

# MYSTERY OF THE GABLE ON HOLLY DRIVE

BETSY BUTTERS BOOKS

Book 4

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## Chapter 1

# HERE SHE GOES AGAIN

Betsy Butters cradled her large pony spotted satchel and looked for a quiet place to sit in the shade of the towering palm trees. Suffering from jet lag and disorientation after having been in Paris, London and Los Angeles in the past eighteen hours, she had to give herself a time out.

For the second time in her life, Betsy was thrown into an environment entirely foreign to her hometown of Lake Forest, Illinois. First, she was whisked away to a Swiss boarding school after the tragic death of her parents, and a year later, she was beginning grade ten in the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles.

Almost ashamed about complaining of her privileged international travels, she quickly found an ideal place to rest. It was a worn stone bench near a large old marble fountain in the court yard of her new boarding school, Bradley Hall. The 1920s Spanish estate that housed the school was hidden from the street by mature shrubbery and rows of palm trees.

From where Betsy was recharging her jet lagged self, she couldn't see, and could barely hear, the almost endless stream of vehicles passing by the school. The non-stop traffic in Los Angeles was a constant reminder to Betsy of how different Los Angeles was than Montreux, Switzerland, the location of her former school.

There was another "scentable" difference between the two locations. The air surrounding Bradley Hall smelled like that of any U.S. urban setting; pleasantly improved with a touch of fresh gardenia and orange blossom. The air surrounding Château Mont Blanc was filled with the aroma of the chocolate made at the neighboring Nestlé factory. She affectionately referred to it as The School with Chocolate Air.

Betsy let her muscles relax and her thoughts go free. She shook her shoulder length auburn hair and raised her arms above her head.

Boarding school in Los Angeles was going to be an entirely different experience than in Montreux. She would be speaking English, not French, and her haute cuisine school

meals would be replaced with dietician crafted menus. No more extra butter fat or home churned butter curls, but her friend Nancy had told her wonderful things about the Paris Pastry on Westwood Blvd. Nancy said the pastry chef and the salesladies were all French. Betsy planned on visiting the shop at her earliest opportunity.

As for the fabulous Swiss ski slopes, Betsy wasn't much of a skier, and didn't think she'd miss sliding down the ski trails by the seat of her pants. If she did get the urge to ski, Big Bear was only a two hour drive from her school. And this was Los Angeles, there was always water skiing.

Betsy knew that what was really bothering her about being relocated to Los Angeles was not being around her former school mates and her French boyfriend, Alex. He was now a student in the SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago). He applied to go to school there when he and Betsy thought she'd be returning to her hometown of Chicago after her year in Montreux. Betsy thought about how making new friends while staying in touch with the old and getting good grades was going to be quite a juggling act.

"Oh, well, here I go again," she said to herself as she stretched her legs and wiggled her feet.

"Hey, stranger," a girl's voice called out, "I'm L.P., what's your name?"

Betsy moved her attention from her inner thoughts to the tall, lanky teen in front of her and replied, "Betsy, Betsy Butters."

"Nice to meet you, Betsy, Betsy Butters. What year are you?"

"Ten and a boarder. You?"

"I'm your tenth grade greeter and I'm a day student."

"What's the L.P. stand for?"

"Linda Polszewski. Now you know why I go by L.P."

"Nice to meet you, L.P. You're the first person I've met since I came in about ten minutes ago, but I do know Nancy Peters. We went to the same Swiss boarding school last year. She's going to be a senior this year and she's a day student.

"It can't hurt to know someone and a senior, but let's introduce you to some other Bradley Girls."

L.P. led Betsy into a large sun filled hall with a domed glass ceiling and bifold glass doors on two sides of the space. The room was painted in various shades of a cheery

tropical coral. Betsy thought it was very tropical and spa-like. Immediately, Betsy sensed that something was missing in this vast space. It had big windows and plenty of sunlight and the welcoming color, but no art.

“Don’t they have any art work in this place?” she asked L.P.

