

# **Natalie Novak and the Hidden Staircase**

## **Chapter 1: Moving to Lilleyville**

Let's say you're angry. So steaming mad you just want to whip a tennis ball against a wall. It might be noisy. It might leave a mark on the wall. And you might get in trouble. But boy does it feel good!

I've learned a few tricks. I only do it when Mom's not at home. And I only do it against the back wall of my closet – I just push the hangers of clothes to the sides and whale away! And sometimes I wail away. Which is what I was doing the day I discovered the hidden staircase.



It was the beginning of summer holidays. I couldn't hang out with my friends. They were miles away. Mom had moved us – yet again! – to

Lilleyville, so she could be the new manager for the Lilleyville Performing Arts Centre.

Earlier in the year I knew something was up when she said, “Natalie, I have some news to share.” My name is really Natalie, but when I was little I guess that was a mouthful so I called myself Nally, and it kind of stuck. Everyone calls me Nally, even Mom, except when there is something serious she needs to talk to me about. When she starts a sentence with, “Natalie...” I just hope I'm not in trouble for anything.

This time she said, “Natalie, I've accepted a new job with the Lilleyville Performing Arts Centre – everyone calls it LPAC for short. It's the perfect job for me, and it will get me back to music. I've missed it.” Mom used to be a classical musician. She played violin with an orchestra that travelled all over Europe. But that was before I was born.

Turns out, this new job meant we had to move to Lilleyville, and we had to drive there the day after I finished school. Boy was I mad!

But Mom had her mind made up. “You know how much I love music, Nally,” she had added. “Almost as much as I love you!”

“Hah!” I snorted. I stomped around. I gave her the silent treatment. I was sarcastic and mean-mouthed. But it didn’t matter, Mom wouldn’t budge. And there was no one else to appeal to – it’s just been me and Mom as long as I can remember. She says we get along fine, just the two of us. Which we do. Mostly.

I called Gramp, but he lives miles away. He listened to me whine and said “Hmm,” and “It sounds like you’re really upset.”

Then he reminded me of something Gran used to say, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it.”

“But how am I supposed to do that?” I wailed. “She’s ruining my life!” I’m not usually that dramatic, but I was kind of enjoying my brief dip in my pool of self-pity.

“Think of it as a new adventure,” he said.



Mom took to calling me Natalie, and speaking to me very formally and very patiently. She sold off and gave things away and packed up the rest. I carefully placed everything I treasured into my own boxes – books, recipe box and baking goods, ball glove, pictures – I didn’t want any of my favourite things to go missing.

The first day of my summer holidays Mom and I got in the car and head for Lilleyville. “Lilleyville is small, just a spit on the map,” Mom told me. “It was founded by a guy named Noble Anderson, who owned the gravel quarry down the road. He named the village for his wife Lilley. He built Lilleyville’s first houses for his workers to live in.

The coolest thing is, it’s right on a lake with a great beach. There are a lot of tourists in the summer, which is why we had to skedaddle and get there quickly, as soon as school was done.”



Our first morning, Mom had to check in at the LPAC office. Since our apartment is right in the

LPAC building, the office is just down the hall from us. I was still sulking so I stayed in my bedroom. Before long I was whipping my tennis ball at the back of my closet wall.

It was frustrating because the closet is narrow. I guess they didn't have many clothes back in the olden days when it was built. So I took the hangers out to give me more room, and I starting throwing again, all the while cursing Mom. Not too loudly, because I wasn't sure how sound proof the walls were. As it turned out, I didn't have to worry.

I must have thrown the ball just hard enough and at just the right spot, because around the fourth throw I heard a soft "click" and I smelled there was a difference in the air. I stepped into the closet to take a closer look.

At first I was afraid I had broken something. The back wall of the closet had shifted slightly. There was a small gap running up one corner. I gingerly put my fingers against the wall, trying to assess the damage. The gap widened as the back wall slid to the side. I grabbed my flashlight, pushed

the wall further and shone my light in. I couldn't believe my eyes!

I was looking at a narrow, circular, black metal staircase, dusty but sturdy looking. I had stumbled upon a hidden staircase, and it looked like it went up to the second floor. I was itching to climb it to see where it went. Flashlight in hand, I quietly pushed the back wall/door to the side, took a deep breath, and started to climb.

*If you want to read more about Nally's adventures in Lilleyville, please visit [kymwolfe.com](http://kymwolfe.com) to order the e-book.*