



BUTT BURGER ALVAREZ

MAMÁ KILLED THE WITCH!

(BOOK 1)

PABLO CIENFUEGOS

Butt Burger Alvarez: Book 1

Sample for Review

Mamá Killed a Witch!

Pablo Cienfuegos

Dedicated to:

Devin and Wesley Johnson

&

Violet and Zachary Rau

Enough

Today I am not enough.

tall enough

short enough

smart enough

skinny enough

good enough

bad enough

rich enough

poor enough

old enough

young enough

white enough

black enough

brown enough

red enough

yellow enough

bastante

assez

足

Someday I will be enough.

Enough.

Chapter 1

Blood ran down into my mouth. I licked my lip. Wiping my mouth, my hair fell into my face, and I mumbled to myself, “Salt. Sodium is explosive. Chlorine is poisonous. Together they are inert.” My black t-shirt was okay. I buy them, too big, in the underwear section, so who cares? The knee of my jeans was ripped. All the girls wore their pants torn, so maybe nobody will notice. When Teddy punched me, the book *Frankenstein* came to mind. Read the book. Magic and science were combined to make the monster in 1823. Teddy was my version of the monster. Who knows what combined to make Teddy? I’m bleeding. Science. Not exactly Harry Potter magic. Today there’s more science than magic. Blood tastes salty. Sodium Chloride.

I didn’t know what Teddy’s problem was. I was standing there waiting to pick up my little sister Leslie, when Teddy yelled, “You!! Your mom killed my mom right after she killed the witch!” I had no idea what he was yelling about. He got in a couple of good punches, and I hit the ground. Mrs. Sullivan yelled out her window. A weird alleyway stands between the middle and elementary schools, and that’s where I usually wait. Kids are always getting into fights there, so the teachers try to watch. Teddy waddled away, shaking his fist at me and scowling as if he was going to give me more later.

I'm getting ahead of myself. This is my journal. If you are reading this, I might be dead. (I've always wanted to say that). As soon as I got home with Leslie, the police were there spilling the story. I guess Teddy had to take it out on someone. I have no idea why his dad sent him to school the day after his mom got killed. On the other hand, Teddy was a royal butthead. I'd send him to school during the summer if I was his dad. Mamá didn't kill Teddy's mom, but someone did, and the entire town "...has their *chonis retorcida*," Mamá said. (That means "panties in a twist" if you don't speak Spanish.)

You can call me Luis Alvarez (or just Luis, I guess.) All the kids at school call me "Butt Burger Alvarez." "Butt Burger" for short. You get the idea. I'm a scrawny brown kid that's half Mexican and half Yakama. Long black hair that drifts into my eyes. Teddy's real name is Teodoro Gelman. Short, blonde curly hair. Some call him Pudgy. Mostly behind his back. His mother used to call him big boned. His parents owned the dude ranch up near Grand Vista.

Why does he have it in for me? I have no idea. In third grade he kept getting into trouble for calling me "A- Burger" until he didn't want detention anymore. He switched it to "Butt Burger" in case a teacher heard him. Like gum under a desk, the name stuck. I'm eleven. I have Asperger's. All it means is that I'm not good with people and I'm really smart. (Teddy never figured that out.)

I don't like to talk. It's because when I started school, my teachers thought I was retarded. I know adults hate that word. That's how I feel. 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, and that's when I had to start going to Seattle. There were tons of appointments with adults smiling, frowning, or shaking their heads at Mamá. Auntie

Marta helped us figure out the school part of the appointments because she's a teacher. Like I said, it turned out I have something called Asperger's. After all those tests in Seattle, teachers kept whispering words like "Spectrum," "ASD," and "Asperger's" around me. Somehow, the teacher gossip got to Teddy's mom, Isabella Gelman. Every big, mean bone Teddy got, he inherited from her. She was too dumb to understand what Asperger's meant, but from the gossip, she was convinced I was a moron. She kept taunting me in Mamá's bakery. I just stared at her. Mamá didn't fight her for different reasons I'll tell you later. Teddy kept up the taunting at school when the teachers weren't looking. Kids started to treat me like I was radioactive. From the gossip, to Teddy's nickname, to all the taunting, I just quit talking altogether. I'm not dumb. I just didn't talk much. Still don't.

