

# SON OF A BUTT BURGER!

MONSTERS! MYSTERY! MIDDLE SCHOOL!

σειρήνα

Sarah Stole A Siren!

(SHORT STORIES)  
PABLO CIENFUEGOS

**Son of a Butt Burger**

Monsters! Mystery! Middle School!

Collection of Short Stories

Story 1

**Sarah Stole the Siren**

## **Not Enough**

Today they call me Not Enough  
Not Enough has many names

Not tall enough means Shorty  
Not short enough means Stretch  
Not smart enough means Moron  
Not skinny enough means Fat  
Not good enough means Thug  
Not bad enough means Nerd  
Not rich enough means Trash  
Not poor enough means Yuppie  
Not old enough means Punk  
Not young enough means Codger  
Not white enough means Alien  
Not black enough means Honky  
Not brown enough means Mixed  
Not red enough means Páshtinin  
Not yellow enough means Gweilo

Someday I will be enough.  
What will they call me?

## Prologue

How do you get a name like “Butt Burger?” How does Butt Burger even get married or have a son? After all, who in their right mind wants to be the “Son of a Butt Burger?” My son’s name is Jorge. Officially, he’s the son of a butt burger. My daughter’s Lily, but I’ve never worried about her catching my nickname. She’s pretty quiet and on the level with all the normal people in town. My actual name is Luis Alvarez. My wife’s Melanie. We all have our moments, but as a family, we make it work.

We have a few stories about how Jorge started solving mysteries around town. I’m really proud because I started to do the same thing around his age with my Uncle Aaron, who was a policeman for Prospect, Washington]. Everybody, especially you if you are in middle school, needs something to practice and be good at. It doesn’t matter if they don’t see it right away. I love science. Maybe you love something else. If you don’t know, don’t worry. Time will tell.

Why “Butt Burger?” For tales of my mystery solving when I was your age, stay tuned. It starts with a guy who is now my best friend. In middle school, he was my mortal enemy. Life is weird. His name is Teddy Gelman.

In third grade, he kept getting in trouble for calling me “A- Burger” and didn’t want detention anymore, so he switched my name to “Butt Burger” in case a teacher heard him yell it at me. Like gum under a desk, the name stuck. I have Asperger’s. All it means is that I’m not good with people and I’m really smart.

I hated talking. When I started school, my teachers thought I was retarded. I know adults hate that word, but is how I felt. They wanted to keep me in kindergarten. This skinny lady, who smelled like socks, took me into a little room and asked me a bunch of questions. I still wouldn’t talk, even though she kept telling me she was trying to help. Eventually, she let me point to the answers or write them down, and that’s when I had to start going to Seattle. There were tons of appointments with adults in white coats smiling, frowning, or shaking their heads at Mamá. Auntie Marta helped us figure out the fuss, because she’s a teacher. Like I said, it turned out I have Asperger’s. My Mamá was from Mexico, so I learned Spanish. I’m teaching Jorge. He’s picking it up pretty quick.

Kids started to treat me like I was radioactive. From all the taunting, to Teddy’s nickname, I quit talking almost altogether. I’m not dumb. I just didn’t talk much.

We live in a little tourist town named Prospect, Washington. The main strip is like the thousands of ghost towns you see in Western movies: big brick buildings with “1895” stamped into the top and a faded cigar advertisement painted there in ancient history. The storefronts were

smashed together and square. Meet Jorge, Prospect, Washington's new Sherlock Holmes in Jordans.

## Story 1

### **Sarah Stole a Siren!**

“Butt Burger, line one!” Melanie yelled from the kitchen. I grinned.

“Why do people call you that?” Jorge asked.

“Long story. Knight to Queen three.” When he wasn’t wearing the VR goggles, my son looked at me with frog-eye glasses that made his pupils look the size of a planet. His VR goggles had to be prescription. It was worth the price. I love my son. Son of a Butt Burger. He gets his eyesight from his mother. He borders on autism because of me. Life will be a challenge. At least kids don’t call him “Butt Burger.” As I said, that was my name in middle school. Some days when he came home, I knew kids had been picking on him, but he wouldn’t say anything. Just stayed to himself. At least he answers people when they talk. I couldn’t even do that much.

