

# Weaving Nightmares

Written by Laura Cuizara

“Double feature today!” Toto shouted from the hotel entrance.

Nico reached into his pocket, his fingers tracing the coins. He was close to having enough for a ticket. Just then, the front bell rang; someone needed help with their bags. Nico smiled—with the tip in his hand, he took off down the street to find Toto. At fourteen, Toto was the eldest of the group and worked every afternoon alongside his father at the town’s bakery.

“We’re going today!” Nico gasped, out of breath. “I finally have the money.”

The group was buzzing with excitement. The hand-painted billboard was a masterpiece that caught everyone’s eye. Every day after school, they took a detour just to see what films were coming. Nico’s eyes lit up when he saw the drawing of Kalimán. He had listened to the hero’s adventures on the radio for years, picturing every scene in his head.

Toto looked up from the bread trays he was cleaning. Without stopping his work, he said, “Catch you guys at the theater at six. I just need to stack the firewood for tomorrow.”

That evening, the group met outside the cinema. From the street, they could see a large poster with a demonic face and the chilling silhouette of a girl levitating above her bed. People nearby spoke in low voices, whispering that the movie was cursed. That only made the boys more curious, though Nico felt a chill up his spine. Getting into the theater wasn’t easy since the movie was restricted, but Toto had “connections” who let them slip inside on one condition: they had to sit in the back row.

The theater was packed. Even though it was only a modest single-screen cinema, to Nico, it felt enormous. But what truly took his breath away was the screen; he had never seen anything like it. As the lights dimmed, voices faded into silence. Nico leaned forward, eyes wide, waiting. Then, the screen came to life.

In their remote town, television was a rare luxury. Nico remembered watching *The Lone Ranger* at Don Cosme’s house when he had gone to pick up supplies for the hotel where he worked; Now this image had colour, everything looked too real—too close, like it could reach out of the screen. As the horror movie started, the mood shifted; fear was in the air. To mask it, the boys cracked jokes.

“If my mother caught me talking like that, she’d use the kinsacharaña to beat the demon out of me,” one whispered.

“That’s nothing. My grandma makes that same face when she’s deep in prayer,” another shot back, drawing shaky laughs.

Nico forced a smile, but every scene sent a chill through his gut. When he saw the girl's bed shaking violently and her head twisting until it spun a full 360 degrees to the sound of snapping bones, his heart leaped into his throat. The joking stopped. Nico squeezed his eyes shut, but it was too late. The images were already burned into his mind.

As they left, the group walked home together along a dirt road. The night was dark, with only a few weak lights from distant houses. Miguel broke the silence in a low voice.

"Did you guys know Doña Lupe has become a Condenado?" he whispered. "My uncle saw a fresh hole at her grave, as if something had clawed its way out."

"What's a Condenado?" Nico asked.

"A soul in debt," Miguel explained. "When someone sins darkly, the holy ground spits them back out. They are trapped in a body that won't rest, condemned to walk searching for someone to help them settle what they owe."

"My mom says that's why you never walk alone near the cemetery," another added. "She also says a Goblin lives in the old well behind the church."

When Toto started talking about the headless *Chola*, Nico reached his limit. He said a quick goodbye and ran home. He tried to slip into the kitchen unnoticed, but his mother was waiting. She scolded him for being out so late. The air was filled with the sweet aroma of *wira-wira* as she prepared an infusion to ward off the Andean cold.

The water bucket was empty, so she told him to go to the well. Nico puffed out his chest to summon courage and grabbed the bucket and a rusted lighter. The communal well was only thirty meters away, but tonight it felt much farther.

The crunch of his steps kept him on edge and when he reached the mouth of the well, the story of Goblins haunted his mind. He lowered the bucket with trembling hands, begging the heavens that nothing would crawl out. Suddenly, a towering figure emerged from the shadows, draped in a ghostly white veil. Nico let go of the rope; the bucket fell back into the well. He tried to run, but his legs were frozen. He tried to scream, but no sound came out. Paralyzed, he squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the worst.

"HEE-HAW! HEE-HAW!"

A loud bray shattered the silence. Nico opened his eyes to see Panchito, the neighbor's donkey, tangled in some laundry.

"You nearly scared me to death, you stupid animal!" Nico yelled. Heart racing, he untangled the sheets from the donkey's ears. "Now you're helping me lug this bucket home after what you just did!"

When Nico returned home, his mother was preparing to leave. She was carefully wrapping the youngest brother and hoisted him onto her back, securing him inside the aguayo.

“Your aunt is in labour,” she said. “Watch over your brothers until I get back.”

Nico was left alone with the little ones. He hurried to his mother’s room so they could all sleep together. Like someone preparing a trench, he placed a candle and the wooden crucifix on the table. He huddled between his siblings, watching the flame until he finally fell asleep. But in his mind, nightmares were weaving themselves.

He woke up with a jolt. The candle had gone out, and the room was pitch black, save for a thin sliver of moonlight. Near the door, he sensed the silhouette of a man in a hat. Then, just a few feet from the bed, he saw two yellow eyes floating in the dark, staring at him.

Nico stopped breathing. A chill crawled up his spine as if ice water had been poured down his back. It’s a demon, he thought, his skin prickling with terror. He turned his head with difficulty; his younger brothers were deep in sleep, oblivious.

He was frozen, but looking at his siblings, he knew he had to act. With courage he didn't know he had, he reached for the crucifix by the bed. His fingers brushed the wood. There it is! he thought. He gripped it like a shield.

“The power of Christ co...!” he managed to stutter, his voice cracking.

In that split second, the yellow eyes flashed. Before he could finish the phrase, he panicked and hurled the crucifix at the eyes before diving under the blankets.

‘Meowww-hiss!!’ A long yowl echoed through the dark. It wasn’t a hellish growl—it was just an angry cat.

Nico let out a long breath. The fear began to fade. The shadows in the room shifted, losing their shape. The "man in the hat" was nothing more than sacks of potatoes from the day's harvest, topped with his mother’s wide-brimmed hat. The room began to clear, as if a veil were being lifted, exposing the reality of his home.

His heart settled into its normal rhythm, and his palms stopped sweating. He lay back, his body relaxing. Beside him, his younger brother—still deep in sleep—curled closer and wrapped an arm around Nico’s, seeking warmth as if he knew that, by his brother’s side, nothing bad could ever happen.

Nico knew the fear was gone for tonight. He also knew it would return on some other dark night. But something was different now: he felt capable of facing it.

## What is a Kinsacharaña

IT'S A TRADITIONAL ANDEAN WHIP, BRAIDED FROM LEATHER. IT IS DEFINED BY ITS THREE TAILS



## What is an AGUAYO



Images drawn by Laura Cuizara and designed in Canva.