they had shared over Christmas with Betsy's new beau, Alex, and Maria's new friend, Skip.

"Everyone will die when I tell them about our sailing the Aegean Sea," Betsy caroled to Maria.

"They might not die," Maria replied, "but I know a few girls who will be seasick green with envy when they hear about the beach parties, scuba diving, and Greek food."

"Look who's back!" Betsy exclaimed. "Nancy, Nancy," she shouted as she wrapped her arms around her in a big hug. "Wow! I never thought you'd come back to school. What happened?"

"Oh, after Mom's funeral, Dad and I tried to spend more time together and bond. He really did try, but he's a dad, not a mom. His new girlfriend, Gina, means well, but she is only five years older than me. It was more like my dad is dating my older sister."

"Oh, I can see how that would be awkward for all of you."

"And, Dad's idea of mourning was to throw dinner parties all the time and act like everything was just like normal," Nancy added with a scowl on her face.

"I'm really happy you're back, Nancy. It's nice to have someone here who knows how I feel. You know."

"Yeah, and you lost your mom and your dad. We need to stick together, kiddo."

No sooner had the girls visited their rooms, than the familiar big brass gong sounded to call them back down to the grand foyer.

Most of the students were asked to sign the check-in sheet and proceed to the dining room for tea, but Betsy was asked by the diminutive maid, Nina, to visit Madame Gastang, the headmistress, in her office, immediately.

Unlike on prior visits, Betsy was no longer frozen in fear in the presence of the commanding figure. The students at CMB called her Madame Stealth Bomber, because she entered a room quickly and silently. If she caught a student not speaking in French, she had to pay a fine.

Madame Gastang was a statuesque woman in her late sixties or early seventies, maybe five feet seven inches of strength in body and character. She had perfectly coiffed

salt and pepper hair worn in a chignon. Her nose was a beak, slender and pointed down at the tip; her eyes pale green with a penetrating stare of a falcon. She didn't look at you, she looked through you. She was dressed in a customary tailored shirtwaist in charcoal gray with small white flowers and a matching short sleeved jacket. Her shoes were a practical black leather Oxford. She wore a string of real white and black pearls and matching earrings. Her wedding ring was a simple braided gold band; her watch was an antique Patek Philippe.

“Mademoiselle Betsy, it is so very good to see you so vivacious, and hear you speaking in French a mile a minute, but I must ask you to freshen up quickly and pack an overnight satchel. You must take a series of proficiency exams for your American schools, and the scheduled date is tomorrow. The exams must be proctored by the University of Geneva to establish if you can advance to the next grade level.”

“Oh, no, really? I was all excited about being back in Château Mont Blanc and now I'm feeling sick. I hate exams, madame.”

“They are a necessary evil for you to continue in your education, Betsy. You've done quite well on your exams here. Stay calm, read the questions carefully, and answer to the best of your ability. I am confident that you will perform at grade level or above.

“Nancy also has to take the exams, and since she is seventeen years of age, I will permit her to be your chaperone,” madame declared with her usual air of authority and competency.

“I trust that since your prior trip to Geneva, you will behave more prudently and stay aware of your surroundings.”

“Oui (Yes), madame. One abduction is enough for a lifetime. I'll keep alert and on my best behavior.”

“Please do keep your word, Betsy. You might not be as fortunate if you misbehave again. Inspector Bernard may have had you and Sharon rescued, but poor Mademoiselle Cheyanne has yet to be found.”

“No worries, madame. No unscheduled sightseeing this trip, just a nasty proficiency exam and back to CMB,” Betsy said politely.

In spite of Madame Gastang's encouraging words, Betsy was truly apprehensive about the exams because she had spent most of her school year absorbed in learning

French, not her American classes, and she'd been distracted by extraordinary adventures in recovering art and other treasures stolen by the Nazis during WWII.

Chapter 2

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

The train ride from Montreux to Geneva took about one hour. It was just enough time for Betsy and Nancy to share more memories of their lives in the past few months since Nancy had returned to America after her mother's tragic suicide. Betsy sensed Nancy was sinking into a somber pit of negativity and quickly changed the subject to an upbeat conversation about her own spring break in Paris and Paros, Greece, for Greek Easter.

