

# Chapter 6

La Botella Raptor

“You don’t gotta worry, mi vida. I’m not dying or anything.” said Nessa Overture as she lay sprawled over her many, many feathery pillows.

“Ma, you never get sick.” Cody said as he gently lay a hefty, white blanket over his mother’s shivering body.

Nessa only paid half-attention to her son’s concerned statement. She was distracted by an old telenovela from the 80’s playing on a beat up TV that stood on top of her dresser. She hardly ever turned her head from it, but it was also likely because she was too weak to move. Cody hated seeing his mom in this bad state. After such a crazy morning, coming home to see her sick in bed felt like a universal slap in the face.

“It’s you I’m worried about. Your head’s all scraped up.” Nessa tried to reach out to place her hand on Cody’s face, but her arms limped down before they could stretch out.

“The bandage makes it look worse. It doesn’t even hurt, but YOU look like you’re in actual pain.”

“Deme un toque.” said Nessa before choking out a dry cough. “It’s only bad because I got cocky and stayed out in the rain too long. That’s it!”

He poured his mom a glass of water. “You don’t look fine right now..”

Nessa played up an overly hurt expression. “Diay, I don’t need water. I need the good stuff.”

“Painkillers?”

Nessa shook her head. “It’s from my special bottle.”

“Tequila?”

“NO! It’s a round bottle in my medicine cabinet. It’s blue. Go get it, please.”

When Cody found it, he was shocked at how heavy the thing was. The round, blue bottle looked like a potion from an alchemist’s lab.

“Where’d you get this?”

“It was my mother’s. I know it looks all crazy and stuff, but it just helps me sleep.”

Cody yanked the cork out of the bottle and grimaced after taking a whiff of the medicine. “It looks like poison.”

“In large amounts, it is. Abuelita called it La Botella Raptor. Just pour me a drop.”

Cody carefully tilted the bottle against his mom’s glass. Blue goo trickled out like stale syrup and sunk through the cold water. “What’s this have to do with dinosaurs?”

“Dinosaurs?” Nessa arched an eyebrow. “OHH, no, mijó. La Botella Raptor means *Kidnapper’s Bottle*.”

Cody nearly spilled it. “Whaat!?! Why do you have this?”

“It helps me sleep. Geez. You try working nights for years as a mother.”

The room went quiet.

“Your bandage,” she continued, “Is that why you were late? Did you get into a fight?.”

“Seriously? Do you really think I’d pick a fight with someone.”

“You did yesterday with a flaming minotaur.”

“Other way around. HE started chasing ME.” said Cody. “No, the reason I’m late is because I had to stop by a friend’s house.”

“Oh, okay.”

Cody wasn’t expecting his mom to accept such a blank statement as a legitimate answer. A part of him wanted to talk about Penny. Maybe it was his obsessive side, or perhaps it was his gut telling him to finally open up to his parents. “There’s a girl we know from work and school. She disappeared. And I went to her home to check if she was okay.”

“Was she a no-call, no-show?”

Cody shook his head. “Her dad said she never came home.”

“I’m sure she’s fine. When I was that age, I took off from my folks all the time.”

Nessa chugged her spiked water and smiled at her son. Her TV program had finally ended, so she could finally look away from it. As Nessa flipped through various channels on their grainy television set, Cody caught a glimpse of a motorcycle accident nearby. For a split second, he wondered if that had something to do with Penny’s disappearance.

“Also,” said Cody. “Some other friends from the gas station asked if they could come to dinner. Dad already said they’re welcome, but he wanted me to check with you first.”

“Aw, that’s so niiiice of him.” said Nessa, already drifting off. “Your father must be proud of you all for helping find that poor girl.”

“Ha, Dad being proud? I’d like to see that someday.” Cody rolled his eyes.

He glanced at his mom and realized she had already fallen asleep. Cody stood there in silence, staring at the blue raptor bottle, amazed at how fast it worked.

Bison meatloaf, green beans, and baked potatoes were for dinner that night. They ate it all. By the time everyone had finished eating, Olive was just about done recounting the exploding waffle batter from earlier. The whole table slipped into uproarious laughter. Ria and Chris were enjoying themselves while Cody was quiet.

Max got out his last chuckle before addressing the guests in a casual toast, “It’s great to have

“It’s funny,” said Chris, “We barely see Cody outside of school and work. He’s like a total ghost sometimes. It’s nice to actually catch up for once.”

“That, and we’re afraid he’s gonna try and embarrass himself.” Ria butted in.

“Ria!” said Cody.

“How?” Olive leaned forward in her seat.

“How NOTHING.” said Cody.

“Yep, my son’s definitely hiding something,” said Max.

The table slipped into laughter again. Cody joined along to save face, but then he stood up and started to put food on a new plate.

“Hey, I’m gonna go grab a plate for mom.”

“Aww, he’s embarrassed. It’s okay, Cody. Your secret’s safe with us!”

Cody waved his hand in the air to dismiss Ria’s teasing.

“You gotta tell me this secret!” said Olive.

