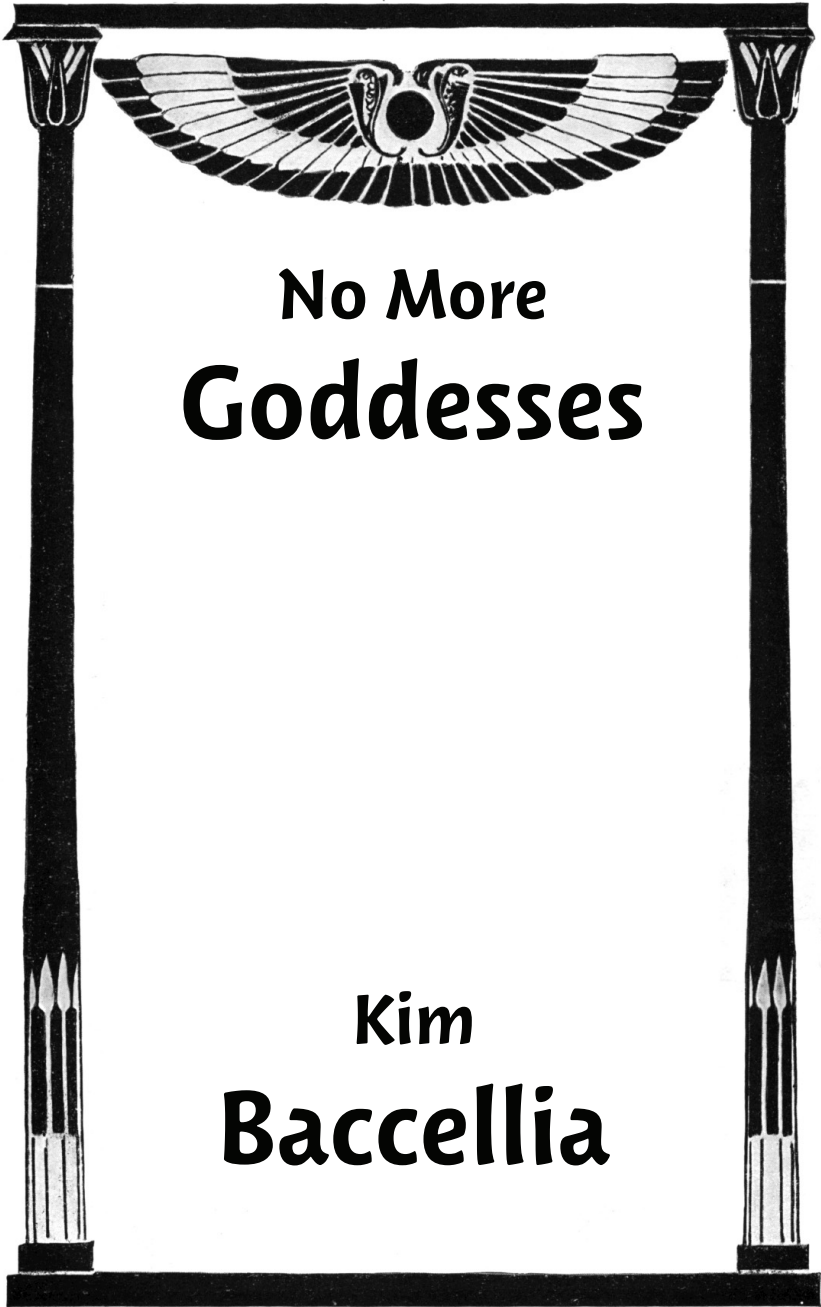


KIM BACCELLIA

NO MORE
GODDESSES



**No More
Goddesses**

**Kim
Baccellia**

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NO MORE GODDESSES

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To Mike

who always believed in me

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Chapter 1

Heart-shaped posters announcing *CANDYGRAMS! 25 CENTS!* were plastered all over campus. It was here, the day I had anticipated with dread and hope, although it would probably end in disappointment.

As if the guy I drooled over would ever send me one.

I dreamed of the moment anyway. Every night since the announcement, I had played it all out in my head. I would be so cool, so sophisticated—just like Audrey Hepburn in *Tessa's Treasure*.

If I closed my eyes, I knew I'd go right to that dream, but then I'd risk being battered by the throng of students bumping and jostling in the overcrowded hall. Thank God there had never been a real emergency. Us lowly freshmen would be floor splatter.

Then, like the parting of the Red Sea, the crowd flowed to the sides of the hall as the star of my dreams, Ethan Taylor, and his bunch of basketball friends walked down the center, flipping their heads as if they owned the place. Who am I kidding? They did. They *were* McKnight High.

"There he is," said my best friend Selena Garza with a subtle wag of her eyebrows. Lost in all the Candygram stuff, I'd almost forgotten she was there. "Go talk to him."

She gave me a gentle shove, and I stumbled forward. Ethan stopped talking to Coby Jett. I straightened out my dress, all non-

chalent-like, acting as if nothing had happened, before I chanced a glance at Ethan. He was watching me with two of the most beautiful blue eyes ever.

Here was my moment. My chance. *Say something, dang it!*

I felt as if someone had shoved a load of cotton in my mouth. I tried to say something clever but I only croaked.

My face burned with embarrassment. I nervously rubbed my sweaty palms on my skirt while a bazillion thoughts and emotions went swirling through my head. *What do I do? Do I look good enough? Why is it so hot all of a sudden?*

"Hey," Ethan said, his husky voice setting off fireworks inside me. My gosh, his eyes were *so* blue and, at this moment—did I dare admit it?—inviting?

