

AMITYVILLE AWAKENS

ROBERT P. OTTONE



PROLOGUE

“Belief in ghosts is not of modern origin, but reaches back
to the childhood of man, and the night of time.”

— H. W. PERCIVAL

PABLO

The house on Ocean Avenue had sat vacant in the Village of Amityville for nearly twenty years.

Pablo Antonio Mendez spent his teens riding past it on his bike from time to time, after his parents had moved to North Amityville, recent arrivals from El Salvador. It didn't take long for a new kid like Pablo to learn all about the "Amityville Horror" house. Classmates in junior high whispered about the bleeding walls, the voices screaming "get out," and the dreaded "Red Room" in the basement. Pablo struggled at first to understand what these new words were. "Ghost," "blood," "haunt"—but he pieced their meaning together quickly.

How could a family live in such a haunted place? It didn't make sense, but every time Pablo rode by, whether he saw the young family who'd taken up residence there or not, an icy spike ran up the back of his neck.

By the time he reached ninth grade, his English had gotten better. He was studying hard. He had friends. Ran track. Even had a girlfriend. Pablo remembered when the last family to live at the Horror House was evicted from their home in the middle of the night. Mostly, Pablo remembered the rumors. The warnings. Whispers of something deeper, darker, in the home. In the

Village of Amityville itself. As if the very ground he rode his bike on was filled with horrors.

There were other reasons, Pablo figured, that kids warned him about the house. Students like Pablo would get jumped in the Village of Amityville. Sometimes they'd just be run out of town. Other times, not so lucky. "*Hijo*," he remembered his dad saying. "I don't wanna hear about you going to the Village." Pablo always listened intently when his father spoke. "That's a dead place."

Amityville was divided by a busy road (Pablo never understood why it was called a "highway" when it was really just a four-lane main street), the house on Ocean Avenue was just a short bike ride away, and Pablo disregarded his father's warnings frequently. As an adult, with his father's words echoing in his mind, crossing the highway into the Village of Amityville gave Pablo pause. There was something in the air. He wondered if others could feel it, too. That same heady mix of excitement and anxiety he felt as a kid rolling past the house.

Everyone in Amityville knew the house's history. There was the DeFeo family. Murdered mysteriously in the night as they slept by the oldest child, Ronald Jr. He claimed something in the house made him do it. Changed his tune later, and rumors of the mafia, of incest, of drug use ran rampant. It was a mess.

Then came the Lutz family. Their stories of the supernatural sparked the world's interest. Books. Movies. More rumors.

The Camp family was different. Pablo had always heard they were quiet. Kept to themselves. Got the house cheap after it sat vacant for a long time. Until the night they, too, were driven from the home, never to return.

And when that happened, it was like all the old wounds in Amityville reopened. Rumors circulated about goo running up the walls. People hearing echoes of gunshots from the night the DeFeo family was murdered. People seeing an eerie glow in the windows each night.

It was the stuff of urban legend. Taking shape through

embellishment and exaggeration. Like a game of telephone played on a larger scale, all throughout both Amityvilles.

As a teen, for Pablo, none of his parents' efforts to keep what happened on Ocean Avenue a secret mattered, because at school, after that cold December night in 1995, all anyone could *do* was talk about the house. In the lunchroom, where Pablo sat with his friends every day. Whispers in the back of classrooms.

"It is a *dead* place, Pablo." These words echoed in Pablo's mind even now, parked across the street from the legendary home. He sat in his truck anxiously waiting for the client who'd hired his demo team to arrive and let them in. Though the Camps had left seventeen years prior and there hadn't been news about the house in as many years, Pablo felt a pang of anxiety as he stared at the looming Dutch Colonial. Brown shingles with white gutters. Large windows, old shutters, most of which were rotted after nearly two decades of coastal north-eastern weather. It was odd to see a home in such disrepair in the middle of an affluent Long Island neighborhood, but that was part of the reason Pablo and his team were there. To begin demolition of a decaying, charred building with a past neither town wanted to confront.

When the house mysteriously caught fire a year after the Camps had evacuated, the fire department and the cops were baffled. There was no electricity fed to the home. No oil, gas, nothing. Authorities eventually settled on burglars or vagrants, but neighbors never reported seeing anyone near the home.

The fire had left a black scar that trailed from the left side of the roof, down across the rear of the house. There was almost no damage to the inside of the attic, beyond some melted insulation, according to the company that hired Pablo's team.

As Pablo unloaded his sledgehammer from the back of the truck, he reflected on when he got the job to tear the place down. He fell into a YouTube rabbit hole, part-research, part-scaring-himself-late-at-night while his family slept.