We all 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 somebody painted in ancient times. The storefronts are smashed together and square.

At first, the town was called Wichaxy. Seeing as my dad was Native American, I'll tell you the Yakama version. Different than the old Western movies, where they shoot up the place and everybody brown is the enemy, most people around here got along back then. Cowboys partied, but I can't imagine they could outdrink most of the high school kids in Prospect.

It wasn't nearly as wild as the stories suggested. (Yeah, sure, the Yakama got kicked around quite a bit, like most Native Americans. Just like Thanksgiving, it didn't start that way.) The Yakama were great horse breeders, and the cowboys would buy and trade their best stock. Communication was difficult because the settlers didn't speak Ichishkíin . The Yakama didn't speak English. The settlers did notice that the Native Americans were always smiling and

repeating a word that sounded like “Wichaxy.” The settlers assumed it meant “happy” so that was the first name of the town.

Eventually, the railroad came through and started renaming towns to sound better in their advertising. They wanted new immigrants to come this way and farm the land. Frowning at the name Wichaxy, some weirdo wrote a newspaper ad, crossed off “Wichaxy” and scribbled “Prospect” at the top. There you have it. What did *Wichaxy* mean? Well, the elders would yell at me for telling the story because it is an inside joke. The horse-trading Yakamas thought the settlers looked wound too tight and figured they must be constipated. “Wichaxy” is just a bad spelling for *constipated*, and an old Yakama will chuckle every time you say the old name. The elders say you write it out as *wits'axk'ii*. As far as my journal goes, I guess you could call these my notes investigating a crime. If you like crime shows on T.V., you’ll already know we’re off the reservation. I crack myself up. Thanks for reading along.

Chapter 2

“We’re shutting you down!” Bumble Bob bellowed. He stomped into Mamá’s bakery right as I walked up. He practically ran me over, flinging the door open. To be fair, adults don’t see me much. I’m a brown, scrawny kid. No big deal. Most of us at George Washington Middle School are brown, scrawny middle-school kids. My hair is long and black, and hangs in my eyes. It doesn’t help that I look at the ground all the time.

Uncle Aaron hurried in behind him, and then I was able to slip by. I have a spot in the corner booth where I sit and do homework and edit Mamá’s recipes for her new cookbook. Today, there was too much going on, so I slid in and made sure to hang my head down and listen. I didn’t want Mamá to see my split lip.

“What?” Mamá asked. Briana Mendoza, Auntie Marta’s friend, was there sweeping up after the Halloween party. The party was really a town festival thrown by Isabella Gelman in her own honor at the dude ranch. She made it no secret that it was her birthday. It was a bit weird, but most people had fun. I never went. I hate crowds. Mamá was finally asked to provide some special order called a *Tarta de Santiago*. Sounds Mexican and everything, but it’s from Spain.

Mamá is an awesome baker, and she can do it all. Isabella had always made sure to leave Mamá off the list of caterers until this year. This was the first year Mamá was invited.

“You’ll have to close your bakery! Until further notice, you’ll—” Bumble Bob kept yelling.

Holding up his hand, Uncle Aaron interrupted. “Hold on, Bob.” It was bizarre. Bob shut his mouth, but his cheeks turned red as he rocked on his heels. Technically, Uncle Aaron was Bob’s boss. They were partners and served on the Prospect police department. On paper, Uncle Aaron outranked Bob due to his military experience and background. Bob was the opposite. He been there forever, but the entire town knew that he got his job because the police chief was his brother-in-law. (Think of a chubby mall security guard with a police badge.) It definitely went to his head. It was a sticky situation, but Aaron’s job was basically to babysit Bob. He earned the name “Bumble Bob” for a reason.