My heart leaped, doing one somersault after another. I opened my mouth again, determined to say something, anything.

"He-ey."

Now I *knew* my face was on fire.

The other guys snickered. I thought for sure I'd die right on the spot. Audrey would never have gotten herself into this situation.

Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, the too sweet scent of Clinique Happy filled the cramped hallway. Sure enough, Jessica Feldman, alias Queen Jessawitch, sauntered up with her crew of clones close at hand. Her too-tight Prada blouse and Burberry pencil skirt clung to her model-thin figure, and she had on four-inch spike Louboutin heels. How she could walk in those shoes was beyond me. Her long, straight blond hair looked perfect. Just like always.

She gave me the once-over then sauntered up close to Ethan.

"There you are, I've been waiting for you. Why are you stopping?"

Ethan sidestepped her, his posture tense and rigid. He looked at his friends, perhaps a little embarrassed, then grinned.

"Man, I didn't know standing in the hallway was a crime."

Jessica giggled.

"No, silly." She stepped between him and me. Her clones nudged me out of the way. "Let's go. You're going to walk me to English lit, right?"

Ethan looked over at his friends again.

"Can't. Got to swing by the coach's office. Sorry."

A wrinkle formed on Jessica's otherwise perfect face.

"Sure. Whatever. Maybe next time."

She swirled away, opening up her cell. In her own haste to avoid a potentially embarrassing moment, she nearly collided with me. Selena pulled me aside just in time, but not before Jessica turned her head and mouthed silently, *In your dreams*.

The crowd moved aside to make room for her and her crew. I felt a glimmer of hope that quickly evaporated. Ethan and his friends left, too.

"Jordan, why didn't you say anything?" Selena asked. "He was right there."

"I know, don't rub it in." I sighed. "Who am I fooling? I'd never be like Jessica in a million years."

"That *bruja*?" Selena smacked her gum. She rolled her eyes and smirked. "Why would you want to be like that witch? Didn't you see Ethan blow her off? Knew that boy had some taste."

"Yeah, right."

"Come on, where's that Audrey spirit?" She snorted. "You can do it!"

"Audrey who?" Andrew Carter slammed his locker shut and joined us. I was so busy staring at Ethan I hadn't even noticed him until now.

Selena and I glanced at each other and shrugged. Figures a guy would know nothing about the most classic lady of all time—Audrey Hepburn. I blame my own love on Grams. Since I was little, I've loved going to my grandmother's house to watch all the old Audrey Hepburn movies. We'd even playact some of our favorite scenes, complete with outfits and, of course, jewelry. Her love of the icon rubbed off on me big-time.

"Oh, nothing," I said, although deep down inside I wished some of Audrey's magic would help me get the guy. I mean, I've watched *Tessa's Treasure* so many times, I know all the lines and plot by heart.

Andrew readjusted his backpack.

"Hey, you want me to carry that?" He pointed to one of my stacked books that, at the moment, hung precariously close to falling.

I reached to push the book back up, but Andrew grabbed it just in time.

"Wow, my hero," I said.

He blushed deep red and took a step back with my book.

"Hey, we better get to class. Don't want to be late and risk getting detention." He took off without waiting down the quickly emptying hallway.

Selena tugged my arm.

"If only Andrew was Ethan." She made a dramatic sigh. "Then you'd have it made. Even you have to admit he's kind of cute."

"Yeah, in a brother kind of way."

Selena giggled. "Right."

I wrinkled my nose, avoiding the strange sensation spreading through my body. Andrew and me? Nah, never in a bazillion years. So, why did I feel warm all of a sudden?

I twisted a piece of my hair, pushing the thought aside.

"You know what? You're right. I can do this."

"Do what? Date Andrew?"

"No, silly. Get the guy. Ethan, that is. I just need to come up with a plan."

"Yeah, what would Audrey do?" Selena asked.

A scenario from a movie flashed through my head. My spirits suddenly lifted. I could see some hope out there.

"Dang." I hit my forehead with my palm. "I totally forgot. Tomorrow night is our Scrabble day thingy at Grams'. And you know my dad, no electronic devices, including cell phones while we visit. Figures." My shoulders slumped.

"Cheer up. Knowing your *abuelita*, I bet she'll still have time to drag out one of her Audrey movies."

"Yeah, maybe you're right."

Selena jumped in front of me, her huge silver hoop earrings dancing.

"Of course I'm right. Hey, maybe your grandmother can share how they used to get a guy's interest and all."

"Yes!" Ideas swirled in my head.

"Hey, *chica*! Make sure to take some notes while you're at it. Maybe I can use one to snag Coby!"

"That would be great. But wait..." My shoulders sagged. "Audrey always got the guy."

"Duh, so will you!" Selena pushed me forward. Our English classroom was just in front of us. "If you need any help snagging one, all you need to do is—"

“Yes, I know! Watch *Tessa’s Treasure*.” Suddenly, I felt as if helium had coursed through my body, lifting my spirits. “What can be better than watching that movie?”

“That’s my *amiga*!”

I daydreamed about a plan to get Ethan. For now, I’d just have to not dwell on the embarrassing encounter. I’d make my own magic. Well, with a little help from Audrey.



Chapter 2

The visit to Grams had gone even better than expected. I changed my earlier plan of getting her to pop in our favorite Audrey Hepburn movie when Dad came up with a really fab idea. He decided to clean out the attic, which meant...

Vintage stuff galore! Sure it wasn't an Audrey movie, but who knew what? My fingers itched to rummage through the boxes. Who knew what treasures lay hidden inside? Nineteen-fifties dresses, gloves, and shoes? Classic 60s-style hats and jewelry? Maybe a gorgeous gown for going out to the theater? All kinds of retro fashion images paraded through my head. There had to be something Audrey-worthy up there.

