

OPEN DOORS

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BOTÁNICA - BACK ROOM - 35 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

A rosary with turquoise beads hangs from a doorknob. PAOLA (10), a girl in white robes and ceremonial face paint, carefully collects the rosary. Candlelight flickers against the silver streak in her long black hair.

Paola places the rosary in YOUNG ROSA's (20s) shaking hands.

PAOLA

If you pray, then pray.

A TEEN GIRL SCREAMS NEARBY.

Old framed photos with people of all ages -- some recent, some dating back a century -- cover the walls. Below them, jars of herbs, plants, and a Virgin Mary statue.

A wrinkled but wise CURANDERA (70s) chants tribal prayers, shakes a maraca, and circles the screaming teen, SOPHIA (17).

Sophia writhes in place. Her eyes dart wildly around the room as tears roll down her pale, gaunt cheeks. She winces as beastly figures made of black smoke and ectoplasm seep out of the shadows; only she sees them.

Paola brushes basil and rose pedals along Sophia's trembling limbs. The Curandera flicks holy water on the tormented teen.

CURANDERA

I cannot stop it. It has tasted
blood, and it craves more. I can
only contain it. Did you bring it?

Young Rosa pulls baby teeth and hair out of her pocket.

CURANDERA

The vessel.

Paola fetches a stained glass bottle with mystical symbols and a bearded man's face etched into it. A DEATH RATTLE ECHOES behind her.

She turns to see her doppelgänger, DARK PAOLA (10), in the shadows. It stares seemingly through her with shiny black, soulless eyes. Paola gasps.

CURANDERA

Quickly!

Paola opens the bottle -- SOPHIA SCREAMS.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

ROSA (80s) wakes in her bed with a start.

ROSA
Isabela?

She waits...

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Mogote, Colorado. Population: 1,025. The modest, modernized three-bedroom ranch-style house sits alone on two acres, save the storage shed and outhouse.

An OWL HOOTS IN THE DISTANCE.

A light goes on in Rosa's bedroom.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The turquoise rosary hangs from the doorknob. Rosa opens the door and steps into the darkness, a picture frame in hand.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Long hallway. Rosa peeks out of her room, listening.

ROSA
Isabela?

INT. RAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

RAUL (30s) snores in bed. Rosa passes his open door.

ROSA (O.S.)
Isabela?

Raul rubs his eyes and turns to the doorway. Rosa's lamplight streaks into the hall.

RAUL
Grandma?

Raul checks his phone -- it's 3:53 AM.

THE PICTURE FRAME CRASHES ON THE LIVING ROOM FLOOR.

Raul snatches a baseball bat from under his bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rosa stands at the front door. She stares at the cross over the doorframe and whispers incoherently.

Raul approaches cautiously. He spots the picture frame on the floor and sets it on a nearby table.

RAUL
Grandma.

Rosa snaps out of her trance.

RAUL
What's wrong, Grandma?

She stares at him for a moment.

RAUL
Come on. Let's go back to bed.

ROSA
I'm waiting for Isabela.

RAUL
Bela's not here, Grandma. She lives in Denver now. Remember?

Rosa stares at him, silently, but confidently.

A LOUD KNOCK AT THE FRONT DOOR BREAKS THE SILENCE.

Raul turns on the porch light and peeks out. He sighs and unlocks/opens the door.

INT./EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ISABELA (30s) stands on the porch, flanked by her three children, MARIA (14), the twins, CARMEN and JAIME (11), and their golden retriever, SAMMY DOG (4).

RAUL
Bela?

BELA
Hi, Raul. We need a place to stay for the night.

RAUL
It's almost four in the morning.

BELA

I would've called, but River took our phones. Please. We have nowhere else to go.

RAUL

Classic Bela. When we need you, you're nowhere to be found. And yet, when you're running away from something, this is the first place you show up --

ROSA

Cállate, both of you!

Rosa steps out to the porch.

ROSA

Oh, my great grandchildren... you are so big! Look at you!

She squeezes Carmen's pudgy cheeks.

ROSA

We have food, and beds, and Raul can pull some old clothes out of the storage shed. Everything else we can figure out in the morning.

(to Bela)

¿Sí?

Bela nods.

ROSA

(to Raul)

¿Sí?

RAUL

Sure, Grandma. Never turn your back on family. Right?

Raul glares at Bela and heads back inside. Rosa ushers Bela, the kids, and Sammy Dog into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Crystals and candles decorate the room. A breeze comes through an open window.

On the floor, Jaime plays with vintage Hot Wheels cars.

JAIME

Ready? Three... two... one... go!

Jaime races the cars, but they don't go very far and stop at approximately the same distance. Jaime crawls after them.

A CREAK COMES FROM THE WALL. In his peripheral, Jaime sees crouching legs stand up by the window.

Jaime turns to see two legs against the wall. Sneakers, jeans, and all. The breeze blows curtains in front of it, so only the thighs and below can be seen.

JAIME

Hello?

Jaime cautiously creeps to the curtain. His shaking hand pulls the curtain aside to reveal --

Mexican knickknacks sitting atop a table, its base made to look like a boy's clothed legs and feet.

Jaime sighs in relief.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Bela sits on a bench, a southwestern blanket wrapped around her. Raul sets a tub of clothes down beside her.

RAUL

The twins can have my room. You and Maria take your old room. I'll sleep on the couch.

BELA

Thanks. That's very generous.

RAUL

Yeah, that's me, I guess.

BELA

What do you want me to say, Raul?

RAUL

Nothing.

Bela waits with a "here it comes" look on her face.

RAUL

I just think it sucks that I've had to take care of grandma all by myself so you could go shack up with River in Denver.

BELA

What can I say? It's the only thing Mom ever taught me.

RAUL

Don't pull that shit again. It's been hard. Especially since Amber left. I can't work and be here for Grandma at the same time.

BELA

She looks like she's managing.

RAUL

She has good days and bad. Sometimes she's sharp as a nail. Other days, she doesn't know who she is. And neither do I.

Bela raises an eyebrow -- this is news to her. She takes a flask out of her hoodie and drinks. She offers it to Raul.

RAUL

No thanks. Haven't had anything since Amber left.

BELA

You know, I've never believed her story. I've seen you pass-out, throw-up drunk, but I've never seen you get physical.

Raul looks away.

RAUL

The Mexican restaurant in town is hiring, if you're interested. I think you'd do pretty well there.

BELA

I don't plan on staying.

RAUL

Figured as much.

Raul opens the door and stops.

RAUL

She misses you, ya know.

He heads inside. Bela sighs.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rosa plays her favorite record on her 70s era record player. A song in the vein of "Los Comanchitos" plays. She smiles.

Maria enters and stands politely with perfect posture. Carmen twirls in and explores the room.

MARIA

Good morning, Great-Grandma.

ROSA

Good morning!

MARIA

What would you like for breakfast?

ROSA

Hmmm. Maybe some coffee? And toast?

MARIA

Yes, ma'am.

Carmen gravitates past religious decorations, paintings, and crosses to a small shrine with a framed photo of a younger Sophia. She picks it up.

CARMEN

Who's this? She looks like me.

Rosa feigns a smile.

ROSA

That was your Grandma Sophia. Be careful please, that's the only photograph I have left of her.

Rosa carefully takes the photo and returns it to the shrine.

Carmen opens her mouth to ask more questions, but Maria grabs her by the arm and drags her to the door.

MARIA

Come on, Carmen.

CARMEN

It's toast, Maria. You don't know how to make toast?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Toast pops out of the steaming toaster.

CARMEN

Why doesn't mom ever talk about
Grandma Sophia?

MARIA

Because it makes her sad.

CARMEN

But, why?

MARIA

Because she left Mom and Tío with
Great Grandma when they were kids.

CARMEN

Why?

MARIA

I dunno. Great Grandma is really
old-school superstitious. I think
that's why Mom moved away, too.

Carmen eats a handful of shredded cheese out of the bag.

MARIA

You're too young to remember, but
Great Grandma Rosa used to do some
crazy stuff. She used to bless us
all with holy water. And on
Christmas, she made us sing happy
birthday to Jesus.

CARMEN

(mouthful of cheese)

Whaaat?

MARIA

It's true. I think she's showing
early signs of dementia. She rarely
leaves the house -- I actually
don't think I've seen her leave the
yard before. And the worst part of
all? Dementia is hereditary.

(whispering)

Sometimes I wonder if that's where
Jaime's issues came from...

Bela enters the kitchen and crosses her arms.

BELA

Hey. Your great grandma is a little eccentric, and yes, she is set in her old ways, but none of us would be here without her kindness and generosity, so let's do our best to respect her beliefs. Even if we don't agree with them. Okay?

MARIA

Yes, Mother.

BELA

Are you eating cheese straight from the bag?

CARMEN

(mouthful of cheese)

Maybe...

She shamefully tilts the bag toward Bela, who rolls her eyes and snatches it. Bela gobbles a handful of cheese herself.

CARMEN

Mom!

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DUSK

Raul's truck rolls out of the driveway and departs.

INT. DEN - DUSK

Maria looks at the label on a marshmallow bag.

MARIA

There's no way these are ethically sourced ingredients.

Bela opens the metal fireplace door.

BELA

It's S'mores. You'll live.

(to the twins)

Get some paper plates, please. And a lot of paper towels.

The twins scurry off to the kitchen.

BELA

I don't think this fireplace has been used in years. It certainly hasn't been cleaned.

She tries to center the uneven ash pit cover. GLASS CRACKS AND SHATTERS WITHIN.

BELA

Shit.

She pulls out her cell phone and shines a light inside.

MARIA

What is it?

BELA

I don't know. Sounded like glass.
I'd better check it out.

The twins return.

BELA

Don't eat all the chocolate.

Bela heads out the front door.

Jaime and Maria look at Carmen, who eats a chocolate bar.

CARMEN

What?

Rosa enters from the hallway with a smile. She sees the fireplace; her smile fades and she drops her coffee mug. It shatters on the hardwood floor.

ROSA

What are you doing?

The kids' eyes bulge in surprise.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DUSK

Bela pulls shards of stained glass out of the chimney clean-out door. She winces from a foul stench.

Rosa turns the corner, the kids sidle up behind her.

ROSA

Isabela... what have you done?

MARIA

What's that smell?

JAIME

It smells like pee-pee.

BELA

I broke something in the fireplace.
I'm just cleaning it out so no one
accidentally -- ouch!

Bela yanks her hand out along with an intact portion of the broken bottle. It contains nails, hair, and baby teeth floating in yellow liquid. Bela's blood drips down the glass from a fresh finger cut.

ROSA

Give it to me!

Rosa reaches for the bottle. Bela pulls it away.

BELA

Grandma, no. There's broken glass --
and probably worse things.

ROSA

They're Sophia's!

BELA

What?

ROSA

Give it to me!

Rosa grasps again with incredible rage.

BELA

No, Grandma! It's gross, and I'm
throwing it away.

Bela takes it to the old outhouse in the backyard and dumps it inside. Rosa sobs.

ROSA

You've damned us... You've damned
us all!

Rosa pulls away from the kids and heads back inside.

Bela sighs.

BELA

Go back to the house. You can make
S'mores in the microwave.