“You can’t just jump to conclusions,” Aaron started.

Bumble wheeled around and pointed. “But you said yourself their breath smelled like almonds! Both victims!” He turned again and pointed at Mamá. “She did it!”

I watched as Uncle Aaron paused trying to figure out what to do. On the one hand, he knew Mamá was the quietest and hardest-working person he’d ever known. On the other hand, he couldn’t show favoritism to his family.

“What do almonds have to do with victims?” Mamá asked, still looking confused. “What victims?”

“Oh, sure, act like you don’t know,” Bob scoffed. “You were mad because Isabella tried to get you deported last year!” He crossed his arms. I looked from Aaron to Bob. Not only was Bob dumb, he really didn’t have a poker face or a filter. At the drop of a hat, he spouted the ugliest rumor he had heard in town. I imagine that was why the police department had to watch him. Uncle Aaron looked at the floor.

“Bob, you need to keep your mouth shut. We will investigate, but you can’t go around insulting every suspect,” Aaron said.

“You’re just taking sides because she’s your sister,” Bob muttered.

“What victims?” Mamá repeated. She’d been insulted before by worse than the likes of Bob and ignored him. She looked directly at Aaron, as Briana Mendoza walked in on the group. She slowed her step, as the smell of donuts and baked goods followed her in from the back

“You want to tell her?” Uncle Aaron glanced at Briana, who was picking up a broom. “You were there. Dorotea was reported to have gone home early after the set-up.”

“Yes. I insisted Dorotea go home and I would clean up with Marta’s help. Briana nodded. Dorotea did a wonderful job, it was getting late, and—”

“Oh, shut up!” Bob blustered. “Isabella Gelman and Agatha Davis are dead! Poisoned! You probably hid it in those Mexican tart thingies you made. It was your first year there! It has to be you!”

“Bob! Outside!” Aaron shouted. Bob glared at Uncle Aaron, red faced. You wouldn’t think a guy that fat could slink away, but he slumped his shoulders and shuffled out the door.

Mamá was still confused, but now she looked scared. “What would make him think I killed them? I just baked tarts for the party.” She wrung her hands and glanced from side to side.

Uncle Aaron sighed, “It’s just a big guess at this point, but people who have been poisoned by cyanide will have breath smelling like almonds.”

Briana tried to come to Mamá’s aid. “That doesn’t make any sense. I was with her the entire time she baked the tarts.

“Look. I’m sorry Bob came in here roaring. We won’t have the toxicology report for a while to confirm cause of death. That’s why it’s such a big guess. The problem is they both died in a public place, and there are no other wounds on the bodies to prove any kind of struggle or weapon.”

“But why do they think someone murdered them?” Mamá asked. “Why me?”

Aaron gave her a sad smile. “Well, that’s part of the mystery. Nobody thinks Isabella committed suicide in front of the entire town at her own birthday party. Nobody has a clue as to why the resident homeless lady died at the same time. Nobody really knows much of anything. There’s just a chance that they were poisoned, and the most common effect from cyanide is the smell of almonds.

I can’t tell you what to do, but this town operates on rumors. I need to be fair in the investigation, but you need to stay safe. Maybe you should close the bakery for a few days but remain here in town. Everyone is jumping to conclusions, and I need some way to get you out of the spotlight.” Aaron closed his notebook and placed his hand on his gun belt, as if to say this was the last word. I couldn’t take it. Mamá’s eyes started to tear up.

“Everyone ate the tarts. Everyone had almond breath,” I said from my corner. They all looked at me. Like I said, I never talk, so when I do, they all look at me as if Moses is parting the Red Sea.

“What did you say?” Uncle Aaron asked.