“Line one!” my wife yelled again. We were playing a VR chess match. You put on goggles that look like something out of a spy movie and adjust your gloves to gaming mode. The game is a great equalizer. I’m a short, skinny, brown guy with long, straight black hair. I still

prefer black t-shirts and jeans. We'll just say that Jorge is not as skinny and takes after his mom's family. He's still figuring out what he wants to wear. In the game, the good thing is that all the players are life-size like superheroes and things smash when an opponent takes a player. There's an extension pack where stormtroopers and Darth Vader take on Luke Skywalker and ewoks. *Of course* I bought the extension pack.

The problem is that Jorge thinks Star Wars is ancient history (the way I did every time I saw Micky Mouse in a black-and-white cartoon). So we're using knights and castles. I tried to tell Jorge the Middle Ages are even older than Star Wars, but he just rolls his eyes. He's in middle school. There is a bunch of eye rolling at our house.

"Butt Burger!" Melanie yelled again. My wife is Korean. I'm half Mexican and half Yakama native. That makes Jorge...American. You do the math. I lost track. People say snarky things sometimes. Just sometimes. We live in a little tourist town full of wineries called Prospect, Washington. It's so small, most people forget to try huge snarky comments.

"Gotcha!" I forgot we were playing and flinched as Jorge's knight blew my pawn into a thousand pieces with his huge broad sword. I moved a piece. Jorge's rook smashed another pawn to bits. "Gotcha again! Hurry up and lose, Dad. I've got a Python project to finish." Jorge did a little dance. He really needed to polish up his trash talk.

"They let you take snakes to school?" I grinned. He rolled his eyes.

"Computer language coding is not a snake, Dad! How many times do you have to tell that joke?" Jorge threw his hands in the air. His other knight took a swing. Repeating the joke tortured him. I repeated the joke.

“If I come in there because this call keeps beeping, I’m going to kill things that aren’t in virtual reality!” my wife yelled, banging a pot with a wooden spoon.

“Hit pause, *mijo*,” I said, changing the mode on my glove from gaming to phone. Everybody used to have tons of controllers and devices, until some whiz kid invented this skintight glove with no fingers. No more phones. No more gaming controllers. Just a glove and a tiny ear bud. I tapped my ear and pulled up the phone call. “What’s up, Teddy?”

“How’d you know it was me?” he chuckled.

“No one else calls me Butt Burger.” I sighed.

“I know You’re a hotshot scientist who worked for the government, and I’m a lowly dude ranch owner.”

“We’re in the middle of a game, Teddy. What do you need?”

My wife broke in on the call. “It had better not be about solving mysteries again, you two.” We may be in the future with all the new tech, but the phone companies still stick it to you on paying for multiple phones. I hacked our one phone to save money with multiple users. The downside is that everyone can listen in on all the calls. Not the most legal of computer science skills, but they cut me some slack at the FBI. Don’t try this at home.

“But, Melanie, we’re best friends now, and we almost never get into trouble on these little mysteries,” Teddy goaded. There was an edge in his voice as he joked. Teddy was agitated, but trying to laugh it off with my wife.

“By the skin of your teeth! Teodoro Gelman, if you drag my husband into another harebrained—.” I hung up on Melanie. She banged the pots more but didn’t come into the media

room. She kept threatening me with bodily harm if I didn't share that part of the hack that lets me hang up, but so far, I've survived. I love my wife. She just gets a bit excited about things. Chasing murderers around the country does tend to put her on edge. That's why I retired. More on that later.

"Teddy, make it quick."

"We need your help. Sarah Russo is in jail because Pierre Lavigne's wife accused her of stealing the Diomedé Siren."

"A World War II air raid siren?" This was taking longer than I expected, so I plopped down on the sofa and took off my VR goggles.

"No, it's a famous brooch Pierre bought his wife. A Russian commercial fisherman stepped into a nightclub in Seattle and fell in love with the singer. He was loaded, so he had the brooch fashioned with encrusted diamonds and rubies. He gave it to her and retired from fishing so he could live happily ever after. Pierre recently bought the historic piece and gave it to his wife.

"You're rambling. Get to the mystery. Melanie will be coming soon," I interrupted.

"The brooch was stolen. They accused Sarah. We need your help."

"What's a siren?" Jorge's voice came on the line. I looked over my shoulder at the kitchen. I started helping Uncle Aaron with cases when I was Jorge's age. Might as well get him started early.