Maria leads the twins to the house.

JAIME

The microwave?

CARMEN

What are we, white people?

Once alone, Bela wipes a tear, pulls out her flask, and takes a big swig.

EXT. WHITE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Suburbia -- Lakewood, Colorado. Upper middle class home.

On the curb, NACHO (35) pulls cases out of her SUV. She looks tough in her black polo, spiky black hair, and cargo shorts, but her kind, compassionate eyes expose her as a real softie.

Nacho heads toward the house.

SUSAN (O.S.)

(prelap)

It all started when we found out about that game.

INT. WHITE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Looking unkempt, DARYL and SUSAN WHITE frown in the foyer.

SUSAN

That... uh... what do they call it?
Creepy story?

DARYL

Creepypasta. We heard about it at a P.T.A. meeting. There's one called Knocking Charlie. Kids are obsessed with it.

Nacho digs through her bag and pulls out a digital camera, a digital recorder, and two EMF meters. She sets them on the ground and turns them on.

SUSAN

We thought it was harmless until Adam -- our son -- invited some friends to sleep over.

Nacho's eyes drift to some school photos of ADAM on the wall, ranging from ages ten through fourteen (his present age).

SUSAN

They stayed up late. They were knocking, and laughing. And then...

DARYL

One of Adam's friends suffered a seizure. But none of the kids would tell us how, or what happened.

SUSAN

They didn't say much of anything. Adam's friends left late that night. They never came back.

Nacho records the convo and calibrates the EMF meters.

DARYL

Things got weird around here after that. We started hearing noises. Like voices. Footsteps. And then the knocking... in sequence. But nobody was ever there.

SUSAN

We caught some of it on video. And some voices. But they sounded...

NACHO

Inhuman?

Daryl reluctantly nods.

SUSAN

Adam changed that night. He doesn't eat. He just lies in bed, but I don't think he sleeps much. We sure as hell don't.

DARYL

We think he feels responsible for his friend. He's in a coma. But we believe there's more to it. We think there's something in this house, and it's affecting us all.

SUSAN

What do you think?

NACHO

When people mess with powers beyond their skill or comprehension, they can open doors and unleash entities they can't control. Taking pictures and recordings tends to antagonize them and make things way worse. And then, they'll need someone to come in and help them close those doors.

SUSAN
Can you close them?

NACHO
I'll do my best, Mrs. White. Now,
let's see what's up with your casa.

Susan musters a hopeful smile.

INT. WHITE RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nacho nears a picture of Adam with her EMF meter. It spikes ever-so-slightly.

DARYL
Feel free to look around.

SUSAN
Just, please don't disturb Adam. We
don't want to push him. He's been
very fragile... since the incident.

Nacho salutes. The Whites head to the couch and commiserate.

INT. WHITE RESIDENCE - 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nacho looks over her shoulder; she's alone. She snaps a shot of the long, dark hallway.

She proceeds with her EMF meter at waist level. It spikes near doorways. She passes a framed photo of the Whites smiling with a plate of S'mores in front of the microwave. The EMF meter spikes. Nacho snaps a pic.

Nacho comes to a final door at the end of the hall. A sign bordered by heavy metal band stickers warns "Keep Out!"

The EMF meter goes wild with activity.

Nacho raises an eyebrow, then casts one more peek over her shoulder. Alone, she gently knocks on Adam's door.

She waits. Silence.

NACHO
Adam? I'm a friend of your parents.
I'm here to help. Can I come in?

No response. She twists the doorknob.

INT. WHITE RESIDENCE - ADAM'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door slowly creaks open. A cold breeze washes over Nacho, raising goosebumps on her exposed flesh. She steps in with her eyes fixed on Adam. He lies in bed with his back to her.

Nacho scans the walls. Skateboard mag fold-outs. Metal band posters. An autographed Denver Broncos cheerleaders calendar.

As Nacho nears the bed, the EMF meter goes wild, then blank -- dead battery.

Nacho's eyes bulge. She almost crumbles -- the room's gravity increases exponentially. She fights to remain standing.

NACHO

Adam?

Adam's head turns all the way to see her. It's not quite 180 degrees, but close enough to be concerning, especially with the sickening CRACK that accompanies its rotation. Adam's face is gaunt and expressionless -- his body is a husk.

Nacho clutches her Indigenous medicine pouch necklace. She squeezes her eyes shut.

NACHO

(whispering)

Our father who art in Heaven...

DARYL (O.S.)

What are you doing in here?

Nacho's eyes spring open. She spins to see Daryl and Susan in the doorway. A glance back to the bed reveals Adam, facing away. Gravity is restored, but the icy chill remains.

SUSAN

We only asked you for one thing!

DARYL

I think you should leave. Now!

EXT. WHITE RESIDENCE - PORCH - NIGHT

Nacho zips her bag closed. The Whites scowl from the doorway.

NACHO

Okay, but -- please, just listen to me for a second. Whatever's in your home is not a typical haunting.

(MORE)

NACHO (CONT'D)

It's not the spirt of a lost loved one, or a residual haunt, or anything simple like that.

Daryl tries to shut the door, Nacho blocks it.

NACHO

Whatever is in there -- it's something evil. And if you don't do something about it, it will spread through your family like mold and drain you till there's nothing left of you to torment.

SUSAN

That's why we called you! To stop it! To give us back our son!

NACHO

Yes, I know. And I really wish I could, but this isn't really in my wheelhouse. I do investigations. I can sniff out whether you have a paranormal entity, and sometimes I can even identify what it is or what it wants and convince it to go on its merry way. But for this?

Nacho points to the second floor window.

NACHO

You need a priest or a holy person from some other faith to fight whatever's going on up there.

DARYL

And for the low, low price of a shit ton of money...

(to Susan)

Told you she's a fraud.

NACHO

I've never charged a penny to do this, Mr. White. I just want to help you, which is why I highly suggest you seek out some serious spiritual guidance. Now.

DARYL

Yeah, I'll get right on it. Are we done here?

NACHO

Just one more thing.

Nacho picks up her camera and snaps a pic of the Whites.

DARYL

Thanks, now get off our property.

Daryl slams the door.

Nacho stares up into the second floor window.

Adam stands still, looking down at her with a sneer.

Nacho aims her camera at the window, but Adam is gone.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Sunny day. No vehicles in the driveway.

INT. DEN - DAY

Carmen heads to the couch, where Jaime is sprawled out asleep. She nudges him and tries to roll him to one side -- he's dead weight.

CARMEN

Jaime, get up! I wanna watch TV.
Why are you sleeping anyway? It's
the middle of the day!

JAIME

I couldn't sleep last night. There
were scary noises outside.

CARMEN

That sucks, but "The Kids' Baking
Championship" is on, so you need to
move. Are you on the remote?

Jaime groans and moves aside. Carmen plops down beside him and turns on the TV. A ghostly shape appears in the screen's reflection behind her just before the TV comes to life.

Carmen gasps. She turns the TV off. The figure is gone.

EXT. MOGOTE STRIP MALL - DAY

Two stories. Shops on the bottom floor, apartments above.

Bela stares blankly through a liquor store's display window. She sighs and drifts to the Mexican restaurant next door.

EXT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - CONTINUOUS

A "Help Wanted" sign hangs in the window. Beside it -- a sign that says "LGBTQIA+ SAFE SPACE" bordered by rainbow stickers.

Bela smiles. She opens the door. LOUD MARIACHI MUSIC SPILLS OUT ONTO THE STREET as she enters.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - DAY

Traditional Mexican restaurant. A few customers at tables. PEPPER (50s), a woman with a million dollar smile and short silver hair approaches with a menu.

PEPPER

Hi! One today?

BELA

Oh, uh -- actually, I saw the help wanted sign.

PEPPER

Yes, come in! I'm the manager, Pepper.

BELA

Hi. Isabela. Or Bela, if you like.

They shake hands.

INT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

ON THE TV

A girl displays her janky UFO-shaped cake to celebrity chefs.

IN THE DEN

Carmen watches TV and eats chips beside a sleeping Jaime.

SAMMY DOG BARKS AT THE FRONT DOOR IN THE DISTANCE.

CARMEN

(to the TV)

Who taught you how to make fondant?
No wonder E.T. wanted to go home.

THE FRONT DOOR CREAKS OPEN IN THE DISTANCE, THEN CLOSES.

BELA (O.S.)

Hey.

Carmen puts the chips down. She heads to the door, but never takes her eyes off the TV screen till she's out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carmen enters to find Sammy Dog barking at the door.

CARMEN
What is it, boy?

Sammy hurries to Carmen, turns to the door, and barks.

CARMEN
Mom? Mom? Are you here?

Carmen turns and creeps slowly toward the hallway.

Rosa curves around the corner. Carmen jumps, startled.

CARMEN
Ah! Great Grandma, wear a bell!

ROSA
I'm sorry, mija. Did I scare you?

CARMEN
Yes!

Rosa laughs and hugs Carmen.

ROSA
I'm so, so sorry. But, guess what?
I have a chore for you kids to do
before it gets dark.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DUSK

Bela's station wagon parks in the driveway.

Maria, Carmen, and Jaime circulate through the yard, misting trees with spray bottles. Bela meets them.

BELA
Hey. What's going on?

MARIA
Grandma asked us to spray the trees
to keep Lechuza away.

JAIME
Mom, what's a La-chooza?

Bela sighs.

BELA

La Lechuza. Your great grandma's
being superstitious again.

Bela takes Jaime's bottle and sniffs it.

CARMEN

What is it?

BELA

Probably holy water. She made me do
it when I was a kid, too.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Bela empties a spray bottle in the sink. Rosa enters.

BELA

Hi, Grandma. We need to talk.

ROSA

Sí. I have something for you.

Rosa hands Bela three folded one-hundred dollar bills.

BELA

Grandma... What is this?

ROSA

So you can get a new phone. And
food, and clothes -- or, if you
want to leave, use it to help you
start over someplace.

BELA

Oh... Thank you, Grandma, but... I
can't take this.

ROSA

Take it.

Rosa folds Bela's fingers around the cash. Bela softens.

BELA

I'm grateful. But, if it's okay
with you, I'd like to stay through
the summer. I got a job at the
cantina today.

ROSA

That's wonderful news!

Rosa hugs Bela.

ROSA
Tonight we celebrate! I'll make
sopapillas!

Rosa turns on the stove. Bela laughs.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Stars fill the sky.

Bela joins Raul on the bench.

RAUL
Congratulations. So I guess that
means you're staying?

BELA
For now.

RAUL
Hey. Don't back out now, okay?
It'll break Grandma's heart.

BELA
I won't. You work tonight?

RAUL
No. I'm taking the kids camping in
the backyard so we can make some
proper S'mores. I heard you made
them use the microwave like some
kind of white people.

BELA
Okay. But no scary stories. I mean
it, Raul.

Raul crosses his heart.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

A campfire burns a short distance from the house. Four tents surround it, as do folding chairs occupied by Raul, Jaime, Carmen, and Maria; they toast marshmallows. Sammy Dog lies among them. Raul smiles mischievously.

RAUL
Have you ever heard about the curse
of La Llorona?

Maria looks confused, speechless for once.