I sighed. “Everyone ate the tarts. Everyone has almond breath. Only two people died. At the moment, everyone in Prospect are suspects because they were all there. If it was cyanide poisoning, one particular local gave it to the mean old ladies. If Mamá had done something to the tarts, everyone would be sick. You don’t even have the toxicology report back. You haven’t proven cause of death. If Mamá wants to, she should keep the bakery open. Otherwise, it looks like she’s admitting she’s guilty.” I went back to searching something up on my phone for my homework.

“There’s some days, I wish you were my partner instead of Bumble, Nephew.” He touched the brim of his police hat and nodded toward us. The door chime sounded as he left, and Mamá came over and hugged me. Ugh. I’m in middle school. I hate hugs, but I didn’t fight it. She’d had a rough day.

Chapter 9

“Butt Burger! Get over here!” Teddy bellowed across the cafeteria. Gina started to get up. “Sit down, Godzilla. I’ve just got an Indian question. If I have a pasta question, I’ll call you next. Your boyfriend is safe.” Teddy signaled her with some goofy jazz hands as if he was scared. The cafeteria lady looked up when she heard the yelling. When Gina sat back down, the lunch lady went back to ignoring us and spooning up what was supposed to be mashed potatoes. I got up, kept looking at the ground, and went to Teddy’s lunch table. As you probably know by now, Teddy is the loud, rich bully of the school.

That means two things, One. The teachers and principals all treat him special so his parents won’t come down and create a fuss about how the school is picking on their *poor* little kid. They drop names about school board member A and Rotary member B to make sure the school gets their drift about what else could happen. At least that’s what Auntie Marta tells me having worked as a teacher for so long. That means Teddy gets away with more stuff than other kids.

Two. Like all the loud, rich bullies you see on TV, he throws his weight around. Throwing weight around is the easiest part for Teddy. He’s chubby. (Start picking ‘em up now. Not sure the jokes are going to get any better.) People who throw their weight around tend to attract a certain crowd that wants to be popular but feels too much like losers to do anything but

follow the pack. Teddy fits number one and number two in those categories, so he has a pack of goons who sit with him at lunch.

I was confused as to why he yelled at me to come to his table. He knew I didn't talk, so I'm not sure what he thought would happen when he asked his magic Indian question. Jeff, (we'll call him *Goon A*) knew that and whined, "Butt Burger doesn't talk. This is pointless."

Teddy snapped his fingers, and ordered, "Notebook." Juan (we'll call him *Goon B*) dug around in his backpack and pulled out, of all things, Teddy's notebook. It was a crumpled mess. Teddy barked at me, "You got a pen, Butt Burger?" I nodded. He shoved the notebook at me and snapped his fingers at me to hurry up. "Write this down while we argue. If we need your opinion, I'll tell you to write it down so we can keep up the pace. Got it?" He wiggled his eyebrows and grinned. I nodded.

Suddenly we were in a mock trial around the lunch table. Teddy started in with his opening statement to the *jury*. "First of all, nobody cares that the old witch is dead. I'm glad somebody killed her. She was mean. She even tried to beat up my mom once."

Mario (meet *Goon C*), Gina's cousin, broke in, "Jeez Teddy. The old lady was just crazy. Your mom was a foot taller than she was, and all the old lady did was dump eggs on her head."

"Prove it! How do you know that?" Teddy countered, shaking his finger at Mario.

"My Nona came home laughing her a... , I mean 'butt', off. She told me the whole story because she was standing in the parking lot when it happened," Mario answered, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. Everybody wanted to hang out with Teddy, but not everyone believed much of what he said.

"Fine, but I still say nobody cares if the old witch is dead. For all we know, she was a black witch, and put a curse on my mom. It backfired and they both ended up dead. She was

sitting right across from my mom's big chair and next to the punch bowl. I saw it! Mom and Mrs. Davis looked like extras in some horror movie where everybody drinks the Kool-Aid and dies. They even had matching red drool!"

"Teddy, your mom went as a vampire. It was her makeup. The old lady drank the punch, and it was dyed red. They both had a glass of red wine from Mark's dad. I was there," Juan replied. "That doesn't prove anything."

