

# TRACE

## Traditional Children's Stories for a Common Future

### Red Rocks

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At the very end of the Cetina river, the fast and green Karst river, rises Mosor, grey stone mountain. There are no rich forests as one would expect there. It is situated on the right bank of the Cetina, and so from the height it seems to be guarding and watching the river. That view is as rocky as the mountain itself. All storms, rolling towards the villages scattered at the bottom of Mosor and on the other bank of the Cetina, start from the mountain top. Gloomy and full of lightnings, thunders and horrible winds, they threaten the fields and the efforts of the peasants.

And there where the mountain foothill and restless Cetina meet each other, the rocks are somewhat different. From the mere touch of those powerful and cold rocks with the clear, noisy water, the rocks have changed. In that part the river is calm and it flows smoothly towards the next dangerous waterfall. It is strange, in all that dull grey, to see the light reddish rocks hidden in the cruel canyon. The rocks hide lots of caves and springs that rush in heavy rains in large quantities into the canyon itself.

People have always looked to the mountain to get prepared for the forthcoming bad weather, but they somehow knew that Mosor was watching them as well. They were aware that the stone had no eyes and that only fairies could live there far away in the heights. They had always known about them.

The people were not afraid of fairies. One just shouldn't disturb them. Fairies had their laws that ordinary people didn't have to understand. Just respect them.

Mare was a nice little girl. Even at an early age, one could recognize that she was more skilled than the other girls. When some goat or lamb had to be saved from the water or some rock, or when one should have taken a loaded horse across the stream, she was the first to do it.

Her whistles made of ash tree bark had the most beautiful sound, even though her fingers were so small to make something alike. The girl would sing while looking after cattle on the meadows. Her mum didn't have to yell at her very much since Mare was obedient and would with no sign of fear help her wash wool in the Cetina. She was also not afraid to use side roads to go home all alone. By the way she would always pick some flowers and give them to her mum.

While dancing, playing or calming the horse under load, she had always had the feeling to be watched by someone. She would frequently turn herself, but there was no one to be seen. It was the feeling that she was observed not from behind but from above. She did not shudder from that, but she would direct her eyes to the heights, to the mountain, hoping to see who it was.

Mare was growing up and so came the time for her to dance in a circle (kolo) with other girls. She would dance, sing and laugh loudly. Her singing and her laughter could be heard, so it seemed to her that they sometimes mingled with the rumbling of the river, and that all sounds

were reflected from the rocks on the other side. And now and then she thought that they turned back to her, but different, with the words she couldn't understand, in a quiet song she was not familiar with, but she somehow liked it. It seemed to her that it was a secret to be kept, but not some terrible burdening secret, rather some special gift she should neither lose nor share.

There were more and more such moments in her life. She was followed by a quiet whisper while she was dancing and singing alone. And that whisper... it was so soft, so warm... She would sometimes recognize some peaceful playful laughter. Words could not be understood. But this never happened while she was with others. She could hear it most clearly when she would, riding a horse, go to the pond. Blowing of wind would then turn into the well-known sound full of unknown words and cheerful laughter.

Some women from the village would now and then throw a warning, allegedly with good intentions...

Don't dance that much, Mare, do not loose your hair... Don't play with a horse... You will be seen by fairies. That is dangerous.

But Mare wouldn't listen. She could see nothing wrong in loving that all. She was not willing to get rid of those unusual songs, words and laughter.

One summer evening, when the villagers were going back home from their fields, and the red sky and hard dry soil were making their way back difficult, Mare decided to stay a bit longer by the Cetina river. She planned to have some rest by the water she loved so much. She knew that those who were singing to her might come, so she would enjoy a little bit in their song and then ride back home.

All of a sudden she could hear the sound of the hoofs, and it wasn't just one horse, she was able to recognize that, there were dozens of them, all approaching her in a gallop. She gave a look to her horse. It only raised its head, but it wasn't frightened at all. It just neighed and shook its nice mane, as if it has met someone well-known. Then she turned back and noticed some ten girls of exceptional beauty. Their dresses were flashing like water and stealing redness of the sunset. With long loose hair, white faces, eyes green as the water from the Cetina river.... they were dancing and wriggling and laughing over the meadows, and singing... And that song reflected the quiet echo of the mountain, the murmur of the stream and the song of nightingales. She watched them, wondering how she could hear the horses but not see them.

She looked at fairies dancing, and then, suddenly, the hem of a dress of one fairy went up. She could see hoofs instead of feet and in that moment she became aware it was really fairies who were dancing. She remembered what those women from the village used to tell her, but she wasn't sorry she failed to follow their advice, since if she had, she would have never experienced something alike. The fairies addressed her telling her that they had come

to dance in the circle with her, confirming they had always watched her from the side of Poljica as she was growing up. They had seen her courage and love and all care shown to her horse. She had all qualities the fairies expected from someone they wanted to dance in the circle with. So they smiled at her and raised their hands and Mare ran to them and she danced the most beautiful dance in her whole life. Finally she could understand what they were singing about.

The fairies were playful, so they combed the horse's mane, ran over the fields with it, even though it had been dark and the night had fallen long ago. But the sky was full of stars and it was a full moon – one could see as in the middle of a day. They ran to the spring, over the fields and meadows, over rocks and streams. They sang and danced all night. Before dawn, they accompanied the horse home, and they took Mare with them into the caves in the Red Rocks.

When mother realized that neither Mare nor the horse had come back home that night, she started crying bitterly. She asked the other girls if anyone had seen them. But no one did. She looked for Mare all night shouting her name, then she sat in front of the stone threshold on a small wooden bench, looking into the starry sky, and praying to God, hoping to hear her steps from every sound she heard. At dawn she saw the horse in gallop, completely wet entering the stable. It was still dark, so she hoped Mare could have come either. Following the horse, she rushed into the stall but Mare wasn't there. Then she had a closer look and she noticed a braid which was twice the length of a mane, something that a human hand couldn't have made. Mother knew it were fairies. Her heart stunned. Every search is in vain, she was aware. If the fairies liked Mare, they would return her. She could do nothing more but pray and hope it would really happen that way.

For seven days Mare rollicked with fairies. At night, by moonlight, she danced and sang with them. She washed her face in the spring with them. During the day she would sleep in deep caves, high in the rocks. Now she could understand their language. She was told that the human beings never stayed to live with them. She would be returned back home when the moonlight disappears. She didn't have to pay anything for all good she had experienced, she was given that due to her special qualities, her courage and kindness. She was promised to be always helped by fairies if attacked by someone in the village, in that case they would take revenge and make that person's life bitter. There was only one condition of a happy return to the village – she should never ever say how to reach the caves in the Red Rocks of the Mosor mountain, nor what fairies really were. She had to keep the secret about their lives and to which wells they used to come to people. This wasn't hard for Mare since – although she was always ready to help people- she didn't believe them very much, so she could keep the secret. She also didn't want to make fairies angry, as they were now her friends.

On the seventh day she came back home. Dead tired of dancing, with the hair unkempt and full of braids, her sleeves and skirts broken... She hugged her mother. Didn't cry. She was calm. She had protection. And the people from the village didn't ask her much, they would just say:

She was taken by the fairies into the rocks of Poljica!

And Mare lived a peaceful life full of memories she wasn't willing to share with anyone.