

THE FLACA FILES

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THE CASE OF THE THREE KINGS



"A mystery serving as a gateway into Puerto Rican culture, traditions and panorama, narrated by a one-of-a-kind Latina gumshoe." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Alidis Vicente

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In memory of my great-grandmother, Alejandrina Rodríguez. I will remember you in your rocking chair, looking at the landscape through your bedroom window. No one can take you from that land. Until next time, Mamita.





FROM THE DESK OF DETECTIVE FLACA

Dear Junior Detective,

It's me, Detective Flaca, with a confidentiality agreement for you to sign. This book isn't about a bunch of awesome mysteries I've solved, even though I have cracked some pretty big ones. This story, my friends, is about one major case that left me with serious questions to answer and answers that left me with serious questions. That probably sounds kind of confusing, but it'll make sense later. For now, just sign the form below so I can make sure my methods of mystery mastery don't fall into the wrong hands. I'm sure you understand how important that is, don't you? Good. So sign, and let's get this trip on the road. Fasten your seat belt, we're going to Puerto Rico. I hope you enjoy the ride!

Carefully yours,

Detective Flaca

I, _____, do solemnly swear not to reveal any of Detective Flaca's extra awesome detective methods to any villains, evil masterminds or criminals in training. I promise to use Detective Flaca's totally confidential information solely for learning and creative purposes and will not criticize any of the characters (except maybe La Bruja). Lastly, I promise to read the whole book and look up any words I don't understand in the dictionary so that one day I can be an even smarter and better detective than Detective Flaca, if that's even humanly possible.

Signed,



CHAPTER 1

Worst Christmas Gift Ever

Last year I got what I thought was the worst Christmas gift in the history of gift giving. Worse than a lump of coal. Worse than an ugly, itchy holiday sweater. Even worse than fruitcake. I got a plane ticket. You're probably thinking, "A plane ticket? That's the most awesome gift ever! What are you talking about?!" Allow me to explain.

On Christmas morning, my family and I were done with opening the gifts found under a beautifully decorated Christmas tree, which, of course, *I* decorated. I love Christmas. I love the fresh smell of pine coming from the giant tree my dad lugs through the house every year. He drags it on the wood floor into the living room, and my mom always runs behind him the minute he walks in the door, picking up fallen pine needles with a dustpan. My sister, La Bruja, just sits in her room and pays no attention. She couldn't care less. I totally expect that,

because decorating a Christmas tree the right way takes dedication. It takes skill and an eye for detail, all things she doesn't have. Luckily, I'm around and have always used my sharp detective eyes for setting up the Christmas tree. I divide the ornaments by shape and color. Then, I take white lights and wrap them around the tree, making sure there is equal space between the rows of lit bulbs. Afterward, I place the ornaments on the tree in such a way that no ornaments from the same group are too close to one another. I have it down to a science and nail it every year.

Anyhow, back to my story. We were all done with opening our stuff. My dad had gotten a new fishing pole, one he had wanted for forever but my mother always said was too expensive. My mom got a purse. Just one handbag, but I guess it cost as much as three regular purses, because she nearly flew through the chimney with excitement when she opened it. My older sister, La Bruja, well, she got a bunch of gift cards, which is exactly what she wanted. She always gets what she wants. Annoying. Unlike my sister, I value the thought behind gift giving, as long as it's something I'd put on my Christmas wish list. My parents got me a brand-new fingerprint-taking set, a police-quality miniflashlight and something I have wanted for a really long time—police tape, so I can block off any crime scene. You wouldn't believe how many people just trample on an area I am working on with no respect for my

need to keep it completely untouched. Details matter, people!

We were all happy little elves that Christmas morning. I was piling up my gifts, getting ready to chow down on my mom's signature eggnog waffles and homemade hot chocolate with green, red and white marshmallows. That's when it all went downhill. My parents came over with envelopes in their hands. My father handed one to me, and my mother handed one to La Bruja. I knew something was up because they were looking at each other, smiling. I hoped it wasn't something awful, like tickets for La Bruja and me to go to some type of event together for that disastrous thing our parents like to call "sisterly bonding." I sat there for a moment, unsure if I wanted to even open the envelope. I'm not a fan of surprises.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Open it," said my dad.

La Bruja ripped her envelope open like a savage beast, hoping for another gift card.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

I opened my envelope. Inside was a ticket. It only took me a moment of scanning with my flawless vision to pinpoint what kind of ticket it was. "It's a plane ticket, genius," I said to La Bruja. She jumped from the floor in her reindeer pajama pants and hugged my mother.

"Where are we going? The Bahamas? Jamaica? Oh, wait! Paris?!"