

ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

More Spooky Texas Tales

Doc Moore

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“I would never have thrown her eyeballs in the fire if she hadn’t taken the dwarf.” So says the young narrator near the beginning of “The Woman with Cat’s Eyes,” one of the tales in this collection of legends and ghost stories as retold by a pair of storytellers. Ten short pieces, each accompanied by a black-and-white illustration, make up this slim volume.

Such traditional figures in Southwestern lore as “La Llorona” and the *chupacabra* work their mayhem in these pages, along with a skinwalker, more traditional ghosts, and the aforementioned woman who changes her eyes for her cat’s before she goes out at night to prowl and steal trifles from her neighbors. Authors Tingle and Moore have drawn on well-known tales and made up a few of their own to entertain children, and the stories range from scary to gross (“Mary Culhaine,” in which the title character defeats an evil creature from the graveyard by feeding its victims bloody oatmeal) to cautionary (“The Gypsy Drum,” in which two sisters engage in more and more wrongdoing till they lose everything they hold dear).

The most poignant tale is “Two Graves,” which tells of a runaway youth’s encounter in a haunted house with a ghost still searching for his long-missing wife; the most intricate is “Catfish and the Owl,” which draws on Choctaw lore to spin the tale of an owl seeking revenge on a small boy after a childhood quarrel. “The Monkey’s Paw” has its version here, although the original is far scarier. And kids will laugh at “Screaming Banshee Cattle of the Night Swamp,” although adults will probably find it silly.

This is a nicely made edition, with spiders and their webs decorating the top outside corner of each page; the illustrations are very attractive, and will hold children's attention. The stories are interesting, but probably come off far better in live retellings. They lack an immediacy that draws in the reader. Still, they offer glimpses into a diverse group of legends and lore that children don't often hear in a society that transplants families and disrupts oral tradition. It's a good beginning book for children who beg for spooky stories, or who will read them on their own. For ages 9-12.

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