“It’s nothing big, he just lllllikes a giiiiirl.” Ria continued to tease. “But it was really strange today. She just disappeared. No one knows where she went!”

“Was it on the news?”

“Not yet. Hopefully, the whole disappearance was just a misunderstanding. Cody’s really taking it seriously.”

Olive sighed as she played with her food. “It must be hard for him, honestly. I can’t imagine what it feels like for your crush to go missing.”

“Her family probably feels way worse,” said Ria. “And if she actually is missing, God knows how she must be right now. At this point, that guy needs to realize he’s done everything he could’ve. It’s better for him to focus on his true calling, monster hunting.”

Max’s food nearly went down the wrong pipe. “Ria, you really gotta stop making these *jokes* about my son.” He said while making a very unconvincing poker face.

Chris butted in. “You don’t have to play dumb, Mr. O. We’ve known about your family’s monster hunting hobby for like five years.”

Max looked more confused. “Cody told you?”

“No, we figured it out pretty quickly.” Ria butted in.

Max looked more concerned now. “And even though you can’t see the monsters, you actually believe it?”

Ria and Chris simultaneously nodded.

“Fair enough. So, do you kids got any hobbies?” said Max.

“Kung fu.” Ria nonchalantly muttered.

“I’ve known for like five years, Mr. Overture.”

Chris butted in. “You don’t have to play dumb, Mr. O. We’ve known about your family’s monster hunting hobby for like five years.”

Max looked more confused. “Cody told you?”

“No, we figured it out pretty quickly.” Ria butted in.

Max looked more concerned now. “And even though you can’t see the monsters, you actually believe it?”

Ria and Chris simultaneously nodded.

“Fair enough. So, do you kids got any hobbies?” said Max.

“Kung fu.” Ria nonchalantly muttered.

“I do a lot of lucid dreaming.” Said Chris.

“Lucid dreaming— you can control your dreams?” said Max while pouring himself a glass of juice.

“Oh yeah! It’s bigger than ever now. Thanks to technology and research, we’re able to access parts of the mind during dreams the human brain was never capable of.”

“Like what? Telepathy.”

“For sure! We’re making way with the neurolinks that form between people during rem cycles. The science books won’t tell you this, but we’re only a couple months away from proving it.”

Olive nearly choked on her meatloaf upon hearing Chris’ bold, yet unsupported claim. “Um. come again, Christopher?”

“Wowhowhow!” Max laughed. “The world keeps on getting bigger by the minute. I remember when monsters were the strangest things I saw.”

“So Mr. Overture,” said Ria, “How long have you been a monster hunter?”

“As much as I’d love to unveil all the details of my family’s secret life, the truth is I gave up that calling a looong time ago.”

“So who helps Cody in his monster fighting?”

“No one. And he doesn’t fight monsters... Well, he shouldn’t. My son’s a bright guy, but he’s still a kid.”

“You really think we’re kids?”

“I don’t ‘think’ that. You ARE children. And you guys have a lot of life ahead. It’s not worth wasting it on chasing invisible creatures.”

Chris chimed in. “We live on a cliffside outside a gas station town. What future is there?”

Max took a bite of food. He needed a moment to chew on the meatloaf AND the question. By the time he swallowed, a response had come to mind. “You can make a difference anywhere, and you don’t need to beat a monster in order to save lives.”

“What makes you think we can save lives?”

“I don’t ‘think’ that, Chris. You can.” said Max, cracking a soft grin.

Suddenly, Olive slammed her hands on the table, nearly hitting her empty plate.

“And yet Cody still turned down his internship with the FCO.”

“Pipsqueek, hush!”

Max picked up a green bean and then playfully flicked it at Olive.

“Ah!”

“FCO?” Chris arched an eyebrow.

Ria nearly gasped. “The Federal Cryptid Organization! Cody had an internship with them?”

“Yup!” Said Olive as she munched on her green bean with a proud smile.

Ria looked like her face was about to split in two. “So all the while Cody’s been denying his destiny by following unrequited love, HE COULD’VE BEEN HELPING OUR NATIONAL HEROES?”

“I’m not sure I’d call any government agency a *national hero*.” said Olive as she swished a cup of apple juice around in a cup as if it were a glass of wine.

“Well, it doesn’t matter because my son turned their offer down. It was over a year ago, and he really regrets it. So when he comes back, it’s best not to bring it up to him.”

“I’ll add it to the list,” Olive said before downing the rest of her juice.”

Unfortunately, Cody had overheard the entire conversation. He figured the best course of action was to pretend he was talking with his sick mom in her room the whole time. That would avoid any awkward confrontation. It’s not that he regretted turning down his internship; the problem was that he was embarrassed about doing it out of fear.

The rest of the night was a fine, peaceful dinner. As Ria and Chris were heading out, they both assured Cody that Penny was somewhere safe. They couldn’t have known. However at the same time, there was nothing they could do about it. At the moment, she had her family to worry about her.

Cody went to bed early that night. There was no need for a sleeping aide like the Botella Raptor. He had enough of the real world today. Now, he wanted to get his mind off everything.