

“LA LLORONA”



The ghostly woman who wanders along canals and rivers crying for her missing children, called in Spanish La Llorona, "the Weeping Woman," is found in many cultures and regions. Her story includes some strong similarities to that of Medea. She is perhaps the most widely known ghost in Texas. Her New World history goes back to the time of Hernán Cortés and links her with La Malinche, the mistress of the conquistador. As tradition has it, after having borne a child to Cortés, La Malinche, who aided in the conquest of Mexico as a translator for the Spanish, was replaced by a highborn Spanish wife. Her Aztec pride plus her jealousy drove her, according to the story, to acts of vengeance against the intruders from across the sea. Sometimes the story is told about a Spanish nobleman and a peasant girl.

Some years ago, the story goes, a young hidalgo fell in love with a lowly girl, usually named María, who over a period of time bore him two or three children. She had a *casita*-a little house-where the young man visited and brought his friends, and in almost every way they shared a happy life together, except that their union was not blessed by the church. His parents, of course, knew nothing of the arrangement and would not have allowed him to marry beneath his station. They urged him to marry a suitable lady and give them grandchildren. Finally he gave in, and sadly he told María that he must marry another. But he would not desert her, he promised-he would still take care of her and the children and visit them as often as he could. Enraged, she drove him away, and when the wedding took place she stood veiled in her shawl at the back of the church.

Once the ceremony was over she went home, and in a crazed state killed the children, threw them into a nearby body of water, and then drowned herself. But when her soul applied for admission to heaven, *el Señor* refused her entry. "Where are your children?" He asked her. Ashamed, she confessed she did not know. "Go and bring them here," the Lord said. "You cannot rest until they are found." And ever since, La Llorona wanders along streams at night, weeping and crying for her children-"*Ay, mis hijos!*" According to some, she has been known to take revenge on men she comes across in her journey. She usually dresses in black. Her face is sometimes that of a horse, but more often horribly blank, and her long fingernails gleam like polished tin in the moonlight.

The story of the Weeping Woman is told to youngsters as a "true" story of what might get you if you're out after dark. But the most frequent use of the story is to warn romantic teenage girls against falling for boys who may have nice clothes and money but are too far above them to consider marriage. The Cortés variant is said to be used in the late twentieth century to express hostility to European culture. La Llorona's loss is compared to the demise of indigenous culture after the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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