By the time the girls pulled into the station in Geneva, Nancy was smiling and planning how she might take a trip to Paris, France, in the summer.

"I have connections with people in Paris who might find you a job in Paris in exchange for room and board. Would that interest you?"

"Are you kidding me? I'll do just about anything to spend my summer in Paris."

"You're seventeen and I think you'd be a great nanny. I'll speak with my French friends, but now we must focus on the task at hand."

"Oh, why don't you let me treat us to a toast to Paris with hot chocolate and pastry at that cute café across the street before we find our hotel?" Nancy suggested.

"I'm not one to turn down a chance for chocolate in any form, let's go," Betsy caroled. She was glad to see Nancy was coming back from the shadows of sadness.

While they waited for their fresh raspberries on vanilla custard in dark chocolate cups and pots of chocolat chaud (hot chocolate), they enjoyed people watching from behind their oversized sunglasses. Nancy was interested in the cute boys who were probably university students, but Betsy had no interest in any boy other than Alex. She was enjoying checking out the clothes the girls were wearing when her eye caught something familiar.

"Hey, Nan, you won't believe who I think just walked into that boutique across the street. I just saw a man who looks exactly like Robert, but he was dressed in an expensive looking business suit, bowler hat and carried a briefcase."

"Our Robert, the groundskeeper, at CMB? No way."

“Yes, way ‘cause he had the same eyeglasses, pronounced forehead, thin moustache and funny little walk. His walk is so unique. I’m sure it’s Robert.”

“You wait here for our order and I’ll pop over to the store and surprise Robert,” Betsy ordered as she jumped up from her chair.

“All right, but hurry back, Bets. We’re here to take an exam. We don’t want Robert reporting to madame that we were window shopping.”

From the outdoor café, a large awning made it impossible to see the store’s name or merchandise in its front window. When Betsy approached it, she was surprised to see the shop was a very upscale jewelry, antiques and antiquities store. The name of the store, Desfrisse y Frères, was stenciled in gold letters on the store window that showcased several antique clocks and antique watches encrusted with diamonds, and a magnificent diamond and emerald choker. In the corner of the window was a small sign that read “We sell gold kilo bars.”

“Maybe Robert is running an errand for madame,” Betsy said to herself as she entered the elegant shop. A doorbell sounded as she entered, and an attractive saleswoman greeted her with a smile and the customary “bonjour” and “how may I help you” in French. Betsy replied in her best French that she came in to speak with the gentleman with the briefcase who had just entered the store.

“What gentleman?” the woman replied. “You must be mistaken, mademoiselle. Nobody has entered the store in more than an hour.”

Betsy knew the woman was lying, but didn’t want to call her a liar and ruin any chances of further conversation after she had time to decide what to do next.

“Oh, I was sure the gentleman came into this store, but perhaps while I crossed the street, he entered a different store. I’m sorry for any inconvenience.”

“No apology is needed, mademoiselle. Do you have an appointment with the gentleman?”

“A friend of mine does, and I was asked to meet them. I must have the wrong address. I better go and look at the stores nearby. Too bad I don’t have more time to look at the beautiful merchandise in your store, madame. I must return another time.”

“Of course, anytime. Good luck finding your friend, mademoiselle.”

“Merci (thank you), madame, au revoir (goodbye).”

Betsy didn't cross the street where the shop woman could see her. She wanted her to think she was looking for the gentleman in the neighboring shops. After waiting for a few minutes and crossing at the corner, she made her way back to the café.

"I was just about to come after you, Betsy. No more side trips for you. Did you find Robert?"

As Betsy ate her tart and drank her chocolate milk, no longer hot or even warm, but just as creamy and chocolaty rich, she told Nancy about the weird conversation with the woman in the shop, how she'd told her she was asked by another person to meet her and the gentleman, and how she must have made a mistake.

"This way you can go in and also to pretend to be looking for the gentleman who told you to meet him at Desfrisse y Frères."