RAUL

The Hermanos Penitentes were a secret religious brotherhood who served their communities in Northern New Mexico, but some of their methods were controversial.

MARIA

They whipped themselves to prove their devotion to God.

RAUL

That's right. But the Catholic church wasn't too crazy about it.

EXT. NEW MEXICO DIRT ROAD - NIGHT - MID-1900S

A line of nearly naked, scraggly-haired men crawl in a line and whip themselves in unison. Moonlight reflects off their pale, bloody skin.

RAUL (V.O.)

So some of the brothers broke off and formed their own group. They still whipped and punished themselves, but they took their rituals much, much further.

A trail of blood leads from their knees into the shadows.

RAUL (V.O.)

They'd travel between here and New Mexico on their hands and knees till they were bloody and worn down to the bone.

BACK TO SCENE

The twins gasp.

RAUL

Then, they started going after others. Especially females. They blamed Eve for bringing sin into the world, so they punished innocent women in her place.

Maria and Carmen listen, glassy eyed.

RAUL
They weren't fighting evil like
they'd vowed to do. They spread it.

JAIME
(stuttering)
Are they still around?

RAUL
Oh, no. The fallen ones disappeared
long ago. But, some people believe
their restless spirits continue
their pilgrimage across the valley
every night. Crawling. Scraping.
Whipping...

Jaime trembles. He pulls his blanket tighter around him.

RAUL
Now. Do you know what they all have
in common? La Llorona, Coco Man,
the Penitente Caído, and probably
even "Knocking Charlie"?

Raul looks the kids in the eyes, one by one.

RAUL
People fear them. And devils know
what we fear. And they use that
fear to feed on our energy, and to
weaken our souls. That's what makes
them real.

Carmen takes a loud bite of her S'more. Maria and Jaime jump.
They look at Carmen and laugh.

CARMEN
What? I eat when I'm stressed!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bela puts a dish in the drainboard. She squints -- two of the
stove's burners are on. She turns them off.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bela tucks Rosa into bed.

ROSA
Thank you, mija.

Bela nods and reaches for the lamp. She stops.

BELA

Um, Grandma? I think you left the stove on tonight.

ROSA

I did? Are you sure? I always check.

Bela frowns.

BELA

You're probably right. Sweet dreams, Grandma.

Bela turns off the light and departs.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

AN OWL CALLS IN THE DISTANCE.

The campfire burns.

Sammy Dog sleeps peacefully. His ears suddenly perk up.

INT./EXT. JAIME'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Jaime lies wrapped tightly in his sleeping bag, his eyes wide open. He listens.

TWIGS CRUNCH OUTSIDE -- FOOTSTEPS.

The tent rustles.

Jaime gasps.

The tent wiggles from side to side.

JAIME

Knock it off, Maria!

The assault becomes violent, jerking the tent in all directions. Unseen fists punch and thrash from outside.

JAIME

Stop it!

Unseen hands launch the tent a couple of yards away from the camp. Jaime screams. He slithers out of his bag, unzips his tent, and races out.

It's so dark, Jaime can't see which way he's going.

JAIME

Mom! Help!

A light flicks on in the house. Jaime runs toward it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bela, groggy, reaches the door just as Jaime comes rocketing inside the house.

JAIME

Mom! Mom!

He wraps himself around Bela, nearly tackling her.

BELA

What is it, Jaime?

She pries him off to examine him. Scratches and a fresh bruise cover his forearm.

Bela scowls.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Bela drags Jaime out to the camp. He struggles to escape, but Bela has a death grip on him.

BELA

Raul!

Raul stirs and pokes his head out of his tent.

Bela presents Jaime's wounds.

BELA

Was this you?

RAUL

What?

BELA

Your little pranks go too far,
Raul! Jaime is sensitive, and he
doesn't need to be scared or
bullied in the middle of the night!
He barely sleeps as it is!

Maria and Carmen poke their heads out of their tents.

MARIA

Mom? What's going on?

BELA
Were you part of this?

MARIA
Part of what?

BELA
Never mind. Campout's over! I have to get up early and shop before work, so I am not in the mood for this shit. Get in the house!

Jaime breaks free and races for the house.

CARMEN
Aww, mom.

BELA
Go!

Maria and Carmen pull their pillows and blankets out of their tents and head to the house.

Raul climbs out of his tent.

RAUL
Nobody touched him, Bela. He probably just had a nightmare.

BELA
A nightmare that leaves him covered in bruises, Raul?

Bela casts him an accusative glare.

BELA
They can clean up the yard in the morning.

Bela stomps back to the house.

Raul pours water on the remaining fire embers.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Maria, Carmen, and Jaime pack up their tents.

MARIA
If you don't stop being afraid of everything, your life is going to suck, you know.

Jaime scowls and rolls up his tent.

CARMEN

And why did you have to blame Tío Raul? You got him in trouble!

JAIME

Someone literally threw my tent across the yard! Why doesn't anyone believe me?

MARIA

Jaime, you know why!

Hurt, Jaime picks up a tent stake and stabs the Earth.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bela pours a cup of coffee. Raul takes a seat.

RAUL

You ready to talk about last night?

BELA

Okay.

Raul waits.

BELA

Well?

RAUL

Oh, it's on me? Okay, let's go. I don't appreciate your bullshit accusations.

BELA

My son burst into the house, bloody and screaming! What am I supposed to think?

RAUL

Must've been the Coco Man.

BELA

It's not funny, Raul! You don't know what he's been through!

Raul sighs.

BELA

Were you drinking?

RAUL

No! I told you, I quit! And as far as anything else you're trying to say, I thought you said you believed me!

Bela looks at him, speechless.

RAUL

I never raised a hand to Amber, and I would never lay a finger on Jaime, either! And I am so sick of everyone looking at me like I did!

Raul heads back to the living room.

THE FRONT DOOR SLAMS.

Bela winces. RAUL'S TRUCK STARTS OUTSIDE AND DRIVES AWAY.

INT. DEN - DAY

Carmen watches TV on the couch with a plate of biscochitos on her lap, a cookie in one hand, a glass of milk in the other.

Jaime sleeps beside her.

Bela enters and puts her purse on.

BELA

Grandma's asleep, but keep your ears open in case she needs something. Where's Maria?

CARMEN

She took Sammy Dog for a walk.

BELA

Why didn't you go with her?

CARMEN

I got everything I need right here.

Carmen gestures to her setup and eats a cookie.

Bela rolls her eyes, and heads out.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Maria jogs with Sammy Dog. They turn onto the property.

Maria steps on her loose shoelace; she stops to tie it.

Sammy Dog barks. He races past her toward the back yard.

MARIA

Sammy!

Maria tucks her shoelace into her shoe and chases after him.

EXT. MOGOTE WOODS - DAY

Maria passes the backyard and maneuvers through the trees.

MARIA

Sammy? Come'ere, boy.

Maria hears THE FAINTEST RUNNING WATER IN THE DISTANCE.

Maria comes to a small creek surrounded by rocks on both sides. Next to a large rock lies a whimpering Sammy Dog.

MARIA

There you are. Come on.

Sammy is frozen in fear, his eyes fixed on the creek. Maria takes the leash and tries to lead him away.

A SPLASHING SOUND ECHOES from the creek.

An OLD WOMAN, cloaked in old rags, her face hidden beneath her hood, wades through the water. She searches for something and quietly groans to herself.

Goosebumps cover Maria's arms.

The Old Woman pulls a baby-shaped bundle of blankets out of the creek. She lets the blankets unroll; an infant-sized skeleton splashes into the water. The woman wails.

Maria pulls at Sammy Dog's leash until he finally stands and lets her lure him away. Maria steps on a twig; it SNAPS.

The Old Woman's head spins toward Maria, revealing her hollowed out skull eyes. She SHRIEKS HORRIFICALLY.

Sammy flees -- the leash slips out of Maria's grasp. They both bolt to --

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Maria reaches the house. She tries the backdoor -- locked. Maria pounds on the door and screams. Sammy Dog barks.

The Old Woman follows Maria's scent through the woods...

Carmen opens the door.

INT. MOGOTE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Maria and Sammy Dog blast past Carmen. Maria slams the door behind them and locks it.

CARMEN
Oww! Rude!

MARIA
Did you see her?

CARMEN
Who?

MARIA
The old woman! Tell me you saw her!

CARMEN
I was watching The View! I saw a
lot of old women!

IN THE DISTANCE, THE FRONT DOOR CREEKS OPEN, then CLOSES.

BELA (O.S.)
Hey.

MARIA
Mom!

Sammy Dog runs through the house toward the front door.

Maria chases after him, and Carmen tries to keep up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sammy Dog barks.

Maria hurries in.

MARIA
Mom?

CAR TIRES CRUNCH GRAVEL OUTSIDE.

Carmen joins Maria at the front door, eyes fixed on the knob.

The front door deadbolt POPS and the door CREAKS open.

Bela enters with two large department store bags.

BELA

Hey. There's more in the car. Can you get them?

She catches their haunted facial expressions.

BELA

Oh... Grandma gave us some money.

MARIA

Did you just come in a minute ago?

BELA

No... I just got here.

Maria and Carmen share an uncomfortable glance.

BELA

¡Ándale! I have to get ready for work.

Bela carries bags to her bedroom.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Carmen lugs two bags into the house. With a paranoid glance back, Maria gets the last two bags. She accidentally downs a canvas tote beside it. She looks inside and gasps.

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Carmen holds two striped shirts up to her body -- one orange and purple, the other blue and green.

CARMEN

They're ugly.

BELA

They didn't have much to pick from.

CARMEN

I'm gonna look like Bert and Ernie.

BELA

Stop. They fit. They'll do for now. Have your brother try these on.

Bela hands her a stack of clothes. Carmen departs.

CARMEN (O.S.)

Acting like she's never shopped online before.

Maria enters and sets bags on the mattress. She sets the canvas tote in front of Bela, making sure she sees it.

BELA

Maria...

MARIA

You took River's gun?

BELA

We were in such a hurry to get out.
I must've grabbed it by accident.

MARIA

But... you didn't really, did you?

BELA

Maria, nobody needs to know about
this. Okay? It's for our
protection.

Maria nods.

Bela pulls some clothes out of the bag, hands them to Maria.

BELA

Go try these on, would you?

MARIA

Sure, Mom.

Maria departs.

Bela sighs. She pulls a revolver out of the canvas tote and eyes the closet. She moves some dresses aside and stops when she spots a dusty box at her feet. She opens it to find a gift set with two full bottles of fancy tequila.

Bela hesitates. She closes the box and pushes it back into the closet. Bela's eyes drift to her purse on the bed. She sneaks the revolver inside.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - NIGHT

A MARIACHI RECORD PLAYS.

On a digital camera display: the White family's long, dark hallway. A strange, faint shadow stands in the distance.

PEPPER (O.S.)

Wow. You weren't kidding.

The image slides to reveal a pic of a bedroom door with a ghostly orb in front of it.

PEPPER (O.S.)
So much activity.

The photo slides left to an image of Adam's school photos; an orb hovers above them.

NACHO (O.S.)
Right? You should've heard the
EVPs. I had to stop listening.

