



Necklace of Kisses

a novel

francesca
lia block



HarperCollins *Publishers*

NECKLACE OF KISSES. Copyright © 2005 by Francesca Lia Block. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Jaime Putorti

Printed on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Block, Francesca Lia.

Necklace of kisses : a novel / Francesca Lia Block.—1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-06-077751-6

1. Hotels—Fiction. 2. Runaway wives—Fiction. 3. Middle-aged women—Fiction. 4. Psychological fiction. I. Title

PS3552.L617N43 2005

813'.54—dc22

2004059651

05 06 07 08 09 ♦/RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Lydia

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family, my longtime editor and beloved friend Joanna Cotler, and my current editor, Alison Callahan, for helping this book come into existence. And thanks to Charlotte Zolotow for starting it all.



Necklace of Kisses

Kisses



Where were the kisses? Weetzie Bat wondered.

Even after almost twenty years, Weetzie and her secret agent lover man still threw each other against walls, climbed up each other's bodies like ladders, and attacked each other's mouths as if they were performing resuscitation. The kisses had been earthquakes, shattering every glass object in a room. They had been thunderstorms, wiping out electricity so that candles had to be lit; then, those kisses extinguished the candle flames. They had been rainstorms on the driest, thirstiest desert days, causing camellias, hydrangeas, agapanthus, and azaleas to bloom in the garden. Those kisses, Weetzie remembered—they had been explosions.

Now there were no kisses at all.

Weetzie dressed in a pair of cropped, zippered, pale orange pants, a silver-studded black belt, a pair of high-heeled ankle-

strap sandals, a black silk-and-lace camisole, a white satin trench, a pink Hello Kitty watch, and a pair of oversized rimless pink glasses with her name written in rhinestones on the lens. Then, carefully, thoughtfully, one by one, Weetzie took out of her closet:

*a lime green, pink, and orange kimono-print string bikini she
had made herself
two fresh, unopened packs of men's extra-small white tank
tops from the surplus store
new-fallen-snowy-white Levi's 501 jeans
men's black silk gabardine trousers from the Salvation Army,
tailored to fit
a pair of orange suede old-school trainers with white stripes
orange-leather, silver-studded slides
some bikini underwear and bras in black, white, pink, lime
green, and orange
a pink-and-green Pucci tunic from her best friend Dirk's
Grandma Fifi*

Weetzie put everything into a small white suitcase covered with pink roses and fastened with gold hardware. It was very important that everything was just right—fabulous, actually. She'd read an article in a fashion magazine, "Aceness at Any Age," and realized that she had already zipped through her twenties and thirties—only ten short years each—wearing Salvation Army finery mixed with her own wacky creations. She liked the jacket made of stuffed-animal pelts and the necklace of plastic baby dolls, but at forty she wasn't sure

that either looked particularly ace. And there was less and less time left to be fabulous now.

Why was fabulousness important? The world was a scary, sad place and adornment was one of the only ways she knew to make herself and the people around her forget their troubles. That was why she had opened her store almost five years ago. Everyone who entered the little square white house with miniature Corinthian columns, cherub statues, and French windows seemed to leave carrying armloads of newly handmade and spruced-up recycled vintage clothing, humming sixties girl-group songs, seventies glam and punk, eighties New Wave one-hit wonders, or nineties grunge, doing silly dances, and not caring what anyone thought.

Weetzie loved the old dresses she found and sold, because they had their own secret histories. She always wondered where, when, and how they had been worn. What they had seen. Old dresses were like old ladies. Except that the Pucci tunic, Emilia, still shone like a young girl.

In her white purse, Weetzie put her tiny pink Hello Kitty wallet, her huge black sunglasses case, a toothbrush, toothpaste and floss, deodorant, a bottle of jasmine-and-gardenia perfume, a tube of pink lipstick, a heart-shaped powder compact, travel-size bottles of sunscreen, moisturizer, hair gel, and shaving cream, a razor, a comb, and her cell phone. She smacked on some pink lip gloss and dumped that in, too. Then she went to look at Max, who was asleep with a newspaper covering his face.

Who was he? she wondered. This man with his head in a newspaper all the time. This man who had been her secret

agent lover for so long and was now just Max. They had hardly said a word to each other in days. There was nothing left to say. There were no kisses or even the ghosts of kisses floating through the air, waiting to be caught.

Weetzie caught a glimpse of herself in the heart-shaped mirror as she walked out of the door of the cottage where she and Max had been together for over two decades. Her hair was short and bleached platinum blonde, as it had been since she was a teenager. Her nose, chin, and ears were pointy, as a petulant fairy's, but her mouth was wide, soft, and affectionate. Her eyes were hidden under pink sunglasses, so she could not see the little lines that revealed her age, or the tears that were not there.

Gray



When Max woke up, he noticed that the room looked different. The walls, which Weetzie had painted to look like they were sleeping inside a rose, were gray, the color of newsprint. He just kept staring at the walls, wondering how this could be, if he was still dreaming. Then he felt an aching emptiness deep in his intestines and he knew she was gone.

He went and checked the closet for her small suitcase and her pink-and-green silk dress, but he already knew they weren't there. He remembered one of Weetzie's favorite movie scenes: Grace Kelly in *Rear Window*, how she comes to see Jimmy Stewart with only the tiniest case, and everything she needs—nightgown, robe, and slippers—tucked neatly inside. Weetzie had learned how to pack like that over the years. He wondered if he had told her how much he appreciated it. When they met, she jumbled everything into large

vinyl shopping bags. "I'm such a bag lady!" she laughed. He had actually loved that about her, too, at the time.