A few hours later, my earlier excitement was kind of dampened, although I refused to give up. Come on, there had to be something unique and fantastic in one of those boxes. Better yet, something that reeked of romance. I just had to find it.

Tons of different-sized boxes cluttered Grams's kitchen, hallway and living room, along with a growing collection of dusty books, antique toys, and mismatched odds and ends. I trailed my finger across a faded yellow lampshade and wondered what secrets it might have seen or heard.

"Hey, check this out." Dad came into the kitchen carrying yet another box, a larger square one. Dust frosted his brown hair and everything else.

“What?” I asked, holding back a sneeze. Searching through old boxes was fun but avoiding all the dust required a miracle girl. So far, I was losing that battle.

As Dad put the box down on the counter, he chuckled.

“Who knows? Maybe something to add to your collection.”

“Ooh, really?”

“Well, I did find something around the...” He shuffled through an open box within the bigger one. “Ah, here it is!” He brought out an old board game.

“Scrabble?” I couldn’t help myself—I sighed. “Didn’t you bring the newer version?”

I leaned over to get a better look. The tattered green rectangular box looked like it belonged in a 50s TV show.

“Where’s your sense of adventure? I thought we’d play with this version. Boy, does this bring back memories.”

Grams glanced up from her own box of forgotten treasures and smiled.

“Yeah, I guess it’s kind of exciting.” I leaned over and took another look. Chances are, Audrey had played a game or two with one like it, but let’s face it—romantic, it wasn’t.

Okay, I admit it. So far, I’d found nada that even hinted at romance in any of the boxes.

Dad must have sensed my growing frustration.

“Come on, kiddo.” He tapped my chin. “Be a sport. I’ll be in the living room when you ladies are done.” He winked as he left the kitchen.

Grams patted my shoulder.

“Don’t give up now. Let’s think of it as our own Tessa’s treasure.”

Now, that got my attention. I didn’t think this box would be any different from the others we’d slaved over, but I’d been wrong before.

“Ooh, look at this,” Grams took out a small wood box. Intricate carvings twirled across the dusty cover. She opened it. A cloud of dust exploded out. I stepped back for a moment, covering my mouth, and started to leave but stopped. Grams’s eyes widened.

“Well, I never!” She motioned me forward.

“What ya got?” A weird sensation shot through me. No way. It couldn’t be.

Deep within folds of fragile tissue paper lay a bracelet I'd seen more than a bazillion times dangling from Audrey's delicate wrist in *Tessa's Treasure*. How did it get in there?

The minute I saw the bracelet, I knew one thing—I had to have it. I ran my fingers over the cool metal, tracing the red, blue, and green gems encircled by narrow settings of gold. Little cat charms dangled from between the stones.

Grams pulled the bracelet away from me.

"I'd forgotten all about this," she said, a look of longing crossing her features that quickly faded.

"Wait a minute. Why do you have this bracelet? It's just like the one in *Tessa's Treasure*. You know, the one she found on that dig in Egypt."

I felt an invisible pull toward the bracelet. I had to touch it.

Grams gazed off into space.

"Yes, a pyramid in Egypt. That's where this came from."

"But, Grams, you never went to Egypt." A tingle whipped through my whole body. "Why is this here? Isn't it from the movie?"

"No, the one in the movie was a cheap imitation," Grams said, her fingers caressing the charms.

"You mean this one is...?"

She narrowed her eyes, giving me an I-can't-believe-you-even-asked-me-that- question look.

"This is the real thing."

"No flippin' way. It's real? You're kidding, right?"

"Young lady, I might tell some outrageous stories, but I'm no liar."

"Sorry, Grams." More curious than ever, I leaned over to take a better look. I glanced back at her. "I don't know if I should ask... but how did an expensive bracelet end up in a dusty box?"

"It belonged to Alice."

"Alice?" Who the heck was Alice?

"You know Tessa was based on a real person, don't you?"

"You mean like the nun in *The Nun's Story*?"

"Yes, just like her."

"So, this is Alice's bracelet?" I squeaked. It didn't make any sense to me but this was totally cool. I reached for the bracelet, but she held it back from me.

"Yes, Alice's bracelet," she said, as if in a trance.

"But why do you have it?"

Grams looked at me as if only now realizing I was in the room with her.

"Because Alice is..." She paused. "Because Alice is my sister."

No way! Talk about a mind-blowing revelation. I didn't know what to think or do.

"Sister? Grams! Audrey Hepburn played your *sister* in a movie, and you never told me about her? Why? I mean, she'd be like my Great-aunt Alice, right?" How I wished I had my cell so I could text Selena this latest revelation. She'd just die!

Instead, I grabbed some of the forgotten photos on the table, frantically searching to see if this Alice might be in any of them.

Grams didn't say anything more. She just stared at the bracelet, turning it over in her hand and fingering the stones. Her eyes seemed clouded with memories.

I glanced up from the photos, worried I might have upset her. She'd been known to forget things and I didn't want the stress to freak her out. Anyway, I didn't really know who to look for, considering I never knew about this Alice until now.

"Wait a minute. Why haven't I ever met her?"

Grams put the bracelet down.

"Alice has been...gone for many years."

"Figures, all the cool relatives are dead." Then I glanced at Grams. "Except you, of course."

"Of course." She gave a nervous little laugh. "The truth is, no one knows what happened to her."

"Wow, seriously?"

"Yes. No one." Grams did a little shake of her head and turned back to me. "It's all in the past."

