

“The Tragedies of La Bruja”

By Rosemary Juarez

Preface

My strong curiosity with folktales started as a child and has followed me all the way to adulthood. I believe it is a topic of great interest, especially to those that grew up in similar environments to my own. There is a certain charm these folktales have within my community that is also seen in other communities: Bigfoot in the Pacific northwest, the Loch Ness Monster in the Scottish Highlands, and the Appalachian monsters in the eastern U.S. communities are all strong cultural identifiers. The mystery and unknown aspect of cryptids place these stories within the paranormal genre.

This subject matters to me a great deal because it represents my overall passion for my Mexican family’s long standing culture and history. Growing up and reflecting on these tales, I realized that they bring me closer to my heritage. Thus, I wish to resurface these stories and spread them to a wider audience. One of my inspirations for this endeavor is Guillermo Del Toro, who himself is the genius behind plenty of dark-fantasy stories. My goal is to create a scary yet grounded reality with my tale, where anything is possible, such as the existence of these paranormal beings.

There had lately been a sudden increase in infant mortality in the small pueblo of San Pedro Tlalcuapan in the 60’s. It terrified people, believing there was some horrible beast out there in the world, mercilessly taking the lives of the innocent. The unspeakable horrors that would soon occur in this small pueblo would leave behind decades worth of trauma, fear, and uncertainty.

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The bright moon hung low in the sky, casting an eerie glow over San Pedro Tlalcuapan Chiautempan, the home to many indigenous people in the 60’s. This largely catholic settlement had no room for the rampant modernization of the world surrounding them. Their calm, idyllic life was the life they knew, and change was just too scary of a notion. However, lurking within this seemingly tranquil pueblo was a dark secret. In Tlaxcala, there were tales of a dangerous

creature hiding deep in the nearby forest. Elders warned those to stay away from the demonic entity, as it was said to be none other than *la bruja*, or a blood-sucking witch. These monsters would cast spells on all of the individuals within a household, in order to prey on an innocent newborn's blood in the dead of night.

This terrible legend had been passed down through countless generations of families. Most of the time, it was whispered in hushed tones, as several families had already experienced the loss of a child. Once it had occurred one too many times, the people started devising means of avoiding *la bruja*. Superstitions ran deep, and the villagers went to great lengths so they could protect their children. While taking refuge in the light was the most fool-proof way to ward off *la bruja*, not everyone could afford keeping candles lit all throughout the night. As added means of protection, doors were locked tight, windows were sealed shut, and mirrors were placed everywhere; it was believed that the witches feared their own appearance, so any reflection would repel them. One of the most common reflective objects used were scissors.

As the sun set in the night sky, a blanket of tense fear shrouded the entire pueblo, causing people to hurry back home. In this poor community, in particular, having candles lit all night was much too expensive, so they all risked eventually inviting *la bruja* into their homestead. Once the last candle went out, the anxiety would then set in. Mothers would cradle their baby, leaving their breast exposed if their baby ever went hungry during the night. Parents and children would all sleep in the same room, keeping close watch of their youngest. From here on out, all they could do was sleep and wait for morning.

For one specific family, they did not know it yet, but their night would imminently devolve into terror.

The whole family had fallen asleep, and nothing but the sound of an owl hooting

permeated the air. However, the owl's hoot was suddenly cut short, and everything went still and quiet. Everything seemed peaceful to the unknowing eye, but in the shadows, evil loomed.

Unfortunately, this poor family had been chosen for tonight's feast.

Within seconds, the house was enveloped in a purple aura, as a hazy spell made its way towards the inhabitants' noses. As each person inhaled the spell, they each fell into a temporary coma, their bodies not moving an inch once they were in slumber. As everyone fell dormant, a shadow opened the door with ease and entered.

The witch was unlike any creature ever seen before. It had the body of a turkey, which glowed with a spiral center. It was like the sun, bright and blinding, only there was no warmth to be found, only a feeling of cold dread. It panned around slowly, looking at each family as it ominously floated by. The glowing orb finally came to a stop when it spotted its victim. The infant lay with its mother, its head resting on her chest. With a sickening smile, the witch leaned over the baby's crib, her bird-like nails extending into razor-sharp claws. The witch swiped the infant away and brought it close to her beak, as she then prepared her monthly rituals.

Meanwhile, in her deep slumber, the young mother found herself immersed in a blissful dream. She stood in a beautiful river, surrounded by her daughters, as they all washed their laundry together. Laughter filled the air as they talked about their day and discussed the latest gossip of the town.

Everything seemed perfect, as if time itself had frozen in this perfect moment. The mother's heart swelled with joy as she watched her family, savoring this beautiful moment.

But for the briefest moment, the mother felt a sudden, inexplicable wave of anxiety.

In the midst of her family's laughter, the mother was abruptly startled awake by the piercing wale of her baby. Her eyes snapped open, and she jolted upright, her heart racing with a mix of

confusion and panic. The remnants of her dream still lingered, its peacefulness disrupted by her child's cry.

Disoriented, the mother looked around the pitch-black room, and realized her sense of sight was completely gone. She quickly searched for her baby, which was nowhere to be found in sight. She then heard the cries of her baby, coming from the kitchen. These sounds of anguish continued, growing louder and more desperate with each passing moment. As the mother stumbled out of bed, her senses were heightened by a maternal instinct to protect her child. At the same time, though, a strange sensation occurred. She heard whispers in her mind, which seemed to float through the air, pleading with her to stay in her pleasant space, to ignore the pained cries of her child. Even so, the mother fought back, and her fierce determination took hold. Her sheer sense of love overpowered any temptation of sleep or rest. She refused to let her child suffer any longer.

As panic and adrenaline set in, the mother cast aside the whispers and rushed towards the kitchen. When she ultimately made it, her heart sank at the sight she saw: The witch was mishandling her wailing baby, gripping strongly at its face, as tears rolled down the infant's flushed cheeks.

A battle then ensued. The mother lurched for her baby, getting a tight grip on it, but the witch was too strong and yanked the child back away. then grabbed the mother's long braid, and held her up in the air, as if daring her to make another futile move. The mother panicked, as she saw the *la bruja* drawing ever closer to her baby.

In a last-minute effort to save her child, the mother spotted a nearby pair of metallic scissors. She reached out for it, and she cut her braid clean through, freeing herself from the witch's grip. Using the same scissors, she began viciously stabbing *La bruja*, only to

discover it hardly affected the demonic entity. The witch ignored the mother's valiant effort, as it then pierced the baby's skin.

Hearing her child wail in indescribable pain, the mother nearly lost her grip on the scissors. Maintaining her strict hold, she next aimed for the witch's head. The scissors impaled the witch's eye, causing her to abruptly stop. *La bruja* dropped the baby, and it began to cower away from the mother. Confused yet determined to keep her child alive, the mother continued shining the scissors in the witch's sight, taking one step closer to it at a time, until the witch disappeared from the house, at last.