



Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

ONCE BITTEN

PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

SPLIT SECOND

The morning sunlight barely cut through the dense trees. This made the woods dimmer and more private. Yet it offered a perfect view of the teenager. He was kneeling on a boulder near a large pond. The black pencil in his hand moved swiftly across the page of a sketchbook. He was often praised for his drawings. Beside him was an empty mason jar. Tiny holes were poked in the jar's lid.

Birds sang in the distance. *I bet those are lark sparrows*, the teen thought with a smile.

Behind him, a figure stirred in a patch

of bushes. A wide smile spread across the person's lips.

With quick, confident movements, the teen captured a big spider in the jar. Raising the container, he observed his catch. Then he set down the jar and began to write in his notepad.

As the sunlight strengthened, it started to make the area brighter.

Now is the time to act, the figure thought. Carefully, the person crept toward the teen. The smile on their face had disappeared.

About 50 feet away, the teen set down his notepad. He reached for the jar and began untwisting its lid. "Time to go, Mr. Spider."

He lay the container sideways on the rock. Then he tapped the bottom of the jar. Seeming to obey him, the spider began its escape.

Noticing a shadow, the teen turned around. Gripping a large rock, the figure

towered above him. The teen's mouth opened in surprise just as the rock came crashing down on him. It was over in a split second. After exiting the jar, the spider scurried away. Birds continued singing in the distance.

Yes, those are lark sparrows, the teen thought. Then he closed his eyes for the last time.



CHAPTER 2

THE PRIZE

Mrs. Garza rarely took an afternoon to relax. But this Saturday was different. She was enjoying the company of her neighbor Ann Watson. They had gone to the art fair. Now the two women were drinking coffee at Mrs. Garza's kitchen table. Ann had brought a dozen freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

"More coffee?" Mrs. Garza asked.

"Yes, please," Anne replied.

Mrs. Garza refilled her neighbor's mug.

"My husband claims I make it too strong."

Anne smiled. "I disagree. It's a perfect cup."

Mrs. Garza nodded. “When he returns from his business trip, I’ll make sure to tell him I have your vote.”

“Please do,” Anne said. Then she changed the subject. “I just love the way you’ve restored this kitchen.” She pointed to one corner of the room. “Are those the original cabinets?”

Mrs. Garza blushed a little. “They are.”

“Wow!” Ann smiled. “They’re beautiful.”

Suddenly, the front door slammed shut. Mrs. Garza steadied her hand to avoid spilling hot coffee on her neighbor. Then she smiled at Ann. “Luna’s home.”

Moments later, Luna Garza and her best friend, Amber Robbins, entered the kitchen laughing.

“Hi, girls,” Mrs. Garza said. “How was Science Saturday?”

Amber’s eyes lit up. “It was amazing, Mrs. Garza! The community center was packed with people.”

Each girl pulled out a chair and sat at the table. Luna reached for the plate of cookies. “We’re learning about drones. It’s so cool what people are doing with that technology.”

Ann took a sip of her coffee. “Oh, really? Like what?”

“Well, drones are being used to restore mangrove forests in Panama,” Amber said. “They fly over land plots and release balls of mangrove seeds. This saves money and labor time. It’s happening here in the U.S. too!”

Luna wiped a cookie crumb from the corner of her mouth. “We’re going to build one next week. A drone, not a forest.”

Ann and Mrs. Garza chuckled.

“That’s very impressive,” Mrs. Garza said. “It sounds like you are both learning so much.”

Luna nodded. “How was the art fair?”

“We had a wonderful time,” Ann said.
“Your mom won a raffle prize.”

Luna looked at her mom. “Really?”

Mrs. Garza smiled. “It’s upstairs in your room.”

Amber and Luna stared at each other for a moment. Luna raised an eyebrow. Her friend nodded. The girls thanked Ann for the cookies. Then they raced upstairs to Luna’s room.

A full-length mirror stood in the corner. The frame was made from pieces of twisted metal. Luna and Amber stepped closer. They carefully touched the frame.

Mrs. Garza leaned against the doorway.
“What do you think?”

Luna admired how the metal pieces curved and coiled like vines. “I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s amazing.”

Amber pointed to the top of the frame.
“What’s that?”

It was an oval-shaped emblem with a cross in the middle. Something was engraved on the cross.

Luna looked closer. They were letters. “A-G-H. What does that mean?”

Amber shrugged.

Mrs. Garza squinted at the letters. “I met the artist at the fair. Maybe she would know.”

Amber folded her arms across her chest. “Aliens grow hazelnuts? Ants go home?”

Confused, Luna tilted her head to one side.

Amber shrugged. “I’m just thinking about what AGH could stand for.”

Luna rolled her eyes. Then she laughed. No wonder Amber was her best friend.

Luna Garza

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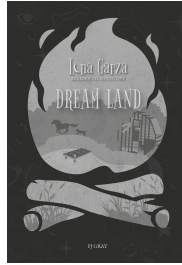
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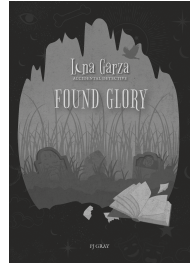
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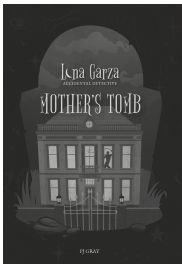
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ONCE BITTEN

When Luna is given a beautiful handcrafted mirror, she cannot hide her excitement. But the gift is causing Luna to ask questions. For example, who is the boy staring back at her in the night? Can she piece together the answers, or will Luna's hope of solving this case completely shatter?

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