“This isn’t The Getty Museum, Betsy, “it’s a friggin’” school. There are some oil paintings that were donated by alumni in a few of the other common rooms. You can always see them; I think there are a few in the staff lounge. You can ask to see them. If Nancy Peters is from the *Peter* Peters family, you can ask her to show you her parents’ collection. The Peters’ collection is like a small museum.”

”Nancy Peter’s dad?”

“Yeah, if he’s Peter Peters II. He’s a local philanthropist and art collector and everybody knows about his collection.”

“Cool! She never told me.”

“Well, if her dad is Peter Peters, consider yourself told. Now enough about artwork, let’s get moving.”

L.P. grabbed Betsy’s free hand and navigated her through a room filled with girls and adults who Betsy assumed were faculty members. Everybody had those nasty sticky name tags stuck to their clothing.

When L.P. finally stopped moving, she introduced Betsy to another tall, lanky teen with wavy, shoulder length red hair. “Betsy, meet your roommate, A.J. She’s also a sophomore.”

“Nice to meet you, A.J. Say, L.P., A.J., does anyone here use their full name, or must I call myself B.B.?”

The two girls laughed at Betsy’s question and explained that in Bradley Hall there were many girls with the same first name, and the teachers decided it was easier to use their initials.

“You just happened to meet the two of us before anybody else, but your head will be full of first names before you know it,” A.J. replied.

“I don’t know, A.J., I sort of like the sound of B.B.,” L.P. joked.

## Chapter 2

### BETSY MEETS THE LADIES OF BRADLEY HALL

A.J. took over for L.P. and led Betsy through the crowds of faculty and students. L.P. whipped back with an ugly name tag and slapped it on Betsy's new white blouse. It said, "Betsy Butters, B.B., Soph., Res."

"I sort of like the sound of B.B., A.J. It's very show biz."

"You'll get comfortable here, and before you know it B.B., you'll be a California girl. And boys love California girls."

"Oh, I'm quite attached to a boy whose OK with my being plain old Betsy from Lake Forest, Illinois. Say what's the 'Res.'?"

"It's short for the Residence. The Residence is the bedroom wing on the second floor of this main house. There are two other houses on the property: The Beach and The Club."

"Mrs. Hall is your house mom. She's quite proper, and a little dotty, but not too much gets past her."

"A.J., where are you from?"

"I'm from Hawaii, the Big Island, and I was here as a freshman."

"OMG! Why would you ever want to leave home to come to school here?"

"I'm a surfer and I have a surfer boyfriend. My parents are worried that I'll never accomplish anything if I don't live in the real world."

A.J. was interrupted by the sound of chimes. "That's what they use here instead of the usual school bells. They are very Zen."

A petite lady with a platinum blond French twist raised her hand and launched into a welcoming speech. Betsy guessed that she must be Mrs. Proctor, the headmistress.

Unlike Betsy's former headmistress, Mrs. Alice Proctor was very open and cheery and stressed that she didn't want any new boarder student to feel homesick. She insisted that each "returning day student" become a big sister to a fellow boarder even if they were from another grade. She asked that the assignment be voluntary and that each returning student give her the name of her "sister" by dinnertime the next evening.

Mrs. Louise Ferris, the dean of studies, followed Mrs. Proctor and told the girls that she wanted everyone to enjoy the welcome party and not even think about class schedules. There would be plenty of time for that the following day. Mrs. Ferris was much taller than Mrs. Proctor and wore her red hair in a Vidal Sassoon like geometric short hair cut that ended just above her shoulder. Betsy guessed that both ladies were in their early fifties. They were very stylishly dressed, à la Michael Kors and Diane von Furstenberg, but that didn't surprise Betsy. Nancy and Bev, her former classmates, were from Los Angeles, and they put wardrobe, hair, and make-up at the top of their list of priorities. Their clothes were "money".

"Mrs. Proctor and Mrs. Ferris were classmates at Harvard, Betsy. They are really smart, but they don't talk about all their degrees in education."

"How do you like the teachers?"

"My teachers last year were great. They all knew how to make us learn without too much stress. Coming from Hawaii, I'm about as laid back as one can be. I freaked when my folks said I was going to go to boarding school on the mainland, but my teachers eased me into the faster pace and heavier work load. The faculty for us as sophomores will be entirely different."

