

VINCENT VENTURA

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AND THE MYSTERY OF THE CHUPACABRAS



Xavier Garza

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THE CHUPACABRAS



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To my grandfather Ventura Garza

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CHAPTER 1

Monsters Are Real

It all began with the overnight disappearances of dogs. Nobody cared when it was just stray dogs that were going missing in the neighborhood. Seen as a nuisance, most people were happy to see them gone. Even my dad commented that animal control must have finally begun to do its job right. It was only after Mrs. Rangel's dog, Chato, went missing that people finally began to care. He was a celebrity Chihuahua, famous for those taco television commercials back in the day. Two days after Chato disappeared, Mrs. García's wiener dog Lucy was nowhere to be found. Mrs. West's pet poodle vanished shortly after. Nobody has any inkling as to why dogs have been disappearing in our neighborhood. Nobody, that is, except for me, Vincent Ventura.

Unbeknownst to them, a great evil has made its way into our neighborhood, an evil that didn't begin to manifest itself until the day after someone moved into the

old house at 666 Duende Street. Rumored to be haunted, the house had been abandoned for years. Recently it was put up for rent and Mr. Calaveras moved in. It was then that the dogs began to disappear.

That's just too much of a coincidence. Mr. Calaveras is behind the dog disappearances. I can feel it in my bones, and my bones are never wrong.

"I know he's hiding something," I tell my cousin Michelle, who is feeding treats to my pet beagle, Kenny.

From my tree house I adjust my binoculars and bring the grey-haired old man watering his lawn into focus. Dressed in farmer's overalls, most people would see Mr. Calaveras as just a harmless, but grumpy, old man with a fondness for yelling at kids that dare set foot in his yard. But not me. I know there is more to Mr. Calaveras than meets the eye. Sooner or later he is going to make a mistake, and when he does, I am going to be there to expose him for the monster that he is.

"Vincent, you shouldn't be spying on Mr. Calaveras," says Michelle. "It's kind of creepy."

My freckle-faced cousin is the smartest student at our school, but she can be very naive. For all her smarts, she insists on seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. That's why it's hard for her to imagine that something truly dark and vile is living among us. As for me, I see the world for what it is: a place filled with evil that lurks behind every corner, waiting to pounce on you at a moment's notice.

"But it just doesn't make sense," pipes in Michelle's twin brother, Bobby, who's in the tree house with us.

“Mr. Calaveras is such an old guy, how can you believe that he’s some kind of monster?”

I understand their reluctance to believe in the existence of monsters. To do so would mean that they would have to accept that there are things in this world that can’t be explained away by science or logic.

“Yeah, you’re talking about a monster, Vincent,” says Michelle. “Monsters just don’t exist in the real world.”

“That’s what monsters want you to think,” I tell her. “People used to say that there were no such things as giant squids either,” I remind her. “But they were wrong, weren’t they? People used to think that panda bears were just a myth. Pandas for crying out loud! But they were wrong, weren’t they?”

“But a monster . . . ?” asks Michelle, still not ready to accept the truth. “You’re asking us to believe that a monster is running loose in our neighborhood. C’mon!”

“I know the monster is real because I have seen it skulking in the shadows with my own eyes. I smelled the foul stench it left in its wake.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a bit melodramatic?” asks Bobby.

“And you saw it?” asks Michelle.

“I did,” I tell her. “I’ve seen it not only once, but twice. The first time was last Tuesday night when I awoke to the sounds of it hissing outside my window.”

“What did it look like?” asks Bobby.

“It was about the size of a full-grown man and covered in thick, green fur. It had spikes protruding from its back and a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. It crouched

down on all fours like a dog and hid behind the bushes in Mr. Calaveras' yard. Shortly after that, I saw a naked Mr. Calaveras emerge from behind the bushes and open the door that leads down to his basement. He looked around first to make sure nobody had seen him, and then disappeared behind the door."

"And you saw the transformation?" asks Michelle, still incredulous. "You actually *saw* Mr. Calaveras transform from a monster into a human? *Right?!?*"

"I didn't actually see it with my own eyes, if that's what you are asking. He was behind the bushes when the transformation took place. But I definitely did see the monster go behind the bushes where Mr. Calaveras emerged seconds later."

"And that proves what?" asks Michelle.

"It proves that Mr. Calaveras is the monster," I tell her.

"First of all, there's no proof there's a monster in the neighborhood, Vincent," she challenges me.

"But . . ."

"And second, you give us no proof that this supposed monster turned into Mr. Calaveras!!! You're just spinning a tale or trying to frighten us."

"Well, I don't have any material proof . . . or evidence . . ."

"So you saw Mr. Calaveras out at night . . . when dogs disappear," she concludes, like she's a lawyer from one of those TV shows she likes to watch. "You need to meet a higher burden of proof if anybody is going to believe you."