"You watch too many bad movies, Teddy," Jeff agreed.

"No, listen; really. We already said there are black witches and white witches. White witches do good things like in the *Wizard of Oz*. Her name was Glenda. Black witches do bad things, and I think Mrs. Davis did a bad thing."

That's where Jeff piped up, "But if white witches are white like Glenda and do good things, then how could a black witch do evil? The other character in that movie was green." Teddy shook his head and glanced at the cafeteria lady, as if he was talking to a toddler. He let Jeff hang out with him because Jeff's parents had just as much money as the Gelmans. Jeff started out in our reading group in elementary school. He still got pulled out for quite a bit of stuff, but he wasn't invisible in town. He always had nice clothes and stories about big cities and skiing vacations. Middle school had a different set of rules. Teddy barely tolerated Jeff. Teddy offered him a thin-lipped grin.

"I told you, Jeff. The bad witch in the movie is green because she is colored. The color is what makes her bad in the movie. Just like color is what makes people bad."

"Teddy, you're a moron. Your mom is Mexican. That make you half bad?" Mario shook his head.

"Shut up," Teddy frowned.

“But that color thing is just in the movies,” Juan countered. “In Mexico, some of the witches are called *curanderas*, and we’re all the same color in Mexico. Those witches use herbs and things to cure people. You can’t say that only white witches do good. That’s like saying only white people do good.”

I wrote down what they said, but I was getting a bad feeling about where this was going. I wanted to just write things down and get away from Teddy. He must have heard my thoughts.

“That brings us to you, Butt Burger. We need you to settle the debate. So far, we know that black witches do bad, but we don’t have any Black people in Prospect. Maybe Black people are good. Maybe they are bad. We don’t have enough evidence, so we’ll let that go for today. We know that white witches do good because we have white witches.” He started to repeat what he said about only White people doing good but shut his mouth when he looked up at Mario.

“The jury is still out on the Mexican witches, because they are all the same color. So, Butt Burger, what’s your opinion? Just remember: I think Mrs. Davis was really a black witch and did something evil. The problem is that she was White, so I don’t know how to prove it. Trust me, I’m going to get whoever killed my mom, and I’m starting with the homeless old witch.” I swallowed hard and tried to deflect the question. I scribbled in the notebook and showed it to Teddy.

He read out loud what I wrote. ““You didn’t ask about Asian witches. Maybe Mrs. Davis was Asian.’.” he repeated from my entry into the middle school court document.

He handed me back the notebook. “A yellow witch. Good question. Let’s ask. Hey, Yua!” Yua’s dad owned a small farm outside of town. Her eyes got wide when she heard her name. In class, she talked almost as little as I did. Teddy barreled along. “Hey, Yua! Are there any Chinese witches?”

The whole cafeteria turned to look at her. She about choked on her French fry. She scanned the lunchroom and hurried to the bathroom to escape without answering. Yua isn't Chinese. She's Japanese. I'm Mexican and Native. I was stuck at Teddy's table. Probably how most of America worked, I thought as Teddy mumbled. I just kept jotting notes down and praying that this would end soon. Adults looked up again when Teddy yelled. They ignored us when we turned around.

"No dice, Butt Burger. Okay. Cough it up. Your mom is Mexican, right?" I nodded. "We already heard from the Mexican guy. Your dad was Yakama, right?" I nodded again. "I certainly didn't call Butt Burger over because you smell nice. You smell like farts. I didn't call you over here because you're smarter than Jeff. The million-dollar question is..." he paused for a drum roll or something. He looked around the table with a grin. "Do Indians have witches? Are they good or bad? The million-dollar question is if Butt Burger came from two bad witches." He busted out giggling. This was his version of a joke with a very long set up. He wiggled his eyebrows at me again with that grin. The goons did not laugh. They looked down or put food into their mouths and stared into the distance.