The image slides left to a photo of Daryl and Susan standing at their front door. They look angry, scared, and broken.

PEPPER (O.S.)
Híjole hermano! There is some bad
mojo in that house!

The next image is a selfie of Nacho in shades, giving the peace sign.

Pepper returns the camera to Nacho, who stands in a small DJ booth in the dining room corner.

NACHO
Yeah, I don't have to be psychic to
know something was there. But,
still, it would have been nice to
have a psychic on hand. Or maybe a
trusted empath. Who maybe misses
investigating.

Nacho wiggles her eyebrows.

PEPPER
Still retired, sunshine. Besides, I
have to stifle what abilities I
have left just to make it through
the day without losing my mind.
Especially in this town. But nice
to know you still think of me.

NACHO
Always. But... do you still think
of me?

Pepper smiles sadly.

PEPPER
Nacho...

Nacho spots Bela and the BUS BOY clearing a table.

NACHO
So, that's the new girl, huh?

Pepper sighs.

PEPPER
That's her. Bela!

Bela folds her towel and meets Pepper at the DJ booth.

PEPPER
This is DJ Nacho del Queso.

Nacho nods with a charming smile.

PEPPER
Nacho, this is the newest
acquisition to the Tortilla Pedro
family, Bela Gonzales.

NACHO
Bela, Bela, Bela, it's a pleasure
to meet you.

PEPPER
Nacho is our resident DJ. Karaoke
on Saturday, Mariachi classics
Tuesday through Friday.

BELA
You must really love this music.

Nacho belts out an EL GRITO yell along with the current SONG.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

The light is on in the den. Bela's car parks in the driveway.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Jaime mashes buttons on his modern handheld video game.

THE FRONT DOOR UNLOCKS AND OPENS IN THE DISTANCE.

Bela gingerly scoots into the den on swollen feet.

BELA
Hey. What are you still doing up?

JAIME
Couldn't sleep.

BELA
Where's Raul?

JAIME
He came home and passed out in bed,
so I guess I'm out here tonight.

BELA
What do you mean, passed out?

Jaime shrugs.

Bela pushes his game down and looks him in his eye.

BELA
Was he drinking?

Jaime looks away.

Bela sighs.

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES IN THE DISTANCE.

ANOTHER BELA (O.S.)
Hey.

Bela and Jaime exchange a confused look.

JAIME
Mom?

BELA
It's... it's probably just Carmen
talking in her sleep again.

Jaime looks at Bela fearfully, unconvinced.

THE LIVING ROOM

Bela, with Jaime wrapped around her from behind, creeps in.
The lights are off, and no one else is there.

BELA
You know what? It was probably just
an owl.

JAIME
Is that supposed to make me feel
better?

BELA

See? This is why you shouldn't stay up so late. You scare yourself and then you can't sleep. Go mimis!

JAIME

Mom! Just one more hour? Please?

BELA

Fine. One hour. But you'd better get your schedule back on track before school starts, little man.

JAIME

I will.

BELA

Mmhmm. Hey... are you... okay? No new... episodes or anything?

Jaime hesitantly shakes his head with sad, lying eyes.

BELA

Okay.

Bela kisses his forehead. Jaime scurries off to the den.

Bela stands at the edge of the hallway, watching the front door, waiting... It's silent. She heads down the hall.

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bela turns on the lamp. Maria and Carmen sleep soundly.

Bela pulls her pajamas out of her dresser and notices the gift set of fancy tequila sticking slightly out of the closet. She opens it. A bottle is missing.

Bela's eyes fill with dread and disappointment.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Only the den's light is on.

AN UNSEEN OWL HOOTS; IT SOUNDS SIMILAR TO A HUMAN BABY'S CRY.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Jaime plays his video game. His legs squirm and tighten. He shifts in his seat and grimaces -- the classic pee-pee dance.

Jaime glances at the door, ready to make a run for it. He bites his lip -- he's desperate.

Jaime gets up, almost doubles over, and takes his game to --

THE HALLWAY

-- where Jaime limps to the bathroom. He flicks the light on and closes the door behind him.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rosa sleeps. Her eyelids tighten. She twitches. Her mouth droops open. She groans and strains.

Rosa catches her breath, then grabs her chest. She freezes, then breathes like normal. Her slumber resumes peacefully.

Beyond Rosa's bed, at her shrine, the framed photo of Sophia is missing.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Darkness. The only light seeps from under the bathroom door.

THE SINK WATER RUNS IN THE BATHROOM, THEN STOPS.

Jaime exits from the bathroom and into the darkness. He gasps and fumbles with his video game. He activates the screen's light function and uses it to guide him through the hallway.

Jaime maneuvers back to --

THE DEN

Jaime flicks on the light switch, hurries to the couch, and stops cold -- Sophia's photo sits on the cushion. Jaime picks it up and examines it.

AN OWL HOOTS OUTSIDE.

Jaime yelps and drops the photo; the frame's glass shatters on the floor. He spins toward the sound outside -- owl eyes shine, then close, leaving a black void beyond the window.

Jaime looks at the broken frame on the ground.

JAIME

Oh snap!

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rosa sleeps. Her blanket tugs from the side. Rosa stirs and finds Jaime standing beside her.

ROSA
What's wrong, hijo?

JAIME
I thought I saw someone outside.

ROSA
Oh, precious. You probably just had a nightmare.

JAIME
I was awake, though.

Rosa smiles sweetly.

ROSA
I believe you. But don't tell your mom, or she'll put you back on the loco pills.

Jaime nods.

ROSA
Well, come on.

Rosa gets out of bed.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rosa and Jaime creep down the dark hallway. Light spills out from the den.

GLASS SCRAPES ACROSS THE FLOOR.

Rosa freezes and jolts a protective hand in front of Jaime. She pokes her head around the corner.

In the den, Jaime has his back to her and sweeps broken glass into a dustpan.

Rosa squints in confusion.

ROSA
... Jaime?

Jaime stops. His head spins to see Rosa in the doorway.

JAIME

Oh, hi, Great Grandma. I'm so
sorry. I broke your picture frame.

Rosa blinks -- *am I dreaming?*

She spins back to find a pale, demonic copy of Jaime with cracked, blackened lips and reflective animal eyes. He smirks at her, and then backs into the hallway's infinite shadows.

JAIME-SIZED FOOT STEPS RUN DEEPER INTO THE DARKNESS UNTIL THEY'RE TOO FAR AWAY TO HEAR.

Rosa jumps and nearly falls. The real Jaime rushes to steady her. They watch the shadows that stretch down the hallway.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rosa nurses Sophia's photo/frame with a frown. Bela enters.

BELA

Be careful, Grandma.

Bela cautiously returns it to the shrine.

BELA

I'll pick up a new frame for you
this weekend. Jaime feels terrible.

ROSA

It's okay. It was an accident.

Rosa feigns a smile.

INT. DEN - DAY

Jaime sleeps on the couch.

VOICE

(whispering)

Jaime.

Jaime twitches.

VOICE

(whispering)

Jaime!

Jaime stirs. He sits up. Fear flashes across his face.

VOICE
(whispering)
Don't look in the basement!

Jaime's arms fill with goosebumps. Then --

Maria and Carmen laugh and stumble into the room.

CARMEN
Dumbass! We don't even have a
basement!

JAIME
Shut up!

MARIA
Why did you take Grandma's picture?
That's pretty messed up, Jaime.
It's the only one she has.

JAIME
I didn't take it!

Bela storms in.

BELA
Hey! Leave your brother alone! He
feels bad enough as it is without
all your teasing!

CARMEN
He needs to toughen up if he's ever
gonna make it in this family.

BELA
You know what? It's beautiful out.
Why don't you go outside and play.

MARIA
I'm good.

BELA
No! I mean it. No TV, no internet,
no drama. Just go!

The girls reluctantly drag themselves out of the room.

Jaime lies back and stretches out.

BELA
You, too!

Jaime groans and follows his sisters.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Rosa sits forward in a bathtub, a lost look in her eyes.

Bela moves Rosa's hair to wash her back and pauses when she discovers a long bruise near her spine. Bela gently touches the wound. Rosa shudders.

BELA
Grandma, what is this?

Bela examines Rosa's arm -- a small bruise. Bela gasps.

BELA
How did this happen?

Rosa stares vacantly.

BELA
Grandma! Did Raul do this?

ROSA
They will come for me first.

BELA
Who?

ROSA
Then you. Our whole bloodline.

Bela breaks down.

EXT. MOGOTE WOODS - DAY

Maria and Carmen volley a blue plastic ball to each other. Jaime tries to intercept it, but misses. He crashes to the ground with a grunt. The girls laugh.

CARMEN
Why are you so bad at this?

JAIME
You're both taller than me!

MARIA
Excuses, excuses!

Maria spikes the ball at Jaime, it rolls away. Maria chases after it. As she closes in, a breeze pushes it farther away.

Maria hops after it...

MARIA
Just face it, Jaime...

A breeze blows the ball toward a large boulder and stops. Maria reaches for it.

MARIA
Girls are just better at sports --

The Old Woman's pale, bony hand reaches out from behind the boulder and grasps Maria's wrist -- it sizzles.

Maria screams. Everywhere the sun touches the Old Woman's face exposes a decaying skull. She shrieks.

Maria drops the ball and yanks her arm free. She races away for dear life.

MARIA
Run!

Jaime and Carmen turn to Maria. Their smiles drop as she bolts past them like a bat out of hell.

MARIA
Hurry!

Carmen and Jaime sprint after Maria, homeward bound.

THE OLD WOMAN'S WAILS ECHO THROUGH THE WOODS.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Maria flings the backdoor open.

INT. MOGOTE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

All three kids stumble through the backdoor. Maria slams it shut, locking it behind them. They catch their breath. Maria checks her arm. The burn isn't bad, but she covers it up.

MARIA
Did you see her? Jaime?

Both twins shake their heads. Maria sighs.

BELA (O.S.)
Grandma, no!

Maria and the twins follow Bela's voice to --

THE HALLWAY

Bela wiggles Rosa's locked doorknob at the end of the hall.

BELA
I'm taking you to Urgent Care right
now! No arguments!

ROSA (O.S.)
I'm fine, Isabela! And I'm not
leaving this house!

BELA
Grandma!

ROSA (O.S.)
Everyone just leave me alone!

ROSA'S FAVORITE RECORD PLAYS LOUDLY IN HER BEDROOM.

Bela walks away from the door, defeated.

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS IN THE DISTANCE.

Raul enters the hallway and heads straight to his bedroom.

Bela follows him.

BELA
And where the fuck have you been?

INT. RAUL'S ROOM - DAY

Raul pulls out a big duffel bag and packs his clothes.

RAUL
Fuck off, Bela.

Bela swipes an empty bottle of tequila off Raul's dresser.

BELA
I believed you, Raul! When no one
else would, I believed you every
single time!

RAUL
So what, it's illegal to get drunk
now? If that's the case, you should
be on death row.

Bela throws the tequila bottle. It narrowly misses Raul and smashes against the wall.

BELA

You asshole! I'm talking about all the bruises you left on Grandma! And after what you did to Jaime the other night?

RAUL

What?

BELA

No? That wasn't you? Was it your drunk alter ego who blacked-out and beat the shit out of Amber?

