

The Amulet

by Lucy W (age 13)

Kayla stepped off the bus onto the cobblestone street and shielded her eyes from the bright glare of the sun. Here she was in Bath, England with her mother on the hottest summer on record, making everything miserable. Kayla fanned herself and groaned as they entered the Roman Bath museum. This was not the way she had wanted to spend her summer vacation. Tour guides with tired sweaty faces repeated once again not to touch the artifacts or jump in the water. Kayla rolled her eyes, though she had to admit that a cold pool sounded heavenly. Her mother searched around in her hand-bag and pulled out her bulky camera as they entered the museum, snapping pictures everywhere she went, a wide smile spread across her face. "Just look at this Kayla!" her mother exclaimed, pointing at a bronze head of a woman. The sign below it read: Sulis Minerva, the goddess of the hot spring and wisdom was worshipped by the Romans roughly 1,800 years ago. Her main role was to execute justice and punish thieves in answer to inscribed lead tablets people would throw in the sacred spring in hopes that Sulis Minerva would hear their pleas and curse the thieves who had stolen their tunics, cloaks, or jewelry. "Huh," Kayla said, tilting her head to the side. "I didn't know that Romans lived in England," she thought aloud. "And why would anyone want to steal something in this heat?"

In 100 AD in Bath, England a fair, Roman girl sat by the Waters of Suli humming as she undressed and prepared to bathe in the sacred springs. She carefully unlatched the jeweled amulet that always hung around her neck and fingered it gingerly before setting it in her coin Purse.

That amulet had been the last gift her mother had given her shortly before her death, and she had treated it with extra care ever since. She slowly stepped into the steaming waters and began to take out her intricate braid pinned to her head and let her long dark hair fall softly on her shoulders.

"Marcella?" someone called from behind her. Marcella spun around then relaxed as she realized it was her young aunt, Julia. "Yes?" Marcella replied, rubbing her scalp with her fingertips. "I knew I would find you here," Julia said quietly. She sat down on the stone steps and glanced absentmindedly at Marcella's coin purse. "Your father sent me to find you. You know how he worries about you," Julia paused, looking meaningfully at her niece. "I know he does.

Ever since mother's passed, he has become extra protective lately," Marcella said, washing her face with the warm water. Julia said nothing, but glanced again at the coin purse. She stood up suddenly, brushing herself off and announcing that she had better get home to fix supper. "Well, goodbye then Julia! Tell father not to worry and that I will be home soon," Marcella called after her aunt happily.

She gave her face a final scrub before putting her whole head under the water to properly rinse it off. Though as she emerged, she vaguely heard a shuffle of footsteps fading out

of the building.

After Marcella was dried and changed back into her clothes, feeling much cleaner, she went to retrieve her coin purse she had left on the stone steps. But when she reached in the purse, she found that her amulet was not inside. Marcella's heart dropped into her stomach. "But I left it right inside my purse!" Marcella thought, as panic took over. "No," she breathed, still unable to process what had happened. She sat down, rubbing her temples, trying to think. "The only other person who was here was.....Julia."

Marcella's jaw dropped as the purse fell from her hand and the coins rolled into the sacred water. She sucked in a sharp breath. Now that she thought about it, Julia had seemed very jealous when her mother gave her the amulet and claimed that it should rightfully belong to her, because their grandmother had given it to them, and she was the next in line for the precious heirloom being the younger sister.

"So she decided to take the only thing I had left of my mother out of her own greed!" Marcella's shock had worn off and now she only felt pure anger. She stormed out of the building, taking the shortcut to her aunt's house, only a few miles from her own home. She knocked on the door aggressively, her forehead clenched in anger. No answer. She tried again, knowing that Julia had to be inside. Again, no response. Marcella was at her wits end. Since Julia would not give back the amulet, and not even answer the door, Marcella would have to do something she wished could be avoided. Hot tears fell down her delicate face as she ran home, her sandals kicking up a cloud of thick dust that fell over her clean body. She ran inside, grabbing a lead tablet and beckoning the scribe to follow her outside.

Marcella walked in silence with the scribe, swallowing her tears, and wiping her eyes. As they reached the building, Marcella's jaw set, and her eyes turned cold with fury. She led the way to the bathing complex and when they reached the water's edge, she said in a flat tone, "Please write what I speak."

She handed the tablet to the scribe along with an iron stylus used for etching words into the tablet. Marcella cleared her throat, then began to speak, telling the goddess Sulis Minerva all her troubles and gifting the amulet to Sulis so that it was now a theft from the goddess herself. She ended the message with a warning that if Julia did not return the amulet to her that Sulis Minerva should punish her until she felt so much anguish that she would eventually return the heirloom to Marcella. After reading over what the scribe had written, she nodded; satisfied, and threw the tablet into the steaming waters.

"Kayla!" her mother called, beckoning her to come. "Come look at this!" Kayla smiled slightly, then followed her to the next artifact. "It's a curse tablet, discovered by archaeologists in these very waters!" her mother exclaimed excitedly.

Kayla nodded and tried to decipher the engravings on the tablet, but then realized it was probably in Latin. She spotted a small sign directly underneath the artifact and read aloud: I have been wronged by my own kin and give to the goddess Sulis Minerva my treasured amulet. Let no good thing happen to her and let not peace come to her mind. May her lips be sealed and her eyes

opened so that she is filled with guilt and sorrow, hunger and fatigue until she returns the amulet to your temple.

Kayla's face lit up. "Wow. I wonder why she loved that amulet so much. I hope she got it back," she said curiously. A slow smile covered her face as she went to join her mother. Maybe this museum wouldn't be so bad after all.