The awkward pause took forever. My brain raced. When was Teddy going to hit me again? Was this all some setup for another massive prank he would pull during social studies class? Jeff tried to come to my rescue again. "Leave him alone, Teddy. He doesn't talk."

"He's not stupid, I hear," Teddy growled, turning to face me. "So, out with it, Butt Burger. Write it down if you have to, but answer the question. I'll even make it simple since your mom killed my mom, and she's Mexican. Must mean Juan over there has it wrong. There must be Mexican witches who do evil things. Did your dad do bad things? Was he a bad witch, too? Did your mom put some kind of curse on my mom? Did she mix the curse with a poison? What would you even call an Indian witch? The tribal elders wear beads still, and do the hocus pocus?"

I looked Teddy in the eye. I glanced over my shoulder at Gina and Mark at the other table. I wrote down, “They’re called *shamans*. They have different names in different languages. Depends on where you are from. People just translate things to *witch* in English when they don’t understand. There are too many witches to choose from. People are just people. My mamá didn’t kill anybody.”

Teddy snatched the notebook from out of my hand. His goons backed off, and I slid away while he was reading. Jeff had his head down. Juan looked like he might be sorry. Mario looked at Gina.

Back safe with Gina and Mark, I was shaking. Gina looked at Teddy. Teddy glared at me and made that stupid move pretending his finger was a knife cutting a throat. Then he pointed that beefy index finger at me, furrowing his brow. Too bad Teddy was so fat. The pudgy factor took some of the bite out of his threat. Besides, I had Gina. I was still shaking when we left lunch.

So, the only reason you know any of this is that I did what Mrs. Funk told me to do and wrote it all down to get it out of my head after school. After getting Leslie settled, I sat in the corner at my booth. I was writing at warp speed because I was so mad. Mamá knew to leave me alone when I got into the scribbling mode like that. I just hoped I didn’t forget anything. Writing down Teddy’s witch trial helped a little.

As I drifted off to sleep later that night, I hoped writing down all the details would help me come up with some answer. It gnawed at me, but I suspected that something in that stupid debate held a small grain of truth. Something in all that stupidity had to offer a clue as to why the mean ladies were murdered. A brief nightmare with Teddy’s head on a flying monkey from *The Wizard of Oz* shoved me into a locker, and I bolted awake. It took a while, but I got back to sleep, tossing and turning.

I woke up worried and groggy at the same time. It wasn't my day to go down to the police station. I desperately hoped Uncle Aaron would share his notes to give me clues, or at least distract me from the nightmare. Auntie Marta is right. Nobody will ever find out if he does share his notes with me. I don't talk. That's why I could write about Teddy's stupid middle school witch trial. I don't talk.

Can you imagine if I tried to tell that to an adult? If you tell your parents about this journal, leave out the part about the witches. Witches really freak out adults. Adults say they are all mature and everything, but from what I can tell, some of them are still just great big babies.

Chapter 13

So much for sneaking around. Mamá didn't scream at me, but she kept eyes on me the entire ten days until the 504 meeting. The first day of my suspension, Mamá pointed to my corner booth and went back to work. Auntie Marta stopped by after school because she had to bring Leslie home. She plopped down across from me in my booth. "You know you have the right to prove you were provoked by the taunting. Briana saw the entire thing. She would back you up." I looked up and blinked. I went back to my journal. I heard the cushion under her go woosh, and knew she wasn't going to hang around and talk to a wall since I was in one of those moods. I didn't care. It was a ten-day vacation from being called Butt Burger.

The second day, Mamá arranged with Uncle Aaron to keep me at the station. People would start to ask why I was out of school so much if I just sat at the bakery. Enter Sergeant Brumley: the cruise director on my ten-day vacation. Uncle Aaron couldn't watch me, and Mamá buried herself in baked goods. I'm not sure any of my family blamed me when they heard Teddy's name in the stories from the school and Briana.

