

**SOY UNA NUEZ**  
**(I Am a Walnut)**

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## An Unusual Case

Judge Bruno Panatta leaned on his elbows and looked at him closely.

"Who are you?"

The boy barely dared to lift his eyes from the ground.

"Walnut," he answered in a whisper.

"Excuse me?" The judge looked at him in astonishment from above his small, round eyeglasses.

"I am a walnut," the boy repeated with more determination, looking up.

"It seems you did not understand me," the judge said, summoning patience. "I asked you who you are."

"Your honor, if you will allow me," Ms. Marinetti corrected him, rising from her chair, "I think my client has understood and has answered your question."

"Please don't give me lessons, counselor," he replied, offended, as he moved a curl from his wig away from his nose. "I am perfectly aware that I am not speaking with an edible tree seed."

The lawyer sat down and remained silent.

"What is your name, my boy?" the judge asked, resuming his interrogation.

"Walnut," the boy insisted.

"Well, that's just... Has everyone gone crazy today?" the judge protested, banging his gavel on the table.

"He is a walnut," Rosanna Marinetti stressed, ignoring Panatta's anger.

"And I'm a pistachio!" the angry magistrate counterattacked. "Look, counsellor, I don't know what's going on with you this morning. If you will allow me, you are acting very odd and this case is, without a doubt, absurd. I have never, in my life, seen you behave this way."

The woman stared at the tips of her red high-heeled boots which peeked from beneath the table. Bruno Panatta was right. The lawyer felt different, and what was even more strange, she didn't give a fig.

"How many years have we known one another?" the judge demanded.

"Thirty two years, your honor"

"Very well. In those thirty two years I can't ever remember you acting in such a surrealist fashion. You know I'm looking forward to retiring and you come here to pull my leg like this. With what right?"

"I am not joking, your honor."

"Where do you intend to go with this?"

"This boy, legally," she stated as she stared at her client, "is a walnut."

"This is the last thing I expected to hear, counselor! Is that going to be your line of defense? 'My client is a walnut,'" he imitated in a mocking voice. "With that argument, the prosecution," he pointed with his hammer to a thin man dressed in black who had remained in silence this whole time, "will crush you mercilessly."

"It would be the first trial I lost in this room," Marinetti replied, crossing her arms across her chest.

The judge fell silent. He knew, from experience, that this woman was a veritable judicial tank, with both a prodigious memory and extraordinary knowledge of the law. So, what was the reason behind this cockamamie story? Presenting her client as a walnut didn't seem a good strategy. Although, of course, coming from her, anything might happen.

"Very well, counselor. Begin your exposition," he ordered. "I confess that I'm on tenterhooks to hear what you have to say."

#### An Astonished Judge

Rossana Marinetti stood up from her chair and looked at the boy who was seated beside her.

"Legally, to all effects, my client is a walnut," she stated confidently.

"I object, your honor!" the prosecutor exclaimed.

"Counsel will please explain itself, and not exhaust my scant patience," the judge said. "I implore you to not go off on any tangents."

"I won't, your honor," she answered, as she began to walk around the room with her red boots.

"According to article 564 of the law of private property of 1879, it is established that any fruit of a tree that falls onto a private property belongs to the owner of that property."

"And?" the judge asked.

And as he asked that question, he couldn't help noticing the lawyer's footwear. What was Marinetti doing in red boots when she usually dressed strictly in black or gray?

"I don't understand," he insisted, looking away from her footwear.

"This child," she continued, "fell out of a walnut tree which, casually, is to be found in my garden. Therefore, according to the law, he should remain my property."

"I object, your honor!" the prosecutor shouted. "This child is an orphan and must return immediately to the refugee shelter."

"What is it you're trying to do, counselor?" the judge asked, his curiosity piqued.

"According to the law, all the fruits that fall in my garden belong to me," she replied.

"I object, your honor!" the prosecutor brayed. "This woman has gone mad!"

The judge looked at her, perplexed. Yes, anyone would say that she was truly off her rocker.

"Counselor, would you please approach the bench for a moment?" Bruno Panatta ordered. "For your own good," he whispered, so no one else could hear, "I hope you present something more in your defense. Otherwise, I must agree with the prosecutor. Do you have anything else to add?"

The lawyer cleared her throat and glared at the prosecutor.

"I'd like to call my first witness, your honor."

Panatta was left speechless. Her first witness? Witness of what? He resettled the white wig which had slipped to one side when he leaned forward to whisper to her, and furrowed his brow. What was Marinetti up to?

