

TRACE

**Traditional Children's Stories for a Common
Future**

**Don't Bump Into a Tree Nor Hit the
Stone...**

Marija Šarac



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Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived in a village near the river Cetina. She was kind to everyone. The playful little girl was beloved among her little friends. She was different from the others because she enjoyed the company of the elders and absorbed their stories, even though sometimes she did not understand their meaning. She was very polite, so her Grandma's friends didn't mind when she joined their company. The relation between Grandma and her youngest grandchild was getting stronger as the time went by.

She grew up to be a pretty young girl. Grandma carefully watched over her and the boys who liked her. She told her: "You must choose the one who will love you just the way you are or you will never be happy!"

The girl thought the words were just the result of Grandma's great love for her and did not quite understand what did she mean by "to love you just the way you are." Her Grandma always advised her and the little girl obeyed because her Grandma would explain every advice she gave her, every except the one about "the way you are". When she asked her about its meaning, Grandma replied: "You will understand the meaning of these words when the time comes, I can't explain it to you now."

The little girl fancied a boy from her village. Grandma was not happy about it and told her that he was a good boy but just not good enough for her being afraid what would happen when "her granddaughter time comes". The girl didn't understand her Grandma again, but did not ask too much. She was so in love that she begged her Grandma to accept him. Once more Grandma complied to her granddaughter's wishes. After some time the dowry was prepared and it was time for the girl to get married. The wedding was like any other: with plenty of songs and joy. Life went on as usual.

As the time passed, Grandma got weaker. She said to her granddaughter: "Everything I know and everything I have will be passed on to you because you are the youngest of all my grandchildren and my favorite one."

Soon the time arrived for Grandma to leave her granddaughter. The girl bid her last farewell with dignity and every sound of the funeral tolling of a bell touched her soul deeply.

It was not long after that the girl couldn't sleep well anymore and every morning she looked more and more tired. Her husband was very worried about her but after the hard day's work in the field he would fall sound asleep. However, he became suspicious of his wife's weary appearance. He had bad dreams one night, then suddenly woke up. He was shocked. His wife was not in bed. He wanted to wait for her but tired as he was he fell asleep again. When he woke up in the morning, his wife was sleeping peacefully next to him.

Next day he decided to work less, eat less and drink less wine that day. When they went to bed that night he pretended to be sleeping. After some time his wife got out of the bed. She took off her heavy cloth nightgown and went to the fire place where she took soot from all the

pots and spread it all over her body until she was totally painted in black colour. Then she said:

Don't bump into a tree nor hit the stone

but go to Puglia under walnut trees.

After saying these words the wife disappeared.

Her husband was scared but anyway he decided to follow her and wanted to find out where was she going and what was she doing. It was easy for him to take off his nightgown and spread soot all over his body but in fear he forgot the exact words his wife said before so he said:

Bump into a tree and hit the stone

and go to Puglia under walnut trees.

All of a sudden he was thrown outside bumping into trees and hitting the stones. All those kicks were pretty hard. As the wind was carrying him he was all bruised and battered from every side. Suddenly he found himself behind some rock. He knew the place. The place with the most walnut trees. But what nobody knew was the fact that witches gather there during the night. They knew how to come there without getting hurt the way he was. He was looking at them wondering and with great fear. He couldn't even imagine that his good wife was also there.

All witches were seated in a circle, murmuring some quiet songs and laughing out loud. In the middle of the circle the fire with crackling sound was lit the way it should be at their home but much stronger and brighter. The big smokey pot was there, too. Now and again every one of them threw something in the pot that made smoke bigger so it was spreading wider from the circle where they were seated. The smell and the smoke made his fear smaller and he felt dizzy so that he would also laugh but had to restrain not to be caught. The rhythmic noise made him sleepy so he fell asleep for a while.

Suddenly down from the village he heard roosters crowing. Everything stopped. None of the sounds were heard anymore. All these soot-covered women turned into fire balls and flew towards direction from where they came. They flew to their villages before the dawn under the sight of the bright morning star. It looked as if the stars had decided to go on Earth. The husband stood still unable to move. First he was astonished by everything he had seen but the fireballs made him even more frightened.

It was almost dawn. The sun was coming out. By this time he came to his senses and became aware that he was in the middle of the mountain, naked and soot-covered. He could remember the magic words but it was too late. It was too bright for the wind to come and get him back. The day came and he, hiding all in fear that he might be seen, somehow tried to reach his house. It wasn't easy. At that time water carriers go to the spring. Children take cattle to pasture and hard working farmers are getting ready to work in the field.

He passed almost the whole village and was close to his hamlet when he was seen by his Godfather who couldn't recognise him because he was naked, all painted in black, full of bruises and scratches. Frightened by his look the Godfather crossed himself and started to pray loudly. The husband said: "You are my Godfather, please take me to the house, give me something to wear and I'll tell you everything that happened to me." When Godfather recovered from fear and was able to recognise husband's voice he took him to his house, gave him some clothes and listened to his story.

The Godfather believed in his friend's story and recalled that he had experienced something strange that night, too. That night the cow from his stable should have been calving so he had to be up before the dawn. When he passed neighbour's house the candle went burning stronger and he saw woman washing her face and sweeping the floor long before the dawn and the bright morning star.

Soon the husband went home and his wife ran to meet him. She saw him all battered. He said:

He said: Bump into a tree and stone
and go to Puglia under walnut trees.

The look on her face told him everything.

After that strange adventure the husband was hiding all the pots in the house before going to sleep. His wife wasn't sleepy as she used to be nor she was happy as before. She remembered her Grandma and understood the meaning of the phrase "to love you the way you are".