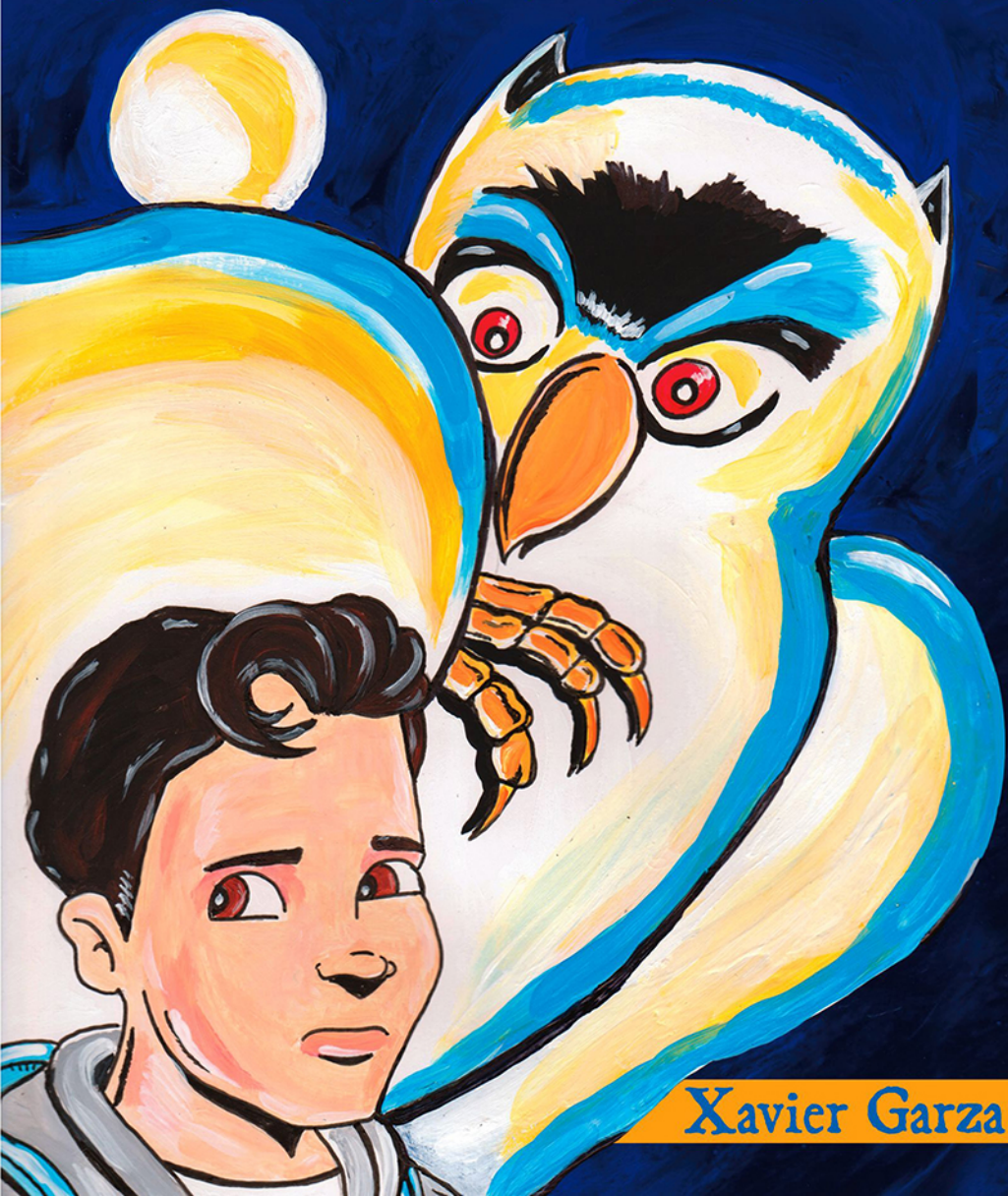


VINCENT VENTURA

#2

AND THE MYSTERY OF THE WITCH OWL



Xavier Garza

VINCENT VENTURA

AND THE MYSTERY
OF THE WITCH OWL



Xavier Garza

Illustrations by Xavier Garza

Spanish translation by Gabriela Baeza Ventura



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*This book is dedicated to my wife Irma. I
couldn't do what I do without you.*



