

Join Anne, Liz, and Jacob Nguyen as they unlock the secrets of their magical gifts!

I hear a sound like wind whistling through trees. I feel her with me. Grandma Nội appears and looks directly at me.  
"Anne, I need your help!"

Organized and thoughtful Anne Nguyen misses her Grandma Nội. A lot. But even though Grandma Nội passed away, it doesn't mean she's disappeared. When Anne and her younger siblings are given gifts passed on to them by Grandma, Anne soon realizes that hers—a jade bangle—has a secret power.

And now it's up to Anne to figure out how to use it.



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THE NGUYEN KIDS

The Secret of the JADE BANGLE

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THE  
NGUYEN KIDS

# The Secret of the JADE BANGLE



written by  
Linda Trinh  
illustrated by  
Clayton Nguyen

THE  
**NGUYEN KIDS**

*The Secret of the*  
**JADE BANGLE**



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 **annick  
press**  
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For Lexi and Evan—your stories matter.

—L.T.

To my family.

—C.N.



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# CHAPTER 1

## Family Ghosts

I, Anne Nguyen, believe in ghosts. Not the kind of ghosts that hide in dark corners and yell *boo!* Not scary ghosts, but family ghosts.

Dad and Mom say we Vietnamese believe the spirits of our family, our ancestors, stay with us after they pass away. They hear our prayers. They watch out for us.

My Grandma Nội died in early spring but we still remember her. Today is the new moon, the day each month we make offerings on her altar. It's my job as the eldest child (I'm nine!) to clean the altar set up in our dining room. As I wipe down the framed picture of Grandma Nội's smiling face, I smile. I look forward to offering days. They make me feel closer to her.

On the altar, there are three ceramic bowls of jasmine rice, three cups of black tea, barbecue pork, kale salad, lasagna, apples, and oranges. We invite the ancestors to share in our meal.

My seven-year-old sister Elizabeth brings out the chopsticks and I line them up neatly next to the bowls.





“You’re super helpful, Liz. Thanks!”

She grins at me. Attention makes her light up.

“I miss her,” Liz whispers.

I hug Liz. “Me too.”

Grandma Nôi came to all my ballet shows. She brought my favorite flowers, pink carnations. She slipped me guava candies when Mom and Dad weren’t looking.

I loved when she put both her hands on my face. The green jade bangle she wore was cold and smooth along my chin.

Mom sets out chocolate chip cookies on the altar. “We are ready.”

I rearrange the cookie platter. Everyone in my family knows I like things super nice and neat.

I look over at my six-year-old brother playing on the couch. “Jacob, no more messes. We’re having dinner soon.”

“Not yet! Grandma Nội eats first,” he replies without looking up from his small building blocks.

I shake my head. Jacob may be spoiled as the baby of the family, but he pays attention.

Dad takes out five joss sticks, long and skinny incense, and lights them. He hands one to each of us—me, Liz, Jacob, and Mom.

Dad closes his eyes. He begins to whisper his prayers, like the rest of the family. It sounds half English and half Vietnamese. I only know a few Vietnamese words.

I hold the joss stick with both hands and close

my eyes. I cough as the flowery smell fills my nose and reaches down my throat.



I say very softly, “Hi, Grandma Nội. It’s me, Anne. We went on vacation to Vancouver to visit Mom’s family. I can’t believe grade four starts in a couple weeks. Mrs. Smith’s invitation-only ballet class starts the middle of September too! This is going to be a super-great year. I miss you.”

## **CHAPTER 2**

# Red Velvet Box

The day before school starts, Liz, Jacob, and I are over at Auntie Hai's house. We help her and my cousins Hanh and Hao clean up their yard. The sun is super warm. At least there are no more mosquitoes now, always annoying in Winnipeg.

I'm in the kitchen to get water for everyone.

I run my hand along the counter and remember Grandma Nội standing at the stove frying my favorite chả giò spring rolls. We spent a lot of time here together. There's an ache in my chest.

Auntie Hai walks in. "Everything okay?"

I nod.

"Thinking about Bà Nội?" she asks.

That's how to say "your dad's mom" in Vietnamese. I nod again, tears sitting at the corners of my eyes.

Grandma and Grandpa Nội always lived with Auntie Hai, Dad's older sister. They live a few blocks away from us. Grandpa Nội lives here still and is taking a nap now.

"We didn't see her in the hospital," I say. I

remember crying on Dad's shoulder when he told us she died.

“She was very sick, and her hair fell out,” Auntie Hai reminds me. “We have the altar. Still with us.”

Auntie Hai helped us set up our altar like the one at her house. Auntie knows more about Vietnamese stuff than Dad and Mom do. She was born in Vietnam. Both Mom and Dad were born here, in Canada.

Auntie takes my hand. “Call all the other kids in. Have something for you.”

Grandpa Nội joins us all in the living room. Auntie opens the shoebox she's holding, and we peer inside.

