A modern tale with an ecological twist!

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For the team of dedicated Znuggle crocheters.
Introduction

Dear Reader,

This is a story about a little girl who can see the sadness of nature in clouds. Even though at first sight this is a rather unusual gift she has, think about it. We do not have to have a sixth sense to see what kind of world we are leaving our younger generations with.

Nature has changed – wilderness has never been so fragile and precious.

Mankind has also changed - humans have never had access to more powerful modern day technology and their arrogance is destroying the planet. Our planet, our home, suffocating in plastic, barren landscapes where vast forests used to be and black clouds above all are a stage to plays such as, "We rule the World" and "After me, the Flood."

Yet there is hope! A long time ago, the famous French author Jean Giono wrote in his story "The Man who Planted Trees," "Despite all, mankind is worthy of attention."

Remember, every boy or girl who sees injustice done towards the planet is a nature reader and that is only the beginning. Get started and initiate the idea of the "Zero Waste" concept, the idea of a world without waste which is the basis you will find in this book. Imitate nature that recycles everything through the cycling of matter and energy. Respect Mother Nature by buying only what you need, reducing your waste, planting trees, and doing acts of kindness.
Literary critics will say the story of Tara and the magic Tree is a modern day fairy tale. The fact is that the biggest truths are found in fact in fairy tales! This is why each of us should be Tara just as every tree is already magic because it gives us life – this is what we do between breathing in and breathing out. Become nature readers and do the right thing for every single person that lives on this planet.

Give the seed of love from your heart to this ball which has been used in many exhausting matches over millions of years. Let it germinate again!
Travelling to Newthamp

On a windswept, rainy night in a country far from the concrete jungles of suburbia exactly a thousand owls’ nests west and three hours butterfly flight east, a rickety old car snaked its way along a winding road. Behind the wheel, a goatee-bearded man peered out into the darkness, trying to spot the turnoff for the village he had left on a similar night, long long ago. Next to him, a tiny woman, her face framed by oversized steel rimmed glasses, was pestering him about the reason for this sudden trip.
“There is no need to be anxious my dear. All will be revealed over a cup of tea when we get to grandfather’s house!”

In the backseat, Tara fidgeted. She had just turned 11 and had been named after the beautiful emerald-green river that flowed from the mountains. That same river where her parents had met back in their student days. She was unhappy for not bringing her 10 beautiful dolls with her. In the turmoil of their hurried departure from the apartment, she had only managed to grab one toy, a wooden crow.

She studied the inscription which read the time of wonders is knocking and pondered the mystery of the crow’s sudden appearance next to her bag when they had left. She had not seen it in ages and thought it was lost. It was a hand-carved present from her grandfather who, three years ago, had gone to be with Grandma, “playing hide and seek in heaven” her parents had explained to her.

Happy to have found an old childhood friend, Tara hugged it tightly and stared into the darkness.

“Don’t worry, we will go back to the flat next week and pack the rest of the things that we couldn’t fit in this tiny old car!” said her father. “You will get your dolls” he added, trying to cheer her up. He had seen her big almond-shaped eyes, fighting back tears of sorrow in the rear-view mirror.

“We’ll be ok, you’ll see!” he said cheerfully. “It’s beautiful out here, you will make new friends and have much more space to roam and explore. I’ve been offered a job at the tavern that our cousin owns which is only half an hour’s walk from home. All the visitors who come to enjoy the beauty of the Stobojne Mountains1 stay there” he added. “You will love the outdoors and open spaces, unfortunately many of the animals I used to see in these mountains when I was a child are not here anymore...” His voice trailed off.

1 Stobojne (pronounced Sto-bo-nye) means hundred colours.
“Stop, stop the car!” his wife shouted, interrupting his thoughts. “We’ve passed the turn-off for the village! I just saw the sign and the leaning birch tree!”

Tara’s father turned the car around. As the car lights cut through the torrential rain, the passengers were surprised to see a big donkey standing next to a strange, gravity-defying birch tree. A piece of dented tin with Newthamp scrawled on it marked the turnoff.

