

He nodded slowly. "What if the kids don't like me?"

"Of course they'll like you! Everyone in preschool liked you."

"What if the kids are different in this town?"

I swallowed hard. Twelve years between us and we were basically worrying about the same thing.

"I was wondering . . ." Colby trailed off, like he was scared to ask.

"What, buddy?"

His eyes went to the box I kept on top of my dresser.

"Something about my collection?" I asked.

A little pink colored his cheeks. "I was wondering if any of your pretties could help me."

I collect gemstones. Some as jewelry pieces, some loose, some inherited from my mother, some collected on my own. I'd passed a lot of time with Colby showing him the gems, talking about their colors, their names, what meanings they each had. I first showed them to him when he was two. He called them my "pretties." Even though he knew the word "gemstones" now, "pretties" had stuck.

"I don't know if a gem exists that can make people like you," I said.

"How about one that will make me stop worrying?"

The truth was that the gem he probably needed was the one my mother named me after. Jade: protector of children. But the only jade I had was a pendant. Sending him to school wearing a girl's necklace probably wasn't going to help.

He read the answer on my face and his lower lip turned down in disappointment. I hated seeing him all nervous. I

went to the box, sifting through the gems, avoiding the one at the bottom that no one was allowed to touch, and pulled out the jade pendant.

“This is very special to me,” I said. “You promise you won’t take it off or show it to anybody?”

His eyes widened with wonder at the dangling, smoky green jewel. “I double-promise.”

Normally, I’d trust a five-year-old boy with a delicate piece of jewelry as much as I’d trust a thief with an ATM password, but Colby was different. I knew he’d take good care of it.

“Okay, then.” I slipped it over his head and hid it under his shirt. “This jade will hang over your heart all day and protect you.”

He wrapped his skinny little arms around my neck. “Thank you, Jade.”

“You’re welcome, buddy.”

He began to skip out of the room, but stopped as if he’d forgotten something. He turned back to me with a smile. “I’ll tell you now . . .”

I blinked quickly. I’d thought being nervous about school *was* what he had to tell me. “Okay.” I crossed my arms and grinned. “What?”

He went to the doorway and looked both ways down the hall, then came back to me. He lifted himself up on his tiptoes and whispered into my ear, “There’s a girl in my room.”

“Right now?” I whispered back with a smile.

“No, just sometimes.”

“A pretend girl?” I asked, my eyebrows raised.

“No, she’s real. But I can see through her.”

An icy sensation tickled the back of my neck and worked its way down my spine. “You can see through her,” I repeated.

“Yeah.” He nodded enthusiastically. “And she . . .” He paused as he shuffled through his five-year-old vocabulary to find the best description. His eyes lit up as he hit on the word he needed. “Glimmers. Yeah, she glimmers.”