



Don't Feed the Geckos!: The Carver Chronicles, Book 3

By Karen English

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Carlos isn't sure how he feels about the news that his cousin Bernardo will be joining his class at Carver Elementary. But when Bernardo comes to live with him temporarily, taking over Carlos's top bunk, his spot on the school soccer team, and even his Papi's attention, Carlos knows he isn't happy. Worse, Bernardo starts messing with Carlos's pet geckos! Carlos tries to see past his cousin's annoying ways, but Bernardo sure doesn't make it easy. Will Carlos—and his geckos—survive Bernardo's visit? Can he keep the peace for his family's sake?

Emerging and newly independent readers are sure to recognize themselves in this humorous school and family story.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Skateboard Party: The Carver Chronicles, Bk 2

"A welcome series addition that emphasizes familiarity instead of difference and treats its message with an affectionately light hand." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Praise for Dog Days: The Carver Chronicles, Bk 1

"Chapter book readers have few options if they want to read about urban boys of color; here's hoping for more."—*The Horn Book Magazine*

About the Author

Karen English is a Coretta Scott King Honor Award-winner and the author of *It All Comes Down to This* as well as the Nikki and Deja and The Carver Chronicles series. Her novels have been praised for their accessible writing, authentic characters, and satisfying storylines. She is a former elementary school teacher and lives in Los Angeles, California.

Laura Freeman has illustrated several books for young readers, including the Nikki and Deja and Carver Chronicles series, and *Natalie's Hair Was Wild*, which she also wrote. Laura grew up in New York City, and now lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and two children. Visit her online at lfreemanart.com and on Twitter @LauraFreemanArt.

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One Company Coming

Carlos's cousin, Bernardo, is coming. It's after school and Carlos sits down at the kitchen table to eat his Toaster Tart and eavesdrop on his mother and Tía Lupe's telephone conversation. His mother and Tía Lupe are always on the phone, checking with each other about everything. At least once or twice a day. His father doesn't even answer the phone anymore because he knows it's probably Tía Lupe.

Carlos overhears that his cousin Bernardo is coming to stay with them all the way from Texas because Bernardo's mom—Tía Emilia—is having a rough time and needs to get a fresh start somewhere else. She's moving to their town and sending Bernardo ahead.

Carlos stops chewing to listen better. Now it sounds as if his mother and Tía Lupe are gossiping about Tía Emilia. She's always having problems; she doesn't make the right choices; she needs to manage her life

better; and blah blah blah. Boring grown-up stuff. But it does make him think about his cousin and the fact that he's coming tomorrow.

His mother finally gets off the phone and comes to sit across from him. She puts on her serious face.

"Now, listen here, Carlos. Do you remember your cousin Bernardo?"

"A little bit." Bernardo was kind of chubby and had a mop of dark curly hair. Carlos went with Mami and Papi to Texas—San Antonio—when he was almost six and his sister, Issy (short for Isabella), had just turned three. It was Bernardo's birthday; Carlos turned six a few months after him. Carlos remembers sitting on a porch, eating a Creamsicle with Bernardo before his birthday party. Oh, and running through the sprinklers. He remembers Bernardo cried because he wanted two pieces of birthday cake on his plate at once. He didn't want to wait until he finished what he had first. He just sat there crying and looking stupid with a mouth full of chewed-up cake.

And Carlos remembers seeing a photograph of Bernardo's dad in some kind of uniform—like an army uniform.

"Bernardo and Tía Emilia are moving here. Your *tía* wants him making the change in schools and settled as soon as possible. I'm picking him up tomorrow, so I just want to give you a heads-up."

Maybe this will be a good thing. Maybe Bernardo will be cool and it'll be awesome to have another guy in the house—kind of like a brother. They'll be able to do things together. Mami doesn't let Carlos go to the park by himself, or the store, or anywhere, actually. But with his cousin Bernardo here, he'll have an automatic buddy to go places with. *Yeah*, Carlos says to himself. *Bernardo*.

"What's he like?" Carlos asks.

"How am I supposed to know?" Mami says, sounding a little irritated. "All I know is that you better make your cousin feel at home. Make him feel welcome."

That's important to Mami, Carlos knows. Family. And sticking together and helping each other out.

Now Mami is giving him a list that she's counting out on her fingers—which shows she means business. She still has the serious face where she stares at Carlos, looking at him closely. His little sister comes into the room and stands next to Mami. She's wearing her tiara because she wants to be a queen when she grows up. It's annoying. Ever since Mami told her she was named after Queen Isabella of Spain, she's been wearing that tiara as much as possible. Mami did a report on Queen Isabella in high school, apparently.

"Can I have a Toaster Tart?" Issy asks in a whiny voice.

"Not now, Princess."

"Queen," Issy says. She adjusts her crown. Carlos rolls his eyes.

"Oh, right. *Queen* Isabella. Not now."

Issy must sense that there's something going on that she wants to be a part of. She climbs onto Mami's lap, and then there are the two of them, looking at Carlos like they expect something special from him.

Bernardo has had a hard year, Mami tells him. She doesn't tell him what that means exactly, but because he has had this hard year, Carlos is to make Bernardo feel extra "at home." Like letting him feed Carlos's geckos. Stuff like that. "And introduce him to your friends, help him in school, share stuff with him."

That sounds super, but Carlos is stuck on letting Bernardo near his geckos. *Uh-uh . . . Ain't gonna happen.* At least not without supervision.

In the last few months, Carlos has discovered a love for animals—and insects. Different kinds of animals, like geckos and horned toads and albino snakes. He also realized he loves insects and their weird behaviors. Because of this, Carlos is no longer a member of the Knucklehead Club. He used to always miss turning in his homework, he did a sloppy job on his projects, he didn't always study for spelling tests, he brought toys to school to play with in his desk, and he didn't do his classwork in a timely fashion. Just a general knucklehead.

Those were the words of his teacher, Ms. Shelby-Ortiz, actually. He'd overheard her talking to Mr. Beaumont, the other third grade teacher, in the front office. She'd said, "I've got a few knuckleheads in my class this year. I'm hoping they'll decide to straighten up." She didn't know Carlos was listening.

He had come into the office to see if he could call his mother and tell her to bring the lunch he'd forgotten (typical knucklehead behavior), and he was standing right behind the two teachers as he waited his turn to speak to Mrs. Marker, the office lady.

He'd left after that. He didn't want Ms. Shelby-Ortiz to know he'd heard. He went back out to the yard and sat down on the nearest bench, thinking he'd just ask a couple of kids for whatever they could spare out of their own lunches.

It wasn't time to line up yet, so he'd had time to think—about being a *knucklehead*. He didn't want to be thought of like that. It made him feel funny. What if he went through his whole life being known as a knucklehead?

Besides, when he'd helped Papi fix the back door screen that Saturday, Papi had told him that if he wanted to be one of those new things he was talking about all the time—an entomologist or a zoologist—he'd have to go to college.

Could he get into college? Could he be an entomologist (a person who studies insects) or a zoologist (one who studies animals) while being a knucklehead? He didn't think so. That really bothered him.

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