



Part 1

The Sedlec Ossuary

(The Church of Bones)

By: Caitlin Quinn



"OMG! You're not serious!" Shayla cried. "I am not seeing this, I am NOT seeing this." Shayla, twirled her long blonde hair around her finger, twisting and untwisting it as her eyes darted. She didn't like it here, and she really didn't care who knew it.

"Quit being a baby, Shayla. It's only bones. A lot of bones, but still, just the bones of – ooh, dead people," Colton replied, wagging his fingers in front of her face. He loved teasing his twin sister, though they were both 14, she always tried to boss him around since she was technically older – five whole minutes older. "I swear, you're afraid of everything. This is the best vacation we've ever taken."

"This is so NOT the best vacation we've ever taken," Shayla said while punching her twin in the shoulder. "I voted for the beach, remember? I don't want to spend my summer touring Prague. Whatever were Mom and Dad thinking, sending us to Aunt Margaret for the summer? And to the Czech Republic? Who goes to Czechoslovakia for summer vacation? I'll just die, just die, if anyone finds out," Shayla said. "Why don't our parents love us, well, me, anyway?"

"OMG!" Colton mocked her. He pretended to wind his short brown hair around his finger, imitating his sister's nervous habit. "Melodramatic much? You'd rather be cooped up in a hotel in Chicago while our parents attend those dermatology lectures. Course, we could always sneak in on the symposium and watch the latest in treatments for hives, rashes, blisters and boils."

"Ick!" Shayla screamed at him. "Symposium? Really? Dork!" "Dorkessa!" he yelled back at her. "Will you two stop? You know Mom's sister has been begging her to let us visit – see their homeland of Prague. And since dipstick over there mentioned this place, dear Aunt Margaret was kind enough to oblige us with this one hour trip into the morbid. What are you guys whining about - I'm stuck watching the two of you, and I can't text, there's no signal! I should be at cheerleading camp, not stuck in... this cell phone underworld!"

Madison told them, trying not to scream. She was 17, a very responsible 17, she could have stayed at home alone. She still couldn't believe her parents had made her travel halfway around the world, just to be the referee for the battling barbarians better known as her siblings. Life was just... so not fair.

"You know, sister dear, this place was the inspiration for my favorite horror flick. This place is Dr. Satan's lair in Rob Zombie's movie House of 1000 Corpses!" Colton loved horror movies, especially the zombie ones. They freaked Shayla out, which made them even better.

"That's just great; Mom and Dad sent us to Russian zombie purgatory!" Shayla moaned.

"Like I said, the best vacation ever! I can't wait until we get inside!"

"Maybe I'll get lucky and you'll be turned into a zombie!" Shayla smirked. She could see that Colton was barely containing his enthusiasm. His friends all had posters of their favorite sports heroes, Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Reggie Bush, Drew Brees, Chipper Jones, Derek Jeter and Eli Manning. But not Colton, he loved science and planned on being a forensic anthropologist. His walls at home were covered with photocopies of skeletal remains he'd found online. Instead of baseball bats, basketballs and footballs, he had a microscope, anatomy and chemistry books. He also had all the novels by Jefferson Bass, Kathy Reichs and Patricia Cornwell as well as Dr. Bill Bass' non-fiction books regarding The Body Farm.

Shayla knew the only thing that would make him happier than visiting this cadaverous tourist site would be if he could actually go behind the gates of The Body Farm – and meet Dr. Bass.

"Zombies, zombies, zombies!" Colton wiggled his fingers in her face, and then yanked her hair. "They eat brains – so, you're safe!" "Would you two PLEASE quit? I can't get a signal here! Finally, there's the guide, now maybe, we can get this waste of my time started," Madison smacked the back of Colton's head when he started to open his mouth. "Stop bickering, already! This was your idea."

Madison motioned to her siblings, shushed them, and walked ahead of them to join the group of about twenty people huddled around the guide, waiting for the tour to begin. On the outside, the chapel was nothing fancy, just old and medieval gothic in design. It was surrounded by a cemetery with stone markers so ancient that many of the names and dates had long since disappeared.

The guide, a tall, attractive Czech woman with a heavy accent, clapped her hands to get everyone's attention. "Welcome to the suburb of Kutna Hora. My name is Eliska, and I will be your guide today. Listen up, once inside, please do not touch the bones. Follow me and don't be afraid to ask questions. Our Chapel is world famous..." "OMG, I love her shoes, stilettos, right?" Shayla whispered to her older sister, Madison. Tall, blonde and athletic, Madison was a varsity cheerleader and dated the school's star quarterback. So, Shayla was always trying to impress her older sister.

