

SCARY STORIES TO TELL IN THE DARK

Written by
Kevin & Dan Hageman

Story by
Guillermo Del Toro

Based on
Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark
By Alvin Schwartz
Illustrations
By Stephen Gammell

*"Some towns have a curse.
Some towns have a witch.
Mill Valley, has both.
But which one is which?"*

Popular Rhyme

EXT. MILL VALLEY - ESTABLISHING - DUSK

Settled on a fork of the Yamhill River in the Pacific Northwest rests the small railway city of MILL VALLEY.

All is quiet, save for the clacking of a lone train.

SERIES OF OPENING SHOTS of a TOWN IN DECLINE:

ON MAIN STREET

Outside MILL VALLEY PAWN SHOP, an OLD TIMER lowers the AMERICAN FLAG. A RECORD SHOP next door is already BOARDED UP.

Super: **MILL VALLEY, OCT 31st, 1968.**

A DISK JOCKEY who sounds like he is battling throat cancer, cuts through the doleful monotony of Americana --

 DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
 Dig yourself out of the grave, Mill
 Valley, 'cause this could be our
 last Halloween...

ON HOUSE

A MOTHER places a JACK-O-LANTERN on her porch -- then sees her "VOTE NIXON '68" YARD SIGN has been vandalized. The 'X' has been turned into a swastika. Mortified, she removes it.

ON UNFINISHED OVERPASS

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS laugh as they pack up for the day beneath an unfinished SPRAWLING RAISED HIGHWAY.

 DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
 ...When that giant monstrosity is
 finally built, they may as well
 turn the knife, cause the rest of
 the world is gonna pass us by...

A SULLEN MAN with the name OREN embroidered on his coveralls, drifts away from the pack to load his tools in his pick-up.

ON GRAVEYARD

STELLA MICHAELS (15), meek with thick black specs that are easy to hide behind, reads a book (TRUE GRIT, Portis) while taking a bite of a sandwich in front of a GRAVESTONE on the anniversary of her mother's death. DINAH B. MICHAELS Apr 8 1921 - Oct 31 1958.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
 But you got *me*. To say what I wanna
 say, and play what I wanna play...

The Sun sets--- Stella uses an early POLAROID camera to photograph a STONE SKULL on a gravestone, then grabs her bike to leave.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
 So you be careful out there tonight
 - cause when the sun goes down...
It's the Season of the Witch.

A plucky GUITAR RIFF begins. It's coupled with a BLUESY BASS LINE. The slow groove of Donovan's "Season of the Witch" as we continue our OPENING SEQUENCE:

ON NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - HALLOWEEN NIGHT

Cowboys, princesses and pirates collect their annual haul of sweets on a suburban street from a bygone era.

A CLOSED CINEMA: On its dilapidated marquee a crumbling sign announces TH HEART IS A ONELY HUNT R.

The cinema may be closed, but the street is alive: Children keep their candy bags close as -- a 68' BLUE BONNEVILLE sulks down the street like a shark on the prowl.

KURT MILNER (18) drives with a sucker in his mouth. His car filled with LETTERMANS chugging Schlitz, looking for trouble.

Donovan's swagger-filled lyrics kick in --

DONOVAN
*"When I look out my window... Many
 sights to see...."*

DEPUTY HOBBS (20s) looks out the window of his idle PATROL CRUISER. As he pets his dog TRIGGER, he motions to Kurt to keep it moving. They do.

IN STEINBERG HOUSEHOLD - LIVING ROOM / LOWBORN BATHROOM

THE STEINBERGS (married, bored, him yawning, her, sewing a costume) watch TV. ON it: Nixon.

NIXON (ON TV)
 I'll take only a minute. I had a
 very good briefing by Secretary
 Rusk this morning up at New York.
 (MORE)

NIXON (ON TV) (CONT'D)

And then I just went over and had a half hour with the General and he's-- it's the longest visit he had. He just looks great.

ALICE STEINBERG (17) cruises by in a slip and her bouffant already done up, carrying swaths of fabric.

She heads upstairs and goes by --

The bathroom --

Then does a double take, retraces her steps: There. Kneeling before the toilet, is CHUCK STEINBERG (14), a scamp with a large mouth that looks ill-placed on his unusually-small body

ALICE

What the hell are you doing?

The answer? He's angling for a turd with a small aquarium fish net.

CHUCK

Little privacy please!

Chuck slams the bathroom door in his sister's face.

DONOVAN

"And when I look in my window... So many different people to be."

IN HILDERBRANDT HOUSEHOLD - UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS LIVING ROOM

AUGGIE HILDERBRANDT (15), excessively tall with long hair and a mopey face, dons a Pierrot costume with black button-balls down a white, silk front.

AUGGIE

Mom. It's fine.

MRS. HILDERBRANDT

It's loose in the crotch.

He buries his mortification as she measures his inseam and sticks him with pins.

IN MICHAELS HOUSEHOLD - CLUTTERED LIVING ROOM

OREN MICHAELS, the sullen man from the construction site, pops open another beer and stares at a TV that isn't on.

Stella mournfully glances from the threshold of the bathroom, fresh out of the shower and wrapped in a towel. She shuts the door. Her father pays no attention.

IN MICHAELS BATHROOM

A drawer is opened. Stella's hand digs through the clutter to expose -- a STRAIGHT RAZOR gleams under a mishmash of MAKEUP.

Stella stares into the mirror. Her body is gaunt, almost skeletal. A sadness in her eyes.

DONOVAN

"That it's strange... So strange."

She lifts her chin, then -- slits her throat, WITH A LINE OF BLACK FACE PAINT. The beginnings of a Halloween costume.

ON MORALES PAINT-CHIPPED HOME

A beat-up CORVAIR MONZA parks in front of a destitute home.

IN MORALES LIVING ROOM

MRS. MORALES watches TV (NEWS about the first Manned Moon Orbit flight) in the dark with her HUSBAND, who is hidden by his recliner. A lit cigarette in a crowded ashtray.

RAMÓN MORALES (18), a young man with hard-knock looks and a disappointed demeanor, drops off vials of prescription pills.

His mother smiles, but something inside her died years ago. His father never turns. The soft glow of the television illuminates DISFIGUREMENTS too disturbing to look at.

IN STEINBERG KITCHEN

MRS. STEINBERG shucks peas as Alice crafts her own dress on a second-hand sewing machine.

CHUCK (O.C.)

I said Spiderman. Not a spider man.

Chuck, embarrassed to be dressed in a silly FOUR-ARMED SPIDER COSTUME, beelines to the fridge to see what he can scavenge -- it's bare, save for some day-old bread and a carton of eggs.

MRS. STEINBERG

Spiders have eight legs-

CHUCK

He doesn't- I gave you the comic book!

He shows her a dynamic cover of Spiderman swinging between buildings.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
He's a superhero, not a freak!

MRS. STEINBERG
Well, the superhero should be happy
the Lord provided.

ALICE
Aren't you too old to be trick or
treating?

Chuck spots a clown tapping outside the kitchen window.

CHUCK
Aren't you too ugly to be going on
a date?-- Auggie's here, gotta run.

Alice lunges to throttle her little brother. Chuck swipes the
carton of eggs and runs off. Mom continues to shuck, unfazed.

DONOVAN
*"You've got to pick up every
stitch... You've got to pick up
every stitch..."*

ON STEINBERG BACKYARD

Chuck exits hauling a BACKPACK, to meet a waiting Auggie --

AUGGIE
I thought you were gonna be
Spiderman.

CHUCK
I am.

AUGGIE
(points at the arms)
But the-

CHUCK
Don't worry about it. I got the
goods. Let's banana split.

AUGGIE
(leering through window)
Is Alice getting dressed?

CHUCK
Get your own sister, you giant
perv.

Off them hopping on their bikes and riding away --

DONOVAN
*"You've got to pick up every
 stitch. Mmhmmm..."*

IN MICHAELS BATHROOM

Stella puts the finishing touches on her face paint and steps back to inspect her work --

DONOVAN (CONT'D)
"Must be the Season of the Witch."

Stella is unrecognizable. A near photo-realistic skull covers her face. Her exquisite paint job is a labor of love.

Confident -- she puts on her glasses and turns off the light.

SCARY STORIES TO TELL IN THE DARK

As "Season of the Witch" fades out... darkness persists... An uncomfortable long moment... Long enough to be unnerving...

And then SMASH TO --

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - HOURS LATER

A bespectacled Skeleton, a Pierrot, and a Spider Man drag their pillowcases half-filled with candy and armaments.

Chuck eyes a slow passing car as Auggie smokes a joint.

AUGGIE
*... I'm just saying, if anything, a
 spider man should have eight arms,
 not four.*

CHUCK
 At least I'm not a clown.

AUGGIE
 I'm a Pierrot. A 17th century
 character from La Commedia
 Dell'arte, idiot stick.

Stella sees porch lights beginning to turn off.

STELLA
He's not gonna show.

AUGGIE
He'll show. Dick Breath does it every year and this time it'll be his last.

CHUCK
Well if he doesn't, maybe next year you can carry the bag of shit.

Chuck empties the last of his Good N' Plentys into his mouth.

AUGGIE
Do you even know what's in those?

CHUCK
What are you now, The Man?

AUGGIE
The same toxic chemicals that's giving our troops Hodgkin's lymphoma and curdling the breast milk of the South Vietnamese.

STELLA
You're crazy.

AUGGIE
Not crazy. Conscious.
(passes joint to Stella)
You sure you don't want any? Cause you're creeping us out with this whole skeleton thing.

She waves it off.

CHUCK
Yeah, pretty tragic considering it's the anniversary your mom's death.

AUGGIE
(annoyed at Chuck)
Dude.

Chuck realizes his poor choice of words and backpedals --

CHUCK
I'm... sorry. I didn't --

Stella goes solemn, but shirks it off.

STELLA
It's fine. Gimme that --

Stella grabs the joint. Before she takes a drag -- OS engine of a '68 Bonneville.

CHUCK
Shit! It's Kurt --

AUGGIE
(lowers clown mask)
Cover your face, stupid. And hold
out the bait.

Chuck dons his disguise, acting as if this were some kind of heist.

INSIDE '68 BONNEVILLE

Kurt laughs with his kind, throwing beer cans out the window.

IN THE BACKSEAT -- Alice is all done up for her date, wedged between two Lettermans. She swats their unwanted advances.

ALICE
(to Kurt, annoyed)
You said we would have dinner.

Kurt's eyes narrow as he spots the backs of some trick-or-treaters all alone.

KURT
How 'bout dessert?

He hits the gas. His FLATTOP buddy cackles and leans out the passenger window, prepping to snare the candy bag --

As they blow past, he RIPS the bag from Chuck's hand. They all laugh. Flattop opens the pillowcase only to find --

FLATTOP
It's full of old man undies!

Enraged, Kurt slams on the brakes.

ON STELLA AND FRIENDS

They unload a SLEW OF EGGS and TOILET PAPER, pelting the car.

CHUCK
Trick or treat, mother fuckers!

ON '68 BONNEVILLE

As the Bonneville takes on a barrage of egg yolk and teepee, Kurt angrily shifts the car into reverse, full speed.

ON STELLA AND FRIENDS

They hold their ground, not afraid to exhaust every bit of their stash. Payback for years of being picked on.

Chuck proudly lights his BROWN PAPER BAG OF SHIT on fire.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

And now for the Poup D'etat...

As the Bonneville returns for a second pass, Chuck TOSSES it -
- throwing it right into their window.

INSIDE '68 BONNEVILLE

The bag EXPLODES on Kurt's lap. Alice SHRIEKS. He frantically swats the flames and manure, forgetting to hit the brakes.

The Bonneville surges backward, out of control --

FLATTOP

The brakes! The brakes!

ON STELLA AND FRIENDS

They beam in victory --

-- Only to see the Bonneville CRASH into a tree. Their smiles drop, suddenly concerned by the inevitable fallout.

AUGGIE

Ah shit!

CHUCK

Let's cheese it!

As they are running away --

ON CRASHED '68 BONNEVILLE

Shit-stained Kurt and his cronies pile out of the car. Alice sees her four-armed brother running away.

ALICE

Chucky? Is that you?!

KURT

That's your brother?! I'm gonna
murder them!!

Kurt and his friends grab baseball bats and chase after.
Alice stays with the car, her arms folded.

ON STELLA AND HER FRIENDS, RUNNING

AUGGIE
Your sister went out with that
dickhead?

CHUCK
So much for our cover. Let's split
up. Better odds only one of us
dying.

STELLA
Meet up at The Gorge.

AUGGIE
Catch 'ya later.

STELLA
Not if you catch a disease first.

They splinter off, cutting through backyards.

Kurt and the Lettermans stay as a pack, targeting Chuck.

ON CHUCK

Chuck sees the heat is on him and silently curses, all four
arms pumping in stride. He heads for the woods.

ON KURT AND LETTERMANS

Run into the woods, searching in all directions.

Flattop finds -- The SPIDER MAN COSTUME. They fan out.

OUTSKIRTS OF SUBURBS

Shivering, Chuck exits the woods in his tightey-whiteys. He
catches his breath, then spots off in the distance --

THE GORGE CINEMA

A DRIVE-IN nestled in a natural basin on the waterfront. A
line of 60-era cars waiting to get inside.

AT LINE OF CARS

Chuck meets Stella and Auggie, ducking behind cars, trying to
stay undetected by the Lettermans scanning the area.

They hide behind a CORVAIR MONZA, blaring "Little Green Apples"

AUGGIE

You're in your underwear.

CHUCK

I'm still not a clown.

Stella shushes them. Then is surprised to see the trunk of the CORVAIR pop open. A voice from the driver --

RAMÓN (O.C.)

You're acting like it's your first time.

She spots Ramón, vaguely recognizing him. Chuck and Auggie act first, hopping inside. Stella follows in after.

Ramón pulls into the Drive-In, past a marquee that reads: "BORIS KARLOFF'S BLACK SABBATH". Pays his ticket for one.

Kurt and the Lettermans lose the scent and move on.

INT. THE GORGE DRIVE-IN -- LATER

THE STARING, GRINNING FACE of a dead woman!! In gory technicolor.

A smattering of cars idly face a towering outdoor screen showing the horror flick. Pipe organ swells through every hanging CAR WINDOW SPEAKER, as the small audience scarf popcorn or take part in the usual immoral behavior.

IN THE CORVAIR MONZA

As Ramón watches the movie -- Chuck climbs out of the retractable back seat, putting on an oversized military tee.

CHUCK

Mind if I borrow these fatigues I found in your trunk? I saw they were in a box marked for Goodwill.

RAMÓN

Have at it.

Stella and Auggie pull themselves out, adrenaline still pumping through their veins.

STELLA

That was amazing.

CHUCK
Did'ju see the look on their faces?

AUGGIE
All I saw were your sister's tits.

Ramón looks at Auggie in his rear-view mirror, unsure of what exactly he is looking at.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
... I'm a Pierrot.

Stella pulls herself into the passenger seat. Wiping her face paint off.

STELLA
Thanks. We owe you.
(re: movie)
Black Sabbath... a good one. Mario
Bava- he's real good-

AUGGIE
Mario, what?

STELLA
Bava. Italian. He's done great
movies- *Black Sunday*-

RAMÓN
Should've been here last week when
they played *The Conqueror Worm*.

STELLA
(Vincent Price impression)
*"Men sometimes have strange motives
for the things they do."*

Ramón smiles upon meeting a kindred spirit.

RAMÓN
Ramón.

Stella blushes, then turns her attention to the movie, pushing up her glasses to see better. Ramón feels dissed.

CHUCK
Her name is Stella. I'm Chuck, and
this is Auggie.

Stella sees the name 'Morales' on Chuck's military attire.

STELLA
Hey, isn't your dad that war hero
who just moved in?
(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

People say he jumped on a grenade
and *lived*.

(morbidly fascinated)

Does he like, still have his
fingers and toes and stuff?

Ramón is taken aback by her bluntness.

RAMÓN

Not all of them...

AUGGIE

Forgive her. She's strange.

Chuck sees something out the window and ducks -

CHUCK

Dick Breath alert. He's coming in.

AT CONCESSION STAND

The banged-up Bonneville pulls into the drive-in. Kurt gets
out and talks to a few Lettermans, motioning to the vicinity.

Alice is offered a bucket of popcorn, but from her crossed
arms, she clearly doesn't want anything to do with this.

They spread out to widen the search, peeking into cars.

IN CORVAIR MONZA

As Kurt and the Lettermans get closer --

RAMÓN

Back in the trunk.

Stella and Chuck are quick to take refuge but Auggie revolts.

AUGGIE

No way that's a trunk, at best it's
a large glove box.

RAMÓN

(handing over blanket)

It's *your* hide.

Auggie hides under a blanket as the others go into the trunk.

STELLA (O.S.)

CHUCK (O.S.)

Get your hand off my butt.

I can't control them.

RAMÓN

Ssh.

They quiet down and Ramón plays it cool. As they wait for Kurt to search the neighboring cars --

RAMÓN (CONT'D)
 (discrete to Auggie)
 What's up with weirdo bird?

Auggie peeks out from under the blanket, keeping his voice low and his sentences short.

