

THE WEEPING WOMAN

by Kristina Sisto Kindel

CREATURE(S): *Banshee* | **LEVEL:** 2
CW: *Domestic violence, suicide, infanticide*

SYNOPSIS

This is a reclamation of the classic Mexican horror story designed to keep young adventurers wary of their curfews, La Llorona. In this tale, adventurers will face perilous encounters with beings that lurk in the shadows, and uncover what might have happened to drive a woman long ago to transform into a nightmarish legend. *The Weeping Woman* is designed for level 2 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The town you are staying in has been on high alert since a broken dam upstream routed a fork of the river through a long dried-up bed. You hear from the bartender at the local tavern that a pair of tiefling children have gone missing. They had been out late at night, playing by the riverbed, and have not been seen for a full day now. Their parents, Marna and Rik, have offered a reward of 150 gold for their safe return. So far, no one in the town has ventured into the woods across the old riverbed, stating that an old curse had returned with the water.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure is based on the Mexican horror legend of La Llorona, the woman who searches the earth for her children who drowned in the river. She lures curfew-breaking children into the water and leads them to their deaths. There are many different iterations of the story, and the players will be given multiple story options throughout the adventure. The adventure is not designed to have a right or wrong version of the story, but your players might discover more about themselves the more stories they hear about the monster, and what they choose to believe.

CHAPTER 1 – THE FOREST

Looming dark on the opposite side of the newly flowing riverbed, an old forest rises into the sky. A few stones stick out and form a path across the lightly trickling river. A path passes through the town square. No one is willing to hold a long conversation, and the party gets the sense that the whole town is afraid of something that they are unwilling to discuss. The path to the old riverbed is well worn, but overgrowth is beginning to take over. Mud splatters on stones crossing the slow trickle of the old river lead into the dark forest. There are a few stone stacks on the other side of the water, and a small shovel and bucket. This is a place where children play. A deer trail leads into the woods. A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) overhears the following bits of conversation:

“That old riverbed is where all the trouble started. Back when I was young, there was this old tale of a witch who wandered the bank, searching for her children that she drowned long ago when she saw her man with another woman. They say she can’t cross to the other side without them. She done killed them though, seems to me that she has no business crossing over at all!”

“Have you heard it? The crying? I heard it once, when I was a child. I never thought I would have to hear it again... chills me to the bone, it does.”

THE OLD HUT

The ruin of an old home stands crumbling in a glade of overgrowth. The door is covered in winding vines of ivy and moss crawls up onto the lower stones of the hut. A candle burns low in the single window. A faint sob comes from the house, and the door is ajar, with a wide beam that has fallen off the roof covering the entry.

- **INSIDE THE HUT.** The beam is rotting and falls apart when interacted with. Three beds, one large, and two smaller stand in the one-room hut. A fireplace full of ash is in the corner, and a writing desk is tipped over next to it. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a cornhusk doll tucked into one of the small beds, and a tarnished ring in a box near the desk. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the desk or the beds also reveals a small leatherbound journal that has slipped under one of the beds.
- **UNDER THE BED.** If characters reach beneath the bed and across the symbol hidden there (a crudely carved symbol of a face with tears streaming down the cheeks, mouth wide open) have them make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the adventurer takes 1d6 psychic damage as sobs fill their head, and is considered frightened until their next short or long rest.
- **ITEM EFFECTS:** If the characters take the items from the hut, they will be haunted with versions of the story of La Llorona throughout their adventure, depending on where they are in the world. Characters must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw, or suffer the item's effects.

The **ring** is activated in the hut. *Effect:* A profound sense of guilt.

The **doll** is activated on the island. *Effect:* A deep sense of loss.

The **journal** is activated once the party begins a short or long rest. *Effect:* An overwhelming sense of fear.

- If they wish, they can lean into the emotion and find out the story anyway.

RING

As you hold the ring in your hands inside the hut, your party members see your eyes roll back into your head as you begin to sob, heavy cries that shake your body to the earthen floor. Before your eyes, like a vision, you see a dark haired woman, young in years, clad all in white. The vision flashes forward to the hut you are in. You see the same woman, embracing a young man as he leaves for the day, the rising sun painting the sky a dark red, their two children playing in the hut behind them. Flashing forward more, you see the woman bent in grief over an empty double bed, ripping a letter to shreds. Flashing forward a final time, you see the man and another woman holding the children, and the dark haired woman screaming from the window of a mule-drawn wagon with iron bars on the windows galloping away from the hut. You awaken with an ache in your chest and tears on your face.

