



SOUNDS
OF TERROR

QUICKREADS

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When he first saw it, Philip Sanchez couldn't believe it. He was standing in front of his grandparents' mobile home in southern Florida. About 100 feet ahead, the earth itself seemed in motion! "What is that?" he gasped. "What's happening?"

Abuelo Ramon, Philip's grandfather, laughed and said, "The crabs are coming in from the mangrove. They come in just so far, and then they return. It is a nightly ritual for them."

Now Philip could make out the small spider-like crabs, waving their little claws in the air. "That's *weird!*" he said with a shudder. He didn't like living here in southern Florida.

He didn't like the bugs or the humidity. And he certainly saw nothing to like about these crabs!

But Philip's only parent, his mother, had been sentenced to 18 months in jail for drug dealing in Los Angeles. There'd been nowhere for Philip to go except here with his grandparents.

"Don't worry, *nieto*," Grandfather said, "the crabs are harmless."

It grieved Grandfather greatly when Philip's mother went to prison. But now he concentrated on helping Philip. "This is a good place, Philip. No gangs or drugs—like where you were. The people here are good," he said.

"It wasn't all bad in the *barrio*," Philip said. "I had lots of good friends. I never got into the bad stuff." Sadly, Philip's mother got mixed up with drugs through her boyfriend, Ricky. She didn't know what she was getting into. Not until it was too late, and the police snapped handcuffs on her.

The sun was going down. *Abuela* Carmen

smiled at Philip and said, “Look, honey. The sky is so pretty here.”

“Yeah,” Philip said. He appreciated his grandparents’ kindness. But he missed Los Angeles and the *barrio*. Only one good thing had happened here so far. That was meeting Cindy Bigelow, a pretty junior at Pine River High School.

As darkness fell, shrill sounds came from the mangrove.

“It’s only the wildcats,” *Abuelo* said.

But Philip heard something else. He heard the distinct sound of a woman crying bitterly. He looked at his grandparents. *Abuela* looked distressed. “Oh, that’s nothing,” she said. “It’s just a strange wind that blows through an empty home at the end of the street. Nobody pays any attention to it.” But as his grandmother spoke, Philip saw her lower lip trembling.



“It sure doesn’t *sound* like wind,” Philip said. “It sounds like some poor lady

who's really hurting."

"It's the wind," *Abuela* said firmly. "Come on in now. I'm making tamales, the kind you like, *nieto!*"

Grandfather looked thoughtful as they ate dinner. "We never knew the people in the green house—the one that's empty now. That's where the wind makes the strange noise. But the other people in the park are very nice."

After dinner, Philip went out for a walk around the trailer court.

"Watch out for the no-see-ums," his grandmother warned. "You know—they are those tiny swarming insects that get in your nose, your eyes—even your mouth, if it's open!"

As Philip walked, moonlight flooded the park. He glanced at the neat rows of mobile homes and their tidy little yards. Colorful flowers grew everywhere. He couldn't hear the wildcats anymore. Maybe they'd finished their argument and finally gone to bed.

But, as Philip drew closer to the green

home, he heard the woman's loud sobbing again. Her voice floated from the open windows. Philip stared at the run-down home. It was surrounded by dead hibiscus shrubs. The voice inside rose and fell like the waves of the ocean. First her sobs would rise to a crescendo like the high tide. Then the loud sobs would die down, and there would be soft weeping—like water lapping the sand. To Philip's ears, both sounds were cries of pure terror.

Philip's mother cried like that when Ricky would beat her. Philip would clench his fists and want to die! But he knew that if he tried to interfere, Ricky would just hurt Mom more.

The abuse never did stop, because Mom wouldn't call the police. Even when Ricky hurt her so bad she had to go to the hospital. Then she'd make up lies about falling down the steps. It didn't end until both Ricky and Mom were arrested. Ricky was dealing big time. He got eight years in prison.

It broke Philip's heart to see his mother going off to prison. But at least Ricky wasn't

hurting her anymore. There would be no more black eyes and swollen jaws, no more concussions. She wouldn't have to spend so many nights rolled up in a pathetic, sobbing little ball in her bed, crying from pain and humiliation.

Now Philip stood in the darkness, staring at the green mobile home. He couldn't help wondering: Was another bad man getting away with hurting a woman in there?



Philip remembered what his grandfather had told him. “*The people here are good.*”

But that wasn't true of anywhere. There were both good and bad people in all places. Back in the *barrio*, even amidst the gangbangers and dealers, there were plenty of good, hardworking people. And, though he was just 17 years old, Philip knew there had to be people like that here in Pine River.

As Philip stood there, a silver-haired lady came out of her mobile home across

the street.

“Hi,” Philip said. “Do you know if anybody lives in this green house?”

The woman shook her head. “No, it’s abandoned. What a mess! They ought to just burn it down!” she said.



When Philip got to school the next morning, he looked for one of the two friends he’d made since coming here. One was a Vietnamese boy named Moon. The other was Cindy. He saw Moon first.

“You liking Pine River any better?” Moon asked as the boys walked down the hall to their first class. Moon’s family had come to the United States when he was just a baby. Now he was a regular American kid. He was a good shortstop for the Pine River Patriots.

“I don’t know. Last night there were a million crabs at the park, and wildcats were screaming—” Philip said.

Moon laughed. “I think all the wild life around here is cool.”

Philip wanted to tell Moon about the crying woman, but he didn't want to seem foolish so he didn't say anything.

At lunch, Cindy asked Philip where he lived. He felt self-conscious about mentioning the park. He knew that her family lived in Little River, a fancy development. "Oh, near the river," he said. He didn't want Cindy to think he was "trailer trash."

"You told me you live with your grandparents," Cindy said. "Are your parents divorced?"

Philip felt uneasy. "Dad's dead, and Mom's, uh—sick, but she'll get better," he said.

"My mom's dead, too. She drowned when I was eight," Cindy said. "Dad married my stepmom when I was eleven. She's okay. She's a real estate agent. She got Dad into that business, too. They make lots more money than Dad did selling water softener systems."

"That's great," Philip said.

"So you live near the river, huh?" Cindy pressed. "Say—you don't live in that big mobile home park, do you?"

Philip's heart sank. Cindy's house was in a gated community! Now Philip was supposed to confess that he lived in that tacky mobile home park. Cindy would know that most of the people there were poor. Nearly all of the older people were living on pensions. And lots of the younger families were on welfare. Philip felt like he *was* trailer trash. He was sure that once Cindy found out, she wouldn't want to be his friend anymore.



Philip couldn't lie, though. "Yeah, I live in the mobile home park. But, when Mom gets better, we'll be moving to a real house."

"I used to live in that park, too," Cindy said, shocking Philip. "My mom and dad lived there when they didn't have much money. It's not a bad place. I made lots of friends there. But it was sad after Mom died—so we moved."

Relieved, Philip grinned back at her. "Yeah, there's lots of wildlife around there, too," he said.