AUGGIE
 Who, Stella?
 (beat)
 Her family moved here about ten years ago. Not long after, her mom was killed. She doesn't like to talk about it, but everyone pretty much knows it was her dad that did it-

Ramón looks shocked. Auggie back peddles --

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
 He didn't kill her- Not on like purpose. He was drunk. And driving. He swears it was someone else but no one really buys it. Not even Stell.

This sits with Ramón. He looks at the trunk through the rear-view mirror, suddenly empathetic.

-- A RAP on the window startles them. Auggie hides.

Ramón cranks down his window to see Kurt leering in.

RAMÓN
 Soda and popcorn. Extra butter.

KURT
 (sneers, then)
 You wouldn't happen to have seen a spider, a clown, or a skinny bitch?

Auggie sees his clown shoes are peeking out. He tries to cover them but the blanket is too short.

RAMÓN
 Now that you mention it... no. But you'll be the first to know.

Kurt checks out Ramón's car and laughs, knowing full well he's being played. Behind him --

Lettermans gather, ready at his beckon call. Kurt motions for them to hold off - he can handle it.

KURT

You got a smart mouth, Amigo. I'll
let that slide. Besides --
(cutting to the bone)
I feel bad for any war hero who has
a hood for a son.

Ramón grips the wheel, restraining his better instinct.

KURT (CONT'D)

(spots clown shoes)
I see you, shit stain! Get outta
the car! I bet that drunk's girl is
in there too!

RAMÓN

Mind keeping it down? Everyone's
trying to watch a movie.

KURT

So you won't get outta the car. See
that, fellas? Mexicans aren't
brown, they're yellow.

Ramón glances to see what he's up against. It must be 5 to 1.
He stays seated, knowing the smart play.

KURT (CONT'D)

I said - get out of the car. Spic.

Ramón bolts out of the car, angrily pressing his forehead
against Kurt's, daring him to throw the first punch.

Just as the Lettermans are about to pounce --

The flashing lights from a SHERIFF'S CRUISER.

SHERIFF MILNER (50s), a once-strong lawman who's grown weary
from the trade, steps out. He doesn't suffer fools gladly.

SHERIFF MILNER

Leave it alone, Kurt.

Kurt backs away with his hands up, staring daggers at Ramón.

KURT

Sorry dad, we were just leaving.

RAMÓN

(returning to car)
We are too, Sheriff.

The slight admission doesn't go unnoticed by Kurt.

KURT
You're all *dead*.

SHERIFF MILNER
Enough.

Ramón drives off. Chuck pops up in the rear windshield, flicking them off.

Kurt looks to his father, like a sniveling tattletale. His father only returns a look of disappointment.

SHERIFF MILNER (CONT'D)
Go home. You smell like shit.

Off Kurt's disdain --

INT. CORVAIR MONZA - LATER

Ramón pulls out of the Drive-In. Stella and her friends get settled into their seats.

STELLA
Sorry you had to miss the movie.

RAMÓN
I'm sorry I missed whatever you did to piss off that ape.

(beat)
You may wanna hold off going home. I take it he knows where you live?

CHUCK
Maybe we can crash at your place?

RAMÓN
I helped enough.

AUGGIE
We can lay low in the motel just outside of town?

CHUCK
And pay for it with what -- Abba Zaba and lollipops?

STELLA
You know...
(mischievous)
The Bellows House is empty.

Auggie and Chuck share a cautious look --

CHUCK

Yeah. They're tearing it down to make way for the freeway later this week. No one'll look for us there.

AUGGIE

No way. We all know what happens to kids who go into the Bellows House.

RAMÓN

What happens to the kids?

CHUCK

(giddy)
He doesn't know.

Ramón looks to Stella, hoping she will clear it up.

STELLA

Ever wanted to check out a haunted house?... Hang a left.

Off Ramón's growing curiosity, he takes the next turn.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - NIGHT - LATER

The Corvair Monza parks on a secluded dirt road. The grass has grown long. Years of neglect, or perhaps avoidance.

RAMÓN

(gazes out window)
You really weren't kidding...

They step out of the car to see --

An unbuilt portion of a RAISED FREEWAY. A fractured monolith of jagged rebar and cement. The two sides nearly touching. Between the divide, on a hill...

An imposing PURITAN MANOR on a sprawling, timeworn estate. Black rotted wood. A pair of prodigious MASONRY CHIMNEYS. The brittle facade is painted with shadows, consumed by rot, and strangled by overgrown foliage.

CHUCK

What better place to spend a Halloween Night. *Muhahaha.*

Chuck cackles as he passes through a wrought-iron gate and crosses a cobblestone bridge over a dry creek bed.

Stella and Auggie slowly make their way. Ramón lingers.

STELLA
You coming?

Intrigued, Ramón shuts his door and follows their lead.

RAMÓN
So who are the Bellows?

STELLA
Some railway magnate who put Mill Valley on the map.

AUGGIE
It was just a settlement until they dammed the river, allowing this place to flourish. My mom says they were a pretty big deal back then.

They pass a FAMILY PLOT. Every single tombstone marks a death in 1921. Ramón double checks to see if he saw that right, then races to catch up with the others.

RAMÓN
Lemme guess - something horrible happened to them in 1921?

Stella and Ramón join Auggie onto the front porch where CLAY BRICKS and WIRE line the house.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)
You sure we want to go in there?
The place is lined to explode.

AUGGIE
Those demo bricks? Don't sweat it,
it's not like they're wired up.
(stepping over)
Better watch your step.

They gingerly walk past the explosives.

AT FRONT DOOR

Auggie slams his shoulder into the door a few times, when --
-- It swings open with Chuck inside, giving them a scare!

CHUCK
I got you!

AUGGIE
You did not. How did'ju get inside?

CHUCK
Through a window and I totally did.

AUGGIE
Now I'm gonna get you!

Auggie chases Chuck --

INT. FOYER - BELLOWS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- Through the foyer and up the bannister stairs.

The front door creaks open, welcoming Stella and Ramón in with the moonlight. They take in the surroundings with reserved wonderment and caution --

What once was a luxurious mansion has now been picked clean of any valuables and defaced over time: Torn, water-stained wallpaper. Missing floorboards. Broken and strewn articles litter a floor already covered in layers of dust.

RAMÓN
So what happened to the Bellows?

Stella runs her fingers down the wallpaper as she passes down the halls, transfixed. Ramón hangs on her every word.

STELLA
They had a young daughter they never let out of the house. Sarah. As the story goes, they never allowed pictures of her either.

Ramón passes a PHOTOGRAPH of the BELLOWS FAMILY still hung on the wall: A gaunt patriarch and matriarch with a thick green ribbon around her neck, surrounded by sturdy young men.

STELLA (CONT'D)
People say she was... *different*.

RAMÓN
How so?

STELLA
Like, she didn't look right. Had scoliosis and gigantism- or something. She was long and tall and sort of not right. But she had this *gift*, see? A milkman once said he saw her bring a dead rabbit back to life.

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

She could touch a dead flower and make it bloom- But that's just the town's usual gossip.

RAMÓN

Nothing usual about that.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - SAME TIME

A car with LETTERMANS drive down the vacant road, passing the Bellows front gates... and spot the parked CORVAIR MONZA.

They share a grin, then speed off.

INT. UPSTAIRS - BELLOWS ESTATE - SAME TIME

Auggie reluctantly walks the halls in search of Chuck.

AUGGIE

Chuck?... Chuck?

He finds a tear in the wallpaper, then takes pleasure in PEELING it for as long as he can, exposing rotted paneling. An INTRUSION of COCKROACHES squeeze through an exposed crack.

Disgusted, he delicately tucks the wallpaper back.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

I know what you're trying to do, you're not going to scare me.

Auggie cautiously moves ahead, swallowing his fear.

INT. LIBRARY - BELLOWS ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Stella peruses bare bookshelves. A few moth-eaten tomes, but nothing worth salvaging. As Ramón takes in the dreary room, she continues the Bellows story --

STELLA

But Sarah was lonely. So she would write these scary stories. And kids would come from all around just to hear her read. To make them extra scary, she would write their names into them.

Ramón sees a broken rocking chair next to cleft toys strewn on the ground, and with her words, they take on new meaning.



Stella finds an ornate MUSIC BOX on the shelf. She winds it up and it tinkers a CHILD-LIKE LULLABY. Her gaze drifts as she recollects the rest of the story.

STELLA (CONT'D)

But then the children started to go missing. Everyone knew it was her.

(beat)

When they couldn't find them, they expected to find the bodies on this estate, but none were found. And when the police came to question Sarah - she disappeared. Never to be seen again.

RAMÓN

What happened to her?

STELLA

No one knows. But a year later, in 1921, every member of her family died from bizarre and unexplained deaths.

(beat)

Some think it was the ghosts of the murdered children, others think it was Sarah herself, come back to punish her family for locking her up.

RAMÓN

What do you think?

Stella takes a moment to choose her words carefully...

STELLA

I think she just wanted to be like the other kids, but knew she could never be like them. As for the rest, I guess we'll never know.

INT. UPSTAIRS MASTER BEDROOM - BELLOWS ESTATE - SAME TIME

Chuck tiptoes through the decrepit remains of what once was an extravagant master bedroom.

AUGGIE (O.S.)

Chuck? If you jump out at me, I'm going to punch you in the face.

As Auggie's footsteps are heard approaching, Chuck quickly climbs inside a large 18th century FRENCH ARMOIRE.

INSIDE ARMOIRE

Chuck stifles a laugh and hides inside. *Creak* - he peeks out the open door. Auggie walks past the bedroom, unsuspecting.

AUGGIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

... Chuck?

Chuck seals himself into the darkness, trying not to laugh. The sound of Auggie's footsteps come back.

Creak - Chuck cracks open the door again, only to see --

The entire bedroom is now vivid in color and texture.

Exquisite antiques adorn the walls and cover the room. As if everything is suddenly restored to its 1921 condition.

In startled awe, Chuck opens the armoire further to witness --

A GAUNT MATRIARCH with a wide GREEN RIBBON around her neck, lies sick in bed, ominously staring back.

Chuck GASPS and seals the armoire doors. Unable to catch his breath. Heart pounding. *Did he see what he thought he saw?* He goes to peek again, when--

Auggie THROWS open the doors and YELLS! Scaring Chuck white.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

I totally got you back!

Chuck holds his beating heart, regaining his wits as he sees the master bedroom HAS RETURNED TO ITS DECREPIT STATE.

CHUCK

The room -- It was new -- And there was a woman -- on the bed. A green ribbon around her neck.

AUGGIE

I know what you're trying to do. I got you, and you can't admit it.

CHUCK

No, for real...

RAMÓN (O.S.)

YOU GUYS?! YOU GOTTA SEE THIS...

Chuck and Auggie share a look.

INT. LIBRARY - BELLOWS ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck and Auggie enter the expansive library to find Stella and Ramón - with an ALCARAZ RUG pulled back, standing over --

A CELLAR HATCH hidden in the floor. The lines of where a rug used to lay framed around it. A SLIDING BOLT locks it.

RAMÓN

It doesn't look like it's ever been opened.

CHUCK

Maybe where they buried the bodies.

Stella stares at the hatch - *only one way to find out.*

CUT TO:

BLACK. The sound of the bolt unlocks, and the hatch door opens. Moonlight floods in, revealing AN OLD STAIRCASE and the four teens framed within the hatch opening in wonderment.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ramón is brave enough to lead them down. He finds an OIL LAMP, lights a match to ignite it. A warm glow reveals --

A YOUNG GIRL'S BEDROOM kept preserved like a time capsule. Fine, deco furnishings. A vanity sink and mirror. A quilted bed covered in worn dolls and dust.

STELLA

It's Sarah's bedroom...

RAMÓN

What kind of family would lock up their own daughter?

AUGGIE

This room's for a little kid. I thought Sarah was our age?

STELLA

(catching on)

She was... But her body was the size of an adult -- larger even...

Auggie picks up an antique EFFANBEE DOLL.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Her mind was simple -- maybe too simple.

Stella sits behind the vanity, trying to imagine being in her place. Personal items still perfectly placed.

She puts on Sarah's slippers. A perfect fit. Disturbed, she quickly removes her feet.

STELLA (CONT'D)
This is a real person. This isn't fun anymore.

AUGGIE
Yeah. Let's get outta here.

As soon as they head toward the stairs --

BOOM!!! THE HATCH SLAMS CLOSED. THEY SCREAM!

Auggie and Ramón try to open it!

RAMÓN
Someone locked us in!

CHUCK
IT'S THE WITCH! WE'RE ALL GONNA DIE!!!

AUGGIE
I can't open it!

But then - familiar LAUGHTER can be heard, coming from --

IN THE LIBRARY

It's Dick Breath, holding a baseball bat, drunk and savoring. Behind him is Alice, her comely dress wasted on the occasion.

ALICE
Kurt, they're scared. Let them out.

IN THE BASEMENT ROOM

CHUCK
Alice?! Is that you?!

AUGGIE
I nearly shit my clown pants.

RAMÓN
You mean, *Pierrot*.

TEENS

Let us out!/Not cool!/C'mon, Kurt!

IN THE LIBRARY

Alice shivers, not liking this place one bit.

ALICE

Joke's over. If you don't open it,
I'm going to tell your father.

Kurt's sadistic laughter fades.

KURT

Now why would you do that?

Alice is caught in his uncomfortable gaze.

ALICE

It's my little brother.

Kurt takes a pull from a flask.

KURT

Fine. Go ahead.

Seeing he won't help, Alice heaves open the hatch. But --

Kurt KICKS her down onto the others, then LOCKS the hatch.

KURT (CONT'D)

If you're not putting out, you're
no better than the other trash!

IN THE BASEMENT ROOM

Alice falls into Auggie's eager arms.

IN THE LIBRARY

Kurt wipes whisky from his sweaty grin.

TEENS (O.S.)

You can't leave us here!/They're
gonna blow up the house!

KURT

Then I hope you find a way out.

TEENS

C'mon, jokes over!/Let us out!/
You're subhuman, Kurt!

Suddenly, TINKERING NOTES come back to life --

Kurt sees the MUSIC BOX sitting upon a derelict book shelf.

He stares at the box, a bit spooked. He downs his flask, then SMASHES it into pieces with his baseball bat.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Kurt coldly stumbles out from the house where a few of his Lettermans have been guarding the exits.

KURT
Let's bug outta here.

FLATTOP
Wha'ja do to them?

KURT
Gave them what they deserve.

Kurt and his cronies drive off.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - BELLOWS ESTATE - SAME TIME

Ramón and Chuck pound on the locked hatch.

RAMÓN
Let us out!

CHUCK
Yeah Kurt, don't be a turd!

Stella plops down on the bed - they could be there a while.

RAMÓN
(to Chuck)
Find something to bust this open.

Ever the gentleman, Auggie helps Alice to her feet. She smooths out her skirt, only to find it's ripped.

ALICE
I worked so hard on this.

AUGGIE
It's a nice dress. I mean, it still looks really good on you.

Alice smiles --

ALICE
You're a Pierrot, right?

Auggie has a permanent grin. Life won't get better than this.

As the others search for a way out... Stella feels something under the mattress and pulls out --

THE BELLOWS BOOK. Considerable and weighty. Her fingers touch warped leather, edges frayed. Smudges of dirt, faded blood.

ALICE (CONT'D)

What's that?

STELLA

I don't know.

She opens the tome, some frail pages stick together. She scans a few hand-written stories, enraptured.

The others suspend their efforts to come see, intrigued.

STELLA (CONT'D)

It's Sarah's book of scary stories.
The one she'd read to the kids.

AUGGIE

That's just town gossip--

CHUCK

Or maybe they're stories about how
she murdered those kids?

Stella flips through the pages, some covered with dark illustrations. She rests on a story called THE GREEN RIBBON. Before she can make sense of it --

A FAINT THUMPING is heard. Then an ominous GROANING. Growing LOUDER. Stella closes the book and puts it aside.

ALICE

Kurt? Is that you?

Within the walls, more CREAKING. Everyone eyes the ceiling and walls. Dust wafts. It's as if the house is possessed.

CHUCK

We disturbed the *disturbed!* Now
we're gonna die!

AUGGIE

(not buying it)
It's an old house - just built up
water pressure --

The vanity sink COUGHS UP gray water! Alice SCREAMS. Pipes RATTLE behind the CRACKING plastered walls. A pipe BURSTS from the wall, spraying Auggie!

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
AAHH! THE CURSE OF SARAH BELLOWS!

Auggie freaks out and charges up the stairs at full speed, SLAMMING his giant frame into the hatch --

IN THE LIBRARY

He EXPLODES out of the hatch! They SCREAM, storming through the fissuring mansion, trying to get out as fast as they can.

A PIPE EXPLODES out of the wall - pouring out grey water. They run out SCREAMING!

IN THE BASEMENT

Stella's the last one out. Feeling watched, she turns to see -

IN THE MIRROR'S REFLECTION -- A pale, gaunt, eerily elongated SARAH BELLOWS (16) sits on the bed wearing a soiled hazel gown. She has spindly limbs, a curved spine, and a simple-sweet smile. Her bony fingers hold up her book.

SARAH BELLOWS
Youuu maaay beee thee neext...

Grey water pours out of her mouth.

Stella clasps her mouth and turns, stifling a scream -- BUT SARAH ISN'T THERE. Only the book remains, as if calling her.

IN LIBRARY

Stella surges out from the hatch with her pillowcase in hand.

