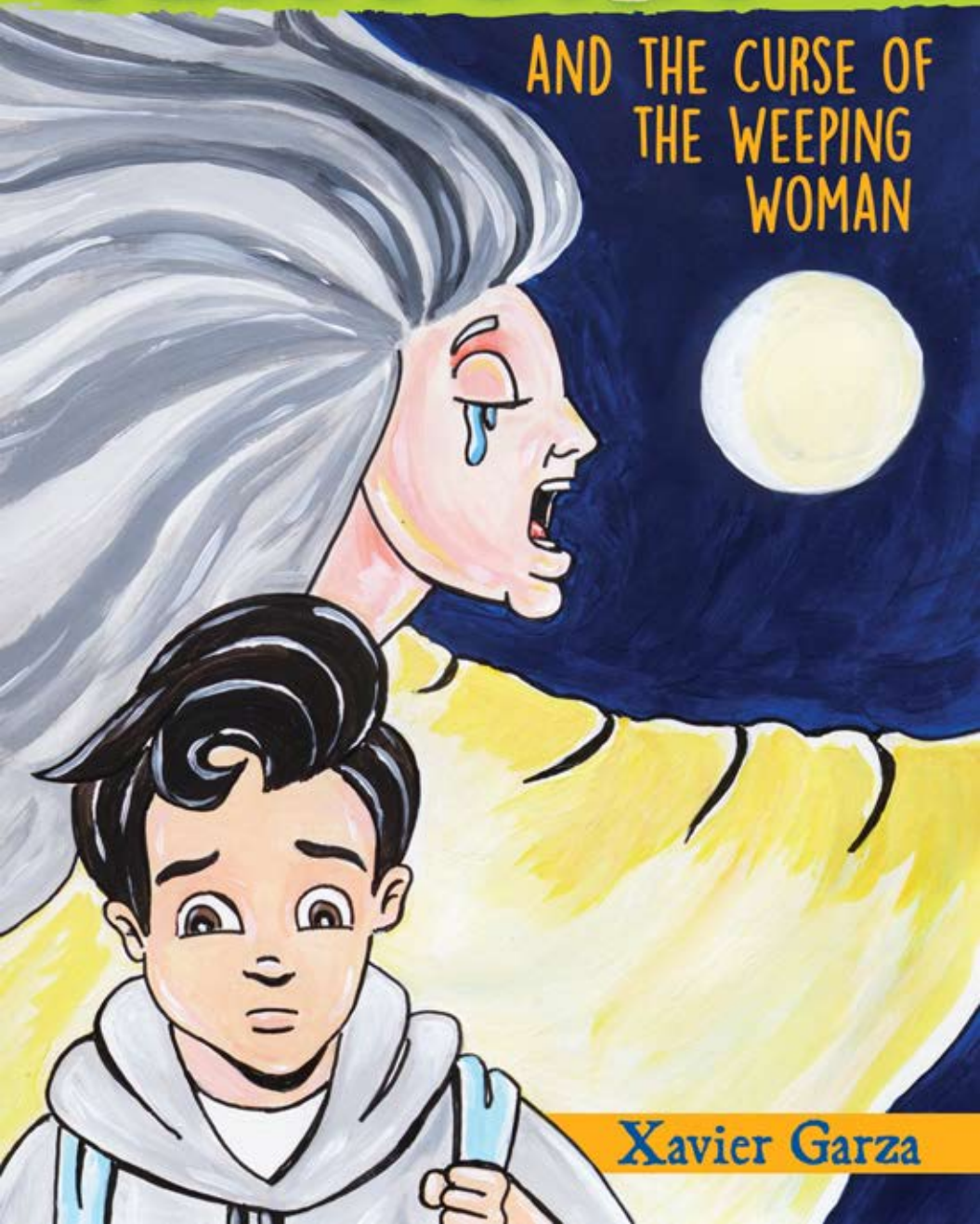


VINCENT VENTURA

#4

AND THE CURSE OF
THE WEEPING
WOMAN



Xavier Garza

Praise for the Monster Fighter Mystery series

"Book 3 in Garza's Monster Fighter Mystery series adds a little psychological horror to Vincent's newest adventure, and this installment [is] a cohesive story centered on friendship and, more importantly, kicking monster butt. A case of lighthearted fun during the witching hour."

—*Kirkus Reviews* on *Vincent Ventura and the Diabolical Duendes* / *Vincent Ventura y los duendes diabólicos*

"This fun, illustrated Spanish/English short chapter book has enough Mexican folklore and American teen angst to keep middle grade and reluctant readers interested in the other-worldly adventures of the monster-fighter extraordinaire."

