

THE
ANKH
OF ISIS

The Library of Athena: Book 2

CHRISTINE NORRIS

“Rachel, move!”

Megan took a step back, then closed her eyes and covered her ears as light and sound erupted from within the book. A cyclone whipped around them. She reached out to Claire, and felt the warmth of a hand as it clasped hers.

The cacophony lasted only a few seconds. When all was quiet again, Megan opened her eyes. The library was still in perfect order. Claire, still gripping Megan’s hand tightly, was not in perfect order. Her glasses sat askew on her nose, and her hair was windblown.

“Wow.” Megan touched her own head—most of her curls had escaped their ponytail holder. “So, that’s what it’s like from this side.”

Claire put her glasses on straight. “And I thought it was bad being the one sucked into the book.”

“Where is the book?” Megan looked for it as she quickly adjusted her hair.

It had slid across the polished wooden floor and come to rest a few feet away, against the back wall of the library. She picked it up.

“So, now Mr. Hemmlich’s in the book. Think we can keep him in there?”

“Megan,” Claire said. “We’ve got a problem.”

Megan turned the book on its side and looked at the gilded edges of the pages.

“If we tear one of the pages out, I’ll bet he’d be stuck inside. Problem is, so would the Ankh. What do you think?”

“Megan!” Claire shouted.

“What?”

“Rachel’s gone.”

Also by Christine Norris

The Library of Athena

The Crown of Zeus

The Ankh of Isis

The Mirror of Yu-Huang

The Sword of Danu

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Zandria Tales

The Talisman of Zandria

The Ankh of Isis

The Library of Athena Book 2



Christine Norris

ZUMAYA THRESHOLDS

AUSTIN TX

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THE ANKH OF ISIS

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For Aunt Beth the Wonderful

Just because



There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a page
Of prancing Poetry—
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of Toll—
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human soul.

— *Emily Dickinson*



Chapter 1

Holiday

Megan stumbled through the formal dining room, still half-asleep, and kicked the stand of a tall Oriental vase.

“Ow!” She cursed as pain shot up her leg, and jumped up and down, her foot in her hand.

Darn, that’s the third time in the last week. Stupid thing. I need to ask Bailey to move that.

Toe throbbing, she limped from the dining room into the hall behind it, and pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen. It was a large, warm place that always smelled inviting. Maggie, the plump Irish woman who cooked for Megan and her father, was busy preparing breakfast.

“Good morning, Miss,” Maggie said cheerfully. She poured water into the coffeemaker and turned it on, then reached into the refrigerator and pulled out a jug of orange juice. “What are you doing up so early on the first day of the holidays?” She set the jug on the counter.

Megan sat on a stool in front of the kitchen's center island and rubbed her sore foot.

"I'm not up on purpose. Miranda woke me up while she was making the fire in my room." She picked an apple from the bowl on the counter and took a bite. "I suppose it's all right, being awake now. I have some things to do today."

"Don't talk with your mouth full," Maggie said. "What kind of things could you have to do today, child?" She bent and pulled a tray of fresh rolls from the oven, then tossed her oven mitts on the counter. "Surely, your professors didn't give you homework over the break, did they?"

Megan swallowed and rolled her eyes. St. Agatha's College for Girls was much tougher academically than her school in New York City—where Megan had lived until seven months ago—could even dream of being.

"Of course they did. Rachel is coming over today, and we're going to work on our history papers and maybe go into town to do some shopping this afternoon."

Rachel Cuthbert was Megan's best friend. They were both in third year at St. Agatha's. They were in the same academic House—Whitmore—and on the House hockey team. One girl rarely went anywhere without the other. Megan had wanted to go riding today, but Rachel, for some reason, insisted she wanted to get some work done.

"Ah." Maggie nodded with a look of mock seriousness. "Important things, I see. Well, breakfast is almost ready. I think there's enough time for you to get yourself back upstairs to wash and dress before your da comes down."