"I can't wait to meet my French teacher. I think French class will make me feel at home after a year in a French speaking boarding school in Switzerland."

"Cool! I surf, and you must ski. What a duo."

"No, A.J., you surf and I slide down the slopes on the seat of my pants. It's a technique I perfected in one season."

"Maybe I can teach you how to surf this year. It's a great way to meet guys."

"I'm not too athletic, A.J. I love to swim and dive and water ski, but I don't know about surfing. And like I said, I'm already attached. "

"We have too much to do now to even think about excursions, but I think you should give surfing a try."

"Say, I see Mademoiselle Amiel, our French teacher. Would you like to meet her now?"

"Mais oui. Oops, I mean, yeah, let's go."

## Chapter 3

# FAMILIAR FRENCH

Mademoiselle Amiel put Betsy at ease from the moment they were introduced. A.J. used her beginner's French to introduce the two, and left Betsy to visit with their teacher while she "worked the room".

Mademoiselle Amiel was in her late twenties and had joined the faculty after earning her undergrad degree from the University of Chicago and graduate degree in education at USC. She was an assistant French professor at both UCLA and USC before joining Bradley Hall.

She and Betsy spoke in French and exchanged information about their backgrounds and what brought them to Bradley Hall. Mademoiselle Amiel was born and raised in Paris and had many friends in Montreux. When she told Betsy that her favorite confiserie (confectionary) in Montreux was Zucher, Betsy felt like she'd come home.

"I think you will be very happy here Betsy," Miss Amiel said. "The faculty is demanding, but also open with the students. We make ourselves available to our students and many teachers speak by phone with students in the evening or on weekends if they need help with an assignment. "

"Wow, I didn't expect that. My teachers in Château Mont Blanc were always available for us too, but it was a small school with about forty students. Bradley Hall has hundreds of students."

"I think you'll enjoy your music and art appreciation classes with Ellen Emory and Joan Smyth, Betsy. You've experienced much in Europe and have developed a true appreciation for history and the arts."

"Oh wow! I didn't know I'd have music and art appreciation. I can't wait. I studied painting and took voice in CMB. Maybe I won't feel like a fish out of water after all."

“No, I don’t think so, but be proud of your individuality. All the girls here have wonderful and unique experiences to share.

“By the way, Betsy, I have an extra-curricular project for my students that I think you’d enjoy. I assign students to a French ex-pat now living in Los Angeles who is alone or a shut in and can use a visitor a few times a week. You speak in French together and it’s a rewarding experience for each participant.”

“Sign me up. That sounds great. Do we get to go to the Paris Pastry?”

“Oh my. You know about the Paris Pastry already? I see you’ve already set your priorities. I’m sure your French ex-pat will love it if you arrive with a special treat once in awhile, but we prefer that you limit excursions away from the ex-pat’s residence.”

“Oh, right. No problem.

“Mlle (Miss) Amiel, my boyfriend, Alex, is beginning studies in art history and conservation at the SAIC. He’s a native Parisien like you, and he’s looking for a roommate or a home where he can be a boarder close to the school. Would you have any ideas for him?”

“I lived in a home halfway between the University of Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago. I’ll call my former landlord and see if he wants a new tenant. His wife is French, and I think it could work out very nicely for everyone.”

“Wow! This is turning out to be a great day after all.”

A.J. politely interrupted their conversation and explained that she and Betsy had to rush to meet with their house mother, Mrs. Hall.

“À demain (until tomorrow), Betsy,” Miss Amiel said as A.J. and Betsy waved and turned to make their way through the crowd to the upper floor.

“Wow! In a few minutes this room has filled up with a ton of people. It’s like a convention hall in here.”

“You’re seeing students and faculty and all grades, day students and boarders. We don’t often all gather in the same place at the same time.”

“That’s good. I have claustrophobia and I’m glad we’re getting out of here.”

## Chapter 4

# GETTING SETTLED

“Let’s put that pony spotted satchel of yours in your bedroom locker, Betsy. You can’t spend the next three years carrying it around. We each have lockers for our valuables and all of our important stuff in our bedrooms. We also have lockers in the main classroom area for books and all of our technology stuff.”