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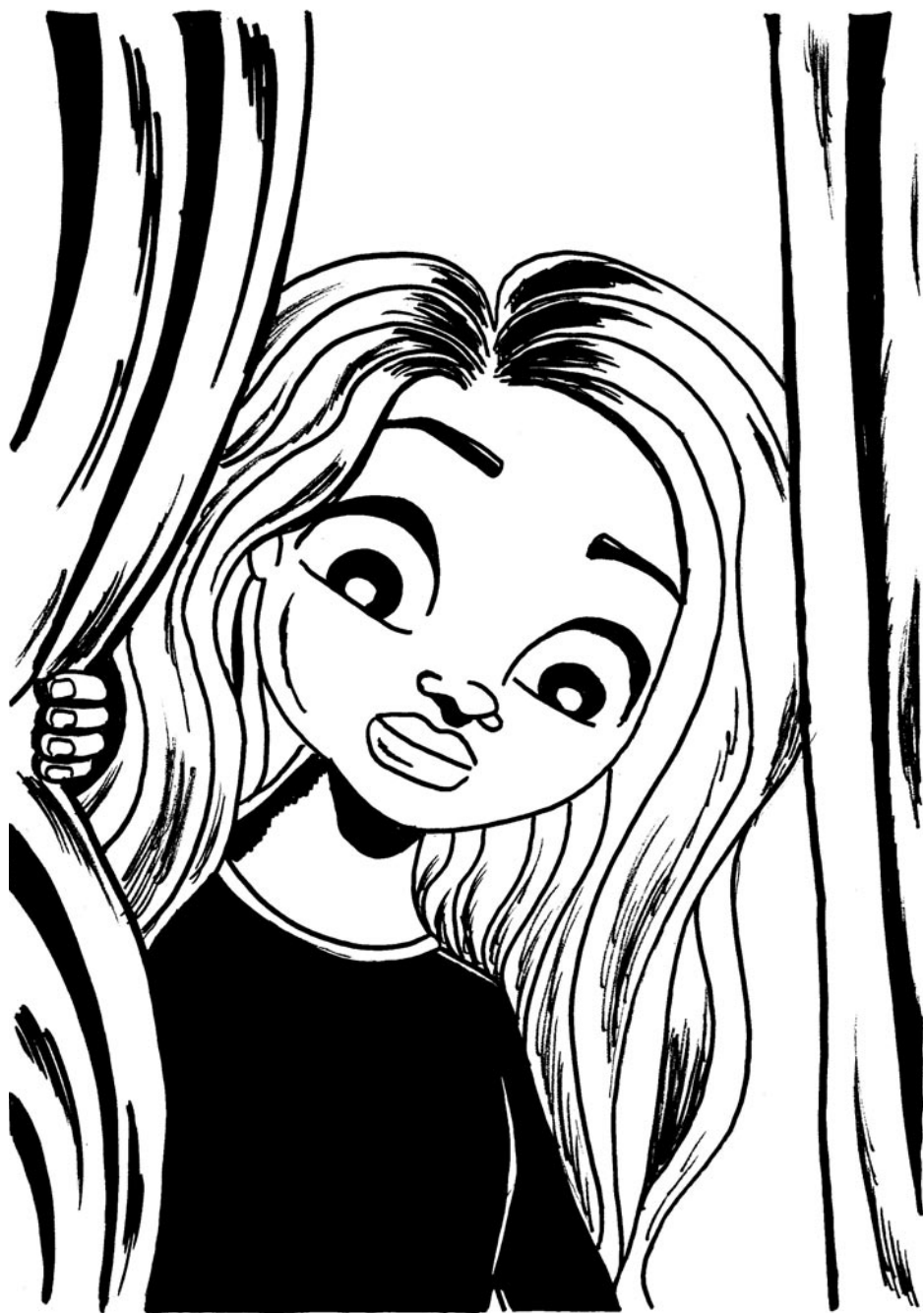


CHAPTER 1

The Girl at the Window

I am awakened by the sound of screeching car tires outside my bedroom window. I see a black minivan pull up to the house at 666 Duende Street. The place has been rented for months, but nobody has moved in as of yet. That is, until tonight. I watch a grown man and a young girl—about middle-school age—step out of the vehicle and rush into the house. Before closing the front door, the man peers up at the sky as if looking for something. What that something could be is a mystery to me. That's when I notice that the girl is staring at me from her living room window. She is a pretty, brown-haired girl with wide, almond-shaped eyes. She waves at me and smiles. Suddenly the man grabs her hand and pulls her away from the window. The house goes dark after that.

I wait for them to turn on the lights in one of the other rooms, but they never do. The house remains pitch black. *Are they trying to hide the fact that they are home? Why would they want to do that?* As I return to



bed, out of the corner of my eye I notice something white in the branches of the ancient ash tree in their yard. At first I think it's a blanket that somehow got caught up in the wind and is now stuck up in the tree. That is, until it spreads open what looks like wings. It's no blanket. It's an enormous white owl. *Are owls supposed to grow that big? I don't think so. Could this be what the man was looking for?*

The owl turns its head in my direction. I quickly hide behind the curtains. After a few minutes, I slowly peer out from behind the curtain, fearful that it has seen me. Apparently it hasn't. The owl has glowing red eyes that bulge from its sockets. I hear it give out a series of loud hoots, and then two more owls land at the top of the old ash tree. All three owls drop down to the ground, but to my amazement, what lands on the ground are not owls at all. What lands on the ground are three women dressed in black. They whisper to each other before heading off in different directions.

What's going on here? I ask myself. *Are they scouting the neighborhood?* Then the realization of what I have just witnessed hits me like a ton of bricks. Monsters have once again taken residence in my neighborhood. But why now? And what does it have to do with the arrival of my mysterious new neighbors?

"It would seem that another monster mystery has fallen into your lap, Vincent Ventura," I whisper to myself. And fully I intend to get to the bottom of this mystery.