DOLL

A wave of comfort and familiarity washes over you as your party sees you collapse to the ground among the rest of the dolls scattered on the island. The cornhusk doll from the old hut has found its way into your hand from where you stored it, and it smiles up at the party. Visions start to swirl before your eyes, a warm plate of simple food passed to you, your tiny hands grasping at some flatbread. A smiling woman with dark hair tousles your hair, and turns to a pot on the fire. Her clothes are torn, but looking down at yourself, you see your clothes are carefully mended and patched. The vision speeds forward. Your body is shivering but you are drenched in a sheen of sweat. Blearily, you see her, also shivering, holding out some broth for you and your sibling next to you to drink. She is pallid and thinner than before, begging you both to eat. The vision speeds forward and you are next to a spot by the river, looking from a birds-eye view as she sobs alone on the ground, and lays a pair of corn husk dolls on top of two tiny mounds of dirt. You wake with dry earth in your mouth.

JOURNAL

As your vision begins to blur towards rest, you begin to hear a faint crying — dry, heavy sobs. The visions that come to you are violent and disturbing, a woman running from a man, hiding her children from him under the beds, in the town temple, in the reeds of the river. You hear him scream at her, “You will never be enough! You are worthless to me!” You see visions of her, bruised and weeping, searching the reeds. “My children! Come back to me! It is over! My children, where did you go?” You awaken with a gasp, tears salty on your face, lungs racked with crying.

THE FOREST PATH

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals an overgrown path into the dark forest. Following the path for a mile, there are little signs of life other than the buzzing of flies.

- **CREATURES.** One **will o' the wisp** suddenly emerges from the forest, blocking the old path. (This is the spirit of one of the many children claimed by the banshee over the years.) Just off the path, two giant centipedes crawl out of the brush.
- **COMBAT.** The **centipedes** do not engage unless the adventurers venture off the path. After the defeat of the will o' the wisp, the players find the path leads to a glade with trees growing in a circle, and a small garden at the foot of the largest one.

DEVELOPMENT

A small garden grows orange marigolds and white sage at the foot of a large tree, one of six lining a dimly lit glade. The canopy provides a great deal of cover and shade, but the rustling of the leaves above seems strange in the windless forest. Something thuds into the ground near to the bottom of the tree, followed by another. Javelins made of branches tied together, crude and dull, stick out of the soil. The rustling continues above you.

CHAPTER 2 — THE PATH TO THE RIVER

The creature in the tree is an elderly human woman, probably in her seventies, lithe and strong. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she is terrified. She retreats into the upper branches of the tree after flinging her two javelins and shouting.

THE WOMAN IN THE TREEHOUSE

- **INTERACTING WITH THE WOMAN.** The woman in the tree is more scared than hostile. She is a **druid**.
- **THE WOMAN'S HISTORY.** When asked her name, she says she cannot remember. Her story is detailed in the next column:

"Scared. Woman took me when I was small. She cry at water and I go to help. She grab my hand, she had no eyes, only white. She scream and dragged me to water. I was so scared I make vines that kept her still while I ran into woods and climb this big tree. I make house, eat plants. Keep birds. No scary woman come here. Tree is kind to me and my birds."

"I remember... long ago, a woman who was warm told me a story. A poor woman met a rich man. She wants to spend all her time with him, so leaves her babies behind in the night. When she return in the morning, they are in the river. She cried so hard by the river for them, she stayed there forever. Still trying to save them. Crying all she does."

THE TREEHOUSE

IF THE CHARACTERS ATTACK THE WOMAN: Depending on what your players decide to do about the woman in the treehouse, they could miss out on a story opportunity to hear the woman's version of the tale. If they end up attacking the old woman and entering the treehouse, it contains the following effects:

- Artwork covering the walls, all depicting a dark haired woman with white eyes, reaching out a clawed hand and screaming. These seem to have been painted over a period of many years. The earliest are reminiscent of the crude carving beneath the bed in the hut.
- Dried meats and bowls of berries surround the circular space. Everything is foraged (confirmed with a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check). There are birds feet drying in the window, and a large mortar and pestle in the center of the room. There are woven mats that serve as bedding in the side of the treehouse near the window. There are sixty-eight carved tic marks next to the bed, signifying the years she has been in the treehouse.

THE BROKEN DAM

Before reaching the edge of the forest, the party hears the sound of rushing water. Upon exiting the dark of the forest, they come face to face with the broken dam. The party cannot see the other side of the river.

- **THE BOAT.** At the shore is a boat that glows with an eerie light. If the players get in the boat, proceed to the *Island of the Dolls*. If the players follow the river, they see a cave on the other side. The spectral boat follows them as they move.