Megan pushed out her lower lip. "But it's vacation. If I have to do homework, why can't I bum around in my PJs for awhile?"

Maggie cocked an eyebrow and put on the face that always made Megan feel guilty. Megan's mother, Gwen, had

died in a car crash four years earlier, leaving Megan and her father alone. Since they'd moved here to The Parthenon, the cook had become something of a surrogate.

She was about to give in to Maggie's berating when she heard her father in the dining room. There was a thump and a loud curse. She gave an evil grin. Not only wasn't she the only one who had a sore foot, she was spared Maggie's lecture.

"Too late, sorry." Megan dashed out the door. She heard Maggie's tongue cluck in disapproval just before the kitchen door swung shut.

Megan finished her apple as she walked through a different door than the one she'd entered by and into the solarium. It was smaller than most of the other rooms, the floor tiled in terra-cotta, the outer wall, which faced east, paned in squares of thick glass. It was a cheery room, where she and her father took most of their morning meals. He already sat at the small, round table, perusing the newspaper.

"Morning, Daddy." Megan gave him a peck on the cheek. She enjoyed her time with her dad. He worked so hard, sometimes long hours, and she was busy with school. Breakfast and dinner were practically the only times they saw each other.

His eyes never left the paper.

"Good morning, Megums," he mumbled. "Ready for school?"

Maggie came in with a tray of rolls, the pitcher of orange juice, a cup of coffee and a small pot of steaming tea. She glanced at Megan as she set the tray on the small table, shook her head and left without a word.

"Dad, I'm off all week," Megan said in a gentle tone meant to remind. She reached for the basket of rolls. "It's Easter holiday. You know, like Spring Break. How could you forget?"

He folded down the top of the paper and looked across the table.

“Is it?” He shook his head and took a sip of coffee. “I’m sorry, Meg. I’ve been so busy with work these last few weeks that everything else has just gotten pushed to the back of my brain.”

Megan poured herself a glass of orange juice.

“Problem with a client?” Her father was an investment banker, and always a little scattered when dealing with a troublesome client. “Who is it—Mrs. Sanderson again?” Mrs. Sanderson was seventy-two years old, very wealthy, and hard of hearing. She also thought everyone was constantly trying to rip her off. Whenever she called, Megan’s father had to put everything else on hold until the old bat was satisfied.

Her father folded the paper in quarters and set it on the table next to his plate.

“Nope, not Mrs. Sanderson, thank goodness. This one is still only a potential client. He’s a very wealthy man. Old money, but he’s successful on his own too. I’ve been trying to get him to sign with us for weeks.”

He picked up his knife and slathered his own roll with Maggie’s special honey butter.

“I’m thinking about bringing him here for a day or two. You know, wine and dine him a bit, show him how serious we are about having his business.”

Megan raised her eyebrows. What was her father thinking?

“Bring him *here*? Why in the world would you want to bring him here—we live in the middle of nowhere.”

“Why? The English countryside, of course. Fresh air, country living.” He laughed. “Actually, Meg, he’s an archaeologist. Curator of some museum in Berlin. I think he’s a fan of Sir Gregory’s.” He slurped up the last of his coffee.

“He’s hinted around that he wants to come here, and if it will seal the deal, I’ll be happy to have him.”

Huh? It seemed like an odd request, to ask to spend time at a complete stranger’s house, even if it was the former home of someone you admired. It struck her as... well, rude.

“Whatever. It’s not like we don’t have the room. It could be fun, I guess, to have a guest.” She finished the last bite of her breakfast and decided to drop the subject. If her father didn’t think it weird, who was she to judge?

“Glad you think so, because he’s coming tonight.”

Megan’s jaw dropped. “Uh, Dad? A little warning?”

“What? I gave you a whole day. He called late last night, and said he would be in London today on other business, so I offered. You just said you’re off from school, so it all works out well.”