"Why would I do that, Betsy? We aren't here to chase after men who look like our school's groundskeeper. We're here to take a day long series of exams and no funny business before or after. The last time you came to Geneva, you convinced Sharon to go with you to do a favor for Jenny and both of you were abducted."

"Oh nothing like that could happen now. It's broad daylight and an upscale shop. No, I'm curious why the woman would lie to me for no reason. I'm sure it was Robert."

"Look Betsy, I still have my personal cell phone with me, against school rules. I keep it in case I get depressed and want to call my shrink back home. I also have the cell phone madame gave me for our trip. It's almost time for me to check in with her on that phone. Why don't I call Bev on my phone and ask her to see if Robert is around. We can probably end this lunacy of yours right now and get on with our day."

"Bev still has her cell phone? "

"Yes, Betsy, but don't tell anybody. Madame hasn't caught either of us, so far. Now let me call Bev and see about Robert."

While they waited for Bev to find out where Robert was on campus, Nancy used madame's cell phone to check in with her and assure her that she and Betsy were safe and sound in Geneva.

"Of course, madame, Betsy and I are enjoying a snack at Café du Monde and then going directly to the hotel. We won't leave the hotel until we go to the university

tomorrow morning for the exams. I'll call you before we leave. Have a good evening, madame, and please do not worry about us."

The waiter brought the girls two more hot, hot chocolates while they waited for Bev to call back with news of Robert.

"Are you sure, Bev?" Nancy asked. "OK, well, thanks for checking. I'll explain when we get back. Say prayers for Betsy and me for our exams tomorrow. Gotta go. 'love ya," Nancy said as she ended her call with Bev.

"What did she say? What did she say?" Betsy asked impatiently.

"Apparently, Nina and Noël both say Robert hasn't been on campus all day and won't return until tomorrow. Bev couldn't really probe for reasons why. So, what we do know is that Robert is not at CMB."

"I knew it. I'm sure he's the man who I saw enter Desfrisse Y Frères, but he hasn't come out, and the lady lied point-blank about it."

"Look Betsy, maybe Robert saw you at the same time you saw him and he is here on personal business and doesn't want to be interrupted by a pesky student."

"Yeah, I guess that could be it, but it couldn't hurt to ask one more time. "

"Why? What's wrong with giving the man a little privacy?"

"Nothing, but my curiosity won't be solved without one final inquiry."

Nancy reluctantly made a trip to Desfrisse y Frères and feigned being very late for an appointment to meet her uncle Baltazar at the store to shop for an anniversary gift for his wife. The saleswoman told her what she had told Betsy. No gentleman had visited the shop all day.

"Oh, he must have had something come up and forgot about it. I've tried calling him, but the calls go to his voice mail. You have such beautiful things, madame, I know we'll return soon to look for a gift."

Nancy thought she'd handled that quite well as she hurriedly left the store and walked to the corner where the saleslady couldn't see her. Betsy was waiting in the shadows.

"Well how'd it go?"

"I got the same answer, Betsy. Now, enough of this nonsense. We're off to the hotel and please forget about the mystery man."

“OK. Robert probably is on a special errand for madame and didn’t want to waste time with me. Too bad. It was very nice seeing Robert outside of school and dressed like a proper gentleman. I thought it would be fun to learn more about him.”

“You’re a nut, Betsy, but I’m very fond of you. Let’s get to the hotel and relax. Maybe we can use the sauna before dinner.”

“I’ll go along with whatever you want to do in return for your help with my investigation of the mystery man.”

Madame had booked them in an upscale hotel that was within walking distance of the university. Betsy figured that the closer they were to the university, the less chance for wandering off where they weren’t supposed to go. The hotel was in two adjacent historic buildings from the 1850s that had been transformed inside into an ultra modern boutique hotel filled with sleek, modern, European furnishings, a vast collection of African art, and state-of-the-art gadgets to entertain and assist the guests.

The hotel had an unexpected cancellation earlier in the day and bumped Nancy and Betsy up into a suite from a regular room for no extra charge. Betsy and Nancy spent the remainder of the day playing video games and watching movies on the giant flat screen TV before taking a leisurely sauna in the fitness center.

“I’m having so much fun right here, why don’t we have our dinner in the room?” Nancy suggested.