Max sat down on the floor and picked up the phone. He dialed Dirk and Duck.

"She's gone," he said when Dirk answered.

Dirk was quiet for a moment. "What did you expect, man," he finally said. Then, as if realizing how harsh he sounded, he added, "Sorry."

Max said, "Do you know where she went?"

"She didn't tell me."

"The room is gray."

"It's what?"

"Gray. The walls. It's like a newspaper in here."

"You must like that."

"Not necessary."

"If we hear anything, I'll let you know, okay?"

Max started to cough. It sounded like his old smoker's hack, but he'd quit years ago. He could almost taste the nicotine now. Maybe he could go down to the liquor store . . .

"Can we make you dinner?" Dirk asked.

"No thanks, man."

"You're okay?"

"Yeah."

"Well, call if you need anything," Dirk said to the dial tone.

Instead of buying cigarettes, Max went and sat on the floor in Weetzie's closet. When they moved back to the cottage, they had converted one of the bedrooms into a closet for her because she said that ever since she was a kid, she didn't care how small her house was, as long as she could

have a walk-in. He realized that he hadn't noticed what she wore in a long time. It used to be such a source of delight to him, every morning, to see how she put her outfits together. Now he ran his hands along the carefully organized racks. They were sorted by color and style, as well as chronologically. It was like looking at a little movie of their lives. There was the red satin minidress she wore on their first date with those rhinestone chandelier earrings that brushed her shoulders. The sundress made out of kids' sheets printed with piglets. The pink velour minidress. The Levi's with intricate layers of colorful suede fringe sewn down the legs. The black steel-toed engineer boots she wore with fifties taffeta prom dresses when she slammed in the pit at punk gigs.

Then he saw the pink-and-black Chanel suit she had inherited from Dirk's Grandma Fifi. He held it in his hands and felt the soft, nubby fabric. It smelled like gardenias and jasmine. She liked to wear the jacket with jeans or over a pink silk slip, the skirt with a black camisole, bare legs and stilettos. He was so relieved that Coco, as she called it, was here. It meant that somehow, maybe, she would be back.

The Lost Kiss



Weetzie had gone to her high school prom at the pink hotel. She had asked Dirk McDonald, who was the coolest of all the boys and still one of her best friends in the whole world, but at the time he told her there was no way he would ever do anything related to high school unless it was absolutely mandatory. He said she could join him for a Pink's hot dog and a gig at the Whiskey. But she was determined to experience one normal high school thing before she left forever, so when Zane Starling asked her to the prom, she said yes.

Zane Starling and Weetzie met in their social studies class, where they worked together on a project about teenage suicide. He was six foot two, with spiky blond hair, green eyes, and golden skin. In the afternoons, Weetzie roller-skated through Hollywood to his small stucco house surrounded by generations of transplanted Christmas trees. They sat in his

dark, pine-scented room talking about what would make someone want to kill himself. These conversations proved how sensitive Zane Starling was, as well as perfect-looking. He told Weetzie that he had had a huge crush on her friend, Tracy Calla, but that she was an ice princess and that he was over her, which showed that he was a person of substance. He played David Bowie albums, which demonstrated that, unlike ninety-five percent of the boys at Weetzie's high school who only listened to heavy metal, he was utterly cool. Then he asked Weetzie if he could paint her, which proved that he was also artistic and attentive.

On prom night, Zane Starling, wearing a rented black tuxedo and an aqua blue shirt, borrowed his father's station wagon and picked Weetzie up. He told her she looked beautiful in the aqua blue satin taffeta dress that she had found at a vintage shop and shortened to the top of her thighs by removing two tiers of ruffles, the devilishly pointed paler aqua blue satin pumps, tiny white fishnet gloves, and an aqua-blue-rhinestone-studded cat collar. Zane Starling pinned a white-tea-rose-and-lily-of-the-valley corsage onto Weetzie's dress and handed her a present wrapped awkwardly in tissue. It was the painting he had made, and it looked just like her.

When they arrived at the hotel, Zane left the car with the valet, took Weetzie's arm, and walked her up the staircase into the ballroom, where they danced all night until Zane Starling's aqua blue shirt was soaked sheer with sweat. Then they slipped out into the gardens of the hotel, under a rose arbor, beside a small pond full of waterlilies. Weetzie imagined that Zane Starling's kiss could have healed anyone who

might have thought they wanted to die, that she would see angels with shocks of iridescent hair and luminous thunderbolts on their faces. But instead of waiting to see if this was true, she pulled away from Zane Starling and told him she wanted to go home. When he dropped her off at her door, she couldn't stop crying, though she could not have said why. Later, she realized it was because Zane Starling could have been the one, and she was too afraid and too young for him to be the one, and she knew it would never happen that way again. Also, Weetzie was thinking of Tracy Calla, who was dark-skinned, had big breasts and long, shiny hair, and had sat at the table next to Weetzie and Zane Starling with her boyfriend, a model who looked at least five years older than anyone else at the prom. Weetzie kept glancing over at their table and wondering how Zane Starling could like her if he really wanted Tracy Calla. When she saw the painting he made of her, she realized even more clearly that she looked nothing like his dark, voluptuous dream girl.

So Weetzie never returned Zane Starling's call. Later, she found out that Dirk was gay. She met Max, who was small and dark and brooding, and whom she loved in all the chambers of her heart but never kissed anymore. Many nights, lying beside him, their bodies not touching, Weetzie dreamed of a pink palace full of dancing ghosts. And so she would go to the hotel now, seeking the kiss she had lost.