I hit pause. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Maybe. I'm not good at remembering what's supposed to be secret."

“No worries. I’ll tell your mom when we solve the case. Shouldn’t take long. Sit next to me and open a docutext file. Make sure to encrypt it when you save it and tuck it in[to] your journal.” Jorge rolled his eyes. Duh. He slipped his VR goggles down and switched his gloves from gaming to production mode.

He used both gloves to pull up a transparent screen. On the coffee table was a piece of plastic the size of what we used to call copy paper. It lit up with a keyboard. It’s cool living in the future. After a couple of keystrokes, he looked up. I took the call off “pause.” “Okay, Teddy. Explain a siren If we need more about the history of the brooch, we’ll ask.”

Teddy got all excited. He loved this part of the chase. “The Russian had a siren set in jewelry to let everyone know [that] his love for his wife wrecked his fishing career and crashed his boat.”

“She sunk his boat? That was mean,” Jorge answered.

Teddy chuckled again. “No, no. A siren is a character out of Greek mythology. They were half woman and half bird. They sang beautiful songs to lure sailors into the rocky coastline and wreck their boats. The Russian flipped a monster into a love.”

“That’s kind of dark for a love story. Love stories are stupid anyway. So, what is the mystery?”

“We were holding a fundraiser to benefit the Children’s Network and give the wineries a chance to showcase their best wines to donors. Pierre Lavigne comes, which is a big deal. Everybody wants to be on his good side. One word from him can sell out a year of your inventory. The Lavignes fly in from San Francisco because Pierre loves the Yakima Valley wines. He comes to the fundraiser and they play cowboy for a couple of days.

“His wife, Bridgett, came along wearing the Diomedé Siren brooch on a red blazer. Pierre bought it for her a while back. She’s petite with blonde hair styled close to her face. Her earrings had to have been as pricy as her brooch. She was very put together and you could tell her nails were painted for the occasion.”

Jorge was keeping up with the story in the encrypted file. He might have put on the voice-to-text mode to speed the process. He stared at the ceiling in concentration. He loved all things computer. Teddy continued.

“Anyway, Sarah has her grandfather Leo’s gift for making guests feel welcome. I asked her to come and help and run the catering. It was getting late. I was talking to Pierre next to the serving station about some cowboy activities the next day. Sarah was chatting up Mrs. Lavigne. Staff was starting to clean up. The Lavignes were the biggest donors, so we wanted to make sure they were happy. We kept talking.

“Mrs. Lavigne said she didn’t feel well and needed to go to their room. She asked if Sarah could get her some water and ibuprofen, and they parted ways. Sarah came over to me and asked what room they were in so she could deliver the ibuprofen.”

“Was Mrs. Lavigne still wearing the brooch when Sarah left her?” I asked.

“I can’t be sure, but let me finish,” Teddy responded. Jorge stared at the ceiling as if like he was thinking. Teddy continued: “Sarah came out of the guest suite sneezing.

“I’m allergic,” she told me as she reached under the serving station for her purse and pulled out a medicine bottle with a green cap. She headed back down the hallway toward the guest suites, to get her sneezing under control. Pierre continued to ask me about breeds of horses and rides they could take.

“About ten minutes after Sarah left the big room, Mrs. Lavigne screamed and heard a crash. Of course, we all rushed over to see what happened. Mr. Lavigne was first because he had a key. I contracted off duty Officer Bob Jr. for these high-end gigs to make the clients feel important. He came in next. We looked on as best we could from the hallway.”

“Describe the room,” Jorge asked in a flat tone, still looking at the ceiling.

“Well, it was hard to see, but whatever happened, the gardenias in the vase, and her nail polish remover were all over the floor. Mrs. Lavigne had passed out and was lying facedown on the bed.”

“Any other details about the room?” Jorge asked.

“Couldn’t tell you. Bob Jr. took some pictures with his phone, so maybe he can help with that description later. I was terrified she was dead and almost called Butt Burger right then and there, but that’s where things got a little crazy.”

“Was she dead?” Jorge prodded.

“No. Mr. Lavigne carried her out of the room and set her in another empty guest room. She finally came to and sat up, asking for water. Sarah ran to help and got her a glass,” Teddy continued. “Then Mrs. Lavigne clutched her chest and noticed the brooch was missing. She glared at Sarah. She reached around and knocked the water out of her hand, shaking her finger.”