She fumbles to put on her glasses -- staring at the IMPRESSIVE CALAMITY SURROUNDING HER. The GROAN of buckling wood sounds like a tortured soul.

... She follows her friends out.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

They race out, only to be met by --

The flashing lights of Sheriff Milner and Deputy Hobbs' squad cars, screeching to a halt. Trigger barking.

The cops get out of their cars and give chase.

CHUCK
It's the fuzz! Let's cheese it!

Ramón hightails it to his Corvair Monza.

RAMÓN
(hops in car)
Get in --

They all pile into the vehicle already on the move. Once all in, Ramón peels out.

Sheriff Milner recognizes Ramón's car. Deputy Hobbs runs after them on foot. It's useless to follow.

DEPUTY HOBBS
Should we check out the house?

SHERIFF MILNER
Nah. I'll be glad when they tear this eyesore down.

He eyes the looming manor as Trigger whines, uneasy.

INT. THE MICHAELS HOUSE - LATER

Stella enters after the long night. Beer bottles decorate a home where a mother's absence is felt. She hear's WHIMPERING.

She passes her father's room on the way to her bedroom -- Oren WEEPS next to his wife's dress laid out on his bed.

Stella feels little sympathy and quietly enters her room.

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stella is cocooned in a bedsheet tent, eating candy out her bag as she reads the Bellows Book by flashlight.

CLOSE ON BOOK: Disturbing B/W illustrations from the stories, "*The Cat's Paw*", "*Wait Till Martin Comes*", "*The Wendigo*"...

She turns to the next chapter -- 'HAROLD'. With it, a horrifying illustration of a scarecrow impaled on a pike.

STELLA
... 'Harold'?

Her hand smudges the ink. It's still wet. *Hmm.*

EXT. MILNER FARMSTEAD - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Kurt's Bonneville drives onto his family's sprawling property with a FARM HOUSE and BARN in the back. Distant CORNFIELDS.

Drunk, he staggers out of his car and chucks his beer can at a SCARECROW made from old sacks and stuffed with straw.

KURT
Eat shit, Harold.

'Harold' is pelted in its burlap face, a crooked scowl permanently stitched on. A pile of spent beer cans below.

Kurt stumbles to his house -- he's startled by MRS. MILNER, barking from the front door in a robe and sour face.

MRS. MILNER
It's late.

KURT
It's Halloween.

MRS. MILNER
You were supposed to feed the chickens.

KURT
It's Brett's turn.

MRS. MILNER
Do it before your father gets home.

He flippantly saunters toward the barn, kicking a chicken. He fails to notice - the pole where Harold was hung is now bare.

INT. BARN - MILNER FARMSTEAD - MOMENTS LATER

Kurt sets down a tin bucket filled with water.

CLOSE ON: The WATER BUCKET. As the surface of the water stills... the faint REFLECTION OF SARAH BELLOWS.

A bag of CHICKEN FEED is RIPPED open. Kurt haphazardly spills some on top of the hungry chickens gathering at his feet.

KURT
Eat up. Get nice and fat.

He gets disturbed at the carcass of a dead chicken, pecked to death by its own.

The wind picks up outside, creating a faint HOWLING through the slats in the barn walls. The CAWING of crows.

Kurt perks up. Thinking it was nothing, he returns to feeding the chickens when he sees --

A FIGURE standing between the barn doors. Kurt squints to see -- It's the scarecrow standing upright.

HAROLD takes an unnatural step forward, jerky. Kurt nearly trips over the chickens.

KURT (CONT'D)

The hell?! --

The chickens peck at Kurt's feet, but he doesn't notice. He's fixed on the WALKING MAN OF HAY before him.

Harold LURCHES closer.

Kurt runs -- enters...

INT. STABLES - NIGHT

A MAZE of stables. He runs- desperate- scared-

He hides, panting. A creak is heard- he peeks-

Harold is coming.

Kurt sprints. Scared, he falls onto his ass. Right next to a PITCHFORK.

KURT

Whoever's in there, you're gonna pay for this!

Kurt WHACKS Harold with the pitchfork! The scarecrow FALLS LIMP to the ground with a GRUNT.

He stands over the scarecrow, trying to see who is hiding behind the hay. But there is no one, only a sinking feeling.

Harold REACHES for Kurt, who CRIES OUT while violently STABBING the scarecrow with the pitchfork. RIPPING out its straw intestines, BEATING the living hay out of it.

Harold is completely TORN TO PIECES.

Kurt stands over it, heaving, victorious -- but confused as to what this thing is.

KURT (CONT'D)

Mom?! MOM?!--

He CHOKES on something. Airway obstructed. He COUGHS up some hay, struggling for air. He tries to call for help, but no words come out -- only hay.

EXT. BARN - MILNER FARMSTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Kurt charges out of the barn, turning blue with asphyxiation.

He runs through the cornfield --

His eyes bulge as he witnesses hay coming out of his sleeves and pants. Straw lengthens from his ears, nose and eyes. He trembles to find the skin on his hand drying, like burlap.

He falls as straw grows from every part of him. He reaches out to his home and releases a final muffled scream...

Only for hay to silently explode from his mouth!

And he stops- frozen in place- standing in the cornfield.

A scarecrow.

SMASH TO BLACK

EXT. MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT MORNING

All is quiet. A JANITOR rides a LAWN MOWER over the grass.

An UPBEAT song begins. A real sugar-pop earworm.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

It's nasty November. The time when
both sides of the political aisle
come together to bury each other in
the mud.

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS of SCHOOL STARTING: The parking lot is full of students showing off their cars, the Principal stands guard by his Cadillac, a Recruiter flirts with two hippie chicks, black students play frisbee, etc.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

Don't believe anything you hear,
Mill Valley. To help separate truth
from fiction, here's John Fred &
His Playboys with '*Judy in
Disguise*'.

A school bell rings as students loiter around the school.
Stella races to school, clutching the Bellows Book.

INT. LOCKERS - MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Stella slams Chuck and Auggie's locker before it can open --

STELLA
You'll never guess what I read.

AUGGIE
You took the book?

CHUCK
Why would you take the book?!

STELLA
Last night... I saw something in
the mirror.

CHUCK
What?

STELLA
I think it was... *her*.

AUGGIE
Halloween's over. Can I please have
364 days of not dealing with your
bullshit?

CHUCK
No, I saw something too. When I was
hiding. There was this woman, with
a green ribbon around her neck.

STELLA
And when I opened the book last
night, there was this new chapter,
and the ink was wet.

She opens the book to "Harold".

STELLA (CONT'D)
Kurt's name was in it.

AUGGIE
(feigning scared)
Oh my god. Kurt Dipplestine? Or
maybe Kurt Rogers? I hope she
wasn't a fan of Kurt Douglas.
(dismissive)
(MORE)

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

Even Dick Breath's name is popular.
It's probably just a coincidence.

Auggie opens the locker to grab his book, uninterested.
Stella flips through the pages, hoping to make a case --

STELLA

But there are more chapters with no
stories. Five of them. Each one
unwritten...

CHUCK

W-what do you mean, unwritten?

AUGGIE

Spooky. Sarah's just as lazy as us.

Alice and Ramón approach with books in hand.

RAMÓN

Did anyone notice that asshole
didn't have the balls to show?

Alice notices the SCARECROW ILLUSTRATION in the Bellows Book.

ALICE

Creepy drawing. Looks just like the
scarecrow on Kurt's farm.

Stella and her friends share a look.

CHUCK

You mean Kurt. As in Kurt Milner.
That scarecrow is on Kurt Milner's
farm?

AUGGIE

(suddenly intrigued)
What exactly is in that story?

Off their troubled looks -

EXT. MILNER FARM HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Ramón raps on the screen door as Alice, Stella, Chuck and
Auggie wait on the porch. After no answer, he knocks again.

Chuck turns and catches sight of something OFF SCREEN.

CHUCK

Guys?... Guys look.

They follow Chuck's gaze to find -

The SCARECROW -- only now it's dressed in Kurt's clothes. A crooked scowl permanently stitched to a burlap face.

ALICE

Isn't that what he was wearing last night?

The front door SWINGS OPEN, startling them.

MRS. MILNER

What do you want?

INT. MILNER FARM HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mrs. Milner reads '*Harold*', unsure of what to make of it. Her six-year-old, BRETT, clings to her arm.

The teens anxiously sit on the sofa, sipping tea. Except for Ramón, who stands -- put off by a nearby framed photo of Sheriff Milner.

Mrs. Milner closes the Bellows Book and takes a moment.

MRS. MILNER

And you wrote this?

Chuck is about to explain, but Auggie takes this one.

AUGGIE

We just haven't seen him around school, and were wondering if your husband or yourself had seen anything... unusual?

Mrs. Milner gives a sour look, then --

MRS. MILNER

Let me call Roy. Stay here.

She leaves and her young son follows, attached at the hip. As soon as they are gone, Ramón tips down the Sheriff's photo.

RAMÓN

She doesn't believe us.

AUGGIE

I don't even know if I believe us.

Chuck catches sight of Stella staring at the coffee table.

CHUCK

What?

STELLA
 (re: tea cups; dread)
 There's five of them...

ALICE
 Yeah, five teacups. You can count --

STELLA
 No... five cups. *Five of us. Five chapters left.*

They share a look, pondering the implication.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 What if there's a story for each of our names? What if what happened to Kurt, *is going to happen to us?*

Auggie motions for her to quiet down.

Ramón watches Mrs. Milner in the KITCHEN, quietly talking on the phone. The mother gives a suspicious look back.

INT. KITCHEN - MILNER FARMSTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Milner turns her back to them, discreetly talking:

MRS. MILNER
 Yes, I know. And that young Mexican that picked a fight with Kurt at the Drive-In is here too.
 (beat)
 Okay. I'll keep them here.

She hangs up, then gives her youngest an encouraging smile. She grabs the tea pot and puts on a fake smile.

MRS. MILNER (CONT'D)
 Refill anyone?

She enters into AN EMPTY ROOM. They've split.

EXT. MILNER FARMSTEAD - LATER

The Sheriff's cruiser pulls up as he's met by Mrs. Milner.

MRS. MILNER
 They're gone.
 (hopeful)
 Any word from Kurt?

SHERIFF MILNER
Still nothing.

He glances at Brett, chucking rocks at a murder of crows gathering at the scarecrow, and thinks nothing of it.

MRS. MILNER
They were acting strange. And that odd Michael's girl wrote a story.

SHERIFF MILNER
A story? --

He can hardly hear himself over the cawing of crows.

SHERIFF MILNER (CONT'D)
Stop minding the crows, Brett.

Brett stops throwing rocks.

CLOSE ON SCARECROW: The crows keep picking SINEWY BITS of flesh from under the scarecrows burlap skin.

BACK ON the parents, none the wiser.

MRS. MILNER
This isn't like him, Roy.

SHERIFF MILNER
Don't worry. I'll find our boy.

CUT TO:

A FIRE BURNS in a tilled area, fueled by dried corn husks.

EXT. CORN FIELDS - DAY

Ramón stands with the others circled around the fire, burning hot. Stella stares into the flames, holding the Bellows Book.

AUGGIE
I don't wanna say it - but maybe it's good that he's gone.

ALICE
What do we tell people if they ask?

RAMÓN
Doesn't matter what you say. Look at us - some freaks, some geeks, and a Mexican. They'll never believe a word.
(pointed finger)
(MORE)

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

No one says anything about last night.

The group nods, except for Alice. Auggie looks to her, sympathetic. She finally agrees.

CHUCK

What if the fuzz came cause he ratted on us? They'll know we were with him...

ALICE

I was on a date. They'll think I had something to do with it.

STELLA

It wasn't us. It was the book. And it's all over.

Stella tossing the Book into the fire. They watch it burn.

CLOSE ON: The Book's pages curl up in flames, its leather bubbles and chars. Cursed or not, it's destroyed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

CLOSE ON: YOUNG STELLA (6) reads a book in her mother's lap. The bedroom is pink. The light is dreamy. A nostalgic memory.

YOUNG STELLA

(learning to read)

"The tiger din... dind..."

MOTHER

(helping)

"Didn't".

YOUNG STELLA

"Didn't just eat one bun. He ate all of the buns... on the dish."

MOTHER

(turning page)

Good, Stella.

Stella looks up, though we never see her mother's face.

YOUNG STELLA

No more reading.

MOTHER
 Don't you want to know how the
 story ends?

She shakes her head with a mischievous grin.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 I'll help you.

STELLA AND MOTHER
 "And then he ate all the biscuits."

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT

Stella wakes up in her own bed. Her eyes still tired.

She wipes the sleep from them, then spots a handwritten NOTE
 from her father on the lamp shade that begins '*STELLA*'.

Off her reading the note --

EXT. FREEWAY ON-RAMP - LATER

Stella rides to a construction site where they are building a
 FREEWAY, her textbooks strapped to the back of her bike.

She ducks as she passes through steel and cement spires.

UNDER THE OVERPASS

Stella finds her father laying a network of rebar.

STELLA
 Got your note --

Oren removes his work gloves and goggles. Over the noise, he
 gestures to his FOREMAN he's going to take five.

OREN
 Good news - They found something
 for me over in Troutdale. They're
 looking for a new supervisor --

STELLA
 When?

OREN
 C'mon, Stell. You know we've been
 looking for our break.

STELLA
 We? You mean, *you*.

OREN

You'll make new friends --

STELLA

Mom chose this place.

(tempers her words)

How am I supposed to visit her? Or
are you going to *drive*? God knows
putting you behind the wheel--

OREN

We need to leave this place. Leave
it behind. Start over.

Hurt and confused, Stella walks away with her bike.

STELLA

We can't start over. You did that.

Her father is pained to see her leave.

Stella hops onto her bike, then notices something on the back
that stops her cold --

The BELLOWS BOOK atop her schoolbooks, in pristine condition.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PLAZA - LATER

Stella rides her bike- Fast.

She goes by the plaza, where the FAMILIES of grieving parents
witness the flag being lowered half-mast.

It's a small ceremony for the fallen sons.

Folded flags are being hand-delivered to the parents by an
OFFICER IN UNIFORM and white gloves.

EXT. THE MORALES HOME - LATER

Stella urgently raps on Ramón's front door. He opens it to
find her clutching the Bellows Book.

STELLA

...It's back.

She allows herself in.

INT. THE HALLWAY - THE MORALES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is bare with moving boxes stacked about. Ramón inspects the Book in disbelief.

RAMÓN

How is this possible?

Frightened, Stella shakes her head.

STELLA

There's a new story. With Chuck's name in it.

RAMÓN

Do you want me to drive?

STELLA

There's no time. I need your phone.

As Stella barges in, Ramón opens the Book to see for himself--

RAMÓN

Kitchen.

CLOSE ON BOOK: The next story is entitled "*The Big Toe*". Ramón lifts his thumb from the page to find INK PRINT.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

The ink's still wet...

STELLA

(defensive)

I *didn't* write it.

RAMÓN

I didn't say you did.

Stella passes the FAMILY ROOM, she catches a glimpse of -

RAMÓN'S FATHER. His ear is burned off. His face disfigured. He meets Stella's glance as she has trouble looking away.

Then, she quickly moves on.

KITCHEN

As Stella rushes to dial Chuck's number, Ramón quickly reads the 'The Big Toe'.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

"One day, Mrs. Steinberg was digging in her garden, when she saw a big toe sticking out of the ground. She tried to pick it up but it was stuck. So she pulled as hard as she could and it came off in her hand..."

(confused)

What the hell is this? This story is gross.

Stella gets a busy signal ringing on the other end.

STELLA

Keep reading.

She hangs up and tries again.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Come on, pick up.

RAMÓN

(reading)

"'That looks like a nice piece of meat', she said. 'I'll put it in the loaf and we'll have it for... dinner'?"

INT. KITCHEN - THE STEINBERG HOME - SAME TIME

Chuck cradles the phone on his shoulder, talking to his mother on the other end, while trying to find something to eat in the kitchen. Shelves are bare.

CHUCK

(into phone)

What leftovers, ma? I don't see anything.

Chuck opens the fridge to discover -- a gleaming MEATLOAF.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Mmm. My favorite. Thanks. I'll see you when you get home.

Chuck hangs up, and moves the meatloaf to the counter.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

(licking lips)

Meat is back on the table.

He fetches a fork and plunges it into the moist loaf. To the trained eye, we see what looks like a HUMAN TOE baked in.

Starving, Chuck mows down. Mashing sinewy meat in his mouth.

The kitchen phone rings. He stuffs in another mouthful before grabbing the receiver.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 What is it now. -- I'm eating, ma.

STELLA (PHONE)
 CHUCK?!

CHUCK
 Stella?

STELLA (PHONE)
 DON'T EAT ANYTHING!

CHUCK
 Why? I'm starving. My mom made a --

STELLA (PHONE)
 You're in the next story. Listen to me. Don't eat the meat.

CHUCK
 What are you talking about? We got rid of the book.

STELLA (PHONE)
 DON'T EAT THE MEAT!

Chuck's chewing slows as he eyes the loaf of minced meat. He bites on something hard, then pulls from his mouth...

A large, rotted human TOE NAIL.

STELLA (PHONE) (CONT'D)
 Chuck?... CHUCK?!

Chuck gags, trying not to hurl. He flushes his mouth under the faucet, then gets back on the phone.