“Oh, thank you A.J. After twenty-four hours, I can’t wait to set myself free.”

“That bag is cool, Betsy. ‘Looks like the real deal.’”

“It is. I found the hide in a flea market in Paris.”

“Well, you can shop on Rodeo Drive and I bet more than one gal will ask how much you want for your bag.”

“Oh, it’s not for sale and I don’t think I’ll be shopping on Rodeo Drive. I’m an orphan, A.J., and my guardian is a busy physician who has no time for a teen cousin. My allowance is very small. My guardian, Dr. Frankenstein, that’s what I call her, sent me away to Switzerland when my parents died in a car accident because she knew I love French. I met Nancy Peters there, one thing led to another, and Bradley Hall became my next boarding school.”

“B.B., I’m so sorry about your parents. I don’t see mine a lot, but they are alive and well. I think with all the things we do here with studies and outside of class, you will keep your mind off of sad thoughts. I’m not experienced in psychology, but if you need to talk with anyone, there are many girls here who’ve lost one or both parents, B.B. and we have a school shrink. You’ve come to the right school.”

“I hope I don’t have to go to the shrink, but it’s nice having girls around who know what it’s like. Nancy lost her mom last year and we sort of have each other’s undivided attention.”

“I hear ya. Well, let’s swing into our room, just up the corridor here, tie up your pony, and head into the bonus room where all of us Res. girls can hang. Mother Hall will tell us

all the nitpicky stuff about the house rules, tidying up, no smoking, drugs or booze, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.”

## Chapter 5

### BETSY GETS A BIG SISTER

Betsy Butters or B.B. settled into her new digs with A.J. without any fanfare. Her suitcases had arrived by special van from LAX and AJ helped her unpack. A.J. had placed posters of surfers at Sunset Beach, Haleiwa Beach, Banzai Pipeline, and the Backdoor above her bed and desk. Betsy put up a collage of photos of her and Alex and her former friends and roommates over her bed on a cork board provided by the school.

“OMG, Alex is a *doll*, B.B. I don’t think I could stand to be two thousand miles away from *him*. And you’re standing in front of the Eiffel Tower.”

Betsy didn’t respond. She knew that A.J. was right about Alex and there wasn’t too much she could say without sounding smug.

They were getting ready to go down to dinner when a student knocked on their door. “Hi A.J., Betsy. I’m Deni Berger. I’m a day student and a senior, Betsy, and I’d like to be your big sister this year.”

“Say yes, B.B. Deni was my big sister last year and she’s *the best*.”

“Thanks, A.J. I love compliments. Well, Betsy, think it over during dinner and get back to me. I’m sticking around school until later tonight to help with the late arriving students.”

“Oh, no. I mean no need to wait. I’d love you to be my big sister, Deni. Thanks for asking me.”

“Great. Well, A.J. can fill you in on almost anything that I can, but I’m here for you and my former little sis, as needed. And, I’ll take you around town, from time to time. I’m sure Mrs. Proctor will have a few formal events for big and little sisters, but here’s my cell number. If you have questions about Bradley or personal stuff, just give me a call. I’ll be seeing you in the hallway and at lunch, so we can talk then too.”

Deni dashed out of the room just as the Zen-like chimes called them to the dining hall.

“You’re lucky that Deni chose you, Betsy. She’s smart, knows everything about LA, and she has a car. She took me to quite a few places last year, just to hang, and when I had to go to get my wisdom teeth removed.”

“Wow. I never expected this kind of a welcome. It’s so personalized.”

“I hope I get a senior, or a junior who is old enough to drive. Well, let’s bounce.”

Betsy was learning fast that having “wheels” was an obsession in Los Angeles even for boarding school girls. She hadn’t given it any thought until then because she had walked everywhere from her school in Montreux, and the winter school in Crans.

## Chapter 6

# DINNER CONVERSATION

The air she breathed, the importance of access to “wheels”, and now the school meals were all major differences between Betsy’s boarding school experience in Switzerland and in Bradley Hall. And the headmistress and other faculty all seemed to be less formal than those in her Swiss school. What was very much the same was the friendliness of the students.

