



# La Lechuza



María J. Estrada

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## Acknowledgements:

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## Foreword

This short story is crafted especially for my Newsletter Readers! It is based on a traditional folk tale about a *lechuza*, a witch who can turn into an owl. I wanted to write a story that focused on a little told aspect of this tale.

One question I have always grappled with is why women would turn themselves into owls in the first place. What would compel a woman to make a deal with the devil to turn into an animal? I often wondered if in the old days, flying was more convenient than driving.

In this retelling, you will meet a protagonist who is battling cultural pressures on his manhood. On this night, he will encounter the impossible, but will he act as society wants him to, or will he tap into a different nature to solve his problems?

I hope you can immerse yourself into this work. Feel free to share it amongst friends and encourage them to read my books and subscribe to [my newsletter](#)

## *La Lechuza*

WHEN HIS GUN JAMMED A SECOND TIME, Oscar knew it was time to go home. It was well past midnight on a lonely Saturday night, which made the hunt more challenging, but the moon was full, and there were jackrabbits bounding everywhere. One even had the nerve to run over his heavy boot. He tried to stomp it, kicking his left leg, hard, and falling on some thorny branches.

“Damn it!” he shouted on impact which raised errant hoots from a distance. He got up grateful no one witnessed his failure.

That night, Oscar trudged through the citrus orchard of Yuma, Arizona. It was a warm evening, too warm, but it was peaceful, and he needed solitude. This particular orchard was a testing facility for the University of Arizona. It was guarded by his childhood friend Fidel. In fact, he had filled out the job application for him in English, because unlike many of his friends, Oscar had gotten his associates degree in business and could write well, and like many of his friends, Fidel was drinking on the weekend. The two men had an agreement, and if he shared his kills and kept an eye on the orchard while Fidel was carousing, Fidel didn't care what Oscar did as long as he didn't pluck the oranges.

Oscar wasn't stupid enough to pick those oranges, yet he liked to go there since the orchard wasn't as frequented, and more animals made their homes there.

In the distance, he saw his white truck, bright with the moon's rays. It was practically new, a couple of years old, yet he had been able to buy it due to being promoted eight months ago to foreman in a *maquila* across the border. The owner, Señor Robles was a prankster and called the company *Chonies Inc.*, a subsidiary of Hanes. While most of his friends were struggling in the lettuce fields and orange groves or some dead-end job, he had a cushy desk job. His workers loved him because he managed to get them breaks, even bathroom breaks without them being docked pay. He also gave them days off and managed to get them small raises, equal for both men and women.

At 35, Oscar was tall and lean, almost five foot seven, with thick black curly hair and olive colored skin. He looked like a popular movie star, Johnny Jackson, from the U.S. and most of the women at *Chonies Inc.* swooned over him. They often brought him food to eat, which he tasted complimenting every cook and being fair to taste all the dishes, so no one would get her feelings hurt. Still, he only had eyes for his wife Diana, a short muscular woman with rare curly red hair. She was *picosa*, a feisty woman who was constantly chasing after him, even though she was four months pregnant. That is where the problems started, when she first got pregnant.

First, as if he were cursed, she started accusing him of cheating calling him a *perro* and horny bastard. Later he would find out it was the hormones, and he tolerated these insults, but after the third month of her pregnancy and non-stop verbal assaults, something unusual happened. Oscar simply could not get it up anymore, which made her even more suspicious that he was sleeping with someone else.

He wasn't sure what had caused the decline in his virility, but whether he was working hard in the shower, or she was expertly handling him, there wasn't so much as a quiver. Oscar wasn't about to tell his friends about his troubles, and he was overly embarrassed to talk to his doctor. At one point he considered going to see the local *curandera* for some homemade remedies, but tongues would wag if they saw him visiting her dirty trailer. Besides, that was close to witchcraft, and witchcraft was a sin.

He sighed heavily and let the warm night air surround him, as he closed his eyes. Oscar was finally alone, away from his four children, and her. The distant hoot didn't startle him this time, *What were so many owls doing in the grove?* He took one last look at the truck and refused to go home without a kill. He was no impotent loser, by God! Oscar tried to unjam the gun one last time and heard a satisfying click.

As he loaded a bullet in his trusty stiff .22, a loud shriek made him lose his nerve. He almost fired, as a large bird flew close to his head. It was an enormous *lechuza*,

unusually dark, almost black, and as it flew by, he felt an odd coldness. Instinctively, Oscar crossed himself and nearly ran but he had a hankering for rabbit stew. Besides, his wife had such terrible morning sickness that she could not clean the rabbits, which would give him half a day outdoors without incessant nagging.

He tensed his body and went deeper into the grove with resolve. His muscle tensed as he saw a fat rabbit in the distance. He aimed and fired, but to his horror, the gun jammed again.

“Just stop,” he said, “You’re lucky you didn’t blow your damned hand off.”

Oscar shined a flashlight at it and analyzed the animal. The bulge under her belly was unmistakable. He cursed and gave up. Oscar wiped the sweat off his brow with the red kerchief from last Christmas, a fine gift from her. “What am I going to do?” He looked up saying a prayer to God and asked for the impossible. Just then, he noticed the plump owl overhead. It, too, appeared to be pregnant.