CHUCK
 ...What happens in my story?

ON STELLA AND RAMÓN

STELLA
 (to Ramón)
 What happens next?

RAMÓN

Uh... He eats the toe, and "That's when Charles heard a voice, saying 'You may be the next.'"

STELLA

A voice says 'You may be the next.'

BACK ON CHUCK, TENSE

He looks around the kitchen. Waiting. Listening. He peeks around the corner - the house is empty. Silent.

CHUCK

It's quiet... There's no voice. I'm the only one here.

He pokes his fork to dig through the meatloaf and instantly recognizes a SEVERED EAR. He recoils, pushing it away.

ON STELLA AND RAMÓN

Ramón holds the book out to Stella to finish reading:

STELLA

We're reading it right here. 'Then the voice grew louder...'
(louder)
"YOU MAY BE THE NEXT!"

BACK ON

Paranoid, Chuck rips open the blinds, half-expecting to see someone... but nothing.

CHUCK

I'M ALL ALONE! THERE'S NO VOICE...

STELLA (PHONE)

THERE HAS TO BE --

CHUCK

YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE SAYING IT LOUDER!

ON STELLA AND RAMÓN

It dons on Stella. She looks to Ramón, horrified --

STELLA

... It's me.
(to Ramón; urgent)
How does it end?

RAMÓN
Nothing. That's it.

ON CHUCK

Huddled in a dark corner, eyeing his empty house.

CHUCK
That's it? That's not an ending.
WHAT KIND OF ENDING IS THAT?!

From out of the shadows behind him --

SARAH BELLOWS lurches out at him! Her elongated soured limbs reaching from the shadows. He SCREAMS!!

ON STELLA AND RAMÓN

They hear Chuck's SCREAM. Then silence, as -

CHUCK'S PHONE

Falls, dangling on its cord, knocking against the fridge.

ON STELLA AND RAMÓN

STELLA
Chuck?!... CHUCK?!!

No response. Then -

SARAH BELLOWS (PHONE)
... *Steeellllaaa...*

Stella SLAMS the phone onto its wall unit, horror-struck.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GORGE DRIVE-IN THEATER - DAWN

The parking lot of the drive-in theater is vast and empty, except for a Corvair Monza and two bikes parked outside the Snack Shack. A beat up Chrysler crosses the abandoned lot.

AT SNACK SHACK

Stella sits on the counter, despondent. Auggie stares at the ice melting in his coke. Ramón leans his head against a wall. They watch Alice coming with a vengeance --

ALICE
Where is that little shit? He was supposed to be home for dinner.
(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)
 Next time he thinks about sleeping
 over without telling our parents...

She notices under Stella's glasses, eyes raw from crying.

ALICE (CONT'D)
 ...Where's my brother?

AUGGIE
 (afraid to ask)
 What did you have for dinner?

ALICE
 We all had Spamloaf, why?

RAMÓN
 (gags)
 Oh god.

The others recoil. Alice looks lost.

ALICE
 Where is he?

RAMÓN
 He wasn't with us.

Reluctant, Auggie holds up the Bellows Book.

AUGGIE
 The Book came back.

STELLA
 It was my fault. We should've never
 gone into that house.

Alice can't believe it, shaking her head.

ALICE
 No... we watched it burn.

STELLA
 There was a new story.

ALICE
 What story?!

Auggie isn't sure if he should show her, but Alice rips it
 from his grasp. Quickly finding the page and skimming.

STELLA
 I tried to warn him... but every
 thing I said only made it worse.

RAMÓN

The ending never told us what happened. We were hoping he was with you.

Alice GAGS, repulsed at what she's reading. She VOMITS in the trash bin. Unable to truly comfort her, Auggie rubs her back.

STELLA

I heard her. She knows our names.

RAMÓN

Four stories left. Four of us.

ALICE

Jesus. My brother just died and now this is gonna happen to us?!

AUGGIE

First Kurt... now Chuck...

(angered)

We have to stop her. We have to do something.

RAMÓN

Do what?! We've already burned it!

AUGGIE

I don't know but I sure as hell ain't gonna sit around and wait for my story to be written! There's gotta be *someway* to stop a witch.

STELLA

She's not a witch. It's a *curse*!

AUGGIE

Forgive me! A *cursed* witch --

ALICE

So what? We wait around to see which of our names come next?

AUGGIE

(mind races)

What about the titles. To our stories. Maybe they're clues...

STELLA

The next story is '*The Red Spot*'... Does that mean anything to anyone?

They share blank glances. A few shrug.

ALICE
Red Spot? That could be anything.

AUGGIE
What about the rest of them?

STELLA
The next ones are "*The Dream*", "*Me Tie Dough-ty Walker*"...

RAMÓN
Me Tie what? What kinda title is that?

STELLA
... And the last chapter, "*The Haunted House*".

They all share a knowing look.

RAMÓN
Well we all know where that is.

ALICE
No way am I going back.

Ramon smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. CORVAIR MONZA - SAME

Full speed. Ramon drives like a demon. The gang sits, tense.

AUGGIE
(to Alice)
If she wants to pick us off one by one, we need to get ahead of it. Instead of waiting for the next story to happen...

STELLA
(finishing sentence)
... We see how everything ends.

AUGGIE
There's gotta be answers...

Ramon barely avoids a collision.

ALICE
Hey, Bullit, watch it.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - LATER

The Corvair Monza parks in front of the gate leading to the Bellow's Estate. As soon as they get out --

KRA-KOOOOM!!! The explosives go off atop the hill, releasing a shower of wood, plaster and bricks. It's ear-shattering.

Surprised, they quickly race up the long driveway --

AUGGIE

No no no no nooooo!

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Stella, Ramón, Auggie and Alice stand before what's left of the Bellows Mansion. A backhoe compresses down on a remaining awning until it buckles. Wood splinters. Glass breaks. A gaping hole left in the dead carcass of a house.

RAMÓN

There goes the answers.

Bulldozers plow debris, while a FOREMAN wears a hard hat, directing a digger and crane raising a dug up COFFIN.

FOREMAN

Careful... careful...

He unshackles it. Then gives the hand signal for the crane operator to fetch the next one. He notices the teens --

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be here. This is no place for kids.

Stella is mesmerized by the crew raising another casket. As it pans over heads, the worm-eaten coffin crumbles, prying loose from its binds --

DEMOLITION CREW (O.C.)

WATCH OUT! SHE'S COMING APART --

The coffin falls. A Worker dives out of the way just as the casket shatters to pieces on the ground, releasing -

A CORPSE, dressed in a rotten white gown and a wide GREEN RIBBON around her neck. The skull rolls off, detaching from the body. It was the ribbon holding it on. Alice screams.

AUGGIE

The green ribbon -- the woman Chuck saw.

ALICE

How? She's been dead over 40 years.

FOREMAN

You gotta get outta here. This is
no place for kids.

The Foreman returns to his crew as they solemnly head back
down the long driveway.

ALICE

Is there another Haunted House? Why
would the last chapter say 'Haunted
House' if it's gone?

RAMÓN

You said Sarah vanished. To where?
(mind racing)
Maybe if we find her remains, we
can lay them to rest... give her a
proper burial.

AUGGIE

This isn't a movie, dork.

HOLD ON

A glint of something OS catches Stella's eye. Then the
TINKERING of a familiar childlike-melody.

RAMÓN (O.S.)

I didn't say it was.

Stella lowers to some construction debris where sits the
MUSIC BOX that was destroyed, rebuilt in perfect order.
Stella picks it up, intrigued.

AUGGIE (O.S.)

Then let's start digging. How 'bout
this? I'll take these 100 acres.
You got those 100 acres. I'm sure
Alice is good with a shovel.

RAMÓN (O.S.)

You don't need to be a dick about
it. I'm just trying to help.

AUGGIE (O.S.)

Help? I'm trying to *live*.

She studies the Music Box. Stella turns it over and finds it
is engraved with the name -- "ELOISE W".

STELLA
You say they died 40 years ago?

AUGGIE
Yeah. Why?

STELLA
Maybe there was someone in that house that's still alive?

EXT. SUNNYHAVEN NURSING HOME - AFTERNOON

The Corvair Monza pulls into the Sunnyhaven Nursing Home parking lot that looks neither sunny nor a haven.

AUGGIE (O.C.)
There's two places dead people go to in this town. The cemetery, and Sunnyhaven.

ALICE (O.C.)
The caretaker told me they didn't have anyone named Eloise, but they do have a LouLou Walker that fits the bill.

They exit the car, taking in the dreary nursing home.

INT. SUNNYHAVEN NURSING HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Three old bedridden elderly men share a room with only one window. A CHEERFUL MAN rests closest to the window, while TWO CANTANKEROUS BED MATES are not privileged to enjoy the view.

CANTANKEROUS BED MATE #1
How does it look out there today, George?

CANTANKEROUS BED MATE #2
What do you see?

CHEERFUL MAN
The flowers have bloomed. Oh, and that voluptuous woman has returned.

A CARETAKER guides Stella and her friends past their room, but as their vantage point pivots, they see the view from the window IS MERELY A BRICK WALL.

George gives them a dead stare and a hollow smile, hoping they will keep his secret. They move on into --

THE SUN ROOM

Frail elderly are hunched over in wheelchairs parked along the walls, holding onto what little life they have left.

The Caretaker points Stella and her friends toward an African American woman in her late 70s, staring out a musty stained-glass window.

CARETAKER

That's LouLou. Don't expect to get much out of her.

They approach LOULOU and see her milky cataract eyes staring at nothing in particular.

STELLA

Eloise Walker?

She only trembles, crippled by late-stage Parkinson's.

AUGGIE

LouLou Walker? Can you hear us?

RAMÓN

Why are we wasting time --

Stella winds the Music Box and lets it play. The child-like melody puts a sweet smile on LouLou --

LOULOU

... You May Be the Next.

Stella and Ramón share a look, recognizing those words.

STELLA

Why did you say that?

LOULOU

It's a song, sweetheart.

(murmurs song)

'The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play pinochle on your snout...'

STELLA

You knew Sarah, didn't you?

LOULOU

I used to watch over that family. How those kids loved to hear her scary stories.

(fondly recollects)

She had a gift... to *fix* things.

(MORE)

LOULOU (CONT'D)

Even helped me see for a bit. They told her she was a monster. But I thought she was a sight.

They share a look, mystified. But Alice loses her patience --

ALICE

Then why is she torturing us? What did we ever do to her--

Stella calms Alice, then takes a gentler approach.

STELLA

We have her book. And she's still writing stories. Why?

LOULOU

Stories hurt. Stories heal. If all you know is hatred, it can make you go mad. Angry for so long.

(singing)

'They'll eat your ears, they'll eat your nose, they'll eat the jelly between your toes...'

AUGGIE

Do you know what happened to the kids? The kids that she murdered?

LOULOU

I can still hear them laughing...

(shakes head)

She could never do those things. The Bellows never done right to that sweet girl.

STELLA

She didn't hurt the kids...

LOULOU

You sound just like your mother asking those questions.

Stella grows cold -- *what did she just say?*

STELLA

My mother? She was here?

LOULOU

*'Don't ever laugh as the hearse goes by, for **you may be the next** to... (die).'*

The music box ends and LouLou drifts off, lost in thought.

STELLA

Why was she here? How do you know
my mother? Is this your music box?

Stella desperately winds the music box again to let it play.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You talked to my mother. When? When
did you talk to her? LouLou?

Stella tries to shake her awake, but she doesn't respond.

RAMÓN

Ease up.

STELLA

LouLou? Talk to me.

The caretaker intervenes.

CARETAKER

That's enough. I need you to leave.

Off their concern --

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

More grim news...

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - NIGHT

Residents of Mill Valley walk the fields, ten feet apart,
waving flashlights. It's a search party.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

On the heels of the missing persons
report out for the Sheriff's son,
we have another disappearance.
Condolences to the Steinbergs... I
pray we can find their son Charlie.

Alice is with her parents, biting her lip.

EXT. MILL VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY - EVENING

The Corvair Monza is parked outside the PUBLIC LIBRARY. An
acropolis built in a time when Mill Valley once had promise.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

If anyone has any information,
please contact local authorities.
Look at that, my phone lines are
already blowing up...

INT. MILL VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

The library is mostly empty. Orb lights softly illuminate a labyrinth of books. SEQUENCE OF SHOTS as they research anything and everything that can shed light on things:

MALE CALLER (V.O.)

Isn't it obvious? It's a prank.
Just some kids, making trouble.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

We all have our opinions. But to
change the mood, here's *The Dock of
the Bay!*

The song starts- giving place to a montage--

--A STACK OF BOOKS HIT a table, "Oregon Territory Rights
1928" "Mill Valley Town and Vital Records Vol. 1,"

--"Registry of Historic Places," etc. Auggie drops them off
for --

-- Stella, already scouring a stack of old periodicals. She
pulls out a front page that has photos of nine children, none
older than ten. "Children continue to vanish. Parents demand
blood," is the headline.

She starts scribbling each child's name onto a note pad.

FEMALE CALLER (V.O.)

Our children are paying for our
sins. All of this free love. This
race mixing. We need an American
Independent, like George Wallace --

A venerable LIBRARIAN sorts books back onto shelves, keeping
a judgmental eye on Ramón, fervently reading in the aisle.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

This is still the real world, is it
not? All I know is this is a time
to come together, not apart.

Ramón studies a county map. He traces the Yamhill River with
his finger, until it intersects with the Bellows Rail Yard.
Further downstream is the heart of Mill Valley.

Ramón catches the Librarian's stare, then stares back. She
moves on. Ramón continues to search for answers.

STUDY SEQUENCE OVER

Stella cross references names as Ramón reads the Bellows Book, while Auggie looks for more research material.

RAMÓN

The name in the Green Ribbon is...
is... gimme a minute.

Stella looks up, knowing the answer already.

STELLA

Dolores.

RAMÓN

(seeing name, then)
How did you --

STELLA

Sarah's mother. The woman with the
green ribbon around her neck.

RAMÓN

Every member of her family, they
are all in this book.

STELLA

Even weirder, anyone that spent
considerable time with them died of
either a strange accident or
unnatural causes...

(holds up obituary)

The detective who searched inside
their house? Died of a heart attack
in his apartment three years ago...
found eaten by his cats, including
his beloved Martin.

RAMÓN

Nothing unnatural about that.

STELLA

And all the deaths are in like,
chronological order. Except the
kids she murdered, who should be in
the front of the book...

(looking through notes)

They aren't in any of the chapters.
Their names don't appear *anywhere*.

RAMÓN

(struggling to track)
Wait. If everyone died who went in
that house, how did LouLou survive?

STELLA

I don't know. You heard her, Sarah
loved her.

RAMÓN

Maybe the kids died before she
became a cursed witch --

STELLA

Or maybe she never murdered them in
the first place.

Ramón raises an eyebrow - *that is quite the allegation.*

Auggie unloads another stack of periodicals.

AUGGIE

If it's my name, don't tell me. I,
for one, don't wanna know how I go.

(beat)

Look what I found.

Stella sees a rare photo of SARAH BELLOWS in a hazel hospital gown, surrounded by a team of doctors, unsmiling. She is simple with a wide smile and unnatural curved spine

STELLA

It's her.

Ramón reads the lab coats insignia.

RAMÓN

'R.P.H.'...

STELLA

I know those letters. Riverwell
Psychiatric Hospital. Upstate.

AUGGIE

Get this- This photo was taken the
year before her whole family died.

As Stella and Auggie extrapolate --

Ramón flips to an illustration in Sarah's book that grabs his attention. It's entitled 'HIGH BEAMS' with an image of a scared woman behind the wheel and headlights following her.

STELLA (O.C.)

So she didn't disappear, she was
locked away.

AUGGIE (O.C.)
 Can you imagine being committed
 into a nut house at our age?

Ramón looks up from the Book.

RAMÓN
 What was your mom's name?

STELLA
 Dinah, why?

Ramón shakes off his presumption and flips to the next page.

RAMÓN
 No reason.

Stella can tell he knows something, but is afraid to ask.

AUGGIE
 (concerned)
 Where's Alice? She should be here
 by now.

Ramón turns to the next unwritten chapter - 'The Red Spot'.
 The story still blank.

RAMÓN
 As long as there isn't a new story,
 she's probably all right.

Alice shuffles into the library, nerves on high. Her head is
 down and half of her face is covered by her hair.

ALICE
 Sorry I'm late. Do you know how
 terrible it was to keep my mouth
 shut?

AUGGIE
 It's okay. We weren't worried.

ALICE
 I uh, I'll just be a minute. I need
 to freshen up.

AUGGIE
 You look fresh to me...

Alice beelines out, ignoring him. Auggie studies her illusive
 manner. Something is not right.

RAMÓN
 Maybe you should hold off on
 telling her how you feel. It's not
 like we're under any unusual
 stress, or curse or anything.

Stella cracks a rare smile. Auggie isn't laughing.

AUGGIE
 (to Ramón)
 I hope you're next.

As they return to their research --

CLOSE ON: A small BEAD OF BLOOD drops onto the blank chapter
 page of 'The Red Spot', creating...

A RED SPOT.

STELLA
 Ramón. Your nose.

Ramón wipes his bloody nose, confused.

He notices the RED SPOT on the blank page, then pushes
 himself away from the Bellows Book, panicked.

