

MYSTERY *at*
the **HAUNTED CASTLE**
A FLAUGHERTY TWINS MYSTERY
Book 1

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Mystery at the Haunted Castle

A business-pleasure trip to Paris sets off a series of incidents that involve the Flagherty Twins in their first mystery.

A mysterious doll everyone seems to want, a legacy involving a cipher, and a ghostly knight haunting an old castle challenge Pat and Patty in their quest to help a newfound friend.

As they are plunged into many dangerous adventures, including a fourth-story rescue operation, they uncover clues that lead them to discover the *Mystery at the Haunted Castle*.

I

Jewel Thieves

“Why are you being so mysterious?” 17-year-old Patty Flaugherly asked her boyfriend as he pulled his dark brown Mustang to the curb in downtown Temple City.

“Because it’s something very special,” Bob Daily said as he ran his hand through his straw-blond hair, then turned to face the girl. “Just like you.” With that, he leaned over and kissed her.

When the kiss ended, he looked searchingly into her eyes, those often serious blue eyes of hers, then took a deep breath.

“I love you, Trish,” he said softly. “I think I’ve loved you since we were two years old. You’re the only girl I’ve ever wanted.”

Patty blushed a little then turned and pulled down the visor, looking at her reflection in the mirror. Brushing her long dark hair back off her shoulders, she pretended to check her make-up.

“Don’t be silly,” she said to the mirror. “You can’t possibly have been in love with me since we first met. We were both too young.”

Bob leaned back in his seat, facing forward once again. He sighed

heavily. After a brief awkward silence, he finally looked once more at her and said quietly, “Well, I know I love you now. Isn’t that what’s important?”

This time, Patty leaned over and gave him a gentle peck on the cheek.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I didn’t mean to make light of what you said.

You’ve always been special to me too.”

Bob smiled at her, dark brown eyes crinkling shut.

“Then I hope you’re ready for this surprise,” he said. He slid out of the seat of the car and walked around to the passenger side, opening Patty’s door. The girl took Bob’s hand, and the couple strolled down the sidewalk under the light of the streetlamps in the gathering dusk.

“Where to?” Patty asked as they ambled through the business section of town.

“Right here,” Bob responded after a moment as he approached a storefront with a glass door that had the name “Weinberg’s Jewelers” stamped on it in gold letters. As he was about to reach for the door handle, the door swung out suddenly, and an older man hurried from the building. Bob nearly lost his balance as he dodged the heavy glass door.

“Hey, you better be careful,” Bob cried. “You almost hit us with the door.”

Patty noted that the man was dressed in a three-piece suit and was slightly portly, with graying hair and a white goatee. He glanced up at the couple with an embarrassed look on his face, then lowered his gaze and continued on his way without a word.

“That was pretty rude,” Bob remarked as he opened the door again and ushered the girl into the store.

He stepped up to the counter and pressed the service bell, then called out, “Mr. Weinberg!”

A wizened old man emerged from the rear of the shop and shuffled

unhurriedly over to the counter where the couple waited.

“Ah, Bobby, good to see you again,” Ira Weinberg exclaimed, looking through thick bifocals that were perched on the end of his nose. “Was there someone else in the store?”

“A man just left as we arrived,” Bob said. “He looked like he was in a bit of a hurry.”

“Oh, well, I’m sorry I missed him,” the jeweler replied. “I was just finishing your gift. Is this the lovely young lady who is to receive it?”

“Yes, it is,” Bob grinned.

Patty glanced at her date, her expression quizzical.

“I’ll get it now,” Mr. Weinberg murmured as he again disappeared into the back room.

“What did he mean by ‘just finished it?’” Patty asked curiously.

“The inscription, Trish,” Bob laughed, tweaking Patty’s nose.

“Here it is!” the old man said after a few minutes. He emerged from the rear of the store, carrying a tiny white box and handed it to Bob. Bob turned to Patty, and opened the box.

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” she gasped, gently fingering the delicate white-gold ring with trembling fingers. At the top, the ends of the band crossed to form two identical settings where two tiny diamonds rested. Stenciled on the inside of the band were the numbers “1-4-3.”

“It’s called a promise ring,” Bob explained. “It’s all I can afford, and besides, we’re too young to get married now anyway.”

He removed the ring from the box.

“But this is my promise that I’ll always be yours. Will you accept this from me as a pledge for our future?”

Patty looked down at the ring, then up at Bob’s face. Her eyes were

moist.

“Oh, Bob!” she finally said. “Yes. Yes, I will.”

Just as Bob slipped the ring on her left hand, two armed and masked men burst through the door.