“Cool. Bà Nội's stuff,” Hao says.

Auntie Hai smiles. “Was saving these. Think she would want you to have them. Hanh, as the oldest, her necklace.”

Hanh, my 15-year-old cousin, takes the gold chain and gold pendant of the Buddha sitting on a lotus. She squeals.

“Anne,” Auntie Hai says, handing me a red velvet box.

“Cám ơn, Auntie,” I say, and open the box after thanking her. I got Grandma Nội’s green jade bangle! I clasp the box to my heart and feel a warm glow.

Hao, who is the same age as me, gets her fountain pen, and he nods his head.

Liz gets her pearl earrings. She gazes at the





other gifts, trying to decide if we all got better gifts than she did.

And Jacob gets her blue silk fan. “Grandpa, look.” He moves to sit next to Grandpa Nội and together they look at the painted animals of the Vietnamese zodiac on the fan.





At home that night before getting into bed, I open the red velvet box and carefully put on the jade bangle. I think of Grandma Nội. I think of her scent of herbal medicine, her warm hands, and her big laugh.

I hear a sound like wind whistling through trees. I feel her with me.

Grandma Nội appears and looks directly at me. “Anne, I need your help!”

## CHAPTER 3

# Me, Why Me?

“Grandma Nội? Is that you?” I ask. Do I dare to hope?

I can see her, but she is blurry. She is like a reflection in water.

I feel both her hands on my face. Like she used to do. “Cháu yêu quý. Precious granddaughter,” she whispers.



“It is you! Why haven’t you appeared like this to me before?” I ask.

“That’s not important. I’m here now. Keep the bracelet safe and wear it when you need me,” she says.

I nod. “Yes, Grandma Nội. Do you visit others in the family? Dad? And Auntie Hai?”

She smiles and shrugs her shoulders. “That’s between me and them. It’s not for you to know. Just like what happens between us is not for others to know. I hear all your prayers. I’m happy you are excited for school and ballet to start. Remember to work hard,” she says.

“Yes, Grandma Nội,” I whisper, beginning to smile. Her care, her love, it feels so familiar.

“Granddaughter, I need your help. I’m not pleased, and the rest of the ancestors are not either. We’re not happy with the food your parents offer us. Why lasagna? Why salad? What about phở, bánh xèo, bò kho! I may be dead, but I still enjoy a nice meal!” She laughs.



I giggle. I forgot how super funny Grandma can be sometimes. “They’re always busy.”

“Convince them to prepare the food from our homeland,” she says.

“But they don’t cook a lot of Vietnamese food. You made us phở,” I reply.

She nods slowly. “I didn’t have the time to teach your dad how to make phở or other foods. I was busy working.”

We are both silent for a while.

“So, what happens if the ancestors aren’t happy?” I ask.

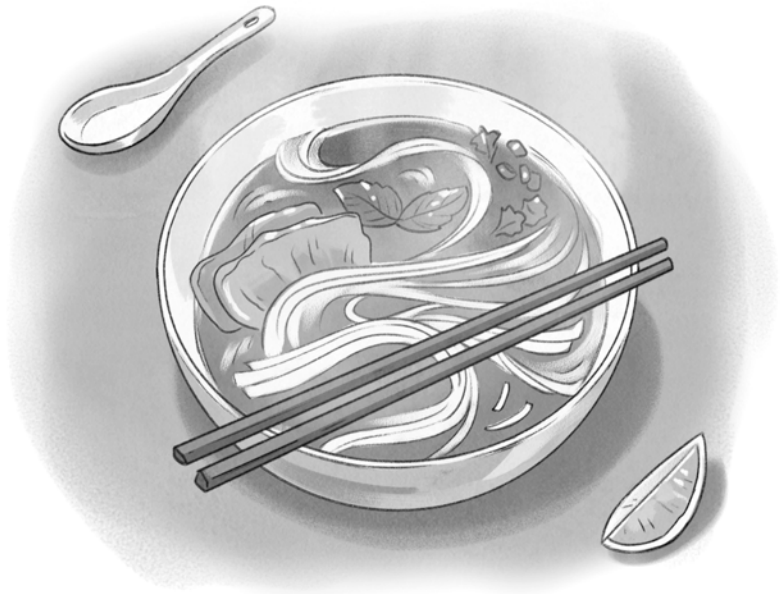
“They won’t grant you good fortune. You must keep the harmony within the family. It’s very important.”



I play with the jade bangle around my wrist.

“I know!” Grandma Nội’s eyes crinkle at the corners. “I will teach you to cook Vietnamese food.” She looks pleased with her plan.

“Me? Why me?” I ask. “Why not Hanh? She’s the eldest.”



“Precious granddaughter, you followed me around the kitchen. You have the curiosity and attention to do this. It’s you I choose,” she says, and I feel her hands holding mine.

I want to say yes. I want to make Grandma Nội happy and keep her with me. But I’m scared. What if I can’t cook? What if I disappoint her?