RAUL

Fuck you, Bela! I am done apologizing for something I never did. And I'm done being taken for granted around here while you just come and go every time you need someone to save your ass!

BELA

How dare you? You don't know what I've been through!

RAUL

And just like that, it's all about you again. I'm hurting, too, Bela! I got abandoned, too! But I was still here! So you know what? It's all you. It's your turn. You stay and do your fucking part.

Raul grabs his bag and heads out to --

THE HALLWAY

Raul passes the kids, agape with fear and confusion.

BELA

Where the fuck are you going? We're not done here!

THE FRONT DOOR SLAMS.

The kids' eyes drift from the living room to Bela.

BELA

None of you are to go anywhere near him. You hear me?

The kids reluctantly nod.

EXT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - DUSK

MARIACHI MUSIC PLAYS WITHIN.

Through the window, Bela clears a table.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - DUSK

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Pepper squints in concentration. Nacho puts an arm around her.

NACHO

What's up? You're making that face.

Nacho follows her gaze to Bela.

PEPPER

It's probably nothing.

NACHO

It's never nothing with you.

PEPPER

I know.

Pepper joins Bela at the table.

PEPPER

Hey. Everything okay?

BELA

Everything's great.

PEPPER

You sure? You seem... stressed.

BELA

Is it that obvious?

PEPPER

I just know things sometimes. Other times, people just have terrible poker faces.

Nacho joins them.

NACHO

She's being modest. Pepper is an extraordinary empath.

BELA

Oh...?

NACHO

Yeah. We used to go on paranormal investigations together.

BELA

Really? Are there a lot of UFO sightings down here?

NACHO

Millions, but that's not our bag. We specialize in the ghosty stuff.

BELA

It is kind of spooky around here.

NACHO

Oh, yeah. This area is known for three things. Bomb-ass chili, that hotel where they shot that Indiana Jones movie, and paranormal entities. You can't go twenty feet without encountering something, whether you're aware of it or not.

BELA

Well. That makes my issues seem a lot less severe.

Bela feigns a smile.

INT. RAUL'S ROOM - NIGHT

On a desktop computer, Carmen scrolls through search results for "Creepypasta." Jaime plays his game beside her.

CARMEN

Knocking... Charlie. Found it.

The Knocking Charlie Wiki page contains scary drawings of a gaunt, slender 19th century mortician in a wide brim hat.

CARMEN

(reading)

It says, "Knock six times and read these lines. Then knock six more, retell the lore. Six more knocks while Charlie walks, when Charlie knocks you'll speak no more."

Jaime looks up from his game.

JAIME

Yeah, except, don't.

CARMEN

Ready?

(knocking six times)

Knock-knock-knock Charlie knocks.

(knocking six times)

Open-up Charlie's lock.

Jaime looks uncomfortable. Even Carmen looks uneasy.

CARMEN

(knocking six times)

Then inside Charlie walks.

(knocking five times)

Nevermore shall I --

Jaime grabs Carmen's fist before she can finish knocking.

Jaime's face fills with relief.

ONE UNSEEN KNOCK ECHOES THROUGH THE ROOM.

The twins jump in their seats.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Maria nervously twirls her finger around the phone cord.

MARIA

No way! I can't tell my mom. I told you what she did to my brother...

SAMMY DOG BARKS OUTSIDE.

MARIA

Hey, Laurel, hold on a sec. Sammy's going crazy about something.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Maria slips out the back patio door. Sammy barks.

MARIA

What is it, boy?

Maria scans the woods -- there's nothing to see. She unties Sammy's leash from a post and brings him in the house.

INT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Maria locks up. As she walks Sammy Dog down the hallway, he spins back, barks, and growls.

Maria turns to find a SHADOW MAN, absolute black, devoid of features, staring in through the patio door window. He floats away, dissipating into the night.

Sammy Dog cries, then runs deeper into the house.

Maria slowly returns to the door.

The Shadow Man darts back and thunderously slams against the window with his fists.

Maria screams and sprints away.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Maria turns the corner and runs into Jaime and Carmen, who charge in from the opposite hallway. They all scream.

MARIA	JAIME
I saw something outside!	Carmen summoned Knocking Charlie!

The siblings look at each other, incredulous.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Every light in the house, except for Rosa's, is on inside.

Bela parks her car. She gets out, stares, and throws her arms up in frustration.

BELA
Gonna kill them all.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND SHUTS.

CARMEN
Wait -- it might not be her.

BELA (O.S.)
There better be a damn good reason
why you left all the --

Bela stomps into the kitchen and stops in her tracks.

Maria, Carmen, and Jaime sit back-to-back in the middle of the floor, trembling. Carmen wields Raul's baseball bat, and Jaime squeezes Sammy Dog like a security blanket.

BELA
What the hell is this?

JAIME
Mom! The owl outside is trying to
get me! I hear it every night --

<p>MARIA I've been seeing things since we moved in! There was an old woman by the creek, and I saw something outside tonight! It was messing with Sammy Dog --</p>	<p>CARMEN Oh my god, I didn't think it was you! Sometimes I hear you, but it's not really you! And nobody's there! But it's your voice --</p>
--	---

BELA
You know what? I don't care. Go to
bed, all of you!

Bela's eyes drift to the oven.

BELA
And who left the stove on?

Bela turns it off.

MARIA
Mom, listen! Something's wrong with
this house!

BELA
Ain't that the truth. You're all
grounded! No Internet, no TV, no
video games!

CARMEN
But... what else is there?

BELA
Read a book or clean your room!
Those are your options. Have any of
you checked on your Great Grandma?

MARIA
She stayed in her room all night.

Bela sighs.

BELA
Okay. I'll handle it. Just turn out
these lights and get to bed!

The kids leave.

Bela stares at the stove, unreadable.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bela stands in front of Rosa's door. She turns the knob -- it's unlocked and opens easily. Bela peeks in.

The hallway light bleeds in just enough to reveal a SCRAWNY NAKED FIGURE perched near Rosa's head with long limbs, long blackened fingers, and white stringy hair covering its face. It's attention snaps to Bela.

Bela shrieks and flicks on the light switch.

The figure is gone.

Bela hurries in, glances around, and exhales. She checks Rosa's wrist for a pulse.

BELA
Grandma? Grandma!

Bela shakes Rosa, gently at first. Then aggressively.

BELA
Grandma!

ROSA
Sophia?

BELA
No, Grandma. It's Isabela.

Rosa's eyes flutter open. She smiles.

BELA
Sorry to wake you. Go to sleep.

Bela heads to the door.

ROSA (O.S.)
(in Curandera's voice)
Pray for her.

BELA
... What?

Rosa sleeps soundly.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

It's sunny. BIRDS CHIRP.

INT. DEN - DAY

The TV is on.

Jaime, Carmen, and Maria sleep upright on the couch. Sammy Dog sleeps on the floor beside them.

Bela enters and scoffs.

BELA

What the hell is this?

Maria and Carmen wake with a start; Carmen drops the baseball bat -- it clanks against the floor. Jaime wakes up and rubs his eyes. Sammy Dog gets up and zips out of the room.

MARIA

I couldn't sleep last night.

CARMEN

Me, neither.

BELA

Why not?

MARIA

It doesn't matter. You wouldn't believe us anyway.

Bela softens.

BELA

I didn't sleep much either. I don't remember it getting so cold here during the summer.

SAMMY DOG WHINES BY THE BACK DOOR.

BELA

Sammy wants to go out. Maria?

Maria hesitates. She shakes her head.

BELA

Carmen? Jaime?

The twins freeze up.

BELA

Fine. I guess I'll do that, too. But don't think you're going to just sit around the house and sleep all summer. You're going to start helping out around here.

Bela heads to the hallway.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Sammy Dog lifts a leg. Bela pulls out her flask and looks at it. She sighs and puts it away.

Sammy Dog barks at nearby shadows. He looks around as unseen beings invade from all sides.

Bela reaches for his leash, but an invisible hand firmly grasps her forearm. Bela pulls away, grabs the leash, and races inside with Sammy Dog.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Bela slams the door and locks it. Maria, Jaime, and Carmen run to them, wide-eyed. Bela looks at her arm. Three fresh talon-like scratches bleed.

BELA

Jaime? Have you been seeing things?

Jaime hesitates, then nods. The girls nod, too. Maria reveals her handprint-shaped burn. Bela gasps.

BELA

I believe you.

The kids look at her with compassion and relief.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rosa fills out a crossword puzzle in bed. Bela sits beside her. Maria and the twins eavesdrop from the doorway.

BELA

I know we used to butt heads about your superstitions. But some of them were real... weren't they?

Rosa nibbles on her pencil.

BELA

Grandma? I think something bad is happening in this house, and it's affecting us all. Raul wasn't the one who hurt you. Or Amber.

ROSA

Tsk.

Rosa erases a mistake.

BELA

Grandma, are you listening to me? I need to know what is happening to us. I need to know how to stop it.

Rosa smiles sweetly at Bela, then resumes her puzzle.

Bela's eyes drop.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - NIGHT

A few customers, no DJ.

Bela sits at the bar on her cell phone.

BELA

(on the phone)

Raul, please call me back. We need to talk. It's important. And... I owe you an apology. Call me back.

Bela hangs up.

Pepper and Nacho come out of the kitchen.

NACHO

Bela! Now it's a party.

BELA

I actually came to ask a favor. I was hoping to learn more about your paranormal investigations.

Pepper and Nacho exchange a concerned look.

NACHO

Well, I used to be a security guard at this Target that was built over an old mental institution. It was hella haunted. Then I met Pepper on this dating app for spooky chicks --

PEPPER

You've had an encounter.

BELA

You could say that.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - LATER

At a table, Pepper and Nacho sit across from Bela with wide eyes. Nacho slams a shot of tequila.

NACHO

Well, fuck.

PEPPER

Do you remember when it started?

BELA

Well... my son started seeing things when he was about four. Naturally, I thought something was wrong with him. I took him to so many doctors. Put him on pills. I feel so awful.

NACHO

Don't beat yourself up. That's a common response, believe it or not.

BELA

Then we moved back to my Grandma's house. And I broke that stupid bottle in the fireplace. That's when Grandma changed.

Pepper raises an eyebrow.

PEPPER

What kind of bottle?

BELA

I don't know. The gross kind. There was hair, and nails... I think someone peed in it.

NACHO

Nasty.

PEPPER

What did it look like?

Pepper pulls out her cell phone and scrolls through photos.

BELA

The bottle? I don't know. Stained glass. It had a face.

PEPPER

A man's face?

BELA

Yes.

PEPPER

Like this?

Pepper shows Bela a pic: a shelf of colorful bottles similar to Rosa's, but with the same face etched into them.

Bela nods.

BELA

... How?

NACHO

Wait -- you don't think...

BELA

What? Tell me.

Pepper bites her lip, sighs.

PEPPER

My abuela was a Curandera. She performed ritual cleansings for the townspeople. She had a gift. I had it, too, so I assisted her... until one day, when I got too close to the other side. I had to stop.

QUICK FLASH

Paola (10) grits her teeth in her ceremonial face paint and the silver streak in her long black hair.