I put the photos down. I really wanted to know more about this mysterious great-aunt, but it was obvious Grams didn't want to talk about it right this minute. I'd have to milk her for more information later. In the meantime, that bracelet called to me. There was no other word to describe what I was feeling.

"Can I hold it, Grams?" I reached over, unable to contain myself. If she didn't let me touch it, I swore I'd burst.

"Of course—here."

I couldn't wait to put it on!

My hands trembled, causing me to fumble with the clasp.

"Here, let me help."

Grams stepped over and helped me with the clasp.

The bracelet felt surprisingly light on my wrist but also warm. A shiver crept through my body. The hair on my arm stood up, as if tiny electrical currents were zapping me. The gems glistened in the light. They looked just too perfect.

"What kind of stones are these?"

Grams looked at the bracelet. The gems looked so exotic.

"I think the blue ones are turquoise, and the names of the other two escape me right now." She tapped her fingers over her mouth and closed her eyes for a second—her classic thinking mode.

"Wait. How did you end up with it?"

That weird look came over her face again as if something had come back to her. Then it passed.

"You know, I don't recall how I ended up with it."

"Really?"

She shook her head. "It happened so long ago. Probably just slipped my mind."

"How could you..." I twirled the bracelet around my wrist. "...forget about something this gorgeous?" The cat charms jingled softly in agreement.

Grams didn't answer; instead, she looked up at the ceiling. A dreamy expression swept across her face.

She blinked. "Oh, sorry. My mind tends to drift at times. What were we discussing?"

"The bracelet. Can you tell me something about Alice? Anything? How about—did she find this bracelet?"

"Well, the movie was based on one of her travels that she took in the fifties."

"You mean she actually did some of those romantic things like in the movie? Like dancing on the Eiffel Tower? Going off on an adventure with a totally hot guy in Egypt?"

"Something like that. Funny, I can't really remember. Like I said before, it was a long time ago."

I plopped both my elbows on the table, cupping my chin in my hands.

"Okay, you have to tell me. Did Alice find her true love there just like Audrey did?"

"If she did, he never came back here." Sadness tugged on her usually serene features.

"Really?" I asked. "In the movie, she had such a fabulous life. If I had half her luck in getting a guy, I'd be set."

"There's no such thing as being lucky." Grams stopped and gave me one of her serious looks. "You make your own destiny. Remember that."

Yeah, right. As if that would help me get Ethan to ask me out.

"I wish I'd been around before Alice disappeared." When she gave me a weird look, I continued, "Well, think about it. Her life was played on the screen by Audrey Hepburn. How cool would it have been to be in the same room as her. But since she's gone and all, now I'll never find out."

"I wish we knew what happened to her, but it's just a big mystery unlikely to be solved at this late date," Grams said, folding the tissue paper over and over. "Maybe it's best it stays that way."

"So sad. I'd love to have met her." I continued to eye the bracelet. "Grams? Can I wear it for a little longer?"

I was hoping, praying she'd let me keep it on. I did my best puppy dog stare.

"Pretty please?"

"Maybe another time." She opened the small wooden box, waiting for me to put the bracelet back in. "We all know how you tend to lose things."

"Who, moi?" I batted my eyelashes.

"Yes, you." Grams laughed. "You don't fool me one bit, young lady. All we need is for you to try out one of the scenes from the movie and lose the bracelet."

"You mean like where she danced on the Eiffel Tower? As if I can go to Paris anytime soon. Don't worry, I won't lose it." I rotated my wrist. The gems shone. I couldn't believe this gorgeous bracelet was clasped on *my* wrist. I felt like a princess—royal and special.

Grams frowned. Guilt squeezed my insides. I knew I shouldn't keep asking, but I still had to know. What wasn't she telling me?

I had the sense she was making excuses to try to get me to take the bracelet instead of telling me the real reason why she had it in her possession. Seriously, how could anyone forget about having an amazing bracelet like this one?

No, there was more to the story and if Grams wouldn't tell me, I'd find out.

Grams held out her hand.

"No, you need to give me the bracelet. I need to put it away."

I took a step back. Something had just happened. A strange expression had flashed across Grams's face, almost as if she were frightened. But why?

"I really should put it somewhere safe," she said. "Like a safe deposit box at the bank."

I lightly fingered the red and bluish-green stones.

"Oh, Grams." I pouted as I unhooked the clasp and reluctantly gave the bracelet back to her. "Can you at least keep it here until our next visit?"

"All right, until next time you're over. You're incorrigible, you know that?" she said as she wrapped the bracelet up and put it back in the box. "I'm sure they're done setting up Scrabble by now. Let's go play. That's something you're lucky at."

"But, Grams, you don't believe in luck."

She winked then steered me toward the living room.

"I'll be with you in a minute."

Dad had given up on his goal of cleaning out the attic. Mom waited at a table he'd pulled into the living room, ignoring my younger brother Jake's latest antics. I swear, seven-year-old boys are such pains! He bounced around, throwing out his wrists then pretending to swing on spider webs. All the while, he kept muttering some silly make-believe Spiderman words. Jeez—boys.

Jake's Spiderman action figures were all over the carpet. I kicked them out of the way and glanced over my shoulder at the kitchen door. I found it hard to move away from the box with the bracelet.

The kitchen went dark. Had Grams turned the lights out?

Suddenly, the box sparkled like a thousand stars on a moonless night. Colors flooded the darkened kitchen, swirling around and around on the walls. I turned around, expecting some comments about the funky light show, but no one.

That kind of made sense, since the room was tucked to the side with some wooden shutters facing out. I glanced back into the kitchen toward the breakfast counter. Grams was by the granite island table, spooning cookie dough on a tray. She acted as if nothing had just happened.