—*School Library Journal* on *Vincent Ventura and the Mystery of the Witch Owl* / *Vincent Ventura y el misterio de la bruja lechuza*

"Garza's cool series sequel offers a little mystery, a little action and a lot of fun. A breezy read, Vincent's latest adventure packs folkloric elements in a fast-paced tale that's sure to entice reluctant readers. Similar to its predecessor, this bilingual novel contains both English and Baeza Ventura's Spanish versions, with the latter being superior in readability. A real hoot."

—*Kirkus Reviews* on *Vincent Ventura and the Mystery of the Witch Owl* / *Vincent Ventura y el misterio de la bruja lechuza*

"Garza delves into Spanish folklore and adds action, horror and mystery to create a wonderfully exciting book. This illustrated series-starter is formatted as a bilingual flipbook, with the Spanish text occupying one half of the book, and English the other. The descriptive Spanish and high vocabulary make it a strong addition to both elementary and middle school mystery sections."

—*Booklist* on *Vincent Ventura and the Mystery of the Chupacabras* / *Vincent Ventura y el misterio del chupacabras*

VINCENT VENTURA

AND THE CURSE OF
THE WEEPING WOMAN



Xavier Garza



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Piñata Books are full of surprises!

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*To my son Vincent. You make me proud
each and every day.*

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CHAPTER 1

Do You Think It's Mamá?

I am awakened from my sleep by the sound of children playing outside my bedroom window. I look over at my clock and see that it is fifteen minutes past 2 AM. Who lets children play outside this late at night? Wrapping myself in my blanket, I climb out of my bed and make my way to the window, where I see two young boys kicking the soccer ball that I left out in the yard. Barefoot and dressed in tattered overalls, the boys look to be around eight years old. One is a good foot taller than the other, but they look alike, which leads me to believe that they are brothers, maybe even twins. I also notice that the two boys seem to disappear and reappear from one moment to the next. What's going on?

“Pass the ball to me,” the taller boy says in Spanish, the language of my grandmother.

Suddenly, the taller boy kicks the ball way too high for the shorter boy to reach, but much to my surprise the boy leaps impossibly high into the air and headbutts it

back. How did he do that? Few adults can leap that high, let alone a child. But as the boy descends down to the ground, I realize that he didn't jump but rather flew up to reach the ball.

The boys both suddenly disappear, only to reappear moments later, which leads me to realize that these are not mere children playing in my yard. As impossible as it may seem, these two boys must be ghosts.

The wind begins to pick up all of a sudden, causing the two boys to stop playing. Maybe it's just my imagination, but the wind seems to mimic the sound of a woman weeping. The two boys look concerned.

"Do you think it's Mamá?" asks the taller of the two boys.

"What if it's not Mamá?" the shorter boy replies. "What if it's the other one?"

The boys start running across the street towards the house at 666 Duende Street.

Did somebody move in and I failed to notice?

The two boys are now standing by the door that leads down into the basement. I turn away to get my night vision binoculars from my drawer. When I turn back around, however, the two boys are already gone. Did they open the door and go inside when I looked away? But how? I hardly took my eyes off them. As I try to make sense of the situation, I hear what sounds like a woman's voice outside my window.

"¿Dónde están mis hijos?" Where are my children?

Did I really just hear that? Or is it just the wind playing tricks on me? Just then I see her. A woman dressed



in white whose eyes glow like balls of fire. I watch as she descends from the sky as if walking down an invisible flight of stairs.

“¿*Dónde están mis hijos?*” the woman asks again.

She makes her way across the street towards the house at 666 Duende Street. The door that leads down to the basement swings open and I hear two voices cheerily cry out.

“Mamá! Mamá!”

The wind stops as soon the door closes behind her. What did I just witness? As I try to make sense of it all, a black SUV pulls into the driveway. A woman, maybe in her late twenties to early thirties and wearing oversized glasses, is sitting behind the wheel. She rubs her eyes and yawns before exiting her vehicle. As she begins walking toward the house, the wind begins to pick up again. It’s blowing harder than last time.

Once again, I hear what seems to be a woman’s voice. But it’s a different voice this time. It’s harsher, darker in tone than the one before. The young woman that emerged from the SUV looks up at the sky as if searching for something. She blesses herself with the sign of the cross and clasps her hands as if in prayer. Whatever it is that she is doing seems to work, because the wind begins to calm down. Taking one last look up at the sky, the young woman seems to breathe a sigh of relief before going inside the house and closing the door.

What is going on? And what do the two boys and woman dressed in white have to do with the young lady

who just went into the house at 666 Duende Street? And to whom does that other voice belong to?

It would seem that another potential monster mystery has made its way into my neighborhood.