RAMÓN
 OH SHIT! The red spot. The red
 spot! I AM next!

The Librarian SHUSHES them.

CLOSE ON

The first sentence to 'THE RED SPOT' APPEARS before their
 eyes, as if scrawled by an invisible author...

AUGGIE
 Ohhhh god... ohgodohgodohgod.

BLACK INK seeps up through the page, bleeding into creepy
 imagery. The story slowly appears, word by word, like
 spiderweb being spun...

Stella, Auggie and Ramón surround the book, anxious to read
 what is scrawled next...

INT. HALLWAY - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Alice is lost, looking for the bathroom. A passing LIBRARIAN
 ASSISTANT approaches, friendly.

LIBRARIAN ASSISTANT
 Afternoon, may I help you -
 (recoils)
 Oh honey, you need to get that
 cherry checked out.

Alice looks up, her hair pulled back behind her ear revealing
 -- a MASSIVE PIMPLE on her cheek. It's a plumper.

ALICE
 (mortified)
 It's stress. Where's your nearest
 washroom?

LIBRARIAN ASSISTANT
 Here, let me show you.

The Librarian Assistant leads her off.

INT. LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Stella and Auggie watch the cursed story unfold before their
 eyes as Ramón paces, stressed out.

RAMÓN
 I don't wanna know. Don't tell me.
 It's gonna be twisted.
 (on second thought)
 Yeah I do. I wanna know --

Stella reads as fast as it is written --

STELLA
 (reading)
 "... it was there in the washroom
 where poor Alice would discover the
 red spot..." It's ALICE!

RAMÓN
 It's Alice? Thank god!

AUGGIE
 The washroom!

Auggie bolts up from the table and races out. Stella throws a
 look to Ramón - *how selfish of you.*

RAMÓN
 What?! I thought I was gonna die.

She grabs the book and runs after. Ramón chases.

INT. HALLWAY - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

The three skid on the linoleum, looking for the washroom!

AUGGIE
ALICE?!!

INT. WASHROOM - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Alice enters the washroom alone. She goes to the mirror to inspect the largest zit ever seen in the history of cinema. Red and raw. She touches the pimple, but it hurts so bad.

It must be popped.

She turns on the hot water, steaming. Then wets a paper towel to gently compress it.

When she leans back down to soak her towel...

SARAH BELLOWS is in the mirror's reflection. Wet and smiling, with the crazed, simple face of a child.

INT. HALLWAY - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Stella, Ramón and Auggie charge down the hallway toward a door labeled WOMEN. Auggie hesitates for the briefest of moments -- then BUSTS in.

AUGGIE
Alice!

INT. WOMEN'S WASHROOM - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

They come to a stop....

It's empty. Panic on their faces.

STELLA
There must be another washroom...

INT. HALLWAY - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

The three charge back out, lost and confused. Stella finds a simple MAP PLAQUE on the wall by some stairs.

STELLA
Upstairs!

They follow Auggie up the stairs, two steps at a time.

INT. WASHROOM - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Alice gets a closer look at the pimple when - it almost looks like SOMETHING moved inside it.

Her heart stops. She wipes the mirror and inspects it closer. Again, something moves just under the skin...

Suddenly, an ingrown BLACK HAIR pokes out... *Ugh gross...*

INT. WOMEN'S WASHROOM - SECOND FLOOR - SAME TIME

Stella, Ramón and Auggie explode into the second floor washroom. But Alice isn't there. Only a CUSTODIAN.

STELLA
WHERE IS SHE?!!

Auggie eyes a STAFF NAME TAG on the custodian, then urgently:

AUGGIE
IS THERE A STAFF WASHROOM?!

Before he can answer --

INT. STAFF WASHROOM - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Disgusted, Alice inspects the short black hair sticking out of her boil. She delicately tugs on it - trying to remove the ingrown hair, only for -

The hair TWITCHES, as if alive. That's no hair, it's a leg.

Alice SCREAMS and places her hand over the pimple, just as -

A SWARM OF BABY SPIDERS escape through her fingers, spreading across her face!!! SHE SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER!

Alice takes her hand off her face. An endless stream of tiny spiders crawl out of her pimple. The more she claws away, the faster they come out.

The Librarian enters to see Alice bristled with creepy crawlies. Alice reaches out for help amidst her thrashing, but the scared librarian only runs away.

ALICE
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGHHHH!!!!!!

INT. LIBRARY - FRONT DESK

Auggie, Stella and Ramón plow past the startled Librarian --

RAMÓN
OUTTA THE WAY! MOVE!

INT. STAFF WASHROOM - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

They enter to find --

A LARGE BLACK MASS WRITHING and SCREAMING in the corner. A vast majority of Alice is covered in spiders as they spread across the floor like WRIGGLY OOZE!

Auggie and Stella instantly take off their jackets and swat them away. But there's too many.

Ramón RUNS OUT into the HALLWAY -- and sees a bucket of mop water. Thinking quick, he picks it up and RACES BACK INTO THE BATHROOM --

He drenches Alice, washing the remaining spiders away.

Stella can only watch as Auggie drops to the floor to cradle Alice, left catatonic. Her skin pock-marked with bites.

Stunned patrons crowd the door, staring. Alice twitches in Auggie's arms, unable to cope. She's alive, but not well.

AUGGIE
HELP! SOMEONE GET HELP!

The crowd doesn't move.

STELLA
CALL AN AMBULANCE!!!

A concerned patron runs off.

Auggie rocks Alice, stroking her hair, trying to calm her. She mutters, unaware of her surroundings.

ALICE
... They're all over me. Get them off. Get them off...

AUGGIE
It's okay. You're going to be okay.

Alice's eyes flutter open. Lost and confused.

ALICE

... My dress. It's ripped. I can't go out like this...

AUGGIE

It's a nice dress, Alice... Don't worry, you look just fine...

Auggie looks to Stella, his eyes filled with sorrow.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MILL VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Lights flash as paramedics roll Alice's gurney into the waiting ambulance for 'Riverwell Psychiatric Hospital'.

AT AMBULANCE

Sickly, Alice stutters. Unable to cope.

ALICE

I saw her in the mirror. I saw her in the mirror.

The paramedics shake their heads. She's a lost cause.

OUTSIDE AMBULANCE

Mrs. Steinberg stifles herself with tissue as her husband is in a heated exchange with Deputy Hobbs.

MR. STEINBERG

Jesus Christ, Tom! You haven't even found my son *and now this?!*

DEPUTY HOBBS

We're doing everything we can.

MRS. STEINBERG

Where's Roy? Why isn't the Sheriff talking to us?

DEPUTY HOBBS

He just found his son's corpse, Darlene. You might want to give him some space.

Mrs. Steinberg breaks down into hysterics. Mr. Steinberg stares at the Deputy -- *how can you be so cruel?*

DEPUTY HOBBS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, we're all on edge. All I can say at this time is we have a warrant out for all of their arrests. We'll figure this out.

Deputy Hobbs eyes the Corvair Monza, knowing Ramón has to return for it eventually.

A FEW BLOCKS AWAY

Ramón nervously lights a cigarette as Auggie watches from afar, keeping their distance. Stella's on a bench, staring at 'The Red Spot'. She looks up with tears in her eyes --

STELLA

Alice *dies* at the end of her story.
(desperate to others)
But she's not dead. We saved her.
We saved her, right?

AUGGIE

There's no coming back from that.
She doesn't even know her name.
(despondent)
And now they think we're all responsible.

RAMÓN

No, they think I am.

Ramón flicks the butt of his cig then takes off his jacket.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

Fuck it. I'm turning myself in.

STELLA/AUGGIE

What? / Why?!

RAMÓN

To tell them you've got nothing to do with this.

STELLA

Neither do you. What good will that do anyone?

RAMÓN

Look, I'm not that thick. I know they won't believe me. But if they give me enough time- if I can make them see- maybe they can help us?

AUGGIE

And what happens when you're locked
up and the next story comes for
you? What help can we be then?

Ramón can't stomach conceding the point. Furious, he throws
his jacket, feeling helpless.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

It's been a long day. We can't
think. We need sleep.

STELLA

The next story is called 'The
Dream'. You really feel like
closing your eyes?

AUGGIE

Then we'll take shifts. One of us
always has eyes on the story.

(direct)

We get through the night, together.

Ramón and Stella share a look and nod, in agreement.

STELLA

Where? They'll be looking for us.

RAMÓN

Where they won't find us.

Ramón takes one last look at his Corvair Monza, then picks up
his jacket and leaves. Auggie and Stella head out, exhausted.

INT. MILL VALLEY LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Sheriff Milner, his face weary over the loss of his son,
stands over the teen's research left behind.

His fingers trace over the photo of Sarah Bellows. His mind
races, trying to make sense of it.

He taps on the doctor besides Sarah. It's almost as if he
recognizes the man.

EXT. MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - LATER THAT NIGHT

The school parking lot is empty in its off hours.

AT FRONT DOORS

Auggie shivers while Ramón jostles the locked doors. Stella keeps warm in his jacket.

AUGGIE
Any other bright ideas?

RAMÓN
Anyone got a pen?

Stella shakes her head. Auggie hands over a fountain pen.

AUGGIE
Careful, it's my favorite --

Ramón twists and rips the pen's clip off. Auggie deflates.

RAMÓN
Now it's *my* favorite.

Ramón uses the clip to pick the lock. The door POPS open.

STELLA
(playful)
Wonder how a war hero feels having
a hood for a son?

RAMÓN
Never said it was untrue.

After they enter --

SERIES OF SHOTS over "*Hurdy Gurdy Man*" by Donovan.

... Ramón breaks into the School Nurse's office, snagging some pain pills, bandages and pillows.

... Stella enters the Faculty Lounge, claiming a comfy couch. She revisits the book - the newest chapter still blank.

... Auggie pillages the cafeteria kitchen. He piles chocolate milk, snacks, and left over Peanut Butter Cake on a tray.

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE - MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Ramón enters with an arm load of pillows to see --

Stella, cradling her knees on the floor while she reads 'High Beams'. Tears run down her cheeks as she stares at an illustration of a frightened woman driving at night.

He sits down beside her as she wipes her eyes.

RAMÓN

Is it your mom? Did you read it?

Stella nods.

STELLA

She was the one who wanted to move here. She told my dad - *there was something about Mill Valley.*

She tries her best to smile through the painful memory.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Even when I see her picture, I don't recognize her face. I can only remember her voice...

RAMÓN

What happened?

STELLA

They were arguing that night. All I can remember is... she couldn't take it anymore and drove off.

(beat)

My dad had to borrow the neighbor's truck to follow her. He had too much, but he wanted to apologize...

She smiles as she wipes a tear. Ramón listens.

FLASHBACK: DINAH MICHAELS (38) drives a GREEN SEDAN upset, straining to see through the night's low fog.

STELLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was late. And dark. And this *truck*, that she didn't recognize, starts turning on their high beams.

In the rear view mirror, a brief FLASH of HIGH BEAMS. A moment would pass, and then another blinding flash of light.

BACK ON

Stella knows this story by heart. She doesn't need to read.

STELLA (CONT'D)

She tried to let them pass, but they kept flashing. The more she tried to get away, the more agitated they got.

(catatonic)

The lights. On. Off. On. Off...

FLASHBACK: Nervous and frightened, Dinah speeds up --

STELLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He saw it happen... but there was
no way to stop it.

RAMÓN (V.O.)
Stop what?

The pursuing truck keeps their high beams on, blinding her.

STELLA (V.O.)
Everyone thought it was his
fault... That he caused the
accident... Even me...
(then)
*But the story says she wasn't alone
in the car.*

IN THE TRUCK, Oren witnesses a FIGURE rise up in the back
seat of the sedan. He lets out a HORSE SCREAM --

IN THE SEDAN, Dinah sees SARAH BELLOWS rise up in her
rearview mirror. She GASPS in fright, then --

THE GREEN SEDAN suddenly jerks off the road, causing the
automobile to TWIST and violently CRASH to a dusty stop.

The Truck hits the brakes. Oren runs out, wracked with grief.

BACK ON

Stella. Lost in the story. Ramón hangs on her every word.

STELLA
Every time he turned on his high
beams, he was trying to warn her.
(breaks down to Ramón)
There was someone else- Just like
he said- But I didn't believe him-
No one believed him- Because it was
her- It was Sarah--

He puts a consoling arm around her.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I hated him so much, I wanted to
kill myself.

He kisses her on the head. Hurting for her.

RAMÓN
Stories hurt. Stories heal.

STELLA
Why didn't I believe him?

He turns the page, helping to put that chapter behind her.
She stares at the next unwritten story. The title is --

STELLA (CONT'D)
'*The Dream*'...
(numb)
I wish this was all a dream.

Ramón holds her tight. The sentiment is mutual.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE - MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

The morning Oregon rain patters and streaks down windows.

First sun stirs Ramón awake on the couch. He looks for Stella, a crinkled sheet beside him where she had slept.

He only sees Auggie snoring, with the Book open on his chest, covered in hostess wrappers and chocolate milk boxes.

Stella enters, drying her hair from a morning shower. She lowers the towel to reveal newly shorn hair. She touches her new pixie cut, unsure. Ramón smiles, showing his approval.

He approaches. She holds back, vulnerable. Their lips wanting to touch...

But her eyes fall on Auggie, in fright --

STELLA
Auggie! Wake up!

Auggie jolts awake. Ramón sees it too.

RAMÓN
The Book --!

AUGGIE
Shit...

Auggie brushes food wrappers and debris way and finds -- The story has already been written. He jumps up, startled.

They pace, losing their wits.

RAMÓN
When was it written --

AUGGIE
I don't know!

Stella marches over and grabs the book, reading:

STELLA
*"Last night, Augustus Hilderbrandt
had a strange dream. He dreamed he
was in a red room-- "*

Auggie rips it out of her hand and SLAMS the book closed.

AUGGIE
No, man. That's my name. IT'S MY
NAME!

RAMÓN
Give us the Book.

AUGGIE
I don't want to know how I die. I
can't know!

STELLA
We can't stop it unless we know
what happens.

RAMÓN
We have to read it.

AUGGIE
Why read it when I dreamt it!

Stella and Ramón back down. Auggie takes a seat, biting his
nails. His nerves rattled.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
I was in this hallway. With so many
doors. And I could hear these...
voices. They were angry. Like they
wanted to get out. I wanted to too.

STELLA
(quiet, to Ramón)
You think he was dreaming of
Riverwell?

RAMÓN
Where they locked Sarah up? They
might know what happened to her.

AUGGIE
I ran into this... red room. And I
mean everything was red.

(MORE)

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

Like it was blood. But it wasn't mine.

(horrified)

And then Sarah... she was reaching out to me. Smiling. I couldn't move my legs. Or my arms. She told me --

STELLA

... You may be the next.

Auggie nods, it's burned into his memory.

STELLA (CONT'D)

We have to go there.

AUGGIE

What?

STELLA

You said it yourself, the stories are clues. We need to read --

Auggie pulls the Book out of reach.

AUGGIE

No. I don't wanna know how I die.

RAMÓN

You're a smart kid, Auggie. We need to see what happens. At least let Stella have a look.

AUGGIE

(rationalizing)

Riverwell Psychiatric. I'm in. But I don't wanna know. I just hafta... avoid red rooms. Yeah. That'll work. If I'm not in one, I'll live, right?

(delirious)

Please. Don't think I'm crazy. I'm conscious... this will work.

Stella and Ramón share a look. Skeptical.

RAMÓN

I'll drive.

Ramón runs out of the room.

Stella and Auggie share a confused look, then --

Ramón runs back, suddenly remembering he has no car.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)
I don't ride bikes.

IN THE HALLWAY

They run into the hallway, only to hear --

OS FOOTSTEPS coming their way. They dart around the corner.

The PRINCIPAL whistles, flipping the keys to his Cadillac in his hand. He sips his coffee and passes them, unnoticed.

Stella, Ramón and Auggie's sneak out behind him.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MILL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Stella and Auggie pile into the Principals' bronze boat of a convertible. It's nicer than anything they've been in.

Ramón fidgets with the wires, hot wiring it. The engine ROARS to life. They share a relieved smile and the car takes off.

EXT. FREEWAY - EARLY MORNING

The Cadillac cruises down the newly built freeway, leaving Mill Valley behind.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
How did we get turned upside down?
Maybe it's me, or maybe it's the
end of the world. Maybe it's time
we 'Reach Out of the Darkness'.

"Reach Out of the Darkness" by Friends and Lover plays.

... Stella closes her eyes and leans her head on the door, letting the wind kiss her face.

... Auggie stretches out in the backseat.

... Ramón steals a glance at Stella. She looks back. For a brief moment, there isn't a care in the world.

... The Cadillac winds through Pacific Northwest wilderness.

EXT. MICHAELS' HOME - MORNING

Oren packs moving boxes into his truck's flatbed. Sheriff Milner pulls up, blocking his driveway. Oren suspicious.

SHERIFF MILNER
Oren. Stella around?

He tenses, then returns packing. Alarmed.

OREN
What'd she do now?

SHERIFF MILNER
Your family's always in some sort
of trouble.

Oren slams his truck-bed closed, restraining his temper.

OREN
She didn't come home last night. I
don't know where she is.

SHERIFF MILNER
Call us if she shows, you hear?

