



Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

MOTHER'S TOMB

PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

TO THE MOON

It was a scorching July evening, but the woman didn't care. Air conditioning kept her cool. She lounged comfortably in a beautiful, oversized chair. Her hair was styled and stiff. The gown she wore was perfect for hosting a party. But there was no such event. She hadn't invited any guests. The woman never entertained anymore.

One of her painted red fingernails tapped on the rim of a glass. She focused on the television.

A curly-haired child sat on the floor nearby, stacking wooden blocks.

The woman set the glass on a table beside her and began twisting a large diamond ring on her finger.

On the television screen, an image of the moon appeared. Then a news anchor spoke. "The date's now indelible. It's going to be remembered as long as man survives."

Turning to the child, the woman smiled. "Are you having fun, my dear?"

There was no response.

"Not to worry, love, I won't go to the moon. I will never leave. We will be together forever."

A door swung open, and a maid entered the room. She reached for the child's hand. "It's time for a bath, little one." The maid sighed when the child pulled away.

"Come now," the well-dressed woman said. Her voice held a tinge of annoyance. "Be good."

The child obeyed, taking the maid's hand. Alone in the room, the woman turned her

attention back to the television. She took another sip from her glass as she watched the first man to ever walk on the moon. That should have impressed her. But it didn't. Her thoughts remained on the child.

“No one will take you from me.” She gritted her teeth. “No one.”



CHAPTER 2

THIEF

Luna Garza dumped a small bowl of chopped mangoes into a blender. It was the final ingredient for a delicious smoothie. She tightened the lid and pressed a button. The blaring sound of the mixer filled the kitchen. Remembering to grab a spoon, Luna turned around.

She noticed her dad standing in the doorway. Mr. Garza's hands were on his hips. His mouth was moving, but Luna couldn't hear him. Then she pushed another button on the blender. Immediately, the thunderous noise stopped.

Mr. Garza dropped his arms to his side. “Lulu, I’m trying to have a conversation with Officer Kent.” He used Luna’s pet name. It was something he and Luna’s mom tried not to do. Luna had told them it made her feel like a little girl.

She wanted to remind her dad of that. But Luna just innocently shrugged. “Sorry, Dad.” Then she pointed to the blender. “Luckily, I made enough for three.”

Mr. Garza shook his head and left the kitchen.

Curiosity tugged at Luna, so she followed her dad into the living room.

Officer Willow Kent stood next to the couch. When she saw Luna trailing her dad into the room, she smiled.

Luna knew the officer. The woman in uniform had come to her school last month. Officer Kent had given a presentation about public safety.

“Thank you again for stopping by,” Luna’s dad said to the officer.

The woman nodded at him. “On the phone, you said there was new evidence.”

“There is,” Mr. Garza replied.

Luna knew what her dad and Officer Kent were talking about. Last week, Mrs. Garza had entered their cellar. She noticed that jars of homemade plum jam were gone. Luna’s favorite pickles were also missing. The latch of the cellar door had been broken too.

Nothing like this had ever happened to the Garzas. Apple Glen, Ohio, was a quiet place. Luna’s family lived in the safest neighborhood in town. Her parents had wanted a new adventure. They moved from California to Apple Glen over a year ago. It was a faded American town that had fallen on hard times. But some people, like the Garzas, tried to make it better.

Luna’s parents had purchased a big old

two-story house as their new home. But it needed work. While Luna's dad traveled for his job, Mrs. Garza restored their house. Restoration was her passion, and she had created her own business. Now she restored mostly furniture and buildings for other people. She was currently working on a project in Dayton, Ohio, and would return in a few weeks.

Mrs. Garza had filed a police report before leaving for her business trip. Officer Kent had suggested installing small security cameras outside. One was placed on the side of the house. It pointed at the cellar door. Another camera was installed above the front porch. Luna's parents could stream the footage from anywhere, on any device.

Mr. Garza grabbed the TV remote and pressed a button. "Here's the evidence from last night."

On the large screen, they watched as someone tried to open the locked cellar door. The person wore dark pants and shoes.

Officer Kent shook her head. “Just as I thought. Your suspect returned.”

“Wow, Dad.” Luna shook her head. “That camera angle is terrible. We can’t even see his face.”

Mr. Garza glanced at her. “I know, Luna.”

“We don’t yet know that it’s a man,” Officer Kent said to Luna. “It could be a woman.”

“Good point,” Mr. Garza said.

The officer took notes and told Mr. Garza she would be in touch. She continued chatting with him at the entryway.

Luna watched video footage of the front porch. The thief ran down the Garzas’ long driveway. Then Luna noticed something odd. Instead of running left or right at the

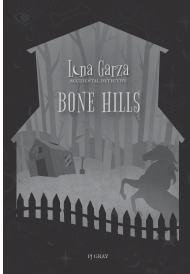
sidewalk, the person simply walked across the street and slipped into darkness.

“Why didn’t the thief keep running?” Luna whispered. “And what’s across the street?”

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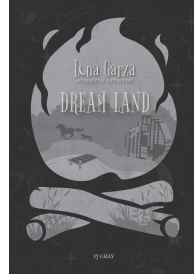
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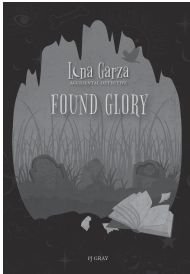
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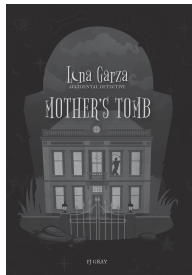
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When someone steals from the Garza family, Luna decides to dig into the case. Her investigation leads her to the dusty doorsteps of the mysterious Rothmont mansion. Can she uncover the secrets that lie within its walls and stop the thief from striking again?

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