

A Bad Case of Ghosts: Chapter Two

The next morning, Giles started unpacking his things. First he set up his desk and shelves. That helped -- already the room was beginning to look a little nicer, more like home. He wasn't crazy about that wallpaper, which was a dingy greyish colour with a faded pattern of vines and ivy leaves. He stuck up some of his favourite posters with putty.

The window was so dirty he could barely see out. He asked Dad for a cloth and some cleaning liquid and gave the glass a good scrub. It was a sunny summer day, and there were lots of people on the sidewalks. He could see an old man, leaning on a walker, making his way slowly past their house.

Across the street was a small park. Giles squinted. Weird!

Perched on the monkey bars were a boy and a girl. That wasn't weird. It was what they were wearing. They both wore enormous sets of headphones which were plugged into a large machine which the girl carried around her neck on a thick strap. And they were both looking straight at his house!

As Giles watched, the girl twiddled a few knobs on the machine and then said something to the boy. They climbed down from the monkey bars, crossed the street and stood on the sidewalk, staring intently at the house. Giles could see them more clearly now. He guessed that they were about his age. The girl was very tiny, with small, thin hands, pale skin, and two precise blonde braids dangling on either side of her head. The boy had tightly curled red hair, and his broad face was splotched with freckles.

But what were they doing with that machine?

The girl said something to the boy, but he obviously didn't hear her. She knocked on his head with her knuckles to get his attention. They had a short conversation.

Then, as Giles watched in amazement, they actually walked through the front gate of the house and into the garden! They stood on the lawn, listening to their headphones again, and the girl was now scribbling in a notepad.

What on earth?

Giles couldn't control his curiosity any longer. He went downstairs, opened the front door and walked out. The boy and girl didn't seem to notice him.

"Hello," he said uncertainly.

No response.

"Hey," he said, more loudly.

They both jumped, and yanked off their headphones.

"Hi," said the boy with the red hair. "Do you live here?"

"We just moved in," Giles told him.

The boy and girl looked at each other in surprise.

"Oh," said the boy. "We thought it was still empty. I'm Kevin Quark, and this is my older sister, Tina. We're geniuses."

Giles blinked.

"Kevin," said the tiny girl, "shut up."

"Well, it's true isn't it?"

"Of course, but it's not the kind of thing you tell people when you first meet them, is it?"

Kevin smiled cheerfully. "Oh well," he said. "Are you a genius?"

"I've never really thought about it," Giles replied.

"Well, it's usually pretty obvious," Kevin told him. "Can you name all the capital cities of Europe? Do you get 10 out of 10 on all your class quizzes? Can you do the thirteen-times table in your head? Those are some of the first signs."

Giles felt out of breath just listening to Kevin.

"We've counted the number of bricks in our house, and calculated the amount of water that flushes through the toilet every day. Sometimes we invent things -- Tina's brilliant at that. She knows everything about chemistry and electricity. She can make liquid in a test tube turn blue and then explode! She can make sparks sizzle between two rods!"

Tina stood there silently, smiling faintly.

"Well, I don't think I'm genius material, compared with all that," Giles admitted.

"Well, that's all right," said Kevin good-naturedly, "I'm only a little bit of a genius myself. Now, Tina, she's a vast genius. She's the brains behind the whole operation. The ghostometer was her idea."

Tina nudged her brother in the ribs with her elbow.

"Owww!" Kevin cried out. "What was that for?"

"For telling him about the ghostometer."

"The what?" Giles said.

Tina sighed. "The ghostometer," she said. "It detects ghosts."

Giles took a good look at the contraption around her neck. It looked like a toaster with lots of switches and knobs added on.

"That thing detects ghosts?" he said. "You're not serious!"

"I'm completely serious," said the tiny girl. "I'll admit, it does need some minor re-adjustments. But I'll have you know that we got some very strong readings from your house."

"Did we?" Kevin asked.

Tina rolled her eyes. "Yes, Kevin, we did. Weren't you listening?"

"Sometimes it all sounds the same to me. All those little beeps and blerps."

"They were positive readings," Tina said, exasperated.

"But didn't we get positive readings from Tom's dog once?" Kevin asked politely.

Tina went red in the face. "Yes, that was in the early stages. It's much more reliable now."

"Hang on a second," said Giles. "You think my house is haunted?"

"It's possible," said Tina gravely.

"I don't believe in ghosts," Giles said firmly, trying to sound like his mother.

"Are you sure you haven't seen anything spooky or creepy or basically weird in there?" Kevin wanted to know.

"No," said Giles quickly, "absolutely not."

He couldn't help thinking about the strange noises he'd heard in his room last night. But that was just his imagination. It had nothing whatsoever to do with ghosts.

"Well," said Kevin eagerly, "no one's lived in this house for years. I bet it's haunted. They say a crazy lady used to live there. She never left the house. There's bound to be ghosts coming out of every nook and cranny!"

"Kevin, please," said Tina in a tired voice, "this is all very unscientific. We haven't proven anything yet."

Giles took a look at his house. Now that he thought about it, it did look a little haunted. He felt a tingling at the base of his skull. Had a crazy lady really lived here? Could there really be ghosts?

"Well, look," said Tina, "we've got to do some work on the ghostometer."

"And if anything zany happens," said Kevin hopefully, "give us a call and we'll be right over. Here's our card."

"Good-bye," said Giles, feeling slightly overwhelmed. He looked at the business card Kevin put in his hand. It said:

Tina and Kevin Quark.
Local Geniuses.
Capable of just about everything.
Reasonable Rates.

"I've never met geniuses before," Giles mumbled, going inside.

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