Megan sighed her most dramatic teenage sigh. “Fine, I guess. Rachel’s coming over, so I’ll see you later. Have a nice day, Dad.” She kissed her father goodbye and went on her way.

She walked back through the dining room, carefully avoiding the vase, crossed the drawing room then the lounge with its big leather armchairs in front of a small fireplace.

As usual, all was quiet here at The Parthenon, which was the odd name given to the enormous English manor where Megan, her father and a small household staff were the only residents. The Montgomerys had moved here from New York after her father’s firm gave him a promotion that forced her to leave the only home she had ever known.

Maggie and the rest of the staff had been here when Megan and her father moved in—they’d come with the manor. All of them had worked and lived at The Parthenon for many years, most hired by the builder and previous owner of the house, Sir Gregory Archibald.

Megan slid in her slippered feet across the black-and-white polished marble floor of the cavernous entrance hall and up the sweeping grand staircase in the center. On the landing stood an impressive eight-foot-tall marble sculpture of the Goddess Athena. In one hand she held a long spear, while the other arm reached out toward the front door. On the hand perched an owl.

The staircase split at the landing, each branch leading to a different wing of the second floor. Megan turned left, where there hung a portrait. A man in his thirties with brown hair, eyes of brilliant green, a long nose and a rakish grin stared from inside the frame. Sir Gregory, a man who had described himself more as an adventurer than an archaeologist.

Megan liked the portrait. He was what might be described as dashing—he reminded her of Indiana Jones. He was also a mysterious man who'd had many secrets, as Megan had discovered soon after moving in. Not the least of which was that he spent much of his life collecting mysterious artifacts many people thought did not exist.

Megan left the painting behind for the long hall. Her feet made no sound on the thick Persian carpet runner as she padded past a series of closed oak doors with brass knobs that led to unoccupied bedrooms. She stopped at her own and went inside. It was gigantic, easily half the size of her entire old NYC apartment, and had its own walk-in closet and elegant, luxurious bathroom.

She flopped on her queen-size four-poster bed and closed her eyes. Because she had been rudely awakened so early, there was still plenty of time before Rachel was due. More than enough for a quick nap.



Megan awoke with a start. She looked at the clock sitting next to the silver-framed picture of her mother on the bedside table. An hour and a half? She had fallen asleep for an hour and a half! Rachel would be here any second.

She jumped up, grabbed her robe and ran to the bathroom. She took the fastest shower of her life, dried herself and brushed her teeth, then ran across the room to the closet. She pulled out some jeans, a tee-shirt and a hoodie and threw them on.

She had just pulled her damp auburn curls into a ponytail when the doorbell rang. By the time her feet hit the last step of the grand staircase, Rachel was already inside.

“Hello, Bailey,” Rachel said to the dour-faced butler. “How are you today?”

“Good day, Miss.” Bailey closed the door behind her. “I am fine, thank you.”

“Thanks, Bailey,” Megan said. “I would have gotten it myself.”

“It is my duty, Miss.” Bailey gave a stiff bow and walked toward the back of the house. He had another duty within the manor, but they never talked about that *particular* part of his job description.

“Hi, Rache.”

Rachel gave a cheery wave. “Ready?”

She wore jeans that accentuated her slim, athletic figure, and a long-sleeved red shirt. Her hair, the color of raven’s feathers, was in a braid that hung down the center of her back. Her school bag was slung over one shoulder, and she shook out an umbrella.

“It’s raining?” Megan asked. As if in answer, a rumble of thunder echoed through the cavernous house. “Do you remember the last time we actually saw the sun?”

Rachel giggled. “Come on, Meg. It’s not that bad.”

“Well, it’s not good for people to have so little sunlight. Besides, you grew up here, you’re used to it.”

“Ha-ha. Can we get some study fuel?” Rachel shifted her bag from one shoulder to the other. “What’s my girl Maggie got that we could nick from the kitchen?”

