

Buried Diamonds
By APRIL HENRY

PUZZLD?

At the beginning of each chapter and sprinkled throughout the book, you will find vanity license plate puzzlers. See if you can decode these hidden messages. Look for the glossary key at the end of the book to check your detective work.

The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.

-William Faulkner

Chapter 1

The blow came out of nowhere. The next thing Eddy knew, he was flat on his back. A kid was standing over him, and something green and shiny and slender was heading straight for the side of Eddy's face.

His cheek exploded in pain.

“Go back to where you came from, you wet back!”

Eddy tried to roll away, but the guy ground his foot on Eddy's shoulder and pinned him fast. Two-handed, the guy swung the thing he was holding back over his shoulder, where it caught the light. It was a half-size souvenir bat, made out of metal. Eddie's son had gotten the same thing at PGE Park one time at a baseball game. The bat connected with the bone just above his right eye, and his vision was flooded with blood.

There were three or four of them he saw now, standing over them, one of them laughing. And one of them, he saw with dimming horror, held a gun.

Eddy tried to speak, but his throat was filled with hot, salty liquid. I was born here, he wanted to say. I belong here, same as you. But the thought melted from his mind, as insubstantial as cotton candy. He barely felt the hand tug his wallet from his pocket, didn't hear the rattle and hiss as someone shook and then used a can of spray-paint. When light from a passing car washed over them, his three attackers froze and then ran.

He was beyond knowing they were gone. Lying on the wet leaves, his legs danced a little, no longer under his control. And then Eduardo Estrada, second generation Mexican-American, lost consciousness.

When a jogger found him just before the sun began to rise, the blood around Eddy's head glowed like a black halo in the sodium shine of the street light. Next to him, someone had spray painted the word, “Spic!”