“Clear the place out!” the taller fellow commanded in a nasal voice.

Glass cases were shattered, and handfuls of gems were shoveled hurriedly into unmarked sacks. Bob instinctively drew close to Patty and put his arms around her as the criminals ransacked the little shop.

“Where’s the safe?” the taller one growled at the proprietor.

Mr. Weinberg pointed to the rear of the store, his hand shaking uncontrollably. The thief prodded him with his weapon, and the jeweler stumbled into the back room, followed by the crook. Once the jeweler had opened the safe, the contents were quickly emptied into another unmarked sack. Just as the two criminals were about to leave, the shorter, burly man noticed Patty’s ring.

“Give me that ring, Missy,” he snarled at Patty with a heavy accent.

With tears in her eyes, she reluctantly slid the ring from her finger and gently placed it in the box, which she handed over to the man. As she did, she noticed a scar on his left palm at the base of his index finger. He quickly grabbed the box, and the two fled.

Bob summoned the police, who arrived moments later on the scene.

One of the officers, with rusty red hair and freckles, recognized Bob at once.

“You’re Sam’s boy, aren’t you?” he asked. “You’re the spitting image of your dad. I used to work with him when he was a beat cop. It’s been way too long since I’ve seen him. Tell him Kevin Murphy asked about him.”

“I will, Officer Murphy,” Bob replied.

Murphy then told them, “I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask all of you to come down to headquarters so we can take statements from you.”

Upon arriving at the precinct, the teens completed the necessary paperwork and were about to leave when they were approached by another officer who was tall and rotund, with a head of thick gray hair. He smiled broadly at the teens, then shook Bob’s hand.

“I’m Chief Shamus Dulan,” he said. “Nice to see you again. You probably don’t remember me, but I remember you. You were just a little tyke when your dad would bring you in sometimes. And now look at you, all grown up. And this lovely young lady is your girl?”

He extended his hand to Patty. “I knew your dad way back when too,” he said softly, then he sighed and shook his head.

“Well, anyway, this sounds like more of the work of those international jewel thieves you may have heard about on the news. And although it seems there’s no one in our files with that identifying mark you gave us, Miss Flagherty, you may have given us the first clue to finding those guys.”

He smiled reassuringly at the teens and added, “And I promise we’ll do our best to recover your ring.”

“Thank you, Chief,” Patty replied.

“Good night, Chief Dulan,” Bob called as he ushered Patty out of the office. Once outside, he remarked to the girl, “You know, this doesn’t change how I feel about you.”

“I know,” Patty said sadly as she sat down in the car, “but I still wish I had the ring.”

“Oho,” Bob laughed, “that ring means more to you than I do!”

“Be serious,”—she smiled at him—“and take me home.”

“My dad’s gonna be at your house when we get there,” Bob said as they

drove. “I told him what I had in mind to do tonight, and he said your mom should know about it, so he went over there to tell her”—he glanced quickly at Patty—“and to make sure it was okay with her too.

“So, what you’re telling me is that I’m the last one to know?” Patty seemed miffed. “Don’t tell me you told my brother already too.”

Bob laughed.

“He *is* my best friend,” he said. “But I don’t tell Pat everything. There are some things I’ve learned not to talk to him about.”

As the car pulled into the driveway of the Flaugherty home, Patty noticed that every light in the house was ablaze. She looked at her watch.

“Ohmigosh!” she gasped. “I had no idea it was that late.”

“Relax,”—Bob patted her hand as he pulled the car to a halt—“we have a good excuse.”

“Well, I hope they don’t think we eloped or something like that,” Patty remarked as they turned up the walk.

“Hi, Dad,” Bob called as they entered the front door. Seated at the table in the dining room were his father and Mrs. Flaugherty, drinking coffee. Sam Daily looked much like his son, with dark brown eyes and blond hair, although his was beginning to turn gray. He was a little shorter than his son and a little heavier. Mary Elizabeth Flaugherty was petite with bright blue eyes and curly, dark auburn hair.

Patty’s twin brother Pat sat in the living room in his dad’s favorite chair, reading the daily paper. He didn’t even lift his dark curly-haired head from his paper as the couple passed him. “About time you two got here,” he murmured.

Mr. Daily rose from his chair. “Son!” he cried. “We were worried sick about you.”

“We’re sorry, Dad,” Bob murmured. “We didn’t mean to upset you.”

He then related the events of the evening.

“Oh, Patty,” Mrs. Flaugherly smiled, “I’m so happy for you.”