Mamá didn't yell at me, but she was mad. That first day, she kept banging her pans in the back, so I tried to avoid her, shrinking as low as I could in the booth. She was about to bend a cookie sheet in half, and I didn't want to have that happen over my head. I couldn't blame her. She was doing her best, and my vacation just added to her list of problems. Faulty oven. Behind on the rent. Kids stealing cookies. The usual. She didn't me screwing up at school to add to her

pile. She needed some relief valves for all the stress. If you are Teddy and live on a dude ranch, there's a bunch of space outside to run. There's better video games to play. If your Mamá is struggling to keep a bakery open while she raises two kids, the options shrink.

Like I said, enter Sergeant Brumley. Talk about the ultimate babysitter. "Your Uncle Aaron says if you screwed up, I can toss you into a cell," she smiled. He loomed over my chair with his arms crossed and legs positioned shoulder distance apart at the combat ready. He didn't smile. He still wasn't happy with me about not standing up for myself more in the situation. Sergeant Brumley's tribe is Tsimshian. The Yakama were great with horses in the desert. Her tribe was great with fishing and carving totem poles. Her tribe lived on the coasts of British Columbia and Alaska. I never understand how she got so far away from her people and ended up here in Prospect... maybe because everyone thinks teepees and totem poles come from the same place.

I didn't know her until my second day of suspension. I looked up between the two khaki uniforms. Earlier, Uncle Aaron plunked me down in the chair next to her desk. After glancing at them through the hair in my eyes, I stared back down at my book. Beyond looking down and staying silent, I was still in a bad mood. It burned me that the only explosion in my entire life got me suspended. Teddy walked around as chief clown and bully. He never got detention anymore. Not that many people could sense my mood seeing as I tend to blend in. Sergeant Brumley could. She nudged me to look up. Uncle Aaron's arms were still crossed.

"I've got to go interview Adrian Ramirez, Luis; meet Sergeant Brumley," Uncle Aaron said. I was in a foul mood and looked back down. "Luis." Uncle Aaron cleared his throat. I ignored him.

"You go ahead. Just go do the interview." Sergeant Brumley's voice smiled at Uncle Aaron. He still scolded me a bit saying, "Now if you want me to uphold our little agreement,

then you will behave. Understand?” At this point, he was putting on a show for Sergeant Brumley to remind people he was in charge of something. I didn’t always make that easy on adults. I knew he was talking about letting me have the recording of the Ramirez interview, so I gave a brief nod, yes, and went back to my book.

Technically, the chair I sat in was for the criminals she booked for jail. “Criminals” probably stretches the word for most of the people in Prospect. Small towns create small-town thugs and drunks. Sure, you need to keep them off the streets, but nobody really gets too worked up about the people she has to book into the jail.

Uncle Aaron left. About that time, the lady who owned the antique store slammed the front door open and marched up to Bumble Bob. We both watched the show.

“Well?” she bellowed. With both hands on her hips, she towered over Bob’s desk.

He tried to act calm and tapped the small stack of papers in his hand three times before putting them in his *out* tray. Taking a breath, he looked up. “Well, what?”

“Bob, you are a bigger idiot than you were in high school! Why didn’t you file the police report on the theft of my priceless brooch!”

“I’m not quite at liberty to say with an ongoing investi—”

“Can it, Gumshoe! I’m here because I called my insurance company, and they say they have no police report from the theft. Where is the police report? You said it was handled.”

“Well, we have had some irregularities in the filing of our—”

“Never mind. Hey, Bumble! Did you know that my husband is the D.A. of Bentward County? I have to listen to too many stories about botched cases and criminals skipping out of the courtroom. You know why? Because of crap like this! Honestly! People could get away with murder in this town, and you would stand there holding your beer belly, saying the paperwork

was lost! I'm coming back tomorrow, and if I don't have a copy of that police report, I'll have your badge! I'm going to kill that thief!!”