Dinner at Bradley Hall began with homemade vegetable soup, fresh greens with sliced tomatoes and cucumbers with light vinaigrette, chicken breast stuffed with steamed spinach and mushrooms with a white wine and lemon juice sauce, and baked apples for dessert.

Betsy described the meals at Château Mont Blanc and all the girls begged her to stop. She and A.J. and four other girls at the table were salivating and feeling deprived with the meal before them.

“You’re going to make me want to call for a three cheese pizza to get a fat fix,” A.J. said with her hand covering her mouth full of healthy delights.

“Oh, this meal is delicious without all the fat,” Betsy added. I’m not complaining. I think after a few months of eating here that I’ll lose the weight I gained in Switzerland without going hungry.”

“You gained weight?” asked A.J. “You must have been anemic because you don’t have any fat on you that I can see.”

“I’m big boned,” Betsy quipped. I can carry extra pounds and they don’t show until it’s too late.”

“All kidding aside,” A.J. said, “You don’t need to diet and certainly not here. Our L.D.N., Mrs. Riley, is fab at making menus that are not boring or unhealthy. My mom would kill to have a professional chef at home with an L.D.N. after his name.

“Enough talk about food,” she insisted. “You’re making me hungry for junk food. At home with all the surfing that I do, I can eat Hawaiian bread and junk food and not gain an ounce.”

“I think I’ll ask Deni to take us all to the Paris Pastry one day, and I’ll treat you to a taste of French pastry worth the extreme calories.”

“Enough,” A.J. said as she grabbed a baked apple that her table mate was too full to eat.

## Chapter 7

# MODERN CONVENIENCES

“I’m going to the showers, Betsy. See ya in a few,” A.J. caroled as she grabbed her towel and bath kit and set out in her flip flops and terry cloth robe.

“Wow, that sounds so weird,” Betsy replied.

“Are you nuts? What’s weird about it?”

“Oh, in my Swiss school, we had to take turns throughout the week using the bathtub, and in the winter school, we only could take one bath a week in a closet-like room with a wooden tub with water heated by a wood fire.”

“OMG! It sounds like Dracula’s castle. Well, now you can shower any time you don’t have classes and any evening that moves you. Our wing of the Res. has an eight shower head shower room. No modesty here, Betsy. You’ll get used to it.”

“I don’t have a choice about the group shower, but getting to shower everyday is a luxury that I welcome. Enjoy your shower. I’m going to call Alex.”

“Don’t forget to send him a big kiss from me, B.B.”

By the time A.J. returned to their room, Betsy had talked with Alex and was gathering up her shower bag and towel.

“Did you reach, Alex?”

“Yes, but it’s later there, and he was in an evening class. He only had three minutes, literally, for us to talk. He’s excited about how I like Bradley Hall and he’s considering calling me by B.B. He thinks it’s very French. Oh, he sends you his hellos and the traditional French kiss on each cheek.”

“Wow! Say, Betsy, do you think he could find me a Frenchman all for myself?”

“I’m sure there are many at USC and UCLA. We can look into social networking down the road, AJ. I’m quite good at interconnecting. Right now, I need a shower and a good night’s sleep. “

Before A.J. could ask Betsy the meaning of interconnecting, she was half way to the showers. Not to be deterred, A.J. followed Betsy into the shower and asked her to explain interconnecting.

“In a nut shell, A.J., it’s the theory that all of us are connected to each other through other people we know and it is not by accident that we meet people who know other people we know, etcetera, etcetera.”

“You mean a six degrees of separation kinda thing?”

“Yes, but I think it’s maybe more than six, but the point, in my mind, is that we don’t randomly meet or connect with people, and the people we meet are connected to other people we meet, etcetera, etcetera.”

“Cool! Say what’s with the etcetera, etcetera?”

“I think now that I’ve arrived in Tinsletown that I’m channeling Yule Brenner’s character in the *The King and I*. Now, let me put my shampoo on and get finished with this shower. I’m ready to fall asleep under the running water.”

“OK. I’m turning in. Sweet dreams. I’ll see ya on the flip side.”