With glasses of iced tea and a platter of sandwiches secured, the girls went upstairs to Megan’s room. Megan pulled her history folder from her bag and leafed through it for the guidelines Professor Livingston, their world-history teacher, had given them for their papers. Professor Livingston was also their Head of House, and one of Megan’s favorite teachers, but she was tough. Her papers were notoriously complicated, asking for handfuls of references that demanded hours of research.

Megan turned to Rachel, who sat on the bed eating. Her bag was on the bed, closed.

“Uh, Rache? The bag works better when you open it. That thing there? It’s called a zipper.”

Rachel gave a small, furtive smile that made Megan nervous. *I don’t like that look. That look always means trouble.*

“I have a better idea. Let’s go down to the Library.”

The library on the first floor was big, but spending the day there wasn’t what Megan had in mind.

“Why do you want to go there? It’s just a bunch of Sir Gregory’s old books. Up here we have the computer, so we can use the internet for research. We can see if there are any books to help us with our papers, but I don’t want to work down in that stuffy room all day.”

Rachel gave her a meaningful look. “Not that library, you dolt. The *other* library. The *Library*.”

Megan raised her brows. “Oh, that Library.”

The biggest of Sir Gregory’s secrets was that his house sat above a huge library called The Library of Athena.

The only reason Megan and Rachel even knew about it was because they had accidentally found it.

She shook her head. "I don't know, Rache..."

"Oh, come on, Megan. You get to go down there whenever you want. I don't."

"But I thought we were working on our papers?"

"There might be some really interesting books we could use. Pleeeasse?"

So, that's why she wanted to work on her paper over here! Megan felt a little used, but buckled beneath Rachel's pleading gaze. She was her best friend, after all, and best friends shared things.

"Oh, all right."

Rachel giggled and clapped her hands like a child. "Yay. You're a love."

Megan pulled open the top drawer of her dresser. Rachel looked over her shoulder.

"You keep the key to a secret magical library in your *underwear* drawer?"

"Can you think of a better place? Nobody goes into it except Lilly, who does the laundry. And she just puts everything on top and shuts the drawer." Megan rifled through the drawer and pulled out a long old-fashioned brass key. "Not that anyone knows I've got the key, except you, Claire, Harriet, and Bailey. I'm not even sure the rest of the staff knows."

Megan had found the key, a cryptic poem and a small journal in a secret compartment beneath one of the hearthstones of the fireplace in her room. According to Bailey, Sir Gregory had believed fate would lead the right person to it. When Megan discovered the key, and the Library of Athena, she became the new Librarian. Which meant she was in charge of keeping the Library and everything inside it safe. It was a pretty easy job, considering very few people knew it even existed.

She stuffed the key in her front pocket and shut the drawer.

“Let’s go.”



Chapter 2

Invited Guest

Megan and Rachel stood on the landing in front of the statue of Athena. The only sounds were the steady beat of the grandfather clock in the lounge and the rain as it tapped against the windows in a counterpoint rhythm to the clock.

Athena was Sir Gregory's patron goddess, which was why the manor was named after her temple in Athens. She was the Goddess of Knowledge, something with which Sir Gregory apparently identified deeply. Megan wasn't sure this was the only reason he had chosen her as his patron, but it made sense.

The statue guarded the entrance to the Library of Athena. It was kind of obvious, but she appreciated the simplicity of it.

Megan reached up, grabbed the head of the owl that sat in Athena's hand, and pulled it so the owl, along with

Athena's hand, spun completely around. There was a tiny click from somewhere nearby as a hidden mechanism opened a door in the wall behind the statue.

"Come on." Megan turned on the flashlight she had taken from the hall cupboard and pushed the door open. Behind it was a dark, winding stone staircase that led deep below the house. Megan descended, and Rachel followed.

"Have you been down here, since our...trip?" Rachel asked.

"Twice," Megan replied. "Over Christmas break."

"You didn't go into any of the *other* books, did you?"