Was I imagining it?

The darkness continued.

Lightheaded, I put my hand on the wall, waiting for the spectacle to stop, but the box still shimmered. I closed my eyes, and as

I opened them, the funky light show faded to be replaced with the regular florescence lighting. I looked around. Mom was picking up game pieces Jake had knocked on the floor. Dad shook his finger at Jake, who ignored it all, as usual.

An impulse emerged, strong and urgent. Only one thing mattered—getting the bracelet. My heart raced, and my palms grew sweaty. The gems made me feel like a movie star—like Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* when she enters the ballroom draped in diamonds and her hair is up in the perfect do. I knew I couldn't wait until next month.

All I had to do was wait for the right time.

I went over to the table, taking my seat while still processing the freaky experience.

Mom had a notepad and pencil ready for Scrabble; I admit, though I teased Dad and moaned about it, I liked the game, too. The real champ at the game was Dad, but a couple times I've won.

I picked my tiles and arranged them.

B-R-A-C-E-L-E.

I squirmed in my chair, tapping my fingers on the table. My gosh, how weird was it I was able to almost spell the very thing that was on my mind?

"So, did you find anything in the box?" Dad asked, pushing around his tiles. He prided himself on being able to make the most unusual words, and he'd have his trusty laptop close by so he could bring up the Scrabble website. Who, besides Dad, would know that *xylem* was actually a word?

"Ah, here we go!" He put down E-X-P-E-R-T.

Mom recorded his forty-two points.

"You're next, Jordan."

A chill crept up my neck. I put my tiles down to make the word *bracelet*. Mom recorded my score.

"Did you find anything to add to your collection?" Dad persisted.

"Why didn't you all tell me that *Tessa's Treasure* is based on someone in our family?" I wiggled my leg, trying to release all the energy pent up inside. "I didn't even know Grams *had* a sister, much less one who just happened to have had such a great life that a movie was based on her. Why doesn't anyone tell me anything?"

Dad and Mom glanced at each other.

"Honey, it was a long time ago," Mom said.

"And kind of a sensitive subject," Dad added.

"Yeah, right. Her being missing for fifty years or so," I said. I started to ask why they hadn't mentioned the bracelet, but for some reason I decided I wanted to keep that little bit of info to myself.

I fidgeted in my chair. I wanted—no, I *needed* that bracelet. Right now.

Grams came in, loaded with a huge platter filled with her to-die-for chocolate chip cookies, but even the warm scent of melted dark chocolate didn't faze me. She glanced down at me.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, I, uh, I mean, no."

Everyone stared at me.

"I think I have..." I coughed. "...something stuck in my throat. I'm going to get some water." I pushed the chair out.

Grams stood still. Then she turned away, placing the platter of cookies on the table. Whew! For a minute, I'd thought she'd guessed what I was going to do.

I had to have that bracelet! Grams had promised she'd keep it in the box until our next visit, which would give me the chance to slip it back inside without anyone knowing I'd taken it.

"Hurry. Your turn will be coming up soon." Dad nudged his glasses up on his nose while he rearranged his new tiles. He hated to be seen wearing his so-called old-fart glasses, although he did wear them when he taught at the college.

I left the table. My heart pounded so loud I had to resist the urge to turn around to see if anyone heard it. I knew what I was about to do was wrong, but I couldn't help it. I. Had. To. Have. It.

I entered the kitchen; the warm sweet scent of freshly baked chocolate cookies engulfed me. The only lights were the florescent ones. The mysterious box sat right in the middle of the kitchen table, teasing me to open it.

My heart raced. I took another quick peek over my shoulder to make sure no one had followed me. Phew. So far, the coast was clear.

I swear the box beckoned to me.

Come on, Jordan. You know you want it. Don't you want Ethan? a strange voice whispered in my ear.

I shivered. Goosebumps rose up on the back of my neck. I stopped and looked around. I could have sworn out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of someone moving. The clean scent of linens drying on a clothesline filled the room for a second then was gone.

Okay, I'm losing it, I thought.

"Jordan, are you okay?"

I spun around to see Grams standing in the hallway. Her arms were folded. She glanced at me then the box then back to me.

She knew!

My face burned red-hot. Busted.

"Uh...I..." I looked down at the floor, shuffling my feet.

"Jordan, honey." Grams clasped her hand on my shoulder. "Why don't you wear the bracelet for a day? Then you can give it back."

"Are you serious?" I stared up at her in amazement. "I can wear it?"

"Yes. Let's just think of it as our little secret. I'll pick it up later tomorrow."

I threw my arms around her and hugged her hard.

"You're the best!"

She hugged me back.

"What can I say?" She smiled. "Here." She let go of me and went over to the table. "Let's put it on."

I held out my wrist, a wave of excitement crashing into me. I couldn't believe I got to wear this! Wait until Selena saw it! Heck, wait until she heard the whole story behind the bracelet.

But even sweeter had to be knowing that an aunt of mine had actually known Audrey Hepburn!

As Grams clasped the bracelet on, a warm tingle raced up my arm. I heard a soft chuckle.

Be careful what you wish for!



Chapter 3

The next day, I rushed around getting ready for school. Mom yelled for me to hurry. Frantic, I opened my drawers, searching for something to wear.

As I was pushing yet another pair of pants aside, a woozy sensation hit me. The walls dipped up, down, and sideways. I felt as if I'd stepped on board a boat, only instead of waves the floor would crash into me. I grabbed the edge of the drawer, waiting for the sick feeling to leave. In the process, my hand slipped inside. My fingers encountered something hard and unyielding. A few cat charms from the bracelet slipped out of a hoodie. I couldn't believe I'd just thrown the bracelet in there last night.

