The Tale of the Seven Stars
(La historia de las siete estrellas)

Based on a Kaxinawá legend (Brazil)

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There once was an Indian woman who lived in the Amazon rainforest with her seven small children. The mother did not look after her children properly and it was their grandmother who really took care of them. She used to feed them, keep them warm and hug them tight when they were sick.

But then the grandmother died and the children were left helpless. The oldest child had to go out and look for honey and fruits to feed his brothers and sisters, but sometimes, because he was so young, he would come home empty-handed. And when the seven children cried because they were hungry, their mother did not bother very much and fed them whatever she could find.

The children became weaker and weaker and then one of them said: "Why don't we go up into the sky? We will be able to find plenty of honey and fruit there, and we will never be hungry again."
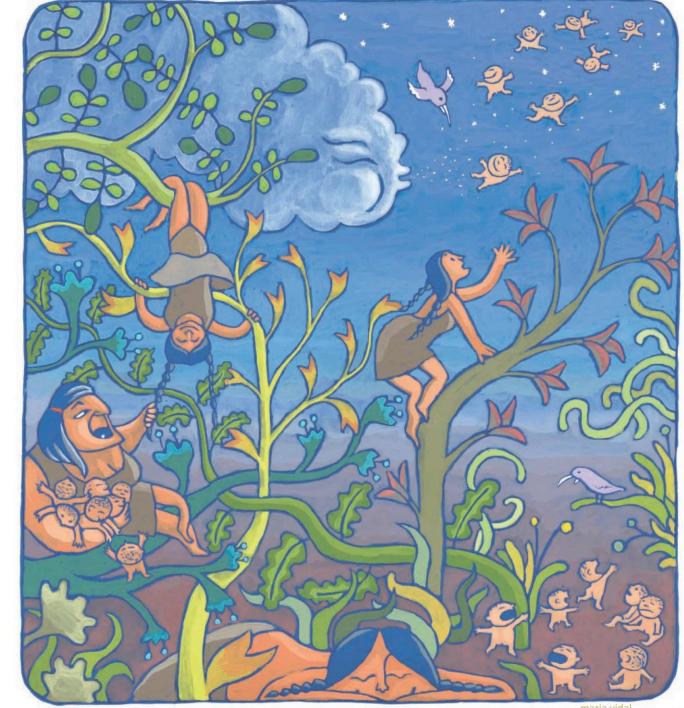
A hummingbird that was flying by overheard their cries of distress. He felt so sorry for the children that he called the winds to help him carry them away up into the sky. Their mother, who was sleeping, woke up and desperately tried to stop her children from leaving. But it was too late. The children climbed higher and higher until they reached the heavens and were transformed into seven little stars.

When the Indians discovered them in the skies, they called them Eixu, which means seven stars in Guaraní.

Open star clusters

The seven stars mentioned in this legend are the Pleiades, an open star cluster located in the constellation Taurus. Some stars seem very close to each other. This is often an illusion because they can be at very different distances. However, when stars are born more or less at the same time and are bound together by gravity, these stars are classified as a cluster. Clusters are very useful because astrophysicists can determine their ages, chemical compositions and distances.

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