There were certain enchanted volumes in a very special part of the library where "falling into the story" became frighteningly literal. Megan and Rachel, along with two other friends, had found that out the hard way when they were accidentally sucked inside one of Sir Gregory's books. The books were actually clever hiding places for his collection of magical artifacts. Trapped in his version of ancient Greece, they had searched for the Crown of Zeus, the legendary headpiece of the Greek god that granted all knowledge to the wearer.

Megan put her free hand against the wall to brace herself—the stairs were slippery.

"Duh, I'm not stupid. I just looked through the books out in the main room. There are some really cool ones down here. I found a spell book that's three hundred years old. It was so awesome."

The enchanted books were but a small part of the library's vast collection. Many of the books in the Library of Athena were magical how-to books—spell books, potion books, books about fantastic creatures like dragons. Sir Gregory had spent much of his life collecting them from all over the world and using them to teach himself magic.

There were also rare and unusual books, some of which no one knew existed. For example, when the four girls first discovered the library, their friend Claire had found some unknown writings of Leonardo da Vinci, while Rachel had stumbled across notebooks of sonnets apparently written in Shakespeare's own hand.

"Spell books? You've been looking through those, have you?" Rachel asked in a not-trying-to-pry-when-she-really-wanted-to-pry tone. "You haven't...tried any of them, have you? Spells, I mean. You shouldn't go messing around with that stuff."

Megan laughed. "No. I'm not about to, either. I don't think I have the patience or the talent for magic. I just found them...interesting. I was bored. It was too cold to go out and ride, Dad was working and you were away somewhere. Visiting your great-aunt, I think."

"And Bailey doesn't mind?" Rachel said. "I would think he would have a fit if he knew you were down there, messing up his library."

"I didn't mess it up," Megan said. "No, he doesn't mind, because it's not his library. He's just keeps it clean. *I'm* the Librarian, remember?" She affected the butler's accent and stiff demeanor. "You should remember, however, that you are now accountable for the Library and all it contains. That is a great responsibility."

Rachel giggled. "Do you suppose having guests down is responsible?"

"It doesn't matter," Megan said as her foot hit the bottom step. "You've already been here. It's not like I've taken an ad in *The Sunday Times* and sold tickets."

The stairs ended in a small, stone anteroom. Megan trained the flashlight on the floor until she came to a particular stone. She pressed it with her foot. There was a loud pop, and gas-powered torches sprang to life. They illumi-

nated the anteroom, the single arch that led from it and the next room.

The girls passed beneath the arch and into a huge empty space, hewn from solid rock. Inside was a perfect replica of a Greek temple, forty feet long, much smaller than the actual Parthenon in Greece. Twenty-foot-tall white marble columns stood at intervals along the outer edge and reached up to the smooth, flat ceiling of the cavern. The ceiling was carved with of symbols—Greek, Egyptian, Cabalistic and others that weren't recognizable.

The temple was very beautiful and very detailed. It took Megan's breath away every time she saw it. She imagined the labor of love it had been for Sir Gregory to build, although she had yet to figure out how he'd built it so far underground, and alone.

"I rather like this temple," Rachel said. "It's got a certain...mysterious charm to it."

"I'm surprised you like anything that reminds you of ancient Greece," Megan said with a teasing smirk. She wrapped an arm around her friend's shoulders. "I would think you'd had enough of it."

Rachel feigned surprise. "I can't imagine why you would say such a thing. I mean, I only helped you cut off a Gorgon's head. Then I was forced to fly on the back of some mad mythical horse."

"His name is Pegasus."

"Whatever, it was perfectly terrifying. *Then* I was almost captured by some bull-man creature and eaten—"

"Minotaur."

"—*and* had to face a Sphinx who threatened to eat me if I didn't answer her silly riddles." She took a deep breath. "It doesn't make the temple any less interesting."

Megan snorted. "Well, when you put it that way..."

Tucked into the far corner, in the shadow of one of the columns, was a plain oak wooden door with a brass knob.

Megan pulled the key from her pocket, put it in the lock and turned it. She swung the door open and allowed Rachel to enter.

