

Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

DREAM LAND



PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

DREAM TO NIGHTMARE

The teen girl fell into bed, humming to herself. She replayed the night in her head. Her party had been a huge success. It was a perfect summer night. All her friends had come. Best of all, her crush was there.

While dancing with a group of girls, she had locked eyes with him. He looked away. Feeling brave, she had gone over and pulled him into their dance party. Some boys had been lighting fireworks from her family's dock. As they danced, colors had exploded overhead. Her heart had felt like it was bursting too.

A warm summer breeze came through the open window. It made the curtains sway gently. The hour was late. Before long, the girl's eyes closed. She fell into a deep sleep.

When she woke up, her room was filled with smoke. The girl jumped out of bed and went to the window. It was still dark, but an eerie glow shone through the smoke.

“Oh no!” she gasped.

She ran downstairs. The smoke was so thick she could hardly breathe. In seconds, she was out the door and in the backyard.

Flames had engulfed the barn. They were licking the side of the house.

“No!” she shouted.

In her bare feet, she ran as fast as she could through the woods. Her nightgown got caught on a low tree branch, causing her to stumble. By the time she reached the neighbor's house, her feet were bloody.

When Mrs. Grant opened the door, half-asleep, she could see the flames dancing in the trees.

“Fire! Call 911!” the girl screamed. Then she collapsed on her neighbor’s front porch, coughing uncontrollably.



CHAPTER 2

LAKE ARRIVAL

Luna Garza gazed out of the car window. It was a beautiful day for a drive. Amber Robbins, her best friend, was next to her in the back seat. Mrs. Garza was driving the girls to Lake Waman, where Amber's uncle lived.

“How far away is the lake?” Luna asked.

“About 20 miles outside of Apple Glen,” Mrs. Garza answered. “Luna, can you please check the directions on your phone? I've never driven to the lake before, and I don't want us to get lost.”

Luna rolled her eyes. “Come on, Mom. We

can't be lost. You've only been driving for ten minutes."

"I know," Luna's mom said. "But these winding roads are confusing."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Garza," Amber said. "I've been to the lake tons of times. This is the right way."

Luna smiled at her friend. Amber had grown up in Apple Glen and knew the area well. But Luna's family had moved to Ohio from California just a couple of years ago. At the time, Luna's parents were looking for a new adventure. They bought a big, old two-story house that needed a lot of work. The town of Apple Glen was similar in some ways. It had once been a bustling American town. Then it had fallen on hard times. People like the Garzas, however, had started moving in and trying to bring the town back to its former glory. While Mr. Garza traveled for his job, Mrs. Garza had

worked on restoring their house. She learned so much that she eventually started her own business. Restoring furniture and objects for other people became her passion.

“I’m looking forward to meeting your uncle, Amber,” Luna’s mom said from the driver’s seat. “His paintings are so beautiful.”

“He’s a painter?” Luna asked Amber. “You never told me that.”

“Yes, and a well-known one too!” Mrs. Garza said. “I’ve seen some of his paintings of the lake at the gallery downtown.”

“He does love to paint the lake,” Amber said. Then she turned to Luna. “I can’t believe you’ve never been there. We’re going to have so much fun! This will be the best start to summer break ever.”

When Amber had asked Luna if she wanted to spend a week at her uncle’s house on the lake, Luna jumped at the chance. Mr. Robbins was going on a business trip,

and Amber's mom had decided to join him. Amber's uncle was happy to have his niece visit. He'd even suggested she bring a friend. Luna was so happy her parents had let her go.

Amber leaned over to look out the windshield. "We're getting close," she said. "The house is up ahead." Then she pointed. "There it is on the right. See the red mailbox?"

The word *Boater* was painted in blue on the side of an old mailbox.

"Shouldn't it say *Robbins*?" Luna asked.

"Boater is my uncle's nickname."

Mrs. Garza carefully turned onto the long dirt driveway. It was lined with towering pine trees.

"Where's the lake?" Luna asked.

"It's close," Amber said. "You will see it once we get to the house."

A white two-story house with dark green shutters came into view. The front door was

painted the same shade of forest green. Flower boxes hung under the windows. Colorful spring flowers spilled out of them.

As they got out of the car, Amber's uncle stepped onto the front porch to greet them. He was tall and slim with a short gray beard. His white pants and shirt were neatly pressed, and he wore a navy blue blazer. A straw hat with a white ribbon around it sat on his head. Luna thought he looked like a movie character.

"Welcome," he said to Mrs. Garza and Luna, shaking their hands. "I'm Rowland Robbins, but everyone calls me Boater." Then he winked at Amber. "Except Amber. I'm *Uncle* Boater to her."

Luna looked around at the house and the thick forest surrounding it. This would be home for a week. She took a deep breath. The fresh air smelled so nice. *What a perfect place to relax*, she thought.