

The Bracelet



The Pink Giraffe.

How could any eleven-year-old girl possibly resist a name like that?

But the name wasn't the only reason Caitlin, Mia, Libby, and Hannah stopped outside the quirky little boutique. The whimsical, carnival-inspired window display featuring fashionable mannequins standing next to an old-fashioned popcorn cart, a cotton candy machine, and a giraffe from a carousel also intrigued them.

The four girls had spent the afternoon exploring Main Street during their field trip into town. It'd been the first time they'd left Camp Brookridge since arriving at summer camp five weeks earlier. They'd had lots of fun, browsing the shops and eating sweet treats. But time was running out, and

the girls had yet to find the special something they were looking for: a trinket that symbolized their friendship.

The campers stood there, admiring the window display for a moment before Caitlin said, “I think this might be it. Come on. We have to hurry.”

“Wait!” Mia said. “I want to take your picture first. In front of the window.”

The others were used to this by now. Mia took pictures of everything. They quickly posed with big smiles while pointing at the window display, and Mia snapped the picture.

Once inside the boutique full of charming clothes, jewelry, and accessories, the girls scattered like mice.

Mia, a strong and athletic Latina girl from Southern California, spotted a display of jewelry inspired by the sea. She fingered a pair of silver earrings in the shape of sand dollars.

Libby, a petite girl with big brown eyes who had come all the way from a town outside of London, England, almost squealed when she saw a jewelry case with the sign TEA PARTY RINGS. Each ring featured an intricately painted teeny-tiny teapot or teacup.

Hannah, tall and lanky, was a quiet but funny girl from

Tennessee. She admired a display of neon T-shirts with zoo animals doing human activities such as riding a bike, skateboarding, and making a pizza.

And then there was Caitlin, the outgoing and friendly African-American girl from Connecticut. Caitlin was the one who had come up with the idea to find something special that sealed their friendship. With that thought firmly on her mind, Caitlin made her way to the back of the shop, knowing that's often where sale items could be found.

The girls didn't have a lot of money, even if they pooled what they had together. When Caitlin saw an antique bookcase filled with various items and a sign at the top — 50 PERCENT OFF — that's where she decided to look.

It didn't seem like much, really — one lonely bracelet on a plastic jewelry holder with a few sad charms lying in a dish next to it. Caitlin and her best friend from home, Jade, loved making jewelry together, and they'd made some pieces that were much prettier than this simple design. But there was something about this bracelet that made Caitlin want to try it on. She slipped it off the holder, unhooked the clasp, and then slipped it around her wrist.

As she pieced the clasp together, a memory popped out of nowhere. It was the first time all four girls had sat together at dinner, the second day at camp. The chef served fruit pizzas for dessert. None of the four girls had ever heard of fruit pizza — let alone tasted it — with a cookie crust, a custard filling, and fresh fruit laid out on top. They bonded over that delicious dessert and talked about it for days afterward.

“The bracelet looks pretty on you.” Caitlin looked to her left and found a petite saleswoman with lots of wrinkles and short gray hair watching her.

“Oh, thank you,” Caitlin said. “Can I show it to my friends?”

The woman waved her hand and said, “Of course. Let them try it on too, if they’d like. That lucky feeling of knowing it’s right doesn’t happen simply by looking, does it?”

Caitlin swore she saw a twinkle in the woman’s eye as she said the word *lucky*. She hurried over to Libby near the front of the shop, unfastening the bracelet as she went. “Here, I want you to try this on. And tell me what happens.”

Libby gave Caitlin a strange look. “Happens? What do you mean?”

“Just wait and see,” Caitlin said as she grasped Libby’s hand, slipped the chain around her wrist, and secured it.

Libby fiddled with the bracelet, staring at it for a moment, before she looked up and met Caitlin’s eyes. “It was so strange. I saw the four of us, sitting around the campfire, singing our favorite song. You know, the one about the bear.” She leaned in and whispered, “Did that happen to you?”

“I saw something different,” Caitlin replied. “But yes, as soon as I fastened it, I had a happy memory of the four of us.”

Just then, Mia and Hannah walked up. Mia pointed to a clock on the wall. “We need to go. Like, now.”

“Wait, I found the perfect thing for us,” Caitlin said, pointing to Libby. “It’s a charm bracelet.”

“Not just any charm bracelet,” Libby said. “It seems to be . . . special.”

“Special?” Hannah asked. “Does it sing or something? I’ll tell you what, my grandma thinks those birthday cards that sing when you open them are the funniest things ever.”

Caitlin smiled. “No, it doesn’t sing.” She remembered what the saleswoman had said. “I think it might be lucky.”

“Lucky?” Mia asked. “How do you know?”

“We’ll tell you later,” Libby said as she unhooked the bracelet. “Do we have enough money?”

“Yes,” Caitlin said. “Barely. I wish we had enough to buy a charm too, but we don’t. Maybe we can take turns wearing it and add charms to it later?”

“Awesome,” Mia said.

“Great idea,” Hannah chimed in, reaching over and fingering the bracelet. “I love how it feels nice and strong.” Her eyes got big and round, like it suddenly made perfect sense. “Just like our friendship!”

The girls walked to the cash register, where a young woman with curly blond hair sat on a stool, flipping through a magazine. After Caitlin set the bracelet on the counter, the girls all reached for their wallets.

“Where’s the other person who works here?” Caitlin asked. “I wanted to thank her for her help.”

The young woman looked up from her magazine. “I’m the only one working this afternoon.”

Caitlin glanced around the shop, but she didn’t see anyone else. “So who was the older woman with short gray hair?” She looked at her friends. “You saw her, didn’t you?”

They all shook their heads.

“Must have been another customer who snuck out when you weren’t looking,” the young woman said.

“Hm. Yeah,” Caitlin said. “That must be it.”

As the four girls made their way back to the bus with the newly purchased charm bracelet tucked away in Caitlin’s backpack, Caitlin glanced behind her, feeling as if someone was watching them.

But she didn’t see anyone there.