I held it up so the sunlight made the reflections off the stones pattern my walls in a kaleidoscope of red and blue. I couldn't resist. I unclasped the latch and put the bracelet on—it felt so *right*. I twisted my wrist slowly, admiring the jewelry.

A sensation traveled up my arm and over my whole body like a warm, snuggly blanket. I closed my eyes, embracing the feeling. Who'd have thought an ancient Egyptian bracelet would feel so good?

I went to my mirror and struck a pose. Would Ethan finally notice me if I wore it? I could just picture his cobalt eyes reflecting the sparkle of the gems while he smiled his lopsided grin. I hugged myself, imaging his arms around me.

“Jordan, we have to leave *now!*”

Mom’s voice broke through the spell the bracelet seemed to have cast on me. No wonder Alice kept the bracelet with her 24/7. I was surprised Grams hadn’t.



“You have everything?” Mom asked as I grabbed my backpack from the seat. Usually I’m half-asleep at seven-thirty in the morning, but the bracelet energized me. With my iPod on the latest Urban Alarm song, I hummed with the music: *I’m gonna break free// break free from this place/no one’s stopping me.*

Just another typical Southern California winter. Figures it would be warmer than normal today, which meant I couldn’t exactly wear a sweater with a snug wrist that would keep the bracelet out of sight. But I didn’t let that little fact stop me. Too bad, because right now I felt the bracelet shimmy down. A lone cat charm peeked out.

Oh, flipping great! I glanced at my mother, fearing she’d seen it. I hadn’t told my parents Grams had let me borrow the bracelet, figuring Mom would never let me wear something that valuable to school. Lucky for me, she was staring at her watch.

Thank goodness for meetings.

Mom stopped the car and leaned over, her usual smooth forehead wrinkled in worry.

“You okay?”

Mom’s concern made me feel even worse about my deception. I pushed the lone charm back up my sleeve and cleared my throat before turning around to face her.

“Yes, I’m fine.” I closed the Honda’s door. “Bye.”

Her eyes softened.

“Well, if everything’s okay...” She glanced again down at her watch. “Have a good day, sweetie.”

I cringed inside.

“Mom,” I hissed, “do you have to say that?” Why she kept treating me like I was five years old was beyond me.

Someone snickered. Jessica’s posse of wannabes followed behind her. As usual, they had cloned everything that reeked of Jessica, from her long, feathered hairstyle to the Prada handbag. I tried to avoid any kind of eye contact, hoping they wouldn’t see me.

Too late.

"Say bye to your mommy, *sweetie*," Jessica said.

The rest of the girls giggled. My face felt hot. I felt myself hunch over, praying I could just get to class without them bothering me anymore. Thank goodness Mom didn't hear them or I'd die for sure.

Wait a minute here.

What would Audrey do? I refused to let them get to me. I pulled my shoulders back, standing straight and tall. No, I wouldn't let them get to me, even though deep down inside I really wanted to find a hole and hide.

"Mom, I'm fine, okay?"

"All right." She must have gotten the hint. She pulled away from the curb.

Tons of tall skinny eucalyptus trees circled the campus, thin flakes of their reddish bark scattered everywhere; a couple of sycamore trees grew close to the office. The painting of McKnight's school mascot, a bear, was half-hidden behind a huge sign announcing a car wash this weekend to earn money for the school. The old high school building had been around, like, forever.

I let out a sigh of relief as I hurried up the stairs. Any embarrassment I'd had about Jessica and her nasty crew evaporated with the thought of what I'd gotten away with. The thought I was wearing a piece of jewelry Audrey Hepburn might have worn made me feel giddy.

"Hey, chica, wait up!" Selena ran over to me. Her dark curly hair bounced along with her. She skidded to a stop next to me. "What gives? You didn't call or text me." She pouted. "But your homegirl forgives ya."

I smiled. Selena's been my best friend forever. Nothing fazes her.

The hall was crowded as kids rushed to their classes. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Ethan. The other day flashed back to me, but I pushed it aside and instead stopped and stared. How could someone be so hot? He had it all—tall, broad shoulders, and amazing watercolor-blue eyes. While Coby and some of the other guys on the basketball team horsed around him acting juvenile, he

stood apart. I closed my eyes for a second, daydreaming of us being together...

A huge McKnight banner fluttered above the gym. Our school was on a winning streak, and tonight's game was no exception. Selena and Andrew sat on either side of me. Our voices blended with the other screaming fans.

"Go, McKnight!"

I stomped my feet and screamed along.

Andrew grabbed my hand and smiled.

Happiness rushed through me.

Startled, I almost stumbled. Where did *that* come from? Andrew? I was supposed to be thinking about Ethan.

"Jordan!" Selena smacked me with her oversized bag. "You're daydreaming again."

"Ouch, careful with that. Jeez, what do you have in there, anyway?" I rubbed my arm, for once glad of the pain her humongous bag caused. My so-called daydream, or whatever I'd just had, had been too weird. Ew—Andrew's been my best friend since forever.

"Well, someone needs to wake up." That was Selena, ignoring my question. "Hey, what's with the shoes today?"

In my haste to get out of the house and not have my mother notice the bracelet, I'd broken with my usual ballet flats that complimented the whole *Love in the Afternoon* look of skinny jeans and a black T-shirt. Instead, I wore a pair of—heaven forbid—Keds. I'd even forgotten the unforgettable—the few fake eyelashes. AH would never do that.

"I was in a hurry, okay?"

