

When Woman Became the Sea

Susan Strauss Christina Acosta Illus.

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In the beginning, Sibú created the world. After making mountains, jungles and valleys, he realizes something is missing. So he creates Woman, named Sea, to attract Thunder, who might know what the earth still needs. After their marriage, Sea fails to heed advice from her husband and is transformed into a tree and split into two by birds. From her center comes water, the missing element in the world.

Susan Strauss retells this creation myth from the native people of Costa Rica with rich, evocative imagery. The story contains many ancient archetypes, including the serpent in the garden and the tree of knowledge. Acosta's beautiful illustrations are as lush and colorful as a rain forest, full of deep greens and blues swirling across the pages. The text itself also grows and shrinks, undulating across the page in an imitation of the sea. While this is visually pleasing, it does make the words a little difficult to read, especially for children. A foreword explains the origin of the story, and the idea of finding science in creation myths. Although this genre of folktale is reflected in a number of lovely picture books, there is room for this valuable addition.

LEIGH FORREST (September / October 1998)

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