She turned on her heel and stomped out as loudly as she had arrived. Bob let out a breath and picked up a piece of paper as if nothing had happened. I raised my eyebrows at Sergeant Brumley, but she gave me a small shake of the head. I went back to reading my book. Bumble Bob got up and walked away. He had a weird limp as if his gut was shifting from side to side with every step. The air in the room seemed to lighten a bit. It was easier to breathe.

Sergeant Brumley opened her top desk drawer and smiled again. “Like a Tootsie Roll?” she offered, pushing it across her desk. I looked up at her, confused, and shook my head. She was trying to be nice, but I felt like a dog someone is trying to train with a piece of beef jerky. I went back to my book. I can tell when an adult wants to change the subject.

“What are you reading?” I looked up and flashed the cover at her before plopping it down in my lap. In the softest tone possible, she said, “I didn't quite catch that, Cousin. Can I see the cover again?” In a dramatic gesture, I slowly lifted it and held it up. I was being a butthead but didn't care. Eventually, I had to prop it on her desk.

“*The Chemical History of Color*. Oh, my! That looks like a college textbook. You can understand all of that?” I rolled my eyes at her like she was an idiot. Don't know what possessed me to act like such a jerk, but adults were all grinding on my nerves. She didn't even seem to notice.

“Did you get that from your Auntie Marta? I hear she is very smart.” That caught me off guard. Sergeant Brumley was new. She definitely wasn't Yakama or Mexican. She knew she had my attention, and her grin widened. “Don't be coy with me, little man. Your Uncle Aaron told me all about how you clocked that boy. He also told me how you try to hide how smart you are and that your Auntie Marta keeps trying to trick you into believing that fact. Did you know

she got that book from culinary school?” Sergeant Brumley knew so much, it took the wind out my sails. I slowly nodded yes and tilted my head to the side to listen. Somehow, Sergeant Brumley knew more about this part of the story than I did, so I was hooked.

She grinned when she saw I was curious, so she continued. She winked. “You aren’t the only detective around Prospect. I had lunch with Auntie Marta and Uncle Aaron right after I took the job here. I served with your Uncle Aaron, and that’s why I ended up here. I was drifting around Alaska and not having much luck getting a job. This job was his way of helping out a friend. Officially, I should be Bob’s boss, but we all know how that would go. The chief said Aaron is perfect for being Bob’s partner.

At lunch your Auntie Marta and I started chatting about her dream of owning the bakery. She ended up in culinary school after high school. Did you know that?” I shook my head. “Well, that’s where she met Briana. She said she got homesick. She quit cooking school and moved closer to home to become a teacher. Briana stayed close to her over the years and ended up here as a college professor. She might have even gotten the job because your auntie told her about the opening. You got that book from Auntie Marta?” I nodded again. “You go back to your smarty pants book. If you change your mind about the candy, go right ahead.” With that, she went back to her paperwork and let me read in peace. I got lost in the book and forgot about the time. She let me sit there and read for the full ten days. I was grateful she didn’t poke at me and try to fix my Asperger’s like the other adults.

Friday was the last day of my ten-day sentence. The huge 504 meeting was the next Monday, but for the moment, my mind drifted between the book and daydreams. It was surprising to see Uncle Aaron standing over me, trying to get my attention. He leaned in close so Bumble Bob couldn’t hear. “You’re not going to believe what I got, Nephew.” He gave Bob a nervous glance.

The first time he tried he had to take Bumble Bob along. It was a bust. As expected, Bumble walked in ordering Adrian around as if he was going to arrest him. Uncle Aaron had to cut it all short and get Bob back into the car. Adrian slunk back into his apartment. Bob yelled at Uncle Aaron the entire trip back to Prospect. Uncle Aaron caught a lucky break. Bumble Bob was sick Thursday, so he tried again, and Adrian answered questions. After Uncle Aaron woke me out of my daydream, he glanced up to make sure Bob wasn't looking. "Take this thumb drive and get what you can. See you at home."