BACK TO SCENE

Pepper taps on her phone.

PEPPER

If one of these bottles was in your house, then we gave it to her to ward off something really bad. Without it, you and your family are vulnerable. You could all be in serious danger.

BELA

Shit. What can I do?

PEPPER

I can put you in touch with a priest. It'll take some time, but --

NACHO

-- She needs us now, Pepper. We have to investigate immediately.

PEPPER

I'm retired, unfortunately. And, uh, hello? We're still open, Nacho.

The women look around. The restaurant is empty, save a waitress who sleeps in a chair by the kitchen.

Nacho smirks.

NACHO

I'll get my gear.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the couch, Carmen and Maria read books, cooking and history, respectively. Jaime plays with his Hot Wheels cars on the floor near Sammy Dog.

Carmen's legs fidget.

MARIA

Carmen, would you just go?

CARMEN

I can hold it till morning.

MARIA

No, you can't! Just go!

CARMEN

I don't want to go alone.

Carmen writhes in misery.

CARMEN

Go with me?

Maria closes her book.

MARIA

Fine. I have to go, anyway.

JAIME

You're leaving me here?!

MARIA
You have Sammy Dog.

Sammy Dog whines.

The girls depart. Sammy Dog trots after them.

Jaime sighs. He sets two cars at equal distance and races them. One rockets behind the curtain with the life-like "boy legs" table.

Jaime gets up and slowly tiptoes to the table. He pulls the curtain back. It's still just a table full of knickknacks.

Jaime bends down and picks up his runaway car. The table's knees bend. The legs spring to life.

Jaime screams. The table chases him.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jaime sprints toward the bathroom, the table in pursuit.

Jaime flings the bathroom door open -- MARIA AND CARMEN SCREAM. Jaime stumbles inside and slams the door shut.

CARMEN (O.S.)
Jaime, what the hell?!

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Full moon.

Nacho pulls two big equipment bags out of her SUV. Pepper shudders beside her.

PEPPER
This is a bad one, Nacho.

Nacho nods.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bela, Pepper, and Nacho enter.

BELA
Come on in. Don't mind the dog. It takes him a while to warm up --

Sammy Dog barks and hurries to greet them. Nacho kneels down and pets him -- instant friendship.

BELA

Except for my brother, Raul. His wife, Amber, said she saw things, but Raul didn't believe her. We think it... assaulted her.

Pepper trembles. Her eyes clench shut. She braces herself against an invisible blast of negative energy.

NACHO

Pepper?

PEPPER

It's a vortex of sorts. Like an open gate to the beyond. But something is acting as a beacon on this side of the door. It's attracting entities. Spirits. Demons.

BELA

What beacon? What do you mean?

PEPPER

Blood.

She looks from Bela, to each of the kids.

PEPPER

Your blood.

BELA

I don't understand.

PEPPER

Neither do I. Not just yet, anyway.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A K2 EMF detector and a tri-field EMF meter sit on the kitchen table beside a recording digital audio recorder.

PEPPER (O.S.)

... surround us in white light...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A camcorder on a tripod films the front door and legs table.

PEPPER (O.S.)

... and protect us from harm.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A camcorder on a tripod films the hallway.

PEPPER (O.S.)
Protect us from darkness.

INT. DEN - CONTINUOUS

Pepper, Nacho, Bela, Maria, Carmen, and Jaime hold hands in a circle, heads bowed in prayer.

PEPPER
And let nothing malicious and
uninvited cross our protective
circle. Amen.

NACHO
Okay. Battle stations, people.

PEPPER
Are you sure you don't want to
involve your grandmother?

BELA
I'd rather not. I don't know if she
could handle all this.

PEPPER
I understand.

Everyone leaves the room, except for Pepper and Jaime.

PEPPER
It's okay to be afraid.

JAIME
But I'm always afraid.

PEPPER
I was, too. But then I learned that
nothing was going to change until I
stood up and fought back against
all the things that scared me.

JAIME
How?

PEPPER
Well, my abuela told me we had a
responsibility to help people,
especially the people we love. Love
can overcome any fear.

NACHO (O.S.)
 Okay, people. Lights out. Mouths on
 silent mode. Let's do this!

Pepper turns out the light. Jaime cowers next to her in the dark. He looks at the camcorder's viewfinder. The ghostly green infrared image shows the doorway. Dust occasionally crosses the image.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nacho and Carmen watch their camcorder's view of the room.

INT. RAUL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bela sits in the dark and watches the door silently.

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria sits in the dark, eyes fixed on the open door.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Pepper stands in the middle of the room.

PEPPER
 I am addressing all unwelcome
 presences in this house. If you can
 hear me, give us a sign.

Silence.

PEPPER
 Who's here? Tell us your name.

Silence. The meters remain dormant.

PEPPER
 Why do you fixate on this family?
 Why their blood?

Silence.

PEPPER
 Nacho... They're here, but they're
 not giving me anything.

NACHO (O.S.)
 Time out. Meeting in the den.

Pepper turns the lights on.

Nacho, Bela, Maria, and Carmen trickle in.

NACHO
What'cha thinkin'?

PEPPER
I don't know. I sensed one right
away. He's aggressive, but he
wouldn't talk to me. I don't think
he likes women very much.

Pepper, Nacho, Bela, Maria, and Carmen slowly look at Jaime.

JAIME
What?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The lights are off.

The K2 EMF detector and tri-field EMF meter are dormant on
the table. The digital recorder is on beside it.

Pepper, Bela, Maria, and Carmen surround Nacho and Jaime at
the table.

Nacho turns on a mini Maglite and unscrews it so that it just
barely turns off. She sets it near the edge of the table.

NACHO
Just ask questions. If it wants to
answer, it'll use the Maglite and
EMF meters. If we're lucky, we
might get some EVP recordings, too.

Jaime looks at Nacho through sad, terrified eyes.

NACHO
It's okay. You got this. And we're
all here with you.

Jaime nods.

Nacho backs into a corner.

JAIME
Hello? Is anyone here?

The mini Maglite pulses on, just barely igniting the bulb. It
dims.

Jaime's eyes go wide.

JAIME
What's your name?

No response.

NACHO
Try yes-or-no questions.

JAIME
Are you a man?

The Maglite flickers on, then dims.

JAIME
Did you live on this land?

The Maglite flickers on, barely igniting the bulb, then dims.

JAIME
Are you one of our ancestors?

The Maglite stays dark.

JAIME
Are you the one that hurt my Great
Grandma?

The mini mag light swells with energy, fully igniting the
bulb. It dims.

Jaime gasps.

BELA
That's enough. Pepper?

JAIME
Are you trying to hurt us?

The K2 meter lights up. The other meter's needle goes crazy.

The mini mag light swells with energy, brightly. It dims.

BELA
Jaime! No more!

Jaime trembles, a million questions cycling through his head.

The Maglite swells with energy, brighter than manufactured to
be. The bulb pops, leaving the room in darkness.

BELA
Jaime!

Bela turns the light on.

PEPPER
Is everyone okay?

MARIA
That was intense!

NACHO
What were you just thinking about?

JAIME
I... I don't know...

Bela turns Jaime toward her. His eyes well up. A small streak of silver taints his otherwise black mop of hair. Bela pinches it between her fingers.

BELA
Okay, we're done with this.

A DOOR CREAKS OPEN IN THE DISTANCE -- ROSA'S ROOM.

FEET SHUFFLE DOWN THE HALLWAY, GETTING CLOSER... CLOSER...

Rosa enters and stops at the sight of everyone's shock.

ROSA
Oh! We have company. I'm Rosa.

Rosa extends a friendly hand to Pepper. She accepts.

QUICK FLASH - 35 YEARS AGO

Paola places a turquoise rosary in Young Rosa's shaking hand.

BACK TO SCENE

Pepper gasps, clutches her heart.

Rosa smiles and shuffles on to the refrigerator.

BELA
Grandma... These are my work friends, Pepper and Nacho.

NACHO
Pleasure to meet you, ma'am.

Rosa pulls some tortillas and cheese out of the refrigerator.

ROSA
Are you hungry?

NACHO
I could eat.

CARMEN
I could eat.

Pepper eyes the hallway, her wheels turning...

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sophia's photo -- there's no glass in the frame.

Pepper stares at it grimly.

Bela enters from the hallway.

BELA
That's my mother. Sophia.

PEPPER
I remember her. Your grandma, too.

BELA
What?

PEPPER
Your mother and her friends stole a grimoire from an old witch cave in the canyon. They started experimenting with the occult. Brujaria. Divination. Necromancy...

Bela's eyes bulge, incredulous.

PEPPER
One night, your mother attempted a blood pact ritual. It attracted demons and other dark entities. And they got a real taste for it. Once a demon gets a foothold, if it isn't dealt with, it hangs on. So your grandmother brought her to us.

INT. BOTÁNICA - BACK ROOM - 35 YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Sophia screams.

Paola empties hair, fingernail clippings, and baby teeth into the witch bottle.

PEPPER (V.O.)

My abuela made them a witch bottle to protect them. Then, she performed a black magic ritual. It worked more like closing a window than closing a door, but it was the best we could do.

Dark Paola, sinister, watches from the shadows.

PEPPER (V.O.)

We contained the evil, but those entities want your souls. They still crave your blood, and the blood of your entire bloodline. And they intend to use Rosa to get it.

Young Rosa watches the Curandera's ritual in horror.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

Rosa enters the room and looks at Pepper with a face full of recognition and lucidity.

ROSA

I remember you. You helped us.

Rosa picks up the picture frame, as though seeing it for the first time. She returns it to the shrine.

ROSA

It's happening again. Isn't it?

Pepper looks at her, thoughtfully.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A white candle's flame flickers in the dark.

Pepper smudges the room with white sage. Bela and the kids follow from a distance.

CARMEN

(whispering)

What is she doing?

NACHO

(whispering)

Smudging. It's supposed to cleanse the house of negative energies.

Pepper sages the "legs" table. Jaime swallows nervously.

Pepper stops at the front door, closes her eyes, and whispers a prayer. She extinguishes the sage in a bowl.

BELA
Is it over?

PEPPER
I don't feel... anything.

Bela lets out a sigh of relief. Pepper does not.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Bela follows Nacho and Pepper to the SUV.

BELA
Thanks again, for everything.

PEPPER
Anytime. Call if you need us.

NACHO
Day or night. My phone is always on
if you need to talk.

PEPPER
Okay.

NACHO
Or if you just need a good hug.

PEPPER
Okay, Nacho, get in the car.

NACHO
I give great hugs.

Nacho makes a "call me" gesture and boards the SUV. Bela smiles as her friends depart.

INT. NACHO'S JEEP - NIGHT

Pepper stares out the window with concern.

NACHO
We did everything we could, right?

PEPPER
When my abuela performed that black
magic ritual, it cost her a piece
of her soul.

(MORE)

PEPPER (CONT'D)

She was never the same after that, knowing that one day the devil may come for the rest of it. That's why I retired. I didn't want to end up like that. So, no, I didn't do everything I could do. I just hope what we did was enough.

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door drifts open.

In bed, Bela sleeps beside Maria and Carmen.

Jaime and Sammy Dog share the floor.