Kevito got out of his truck and walked over. "Has to be haunted, right?" Kevito said, before hauling the demo hammer

from the bed of his truck. “Folks just leaving a nice place like this?”

“Could be,” said Cal. He was the only non-Honduran on the crew. “¿Ustedes dos saben cómo usar uno de estos?” Cal asked a pair of new-hires as he held up a reciprocating saw. Cal’s Spanish was good, learned from years of working with Pablo. The new guys, roommates of Kevito that Pablo had only met once before, Victor and Memo, were green but strong. They’d make a good addition to the crew if they stuck around long enough. Kevito had assured him that they were good guys, but Pablo had yet to see them in action. If they couldn’t stack up, the whole crew would end up putting in extra hours at the end of the week.

As Pablo led his crew up the driveway into the backyard of the home, he surveyed the area: overgrown grass, broken windows, a cellar door that was mostly splinters. He’d often felt people watching him as he cruised the streets of the Village, enjoying the beautiful summers, springs, and early falls on Long Island. Sometimes he questioned whether all of the eyes watching him were human. He thought it again now, briefly, but quickly brushed away the thought.

“You ever seen pictures of this place in the seventies?” Kevito asked.

“Used to be beautiful,” Cal said. “Dutch Colonial. They don’t make ‘em like this anymore.” They were standing on the porch now, and Cal ran his hands along the cedar shingles. “Think these are original? How long’s this place been empty?”

“Almost twenty years,” Pablo said. “The Camps vacated in ninety-five. Place caught fire one year later, but got put out pretty quickly.”

“That’s the year I met Sheryl.” Cal beamed. He took his wallet out—a faded, worn sticker of the Haitian flag on it—and showed Memo and Victor an old picture of his wife. Pablo had seen it a hundred times. “Ain’t she a beauty?”

Memo and Victor looked at each other and shrugged.

A large SUV rolled up the driveway and a fit woman in a

gray pantsuit stepped out, all smiles. She wore Ray-Bans and walked on unsure heels across the overgrown lawn toward Pablo and his crew.

“No spooky talk,” Pablo said. “Here comes the boss.”

“You the demo crew? Paul Anthony’s guys?” she asked, pointing toward the truck, which had *Paul Anthony Demolition* — *For All Your Demo Needs* on the side.

“I’m Cal, the foreman.” Cal extended his hand.

There was a moment’s hesitation before she shook his hand and sighed dramatically. “I’m glad *one* of you speaks English. I’m Donna, I work for Mr. Linklater. I believe you said you’ll have the interior completely stripped by the beginning of next week?”

Pablo smiled to himself and turned away from Cal as he went over the terms of their contract with the Linklater Group. Even though he spoke perfect English, he preferred to let Cal do the talking on-site. Nobody needed to know that “Paul Anthony” was him. He just needed the cash to pay his guys. Pretending to be just another worker and not the owner of a profitable demolition company left Pablo able to focus on the job itself and not have to hustle to find work under his real name.

Pablo rounded the corner of the home, looked up, and felt a slight chill crawl up his back as his eyes landed on the two quarter-moon windows that sat in the loft on the third floor of the house. For the briefest moment, as the light caught the windowpane, Pablo thought he saw a soft red glow from within. The sight made his pulse quicken, and the ice that began in his thighs buried itself at the base of his skull. He thought of the scene in *The Amityville Horror* when the father sees a demonic monster clearly made of rubber in the window. Pablo rolled his eyes.

“We good, boss?” Cal whispered to Pablo, as Donna thumbed through some documents.

Pablo’s reverie was broken. *There’s nothing in this house but*

broken glass, bad wiring, and shag carpeting, he thought to himself. *Not even rubber demons in the attic.*



PABLO COULD HEAR Kevito's boombox all the way from the first floor as he stood in the loft on the third. He stared out the left quarter-moon window down onto the lawn where he had been standing moments earlier. The crew had begun their work: Cal in the basement, Kevito and Memo on the first floor, and Victor on the second.

The house hadn't changed since 1995, beyond the remarkably minimal fire damage to the exterior. The crimson shag carpeting that ran from the first floor up the stairs to the second, like a growing red fungus, was a holdover from the seventies. Pictures of the Camp family still lined the stairwell, and the furniture and other items were exactly where they left them when they evacuated on that strange, frozen night. The kitchen cabinets were all open; stale and rotted food greeted the demo crew when they stepped inside. If there hadn't been the broken window above the sink, the entire first floor would've stunk to high heaven. "Looks like a Kevito job," Cal joked, handing him a large plastic garbage bag.