Rachel's voice echoed in the dark. "Brr. I'd forgotten how cold it is in here."

"Bailey says it's climate-controlled," Megan explained. She flicked a switch, and torch-shaped electric lights came on to chase away the gloom. "The rocky cavern underneath the house keeps the books at precisely the right temperature and humidity levels to preserve the books." She picked up two pairs of white cotton gloves from a holder on the wall next to the door. She handed a pair to Rachel. "If you're going to touch the books, put these on."

"Why?" Rachel took the gloves. "We didn't have to before."

"We didn't know any better last time. They keep the oils on our hands from damaging the paper."

Rachel pulled on the gloves and took a few steps inside. The Library was an oak-paneled room three times the size of the temple outside. Polished wooden floors reflected pools of light. A wide, carpeted aisle ran down the center of the room and away into the distance; on either side stood row upon row of bookshelves, filled with more books than one could hope to read in three lifetimes.

Above them arched an elegant domed plaster ceiling. Today the dome looked like a perfect spring day—robin's-egg blue with white fluffy clouds floating across it. It was sort of a timepiece. The ceiling would change as the day wore on, the clouds fading and the sky darkening until it was a deep, midnight blue spattered with golden stars. A crystal chandelier, ten feet in diameter, hung from the top of the dome to cast its light over the room.

The Library of Athena. Megan thought there was something solemn, something sad about this big room. At the

same time, she was glad it was here, a secret place that was just for her, as it had been for Sir Gregory. How many other people had their very own library, let alone one filled with books about magic?

How many people actually believed in magic? Anyone who came down here would probably be more interested in the scrolls or the rare first editions...or *only* editions, in some cases.

Megan hadn't believed in magic herself before her firsthand, near-death experience with it. Now she was a true believer, and she took her job protecting the Library seriously. She felt it was up to her to be responsible, to care for the Library as best she could.

Rachel walked slowly down the aisle, stopping to read the cards in brass holders mounted on the end of every case. The handwritten cards indicated what was shelved there.

"I don't know what's down here we could use for our papers," Megan said.

Rachel reached the fifth set of shelves, turned right and disappeared down the aisle.

"Rachel..." Megan said. She pulled the door shut and followed her.

Rachel hadn't gone far; Megan found her in front of a set of shelves halfway down, scanning the titles.

"Looking for something in particular?" Megan asked, her suspicion reflected in her voice.

Rachel picked three books from the shelf.

"I'm doing my paper for Livingston's class on ancient Egypt," she said. She tucked the books beneath her arm and walked away from Megan, through the stacks.

Megan chased after her.

"I think we should be careful about using books from here..."

Rachel shot a look over her shoulder. "Come on, Megan. There's way better books here than at the school's library. Who am I to pass up a great resource?"

The stacks emptied into a narrow open area with several reading tables. Rachel pulled out a chair from beneath the nearest one and sat. She opened her pack and got a notebook and pen from inside.

"The books are definitely more interesting here. I don't want to turn in the same old boring paper everyone else does."

Megan sat next to her.

"Um, well, I guess you can look. Like I said, I don't know what you can actually use. Some of these books you'd have a hard time explaining in the bibliography." She picked up one of the books. "Like this one—*Secret Spells of Ancient Egypt: A Translation of a Papyrus Found Buried Beneath the Temple of Osiris.*"

"What's wrong with that?" Rachel said. She opened her notebook and started writing. "It's not like hieroglyphs are some big secret. Everyone knows the Egyptian priests used their own brand of magic. If you're worried about me telling where I got it, I'll just say I found a copy online at the British Museum or something."

"No, you can't lie. Livingston will see right through you. And I'm not worried about that. This copy is *handwritten*, by Sir Gregory, from a manuscript he personally discovered." Megan said. She laid the open book down in front of Rachel. She pointed to the title page. "Look here, it says it was translated in nineteen-thirty-six, by Sir Gregory Archibald." She scanned the translation. "I'd love to see the look on Livingston's face, but how would you explain it?"