“Dad is this a Magic Donkey?” asked Tara excitedly. Taken aback, her father replied: “Maybe it is Tara! Your grandfather bought a donkey from an old gypsy once, who claimed it had mystical powers. All I remember is that the donkey loved to work and considered itself to be a dog. It helped your grandfather herd the sheep and loved his homemade carrot and forest fruit juices.”

The donkey stared at them as if it had been expecting their arrival. Before Tara’s father had even hooted the horn, it began walking in front of them down the forest road that led to the village. It trotted along, turning from time to time to see if the car was following.

They followed the winding, muddy road through thick shrub for several kilometres before arriving at a narrow, wooden suspension bridge, just wide enough for a small car. Tara’s father did not want to take any chances however and felt safer parking the car on the side of the road. The donkey brayed loudly, as if inviting him to drive over the bridge. Tara and her mother got out of the car and stood together under the umbrella while her father took the advice of their long-eared guide and carefully drove the car over the Teardrop River.

Tara followed the old car across the bridge, mesmerised by the chorus of frogs calling and croaking. Suddenly, she noticed a white glow approaching her. Before she could point her torch to see what it was, she felt a prickly bundle touch her leg.
Bending down for a better look, she realised it was a small hedgehog trapped in a plastic bag.

“Poor little thing, the wind must have blown this bag onto your spikes, completely covering your face. Oh dear, you must have been so terrified not seeing where you were going! You could have ended up in the river!” Tara kept talking to him while trying to free him from the bag. She turned to her mother and said, “He is so small, and his heart is beating so quickly – I’ll call him Spikey; we can take him home and feed him.”

Tara spotted the glow of a cigarette next to the bridge. Two people were standing there in the darkness. “Good evening!” Tara greeted them but got no reply in return. “Let them be, Tara. They are probably fishermen, let’s not disturb them. Please hurry up and help your father put the bags in the house!” said her mother.

After a thousand days of peace, the door of a little stone house with a wooden roof opened. A pile of leaves was scattered off the doorstep, the breeze lifting them and carrying them down the stairs that led to the house. The door hinges creaked and the stagnant air, heavy with the smell of resin and mountain herbs, wafted up to greet Tara. Little did she realise she was entering a cabin of secrets and wonders.
II The Story of the Magic Tree

The house had no electricity. Tara’s father found a spirit lamp on the mantel above the fireplace. A beam of yellow light lit the large room, which was filled with old wooden figurines and statues. Tara’s curiosity stirred.

“I wish I knew why Grandfather chose to carve these animals, and what the meaning is of those unusual words etched into them?” Tara studied them closely. On the wooden wolf it read: *Onion in the front, pomegranate behind*, and on the wooden frog *Chokeberries throughout all the pores!*

Regaining its strength after a tasty dinner, the hedgehog wriggled out of Tara’s hands. It nudged a little figurine on the bottom shelf with its snout. Tara picked him up. She noticed the wooden toy was also a hedgehog, just like her new friend. The carving on the hedgehog read: “Welcome dear finally!”

“Daddy, what do these messages mean? Maybe this house is enchanted!” said Tara excitedly.

“Tonight, I will tell you the story of the magic tree!” her father answered. He sighed, thinking how long it had been since he had enough time to read bedtime stories to his baby girl.

Not wasting any time, Tara climbed into bed. She noticed it had an unusually carved headboard. It depicted a forest scene with animals gathered around a bearded man planting a tree.

“Once upon a time, not that long ago and not far from this house, a magic tree grew” her father began. “It lived at the top of the mountain, covered with beautiful leaves that turned as red as a fireball in autumn. It was connected to Mother
Earth with a mighty network of roots which created a home for many forest creatures. Its trunk was gnarled and twisted from years of battle between the bitterly cold northern winds clashing with the playful, warm, dry winds from the South. When they swirled around the tree, they created a melody that enchanted all the creatures on the mountain.

In this place lived a small boy. It was his fifth birthday, but he knew there would be no cake or sweets in his humble home. The drought had taken its toll – there was only enough food for one meal a day. His parents had sold their old cow which left them without any livestock. Occasionally, his mother would bring the boy fresh milk and mix it with crushed ice to make his tummy feel full.