“Fine with me. Room service is free, and the food is from the restaurant across the street. I’m going to have the steak and frites and an American milkshake. How about you?”

“I’m going for the veggie pizza and salad and water. I shouldn’t have had that pastry and hot chocolate, but I couldn’t resist. I have to watch my weight. Sorry to say it, but I don’t have your tall, lanky body,” Nancy replied.

“It’s a blessing and a curse. At least you have curves. I’m a pole, but I’m strong and agile, and maybe one day I’ll get some curves. For now, I can eat almost anything and burn off the calories.”

“You order for us, Bets, for dinner around seven. I’m going to pop down to the gym and use that cool muscle training machine before dinner. If you want to work out too, that’s where I’ll be for the next hour. OK?”

“Fine with me. I’m going to wash my hair. That always helps me relax. I’m a little bit nervous about tomorrow.”

The girls ate dinner while they watched American television via the satellite TV. Both Nancy and Betsy were enjoying their time away from school and the ultra modern hotel and all the electronic toys. A few hours after dinner, room service brought carafes of a special drink and gingersnap cookies.

“When I called in the dinner order, I told the room service guy that I wanted an extra helping of frites (French fries) because of my pre-exam nerves. He said he’s send us complimentary bedtime elixirs to calm the nerves.”

“This is delicious. It’s very much like chai latte with the extra rich Swiss cream. I could get used to this place,” Nancy said, smacking her lips.

Around ten pm, both girls were feeling sleepy, took warm showers, and called it a night. Nancy won the toss for the queen sized bed in the enclosed bedroom, and Betsy was happy to sleep on the daybed in the living room.

Chapter 3

WHO'S THERE?

Betsy was having a bad dream about being at her exams. She was reading the questions and freezing up, and someone was distracting her with beeping sounds. The sounds kept repeating and distracting her until she finally jumped up from her computer terminal and shouted for quiet.

Betsy was roused from her nightmare to find herself sitting up in bed and staring at the front door to the suite. Irritating beeping sounds were coming from the door to the hallway. Betsy quickly yelled, "Who's there? Who's there?" She grabbed the telephone and called the desk, but before she could explain her call, the beeps stopped.

"It's stopped, but please send someone to room 611. I think someone was trying to get into my room."

Before she had buttoned her skirt, hotel security was at the door.

Betsy looked through the monitor of the hallway next to the big screen TV and recognized the desk clerk with the security man.

She opened the door and let the men in. Now she was wide awake. She explained how beeping sounds from the keyless lock woke her.

"I'm so very sorry, mademoiselle. The security camera shows a man at your door, but didn't see any man come by the front desk or leave the hotel in the past hour. We are looking into the incident, but it appears to be a guest who was already on the floor and simply at the wrong room or the wrong floor," the security man explained.

"You have nothing to worry about if you keep the door closed. It was probably someone who is a little tipsy who came to your room instead of his own," the desk clerk added.

"Can I see the picture of the man? Maybe I have seen him before?"

"You can't see the man's face, mademoiselle. He kept his head down and he's wearing a wide brimmed fedora. There's nothing to see."

"Does it show the person walking in the hallway?"

“Yes, but the cameras at each room have a very limited range. Only a few feet in either direction from the door.”

“Please, can I come and see it? I’ll sleep much better if I see the footage.”

The men knew better than to argue with a guest and accompanied Betsy to the room behind the front desk with the different security cameras. In a minute, they had the limited footage of the person at Betsy’s room. They’d not lied about the hat blocking out the face, but Betsy didn’t need to see the man’s face to answer her question.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” she said in French. “You were right. There’s no way to know who it was, but seeing the video made me feel better. I’ll just go back and try and get a little sleep before my wake up call.”

When Betsy returned to her room, she noticed that through all of this, Nancy never awoke. The bedroom door was closed, and apparently the bedtime elixir had worked for one of them at least. Betsy spent the next four hours wide awake and worried about why she’d upset Robert enough to try and frighten her into silence because she’d recognized him in Geneva.