Rachel's face fell. "I see your point. Not that one, then."

Megan picked up the next book.

"But you could probably use this one. *A Guide to Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*." She flipped through the book quickly. "I recognize this one; it's just a reference book. There's another one like it upstairs." She handed it back to Rachel. "It's a little on the old side, but I think you can get away with it. If Professor Livingston asks, you can tell her you borrowed it from me."

Rachel flipped through the book, but didn't really look at it.

"I wonder what it's doing down here, if it's not that special?"

"I guess even Sir Gregory needed a handy reference book or two," Megan said with a shrug. "Down in the potion section I found three books on herbs. Nothing particularly special about any of them, they were just about how to grow them and what they look like. Of course, there was also a book from seventeen-thirty-five detailing many useful potions containing hemlock and wolfsbane."

Rachel's eyebrows went up. "Really?"

Megan nodded. "You wouldn't believe some of the things they used it for. Poisons, medicines...a potion to turn someone into a brown toad."

Rachel knit her brows together. "You're serious."

"Oh, yeah. I mean, that's just what the book said. I didn't try it or anything." She gave Rachel a sidelong glance. "Although I'm pretty sure there's some wolfsbane in the storeroom."

Rachel's mouth fell open.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding," Megan said, and laughed. *Sometimes, Rache, you make it way too easy.* "I don't know how to get into the storeroom. It's in the vault, remember? Only Bailey can get in there."

Rachel set the reference book aside and picked up the third one she had selected. It was a large ring-bound volume with an odd-looking hard cover.

"I picked this one up because it just looked so cool." She ran her fingers over the front of the book. "It feels like it's engraved."

The face of the book was covered with columns of hieroglyphs. In the center was a large scarab sporting a pair of wings and a ring around its head, like a halo.

Megan looked over Rachel's shoulder, then reached around and rapped her knuckles against the book.

"It's not engraved, it's carved. The cover's made of wood."

Rachel laid the book open on the table. The pages were made of a smooth light-brown paper. Each was filled with hieroglyphs, and drawings of Ancient Egyptians, like the slides Professor Livingston showed during her lecture on pyramid art.

"This book is cool." Megan's eyes were wide. She rubbed a page between her fingers. The paper was so thin. "I wonder what kind of paper this is."

"Maybe it's papyrus or something," Rachel said. "Look here." She pointed to a small piece of paper taped inside the back cover. Megan recognized the handwriting as Sir Gregory's.

"*The Book of the Dead*," Rachel read. "*Funerary Spells of Ancient Egypt*."

Megan was intrigued. "Awesome. I'll bet Archibald probably found it in some musty old tomb." The thought was exciting; sometimes she wished she could go on an expedition to Egypt. The movies just made it look so cool.

"*Book of the Dead*?" Rachel asked with a nervous look. "So, if I read this, can I bring some mummy back to life? You know, like in the movies?"

Megan gave her an ominous look. "I don't know. Maybe." She couldn't keep a straight face—she covered her mouth as she giggled. "Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? Are you sure you don't want to borrow it?"

Rachel shut the book and pushed it away. “No, thank you. You can never be too careful. I’ve seen what’s in some of these other books. I’ve been *in* one of the other books. I’ll take my chances with this nice safe reference, if you don’t mind.”

The two girls spent the afternoon pulling out books and flipping through them, taking notes. They amused themselves by having a friendly contest to see which of them could find the strangest un-enchanted book in the Library. Megan, who had an advantage of having been there much more often than Rachel, won by a landslide when she emerged from between the shelves with a huge book called *Sixty-Five Ways to Spot a Werewolf in Your Village*.

Megan realized the light in the dome above them had shifted, and looked at her watch.

“Wow, I didn’t realize it was that late. Come on, we’ve got to go. I need to get cleaned up before my dad and his guest get here.”