His father woke him up early and wished him a happy birthday. He told him he had a special present for him. The boy’s dreams were coming true, he would get the best present ever! “Don’t peek as we begin our journey or there will be no present” his father said as he slipped on the blindfold that was part of the surprise. “Your friends may have lot of toys but none of them have the chance to choose something this special” his father told him as he lifted him onto his shoulders. He was enchanted by his father’s words.

They reached the top of the mountain. His father put him down and took the blindfold off. “Now you can choose your magic tree! Every tree in this forest wants you to choose them. They have heard how kind you are, and they all want to be your friends. But you can only give your love and tell your secrets to one tree!”

For a moment the boy stood, confused. Then he looked at the majestic red crown that dominated the forest. The two winds danced through it and the tree sang a beautiful melody.
Birds flew above it, chirping happily while purple crocuses surrounded it in a fairy-tale scene. Enchanted, the boy pointed to that tree and gave his father a huge hug.

In the years to follow, the boy and the tree grew alongside each other. While herding the sheep and dreaming under his tree, the seeds of love for Mother Earth sprouted. One night his father came home in pain, his hand was hurt and he told his son that their flock had run away. He forbade his son to go to the tree again because the fiercest beast in the woods had come there and attacked him.

Awful sounds and screams followed in the days to come. Crashing sounds and great tremors ripped through the sky above the mountains. The boy’s father went to town to get help but returned pale and scared. He spent hours looking up to the top of the mountain where the magic tree lived.

Several days later, he gave his son a figurine of a dormouse and told him, “This is a gift from your magic friend. I managed to reach it. It sends a message saying that if you believe in miracles – miracles will happen!” The following week a new gift arrived – a wooden frog, then a wolf, a fox, a hedgehog, a bear and a deer... Soon the entire house was full of wooden animals. The boy was happy because the tree was thinking of him.

Autumn came. The boy dreamt that his tree was calling him, so disobeying his father’s wishes, he snuck out and headed up the mountain. As he was walking up the trail, he saw piles of logs in the mud and deeply scarred slopes. There was no magic tree at the top, just a large stump with a young stem growing from it. The boy sat on the stump crying until sunset when his worried father found him. His father hugged him and told him “When you love something there is no end.
Remember, love your tree and it will be happy. A part of it will always be with you and one day it will come to life again, for the good of us all. It will happen when you least expect it. One day the mountains will again thrive with wild animals, they have fled for now because they have no protection or food left."

The boy grew up and went out into the wide world, but never forgot his father’s words.

Tara’s father finished the story and closing her bedroom door, whispered “Good night my sweetheart.”
III Clever Clogs

It had been a month since Tara arrived in Newthamp. Her father got the job at the pub, while her mother worked in and around the house. Tara would start each day by riding Maga the Magic Donkey all the way up the hill to the school. They became such close friends that the donkey could not wait for the school day to finish so that the two of them could visit the Stobojne Mountains or the Teardrop River together.

Unlike in the crowded city schools, the children in this school were divided into just two classes. Younger pupils from the first to fourth grade in one classroom and the older pupils from the fifth grade onwards in the other one. Tara found this rather unusual, however she quickly got used to sitting at the same table with friends from an older grade. She was proud of the fact that her father once went to the same school. He told her there were a lot more children at the school back then.

Tara spent most of her time with her new friend Timothy. He was a freckled, thirteen-year old nature enthusiast. Ever since he saved an otter which had become entangled in a poacher’s net, he’d been thinking about forming a Newthamp Friends of the Earth Club, in order to protect the area from unscrupulous people. Timothy really enjoyed reading the stories of all the different plants and animals that once lived in Newthamp.

He longed to see the alpine newts swimming in the Silver stream again, but they had disappeared back when his mum was just a girl.
The village children were expected to help their parents with the livestock, or in their orchards and gardens after school. This meant Timothy had little time to spare for his passion of taking care of wild animals or cleaning up rubbish from the river and forest.

Tara was the only child with no commitments, so she often kept Timothy company. In return he tried his best to teach her everything he knew. He showed her how to make vinegar out of the wild apples that grew on the sunny side of the mountain. He also explained how it could be used for cleaning the house instead of using expensive detergents which also pollute the environment.