Oren looks down, giving no response.

Sheriff Milner returns to his squad car and leaves.

EXT. RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - DAY - LATER

The Cadillac passes a *RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL* sign.

They pull up towards a sprawling behemoth built with such
pristine symmetry it's unsettling.

INT. FRONT DESK - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - MOMENTS LATER

Within an institutional corridor, a rigid RECEPTION NURSE
looks up to find Stella, Ramón and Auggie. A lit cigarette
hangs from her pursed lips. Moans and shrieks are heard O.S.

STELLA
We need to see the records of a
former patient named Sarah Bellows.

RECEPTION NURSE
We're a mental health facility. Our
records are private.

RAMÓN
(putting on the charm)
She's probably been dead for forty
years, you really think she cares?

RECEPTION NURSE
Our new file system doesn't even go
back that far. Sorry.

Just as they are about to give up, Stella takes a flyer --

STELLA
They wouldn't be in the... Red
Room?

The Nurse exhales smoke, suspiciously eyeing them. She leans
back and calls out to a passing ORDERLY.

RECEPTION NURSE
Gene, where are we storing the
lapsed files?

ORDERLY GENE
In the red room of the old
building. But it's all locked up.

The Nurse hands them a clipboard with paperwork.

RECEPTION NURSE
Fill out an authorization request
and *maybe* we can get it to you in
seven to ten business days.
(amused by their anguish)
Need a pen?

RAMÓN
(takes clipboard)
Got one. Thanks.

They slowly make their way out. Ramón tosses the clipboard in
the trash and they leave.

EXT. RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - MOMENTS LATER

They walk behind the renovated hospital to discover --

A DECAYING, THREE STORY SANITARIUM behind it. All windows and
doors are boarded up. Thick chains on the door.

STELLA
To what extent is your criminal
capabilities?

RAMÓN
There's no way I can get in it...
(mind racing)
But maybe we could get on it.

Ramón points up to the roof. There's a SMALL DIVIDE between the two buildings.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

If we can get up to the third story, we might be able to cross over and gain access onto its roof.

AUGGIE

That's all you. I have no desire to see this red room.

Stella eyes a COUPLE walking with a PATIENT IN A HAZEL GOWN.

RAMÓN

That's the same gown Sarah wore.

STELLA

We're close.

INT. FIRST FLOOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - LATER

A 'LAUNDRY' door opens -- Stella and Ramón exit, pushing a wheelchair with Auggie dressed in a HAZEL PATIENT GOWN. They wheel him down an institutional corridor.

AUGGIE

(re: hazel gown)

Just till we get to the third floor.

RAMÓN

No further.

INT. FRONT DESK - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - MOMENTS LATER

A PASSING NURSE drops off a stack of papers in front of the Reception Nurse. The top page catches her eye -- SCHOOL PICTURES of Ramón, Stella and Auggie.

RECEPTION NURSE

What are these?

PASSING NURSE

Apparently there's a warrant out for their arrest.

Her cigarette hangs from her lip, recognizing the faces. She instantly goes to her phone, dialing the police.

INT. ELEVATOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Stella and Ramón wheel Auggie onto an empty elevator. They push the 3rd floor button. Just as the doors close -

A MEATY HAND JUTS IN, allowing an ORDERLY to enter.

ORDERLY

I think you want the fifth floor.
Brown gown, *fifth floor*.

He hits the 5th floor button for them. They smile.

The Orderly eyes Auggie, giving him a quizzical once over. The elevator is unusually quiet on their way up. Then --

Ding.

INT. FIFTH FLOOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - MOMENTS LATER

The doors open to the sound of strange moaning and erratic screams. The occasion banging.

The Orderly holds the door open so Stella and Ramón can push Auggie out, though they are unsure where they've been taken.

ORDERLY

Be well, big fella.

He gives a warm smile, then the elevator seals behind them.

REVERSE

Mental patients guzzle pills and struggle to cope. All in hazel scrubs.

STELLA

You're conscious. Not crazy, right?

Auggie frantically looks around, ultra-sensitive to his surroundings. The walls and linoleum are all a stark white.

AUGGIE

At least there's no red.

With the coast clear, they wheel Auggie further into the restricted portion of the hospital.

RAMÓN

Don't worry. We'll make this quick.

They duck down a hallway, keeping out of the orderlies sight.

They pass windows, where -- a patient pulls clumps of hair from his scalp... Another patient screams from behind glass:

MENTAL PATIENT #1

I don't want the drum. I promise to be good. I want my mommy back.

MENTAL PATIENT #2

Wait till Martin comes!

They pass drugged patients sleeping in a room. They quickly wheel inside.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The patients are too doped up to notice as the three go to a window and spot the rotting rooftop of the old sanitarium two floors below. Auggie hops out of the wheelchair.

AUGGIE

I'll keep watch.

Auggie guards the open doorway, on the lookout.

Stella and Ramón open the large window, judging the distance.

RAMÓN

A little high. If the book doesn't kill us, the jump might.

Quick thinking, Stella pulls a stained SPRING MATTRESS off an empty bed, dragging it to the window.

RAMÓN(CONT'D)

Good thinking.

They throw the mattress over the divide. It drops down until landing in a plume of dust on the roof, two stories below.

STELLA

You think we can make it?

Ramón judges the distance, then carefully throws the Book down in a test run... It misses the mattress, *by a lot*.

Stella throws Ramón a look - *seriously?*

RAMÓN

Ladies first?

STELLA

We go together.

AUGGIE
Just make it quick, will ya?

A drugged patient wakes up. He points to Auggie, moaning.

AUGGIE POV: Down the corridor, the elevator opens with the Orderlies, Reception Nurse, and Deputy Hobbs.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
Shit. The fuzz. Hurry. *Hurry.*

Ramón climbs out onto the ledge and helps Stella out. A five story fall onto a sidewalk if they don't make the jump.

Stella looks back at Auggie.

STELLA
Catch ya later.

AUGGIE
Not if ya catch a disease.

Now all of the drugged patients have awoken, making an incredible racket, sure to draw attention.

Ramón holds Stella's hand tight.

RAMÓN
Together?

STELLA
Together.

AUGGIE
(whispers)
Go, go, go -- !

Outside, the Deputy and staff are about to pass the room --

ON THE LEDGE

SLOW MOTION: Stella and Ramón JUMP together... Sneakers kicking in the air... Over the expanse... Falling...

ON ROOFTOP

Stella and Ramón CRASH onto the mattress -- they made it!

But the mattress CRASHES through the rotted roof! They scream as the roof collapses below them. Leaving a gaping hole.

BACK IN THE ROOM

Deputy Hobbs and the staff look into the bemoaning patients room. Auggie disguised himself in an empty bed, wailing too.

They move on in their search.

When the coast is clear, Auggie bolts to the window and spots the hole in the roof below.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

Oof.

INT. OLD SANITARIUM - SAME TIME

Stella and Ramón writhe on their mattress on a hallway floor, showered in wood and debris.

As the dust settles, they sit up. Hair askew. Amazed to find they're alive. Ramón pulls a splinter from her hair.

RAMÓN

We make a great team.

Stella rolls her eyes and rises. The two find themselves --

In a dark, decomposing corridor to a place long forgotten. Sunlight from narrow, inescapable windows accentuate the molting walls. Wire bed frames and discarded furniture left.

Spooked, the two gingerly move down the hallway.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

This wasn't a hospital, it was a prison...

STELLA

Let's just find her file and get outta here.

INT. BASEMENT RECORDS ROOM - OLD SANITARIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Ramón kicks open a door, allowing them into the basement floor where a large 'B' is prominently displayed on a wall. More importantly, THE CEMENT FLOOR AND WALLS ARE PAINTED RED.

RAMÓN

Jesus...

STELLA

It's just like he said.

Stella turns on the musty fixtures in the RED RECORDS ROOM. Dank, in disarray. CLUTTERED file boxes scrawled with dates as far back as the 1880's. There must be hundreds of them.

Stella and Ramón begin looking through the disarray, floor to ceiling red.

RAMÓN

Aren't files supposed to be
'filed'?

Off their desperate search --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Auggie casually rolls himself down a white hallway in his wheelchair.

AUGGIE

I love white. White Christmas,
white bread, white people...

As he rolls past the VENDING MACHINE --

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

White chocolate...

Auggie fishes some coins from his pocket, and selects a white ZERO CANDY BAR.

INT. RECORDS ROOM - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Stella and Ramón sit amongst piles of files, lost.

STELLA

There's *nothing* on her. It's like
she didn't even exist.

Defeated, Stella grabs the next file box to inspect --

Ramón sits up, stares at something OFF SCREEN.

Stella follows his gaze to a TURNED FILE BOX spilling a dozen or so LEATHER-BOUND LEDGERS - IDENTICAL TO THE BELLOWS BOOK.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(mind races)

... Just like her Book.

The two sit close, pouring through the ledgers. An intimacy both are comfortable with; even yearn for. In the ledgers --

Instead of scary stories, they are filled with dated patient reviews, x-rays, photos --

Stella looks at the file in his hand: Autopsy reports for a group of children - the ones Sarah allegedly had murdered.

STELLA (CONT'D)

These are medical charts... for the kids that disappeared.

(reviewing statistics)

They suffered from liver failure.

They were sick from lead poisoning.

Ramón pauses, trying to recollect --

RAMÓN

Back at the library. On the map. Their rail yard was built on the Yamhill River. They dammed that creak the year they locked her up in here.

The truth hits Stella like a punch to the stomach.

STELLA

She didn't murder them. Her family did to bury their secret.

RAMÓN

(re: file)

Look who's her supervising doctor --

Ramón shows her Sarah's weekly reports, patient reports "Milner, Alfred, Dr." "Severe paranoia... imaginative constructs... false stories, family lies..."

STELLA

(reading)

... Dr. Alfred Milner. Roy Milner's father?

RAMÓN

(reading)

"Electroshock, metrozol, radium and isolation therapy, lateral cerebral diathermia treatment... "

(beat)

Jesus, she was just sixteen and they tortured her...

STELLA

(mind racing)

They made her believe she did it...

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)
that's why the stories keep
happening.

(resolute)
Is there a death certificate? Proof
that they killed her? What they did
with her remains?

Ramón gets a closer look at two faded forms.

RAMÓN
(reading)
"Sessions terminated at family
request". -- She didn't die here,
she was discharged.

STELLA
That can't be, that doesn't make
any sense --

Stella compares the two forms: Under the line '#
administered' a "1" is admitted, then a "2" on release.

STELLA (CONT'D)
It says here one patient was
admitted, and two were released.
Sarah left with a woman named
Beatrice Bellows.

RAMÓN
I thought her mom's name was
Delores. Did she have a sister?

Stella shakes her head, consumed. They both share a look,
trying to make sense of things.

A PAIR OF HANDS jut out at them through a file shelf,
belonging to an oafish ORDERLY dressed in white.

ORDERLY (O.S.)
THERE YOU ARE!

Stella falls back. Ramón pushes the shelf atop of him --
giving them a chance to flee, leaving the evidence behind.

SANITARIUM HALLWAYS

The two quickly scramble through dark hallways, racing past
large debris. The Orderly follows but they're too quick.

They BURST open the door -- but it's held by chains outside.

Stella's small frame squeezes through, but Ramón struggles.
He manages to escape mere moments from the Orderly's capture.

They back up as his arm blindly grabs for them.

EXT. RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - CONTINUOUS

Stella and Ramón find parked police cars out front. They dart into a side door into the renovated hospital.

INT. RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - CONTINUOUS

Stella and Ramón hurry, scanning for Auggie.

MOMENTS LATER

The Orderly loses sight of the teens in the hospital. He activates an emergency alarm button. KLAXONS sound off--

IN FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY

Stella and Ramón witness RED WARNING LIGHTS, causing every white wall to appear red!

RAMÓN

... The red room.

STELLA

Auggie!!

Ramón skims 'The Dream' in the Bellows Book, quickly skipping to the end. He goes grim.

RAMÓN

We shouldn't have gone to the fifth floor.

They frantically search --

STELLA

Where's the elevator?!

INT. FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Auggie tenses, bathed in a sea of red. He drops his candy and wheels out as fast as he can.

AUGGIE

Red room. Red room. RED ROOM!!!

Auggie abandons his wheelchair, toppling it over as he charges out into a full sprint.

Everywhere Auggie turns is red. There is no escape yet he desperately runs. When he rounds a corner --

He comes upon an ENDLESS CORRIDOR THAT STRETCHES OUT TO INFINITY. Almost like a dream.

Auggie pivots around, only to find he's trapped inside some kind of labyrinth of red corridors. The sounds of the real world drown out, as if underwater.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

(sotto)

I'm not crazy, I'm conscious. I'm
not crazy, I'm conscious...

INT. FIRST FLOOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - LATER

The hospital is in chaos - patients huddled or screaming, and orderlies trying to restrain their patients. Their voices are drowned out by the emergency klaxons.

Stella and Ramón find the elevator and frantically push the call button.

STELLA

C'mon... c'mon...

INT. DREAM CORRIDORS - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Auggie charges down another endless red corridor and turns to find a dead end. Unable to escape the nightmarish red maze, Auggie stops, sobbing in fear. In his state of panic, he fails to notice -

On the wall behind him, a TINY POINT OF PLASTER CRACKS, leaking trails of water, red as blood. The fissures spread releasing a trickle of river water... and what looks to be a FINGER poking through.

Followed by a RED ARM punching through the wall!

AUGGIE

Turns and finds a sinewy ARM protruding through the wall, grasping. The limb unnaturally long for the human body.

Chips of plaster flake off as the hole gets bigger. Another elongated limb breaks through. We know who this is.

AUGGIE

Nonononononono -- !

The wall breaks as a besmeared RED SARAH BELLOWS is birthed from out of the seeping wall.

Auggie trembles as the story comes true. He SCREAMS and RUNS!

Sarah Bellows shuffles behind, her twisted, naked and coated body leaving a trail of red footprints behind.

DREAM HALLWAYS

Auggie flees through winding, endless red corridors. He struggles with a handle. He BANGS on a door.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
HELP!!! IT'S HER! IT'S THE WITCH!

After every turn, Auggie looks back and finds the slow-moving Sarah surprising closer.

SARAH BELLOWS
Youuu Maaay Beee Theee Neeext...

Auggie darts down another hallway, only to find Sarah now there too. Always a little closer.

MAZE OF HALLWAYS

Auggie turns and tries to escape. Panting. As he runs, he passes a window with people, only it's --

The BELLOWS FAMILY sitting around their lavish dinner table in their house. They turn to stare with gaunt faces. Instead of a ham displayed in the middle of the feast, it's a child's decapitated head on a platter. No older than ten.

Auggie moves past the dream-like window. Refusing to quit.

AUGGIE
I'm not crazy, I'm conscious. I'm
not crazy, I'm conscious...

He turns a corner, and there's Sarah again, shuffling closer.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)
STELLAAAAA?!

EXT. FIRST FLOOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

The Receptionist Nurse spots Stella and Ramón waiting for the elevator.

RECEPTION NURSE
You!

She charges with two large Orderlies --

The elevator door opens. Stella and Ramón race inside and push the fifth floor button. The doors seal just in time.

Inside, they share a hopeful glance, but the floor numbers are slow to change. First level... .. second level...

RAMÓN

Come on...

INT. DREAM CORRIDORS - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

With Sarah just twenty feet behind him, Auggie turns another corner and finds THE ELEVATOR! He rapidly hits the call button. Eyeing Sarah shuffling towards him.

AUGGIE

Come on...

He tries to pry the doors open to no avail.

INT. ELEVATOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC

Stella and Ramón tensely watch the floor numbers on the elevator rise. Third level... fourth level...

They wait for the fifth level...

INT. DREAM CORRIDORS - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Ding! The elevator arrives before Auggie. His face awash with hope, awaiting for the doors to open. Sarah nearing.

INT. ELEVATOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC

Their elevator chimes for Stella and Ramón. But when the doors open --

They discover their elevator HAS BEEN CALLED TO THE 4TH FLOOR, where Deputy Hobbs stands with his back turned.

Ramón tries to hit the button again, but Hobbs turns and is quick to draw his gun on them.

DEPUTY HOBBS

Out of the elevator! Your hands up!

INT. DREAM CORRIDORS - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Auggie's elevator door opens, but it's occupied by ORDERLIES.

The klaxons instantly shut off and the hallway returns white. More importantly, SARAH HAS DISAPPEARED. Auggie trembles in fright, confused.

AUGGIE

The witch... she was just here!

The Orderlies suspiciously eye him in his red patient gown.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

She almost got me! T-the room was red, and...

(catches on)

... No, no, it's not what you think.

They firmly grab hold of him.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

No wait! I don't belong here! I snuck in. I'm not crazy!

ORDERLY

Sure. Sure you aren't.

AUGGIE

NO! PLEASE! I'M NOT CRAZY!!! I'M CONSCIOUS!! THE RED ROOM! IT WAS THE WITCH!!! IT WAS SARAH BELLOWS!

The Orderlies drag Auggie away behind two doors that read: ELECTROCONVULSIVE SHOCK THERAPY.

INT. SHOCK THERAPY - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - MOMENTS LATER

The Orderlies strap Auggie into a STRAIGHT JACKET.

