



Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

COAL SPELL

PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

DUST TO DUST

A hand reached into the darkness and pulled the chain hanging from the ceiling. Instantly, a single light bulb lit the room.

The young man stepped inside and looked around. He had never set foot in the maintenance room before. There was a long wooden workbench on one wall. Shelves filled with paint cans and tools hung above it. In the air, a damp, musty smell lingered. A large furnace door took up most of another wall. Across from it was a narrow metal door.

“Hello?” the man called. He walked over to the metal door and knocked. “Sir? Are

you here?” Slowly, he opened the door and leaned inside. The air in the pitch-black room was thick with coal ash. It made breathing difficult.

Just as he was about to turn around, someone pushed him from behind. The man stumbled forward. Then the coal room door slammed shut behind him.

“Hey!” he cried in the darkness. Pieces of coal littered the floor, making it hard to walk. The man spun around and grabbed the doorknob. It was locked. He pounded on the door with his fists. “Open up! Let me out!”

He looked up. The only light in the room came from the thin rays of sunlight streaming through the cracks of a small square door near the ceiling. Then that door opened. A shaft of daylight beamed into the room. Seconds later, black coal began pouring through the opening.

“Wait!” the man yelled. “Stop!”

Pieces of coal showered into the room from above. The man tried to scream, but the dust made him cough and choke. He attempted to climb the ever-growing pile of coal, but he lost his footing. His eyes were blinded by the thick black dust.

Within minutes, the room was filled with coal. It became the young man's grave.



CHAPTER 2

HARDLY A TRIP

Luna Garza sat on the edge of her bed and stared at the open suitcase on the floor. She sighed. Clothes were scattered around her bedroom.

“Be sure to pack enough school clothes for a whole week!” her mom shouted from the hallway.

Luna rolled her eyes. “I know, Mom.”

There was a reason for Luna’s lack of enthusiasm. Packing usually meant going on a trip, and she loved traveling. But this time, there was hardly a trip at all. Luna and her mom were going to stay at an old hotel in

downtown Apple Glen. Her mom was working there. She had been hired to help restore the hotel before it reopened.

Luna was proud of her mom. The Garza family had moved to Apple Glen, Ohio, a couple of years ago. Mr. and Mrs. Garza had wanted a new adventure. They bought a big, old two-story house. But it needed a lot of work. Like the town of Apple Glen, the house had fallen on hard times. Bringing it back to its former glory became the Garzas' mission.

While Luna's dad traveled for his job, Mrs. Garza got to work restoring their house. Then she took everything she learned and turned it into her own business. Now people hired her to restore old furniture, antiques, and even buildings. Her latest job was at the Widmark Hotel. It was one of the oldest hotels in Ohio. Mrs. Garza had been working long days on the demanding project.

"Luna!" Mrs. Garza exclaimed. She was

standing in the bedroom doorway, eyeing the clothes that Luna had flung everywhere. “Look at your room. What have you been doing all this time?”

Mrs. Garza could see that Luna wasn’t happy. She sat on the bed and grabbed Luna’s hand. “I know you don’t want to go,” she said. “But it’s only for a week. It will be fun.”

“Do I have to go to the hotel with you? Why can’t I stay here? It would be so much easier. I’ll miss my bed.” Luna flopped back onto her mattress.

“We’ve already discussed this,” her mom said. “Your father won’t be back from his business trip for another week. Plus, I’ll be working early in the morning and late at night at the hotel. You can’t stay home alone for that long. Staying at the hotel makes the most sense.”

Luna grabbed her pillow and sat up. “Can’t Ann just check on me?” Ann was their

next-door neighbor. She often looked in on Luna when she was home alone.

“Didn’t I tell you?” her mom said. “Ann is visiting her family in Texas for the next two weeks.”

“Amber said I could stay at her house.” Amber Robbins was Luna’s best friend.

“No, Luna.”

“Why not? I’ve spent the night there before.”

“Spending the night is one thing. Staying a week is a different story.”

Luna looked at her open suitcase again and sighed.

“Listen,” Mrs. Garza said softly. “You can come home when your father gets back. The hotel won’t be so bad. I promise.”

“How do you know?” Luna squeezed her pillow. “The place is still under construction. It’s not even open yet. You will be busy working. What will I do there?”

“The days will pass quickly. You still have school and homework. We can get takeout for dinner. There is also a pool in the hotel’s basement. Why don’t you invite Amber to come swim with you?”

Luna’s eyes brightened. “Really? That would be fun.”

Mrs. Garza kissed Luna’s forehead and stood up. “It’s getting late. Let’s finish packing and drive over to the hotel. Tomorrow is a school day for you, and my team has a lot to do.”

“School!” Luna jumped up. “How will I get there? Can I bring my bike?”

“You don’t need to. The hotel bought brand-new bikes for guests to rent. You’ll be the first test rider. Just make sure to bring your helmet.” Mrs. Garza smiled as she turned to go.

“Mom!” Luna cried. “One more thing.”

“What now?”

“The hotel is old, right? Do you know if it has any ghosts?” Luna grinned.

Mrs. Garza shook her head as she walked out of the room.