Timothy’s friends mostly dressed in city styles, but he had his own style. He loved the woollen clothes that his grandma knitted for him, the colourful sweaters and long vests. Underneath he usually wore a white linen shirt with an embroidered collar. A dashing, brightly coloured woollen scarf floated around his neck and a broad cap fought to cover the wild curls on his head. As he was the youngest of three brothers, he was not ashamed to wear their hand-me-downs. From the money he saved, he bought books, some of which he would donate to the school library.

Timothy told Tara his secret. He was working on a magical potion which he called super, mighty carrot juice.

Several years ago, Timothy’s grandmother had been given some domestic carrot seeds from Tara’s grandfather. The old man had inspired Timothy with an idea about a super juice
made out of forest treasures and organically grown carrots. The seed was not sprayed with chemicals nor had its genetic code, that Mother Nature gave it, ever been changed. This was how it kept its original sweet taste and health-giving properties.

These carrots were smaller than those from the greenhouses so the shops in town were not interested in buying them. Timothy was not discouraged - he had the recipe for the super-juice as entrusted to him by Tara's grandfather. All he needed was one secret ingredient – an ingredient for excellence.

Tara's grandfather told Timothy that Maga, who was an experienced juice tester, would recognise this ingredient and when the donkey found it, he would let them know by behaving unusually. "I am sure that the special ingredient, the one that will make the juice unique, can be found somewhere around us" he said.

As the days passed and his attempts to find a magic formula were still unsuccessful, Timothy turned his attention to the protection of Newthamp and the Stobojne Mountains. "Every weekend I visit the shops in Sootown and give their customers the canvas bags that my grandma sews. I tell them that we will choke on plastic if we continue using plastic bags" Timothy told Tara.

Timothy gave Tara an unusual woollen hat that reminded him of a common house leek. Tara was excited and made several plaits in her hair to match the hat. Timothy watched her timidly,
observing her new look and the sparkle in her eyes. He felt butterflies in his tummy and his ears burned like a furnace full of dry beech wood.

One day, Maga was not waiting for Tara after school which was odd. She saw Timothy and asked if he would help her with her maths homework because she always struggled with it. The maths test was scheduled for the following week and she needed to practise.

When she got to Timothy’s house, she saw his grandmother sitting down with small bundles of wool. The old woman was spinning the wool she held in her left hand. She was skilfully making woollen thread, spinning from the distaff in one hand onto the spindle she held in the other hand.

Tara’s eyes lit up! She grabbed Timothy’s hand and took him outside. “I understand now what the words on my wooden forest creatures mean! Quick, let’s go to my house!” They ran excitedly across the fields, climbing fences and jumping across the streams. They both grinned at each other. Tara, because she was onto something magic, and Timothy because he was in the company of a pretty girl.

After reaching Tara’s house, they both climbed up to the attic. Timothy saw the wooden animal figures. Each of them looked beautiful and had a small hole where the mouth should be. Tara turned them all upside down and started reading the carved verses, until she was able to put them in the order that formed a poem.
Timothy was extremely confused. However, he was happy to see Tara so excited and she hugged him in happiness.

“We just need to find the White Sea! Let’s run back to your grandmother’s place!” she said with a smile on her face. Spikey the hedgehog set off too and Tara picked him up and placed him on the rim of her unusual hat.
The Stobojne Mountains’ Team

**Tara** – the girl with a mind as clear as the river she was named after. With the help of an unusual bunch, mysterious threads of old nature readers and love towards the Stobojne Mountains, she crocheted a magical bridge connecting our hopes for a cleaner Planet and the wisdom needed for this to become a reality.

**Timothy** – the boy who reads a lot and asks even more. He knows the place for humans in nature and protects it just as well as the one secret that makes him blush.
Spikey the Hedgehog – Since Tara had saved him from the ‘attack’ of a plastic bag that could have suffocated him, Spikey swore to be on hand to assist this mischievous girl. He helped her by showing her the way to the old mill where his spikey family kept magic wool. Spikey continues to help his parents who are the best tailors in the Stobojne Mountains.

