

The background of the cover is a large, irregular blue shape containing a stylized illustration of a forest. A winding path or stream flows through the trees. In the lower right, a white tent is pitched on a grassy area. In the foreground, several dark mushrooms are silhouetted against the blue background. The overall aesthetic is whimsical and atmospheric.

Lena Garza

ACCIDENTAL DETECTIVE

SCENT OF BLUE

PJ GRAY



CHAPTER 1

AFTER THE RAIN

A blanket of gray clouds hung over the forest. The smell of recent rain filled the damp air. When the old man stepped out of his shack onto the porch, he listened for the sound of raindrops.

“Come on, Blue,” he called, grabbing his walking stick. “The rain has stopped. Let’s move our lazy bones.”

A hound dog ambled out of the shack, stopping to stretch in the doorway. Blue was always at the man’s side. They were best friends.

“Do you think we’ll find gold today?” the

man asked as Blue sniffed his pants legs. “You’re right,” he chuckled. “I need a bath. But so do you.” His laughter led to a coughing spell. The dog barked as if he were laughing too.

Blue and the old man walked behind the shack. A large patch of mint grew there. The man plucked some leaves off a plant. He rubbed them on his face and neck, releasing the clean, minty smell.

“Who needs soap?” He laughed again, and the dog barked in agreement.

With the smell of mint hanging in the air, the pair walked into the woods. The hound knew the path well. His nose stayed close to the ground.

The old man walked behind him. “Slow down, Blue,” he said. “Not so fast.” They were in a familiar part of the woods when the dog stopped at some trees. He sniffed the forest floor and started digging.

“Did you find more?” the man asked, stepping toward the dog.

Blue continued to dig. The man laughed and clapped his hands. “Good boy, Blue!” he cried. “This is the spot. We’re going to be rich!”

A shotgun blast broke the quiet of the forest. The old man fell to the ground. He had been struck in the back of the head. Blue went to the man’s side and let out a sad howl. Then he took off running deep into the woods.



CHAPTER 2

FAREWELL DINNER

Luna Garza perched on the kitchen stool and inhaled deeply. “When do we eat?” she asked. “It smells amazing!”

“Soon,” Mrs. Garza answered. “Did you set the table yet?”

Luna pretended not to hear her. She was watching Marco as he stirred a big pot on the stove. “What are you making?” Luna asked him.

“Potato cheese soup,” he said. “There’s fresh-baked bread in the oven too.”

Luna’s stomach rumbled.

Marco Vargas was a friend of the Garza

family. His father had worked with Luna's dad in California. Their families were close. When Luna was little, Marco had babysat her. They had a special bond. He was like an older brother to her.

Since moving to Apple Glen over two years ago, Luna hadn't seen Marco or his family. Mr. and Mrs. Garza had decided to move to Ohio because they wanted a new adventure. Apple Glen seemed like the perfect place. It was a faded American town that had fallen on hard times. But the Garzas saw potential in it. They purchased a big, old two-story house and fixed it up. Mrs. Garza had learned so many new skills during the process that she started her own restoration business.

Luna's mom smiled at Marco. "You have spoiled us all week with your cooking."

"I'm the one who feels spoiled," Marco said. "You helped me find a job. And you gave me a

place to stay until my apartment was ready. Cooking for you is the least I can do.”

Marco was a chef. He had been working at a restaurant in California, but he wanted a head chef job. Mr. Garza had told him about a restaurant in downtown Apple Glen that was looking for one. A few weeks earlier, Marco had come for an interview and gotten the job. The restaurant was called Bunton’s. It was the type of place where people dressed up to dine. Critics considered it the best restaurant in town.

Finally, dinner was ready. Marco ladled the soup into bowls, and Luna placed them on the table. Everyone sat down to eat.

“Mmm,” Luna said after her first spoonful of soup. “Marco, we’re going to miss you around here. We might starve!”

Marco laughed. “I will miss you all too,” he said. “But don’t worry. I won’t be far away.

You're welcome to stop by the restaurant anytime. My apartment is just upstairs from the kitchen."

Mr. Garza grinned. "We can't wait, Marco. In fact, we were thinking of coming by for dinner this weekend."

"What?" Luna looked hurt. "Dad, I won't be here this weekend. You can't go without me!"

Mrs. Garza chuckled. "You know, Luna, sometimes your father and I like to go on a date, just the two of us. We promise to take you with us next time."

"You're going camping, right?" Marco asked Luna. "That sounds like fun." He passed the bread to her.

"Yes, she's going to nature camp," Mrs. Garza said.

"It's *science* camp, Mom," Luna corrected her.

"Oh, pardon me." Mrs. Garza laughed.

Luna turned to Marco. “My whole science class is going. We’re camping overnight in Poplar Woods. It’s about 30 minutes from here.”

“What will you do there?” Marco asked.

“We’re going to study the plant and animal life in the forest.”

“Sounds neat. Are you scared?”

“Scared?” Luna asked. “Of what?”

“I don’t know. Bears?”

Luna laughed. She thought about some of the spirits she had met in the past. “No. I think I can handle bears.”

Mr. Garza looked at Luna. “Yes, the bears are the ones who should be scared of my daughter!”

Everyone laughed.