

The Legend of **Maria Lionza**



According to legend, around the year 1500, during the time of the Spanish Conquest in Venezuela, the chief of The Caquetios Tribe (Arawakan indigenous from what is now the state of Yaracuy) fell in love with a white woman. From their union, a beautiful girl with uncommon and enchanting green eyes was born. Her name was princess Yara. The Caquetios believed that the uncommon color of princess Yara's eyes would bring bad luck and destruction to their tribe. Because of this belief, the tribe's Shaman, Jirajara, decided that princess Yara needed to be sacrificed to their gods in order to keep their community safe against the Spanish.



Yara's father respected all of the tribe's rules and traditions, but he could not sacrifice his own daughter. He decided to keep Yara in a secret place with 22 warriors as her guardians.

Yara grew up without ever seeing the sun. One day, young Yara decides to escape while all of the guardians were asleep. She goes to purify herself in the waters of the lagoon, and for the first time, she sees her reflection in the water. She noticed that her green eyes seemed to

reflect two large caves where the aquatic spirit (the god of the lagoon) emerged in the form of an anaconda. At that moment, the aquatic spirit swallowed Yara, and then rapidly disappeared into the deep waters.

Suddenly, the snake started to grow so big that the waters of the lagoon overflowed, and the entire valley was flooded. The snake grew so large that it burst, and princess Yara was liberated from the horrible aquatic spirit. The Caquetios tribe were extinct by the terrible disaster of flood; but princess Yara became the goddess of waters, protector of all animals, princess of the mountains, and the mother of crops.

Princess Yara rides through the mountains on a tapir and often appears in the form of a blue butterfly.



The story from the times of conquest narrates that after the battle of Cuyucutua in 1552, Chief Yaracuy defeats the Spanish and Princess Yara was able to return to her tribe. She raised the court council proposing to join the Caribbean tribes; but the Spanish surprised them. Princess Yara managed to escape. Tired and lonely, a tapir offers to carry her on his back. After the death of conquistador Ponce de Leon, Princess Yara decides to agree to the rules of the new governor, Cuba Diego, and returns to her land.

The Caquetios tribe became extinct during the 16th century.

Drawing of a tapir



Drawing of the Caquetios Tribe



Drawings of La Reina Maria Lionza – Princess Yara