Pat had wandered in from the other room as the young couple told of their experience. He now reached out his hand and shook Bob’s hand.

“Congratulations, sir,” Pat said, then he leaned over and kissed his sister on the cheek.

“And congrats to you too, sis.”

“Pat!” Patty laughed, tousling his curls. “What’s got into you? You’re beginning to act human!”

“Thanks a lot,” he replied sarcastically. Then he brightened up. “Hey, you know, speaking of those international jewel thieves, I just read a really interesting article in the paper this evening about them.”

He quickly retrieved the paper he had been reading and opened it to the article.

“Listen to this. It says here that there have been a series of jewel robberies throughout the world, and now they think the crimes are connected, because,” he paused, then continued in an excited tone, “some of the jewels have been found intact in other countries.”

“What about the rest of the jewels?” Patty asked, absorbed.

“They think the stones have been recut, laid in new settings, and sold somewhere else,” Pat said.

“And they haven’t caught any of the criminals yet?” queried Patty.

“No,” Pat answered. “They can’t even figure out how the jewels get out of the various countries.”

With a twinkle in his blue eyes, he added, “Wouldn’t it be cool to work on that case and maybe crack it and catch those thieves?”

“Now, Pat, that’s doesn’t sound like a good idea to me,” Sam Daily said. “I

thought you wanted to be an investigative reporter, not a criminal investigator. You need to let the authorities handle those kinds of things.”

“Aw, c’mon, Uncle Sam,” Pat coaxed. “I bet I could really do some mean detective work.” Although Pat called him “Uncle,” Sam Daily was actually no relation to the boy, just a good friend of his mother’s since the twins were very young when they had lost their own father.

“You don’t understand how dangerous these criminals can be,” Sam said. “It’s not just a game to them, Pat. It’s life and death. And you don’t want to be involved in that. I wouldn’t want to see you get hurt.”

“I still think it would be cool,” Pat murmured as he set the paper down.

Sam sighed heavily. Then he said, “Well, I might have something that would interest you and keep you out of trouble at the same time. Now that school’s out for the summer, I know you’ve got that carnival fundraiser this weekend, but I believe you’re free after that, so I just might have an opportunity for you to go on a little adventure.”

“I’d be happy if nothing else would happen all summer after the carnival,” Pat said. “It’s gonna be a lot of work. But an adventure, you say?”

“And it’s one that might just make you change your mind, Pat,” Mrs. Flagherty said, “once you hear what Sam has to tell you. It’ll certainly take your mind off criminal investigations for a while.”

“Okay, Uncle Sam,” Pat replied, “what did you have in mind?”

“Well, you know how I’ve taken you guys on some of my business trips before,” Sam began. Sam Daily owned an air freight service and would often pilot the flights himself. “But they’ve always been domestic flights—somewhere in the United States. This will be the first time I can offer you a trip abroad. How’d you like to go to Paris, France?”

II

Invitation to Mystery

“Paris!” Pat was enthused. “Oh, cool! How’d you manage that kind of trip?”

“Ooh, Paris,” Patty echoed. “Sounds so romantic.”

Mr. Daily laughed.

“It is a beautiful city,” he acknowledged. “It’s actually kind of odd how it all came together. I was just getting ready to leave the office this afternoon, and I got a call from this toy company that wants me to deliver a load of their products to Paris this coming Monday.”

Sam paused for a moment, looking off into space.

“It’s kind of fortuitous, actually,” he continued. “We had nothing scheduled for the next two weeks, which is really unusual, so, I told the guy absolutely I would do it.”

“Monday!” Patty was surprised. “What time would we have to leave?”

“First thing in the morning,” Sam replied. “It’s an eight-hour flight.”

“We’ll barely have time to pack,” Patty moaned. “We’re supposed to be at the school grounds tomorrow early to set up for the festival.”

“Yeah,” Pat agreed. “It opens tomorrow night, then there’s Saturday night, and finishing up Sunday afternoon. This is going to be one crazy weekend.”

“Well, do you think you can find some time in there to pack?” Mr. Daily asked. “Once-in-a-lifetime chance here.”

“Oh, absolutely, Uncle Sam!” Patty was enthused. “Our passports are up-to-date and everything. We’ll find a way to make it work.”

“I tried to talk your mom into coming this time,” Sam said, eyeing Mary Elizabeth as he spoke. “But she says she can’t get off work.”

“Aw, Mom, you don’t know what you’d be missing,” Pat coaxed, then he looked at Sam. “How long will we get to stay?”

“Right now, the trip is open-ended,” Mr. Daily said. “They tell me they may have additional work for me once we land in Paris, so it could be several days. And even if they don’t need me, we can stay a while and do the tourist thing, if we want.”