The girls picked up their books and returned them to their places. Rachel shoved the reference book into her pack, and they left the library, making sure to shut off the lights and lock the door.

When they reached the top of the stone staircase, Megan put out a hand to pull the door open.

“Shh.” She held up her other hand to stop Rachel. “Don’t say a thing. Someone’s out there.” The door was open a half-inch, and voices floated to them through it.

“Who is it?” Rachel whispered. “Bailey and one of the maids, maybe?”

Megan shook her head. “There are definitely more than two people out there. I hear at least three, I think.” She put her ear to the door and listened for a few moments. “Shoot, it’s my dad. He must have taken an earlier train. I don’t recognize the other voice. It must be the client he was bring-

ing home. She listened again. "I don't hear the third person now, but I know I did. I wonder who it is."

"It's probably Bailey," Rachel said.

"Maybe. He doesn't usually say much in front of guests, though."

There was the familiar roar of Megan's father's laughter, and the sound of footfalls on the steps. They stopped on the landing, right in front of Athena. Megan held her breath, even though she knew no one could see the hidden door from where they stood.

"What a beautiful statue," said a deep voice with a guttural accent. "An unusual one for such a home as this, is it not?"

Megan hoped they wouldn't notice the statue's hand was upside down. It stayed that way until the secret door was closed, and the mechanism reset itself.

"Sir Gregory had...eclectic tastes," Megan heard her father say. "If you like this one, you'll really love the reflecting pool out back. Come, this way, Bailey will show you to your rooms, and then I'll be happy to give you the whole tour."

Megan listened as they continued upstairs. She exhaled.

"That was close." She pulled the door open all the way. "Good thing my dad is loud, or they might have heard us."

Megan's father did not know about the Library. It wasn't that she didn't want to tell him, but she had sworn to Bailey when she took the job as Librarian that she wouldn't tell anyone else, including her father. For all she loved and trusted him, her father was a very down-to-earth man, his eye always on the bottom line. She couldn't risk his wanting to have the contents of the Library appraised or put on display, or even that he would ask his employer, who technically still owned the house, about it.

Sir Gregory had been a client of the firm her father now worked for, and a friend to its founder, Mr. Baird. When Sir Gregory died with no family, he left the house to Mr. Baird with the stipulation it was never sold. Sir Gregory's wishes were honored, but none of the Baird family ever knew about the Library.

There was something else. Bailey had told her and Rachel that, before the Library was even thought of, someone sent a burglar to try and steal the Crown of Zeus. He never learned who'd hired the unsuccessful thief, but whoever it was had known about the crown's power. It had crossed Megan's mind on more than one occasion that someone might still be after it, or any of the other artifacts. The world was full of untrustworthy people.

She peeked from behind the statue.

"The coast is clear." She waved Rachel out, and Rachel closed the secret door without a sound.

"I'm going to go," Rachel said. She hopped down the stairs and walked to the front door. The rain had stopped and weak sunshine came through the windows and fell on the entrance-hall floor. She tapped her backpack. "I'll bring this back soon, all right?"

Megan nodded. "Want to go riding tomorrow? We could, you know, enjoy a little of our holiday?"

"Oooh, that's tempting, but I should really get started on this paper."

"Aw, c'mon, it's vacation. I'll call Claire and Harriet. We'll all go. You can start on the paper tomorrow night."

Rachel closed her eyes and dropped her head back.

"All right. I surrender to temptation. I'll call Claire when I get home. But you won't be able to reach Harriet. She went with her parents to Paris this week. Shopping trip or some such thing." She opened the door and gave Megan a quick wave. "I'll see you."

“I’ll text you tonight,” Megan called after her. When the door closed, she turned and walked up the steps to the hall. Bailey walked toward her.

“Good day, Miss,” he said in his usual dry tone. “I trust you and Miss Rachel had an enjoyable day?”

“Yes, thank you,” Megan said.

“I also trust you left the Library as you found it?”

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