



Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

KILLER CHILL



PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

VICTORIOUS

He awoke in a small boat. A sharp pain throbbed in his head. His eyes were purple and swollen. Yet he spotted a sliver of blue sky above. A buzzing fly circled twice and landed on his cheek. He moved to swat it away. But it was impossible for him to reach the insect. Thick chains bound the man's limbs. The chains were wound around heavy rocks. Screaming for help would be useless. No one could hear the man if he tried.

A figure appeared above him and leaned toward his face. Then a large fist hit the man's cheek. Despite his blurred vision, the

man noticed a raised scar that stretched diagonally across the figure's face.

“Where did you put the money?” the figure demanded.

The man didn't answer. Instead, his thoughts drifted to his life of crime. It began when he was a teenager. Petty theft had led to stealing cars. Next, he spent time in prison. He joined a gang there. After being released, he started robbing banks for the gang's leader. But his last bank robbery was different. He decided to do it alone without telling the gang's boss. If the man could escape the gang, he could keep all the money he stole.

A heavy fist struck his face again. “Did you hear me?” the figure yelled. “The boss is very upset with you. I'm going to give you one more chance. Where's the money?”

Seconds passed in silence. Then the bound man slowly shook his head. A victorious smile spread across his lips.

“Okay,” the figure said. “It’s your funeral.”

The man was dragged up to a sitting position. With one swift kick to the chest, he fell over the side of the boat. His body quickly sank into the dark water.



CHAPTER 2

TIMBER PEAK

After adjusting her knit cap for the fourth time, Luna Garza wondered if she would ever feel comfortable wearing a hat. The temperature outside was frigid. Luna needed the hat. Still, it annoyed her.

She gazed out the car window, choosing to focus on something else instead. Afternoon sunshine peeked through the clouds. Newly fallen snow blanketed the ground. It glittered like diamonds. Today was another chilly January day in Ohio.

Buzz.

Luna's phone vibrated in her hand. She glanced at the screen.

Her best friend, Amber Robbins, had texted. "I'm so excited for you! It's your first ski trip to . . . wait, where are you going?"

"Mom," Luna said. "Where are we headed again? Amber wants to know."

"It's called Kendall House," Mrs. Garza replied from the passenger seat.

Luna furrowed her brow. "No, I mean the area."

"Timber Peak," Mr. Garza said as he rounded a corner. "It's about an hour outside of Apple Glen."

The Garzas had moved to Apple Glen, Ohio, almost two years ago. It was a faded American town that had fallen on hard times. Some people, like the Garzas, wanted to make it better. Mr. and Mrs. Garza also craved a new adventure. They bought a big old two-story

house that needed a lot of work. While Luna's dad traveled for his job, Mrs. Garza restored their house. From that work, she had created her own business. Now she restored mostly furniture and buildings for other people.

"And your client's name is Mr. Kendall?" Luna asked her mom.

"Of House Kendall," her dad joked.

Mrs. Garza smiled and waved her finger at him. "Don't you start." Then she turned in her seat to face Luna. "Yes, his name is Mr. Kendall."

The client was a wealthy businessman from New York. He invested money in real estate. Recently, he had purchased a large home on Timber Peak.

Mrs. Garza continued. "Do you remember that magazine article about my business?"

Luna nodded.

"Well, Mr. Kendall read it. There were

photos of the work I did at the Widmark Hotel. He was so impressed that he hired me.”

Luna scratched at her knit cap. “What will you do for him?”

“Parts of the house need to be restored. Mr. Kendall said that it has damaged walls throughout. The house was built years ago. But it has been vacant for a long time.” Mrs. Garza turned to face forward in her seat again. “Believe it or not, he bought the house online without seeing it first.”

“That’s very . . . brave?” Luna replied.

Her dad chuckled.

Luna returned to admiring the fresh snow. “When are we going skiing?”

Growing up on the California coast, Luna never had the opportunity to ski. But she had always wanted to learn.

Mr. Garza looked at his daughter in the rearview mirror. “We’ll go tomorrow. It’s

supposed to snow again tonight. That will be better for skiing.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Garza added. “There’s a ski park near Kendall House. I know Mr. Kendall invited us as guests for the long weekend. But remember, this is also a work trip for me.”

Luna scratched her knit cap again. Frustrated, she swiped the hat off her head and tossed it on the seat.

Her parents smiled when they heard their daughter sigh in relief.

Mrs. Garza turned back around to face Luna. “By the way, you won’t be the only person hitting the slopes for the first time this weekend.”

“Mr. Kendall has never been skiing?” Luna asked.

“He has,” her mom replied. “But one of his grandsons hasn’t.”

Luna was confused. “He has grandsons? They’ll be there?”

Mrs. Garza nodded. “They’re staying at Kendall House this weekend too. The boys are from Dallas, Texas. Mr. Kendall said his grandsons needed to spend time away from the city.”

Luna quickly texted Amber with the surprising news.

Amber texted back, asking for the grandsons’ ages.

“One of the boys is in high school,” Mrs. Garza said. “I’m not sure about the other one. He might be your age.”

Luna relayed the information to Amber.

Her friend replied with a smiley face.

“What if we have nothing in common?” Luna blurted.

Her dad shrugged. “Well, two of you are learning to ski. That’s a start.”

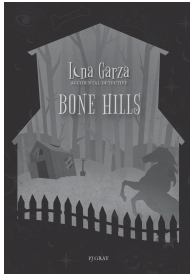
Mrs. Garza chimed in. “It’ll be a great weekend. I’m sure we’ll all have fun. But don’t forget—”

“It’s also a work trip,” the Garzas said in unison.

Icna Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

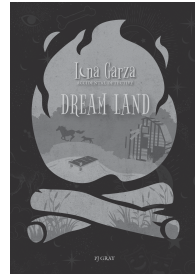
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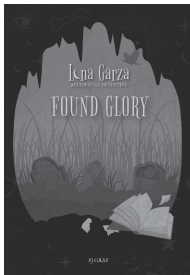
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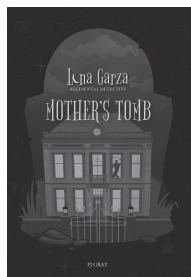
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The Garza family is invited to spend a snowy weekend on Timber Peak, and Luna is thrilled. Then chilling messages from a strange presence become impossible for Luna to ignore. Can she figure out what's going on, or will everyone at Timber Peak be left out in the cold?

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