The strangest thing to Pablo was the dining room. The table, which served as the centerpiece of the room, was split in two; its sharp, broken angles dug into the wood flooring. The crew postulated that maybe a couple teenagers broke it one night by jumping or wrestling on it or something, but when Cal examined the table, he shook his head, saying, "This is walnut, boss. You'd have to really get some acceleration and force behind you to do this."

Pablo felt a pang of sadness knowing that the Linklater Group planned on turning the storied home into a multifamily condo. It was more than "they don't make 'em like this anymore," too. There was *history* here. Sure, the Amityville Horror was a stain on the Village of Amityville, one that existed

long before Pablo arrived in the United States. Everyone knew about it. The movies. The books. There was more than enough information about whether the house was actually haunted or not.

As the events in the Village faded from the public eye and the Camp couple moved in and reported no “green goo” dripping down the walls, no congregation of flies attacking any Catholic priests (which wouldn’t happen anyway, as the Camps were devout Episcopalians), no blood pooling in bathtubs or showers, people started regarding the whole event as nonsense. The Lutzes seemed like a family looking to make a quick buck.

As Pablo got older and eventually moved out of his parents’ house, he watched the 1979 movie starring Mr. Barbra Streisand himself, James Brolin. He remembered thinking that the movie sucked, but that it had good music and at least one creepy scene: the aforementioned being an insect attack on Rod Steiger’s priest character. The sequels that Pablo found himself watching whenever they were on TV were more or less garbage, but he did like the fictionalized portrayal of the DeFeo family’s murders in the 1982 prequel/(sequel?) that followed the original.

The sound of a sudden gunshot made Pablo jump. He turned and looked toward the staircase leading down to the second floor and took a deep breath. *Just Victor using the demo hammer.*

A fly buzzed in Pablo’s face, and he swatted at it, its obnoxious *bzzzzzz* growing soft as it disappeared into the darkness of the attic. He waited for a creepy voice in the darkness to tell him to “get out,” but it never came.

He began tearing down some of the fixtures along the walls in the loft. His dad’s warning repeated in his mind as every shadow caught Pablo’s attention, inky splotches in the corners of the open, hungry space. The dust lingering in the air didn’t help matters much, and Pablo adjusted the respirator affixed to his face. He felt somewhat claustrophobic, even in the expansive space of the third floor.

A shadow moved along the far wall opposite where he stood. Pablo blinked a few times and realized it was just the light playing tricks. *Shadows don't move*, he reminded himself. He stepped toward it and knew that if this were a horror movie, this would be the moment when the shadow came to life and attacked him.

But nothing happened. Instead, Pablo studied the shadow on the wall and realized that it wasn't a shadow at all, but a *stain*. A stain that curved at the top, roughly the shape of a person. *Maybe mold*, he thought, examining it closer, running a finger along the spot. Flecks of black scraped off, foul-smelling with a reddish tint. The scent was enough to make Pablo gag for a moment, even through the respirator, before he could get a breath of fresh air closer to the windows.

Kevito jokingly called the dark mold along the walls downstairs a "mark of leprosy" when he saw it. "The Bible, boss. Oldest mold remediation document in the world. Leviticus. '*He shall then look at the mark on the seventh day; if the mark has spread in the garment, whether in the warp or in the woof, or in the leather, whatever the purpose for which the leather is used, the mark is a leprous malignancy, it is unclean.*'"

Pablo didn't put much stock in Kevito's musings. He just wanted to get the job done and get out of what many believed to be the most haunted house on the East Coast.

It is unclean...

The music from below drifted upward, and Pablo steadied himself, thinking of the soft notes as a kind of lifeline to his crew throughout the house. He could hear them working. All except Cal who was in the basement. Kevito taking a sledgehammer to the walls, Memo using a pry bar in a bathroom, Victor using the demo hammer on the brick wall in the kitchen.

Breathing hard, he wiped his forehead with his shirt sleeve and shook some of the dust and debris from his hair.

Hello...

Pablo...

As if the words were whispered directly into his ear.

He spun quickly, expecting to see Kevito or Cal behind him. Instead, he saw nothing. Just the dim converted attic of the home, now coated in shadow.

The stain remained, a contrast of darkness against faded wallpaper in the shadowy space.

“Hello?” Pablo called into the darkness.

Nothing.



