The Weeping Woman
La Llorona

Here is the best-known story in the Southwest. And it is known all over Mexico as well. Wherever you hear it, the teller will swear that it happened in that very town, so no one can say where it really took place or whether it truly happened at all.

Este cuento es el más conocido de todo el suroeste de los Estados Unidos. Es muy conocido en todo México también. Dondequiera que lo oigas, el cuentero va a jurar que ocurrió por ahí cerca de donde vive él, así que ya es imposible precisar dónde tuvo lugar o si sucedió de verdad.
Then one day a man who seemed to be just the one Maria was always talking about came to her village. His name was Gregorio. He was a cowboy from the llano east of the mountains. He could ride anything. In fact, if he was riding a horse and it got well trained, he would give it away and go rope a wild horse. He thought it wasn't manly to ride a horse unless it was half wild. He was so handsome that all the girls were falling in love with him. He could play the guitar and sing beautifully. Maria made up her mind that this was the man she would marry.

But she didn't show how she felt. If they passed on the street and Gregorio greeted her, she would look away. If he came to her house and played his guitar and sang, she wouldn't even come to the window.

Before long, Gregorio made up his own mind. "That haughty, proud girl Maria," he told himself. "That's the girl I'll marry. I can win her heart!"

Everything turned out just as Maria had planned.

Maria's parents didn't like the idea of her marrying Gregorio. "He won't make a good husband," they told her. "He's used to the wild life of the plains. Don't marry him."

Of course, Maria wouldn't listen to her parents. She married Gregorio. And for a time things were fine. They had two children.

But after a few years, Gregorio went back to his old ways. He would be gone for months at a time. When he returned, he would say to Maria, "I didn't come to see you. I just want to visit my children for a while."
He would play with the children and then go off to the cantina to gamble all night long with his friends and drink wine. And he began to say he was going to put María aside so that he could marry a rich woman.

As proud as María was, she became very jealous. She even began to feel jealous of her own children, because Gregorio paid attention to them but ignored her.

One evening, María was standing out in front of her house with her two children beside her when Gregorio came riding by in a carriage. An elegant woman sat on the seat beside him. He stopped and spoke to his children, but didn’t even look at María. He just drove on up the street.

At the sight of that, something just seemed to burst inside María. She felt such anger and jealousy and it all turned against her children. She grabbed her two children by the arm and dragged them along with her to the river. And she threw her own children into the water!

But as they disappeared with the current, María realized what she had done. She ran along the bank of the river, reaching out her arms, as though she might snatch her children back from the water—but they were long gone.

She ran on, driven by the anger and guilt that filled her heart. She wasn’t paying attention to where she was going, and her foot caught on a root. She tripped and fell forward. Her forehead struck a rock, and she was killed.

The next day her parents looked all over town for her. Then someone brought the word that her body was lying out there on the bank of the river.

Her parents found her, but because of what she had done, she couldn’t be buried in the sacred ground of the cemetery. Her parents buried her there on the riverbank where she had fallen.

But from the first night she was in the grave, she wouldn’t rest at peace. She would rise up and go walking along the bank of the river. They saw her moving through the trees, dressed in a long, winding white sheet, the way a body would be dressed for burial in those times.

And they heard her crying and crying through the night. Sometimes they thought it was the wind. But at other times they were sure they could hear the words she was saying: “Aaaaiiiii...mis hijos.... ¿Dónde están mis hijos?... Where are my children?”

She went all up and down the banks of the river, through all the arroyos to the base of the mountains and back down.

Night after night they saw her and heard her. Before long, no one spoke of her as María any longer. They called her La Llorona, the Weeping Woman.

And they told the children, “When it gets dark, you get home. La Llorona is out looking for her children. She’s so crazy, if she sees you, she won’t know if it’s you or her own child. She’ll pick you up and carry you away! We’ll never see you again.”

The children heed that warning. They may play along the rivers and arroyos during the daytime, but when the sun sets, they hurry home!