He wasn’t sure why he did it, but he began to say the Our Father backwards. It was a trick his mother had taught him years ago, to protect him from witches. He said the prayer with true faith three times. He waited, and nothing happened, but a few seconds later, there was a frightening crash, as something heavy fell to the ground.

Oscar almost had a heart attack, but he was too young for that. He poised the gun and aimed it at the naked figure. *Now what, you idiot?* he thought.

He looked around, but no one was near the grove. Oscar inched closer to the naked woman. She was face down, obese with expansive buttocks. The rest of her was covered with long white hair. She stirred, and Oscar had to use his strength not to run away like a *cobarde*.

A loud groan made him speak, "I have you in my power, witch!"

The woman sat up clumsily and began to plead, "Let me go, please."

He was expecting the begging but not the English with a Michoacán accent. He was anticipating pathetic pleas, but what he wasn't ready for was the image of the expansive cock between her legs. Oscar looked away quickly and realized the woman's chest was flat.

Oscar gasped, "What?"

"Please," said the gruff voice, "Let me go! I have grandchildren, here, in the U.S. I was just visiting. Please!"

The face was unmistakably male, and Oscar was surprised at how large the balding man was; the *viejo* was well over 250 pounds. He was supernaturally white almost translucent, and Oscar wondered if that was because of the magic. His face looked very much like the 5 o'clock Anglo anchorman with a straight nose.

"Are you white?"

"No! I am like you, just a family man. Please, let me go."

Oscar waited for the right moment. After a few more minutes of supplications, the stranger finally said, "I'll grant you whatever you want."

Unlike his mother, Oscar was not as well versed in lore. She had taught him the prayer and when to say it right below a lechuza, but not how to let a trapped witch go because if he did find one as a child, he was supposed to fetch his father.

“Then what?” he asked.

“You let me go,” whimpered the man beginning to cry.

“Hmmm,” he said, “Anything I ask?”

“Riches, women!” said the corpulent man crying in earnest now. *-Por favor-* he persuaded, “They can’t know you trapped me! I’ll be killed.”

Oscar poised his gun and looked around. There was no one else there.

“Very well, then,” in a small voice, as the witch strained and leaned in, Oscar explained his problem.

The man paused for a few moments, then began to laugh. His belly jiggled in a disgusting display.

Oscar was taken aback, “Why are you laughing at me?”

It cackled loudly and beckoned him to come forward, but Oscar would not be moved. In the recesses of his memory he remembered something else his mother taught him *Witches are not to be trusted. Even when they grant wishes, they always cause trouble.*

The witch grew frightened again, “I am so sorry. I laugh when I am nervous.”

But Oscar knew the witch was lying. He had laughed at his manhood. He thought about the situation

and made a decision. Oscar said the Our Father three times, correctly.

The witch gasped and without a word transformed back into an owl. At first, his head began to shrink; then, Oscar watched mesmerized as thick hair emerged all over its ugly skin, becoming feathers. The man was folding in on itself until he became the size of the owl. The feathers poked and smoothed out. Oscar recalled how once he had seen a movie about a wolf man. In it when the man transformed, the shift had lasted five minutes. This change happened so rapidly, he doubted the owl had ever been a man.

Slow and lethargic it began to fly as though it were learning how to do so for the first time. It turned away from Oscar going south towards Mexico.

That gave Oscar enough time to aim. Now, hitting a moving target was tricky, which made hunting rabbits fun. But this creature was so large, he aimed ahead in the flight's path with ample time. He also knew God was on his side when the gun finally fired. The sound filled the night scattering rabbits and other small creatures everywhere.

He didn't miss. Oscar froze, waiting to see if it would turn back into a man, but an owl it would remain.

He got close to it and kicked it with his foot. The bullet nearly blew the *lechuza's* head clean off. Oscar finally got a kill.

"You shouldn't have laughed at me asshole." He looked around and sought more owls, but he was alone

again. For a moment, he thought about taking the *lechuza* and eating it to see if it would cure him, or stuffing it to brag to his friends, but that would be foolish.

Oscar whistled a happy tune, as he walked to his truck, and he smiled wide as he realized something was working downstairs again. He would have something to share with his wife after all.

## About the Author

DR. MARIA ESTRADA holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from Washington State University. She grew up in the desert outside of Yuma, Arizona in a barrio comprised of new Mexican immigrants and first-generation Chicanos. Drawing from this setting and experiences, she writes in numerous genres from serious fiction to horror, and often spins out poetry. She is a tenured faculty member in English, creative writing being one of her favorite classes to teach, and lives in Chicago, Illinois with her wonderful, supportive husband, two remarkable children, and two mischievous cats. Her other publications include *The Long Walk (with Paranoia: The Corrido of Andrea Quinta)*, *La Bruja in the Orchard*, *Wolf Trek* and *La Bruja del Barrio Loco*. You can learn more about her other books and writing happenings at [barrioblues.com](http://barrioblues.com).

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Thank you, Readers! I am honored by your  
support.

-M. Estrada