“‘Trying to poison me twice?!’ Mrs. Lavigne tried to stand, but she was too woozy, so she sat back down.

“‘Poison you?’ Sarah took a step back, confused. Her white server’s blouse was wet, so she pulled her hands up around her neck.

“‘Arrest that woman!’ Mrs. Lavigne screamed. ‘She came up behind me, chloroformed me, and stole my brooch!’

“‘Chloroform! Are you bonkers? Even if it *was* me, which it isn’t, how do you know? You passed out!’ Sarah yelled.

“‘I’m *positive* it was chloroform. You tried the oldest trick in the book. You must watch too much T.V.’ Mrs. Lavigne huffed.

“‘Anybody could have come up behind you! Why would I do that? I was nice to you all night and even took you ibuprofen!’ Sarah defended, her sentences growing louder. Mr. Lavigne stood between Sarah and Mrs. Lavigne. Mrs. Lavigne leaned around his back and growled, as she tapped her nose on one side.

“‘Who do you think chooses the best wines for Pierre! I judge wine-tasting festivals all over the world! I’m a well-trained bloodhound for grapes!’ She scoffed. ‘I smelled your horrible perfume right as you came up behind me! We struggled so long, I was sure you had killed me. I’m just lucky I backed you into that vase and you let go!’

“Mr. Lavigne, turning red, wheeled on Bob Jr. ‘I demand you arrest this woman!’

“Bob Jr. looked at me and sighed, shaking his head. He looked at Sarah and asked, ‘Does this belong to you?’

“‘A catering napkin? There must be hundreds of those around. Are you going to dust it for prints?’ Sarah snorted, crossing her arms.

“Bob Jr. looked up at Mr. Lavigne and then back at Sarah. ‘No, but it smells weird, and I found it in the Lavigne room. From the looks of things, Mrs. Lavigne’s story checks out. With

your permission and cooperation, we'll look for the brooch after I book Ms. Russo here. Then if you feel up to it, I'll take a statement. You will need that paperwork for any insurance claim you start for your loss. That's only if we can't recover the brooch, but at least you'll be prepared either way."

"What did you do?" I asked Teddy. Jorge was still looking at the ceiling. The docutext scribing Teddy's voice.

"Bob Jr. arrested her. Can you imagine if the Lavignes throw a bigger fit? That's why I called you. What do we do?"

"Dad and I are going to finish our game so I can work on my Python project. Make sure Mrs. Lavigne doesn't leave for a couple of days. Give her a horse or something. Bye, Uncle Teddy. Whatever." Jorge hung up his glove. He typed a few things into the docutext, then switched his glove to gaming mode and put his goggles back in place. I hit "pause." I had to ask.

"Did you solve the case?" He nodded and turned back to the game.

"Come on, Dad. The game." In true autistic fashion, he had solved it and moved on.

I returned to Teddy. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Where'd you go? Keep Mrs. Lavigne here? How? Do I tie her up? Aren't you going to come by and investigate? Look at the room or something?" Teddy sputtered.

I grinned. "They say the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. That's an old way to say if your dad is nuts, you might be too." I winked at Jorge, who looked over his shoulder. He shook his head. "There's a new kid in town, Teddy. Jorge already solved it. I wouldn't advise tying up Mrs. Lavigne. I'll get back to you early tomorrow morning. Giving them a horse might work if

you are worried. They probably won't be in a hurry, since they want to make sure Sarah is the thief. They need a solid case against her before they try to skip town. Give me a day. Tell Sarah to stay put. It will all clear up soon."

"If you solved it, tell Bob Jr. and Sarah so we can get her out of—."

"I have to make a call to an old buddy so it all looks legit. Bye, Teddy. Honest, I'll call and tell you how we know." I hung up. "Should I tell him more after you go to bed?" I asked Jorge.

"Dad! The game!" Jorge adjusted his posture and we started smashing chess pieces.

### **HINTS TO SOLVE?**

Put **"I want to help Sarah!"** in the message line and ask a question.

Email [cavemoonpress@gmail.com](mailto:cavemoonpress@gmail.com)

**SOLVED IT?** Tell your teacher and Cave Moon Press about the science you learned!