A fly buzzes into the room and settles on the nightstand.

Three more flies buzz in and occupy the walls.

WHISPERS OVERLAP DOWN THE HALL.

LOUD, LEATHERY CLAPPING SOUNDS ECHO FROM THE OTHER END OF THE HALLWAY. WET BONES SCRAPE ALONG THE HARDWOOD FLOOR.

CLAP. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLAP. SCRAPE. SCRAPE.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

A shirtless PENITENTE CAÍDO in bloody white pants crawls down the hall on his hands and knees. Flies encircle him. His head down, long, scraggly white hair obstructs his face.

The Penitente Caído stops and whips himself with Disciplinas made from Yucca stalks, leaving scars on his swollen back. He crawls on, scraping his exposed bony knees across the floor and leaving a bloody trail as he goes.

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jaime wakes with a start. He sits up and listens.

JAIME
(whispering)
Mom!

Bela stirs, sits up.

BELA
What's wrong?

Maria and Carmen wake up.

Sammy Dog lunges defensively toward the door and growls.

IN THE HALLWAY: CLAP. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLAP. SILENCE.

Jaime jumps on the bed. The kids huddle closer to Bela.

MARIA

Mom, what is that?

Sammy Dog whimpers and scurries into the closet.

The Penitente Caído crawls into their line of sight just outside the doorway. He leers in with an unholy smile and whitened eyes, then scrapes on down the hallway...

BELA

Grandma!

The kids' faces fill with terror.

Bela jumps up -- the door slams shut before she can reach it. Bela turns the knob, but it doesn't budge.

Maria dives out of bed and tries to help.

BEYOND THE DOOR, IN THE DISTANCE: CLAP. ROSA SCREAMS. CLAP. ROSA SCREAMS. CLAP.

Bela hurries to the nightstand and grabs her phone. She tries to call Pepper.

Maria and the twins sob and pound on the door.

BEYOND THE DOOR, IN THE DISTANCE: CLAP. ROSA SCREAMS. CLAP. ROSA SCREAMS. CLAP. Silence. CLAP. Silence. CLAP. SILENCE...

Bela tries the door. It opens. Cold wind blasts in, sending Bela, Maria, Carmen, and Jaime flying across the room.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. BELA'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Bela and the kids lie scattered about the room, unconscious.

Sammy Dog licks Bela's face. He whines and nudges her with his snout. Bela wakes. She sees Jaime beside her and gently shakes him awake. Bela crawls over to Carmen across the room.

BELA

Carmen.

She nudges Carmen awake.

BELA

Maria?

Maria pulls herself out from under the bed.

Bela limps to the door and opens it.

INT. HALLWAY - DAWN

Bela hobbles to Rosa's door. The kids watch from Bela's room.

Bela turns the doorknob; it opens with ease.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Bela enters. Rosa lies still, eyes closed peacefully. Bruises stretch across her face and collar bone.

BELA

Grandma.

No response.

BELA

Grandma?

Bela breaks down. She takes Rosa's hand and finds Yucca stalks tightly clutched between her fingers.

MARIA (O.S.)

Mom?

BELA

Don't come in here.

Bela sobs and rests her head on Rosa's chest.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - DAY

Two paramedics lift a covered stretcher into an ambulance.

Bela, Nacho, and Pepper watch from the porch.

BELA

It looked like she fought back. She was fighting for us.

PEPPER

Did you get a hold of your brother?

BELA

No. He's not answering his phone, and I didn't want to leave it in a message. But I might have to. We're packing up and leaving tonight.

PEPPER

Bela...

BELA

Will you help him? If they come back?

Nacho and Pepper exchange a frown.

NACHO

Bela... I've never lost someone in an investigation. Whatever your family encountered last night, it's not going to be afraid of me.

PEPPER

I can reach out to the church, but there's a lot of red tape involved. Beyond that, there's not much more I could do. Even my abuela would've been overwhelmed by that many entities. I'm sorry Bela.

Bela smiles and nods politely.

INT. VAL-U STAY MOTEL - NIGHT

Seedy motel. Bela's car is parked in front of room #106.

INT. VAL-U STAY MOTEL - ROOM #106 - NIGHT

Two beds. Bad 1970s decor. Desperation central.

Bela, Carmen, Jaime, and Maria sit on one of the beds and play Go Fish. Sammy Dog rests on the floor nearby.

MARIA

I win again!

Maria flops her cards on the bed and laughs. The twins groan and throw their cards at Maria.

BELA

Okay, I think it's bed time.

JAIME

Good. Maybe I can actually sleep in a ghost-free environment.

CARMEN

Are you kidding? Do you know how many people probably died in this dump?

BELA

Carmen!

Bela throws a pillow at her. The family laughs.

KNOCKS AT THE DOOR. Bela opens it.

It's RIVER (40s). Her hair is pulled back, and her denim jacket, torn jeans, and haunted eyes make her look like she's spent her whole life in worse places than this.

BELA

River...

RIVER

Hey, Darlin'.

The kids freeze. Sammy cries.

BELA

How did you find us?

RIVER

You used our credit card. As usual, you got emotional, ran away like a child, and then practically dared me to come find you. Never fails.

BELA

It's my credit card, River.

River sighs.

RIVER

Not this again. We can't build a life together if you're gonna keep fighting it. Now, let's go home.

BELA

We're not going back.

RIVER

But, you are, Bela. The kids, too. Unless you want to just leave 'em here. They might be better off. A drunk like you for a mother?

Bela tries to shut the door, but River blocks it.

RIVER

Baby, you know better. You can try to shut me out, but there's always gonna be consequences.

Bela looks at her kids with glassy eyes.

BELA

Get your shoes on and pack the car.

JAIME

Mom, no...

MARIA

Mom?

BELA

Do what I say!

Maria, Carmen, and Jaime begrudgingly pack up.

River enters like she owns the place.

Bela's phone rings on the nightstand. She hurries to answer.

BELA

(on the phone)
Hello?

RAUL (V.O.)

(on the phone)
Bela. Where the hell is Grandma?

INT. MOGOTE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Raul stares down the hallway, then toward the kitchen.

RAUL

I know you're here. I just heard you come in through the front door!

INT. VAL-U STAY MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Bela gasps.

BELA
 (on the phone)
 Raul, that wasn't me! Listen, you
 need to get out of there --

River snatches the phone and hangs up.

BELA
 River! Give it back!

RIVER
 See? What did I just say? This
 isn't your phone, it's our phone.

BELA
 My grandma just died and I've been
 trying to reach Raul all day!

RIVER
 Doesn't sound like a very close-
 knit family. I guess I'm all you've
 got left now, huh, Bela?

BELA
 Go to hell!

RIVER
 Close. Denver. Now load up the car.
 I'm gonna follow you back. And just
 to make sure you don't fuck up?
 (to the twins)
 You two are riding with me.

The kids get their bags together.

CARMEN
 What about Sammy Dog?

River rolls her eyes.

RIVER
 Oh. Didn't you hear? Dog ran away.

EXT. VAL-U STAY MOTEL - NIGHT

River drags a whining Sammy Dog outside and unhooks his
 collar. She kicks him in the ass.

RIVER
 Go play in traffic, mongrel!

Sammy Dog yelps and runs away.

The kids stifle their cries.

BELA
Fuck you, River!

River grabs Bela by the hair and drags her outside. She throws her toward the station wagon.

RIVER
Get in the car, bitch. We'll settle this later.

Maria follows Bela to the car.

Jaime and Carmen follow River to a beat-up Ford Bronco.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Raul heads to the front door. He turns the knob, but the deadbolt locks on its own before he can open it.

ROSA'S FAVORITE RECORD PLAYS IN HER BEDROOM.

Raul whips around toward the hallway.

RAUL
Grandma?

EXT. ALAMOSA - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Bela's car accelerates, River's is hot on her tail.

INT. BELA'S STATION WAGON - NIGHT

Bela's fingers tense around the steering wheel.

Maria wipes a tear.

MARIA
I'm worried about Tío Raul.

BELA
Me, too.

MARIA
We can't just leave him.

BELA
We don't have a choice.

MARIA

Sure we do. That's just not the choice you made.

Bela stops at a red light. She bows her head in shame.

BELA

You're right. And so was Raul.

MARIA

So what are we gonna do?

Bela looks at Maria with uncertainty. Their eyes drift to Bela's purse on the center console.

The red traffic light on Bela's face turns green.

EXT. NACHO'S TRAILER - NIGHT

TV light flickers through the window.

INT. NACHO'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Nacho eats noodles out of a cup on her big, comfy couch and flips channels. She stops on the local news.

ON THE TV

A YOUNG REPORTER's story already in progress.

YOUNG REPORTER

... fourteen-year-old victim was found malnourished and in a catatonic state. An officer on site said the boy's surroundings could only be described as uninhabitable.

Mugshots for Daryl and Susan White appear on the screen. The pair look gaunt and sickly, like meth addicts, but without the "meth skin/teeth." Their eyes are lifeless, soulless.

YOUNG REPORTER (V.O.)

The young victim's parents, Daryl and Susan White, were charged with child abuse, neglect, and --

BACK TO SCENE

Nacho pauses the screen.

NACHO
No freaking way.

Nacho stares at the image. She squeezes her sacred necklace a moment. Her jaw tightens in grim determination.

Nacho hops up, grabs her jacket, and heads to the door.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Bela parks at a pump. River's Bronco rolls up beside her. River lowers her window with a glare.

BELA
I need gas.

RIVER
Hurry up. I don't want to be
driving all night.

River pulls off to the side and parks.

INT. RIVER'S BRONCO - NIGHT

In the backseat, Jaime frowns. He leans over to Carmen.

JAIME
(whispering)
We have to get away.

CARMEN
(whispering)
How?

Jaime quietly ponders.

JAIME
I have to pee!

River glares back at him through the rearview.

RIVER
Oh, for fuck's sake.

CARMEN
Me, too!

River looks up and sees an exterior restroom.

RIVER
Go! One at a time. I ain't fuckin'
stupid.

Jaime jumps out and runs to the restroom.

Carmen looks on nervously. River lights a cigarette.

INT. BELA'S STATION WAGON - NIGHT

Bela replaces the gas nozzle. She leans in to talk to Maria through the window.

BELA

If this goes bad, you run inside
and call the police.

MARIA

What about the twins?

Bela looks up as Jaime exits the restroom.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Jaime jogs to the Bronco and stops at River's window.

RIVER

What now?

INT./EXT. RIVER'S BRONCO - CONTINUOUS

Jaime stands firm.

JAIME

You make my mom sad. You make us
all miserable. Why don't you just
leave us alone?

Carmen stealthily slips out of her seatbelt.

RIVER

Well, that's just part of life,
kid. Making the best out of a bad
situation. I did it. Your mother
did it. And one day, you're gonna
have to do it, too. Now get your
ass in the car before I burn your
forehead with this here cigarette.

JAIME

Now!

Carmen flings her door open.

The twins race to Bela's car.

RIVER
Little shits!

River flings her door open and lunges to get out, but she's yanked back by her seatbelt. She drops her cigarette in her lap and grunts in pain.

INT./EXT. BELA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Bela starts her car. Jaime and Carmen jump in the backseat.