"Whatever. Let's just get to class." She nudged me along, almost hitting a passing student on the way. "I, for one, don't have time for detention if we're late for Mr. Eipper's class."

"Yeah, right."

"Hey, Selena, Jordan. Wait up!" Andrew joined us. He flung his backpack on his shoulder and smiled. His shaggy brown hair begged to be pushed out of his eyes. I couldn't help but wonder if, when he got older, he'd look like his older brother Noah, who all the girls completely drooled over.

I looked down. What was the matter with me? He'd been Selena and my friend since the second grade. He also knew just

everything about me, including my journal of my favorite things. But I remembered the sensation of holding his hand, which was too weird. Okay, it was just a freaking daydream, but it had felt so real.

No, I couldn't think of that. He was just a friend.

He turned, glancing over at Ethan and his friends. Frowning, he shrugged.

"What you see in him, I don't know."

"Duh, isn't it obvious? He's hot!" I said, glad to get back on a more comfortable subject. "Anyway, let's go."

The first bell rang, meaning we had only a few minutes. I hurried with the others but not before sneaking another peek at the bracelet. I felt giddy with excitement. Could the *Tessa's Treasure* romance rub off on me?



After class, Selena stood by our lockers, showing me the results of her shopping trip I'd missed because I was at Grams's house. She modeled new hoop earrings, a Macy's necklace, and a matching charm bracelet.

"Too bad you didn't come," she said. "I get the whole family get-together thingy." She gave a half-smile. "But Scrabble? Puhlease."

"You know the rule." I rolled my eyes and tried my best Dad imitation. "Nothing stands in the way of our biweekly Scrabble game."

Selena laughed. "Yeah, that bites big time."

I couldn't resist. I had to tell someone.

"It wasn't all boring board games." I rolled up my sleeve. "Look what Grams let me borrow."

The stones shone in the otherwise dreary hallway. Selena stepped back; her eyes looked like they'd pop out of her face.

"No way. Is that what I think it is?"

"Yes, but even better." I motioned her closer, whispering in her ear. "It's the real thing. The one in the movie was a fake."

She grabbed me, bringing my arm up closer.

"How'd you get it?"

An earlier fear that had been nibbling at me came back full force. I wanted to show everyone the bracelet, so what was up with this feeling that I didn't want her to touch it? It didn't make any sense. I couldn't help it, though; I pulled back a little.

“Come on, chica. You can’t just drop that big of a bomb on me without sharing.” Selena put her hands on her hips.

I didn’t get it. I wanted everyone to see the bracelet—I really did, but right now something didn’t feel right. Selena’s over-exuberance didn’t help, either. More than a few kids in the hallway stared. I moved away from curious eyes, closer to the lockers.

Selena frowned.

“You’re right.” I motioned for her to closer. She rushed to my side, grabbing my arm. “We found it in a box Dad brought down from the attic. Come to find out my dad has an Aunt Alice who the movie was based on. How sweet is that?”

“Shut *up!* Are you telling me your grandmother’s sister was the real Tessa?” Selena put her hands on her hips again. “And you didn’t text me this new bit of info because...?”

“Come on, it’s not as if it was a known fact. I mean, I just found out, too.”

“Yeah, I guess even Audrey might not have known. How sweet is this?”

I ignored the comment and continued.

“It gets even better. Grams’s sister did some of those same things that are in the movie.” I avoided looking at her. Grams did say she thought the story might have been a tad bit exaggerated, but Selena didn’t need to know that. Anyway, I could have sworn I felt some kind of magic radiating from the bracelet.

“*Diós mio*, this is so exciting! Isn’t jewelry on your list?”

Yes, it’s lame, but we still had our own special lists, similar to what Audrey Hepburn shared in *War and Peace*. While she listed ways to fall in love, which was sooo romantic, we listed our most romantic things. Ethan wasn’t on Selena’s list—thank God for that. I don’t know what I’d do if we both liked him.

But Coby Jett was. She’d been hoping he’d ask her to the Valentine’s Day dance.

I couldn’t believe he hadn’t. I mean, Selena is gorgeous with her olive skin and her to-die-for thick, dark curly hair. Plus, I swear that girl can eat anything without gaining an ounce. Her slim frame fits so much better than mine into those skinny jeans that are *so* Audrey Hepburn. Or any of the other really cute outfits from Forever 21, her all-time favorite store.

Me, on the other hand? Well, I’m what my Mom called “petite,” although anyone else would say I was short, flat on top

and round on the bottom. Big butts aren't in, by any means. I'd cut my hair similar to AH's in *Roman Holiday*, a stylish short cut with layers that made my eyes look even bigger. It seemed to fit. Before that, my straight, shoulder-length brown hair just hung around my face.

Don't even get me started on my pale skin, which burns even with sunscreen. I know AH looked fab with super-white skin, but not me. So unfair.

Selena doesn't suffer from that problem. The gods sure looked out for her.

Huh? Where did that thought come from? My wrist tingled.

"Yes, it's, like, number four on my list." I yanked my sleeve back down.

The bell rang. Coby walked by.

"Hi, Selena. See ya in class."

He brushed his hair aside before he caught up with his gang of friends, waiting by the water fountain. Ethan was with them. I said a silent prayer that he'd glance my way.

Selena leaned against her locker.

"Oh, what I wouldn't give for Coby to ask me out." She pulled my sleeve up and glanced again at the bracelet. "Can I wear it?"

"Uh, I don't know..."

"Jeez, you still aren't holding *that* over me, are you?"

"You lost my favorite earrings."

"Tsst on those earrings from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Those were only a fake imitation. Now that..." She pointed at my wrist. "...is actually from an Audrey Hepburn movie."

