

THE COOSHMAH
IS COMING

by

Alaina Markey

Author's Purpose

The author's purpose is to create a story for children to recognize cultural identity and support with Louisiana folklore and storytelling. This fictional short story brings light to the legend of the Cauchemars or "Cooshmah" as spelled in the piece. The appropriate reading grade level supports 3rd grade Louisiana Believes standards in ELA and Social Studies.

The tone of the story is persuasive, to encourage children to be kind and loving to those around them. This story is an informational work of fiction to uncover one of the rich legends of folklore in Louisiana storytelling.

Dedication

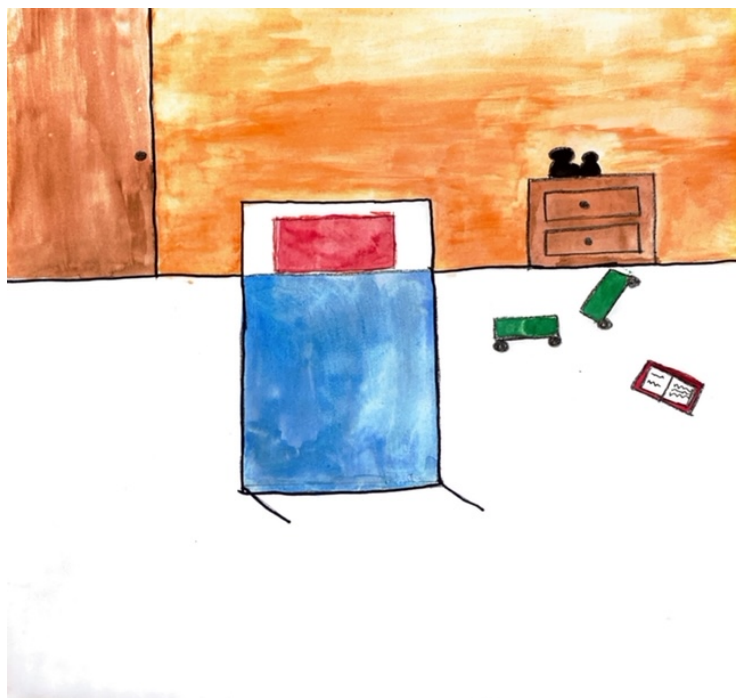
*I dedicate this short story to my father,
Kevin Markey. Thanks for raising me to be a kind and
creative person.*

Vocabulary

Cauchemars (Cooshmah): (N.) The spirit of an unbaptized soul that causes one nightmares and sleep paralysis. One may choke, suffocate, and scratch those sleeping with a bad conscience (guilty and sinful people).

Nightmare: (N.) A disturbing or terrifying dream that is associated with negative feelings and emotions.

Witch Riding: (V.) Southern term for sleep paralysis, when one is conscious but an able to move.



The Cooshmah is Coming

It's Saturday. The only day that I can relax and have fun at home. My dad is going to be taking my older sister to her stupid soccer game. So, I have the house all to myself. Well, not really all to myself, I have a babysitter. Mrs. Jenkins, my babysitter is a really old and wrinkly woman who falls asleep every few hours. With Mrs. Jenkins as my babysitter I'm basically home alone.

Mrs. Jenkins is super weird. She always tells these crazy bedtime stories about glowing fairies who confuse people or a werewolf man. One time she even gave me a little wooden statue of two boys saying they would warn me of the Cooshmah; a devil-like black shadow who rides on the backs of guilty people in their dreams. The legend of Cooshmah comes from Louisiana Folklore, Mrs. Jenkins told me.

I tried to tell my dad about how strange she is. He was very upset with me for calling an old women mean names, but I don't care. I

think that I don't need a babysitter, but he always gives me a stern look that stops me from trying to argue anymore.

Mrs. Jenkins arrived at our house this morning at 11:00 am. She immediately filled the room with her old women perfume that made me want to throw up. I hate when she babysits.

"Hello Dylan. How are you doing this morning?" Mrs. Jenkins asked as she placed her bag of yarn next to the end of the couch.

"I'm okay." I responded and went back to the kitchen to finish eating my breakfast. My dad always makes a huge breakfast when my sister has a soccer game. Dad says he cooks breakfast, so my sister Diamond doesn't play a game on an empty stomach, but I think it's because he likes her more than me sometimes. You see, Diamond never gets punished and I always get punished. Dad has taken away my iPad, toy cars, and even some books I like to read sometimes.

