

# La Llorona

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Where is she? I can't remember where I placed her. I thought I left her next to my bag of meth, but she's not there. I run to my small room and check the busted wooden crib next to my mattress. It's empty.

"Rosa? Rosita? Where the fuck is my baby?" I cry in desperation, hoping she'll respond. But she won't. She's only a month old, or has it been two already? "Cry! Laugh! Do something you stupid child!"

And then I hear it, coming from outside. A soft echo of a cry slithers in through the window. That's not Rosa. It's a grown woman. I step outside and realize the woman is sobbing loudly. I wonder if any of the neighbors will come out, but the dark houses look sound asleep. My bare feet pick up the cold dirt and carry it with me as I follow the cry. I see her at the end of the street, sitting on the edge of the river. Her boney bare feet are clean, as they're brushed by the stream.

"Rosa?" I yell, even though I know the woman isn't her, but I'm scared. I clumsily dance my bruised brown legs over to her as if they're broken. I know she's close enough to hear me. I yell louder than her cry. "Rosa!"

The woman stops. I feel my heartbeat do the same. My hands shake as I get closer and her image clears up. She wears a white lace veil over her head of long black hair with a matching white gown. I only see her from behind, but I see she is cradling something in her arms.

"Are you looking for something?" she asks me without turning around.

"Yes, I..." I hesitate. I feel stupid saying it out loud. "I've lost my child."

I stop a few feet behind her. Too scared to get any closer. She stays silent, all I hear is the gentle stream of water splash against the rocks. Spla, splash.

"Have you seen her?" I ask.

Spla, splash.

I try to peek at what she holds in her arms, but she keeps moving them. She looks back suddenly and I jump back in fear. Her skin is so tight on her face she looks made of bone. Her eyes are the darkest black I've ever seen. Still, she looks me up and down. I see her judge me. I see her wonder why I'm barefoot, why my legs are bruised, why I lost my child. I see her wonder if I love my child. But I know I love Rosita. That's why I'm looking for her.

When I look behind the woman's frightening face I see the blanket-wrapped baby in her arms. I see Rosa. The woman must know because she gets up immediately, clutching my baby while she turns to face me.

"You're not a mother," she says. And I see the truth in the darkness of her eyes.

"Give me my child," I cry, falling knees first on the dirt.

"Rosita is my child," she says.

I see her take my child and throw her in the river. I jump in desperately waving my arms but all I find is the blanket Rosa was wrapped in. She's lost my child again and now she's gone. I cry in the river as I dive down in search of Rosa. Underwater, I remember my beautiful baby. I remember the warm water washing her soft skin. I get out of the water and run back home. The pebbles and ants pinch the dirty soles of my feet. I run to the tub and pull her out. The water still feels warm, but her body doesn't.

"Rosa!" I cry. I shake her small body, but she stays still.

She took her.