At breakfast, Nancy couldn’t stop talking about how she couldn’t believe she’d slept through the events of the prior evening, but she was sure Betsy’s imagination had gone wild and the unwanted caller was merely a confused or intoxicated hotel guest.

“I’m not mentioning the incident to madame, Betsy. It was just a coincidence that it happened after you thought you saw Robert and you thought he was avoiding you for some diabolical reason. I’ll check in with madame, and then we better get a cab over to the university. You look like you could use a good sleep.”

“No, let’s walk, Nancy. It’s only a few blocks and the fresh air will help me wake up for the exams.”

“Fine with me. Why don’t you wait outside on the patio in the fresh air while I call madame and check out at the desk.”

While Betsy waited, she inhaled big gulps of Switzerland’s unpolluted air. After seeing the security footage, she was positive it was Robert from his unique walk. Her eureka moment came when she thought she knew why he’d tried to frighten her into silence. She had seen Robert at Desfrisse y Frères and he wasn’t on an errand for madame

and he hadn't told anyone at CMB that he was going to Geneva. His trip had to remain a secret and the reason why was something she'd have to uncover.

Chapter 4

FRAZZLED

Betsy was exhausted after daylong exams and little sleep the night before after the upsetting break in attempt. She'd done her best, but didn't know if she'd done well enough to move on to tenth grade. She preferred to dwell on the curious incident with Robert rather than on how she'd performed in her exams. The humming train was all she needed to fall into a deep sleep on the return trip to Montreux. Nancy was busy texting and was happy to see Betsy sleeping so soundly.

Betsy's dream was a rerun of the people, places and events that changed her life since she left home for CMB. In just seven months, she'd met people of all ages from more countries than she might ever meet again in her lifetime. In her mind's eye, she relived the moment she had met many of the girls who were now her friends. Several of them were more like the sisters she never had, but always wanted. They had been with her everyday like a family.

There was boisterous and outgoing Kala, from Bahrain, who was one of the first girls she'd met on her Swiss adventure. She was confident in her skin and carried her full figured form with grace and authority. At twenty-one, she was almost like a mother figure to Betsy. Kala's younger sister, Noor, and their cousins were all different ages, sizes and personalities, but Betsy liked each of them. And, there was Kala's big hearted fiancé, Sharif. He was the most sophisticated, successful, and generous businessman Betsy had ever met.

Little Maria Dias from Colombia, and Katingo and Maria Alexiou, from Greece, had played childish pranks on her, joked and cried with her, and infuriated her with their evening prayers and banter in Spanish and Greek, way past lights out.

“Katingo and Maria actually threw fruit at me when I complained that I couldn't sleep. I'd never had grapefruit and oranges thrown at my head and I'll never forget it without remembering how much they mean to me.”

Jenny Jordan from England, Axel from Holland, Sharon, Bev and Nancy from California had shocked and educated her about many things in life her family had not had

time to share with her before her Swiss boarding school experience. She had spent life-changing experiences with Jenny and Sharon that few people ever share, in or out of school. And, she could never forget Cheyanne. She had convinced Betsy she was a crude teen from the Bronx, until she disappeared and reappeared, weeks later, as the heroine who saved Betsy in her greatest time of need.

She was amazed at how vastly different her friends were and yet, how she never really thought of any of them as different. They ate, slept, played, learned, shared experiences and made memories for life together without any attention to age, nationality, native language, religion or culture.

Suddenly, Betsy realized that she was dreaming in French, not English.

“I can’t believe how few words I knew in French on my first day at CMB, and now I’m dreaming in French,” Betsy said to herself in her dream. I wonder how long I’ve been dreaming in French? I’ve got to tell madame. Oh, yeah, madame. She scares me, but I respect her. She’s the strongest woman I’ve ever met. She’s so confident and competent. She’s like a really strict grandmother and I will miss her too, when I leave Switzerland.”

Next, Betsy saw herself holding hands and walking down the Champs Elysée with her first love, Alex. She met him over Christmas. Maria Dias had invited her to spend Christmas with her family at their new home in Paris, and Betsy’s guardian had approved. Betsy had done things and gone places in Paris that she could never imagine or forget. She’d been to Midnight Mass at Notre Dame Cathedral, visited the Louvre and Pompidou museums, and Château Fontainebleau.