DURING LUNCH, the men sat scattered either in the cab of Kevito’s pickup truck or along the curb opposite the house. Kevito had been sent to the Noshery with the order written in Cal’s perfectly legible block script. Somehow, he still managed to mess up Pablo’s bologna and cheese with mayo on a hero.

Instead, Pablo picked at a ham and Swiss on rye.

“Sorry, boss,” Kevito said. “I don’t know what happened.”

“S’okay, amigo,” Pablo shrugged. He’d be starving by the end of the day. “I’m gonna go back in and get some teardown going on the second floor. Cal, if anyone comes by and complains about the guys eating—”

“I’ll take care of it, boss. You want some help in there? I don’t mind skipping lunch today,” Cal said.

“All good. I’ll see you guys in a bit, yeah?”

Kevito repeated Pablo’s words in Spanish to Victor and Memo. They nodded and gave him a thumbs-up. Victor and Memo were mostly quiet, but they’d mentioned earlier how dark the place was, that light from the windows didn’t seem like enough, and said they’d bring portable work lights the next day.

Pablo wrapped his barely-picked-at sandwich and placed it on the driver’s seat of the truck before slamming the door shut. He turned to the house and started across the street, spotting the foot-long *No Trespassing* sign the Camps put up, now lying in the overgrowth of the hedge wall that separated the property from the road. Reaching into the bush to clear the sign from the

underbrush, Pablo felt the sting of something biting into his hand. The hedge wall had grown thick and prickly, vines clawed their way from inside the bush, desperate for light, moisture, and attention. Pablo drew his hand to his mouth, unconsciously sucking the blood. The taste of copper flooded his mouth, even though the wound itself was no worse than a scratch.

He dropped the broken *No Trespassing* sign on the lawn, depressing a section of tall grass. Shaking the bandana in his back pocket, Pablo tied his pricked and bleeding hand. At first, he couldn't be sure, but then he heard, over the birdsong and hiss of the cicadas, the sound of a sharp metallic creak.

Looking up, he watched as the front door of the house opened slowly on its own, hinges squealing as the light of early afternoon failed to penetrate the shadows within. Instinctively, Pablo stepped closer, tightening the bandana on his hand. He pushed away the tall grass that stood between him and the door. Segments of gray-yellow weeds grew between the paving stones that once served to welcome visitors to the front door.

Walking up onto the steps, Pablo could make out the kitchen in the back right corner of the house, sunlight struggling to break through dusty windows. The front door was actually on the side of the house, as the entire structure was a sideways rectangle. The dining room was barely visible to Pablo's right. He turned back toward the driveway, where he could see Cal beyond the hedges, eating lunch and chatting with the crew. "Guys, did you leave the front door open?"

Either Pablo's words didn't actually escape his lips, or the crew couldn't hear him. "Guys?" he repeated. But instead of Cal or Kevito answering him, Pablo was met with the sound of a great inhalation of air from within the house. It reminded him of going swimming back home in El Salvador, emerging from the glistening ocean and gulping for air.

He closed his eyes and braced himself, a shudder surging its way up his spine. He'd seen the movies. He'd read Jay Anson's book about the storied home. But the voice in the attic. The

sound of someone...something swallowing air. The darkness that seemed to grow the more time the crew spent inside.

A dead place.

Staring up into the house, Pablo could see a pair of glowing yellow-gold eyes peering out from a doorway. He thought for a moment that they were just a glare from one of the upstairs windows, but no. They took shape in the dark of a room that had once belonged to one of the Lutz children. He closed his eyes, squeezing them shut hard, as if he could somehow make the image disappear.

When he opened his eyes and glanced around the upstairs landing of the home, he saw a little boy, face pressed between the balusters of the stairs. Blank. Pale. Emotionless in every way. But not the eyes. There was hunger there. Deep and ravenous.

Shadows emerged behind the boy. Stains like the one in the attic. They grew, pouring themselves over the walls. First two. Then three. Then eight. Then far too many to count.

"I can't see this," Pablo said, turning from the house and walking down the steps, across the yard, down the driveway to his truck. He turned to Cal. "I'll be back to pick you guys up later, I'm not feeling well. I'll send another set of hands to help out."

"What's wrong, boss?" Cal asked, placing a hand on Pablo's shoulder.

"Nothing. Everything's fine," Pablo said, climbing behind the wheel. His fingers fumbled with his keys, but eventually he started the engine. Kevito closed the cab of the truck, and in seconds, Pablo was soaring down Ocean Avenue, glancing nervously in his rearview at the crew he'd left behind.

He didn't know it at the time, but it would be the last he'd ever see of them.