A Lenda da Iara (The Legend of Iara)

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A Lenda da Iara (The Legend of Iara)

Brazilian Legend (Supernatural Non-Religious)

Informant:

Israel (pronounced Is-hi-el) is a native Brazilian, native to the state of Amazonas. Manaus is the capital of Amazonas and is a fairly large city though less developed than other cities in Brazil. I met him as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints when I was serving in Manaus. He is a member of that church as well. He has indigenous heritage and strong indigenous features. He loves to tell crazy stories and is a great story teller. He is a bit of a jokester and likes to make fun of things. However, the stories he tells are ones that he believes in completely. He believes very strongly in the supernatural and seems to be well in tune with the strange things happening around him. He is in his early thirties, is married, and has two young children under the age of six. In the time that I have known him he has moved between a lot of different jobs. Though he and his family have very humble means, they are happy.

Context:

Israel told me this story when I asked him for some legends from the Amazon Rainforest. He told me over Facebook messenger using voice message. He spoke in his native Portuguese and I transcribed and then translated into English. However, just a funny note, Israel likes to joke about speaking English (he can only say a handful of phrases like “My name is…” “Speak English…””) so he jokingly said that he could come here to Utah State and tell us the stories in English. This particular legend is one that he was often told by his grandparents who lived in the villages in the jungle.

This legend has to do with The Meeting of the Waters, which is an important landmark in the Amazon because it is where the Amazon River (known as the Solimões River in Brazil, the Amazon River referring to where the two rivers mix) and the Black River merge. Because of the composite of the water there is a long stretch where the black and brown waters don’t mix and the river is split into two colors.

Text:

Portuguese:
Agora vou te falar um pouco sobre uma outra lenda da Amazônia, que fala sobre a lenda da Iara. A lenda da Iara tem origem indígena popular da Amazônia, também conhecida como mãe da água. Iara é uma linda sereia de pele morena, cabelos longos, olhos castanhos, e quem vive no rio Amazonas. A minha avó, lembro que ela acostumava muito falar dessa personagem e ela disse, a minha avó e meu avô disseram que eles verem ela no encontro das águas na beira do rio Solimões e a lenda se acostuma dizer assim. A Iara era uma jovem indígena muito conhecida nas tribos do rio Solimões por ser considerada uma excelente indígena guerreira. Os irmãos de Iara sentiram muito inveja dela pois o pai dela a elogiava muito pelo fato que Iara fazia função de guerreira melhor que os irmãos. Então os irmãos de Iara sentiram um pouco de inveja dela porque ela era jovem guerreira e além de ela ser muito jovem guerreira, ela era muito bela e maravilhosa. E certo dia a Iara ouviu os irmãos planejando sua morte, porém ela resolveu matar os irmãos dela antes que eles executassem o plano. Após assassinar os irmãos dela, a Iara fugiu para os matos com medo da reação do pai dela, porém, o pai dela realizou uma busca e conseguiu capturá-la. Como castigo, por que tinha feito com os irmãos dela, o pai dela jogou ela no encontro das águas, rio Negro e Solimões. Mas, ao jogar ela no encontro das águas, eh...os peixes que ali estavam, salvaram a índia, e a Iara, ela se transformou em uma linda sereia. Só que ela encanta os homens com a beleza dela e com o canto dela e ela afoga-los. E é tipo hipnotismo. Muitas pessoas podem achar a lenda da Iara muito notório mas é isso mesmo, é real Sister Patchett [ele falou isso com muita convicção].

Então essas duas lendas estou contando para você. Se alguém tiver dúvida aí, pode falar para vim em Manaus, em Amazonas, e eles podem ver que é real, o encontro das águas e histórias reais e os antigos contam bem melhor que eu. Estou só te contando o que minha avó contou para mim, entendeu?
English Translation:

Now I will tell you a little about another legend of the Amazon, that talks about the legend of Iara. The legend of Iara has popular indigenous origins in the Amazon, also known as the mother of the water. Iara is a beautiful mermaid with brown skin, long hair, brown eyes, and who lives in the Amazon River. My grandma, I remember that she would always talk a lot about this personage and she said, my grandma and my grandpa said that they saw her at the Meeting of the Waters on the riverside of the Solimões River and the legend usually says the same. Iara was a young indigenous girl very well know in the tribes of the Solimões River because she was considered an excelente indigenous warrior. Iara’s brothers were very envious because her father praised her a lot because of the fact that Iara did the work of a warrior better than her brothers. So Iara’s brothers felt a little envious of her because she was a young warrior and more than her being a young warrior, she was very beautiful and wonderful. And one day Iara heard her brother planning her death, so she resolved to kill her brothers before they executed their plan. After murdering her brothers, Iara ran away into the jungle with fear of her father’s reaction, but, her father searched and was able to capture her. As punishment, for what she had done with her brothers, her father threw her in the Meeting of the Waters, the Black River and Solimões River. But, when he threw her into the Meeting of the Waters, um…the fish that were there, saved the indian girl, and Iara, she transformed into a beautiful mermaid. Only that she enchants men with her beauty and with her song and she drowns them. It is like hypnotism. Many people may think that the legend is notorious but it really is, it is real Sister Patchett [this was said with a lot of conviction].

So these two legends that I’m telling you. If anyone has doubt there, you can tell them to come to Manaus, to Amazonas, and they can see that it is real, the meeting of the waters and the real
stories and the elderly tell them way better than me. I’m just telling you what my grandma told to me, understand?

**Texture:**

Israel told me this story as true. The details are kind of spotty which I think is due to the medium of digital voice messages. In person, he tells much more detailed stories with more inflection and excitement. Some things also remained unclear because of his busy schedule and the distance between us.

Israel has a habit common in the Portuguese language to add the word “understand?” to the end of his sentences. Sometimes it is an actual question but mostly it is just habitual, especially because he told these stories in a voice message where I could not respond in real time.

At one point in the story, Israel addresses me directly, calling me Sister Patchett because he knew me as a missionary (my title was “Sister”). When he did this in the story, he got serious and spoke with a lot of conviction, the use of my name intensifying that as if he were calling my complete attention to what he said.

He told me two different legends at the same time and ended his message with the final paragraph included in the text section. It is basically just an assurance that what he told is true and if anyone doubts it, they just need to come to Manaus and see for themselves.

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