“I think of all I did and saw, my special lunch with Alex at Café Lorette, our visit to the Eiffel Tower, and my first kiss are my favorite memories of Paris.”

Quickly, her most recent adventures with Alex and Maria Dias and Katingo and Maria Alexiou over Easter break flashed before her eyes.

“Oh, how will I ever be able to leave and go back to my former life in Lake Forest, Illinois?”

As the train decelerated for its arrival in Montreux, the change in movement pulled Betsy out of her reverie. She was abruptly awakened and found she had tears running down her cheeks. For the first time, Betsy was consciously aware of how very special all

these new people and experiences were to her and who she was becoming as an individual.

She quickly wiped the tears from her face before Nancy realized that she was awake.

“I don’t know how I’ll manage to put all of this behind me and return to my life in America. I’m not the same Betsy Butters who left Lake Forest, Illinois, last year,” she acknowledged to herself.

“Welcome back, Betsy,” Nancy said as she put her cell phone into her purse. “I’m glad you had a good nap after your sleepless night in Geneva. Remember, Betsy, don’t say anything to madame about the incident at the hotel.”

“Yeah, sure. No problem,” Betsy said as she looked at the people behind her.

“What’s wrong?” Nancy asked.

“I have this weird feeling like somebody is watching me.”

“I think you should talk with my shrink, kiddo. You’re letting your imagination run wild. Nobody is following either one of us. Back to school. Let’s go, vite (hurry).”

Chapter 5

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Betsy and Nancy returned just after the gong was struck for afternoon tea. All their friends were there to greet them and begin the barrage of banter about how each of them had spent Easter break.

“Betsy”, Jenny shouted across the grand foyer, “how’d it go? The exams, first, Easter vacation second.”

“Oh the exams were very hard in the math, the English wasn’t too bad. I’ll fill you in on vacation later. Too much to tell, but more importantly, did you notice the Frans Hals-like portrait is no longer in the vestibule?”

“First thing when I walked into school. I wonder if we’ll ever know who in the Gastang family paints so many oils in the style of master artists?”

“Say, that reminds me,” Betsy said as they walked into the dining hall for high tea. “How ‘bout if you and I ask Adelle for special art classes on the painting techniques of master painters like the seventeenth century Dutch and nineteenth century Impressionist painters?”

“How’d you get this idea?”

“Alex and I visited the Louvre’s art conservation department over Easter break. We got to watch the restoration of several famous paintings. He’s taking classes in it, and I think it’s really exciting. Besides, it’s helpful if I want to get into art appraising or restoration. I’m really interested in studying how to identify art forgeries and maybe criminal investigation work in the underground world of forged and stolen original art.”

“Wow! Looks like my protégé may exceed the master if I don’t get my scholarship,” Jenny joked.

“Oh I can’t get enough information on anything about art. Did you know that in 1496, Michelangelo painted a sleeping cupid with acidic earth to make it seem ancient? He sold it under the guise of an ancient painting to art dealer Baidassare de Milanese who sold to Cardinal Rearico of San Giorigo who learned it was a fraud and demanded a refund.”

“I knew that, but I’m a university art history major,” Jenny replied in amazement.

“Then you also know that the cardinal was so impressed and pleased with the painting that he allowed Leonardo to keep his share of the proceeds. It was an example of art fraud that paid off. Forgery was and continues to be a very lucrative business for the very skilled.”

“What else do you know?”

“In 1938, Han Van Meegeren painted the finest forgery of a Vermeer ever painted. In 1945, when he revealed that his fake was a forgery, he had a hard time convincing the finest experts. His work became valuable and he spawned other forgers.”

“You’re dangerous, Betsy. Do you know that?” Jenny joked.

“And speaking of forgeries, I wonder where the Frans Hals-like portrait has gone. If it were to be sold as a newly found original Frans Hals, that would mean big bucks.”

“It would also mean big crime. It is worth looking into, but remember we’re here to learn so we can move on in our education. If you get too distracted, you’ll stay a perpetual first year high school student.”