I sat down at the round kitchen table and watched the chaos of my sister packing her soccer bag and my dad explain everything to

Mrs. Jenkins. Occasionally, I stabbed the eggs on my plate with the fork but never put them into my mouth. I don't like eggs, but Diamond does.

“Alright kiddo, your sister and I are going to head out. We'll be headed back from the restaurant around 2:00 pm,” my dad said, as he rushed Diamond out of the door.

I stood up and watched carefully as they packed everything into the red van and headed towards the Acadian Middle School. As I was staring blankly out the window, I wondered why my dad never asked to take me to the restaurant with them. I know I said I didn't like going to Diamond's games, but they always go get tacos without me. I like tacos too. This is why I am sure that my dad likes Diamond more than me.

I went back to the living room, where Mrs. Jenkins was making herself comfortable. She looked like a bird making a nest as she pulled out everything she needed to crochet. Mrs. Jenkins was the first person to show me crocheting. I think it's a weird old lady thing. She just sits in front of the TV pulling yarn out

of her black bag that has a picture of a cat on it. I have watched her many times come over and make blankets, scarves, and even headbands that she gives to my sister and me. I never actually wear the items she makes me, but Diamond does, she says they are good luck.

I sat down on the reclining chair my dad bought a few years back. Although it was getting old, the chair was still as comfy as the day he bought it. I grabbed the remote and changed the channel to Nickelodeon hoping to catch some funny shows. As SpongeBob was running from the Flying Dutchman something weird started happening. I just wanted to watch some cartoons and next thing I knew this *thing* appeared and stood in my way of the TV. This *thing* looks like a black shadow creature. It seemed to have no face, yet I know it was looking at me. I turned to look at Mrs. Jenkins who was fast asleep with half of a blanket in her lap. The room felt colder and dark. I no longer wanted to be in the room with that creature. So, I ran.

Running. I just keep running. Although I feel like I have been running in circles, I just

can't stop running. I don't know what I did to upset this *thing*, but it seems to be very angry with me. I'm running out of options, better yet I am running out of places to run to.

I ran through the kitchen and turned around to see the thing was following me. Slowly it was floating towards me like a witch riding a broom in the Halloween movies. The creepy shadow was still following me, so I decided to run up the stairs to my room. On the last step I stumbled and fell. I looked back and there it was. Hovering up the stairs reaching out to me.

"What are you?" I screamed at the thing as I crawled towards my room. It's the first door down the hall so it wasn't that far from the top of the stairs.

I tripped while I was getting up and ran inside my own room just as the shadow made it to the top of the stairs. I slammed the door and locked it while huffing and puffing from all the running. As I was trying to catch my breath, I felt something bang on the door, so I jumped into my bed. Old lady smell swarmed me, and I noticed that my dad must have put

Mrs. Jenkin's blanket on my bed. Taking Diamond's word, I pulled the "lucky" garment over my head.

"He's scared too," a faint hushed voice said.

"Well, that's what he gets for being mean," said another voice that trembled as the door continued to rattle and thud.

I peeked my head from under the covers to see a not so scary surprise compared to first shocker I received in the living room. The wooden statue that Mrs. Jenkins gave me after telling one of her weird bedtime stories was looking back at me.

"Are y-you t-t-talking about me?" I asked the statue.

"Well, who else would we be talking about?" The taller of the two statues replied.

He was whispering as though he didn't want the thing outside of my door to know he was talking to me. The taller boy-like statue somehow felt older than me. I am 8 and a half and will be 9 on June 5th, so he must be at least

9 or 10. He seemed like an older brother to the smaller statue that was very nervous.

“Come on we have to tell him the rules,” the smaller statue said as he was eyeing the door that was almost wobbling off of the hinges.

“Rules? What Rules? Do you guys know what that thing is? Why is it chasing me?” I rambled off all the questions in my head.

“Of course, we do. She put us here to watch you.”

“That thing is Mrs. Jenkins?” I questioned.

“No Dylan. That “thing” is the Cooshmah,” the younger statue mumbled.

“How do you know my name?” I whispered back in a hurry. These statue boys just weren’t answering my questions fast enough.

“We are the Cooshmah’s little boys. We know so much about you because we watch over you and all the good and bad things you

do in your life. I have to tell her all the bad things you do,” the taller stated.

“I tell her of all the good,” the smaller said.

