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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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How Old Witch Neda Stole the Moon and the Sun

Once upon a time, thousands and thousands of years ago, I expect, for no one ever hears of Witch Neda in these days, an old witch named Neda used to jump on her broomstick with another broom in her hand. She used to fly about the sky, brushing away the cobwebs, as she called them.

What she really did was to brush away the little rain clouds that the stars used for veils when they were tired of shining.

"You let our veils stay over our faces," said the little stars, quite angry with old Witch Neda. "We want them. You wicked old witch, go away, go away!"

But Witch Neda would only laugh a cackling laugh and go on with her broom, sweeping away the cobwebs.

"Silly little stars," said old Witch Neda, "they would have the sky in a most untidy state if it were not for me. I have to sweep every night. If I didn't, the sky would be filled with cobwebs. 'Veils,' indeed! Those silly little things do not know the difference between a veil and a cobweb."

One night, the stars were all wearing their veils when along came old Witch Neda with her broom and whisked them off, and the little stars were so angry they forgot their nice manners, and many of them rushed at old

Witch Neda, darting little sharp points right into her face and making her wink and blink so that she could not see where she was going, and she bumped right into the moon, who was just coming out from behind a cloud to see what was going on.

"Look out where you are going, old witch," he called. Old Neda dropped her broom and made a grab for the moon, and she caught him, too, right by the nose.

"Here, here, here! Let go of my nose!" he cried, but old Witch Neda did not let go. She hung on and carried him off to her house, on the top of a high mountain.

"I'll give those silly stars something to cry about now," said old Neda, as she opened a dark closet and threw in the moon.

"They won't have any moonlight for a while, and if I can get the sun, I can have things all my own way in the sky and make those stars sorry they were so rude to me tonight."

The next day, when the sun was shining and not thinking a thing about any harm coming to him, old Neda put on her smoked glasses and her high-topped cap and a long, black cape.

Then she jumped on her broomstick and flew straight for the sun. Of course, the stars were asleep and could not warn the sun, and he thought it was a black cloud he saw sailing toward him.

"Ah! now I can take a little nap," he said. "Here comes a black cloud which I can hide behind for a while. I do get so sleepy shining all day," and then the sun gave a yawn just to get ready for his nap.

But something happened, he didn't just know what, but before he could stop the yawn, he felt a jerk, and then he was covered with something black and whizzed along at a terrible rate of speed he did not know where.

"There, I guess I can run things to suit myself now," said old Witch Neda as she took from under her cape the sun, winking and blinking and wondering whatever had happened to him.

Into the dark closet with the moon, she threw the sun and closed the door.



Of course, the stars awoke as soon as it was dark, and it became dark right away when old Neda stole the sun, so the little stars shone and winked all night and all day because the sun did not get up, and they did not know when the night was over.

The next night they twinkled, and the next day, but then they began to get so sleepy they could not keep their bright eyes open, and one by one they began to nod.

"I wonder what can be the matter with us?" said one star, trying to keep awake. "This is the longest night I ever saw."

"And I wonder where the moon is?" said another. "If we could see him, we might find out why the sun is so lazy this morning."

Old Witch Neda was flying about, hidden beneath her black cape, and she laughed to herself as she heard what the stars said.

"I can tell you where the sun is and the moon, too," she said, throwing off her cape and showing herself to the stars. "I have them both locked up in a closet in my house," and off she flew on her broomstick, leaving the poor little stars quite speechless with amazement.

"Something must be done and done at once," said one star. "If we let that old witch have the sun and moon, who knows what will become of us."

"But what can we do?" asked another star. "Here we are up here in the sky and old Neda's house is on the top of a mountain. Besides that, she will keep a close watch over them, you may be sure. What can we do, and what will become of us?"

"One of us must go down there and let them out," said the first star. "Now which one of us will go? That is the first thing to settle."

No one answered for a minute, and then a very little star said timidly, "I am willing to go, but I am so small I do not suppose I could do any good."

"You are the very one to go, just because you are small," said the first star. "And now I will tell you how it can be done."

"Old Witch Neda will be up here tonight, you may be sure, because she is happy now that she has the sun and moon and wants to see how unhappy we are."

"When she comes tonight, we must make a great fuss and cry because we are so upset, not knowing when it is night or day, and beg her to help us. She will fly around close to us, and when she is very near Little Star, we must wail and cry and attract her attention, and then Little Star must jump on the broomstick right behind old Witch Neda—"

"Oh! oh! oh!" said all the stars. "Oh! oh! oh!" for they were afraid of old Neda. But Little Star did not cry out; she just winked and blinked and listened to what the first star said.

"As I said," continued the first star, "Little Star must jump on the broomstick right behind old Witch Neda and then close her eyes until old Neda comes to her house on the top of the mountain.

"Of course, she can only take just one look then, just to see where the old witch goes, and Little Star must stay very still until old Neda goes to bed, for she usually sleeps in the daytime.

"When all is still and you are sure old Witch Neda sleeps, then you must go about very carefully and quietly until you find the closet where the sun and moon are kept prisoners and unlock the door."

"But what good will that do?" asked one star. "They will be out of the closet, but how will they ever get back to their places in the sky? The old witch will never bring them, of course."

"Wait, my dear sister, and I will tell you even how that can be managed," said the first star.

"After you have released the sun and moon, Little Star, you must hurry to the place where the old witch keeps

her magic broomstick and jump on it. Smooth it three times one way and then three times in the opposite direction, and it will obey you.

"You must be careful, however, to smooth it but one way until you have the sun and moon safely on it with you. But hush, hush! here comes old Witch Neda."

Old Witch Neda cackled and chuckled when she heard the wailing and crying the stars were making over the loss of the sun and moon.

"Oh, give them back to us, give them back to us!" they cried. "We will never be rude to you again, even when you pull off our veils."

"Ah-ha!" said the old witch, laughing loudly. "I guess you won't be rude to me, my silly little stars, for I intend to keep the old moon and sun locked in my closet and make you shine all the time until you are so sleepy you fall out of the sky. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried the stars, all together, and old Neda flew close to them to better see how they suffered, and then Little Star did as the first star had told her to do, and the next instant she was flying along with old Witch Neda toward her house on the top of the mountain.

Little Star looked just once and saw old Neda go into the house. Then she closed her eyes and waited until she was sure the witch was asleep.

Very, very carefully she opened the door and slipped in. Then she looked around and from under a door, she saw a very bright light and knew that behind that door were the sun and moon.

The key was in the door, and it took only a second to turn it. "Hush!" said Little Star. "I have come to release you. Do not make a sound, but follow me."

Little Star took from a chair old Witch Neda's big black cape and threw it over the sun and moon so their bright light might not awaken the old witch, and in another minute, they were all sitting on the broomstick, while Little Star smoothed it three times one way and three times the other, and then said: "Off to the sky. Take us home, good broomstick."

Away they flew, and in a short time, the sun was shining in the sky just as if nothing had happened to him, and the stars went to sleep and slept soundly; they were so tired.

Little Star that night took her place in the sky very quietly, but the other stars wanted to know all about her adventure.

"Oh, I just did as the first star told me," modestly replied the Little Star, "and brought back the sun and moon, that was all."

"You were a brave Little Star," said the first star, "and as a reward, the broomstick of the old witch has been made into stars, which is to be made into a big cross, and in this cross forever shall you shine, and you will take on more brightness than any of us, brave, brave Little Star."

Of course, the old witch, having lost her broomstick, could not bother the stars any more, so they shone and twinkled happily on, always feeling grateful to Little Star for helping them out of their great trouble.