DEVELOPMENT

Emerging from the rushing current is the faint outline of an island. Through the fog are trees bearing large, strangely shaped leaves. The ground is strewn with large rocks, and overgrown by gnarled weeds.

CHAPTER 3 — THE FAR SHORE

As the boat crests the shore, you see that the rocks are not rocks. The leaves are not organic material. The island is covered in dolls. Small, large, made of various material, some with faces that gaze up, unblinking; others with no face at all. They litter the ground, propped against trees and hanging by their limbs from the branches. Whoever put them there has been doing so for many years.

ISLAND OF THE DOLLS

- **EXPLORING THE ISLAND.** Upon exploring the island, characters keep running into dolls. They are disturbingly everywhere. As they crest the hill toward the other side of the island, the characters notice a glinting under a pile of logs.
- **COMBAT.** There are 3 dolls on top of the log pile with the glinting underneath. One is a **mimic**! When characters inspect, have them roll initiative and be surprised.
- **THE LOGPILE.** A successful DC 11 Strength check topples the logs, revealing a treasure horde. The party discovers jewels and coin stashed under the logs, worth approximately 300 gold. They also recover 2 healing potions.
- **THE OLD TREE.** There is an old tree next to the log pile. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals an idol carved from pure precious stone. A

DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that this is a protection idol to an ancient goddess of childbirth, who weeps for the babies lost in childbirth, including her own whom she abandoned long ago; she has power to give guidance for those mothers lost on their path to the other side.

Instead of collapsing, the character who holds the idol feels it pulse with power, the statuette glowing in their hands. Read or paraphrase the following:

Everything shifts, the island is the same, but devoid of dolls; covered in lush vegetation with large flowering blooms. A group of women, adorned in armor and feathered capes approach. They carry shields and spears and are adorned with skull masks and crowns of feathers. They drop to their knees in front of a stone pile. Placing an identical carved idol on the stones, they begin to pray. *“Goddess, bless this warrior’s tomb. Fallen in the battle of childbirth, walk with her and her children to the far great beyond. Do not let go of her hand and let her walk alone, bearing with her the sun.”* The warriors will not interact with the party, and as they stand by the tomb like guards, and the players are once again on the Island of the Dolls. The idol is warm and comforting in their hands, it seems to draw them to the boat, once again at the shore.

THE CAVE

The boat takes the party to the final encounter, which is under the stone bridge, in a natural cave. Water flows freely out of a natural spring in the cavern, and a chill permeates the space. A dense fog rolls out of the depths, slightly obscuring the rocks that create the floor of the cave.

COMBAT. The party encounters the **banshee** and her two **shadow children**. They can choose to fight her, but she does not show them mercy unless they present her with the precious stone icon. Read or paraphrase the following:

IF THE CHARACTERS DEFEAT THE BANSHEE THROUGH COMBAT:

With a final scream, what had once might have been a human woman reaches out a clawed hand and grasps the air where the shadows had been.