The warning bell for our next class rang, saving me from answering. Selena wouldn't give it up.

"Come on, let me wear it for a few." She touched my wrist.

I jerked it back. For some reason, the bracelet reacted this time. I felt as if tiny ants were crawling up my arm.

What's going on? I resisted the urge to tell Selena the weird things that seemed to be happening since I'd been wearing the bracelet, fearing she'd think I'd totally lost it. The tingle grew stronger. From out of nowhere an image appeared...

Selena, gorgeous in a green dress cropped above the knees...long legs, chestnut hair glowing. Coby by her side, holding her hand. They looked so cute together. The latest hit songs played in the background. A large sign reading VALENTINE'S DANCE hung on the wall.

What do you wish for? a woman's voice whispered in my ear, low and breathless.

I jumped. A chill swept through me, and I clutched my sweater closer. Just as quickly, the vision slipped away.

"Hey!" Selena shook me. "What happened? You zone out or something?"

"Huh?" I stepped away from my locker and pulled my sleeve back up. The bracelet seemed to glow, just like back at Grams' house. Then the light faded.

Did I really see that? I stared at my wrist, fearing something creepier might happen. Okay, this wasn't cool. I pulled my sleeve down

Stuff like glowing bracelets only happens in the movies. And not to people like me.



Chapter 4

The bell rang, releasing me from boring American history class. As I rushed to my locker, something caught my attention. I slowed down and scanned the hall. A weird woman stood next to the cluster of lockers, looking as if she'd stumbled off a Cleopatra movie set. I couldn't resist. I had to check her out.

I skidded to a stop. Other kids walked down the hallway, chatting and horsing around. No one seemed to notice the woman. A sick feeling like the one from before gurgled in my stomach. Strange.

She turned and looked right at me. My whole body froze. Raven-black hair brushed her shoulders; a long sheer gown covered her curvy body. I could almost see right through it! Her crown, a huge moon disc supported on each side by animal horns, seemed familiar, too. Wisps of bird feathers hung down from them.

Her heavily lined eyes seemed to drill a hole right through me. I wanted to run, scream, and just get the heck out of there, but I couldn't move.

"Hey, Jordan!" Selena nudged me then opened her locker. "What's up with you this morning?"

I jumped, glancing back over my shoulder to see if my eyes had been playing tricks on me. No such luck. The strange woman flashed a cold smile that didn't reach her eyes. I turned quickly away, praying it was all in my head.

Selena wrinkled her nose and frowned.

"Seriously, are you okay?"

"Yes. Why?"

"It's like you're on another planet." She whistled the theme song for that old *Twilight Zone* show that's on every Fourth of July. "Earth to Jordan. Are you here?"

"Oh, yeah, sure." I smiled, although my guts were turning into mush. Selena was right. I needed to return to Earth.

"Oh snap, don't look, but Coby is coming this way," she whispered.

Sure enough, Coby strolled down the hallway sans his usual gaggle of friends, which usually included Jessica. It seemed as if he had this magical ability to part the crowd that clogged up the hallways. His shoulders were pulled back, and a very determined expression made him look serious—and older.

He glanced up, and a half-smile tugged at his mouth when he looked our way. I tried to get a better view, but Selena blocked me.

"Don't stare," she hissed then added in the same breath, "Do I look okay?"

Coby stopped right in front of us before I could say anything.

"Hey, Selena...Jordan." He shuffled his feet, looking away then back up at Selena.

"Hey," she said, her face flushed.

"I was meaning to ask...I mean, I know it might be late and all, but has anyone asked you to the dance? I mean, I understand if someone did and all."

"No," Selena said.

"Oh, okay. I just was wondering and all." Coby's shoulders slumped, and he started to move away.

"No. I didn't mean...I mean, no one asked me yet."

"Seriously?" A smile lit up his face. Coby is kind of cute in a skater way but that smile really made me see why Jessica might be interested in him.

"Want to go with me?" he asked, shy-like.

"Yes, I'd love to!"

Selena hugged her books close to her chest and glanced over at me. I felt kind of like I was intruding, with Coby asking her out and all, but didn't want to leave, either.

"Sweet. I'll text ya later."

He left. Selena waited until he disappeared into the thinning crowd.

"Ay, ay, ay!" She leaned up against her locker, a dreamy look on her face. "Coby just asked me out. Can you believe that?"

"Why *wouldn't* he ask you out?"

"Uh, duh—Jessica?" Selena rolled her eyes. "The wicked *bruja* of McKnight High? That's why not."

"Come on, Selena. You're gorgeous and funny. He'd be stupid if he didn't see that."

"Mmm, you might have something there." She stepped away from her locker and motioned at my covered wrist. "It would be fun to wear something different and exotic, like that bracelet. Didn't Tessa have those guys falling at her feet when she wore the one in the movie?"

"What does that have to do with anything? Coby already asked you."

"Nada, but maybe it might be a Jessica repellent. Can't have that chica messing with me now!"

I couldn't help it. I rolled my eyes.

"Don't worry about her. It's not as if they're a couple. Anyway, he asked you, not her."

"That is so true." Her dark curls bounced. "And you're so right. Why shouldn't he ask me?"

"Exactly."

"Now we have a mission. A serious one," Selena said. "We have to get someone to ask you, too. Coby might know someone..."

At that moment, the bracelet dug into my skin. I ignored the impulse to rub my wrist.

"Yeah, right," I said.

"We'll talk about it during lunch. First, let's get to the cafeteria before the good food is gone." On cue, her stomach growled. "I'm starving."

"What else is new?"