Maga the Magic Donkey – What can be said about this rascal with an eye patch, who is a juice tester and a jolly means of transport for two people, apart from that it is a pity there are no more of those long eared creatures in the animal world. While other donkeys bray all day and are known to be stubborn, Maga is totally different. He listens to Tara without braying back and only sounds when he has something clever to say, unaware that no one from Tara’s company knows the language of donkeys!
Ow the Frog – green ribbit who captured Tara’s heart by his wise repetition of his motto “ow, ow, ow” and his calm demeanour. She still addresses him respectfully as Mister Ow and asks his opinion about her poems (more “ow’s” mean that a poem is good, and less “ow’s”, that she needs to work more on it). Prison guards say that this frog often visits the ex-mayor of Sootown in his dreams, and he still cannot forget their fatal encounter on the night of luminous animals.

Crow – a black bird with special vocal cords, and Tara’s heavenly friend who helped her do everything properly.
**Dormouse** – a close relative of the famous Dormouse George from the Pro-šćenske Mountains and the first animal brought to life by the magic wool and the super-juice Mighty Carrot. He is charming and always wears the latest forest creations.

**Magic Tree** – a magnificent master in the centre of an infinite circle of life in a forest. Every happy person has their magic tree.

**Carrot** – healthy and orange, low calorie fighter for a slim line, good eyesight, and a favourite vegetable of Maga the Magic Donkey. Eat it daily and watch your muscles develop.
Author Bio

Žarko Vučinić

Happily employed author and unemployed forestry engineer (born in Belgrade in 1972) who advocates that children should rule the world.

Through his award winning ecology trilogy about a mischievous dormouse George (Dormouse George's World of Wonders, Dormouse George and Ghosts of Ancient Rafters and Dormouse George in the Trap of Spyridon Ice) he promotes the Tara River, the Prošćenske Mountains and the return of children to nature. Dominantly a daydreamer, sometimes he records some of his dreams in the form of unusual edutaining stories and poems about forest dwellers.

He is inspired by the philosophy of highlanders, a view from Svevide (See-it-all peak) and a woman with purple eyes. He strives to be a good father (has exhausting fights with computer games). He has been working (unsuccessfully) on a perfect plum jam recipe. He is allergic to plastic straws and people who throw trash everywhere.

He is thinking about establishing a colony of nature readers under the tree tops of black pines in the Gostilovina village.
Young Illustrators

Bearing in mind that our aim is to support the young artists of Montenegro, we are very proud of the cooperation we established with the "Petar Lubarda" Art High School of Cetinje.

The students that illustrated the story "Tara and the Magic Tree" are in 2nd and 3rd Grades of the Graphic design department at the Art School (2018/2019 Academic year) and their teacher is Ana Knežević.

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ZNUGGLE WORLD

You too can become a nature reader like Tara and make a positive change with your magic in the world! How? Follow your intuition and get in tune with nature: start protecting it in everything you do, and you will receive nature’s love back. Take a walk in nature as often as you can and observe all its wonders. Remember to never litter and to be a role model for others. Before you buy anything, ask yourself if you really need it, think of the impact it will have on our Planet: how it was made and how it will end its life. Maybe you could reuse or make something yourself instead of buying it? Why not start a compost today in your garden or on your balcony with little worms? Join the community of nature readers and become part of a big movement to protect Mother Nature: www.znuggle.me/going-further

And you too can also turn Tara’s friends back to life as it is done in the story! Choose your favourite one: it will help you remember every day to protect the world around us.
Welcome to the magic world of Znuggle!

Tara and her little friends are born in the North of Montenegro, a small country in Eastern Europe, where women who live in the mountains with their sheep flock make them. To make one soft toy, our group of rural women first sheer the wool off their sheep, then wash it, straighten the wool fibres then spin the wool. They dye it afterwards by hand with berries or vegetables peels or sometimes even with the leaves, bark or roots of special trees. Finally, they crochet the toys using a small hook, stitch by stitch. Before Znuggle entered their lives, they used to throw away or burn the dirty wool of their sheep, so all soft toys they create are made from discarded resources. By welcoming a little Znuggle soft toy into your life, you are helping rural women in Montenegro sustain themselves and their families, maintaining traditions that are on the verge of extinction, while providing a teaching aid to more children around the world on Circular Economy!

Znuggle soft toys are fully ecological, biodegradable and Fair Trade. Discover Tara or her little friends today on: www.znuggle.me
Your reader surprise code is ZNUGGLEBOOKLOVE
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SHEARING SHEEP

CARDING
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