The next morning, bright and early, the teens arrived at the high school grounds. The Flaughertys and their friends attended Temple High, located on a sprawling suburban campus in the outskirts of Temple City, a rather small but prosperous river community that had grown up on the banks of the Tioga River. The students of the high school were holding a carnival at the end of the school year to raise money for the next year’s senior prom.

Most of the carnival booths had been erected earlier in the week, but they now had to put the finishing touches on everything, adding the canvas tarpaulins and setting up the various games and prizes.

Pat picked up a hammer and some nails, stuffing the tool in his back pocket and the nails in his shirt pocket. He set up a ladder next to a tall wooden post that was part of the framework for the entryway into the carnival.

He began to climb up the ladder, a folded fabric sign tucked under his arm.

Now, what? he thought to himself as he reached the top. Surveying his surroundings, he spotted one of his classmates approaching.

“Hey, Bill, you wanna give me a hand with this sign?” he called to the other student.

“Okay, Pat.” Bill Johnson, a black youth, laughed as he watched Pat trying to juggle the large sign into place. Bill was handsome, athletically built, with short-cropped dark hair. “I’ll get another ladder,” he said as he disappeared between two of the booths.

Bill was soon back carrying a ladder, and after he had set it up opposite Pat’s ladder, he climbed up and both began earnestly pounding nails into the fabric to attach the sign to the wooden frame.

As they were working, Patty appeared below, wearing a colorful maxi skirt, peasant blouse, and shawl, with loops of beads dangling around her neck and huge hoop earrings. The colors and style added to her natural attractiveness.

Pat looked down at his sister as he finished his work.

“I hate your outfit,” he noted. “What are you supposed to be anyway?”

“It’s my costume,” Patty seemed indignant as she surveyed her outfit. “I’m a wandering gypsy who’s supposed to sell raffle tickets. And I kinda like it.”

As Bill descended his ladder, he looked over at Patty.

“I think you look sharp, Patty,” he said before he folded his ladder and walked away with it.

When Pat got to the ground, he wiped some perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand.

“Whatever,” he murmured.

“It wasn’t my idea to make this carnival a medieval theme,” Patty shot back at him. “Wasn’t it your Cathy who suggested it at the planning meeting?”

Cathy Brent was Pat’s sometimes date and one of the prettiest girls in school. The only problem was that she knew it.

“Actually, I suggested it to her,” Pat tried to appear modest. “I like Renaissance festivals. Cathy just saw my wisdom and went with it in the meeting.”

“You are so full of yourself sometimes,” Patty chided him.

Just then, Bob appeared from between the booths.

“How’s my favorite girl?” he asked as he gave Patty a quick kiss.

“Ew, you’re all sweaty!” Patty was disgusted. “What have you been doing?”

“A lot of heavy lifting,” Bob replied. “We had to bring all of the games out of storage and haul them up here. It’s hard work.”

He reached up with his sleeve and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“I could use a break right now. You wanna take five and get something cool to drink?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Patty said as she took the boy’s outstretched hand.

They were about to leave when they heard a voice coming from beside the nearest booth.

“Patrick, oh, Patrick,” they heard the slightly singsong voice calling from the shadows. “I thought I’d find you here with the plebeians.”

“Yep, that’s where I am,” Pat acknowledged as a stunning redhead emerged from beside the booth. “I’m just one of the great unwashed masses.” He chuckled, then added, “Cathy, come meet some folks.”

She reluctantly stepped toward the group.

“Cathy,” Pat began, “this is my sister Patty and my friend Bob Daily.”

“Hello, Bob.” Cathy smiled bewitchingly, her large green eyes taking in Bob’s every detail. She ignored Patty. “My, what a beautiful tan. How long did it take you to get it?”

Bob looked at the ground, feeling embarrassed. Sheepishly, he answered, “I-I spent a few weeks in Florida this past spring. I have relatives there.”

“I see,” she said. “Do you—?”

“Uh,” Pat interrupted, “did you know that Cathy’s father, Mr. Brent, owns Brent’s Department Store and is donating most of the prizes for our fair?”

“How nice,” Patty remarked through clenched teeth. And grasping Bob’s arm, she added, “We must be going now. Goodbye, Pat.”

As Patty stomped off with Bob, Cathy called after her, “I like your outfit. It’s so quaint.”

When the couple was out of sight, Pat remarked, “Guess what, Cath? I’m going to Paris on Monday!”

“Oh, how exciting!” Cathy cried dreamily. “May I go too?”