Talking while she walked, Eliska led the group towards the stone entrance, stopping just outside. "The Sedlec Ossuary, a Roman Catholic Chapel, is located beneath the Cemetery Church of All Saints. Sedlec Ossuary was established by Henry, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Sedlec. During The Christian Crusades, King Otakar II of Bohemia sent Henry to Palestine, what you call the Holy Land, in 1278. When Henry returned, he brought with him a small amount of earth he had removed from Golgotha or, what Christians call Calvary, where the crucifixion of Christ occurred. Henry sprinkled the sacred earth over the abbey cemetery. As word spread of this pious act, the Sedlec cemetery became the most desirable burial ground for the religious of Central Europe."

"Do we have to go inside?" Shayla mumbled to her sister. She'd never seen a church like this one before, and from what the guide said, Shayla was sure she would rather be playing volleyball on the beach, or taking final exams, or having to perform Juliet with Kurt as her Romeo - again. Talk about disaster, now, everyone at school knew she had a huge crush on him. Right now, she'd even be happy to - she couldn't believe she was thinking it - watch reruns of The Brady Bunch with her mom.

"Aunt Margaret paid for this trip, so, yeah, we have to," Madison whispered back.

"Sedlec Ossuary is also known as the Bone Church and the Church of Bones," Eliska continued. "During the Black Death or plague of the 14th century and after the Hessian Wars of the early 15th century, thousands of people were buried here. Around 1400, a Gothic church was built in the center of the cemetery with a vaulted upper level and a lower chapel to serve as the ossuary for the mass graves unearthed during the construction. According to legend, sometime after 1511, the gruesome task of exhuming the skeletal remains and stacking their bones in the chapel

was bestowed upon a half-blind monk."

"Madison, I really don't want to be here," Shayla hated to be so whiny, or to show fear, especially in front of Colton, but her skin was already crawling and they hadn't even gotten to the bones yet.

"You're such a buffoon, Shayla. I can't wait to tell the guys about this," Colton was busy snapping photos on his iPhone4. "Wait until they see this!"

"There are anywhere from 40,000 to 70,000 people buried here. In 1870, the Schwarzenberg family hired Frantisek Rint, a woodcarver, to put the piles of bones into order." Eliska waited until everyone was inside, then continued, "the Schwarzenberg's were a Franconian and Bohemian aristocratic family first mentioned in 1172. They were a branch of the Seinsheim family – Erkinger I of Seinsheim acquired the Franconian barony, he served from 1405-1421. In 1599, the family was elevated to Counts and then in 1670 to Princes. Through a marriage alliance with the House of Eggenberg, their land holdings in Bohemia expanded."

Shayla smacked the back of Colton's head, just like Madison had done earlier. "THIS is what you find so exciting? You are such a dork!"

"Not this, dorkessa! What's inside, just wait, you'll see," he replied.

"Will you two be quiet? We're here, listen and be quiet," Madison whopped his head again.

"Hey, she started it!" he said, pointing to Shayla with one hand, rubbing the tender spot with his other.

"Here, on this wall, is the signature of Rint, executed entirely of bone. On this wall, we have the Schwarzenberg Coat-of-Arms, also made entirely of bones. Rint was truly a master carver to have pieced together such an intricate shield using only the bones of the faithful. As you can see, Rint used every bone in the human body to design it."

Colton stood and stared, mouth gaped open, at the Coat-of-Arms. On top of the shield, made of babies' bones, was a cross projecting out of a jawless skull. The skull was wedged between two circles; the center of each circle was another skull surrounded by overlapping scapulas or shoulder blades jutting from it. Below it was the Coat-of-Arms, the focal point was a child's spine, hips and leg bones. The sides of the Family Crest were also apparently made out of babies' and young children's bones. Try as he might, Colton couldn't see how the pieces were held together. Draped like garish trim on a Christmas tree, the shield was flanked overhead by a garland of interconnected skulls.

"Awesome, Satan's Lego set!" Colton laughed.

"Totally gross!" Shayla added. "This guy was truly disturbed! Almost as disturbed as you!"

"You two, quiet!" Madison reached over to clap Colton's head again, but he ducked.

"Missed!" he said, right before Madison's hand connected.

"Didn't," she smiled. "Keep up. This was your idea, remember?"

Eliska led them further inside, "And, now, as you can see, four bell-shaped bone mounds occupy each of the corners of the chapel." She pointed to the four corners, where leg and arm bones entwined with ribs, hip bones and shoulder blades. The stacks were arranged so that skulls sat upon the other bones, vacant stares, jaws agape in a perpetual eerie grin.

"NO! I am so not doing this!" Shayla cried. Before her, hanging from the chapel's ceiling, was the most grotesque, horrendous sight she had ever seen.

(The End of Part One)

Look for Part 2 of

The Sedlec Ossuary next week!

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