AUGGIE

Please. I-I'm not crazy --

They restrain Auggie down onto a gurney.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

I don't want this to be the way it ends... I SHOULD'VE READ... I SHOULD'VE READ... RED... EVERYTHING'S RED...!

They shut him up by a wooden handle between his teeth. Auggie lets out a muffled SCREAM as they begin strapping electrodes to his temples. He shakes his head, unable to stop it.

The electroshock machines charge up with electricity.

INT. FIRST FLOOR - RIVERWELL PSYCHIATRIC - SAME TIME

Stella and Ramón are distraught as their handcuffed when --

BZZZZZZZ - The lights FLICKER as a surge of power is felt throughout the hospital. Along with Auggie's distant SCREAM.

TIME SLOWS AS

Ramón withers, deeply devastated.

Stella releases a long, ANGUISHED SCREAM. She falls upon her knees as the Deputy restrains her. Stella is laid to waste.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CELLS - MILL VALLEY POLICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

CLANG! An old JAIL DOOR is slammed shut on Stella. Ramón is in his own cell, sharing a wall of bars between them. The room is bare, save for a fireplace and a folding chair.

Deputy Hobbs locks up.

RAMÓN

You don't understand. We're innocent! The Book is cursed, man!

DEPUTY HOBBS

Sure it is.

While Ramón fights for his life, Stella slumps in a corner.

RAMÓN

At least give us the book before it's too late! If we could save Alice, we can save ourselves!

DEPUTY HOBBS

You didn't hear? Alice died on the way to the hospital.

Ramón pales. Stella scoffs - despondent.

DEPUTY HOBBS (CONT'D)
 Whatever you guys are into, I'd
 start telling the truth. Cause
 someone's gotta pay.

RAMÓN
 We ARE telling the truth!

Deputy Hobbs leaves as their pleas fall on deaf ears, taking
 the Book with him. Ramón falls to the ground. Defeated.

STELLA
 (numb)
 They don't believe us... just like
 they didn't believe Sarah. Alice
 died... just like the story said.
 Whatever's written, comes true.

RAMÓN
 So the son of a war hero, dies a
 two-bit hood.

STELLA
 I don't think--

RAMÓN
 It doesn't matter what you think.
 It's the stories you leave behind.
 What people believe... It's all
 stories... They come up with the
 right lies and we go to war -- they
 say the freeway will bring progress
 and it kills the town.

He hits his head against the wall, remembering something he
 can't get out of his head.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)
 When my father returned from war,
 when I was a kid, I remembered the
 ticker tape that would fall out of
 his clothes. They couldn't look at
 him, but they loved him.
 (beat)
 I hated him. When I caught up
 enough courage, I finally asked
 him. 'What kind of father would
 jump on a grenade, knowing he had a
 kid back at home.' Y'know what he
 said?
 (to Stella)
 'What sort of father would I be if
 I hadn't?'

Stella sees Ramón in a new light. He makes himself laugh, perhaps to prevent his tears.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

I didn't understand it at the time.
But after all of this shit... If I
get outta here, I'd do the same.

STELLA

My father will never know. If I
could to talk to him -- tell him I
believe him now.

(hopeless)

We're gonna die. But I wanna live.

(resolute)

I want to live.

Ramón grabs her hand between the bars, trying to comfort her. But they both know their fate is all but sealed.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - POLICE STATION - SAME

Deputy Hobbs sits at his desk, awaiting Sheriff Milner. He reads the Bellows Book, with TRIGGER laying at his feet.

DEPUTY HOBBS

(to Trigger)

Can you believe what the kids these
days are reading?

He turns a page to a new chapter "*Me Tie Dough-ty Walker*". We notice it's no longer blank, but covered in writing.

As he reads, his brows narrow. Eyes locked in. *Could it be?*

INT. DETENTION CELLS - CONTINUOUS

Stella and Ramón rise as Deputy Hobbs forcefully enters. A palpable tension in the air. The man looks unhinged.

DEPUTY HOBBS

How'd you get my name in that book?

They share a look of distress, unsure how to answer.

Hobbs opens the cylinder to his revolver and inserts bullets.

RAMÓN

It writes itself. But your name
shouldn't be in it. You never went
into the hou--

He closes the cylinder and points his gun at Ramón. He fires - *BANG!* The bullet SPARKS off a cell bar. Stella screams.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)
JESUS! ARE YOU INSANE?!!

DEPUTY HOBBS
Shut your mouth, wetback.
(beat)
Now I have questions and one of you
will give me answers.

Hobbs keeps the gun pointed at Ramón as he talks to Stella.

DEPUTY HOBBS (CONT'D)
That's one sick story you wrote,
but how did you know you'd be
locked up in here?

STELLA
Please. It's like he said. It
wasn't us, it was the--

BANG! Another fire RINGS out! This time making contact with the brick wall over Ramón's head! They SCREAM.

DEPUTY HOBBS
Did he bring you into this?
Handsome, older boy, invites you
into some trouble?

STELLA
We went into the Bellows house...
And found that Book... Kurt
followed us in...

Hobbs aims his anger and his gun at the cowering Ramón, he's sure not to miss this time. Stella talks twice as fast.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Sarah Bellows, she murdered our
friends, and Kurt, and my mom.
Please - you have to believe us-
It's the truth...

DEPUTY HOBBS
THAT AIN'T THE TRUTH!

Hobbs points the gun at Stella, a fed up man.

RAMÓN
Don't -- !

STELLA
 (through sobs)
 You have to tell my dad... I know
 it wasn't him... It was Sarah in
 the car... Just tell my dad... We
 didn't write the stories --

As Stella weeps, Hobbs keeps his gun trained on her. Then --
 Trigger casually saunters in as the tension hits its climax.

All three eye the dog as it sits and curiously stares at the
 fireplace, as if awaiting something.

The dog yelps and whines at the hearth, as if trying to speak
 actual words - *'Wee rai rowly rawer'*.

Hobbs lowers his revolver, even more perturbed.

DEPUTY HOBBS
 That was in the story. How'd you
 make my dog do that?

Stella and Ramón share a startled look, realizing...

STELLA
 Who else's name is in the story?

Trigger wags his tail, staring off at something unseen. He
 whimpers. All three look at the chimney, alarmed.

DEPUTY HOBBS
 You okay, boy?

He tries to comfort his dog, only it won't break its stare
 from the fireplace. He yelps louder, *'WEE RAI ROWLY RAWER!'*

DEPUTY HOBBS (CONT'D)
 What's wrong with him?

They stare at the mutt, trying to decipher the strange dog-
 like moaning. Almost like words. It dawns on Stella first --

STELLA
'Me Tie Dough-Ty Walker'.

Trigger, louder: *'WEE RAI ROWLY RAWER! WEE RAI ROWLY RAWER!'*

RAMÓN
 Who's name is in the story?!

They back away in their cells - hope fleeting.

DEPUTY HOBBS
What'd you do to my dog?!

STELLA
PLEASE! You have to let us out of
here.

RAMÓN
One of us is gonna die next. Who's
name is in the story?!

DEPUTY HOBBS
(fed up, to Ramón)
Yours, okay? It's you.

Stella looks to Ramón - his heart skips a beat. Trigger
skitters, barking at the fireplace.

Something HARD AND FLESHY bounces down the chimney, then -
The BLOODY HEAD of SARAH BELLOWS rolls across the floor and
comes to a stop!

SARAH BELLOWS HEAD
...Youuu maaay beee thee neeext...

Deputy Hobbs's eyes bulge.

DEPUTY HOBBS
What the f--

STELLA
Listen to me. If we don't get out
of here, Ramón is going to die.

Deputy Hobbs snaps out of it and grabs his key ring but --
Trigger TURNS ON his master with a low and guttural growl.

DEPUTY HOBBS
Boy, it's me...

The dog snaps and starts BARKING. Drool foams from his mouth.

RAMÓN
Don't just stand there, GET ME
OUTTA HERE!

TWO ROTTED FEET tumble from out of the hearth next.

Deputy Hobbs isn't sure what to do, but finally moves to
unlock the teens, when --

Trigger CHOMPS onto his arm! He SCREAMS in pain as he drops his keys just short of Stella's cell.

Trigger thrashes as Deputy Hobbs HOWLS.

Ramón can do nothing but watch the horror unfold.

Stella reaches for the keys, but they are just out of grasp.

TWO ROTTED LEGS topple from the fireplace and then attach themselves to the feet.

FLESHY BODY PARTS spasm on the ground like suffocating fish. A TORSO and CHEST CAVITY wriggle up to the legs, rising before them. Then chunks of shoulder meat... a pair of forearms, rotted hands... and finally a smiling head...

SARAH'S DISJOINTED AND ROTTED BODY rises. She lurches toward the wailing Sheriff -- held down by Trigger, further sinking his teeth into his master's arm.

Deputy Hobbs looks up in horror at the smiling face of Sarah. She looks him deep in the eye -- then SNAPS his neck!

The Deputy's body lands with a THUD! Stella and Ramón react -- all hope of their escape now dead on the ground.

Rotted Sarah rears her neck -- staring at Ramón. Sarah starts to lurch toward his cell.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

Open it! Open it!

STELLA

I can't reach the keys!

Ramón backs away as Sarah hobbles outside his cell, her arms reaching through the bars.

Sarah begins to SQUEEZE her rotten head through the bars. Her skull crunches and indents, allowing her head THROUGH.

RAMÓN

GET THE KEYS!

STELLA

My arm isn't long enough!!

Sarah dislocates her shoulder, pushing one arm through, then CRUNCHES her chest cavity through. She's inside!

Rotted Sarah grasps for Ramón, when -

Stella REACHES through the bars and GRABS Sarah!

The mere touch of her causes Stella's eyes to turn white as she begins to CHOKe -- water pours out of Stella's mouth --

RAMÓN

Stella!

--Stella's deadening eyes look up -- The bright lamps above BLINDING... ANGLE RACES INTO THE LIGHT, AND--

UNDERWATER - TIME UNKNOWN

Stella is suddenly SUBMERGED underwater. A hand tight around her neck. But as she tries to make out what is on the other side of the water's surface --

-- it isn't Sarah. But Sarah's Father, ARNOLD BELLOWS. Three sons surround the patriarch, watching Stella drown. A cold matriarch holding an infant watches on without intervention.

She tries to scream, but can't get any air out of her lungs. She fixates on something over the faceless men -- A PAIR OF MASONRY CHIMNEYS that belong to THE BELLOWS MANSION.

Just as Stella's eyes drift closed and her body goes limp --

INT. DETENTION CELLS - RETURN TO PRESENT DAY

Ramón sees their struggle has kicked the keys closer to him. He reaches out and stretches for the keys. He snares them!

After unlocking himself, he sees Stella holding Sarah back. Drowning from the water pouring out of her mouth...

Ramón grabs the revolver off the floor and --

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! Bullets STRIKE the corpse of Sarah, TORQUING her body free from Stella! *CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!...*

Stella falls to the floor in a heap, gagging and coughing.

Ramón opens her cell and helps Stella to her feet. She struggles to catch her breath.

Still alive, Rotted Sarah LUNGES for Ramón again --

--only for him to SLAM the cell door closed on her!

RAMÓN

Come on!

Ramón grabs Stella's hand --

INT. MAIN OFFICE - POLICE STATION - SAME

Before they race out of the main office -- Stella breaks her grip with Ramón... to retrieve the Bellows Book.

EXT. MILL VALLEY POLICE STATION - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Ramón opens the squad car, but it's locked. Stella anxious.

TRIGGER jumps on the hood of the car, SNARLING. They YELL!

The SARAH BELLOWS' CORPSE stumbles her way towards them!

Suddenly, a POLICE CRUISER barrels into Sarah! She EXPLODES and rains down in body parts. A window lowers, revealing -

SHERIFF MILNER. Looking spooked.

SHERIFF MILNER

Get in!

Stella and Ramón dive into the car, closing the door just as Trigger attacks, clawing at the window.

Milner can't take his eyes off the body parts on the street ahead, flopping on the pavement. Some begin to rejoin, slowly rebuilding back into a rotted Sarah.

CLOSE ON

Her head rolls to a stop, SCREECHING a deafening SCREAM! The cruiser's wheels kick up dirt and peel off.

INT. SHERIFF CRUISER - DRIVING - NIGHT

As Sheriff Milner drives, Stella and Ramón gasp in relief. They know they were saved from an inch of their lives.

Ramón clings to the mesh screen dividing them.

RAMÓN

Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!

SHERIFF MILNER

What the hell was that?

RAMÓN

You saw it too? Thank GOD you saw it! You finally believe us.

STELLA

That's what killed your son. And will kill us too unless we get as far away from here as possible...

Stella starts to read the rest of 'Me Tie Dough-ty Walker'.

STELLA (CONT'D)

The stories. There's no way to stop them once they've been written.

SHERIFF MILNER

That was Sarah Bellows?

Ramón has never heard sweeter words.

RAMÓN

You even know her name?! I love you, man. I love the law! Just drive, man. Open her up.
(to Stella)
How do I die in the end?

Stella finishes reading to herself, then mournfully looks up.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

It's okay... I can handle it. I'd rather know.

She catches the Sheriff's cold glance in the rearview mirror.

STELLA

He shoots you.

Milner drives coolly, never taking his eyes off the road.

RAMÓN

(incredulous)
What? You've got to be kidding me.

STELLA

His father... he was the doctor in charge at the hospital. He helped the Bellows cover it up.

The CB radio sparks up. An out of jurisdiction DISPATCHER.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)

Sheriff, we're getting an unusual amount of calls. Are you picking up the phone--

The Sheriff clicks off his CB. They drive in eerie silence.

SHERIFF MILNER

You just had to go into that damn house.

They try to force their doors open, to no avail.

OUTSIDE CRUISER

As the cruiser drives down a deserted highway...

Stella and Ramón claw at the doors and window -- kicking and screaming -- but their muffled cries for help go unnoticed.

EXT. BELLOWS ESTATE - NIGHT - LATER

The Sheriff's cruiser passes through the property gates and crosses a small bridge over a dry riverbed, winding up the hill to where the Bellows mansion once stood.

The entire estate has been razed down to dirt and debris, except for the brittle remains of the dual chimney stacks.

EXT. BELLOWS DAM - NIGHT - LATER

The cruiser has parked beside a dry riverbed and a small MASONRY ARCH-WALL DAM. Beyond it, the remains of a river along with rusty iron frames, chloridized leeching tanks, and drain boxes make up the derelict rail yard.

Headlights illuminate the dam, where Sheriff Milner has a shovel, pick axe and some bags of cement.

IN THE BACK OF THE CRUISER

Stella and Ramón struggle, both of their hands now cuffed behind their back.

She spots the dual chimney stacks and wanes as she recognizes it as the location from her vision.

STELLA

This is where they took her. This is where her family murdered her.

RAMÓN

Misery loves company.

STELLA

(struck)

They buried the bodies in the dam.

ON MILNER

Stacks of cobblestone are piled aside as Milner digs a shovel into fresh earth. A hole big enough for two graves.

He sweats with each burrow into the ground. His voice raised--

SHERIFF MILNER

I was told I only needed to keep
the secret -- But then your mother
had gone into that house -- Now
'cause of you, my son is dead - And
once you're dead and buried,
everything will settle down -- Just
as it always does.

His shovel scrapes dirt aside, incidentally exposing the skeletal remains of an ABNORMALLY ENLARGED SKULL.

Milner keeps digging, paying no mind.

IN THE BACK OF THE CRUISER

Stella writhes as they try to escape. She presses her face against Ramón's in what appears to be a passionate gesture.

RAMÓN

(shared passion)

If this is it, may as well --

Ramón attempts to meet her lips, but it isn't reciprocated.

Stella scrunches to get her arms under her rear, bringing the cuffs in front of her. It finally dons on Ramón--

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

Oh good. You can do that.

(turning)

Now help me out.

Stella ignores Ramón in favor of grabbing the Bellows Book.

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

With her hands cinched, she opens to the last chapter. The story of 'The Haunted House' is still unwritten.

STELLA

Whatever is written, comes true.

(searching)

Pen... pen... pen...

RAMÓN

What?

STELLA

We have to write her story. It's the only way for her to hear the truth.

Ramón catches on. He turns his pelvis to her.

RAMÓN

Front pocket.

Stella grabs Auggie's old broken pen.

Ramón keeps one eye on Milner as Stella begins writing. Her words escape her lips as if in a fever dream.

STELLA

"Sarah Bellows was a sweet, young-lonely girl whose parents never let her out of the house..."

Ramón looks out the window and goes in awe at something OS.

ON SHERIFF MILNER

He finishes mixing some wet cement in a wheelbarrow. He rises and wipes his brow. The wind howls and sweeps past him. Feeling watched, he slowly turns, his frame moving aside -

Revealing THE BELLOW'S HOUSE fully rebuilt in the distance.

Milner can't believe his eyes. He looks to the cruiser and his eyes narrow on Stella writing in stride.

He stabs his shovel into the earth.

IN THE BACK OF THE CRUISER

Stella now sees the house on the hill, gobsmacked.

RAMÓN

Write, Stella. Hurry!

She returns to scribbling out words, almost illegible, when --

Stella's door rips open and she is YANKED out of the car. The Book goes flying along with her glasses.

SHERIFF MILNER

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING!

Stella hits the dirt hard. She struggles to see, but spots her glasses behind her, and the Book between her and Milner.