“I don’t know,” Pat replied. “I’ll ask Bob if you can go.”

“Oh,” Cathy said, “you mean that cute blond boy’s taking you?”

Pat outlined the plans of the trip for Cathy.

“I’m sorry,” Cathy seemed repulsed, “but I only fly first-class or in my dad’s private plane. If we have to go in a dirty old cargo plane, count me out.”

“It’s not like that at all,” Pat commented. “It’s a pretty nice plane, if you ask me.”

Meanwhile, Patty and Bob had reached an area a safe distance from the other teens. They stood near a baked goods stand.

“Thanks, Trish,” Bob laughed. “She sure is embarrassing.”

“She’s nauseating,” Patty angrily retorted. Then they both burst into laughter.

“Patty, dear,” they heard from behind them. “And Bob; how are you two?”

The couple turned to see a familiar face behind the counter of the baked goods stand. Hélène Durant was a wealthy socialite who was an old friend of the Flaugherty and Daily families. Now in her sixties, with graying hair and pale blue eyes, her face still looked aristocratic, although age had begun to dull her former beauty.

“Mrs. Durant, how have you been?” Patty asked. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen you.”

“Well, I don’t get out as much as I used to, but I’m fine,” Mrs. Durant answered. “Though I am worried about my niece.” She paused then, looking embarrassed. “Oh, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t bother you with my family problems,” she dismissed the subject.

“But, Mrs. Durant,” Patty interjected, “we wouldn’t have asked if we hadn’t wanted to be of some help to you or your family.”

“Please tell us,” Bob added. “We may be able to help.”

“I don’t see how you could,” the woman murmured as her eyes began to well up with tears. Patty offered her a tissue and the woman accepted it gratefully, dabbing at her eyes.

“You see, my niece Michelle Bordeaux has inherited a château in the Loire Valley, France, from her grandfather—that would be my deceased father-in-law,” she began. “And ever since she has moved there, terrible things have been happening.”

“Like what?” Bob asked, concern in his voice.

Mrs. Durant continued, “She has had nightmares in which she sees the ghost of her grandfather warning her of danger if she should remain there. A ghostly knight has also been seen at the château.”

“A ghost! Fascinating,” Patty breathed.

“And more recently,” the woman added, “dolls from her mother’s collection have been disappearing.”

“Maybe they were misplaced when she moved to the castle?” Bob suggested.

“I don’t believe so,” Mrs. Durant remarked. “She made an accurate accounting of her collection after she moved in. Also, the dolls have disappeared gradually. It’s all in this letter.” She removed an envelope from her purse and held it out to Patty. “Would you like to read it?”

Bob and Patty accepted the letter and scanned the lines together for several seconds.

“Why, it says here,” Patty remarked, “that she would like you to come to visit her and help her with her problem.”

“I’m afraid I cannot,” the woman answered forlornly.

“Why not?” Bob asked. “My dad’s freight line is flying to Paris on Monday,” he added hopefully. “Maybe he could arrange for you to come with us.”

“I have a health issue that does not permit me to fly,” Mrs. Durant said sadly. “I wish I could accept your generous offer, but I cannot. Maybe you young people can help her.” With tears in her eyes, she added, “When you go, would you please help her?”

“Of course we will,” Patty soothed the older woman.

Bob and Patty left the woman, who seemed to feel better for their talk. They began to discuss the new developments.

“I think it would be fun to ghost-hunt,” Patty remarked as they walked along, holding hands.

“I’m not so sure I’d like that,” Bob replied. “I’m not sure I believe in ghosts.”

“I don’t know how I feel about them,” said Patty. “But there are so many things beyond our understanding in the universe. I’m always curious to learn more.”

“Well, what I’m wondering is,” Bob began, “why would anybody want to steal a doll collection?”

“If you think about it,” Patty answered, “some of the dolls are probably very old and valuable.”

“Hey, Bob!” The couple turned to see Pat jogging toward them.

“Bob,” Pat panted as he stopped before the couple. “The truckload of prizes from Brent’s is on the way, and we’ll need help unloading it.” With that, he turned and raced off in the direction he had just come from.

Bob hurried off after Pat, waving a hasty goodbye to Patty. Finally, he caught up to Pat.

“There’s the truck now.” Pat pointed as a dark green van with white stenciled letters spelling the word “Brent’s” on the side and rear pulled into the parking lot. The driver emerged from the cab and opened the rear doors of the truck as a group of high school students—including Bob, Pat, and Bill—reached the spot.

As the students looked on, the driver cried in disbelief, “The dolls—they’re gone!”