BELA
Buckle up!

Bela speeds toward the street. River charges at them and blocks their escape, fists clenched, and ready to brawl. Bela slams on the brakes.

River runs up to the window.

Bela pulls the gun out of her purse and takes aim.

RIVER
Hey, Bela. Put that shit down. Now!

BELA
No, River. We're done. I'll send someone to pick up my things, and then you are never to contact me or my familia ever again.

River smiles, nervously.

RIVER
You're not gonna shoot me, Bela.

BELA
If I have to choose between your life and the lives of my family, there's no choice to make. I'll gladly spend my life in prison if it means they'll be safe from you. And I can live with it, because no one will even care you're gone.

River gapes, eyes glassy.

BELA
Now, give me my phone!

River pulls out the phone and tosses it to Bela.

BELA

Better get going. You don't wanna
be driving all night.

Bela pulls onto the street and leaves River in her dust.

The kids CHEER.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A FUN AMBIENCE CAN BE HEARD FROM THE DINING ROOM.

Pepper finds a tray running low on shredded cheese. She smiles, picks up a block of cheddar, and grates it.

The cheese turns green before it hits the tray.

Pepper's smile fades. She glances at the cheese block. It's fresh and perfectly orange.

Pepper grates the cheese over the trash, but the shreds turn green before they even reach the can.

Pepper glances at the expiration date on the packaging. She sniffs the cheese. She shrugs, perplexed. She gets a knife and halves the block -- it turns moldy within the cut.

Pepper backs away and heads to the door. She pushes it, but it doesn't budge.

WHISPERS OVERLAP BEHIND PEPPER, FOLLOWED BY A DEATH RATTLE.

Pepper shoves the door. She pounds on it.

The door swings open. Pepper falls through and lands on the mat behind the bar.

INT. TORTILLA PEDRO'S - BAR - CONTINUOUS

The door slowly swings in and out, in and out.

Pepper's childhood doppelgänger, Dark Paola, glares at her through shiny black eyes from the kitchen.

Pepper's eyes fill with terror. She pops up, pulls out her cell phone, dials a number, and jogs to the front door.

PEPPER

(on the phone)

Nacho! It's not over! We need to --

Pepper nearly runs into an incoming Nacho.

NACHO
Pepper! We can't quit on Bela.

PEPPER
I know! Come on!

Pepper and Nacho depart.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Lights flicker intermittently throughout the house.

Bela parks the station wagon and springs out.

BELA
Stay in the car!

Bela slams the door and runs to the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bela bounds through the door.

BELA
Raul!

Pictures and knickknacks fly off walls and shelves. The front door slams shut. Bela presses onward.

BELA
Raul!

INT. BELA'S STATION WAGON - NIGHT

Maria watches the house from the passenger seat. Carmen and Jaime huddle together in the back.

JAIME
Can you see anything?

MARIA
Nothing. Wait...

The Shadow Man's silhouette manifests on the side of the house. Maria flicks on the headlights, but he disappears.

She flicks off the headlights. Shadow Man is closer.

She flicks on the headlights. Shadow Man is gone.

She flicks off the headlights. The Shadow Man is missing.

Carmen looks out her window. The Old Woman's ghastly face breathes on the glass. Carmen screams.

The Old Woman scratches the window with her bony fingers. She tries the door handle -- it's locked.

Shadow Man lunges at the car and cracks the windshield.

JAIME

Maria! What do we do?

MARIA

I... I don't know!

The Old Woman hisses at the window, then pounds the glass.

Shadow Man crawls onto the hood.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bela creeps toward the bedrooms.

BELA

Raul?

Raul lumbers out of his room with a baseball bat.

RAUL

Bela! Where's Grandma?

BELA

They got her! And they want us,
too! We have to get out of here!

The lights in the living room fade out.

FOOTSTEPS CREAK ON THE LIVING ROOM FLOOR, THEN UP THE WALL,
THEN TO THE CEILING. THEY TRUDGE CLOSER TO BELA AND RAUL.

Raul and Bela back up, eyes wide.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

Nacho's SUV skids to a stop. Its spotlights blast Bela's station wagon with intensity.

The Old Woman becomes invisible in the light, while Shadow Man SCREECHES and dives away into the shadows.

Pepper and Nacho hop out of the SUV with nylon bags.

PEPPER
Perimeter! Hurry!

NACHO
On it!

Nacho flicks holy water on the station wagon. Pepper encircles it with her canister of salt.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bela and Raul back up toward the bedrooms.

SOPHIA (O.S.)
(from Rosa's room)
Isabela? Raul?

Raul spins toward Rosa's bedroom door.

RAUL
... Mama?

BELA
It's not her, Raul.

SOPHIA (O.S.)
(from the bedroom)
Help me! Somebody help me!

RAUL
Mama!

BELA
Raul, don't!

Raul opens Rosa's door and runs inside.

BELA
Raul!

Invisible hands suddenly pull Bela inside. The door slams.

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - NIGHT

The kids jump out of the station wagon.

MARIA
Mom's inside!

PEPPER
I know. Stay with Nacho --

BELA SCREAMS IN THE HOUSE.

CARMEN

Mom!

Carmen sprints for the front door.

NACHO

The circle!

Carmen's shoes skid through the salt.

MARIA

Carmen!

Maria and Jaime chase after their sister.

NACHO

Plan B?

Pepper nods. They run to the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Pepper and Nacho enter and join Maria, Carmen, and Jaime.

PEPPER

Everyone in the bathroom! Go!

Maria leads Carmen, Jaime, Pepper, and Nacho to --

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nacho slams the door and barricades it with her body.

MARIA

We have to help them!

Pepper pulls vials of black and white salt, red brick dust, rosemary, and a stained glass witch bottle out of her bag and sets them on the toilet seat.

PEPPER

I need some hair and finger nails!

Maria pulls scissors out of a drawer. She snips her hair and drops it in the bottle. Carmen takes the scissors and cuts her nails, adding them to the spell.

SIX KNOCKS COME FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL.

Carmen and Jaime gasp. Pepper grabs the bottle.

PEPPER

Okay. Someone needs to pee in this.

Maria and Carmen turn to Jaime.

JAIME

Why do I always have to do everything?

MARIA

You're the one with a hose!

SIX KNOCKS COME FROM A WALL CLOSER TO THE DOOR.

Pepper sets the bottle in the bathtub.

PEPPER

Hurry!

Jaime swallows and unzips his pants.

SIX KNOCKS COME FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

NACHO

Ah, shit.

The doorknob twists until it breaks the lock -- SNAP.

KNOCKING CHARLIE pushes the door open a crack, but Nacho resists. Through the gap, Charlie's unholy smile is visible.

Maria and Carmen scream.

PEPPER

Hurry, Jaime!

JAIME

I can't!

An owl bursts through the bathroom window. Its wings flap wildly and shower Jaime with shards of glass.

The bottle in the bathtub fills with urine.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bela wakes up on the floor and wipes blood from her mouth.

An invisible force drags Raul up a wall. Scratches tear through his chest. He bleeds from his eyes and ears.

THE DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

FLIES BUZZ into the room.

WHISPERS OVERLAP DOWN THE HALL. THEN, WET BONES SCRAPE AGAINST THE HARDWOOD FLOOR. CLAP. SCRAPE. SCRAPE. CLAP...

BELA

No...

The Penitente Caído crawls into the room with a sneer. He closes in on Bela.

RAUL

Please, God... help us...

Unnatural white light spills in from the hallway. The silhouette of two humanoid forms emerge.

A woman's hand takes the rosary from the doorknob.

BELA

Grandma!

The Penitente Caído turns around to see halos of white light spilling around apparitions of Rosa and the Curandera.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jaime blocks the window with the shower curtain.

Pepper drops sharp metal nails into the witch bottle.

PEPPER

I need a teaspoon of black salt, sea salt, and rosemary. Quickly!

MARIA

How are we supposed to measure?

CARMEN

I got this.

Carmen accurately measures by eye and adds the ingredients.

PEPPER

I need a key to the house!

Maria drops her key in the bottle.

Pepper corks the bottle, then ties a black ribbon around its neck. She lights a white candle and seals it with wax.

JAIME

Is that it?

Pepper feels a warm breeze and smiles.

PEPPER

Almost. We have help now. But
there's still one more thing to do.
I need blood.

She pulls a sacrificial dagger from her bag.

Jaime bravely extends his hand. As does Carmen, then Maria.
Pepper frowns at them. She exhales and shakes her head.

Pepper closes her eyes. She pricks her thumb with the blade,
then smears her blood along the bottle's seal.

NACHO

Pepper?

PEPPER

I offer my blood in exchange for
theirs, so that this family may be
free! This pact, now sealed, this
burden, now mine. Our spirits, now
bound. Their bloodline, now clean!

The owl retreats into the night. All is quiet.

Nacho, Pepper, Maria, Jaime, and Carmen settle.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Raul winces and instinctively touches his wounds.

RAUL

Bela?

BELA

It was Grandma. She was here.

RAUL

I saw.

Raul hugs Bela.

THE BATHROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

Carmen, Jaime, and Maria peek into the bedroom. Pepper and
Nacho are a step behind.

BELA

Is it over?

Pepper sees Dark Paola in her peripheral.

PEPPER
Your family is safe now.

A sad, fearful tear rolls down her cheek.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOGOTE HOUSE - TWO WEEKS LATER - DAY

It's Sunny. The house looks peaceful, cozy.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Maria clears the table. Nacho scoops rice into Tupperware. Carmen empties a handful of shredded cheese into her mouth.

Jaime springs in from the hallway.

JAIME
Are there any sopapillas left?

CARMEN
Jaime! Quit eating them all!

JAIME
You'll make more.

Jaime swipes a sopapilla off Carmen's plate and bounces out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jaime stops in front of a new pedestal. On it: an urn inscribed with "Rosa Quelinda Gonzales".

JAIME
Happy Birthday, Great Grandma. We all miss you very much. Tío Raul's not here, though. He's working things out with Tía Amber.

A SCRATCHING AT THE FRONT DOOR...

Jaime creeps to the door and slowly opens it. He gasps.

JAIME
Sammy Dog!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Carmen's eyes go wide. Jaime and Sammy Dog barrel into the kitchen. Maria and Nacho hurry to them.

CARMEN
I knew you'd find us!

The kids hug Sammy Dog, and he licks their faces in turn.

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - DUSK

Bela frowns at a framed photo of Rosa on Sophia's shrine. Pepper carries Rosa's rosary into the room.

PEPPER
So, I heard you decided to stay.

BELA
Maybe. If I can find a job.

PEPPER
Too bad I replaced you already.

Bela laughs.

PEPPER
But, I've been thinking about hiring an assistant manager to watch the place when I go out on investigations.

BELA
You came out of retirement?

PEPPER
I realized there are people who need my help, and it would be wrong to ignore them. Plus, someone's gotta keep Nacho out of trouble.

CARMEN (O.S.)
Mom! Sammy Dog came back! Hurry!

BELA
What? ... Okay! We're coming!

Pepper hangs the rosary on the doorknob and follows Bela out.

THE DOOR GENTLY DRIFTS CLOSED.

FADE TO BLACK.