Fuck the glasses. She crawls toward the Book.

Milner approaches, taking his revolver out of the holster.

SHERIFF MILNER (CONT'D)

Don't you see, darling? If they
found out the water was spoiled,
there would be no Mill Valley...

Ramón sees this as his chance. He gathers his courage --

From out of the cruiser comes a warrior's cry. Ramón LAUNCHES
himself out of the back and TACKLES Milner to the ground.

Stella grabs the Book but is vexed - she knows Ramón will
never win this fight with his hands cuffed behind his back.

STELLA

No, your story --

RAMÓN

RUN, STELLA, WRITE!

As Ramón and Milner wrestle, Stella takes the Book and darts
towards the Bellow's House, tripping over the tall grass.

Milner tries to get to his gun, but Ramón does everything in
his power to stop him. He's thrown back --

Ramón's face hits the dirt, in plain view of --

Headlights illuminate an upright pick axe dissecting the
printed words on a box of "MEATIER SAND" and "DOUGHTY WALKER
CEMENT" to reveal the words "ME TIE DOUGHTY WALKER".

Ramón smirks as it gravely dons on him --

RAMÓN (CONT'D)

So that's why it's called that.

ON STELLA - RUNNING

As she approaches the Bellow's House, a deafening GUN SHOT
rings out into the night. She stutters, fearing Ramón's fate.
But she continues on, never looking back.

BEHIND HER

Milner rises out of the tall grass.

SHERIFF MILNER

Come back here, Stella!

ON STELLA AT BELLOWS HOUSE

Another gunshot rings out and the bullet whizzes by. Heart racing, she enters the house.

INT. BELLOWS ESTATE - YESTERYEAR

Stella bursts through the front door, confused and alone... only the place isn't cold and crumbling, but warm and lavish. The fixtures cast the elegant interiors in a ghostly light.

Confused, she returns to writing in the Book, reciting:

STELLA
*"Sarah felt alone, so she wrote
 scary stories for the children. And
 they would come visit from all
 around for they loved to hear her
 read..."*

The sounds of CHILDREN LAUGHING. Little feet PITTER-PATTER across wood floors, gathering someplace.

Stella peers into the grand library, where it's now lined with books. A YOUNG SARAH sits in a rocking chair with a large GROUP OF CHILDREN seated around her. She smiles as she finishes reading a story she's written in a child-like voice:

YOUNG SARAH
 ..."He's not a hairless", the Vet
 said, "He's not even a dog."

CHILD
 What was it?

YOUNG SARAH
 It was a sewer rat with rabies!

The kids squeal with laughter and scares, while Sarah giggles and enjoys telling the spooky tale. It's as if the ghostly inhabitants of yesteryear are pre-recorded memories.

Stella has a bewildered look - *Is this really happening?*

Suddenly, the front door to the manor SLAMS OPEN, revealing -
 SHERIFF MILNER.

He reloads, but his bullets slip out of his hand as he is awestruck by the sudden transformation of the house.

He gathers himself, then returns to the hunt.

A CHILD who Young Sarah is reading to turns his head to look straight at him, breaking the fourth wall. His skin is pale and sickly. River water starts pouring from his mouth.

Milner fires at the apparition, to no effect. Realizing they're no threat, the Sheriff continues after Stella.

IN THE KITCHEN

Stella tries to find safe refuge to write. She hides between an oven and wall, continuing to write --

STELLA

"One day, the children started to get sick. And Sarah knew it was the water. The water was being poisoned by her family's rail yard..."

The pipes in the walls rattle. Household items tremble. The kitchen faucet BURSTS dirty water. It bleeds through cracks in the wall, seeping out of ceilings and floors. All around, pools of river water gather. As if the house was weeping.

IN A DINING ROOM

Milner is startled by the water pressure building and moaning in the walls. He eyes the stairway where massive amounts of river water waterfalls down.

He spots movement in the kitchen and FIRES.

IN THE KITCHEN

Stella SCREAMS as the bullet ricochets nearby. She breaks from her writing and races to the next room, getting wet.

IN THE LIBRARY

Stella enters the giant library where river water drains down from above. She looks for a place to hide, then spots -

The Alcaraz Rug covering the cellar hatch in the floor. She moves the rug aside and hides down in Sarah's hidden bedroom.

A MOMENT LATER

Milner steps in. He uses his ears as much as his eyes. He studies the library. Shelves filled with a myriad of books.

IN SARAH'S BEDROOM

Stella holds her breath below the hatch. Hoping it will work.

IN LIBRARY

Milner's boots step onto the Alcaraz rug, left askew. His boot takes another step. The hidden hatch *creaks*.

IN SARAH'S BEDROOM

Stella closes her eyes. Silently praying. All goes quiet.

IN LIBRARY

Milner's foot casually pushes aside a corner of the rug to reveal the cellar hatch. He knows this is where she's hiding.

IN SARAH'S BEDROOM

Stella holds her breath in fear, unable to write a word. Water seeps and drains into the basement room, pooling.

IN LIBRARY

Milner lowers down to lift the hatch door, when the wall of books behind him MOVE. Some JUT OUT, others RETRACT -- creating the IMPRESSION OF SARAH'S FACE.

When he slowly turns to witness it, Sarah's impression opens its mouth, inhaling books into a DARK, WIND TUNNEL ABYSS.

Milner EMPTIES his gun, hitting nothing but books and parchment. The impression SCREAMS as the wind flurries.

Milner's hat is sucked off into the void. He digs his heels in to try to reload, but the gust takes his gun too.

A look of fear washes over him as he is pulled toward the bookshelf. Heels scraping. He covers his face and then --

He SCREAMS as he is SUCKED into the abyss. The tremendous wind dies down as loose book pages flutter to the floor.

IN SARAH'S BEDROOM

Stella's breath quickens. Unsure of what happened. She holds onto the hatch, questioning whether it's safe to come out.

IN THE LIBRARY

A PAIR OF FEET step out from the void in the book shelf...

ROTTED SARAH limps into the library in her hazel gown. Crooked, elongated limbs. A damaged, child-like mind. Her mouth is agape with river water pouring out.

Sarah lurches her mangled body towards the cellar hatch.

IN SARAH'S BEDROOM

Stella decides it's time to open the hatch, but --

SARAH'S MANGLED FACE IS RIGHT THERE!

Stella SCREAMS. The hatch door CRASHES DOWN as she falls deeper into the cellar, splashing into the water now up to her waist.

A BANGING on the hatch door. She's trying to get in.

Stella looks for a way out, but there is none. She reclaims the Book... only now the pages are all wet.

Regardless, she writes. The ink bleeding on the page.

STELLA (CONT'D)

*"When the children started dying,
Sarah confronted her family..."*

The BANGING intensifies. Stella writes on --

STELLA (CONT'D)

*"But her family wouldn't listen to
Young Sarah. And to protect the
family name, they murdered the
children and hid their bodies in
the dam. And then told everyone
that she was the monster."*

MORE VIOLENT BANGING. It's deafening... Then silence.

EXT. MILL VALLEY STREETS - NIGHT

Driving his pickup, Oren overhears on the radio:

DISK JOCKEY (RADIO)

I really don't know what to make of
it, but this is the third caller
who's called in to say something
odd is going on over by the Bellows
property. Don't ask me what --

Oren yanks the steering, accelerating towards the property.

INT. SARAH'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Stella shivers, the rising water up to her chest. Her trembling hand struggles to write clearly.

STELLA

"... Her family locked her away in Riverwell, where they made her forget the truth, so that she would believe her family's lies..."

Behind Stella, Rotted Sarah's cockeyed face slowly rises up from out of the water, inside the room.

STELLA (CONT'D)

"And when she tried to fix what was broken, they murdered her -- with their bare hands... Sarah hated her family for their betrayal... So she cursed them and everyone who went into their house."

Rotted Sarah releases a banshee-like SCREAM!

Stella drops the book into the dark water. She swims back and pushes floating articles to create distance.

She chokes on a mouthful of water as she searches the room, looking for the book. But now Rotted Sarah is gone too.

Stella's head cranks, trying to cover every direction. Something touches her back -- she spins to find -- the Book.

Stella's feet find some footing standing on a dresser. She puts her pen back to paper, only it's not writing anymore. The parchment is completely waterlogged.

STELLA (CONT'D)

No, no, no. Come on. Please --

UNDERWATER POV: Stella's vulnerable body. Her voice muffled.

Stella finds a quietness that comes over the room. The ripples calm...

Without warning, Stella's violently YANKED underwater.

UNDERWATER

Stella thrashes and tries to kick free from Sarah's grasp. The Book floats away from Stella's grasp, sinking.

Stella struggles for air, and to break free. The Book too far from her grasp. She SCREAMS, releasing an explosion of bubbles, desperate to reach the surface.

She's drowning and slowly losing consciousness. And then a distant voice. Almost dreamy.

DINAH MICHAELS (V.O.)
 Don't you want to know how the
 story ends?... I'll help you.

Her mother's voice stirs Stella awake from the sinking
 slumber. She KICKS her leg free from Sarah's grasp...

And explodes out of the water, filling her lungs with life.
 She ignores the Book and clears her throat. Confident.

STELLA
 We're not all at fault. We didn't
 do this to you, Sarah. My friends,
 Me... my mother...
 (infinite sadness)
 ... Her name was Dinah Beatrix
 Michaels.

Rotted Sarah's curdled face slowly rises just a breath from
 Stella's. A newfound curiosity about what she is saying.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 But she wasn't always a Michaels...
 At first, she was a Bellows.

Trembling, Stella continues, with her deepest confession.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 She was your daughter you carried
 at Riverwell, wasn't she? Do you
 remember? They ripped her out of
 your arms before they murdered you.

Rotted Sarah is lost in a flood of painful memories. Stella
 holds strong, never taking her eyes off of Sarah.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 You cursed your family and so you
 cursed mine. But you aren't the
 monster, Sarah. They are. You don't
 want to hurt anyone, because this
 isn't you. You forgot who you are.

Sarah's eyes fix onto Stella's. A fleeting moment of clarity.
 The water level quickly continuing to rise.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 You're a sweet girl, Sarah. And
this is your story.

Stella takes her last gulp of air as the water rises over
 their heads, submerging them both.

UNDERWATER

Sarah no longer looks 'rotted' - Stella sees the real SARAH BELLOWS for the first time.

Sarah sweetly smiles and gently moves back a floating wisp of hair from Stella's face. Just like LouLou described, she is a sight. A soul that has been set free from the lies that have been holding her hostage.

The two women float in the center of the water-filled room, furnishings drifting about. If Stella could hold her breath forever, she would stay to look at her grandmother's face...

CLOSE ON: The Bellows Book floats by to the last pages of "Me Tie Dough-ty Walker" that describe Ramón's death. The ink from the freshly written letters drift off the page...

Stella is hypnotized by Sarah. She may never come up for air. The last bit of breath escaping her lips. And then --

The hatch opens above the surface, letting in light. An ARM PLUNGES into the water, pulling Stella up.

IN THE LIBRARY

Stella is yanked onto the library floor, GASPING for air, coughing. She is shocked to see --

Ramón, clutches his bloody gut from a near fatal bullet wound. Stella wraps her arms around him as he winces.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You're alive!

RAMÓN

You changed the ending. You saved me.

STELLA

We saved *her*.

EXT. NEW BELLOWS ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Oren pulls to a stop at the Bellows Estate where some onlookers have gathered, sharing hushed whispers.

His jaw drops seeing the newly restored BELLOWS HOUSE. The front door opens, with Stella and Ramón exiting.

Overcome with emotion, Oren pushes through the crowd to be with his daughter.

OREN

STELL?!

Stella turns to see her father. His presence is far more spectacular than anything that has happened to her.

STELLA

DAD!

She runs to him. They meet in a long embrace. He holds her, never wanting to let go. Through tears --

STELLA (CONT'D)

It wasn't you... I know it wasn't you. I know the truth.

OREN

The truth doesn't matter, Stella. Only you do. I was so worried.

(beat)

What happened to you?

STELLA

Stories hurt. Stories heal.

He breaks the embrace to look her in the eyes, as if to convince himself she really is okay...

Stella beams, tears of joy in her eyes. A brightness exudes.

Oren embraces her again. Their relationship made whole. He knows this isn't his sad daughter anymore. Stella is reborn.

Stella closes her eyes, taking in the moment.

Ramón is overjoyed at the sight, partly wishing his father was there too. But then he sees something horrific --

The front door to the house kicks open to a wind-ravaged SHERIFF MILNER! He looks like he's crawled out of the sludge from hell. He raises his gun, when -

The ground beneath the Bellows House gives way, and a portion of the estate collapses into a sinkhole.

The startled crowd gasps.

Sheriff Milner looks up at the house, unsure if the rest of it is going to fall on him. Then --

THE BASE OF THE LOOMING ON-RAMP sinks into the ground. The soaked foundation of earth grows unstable, causing rebar to bend and groan, chunks of concrete to crumble from above...

Before the Sheriff can run away, the entire crowd watches the on-ramp all come CRASHING DOWN. He SCREAMS as -

CRAAAAASH! - a mountain of concrete and iron PLUMMETS down, DESTROYING the Bellows House and Sheriff Milner with it.

As the dust settles, all that remains is a MOUNTAIN OF DEBRIS. Stella and Ramón eye the pile of rubble, unsure if it's really over.

OREN

What just happened?

RAMÓN

I think she fixed things.

Oren looks confused, but Stella knows he's right.

SLOWLY PAN UP on the three as the crowd behind them marvels at the destruction of the Bellows House.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

Happy Thanksgiving, Mill Valley, or should I say the new era of *Dick*. Richard Nixon can't save us now.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MILL VALLEY - WEEKS LATER

The last remaining Autumn leaves cling to frigid trees. A slight frost on people's lawns. Winter at the doorstep.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

Let me tell ya, folks... As much as this crazy world is filled with lies and hypocrisy, I like to believe there are still some stories out there worth a damn. And I've never found it more evident than right here in our backyard.

A bundled Paper Boy slings NEWSPAPERS on his route. On the front page, a picture of the Bellows Family, Sarah, and the murdered young children.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

She didn't do it. Plain and simple.

(beat)

Why did we believe then? Cause we are afraid of what we don't know. We're afraid of what's in the dark. But when we turn on the lights... most of the time, it's us.

AT THE DAM

City Workers and Detectives continue their arduous work at slowly breaking up the dam, removing skeletal remains.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
Wake up, people. Our forefathers...
are cocksucking murderers.

They've laid the pieces of bone on a tarp like a puzzle. It's the making of nine children, and one young adult.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
And because our city is built on
their evil deeds... The state did
some soil tests, and wouldn't you
know, our land is foundationally
unsound to build a freeway on.

INT. MORALES'S HOME - NIGHT

Ramón spoon feeds food into his father's mouth as they watch TV in the family room. The distance that once divided them is now gone.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)
Our town lives again... for now.

ON TV: Officials stand before a board, posting birthdates in ascending order. Seated corespondent ROGER MUDD informs:

ROGER MUDD
*Tonight for the first time in 27
years the United States has again
started a draft lottery, and the
famous first pick tonight is...*

Ramón hears something that gives him pause, the spoon lingers in the air, frozen in time. It may as well be his birthday.

His mother's hand comforts him. He looks to his father, fear in his eyes. They meet in their fragility.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Stella lays a bouquet of yellow flowers at Dinah's grave. Behind her stands Ramón, clean-shaven and in an army uniform.

They walk past a few other gravestones that have been left similar yellow bouquets... Auggie Hilderbrandt, Charles and Alice Steinberg, even Kurt Milner.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

So let's be nice to each other,
because eventually, we all have to
move on.

They meet at Oren's pickup, its bed packed with moving boxes.

Before Stella goes, she gives Ramón a lasting embrace. As if they both know there may never be one again.

For a moment, it looks like they may kiss, but they pull away - knowing it'll only make it harder to say goodbye.

DISK JOCKEY (V.O.)

And wouldn't you like to leave this
world a little better than how you
left it? I know what I want to be
played at my funeral. This is 'Hey
Jude'...

The Beatles "Hey Jude" plays as Stella gets into her father's truck and drives away.

EXT. BELLOWS PROPERTY - LATER

Oren waits in his idling truck, ready to leave town for good.

Stella walks up the long driveway that leads to what is left of the Bellows Estate, holding one last bouquet for Sarah.

Wild flowers and tall grass have already started to grow in the crevices of the ruined estate.

Stella climbs to the top of the rubble, where a small tree has strangely already begun to sprout. She takes a moment for herself.

And gently lays the bouquet down. And then rests on the grass-looking up to the clear, blue sky.

STELLA

Lies- stories and lies... Now
everybody knows. That you were not
evil. That you were in pain. There
was no darkness in your heart --

She looks up -- a black cloud crosses the sun --

-- then the sound of a faint music box.

The playful melody -- You May Be the Next.

Concerned, Stella turns to see -- Her pretty yellow flowers brown and wilt before her eyes. They sour until they are nothing but crippled stalks. Even the Beatles rendition slows and warps... like a broken record player underwater.

Stella turns to her father, fearful of what may come next --

SARAH'S ROTTED ARMS erupt from the earth, CLUTCHING her!
Stella SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER, as the arms pulls her down,
into the earth --

Screaming.

THE END