“Look who’s talking. You’re the art buff who helped get me hooked on art in the first place.”

“Point taken, but let’s remember that art is my major and a ticket to a university scholarship. For you, a yank, it’s only an elective.”

“Maybe, but it’s only an elective until I get into college. Then I can major in art history too.”

Next, Betsy whispered into Jenny’s ear, “After tea I need to tell you something important that happened in Geneva, but where nobody can hear.”

“Sure. We can go out in the garden.”

Betsy told Jenny about all the events in Geneva with the mystery man who she was certain was Robert. She shared with Jenny her reasoning behind her conclusion that Robert wanted to frighten her into silence about seeing him at Desfrisse y Frères.

“I don’t know, Betsy. Maybe Robert was doing something for madame and if she knew you saw him in that store, she’d be furious. My advice to you is to stay among crowds when you go into town on Friday afternoons or go with a buddy. If your sixth sense tells you someone is watching or following you, don’t discard it. You carry everything but the kitchen sink in your pony spotted satchel. If you don’t have a whistle,

I'd get one and something to hit someone on the head. Prepare yourself if you're pursued and need to defend yourself."

"I have a whistle, my camping Swiss Army knife and a heavy flashlight. But better than all of that, I've been practicing. I can scream loudly and long and I can kick in the shins and private parts and run fast."

"This might be real danger, Betsy, not movie fantasy. I wouldn't act brave with a knife. Your attacker could use it on you. Don't let yourself be caught and don't get into any vehicle. You never want to be in a position close enough to use the kicking, but keep practicing kicking and elbowing too. I'll get you a really loud police whistle and I want you to wear it around your neck."

That night at dinner, the conversation at Château Mont Blanc was unusually subdued. Mr. Rowland, the dapper British English teacher, thought perhaps the students were recovering from their return to school after Easter vacation. "Why the long face, Miss Butters?" he asked as he passed the platter of schnitzel and spaetzle. "You are the Howard Carter of Crans-Montreux, Switzerland. How many fourteen-year-olds put their hand in a hole in a wall and pull out three missing masterpieces by Modigliani?"

"Who's Howard Carter?" Maria Alexiou asked.

"He's the British archeologist who discovered the tomb of Egypt's boy king, Tutankhamen," Mr. Rowland replied.

"I'm no Howard Carter, Mr. Rowland," Betsy commented. "I don't know how I manage to get involved with people with intriguing lives, but I seem to be a little let down now that it's all over."

"I don't think you can count on another adventure like discovering the Petrov fortune, Betsy. Get real," Maria said.

"That's the problem, Maria. I'm bored and eager to find more missing treasure."

"I think, from now until you return to America in June, that you should focus on your French and American studies and stop fantasizing about dangerous adventures in crime," Mr. Rowland said emphatically. "You're just lucky Eva Hurteau didn't see you coming or both you and Jenny may have been seriously injured, or worse. Eva was desperate enough to kill without hesitation to find those Modigliani paintings."

That statement haunted Betsy's thoughts and reminded her of the most recent attempt to break into her hotel room in Geneva and the prior incident during her last trip to Geneva when she and Sharon were abducted. If events hadn't unfolded as they had, she and Sharon could have been killed as they tried to escape.

"Oh, yeah. How could I forget being hurled from the ski lift high above Crans? I could easily been seriously hurt or worse," Betsy said to herself with a sick feeling in her stomach. Whoever was behind that staged accident had never been apprehended.

I hope you enjoyed the story. If you did, please help spread the word and write a review on Amazon, Goodreads, Librarything or anywhere else you frequent.

This is the third book in a series of the adventures of Betsy Butters. To follow Betsy and learn of her further adventures, please visit:

<http://www.jeniferrubloff.com>

About the Author

Jenifer Rubloff

As a teenager in boarding schools in Switzerland and the US, Jenifer learned from the people she met and the friends she made about different cultures, customs, religions and cuisines. When she sat in her school study halls, on many nights, she'd play "what if" with her imagination about what could happen in her school with only a small tweak to reality.

As an author of fiction, Rubloff twists reality to share her experiences and fascination with how people and events can be interconnected.