“So, this Cooshmah thing is just following me because you two told her when I was being good and bad. Isn’t that like Santa Clause? Why is the Cooshmah so scary then?” I question them again.

“We don’t have time to tell you everything,” said the older.

“The Cooshmah is coming!” they yelled in unison.

“The Cooshmah is coming and you still have to promise,” the pair stated scarily in unison again.

“The list of all the bad things you have done is getting way longer than that of the good. The Cooshmah told us to warn you before she got here.”

“What do you mean she is coming? She is already here!” I yelled.

The statue boys seemed to not hear me anymore as they continued to speak in unison about how the Cooshmah is on her way.

“You have to promise to start being good. Stop being so mean to those around you. You have to stop bullying the kids at school and start being kind to your father and sister. You even have to be nice to Mrs. Jenkins when she comes to babysit. All these people want to love you or be your friend and in order to do so you have to stop pushing them away with your mean actions,” the younger one said as the room got freezing cold and the shadow thing I now know as the Cooshmah slammed at my door.

“Okay. Okay I promise. I promise to be kind. I will stop being mean to those around me. I promise!” I yelled at them hoping that they would get the Cooshmah to stop coming.

I abruptly sat up and looked around me. I no longer was in my room under the blanket Mrs. Jenkins made for me. I was back in Dad’s comfy recliner in the living room. I looked around for the shadow like creature and she didn’t seem to be there anymore. The house

wasn't as cold as it felt when the Cooshmah was here a minute ago. What happened?

“Morning sleepy head. You slept all day.” I turned my head to see Mrs. Jenkins looking at me with a now almost complete blanket.

“Your dad and sister still haven't made it back yet. Something about Diamond's team winning and taking the whole team out for tacos,” she stated as she brought her attention back to the needle and yarn occupying her hands.

Confused, I got up and ran to my room. Wanting to check for the statue boys in my room. Sure, enough they were there but they no longer had eyes and mouths to look and talk to me.

“Dylan, We're home!” yelled Diamond.

“And we brought tacos!” My dad said as I ran back down the stairs to see them in the kitchen.

“Dad, Diamond I missed y'all. I'm so glad you won your game. You guys brought

me tacos!” I exclaimed as I pulled both my dad and sister into a warm hug.

My dad and sister looked down at me weirdly since I usually don’t like to hug them. I also have never congratulated Diamond on a win before. I definitely have to start being nicer to them.

“Thank you for the tacos. Did you bring enough for Mrs. Jenkins? Can she stay and tell me a bedtime story?” I asked my dad.

“Oh yeah sure. You don’t want her to go home immediately like all the other times she comes to babysit?” my dad questioned.

“No. I want her to stay. She tells the best stories and I want to ask her questions.” I explained.

Mrs. Jenkins walked into the kitchen and my dad told her to sit down and eat dinner with us. We all sat down at the round kitchen table and ate as many tacos as our heart desired. Diamond told us about all of her star moments in the game today and we all just kept talking and laughing together; like a family. I got showered up and ready for bed. I

was super excited to ask Mrs. Jenkins all the questions I had about the Cooshmah. I even wanted to know more about those glowing fairies and the werewolf man.

“Goodnight, Dylan. Thanks for letting me stay to eat tacos with you. I’m going to go home now. See you next time.” Mrs. Jenkins said as she pulled up the covers, she made for me up to my neck.

“Wait Mrs. Jenkins do you know the story about the Cooshmah?”

“Oh yes. The Cooshmah is...” She started her story.

From that Saturday on I tried to make sure my good list was longer than my bad one. I never wanted to see the Cooshmah again. The statue boys never talked to me again, but I feel like they were very proud of me. I made friends at school after I apologized to my classmates for being so mean. Diamond even convinced me to try out for the boys’ soccer team at my school because the sport isn’t stupid like I used to think. Mrs. Jenkins comes over just for fun now so she can tell me all of the crazy awesome stories that her grandma

used to tell her as a child. I can now spend Saturdays relaxing and having fun with my small family. I promised the Cooshmah I would start being nice and I plan to never break it.

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Author's Biography

Alaina Markey is an Early Childhood Education major at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. This story was written to persuade readers to be kind and compassionate towards others. One of Markey's favorite quotes is "Treat others how you want to be treated". The main character Dylan experiences a growth curve where he learns to be kind to those around him. It is most important to be caring to family and friends. Keeping the Cooshmah away seems like good motivation for children to be kind and respectful to everyone.