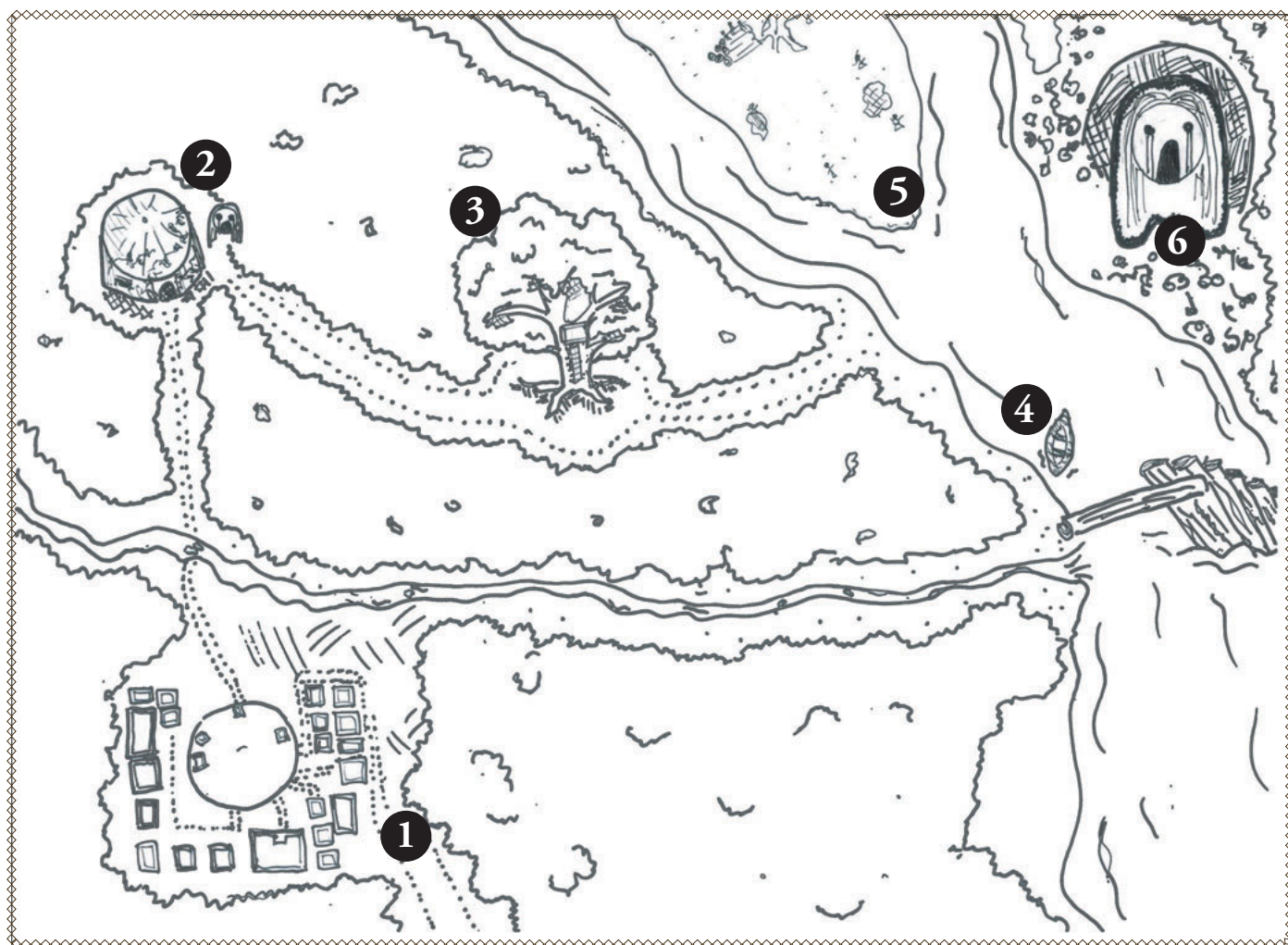
(If they took the idol:) The idol in your bag grows heavier as she dies, and when you pull it out, the bright polished stone is now dull and the face has morphed to a familiar face: tear streaked cheeks under black eyes and a gaping mouth.

IF THE CHARACTERS OFFER THE IDOL TO THE BANSHEE:

A glimmer of recognition crosses her drawn face. Looking to her right, she sees the shadows, who retreat to her side. With a strange smile, she reaches her arms to them. “My... children...” her voice rasps, tired from years of screaming. She is drawn into the idol as the shadows swirl amorphously around and then into the idol as well. The statue becomes heavy and the shine dulls. The face has morphed to a familiar face — tear streaked cheeks under black eyes and a gaping mouth.

DEVELOPMENT

A faint sobbing is heard from the back of the cave. Scrabbling hands emerge from a small cave in the wet rock. Two children, dirt smeared and tear-streaked emerge from the dark. They run to the characters, crying for their parents. The characters recognize them as Marna and Rik’s children!



MAP BY KRISTINA SISTO KINDEL

MAP LEGEND:

- 1. THE TOWN
- 2. THE OLD HUT
- 3. THE GROVE
- 4. THE BOAT/BROKEN DAM
- 5. THE ISLAND
- 6. THE CAVE

CONCLUSION

With tears of joy upon being reunited with their children, the parents of the village thank the party in between throaty sobs. A woman dressed in a deep red feather robe comes forward and rewards the party with 150 gp.

“Thank you for the safe return of these children, and for braving the curse. What happened? How did you escape the witch? We have always feared her return, some part of her has always been here. What did you find?”

REWARDS

Each adventurer receives the treasure they collected on the island, as well as 150 gold from the village matriarch. If there are healing potions left over, the players can keep those. If they keep the enchanted items, know that if the banshee is defeated, they no longer have any properties.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

All acknowledgement to the indigenous people of Mexico whose story La Llorona comes from, and the storytellers who carry the leyenda to their time, place, and tradition. May her story continue to be known, and may all the stories of women made to be monsters by the world get their day in the sun. Muchas gracias also to my playtesters; Aaron, Brian, Chris, Chris, Elena, Isaac, Laura, Morgan, and Peter. Te amo.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristina lives in Portland, OR with her husband, Isaac, and her sweet dog, Lady Sansa. When she is not playing or running copious amounts of tabletop RPGs, she fills her time with other creative pursuits such as singing, acting, knitting, and cooking.