

Heart of the Castle:
A Ghost Story

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Heart of the Castle: A Ghost Story

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Summary: 15-year-old Katie travels with her friends to summer school in Romania. There, she must get the help of ghosts to find gold hidden in Transylvania's Bran Castle before a dangerous ex-secret policeman can find it.

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Limo for Two?

Stink Bombs

The Tattoo

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SUMMER PLANS

Chapter 1

“**T**ell me you’re going to Transylvania with me this summer,” Katie announced before she got all the way into the coffee shop. She was so excited to tell her two best friends, Cam and John, about her plans that she couldn’t wait any longer. Cam and John quickly looked up from their drinks. Everyone in the shop stopped talking and looked up, too. In Katie’s excitement, she said it louder and quicker than she had intended. But, if Katie had noticed some of the odd looks given her, she didn’t show it. Katie was a very confident 15-year-old girl and she was on a mission to let her friends know about this new adventure she planned.

The boys had their drinks and had just sat down at their usual table. They had gotten to the coffee shop on time to hang out

with Katie. They were surprised that, for once, Katie was right on time, too. Normally, Katie was a few minutes late. She liked to be “fashionably late.” Katie thought it made her a little more interesting. Also, she didn’t want to be too predictable. The funny thing was, she was predictably late most of the time. In spite of that, she was a good person to have as a friend, always there for whoever needed her. It was one of her quirks.

“Transylvania? Isn’t that where all the vampires are?” John asked. “Are you into vampires now?”

Dressed, as usual, in all black with a large white skull on his t-shirt, John looked like the one who would go looking for vampires. He was tall for his age and thin. His black clothes made him seem even thinner than he was.

“Of course not! There are no such things as vampires. We all know that. That’s made up stuff,” she said. Katie believes in ghosts, but vampires? No way!

“You’ve got to admit, it would be more of an adventure than staying around here all summer. And, if we happen to find some ghosts, that would be great too,” she said with a sly look on her face.

John’s eyebrows went up when Katie said ‘ghosts’. Katie could tell that got his attention. Katie and John have been close friends since they met in 8th grade because they both have an interest in ghosts. Then, last year, Katie met John’s friend, Cam. He had a ghost problem that they were able to help him with.

Fifteen-year-old Cam swept his hand through his light brown hair. He stayed quiet for a minute. He liked to think things through before speaking. “I know you’re into ghosts,” he said. “You helped me with mine!” Cam had recently been haunted

by the ghost of his grandpa's shipmate from World War Two. Cam had been SCUBA diving on his grandpa's sunken ship when he found a ghost that scared him half to death.

Luckily for Cam, all that ended well, plus he and Katie started spending more time together. They barely knew each other before Cam's ghost but are better friends now. Cam didn't mind Katie using the word, 'we'. He wanted to get even closer to Katie but wasn't sure if she felt the same way about him. Also, he didn't want to ruin his friendship with John. Cam knew John wasn't seeing anyone. He just didn't know if John also wanted Katie to be his girlfriend. He could never build up the courage to ask John about it.

Katie bought her drink and sat down with the boys. They hunched over the small table while Katie spoke. Katie's next words brought Cam back into the conversation. "There's more. I'm going to go to summer school there. I am hoping you guys will be going too, right?" she asked. Katie looked at her two silent friends and focused on their eyes; first she looked into Cam's good natured blue eyes. Then she looked into John's questioning brown eyes. Katie always says the eyes are the windows to the souls.

John looked at Katie again with raised eyebrows. His eyebrows said a lot more than what was coming out of his mouth. They said, *Wow, that might be cool.* But, out loud he said, "I, I don't know what my parents might say."

"Come on, John. This will be perfect for us. There's even a field trip to a castle nearby. They say it's one of the most haunted castles in the world. They've had all kinds of sightings there. It was built in the 1300s so there's bound to be some ghosts floating around there," Katie told John.

Cam knew Katie mentioned ghosts again to give John more reason to come on the trip, but that wasn't the case for Cam. Cam did want to spend time with Katie and he didn't want to be left out . . . *but ghosts, did it have to be ghosts?* He was beginning to understand that to hang out with Katie, ghosts would be involved somewhere.

Cam couldn't give Katie an answer, not yet anyway. "I don't know if I can, but at least I already have my passport. My parents are going to want to know everything about this trip before they say yes. Tell us more," he said. "How much will it cost? When are you going? When will I need to tell you if I can go?"

John's mind was slowly coming up to speed. "Wait, passport? Isn't Transylvania in the United States?" he slowly asked. He tried to remember his 7th grade World History lessons.

"Are you thinking of Pennsylvania?" Katie asked.

"Oh, yeah," John replied, bumping his head with the palm of his hand. "I didn't remember hearing about any haunted castles in Pennsylvania."

"Ok. Let's start with the basics. Romania is in Europe. Transylvania is an area in the country of Romania. It used to be a part of Hungary, but that was a long time ago," Katie said in a way that sounded as if everyone should know that. "My relatives were farmers or something like that. They lived in Transylvania. They didn't have a lot of money or anything. So, before World War II, my great-great-grandma came here, to the U.S. The bad thing is she died not long after getting here. Her daughter was young, so she didn't know much about her family. I've learned all I can about them from my grandma who

researched them. I still want to learn more about that side of my family.”

Cam felt as though he had slept through his history and geography classes. He didn't remember hearing Transylvania mentioned at all. He felt sure he would have remembered if he had heard of it in school. He only heard of it in old vampire movies. He also felt bad since he should have known his friend better.

“Oh, that's right. Your family is from there. I forgot you are part Romanian.” he told Katie.

With her head slightly tilted and her slow nod, she said a lot. Her nod said, *Cam, you should have known this*. And at the same time, it also said, *how could you not think Transylvania was a real place?* “I don't know about you,” she said as she shook her head. “I may have to insist you come with me so you'll learn something,” she teased.

Katie reached across the table, taking hold of Cam's and John's hands. She gave them each a short squeeze. She wanted her two friends to go with her on the trip. She knew it would be more fun for her if the boys went, too. If they went, it would also help her get permission to go. Her dad wasn't so open about her going alone. Katie knew her mom and dad liked Cam and John. Her parents were the ones who encouraged Katie to ask Cam and John to go with her. They felt Katie would be safer in a group of close friends rather than being there with only strangers.

Katie glanced at Cam. She wasn't looking for this trip to bring her a big romance. Of course, if Cam was there, she would prefer a romance with him rather than one with a Romanian stranger.

“Students stay in the college dorms. They’re like little apartments for one or two students. I’ll bet it will be cool even just to stay in the college dorms.” Katie had high hopes of what the rooms looked like. She always imagined them being cool like in the movies. “The classes are given at the college.”

Cam and John both wondered how much studying they would need to do. They generally thought summer should never involve school. John thought even regular school should barely involve studying.

Katie could read their faces. “You won’t really have to put much effort into the classes. I read that the classes are for only a few hours each day. The rest of the day everybody goes on field trips or gets to explore the town. There’s no pressure. I thought it sounded like a lot of fun. All the meals are included. You’re basically taken care of.”

Most of it sounded good to both the boys. The part about going to school during their summer vacation was the only bad part for them. John and Cam had to talk their parents into letting them go with Katie. Finally, both got permission to go on their summer adventure.