

# LA LLORONA

Alcina Lubitch Domecq

Translated by Ilan Stavans

*Alcina Lubitch Domecq, born in Guatemala in 1953, lives in Jerusalem. Her father was sent to Auschwitz by the Nazis because he was Jewish. He survived, but the terrible experience in the concentration camp left a deep mark of depression on him. In her work Lubitch Domecq tries to understand the experience her father went through, and the life he led as an immigrant to Guatemala City. The following story is a variation on the Mexican folk tale of the Weeping Woman, who is forced to abandon her children. In this haunting rendition La Llorona becomes an immigrant.*

This rendition of the mythic tale of La Llorona takes place in Ciudad Juárez.

She was, as everyone knows, a betrayed woman. After her husband left her without a single centavo, La Llorona and her three children tried to cross the border to the United States. She sold all her belongings in the town not far from Chetumal, the capital of Quintana Roo, where poverty reigns. A distant relative in Arizona (a nephew of her stepfather), to whom she had sent a desperate word, replied several months later saying he wasn't wealthy enough to provide her with the tickets but if she moved to *el otro lado*, the other side, he knew of a *niñera* always helpful to Mexican immigrants where she could place the kids during the day while she herself worked as a cleaning maid. He offered her the name and phone number of a *coyote* who could help her in the task of deceiving the U.S. border police.

The prospect of cleaning other people's dirt didn't appeal to La Llorona, but she was very hungry and so were the kids.

She decided to risk the mercy of strangers by traveling to Ciudad Juárez in whichever way she could.

Along the way people were helpful, but only to a certain degree. They offered an occasional *tortilla con frijoles* and gave them a ride on the back of a truck. The journey was extremely difficult. By the time they arrived, the second child, only three years old, had contracted diphtheria. La Llorona buried him in an unnamed pit somewhere in northeastern Nuevo León.

She decided not to give up, though. She contacted the *coyote* from a public phone, but he wanted to charge her \$750. It was an astronomical amount; she didn't even have a small fraction of it. She begged him by telling the whole truth, that she had not even a roof where to stay overnight and that her children were dying of malnutrition. But the *coyote* hung up the phone. Many people came to him with the same litany.

On the street La Llorona's children were crying out loud. She began to ask for *una limoznita*, a small charity. After a while a passer-by gave her a few pesos. He whispered to her ear that she could get a few more by selling herself once or twice that night. She sobbed in desperation.

Then she saw a *feria*, a town fair. An idea crossed her mind. She would use the remaining money on amusement rides for her children, and while they were on them, she would run away. The thought overwhelmed her with remorse, but she had no other alternative.

And thus, when the kids were at *la rueda de la fortuna*, the Ferris wheel, La Llorona escaped without looking back. That morning, she had seen some Mexican peasants being taken in the direction of the border and she followed that same road. When she reached a fence, she jumped it and moved to a nearby river. Soon after she heard dogs barking and saw a helicopter.

## ***Alcina Lubitch Domecq***

A day later La Llorona was returned to Ciudad Juárez. In punishment for abandoning her children, the Almighty condemned her to wandering eternally in search of them.

Her shrieks are still heard at dawn in the city.