"I object" the prosecutor replied.

"Counselor," the judge berated, "you should have informed us of this beforehand."

"Your honor," she murmured just between the two of them, "I didn't know they were going to testify until last evening."

The judge signed in resignation.

"How many people have you convinced to testify in favor of your 'walnut'?"

"A few," she answered, lowering her voice to avoid the rest of the courtroom from hearing.

"Can you be more specific, counselor?"

She leaned even closer to his ear. The judge's eyebrows rose in shock when he heard the number. Where had all these last minute witnesses come from? And what devices had Marinetti used to get them to attend a trial?

Marinetti

My name is Rossana. However, everyone knows me as the merciless Marinetti, the lawyer. In recent years, after the death of my parents, I have sued almost the entire building. Since then, I wear and dress all in black. Sometimes in dark gray. That's how things have been until some mysterious red boots appeared on the floor of my bedroom, next to my bed.

I wondered how they had gotten there. Who had given them to me? And how had they entered my home?

Forced entry, I thought, scratching my nose. Without a doubt, it was a crime so serious that it deserved a no holds barred lawsuit. But, who should I sue? My neighbor, the shoemaker, didn't even greet me ever since I won the lawsuit against him for repeatedly making mistakes with the bags of recycling. He alleged that he was daltonic, that he had gotten the colors confused. But neither the judge nor I swallowed that story. Who could I accuse without proof? And, what more, why would I notify the police if something so lovely had appeared in my bedroom?

Because I must confess that those red boots captivated me right away. They gave off a lovely shine. They reminded me of some rain boots my mother had given me when I was little. And, almost without realizing, I put them on and tied the long laces and confirmed, astonished, that they were exactly my size. I stared at them astonished and a nervous giggle escaped me. It had been various years since I had last laughed. But that was not the first nor the last of the marvelous events that took place in my house over the past weeks. And, at no moment, did I think of denouncing them because I was delighted by them.

#### The Botanist's Opinion

Marinetti's first witness was a man with thick eyebrows and a tangled beard that grew around his face and gave him the look of a mad scientist.

"Mr. William Peterson," the lawyer asked him, "can you tell us your profession."

"I am a botanist," the man answered.

"Do you consider yourself to be a good botanist?"

"Well, I was in the top of my class at the University of Glasgow."

"As I understand, that university is considered one of the best in the world in your speciality," Marinetti indicated.

"That is so," the witness confirmed.

Judge Panatta couldn't stand any more and shifted restlessly on the bench. "Counselor," he said, "Please get to the point."

"Mr. Peterson, I want you to turn your attention to my client and explain to us what you see."

The boy raised his large dark eyes. Their gazes crossed in the silence of the room.

"Well," the expert coughed, "from a botanical point of view, I can state that he is a walnut."

"I object, your honor!" The prosecutor couldn't believe this. "This is a complete farce!"

"Mr. Peterson," the judge warned him seriously, "remember that you are under oath."

The witness nodded seriously.

"Mr. Peterson," Marinetti continued without the least worry, "you have come here as a witness and I would like you to tell the courtroom your own version of the events."

"I saw it with my own eyes," he pointed out, "how the accused fell from one of the branches of a walnut tree on her property. And I can assure you, as a specialist in botany as I am, that his manner of dropping from the tree, and even the way he rolled on the ground, coincide exactly with those of a walnut."

"That doesn't turn him into a fruit!" the prosecutor shrieked.

"From the botanical point of view," William Peterson replied, "I would say that it does."

"Anything else to declare?" asked the judge, who couldn't believe what he had just heard.

"No, your honor," the first witness answered.

"Then you may step down," the judge ordered, exhaling a long breath to blow another rebel strand from the wig away from his face.

Of all the nonsense he had heard in his life, the botanist's story was without a doubt the winner!

"Your honor," the accusation's lawyer begged, "I request a recess."

Because the unexpected version of the first witness had left the prosecutor seeing red.

In agreement with his request, the judge banged his gavel on the table and ordered a half hour recess. He also needed a pause to digest Marinetti's defense strategy. He had never heard anything like this! And what should seem a clearcut case of an orphaned, immigrant minor who should be returned to his shelter had transformed into a trial over the ownership of a walnut.

William

My name is William, and since I was little I wanted to study Botany. The problem is that I was not good with plants. And when I finished my degree, despite all my studies and being considered a brilliant specialist, the only plants that survived me were geraniums, cacti, and some trees like oaks.

That autumn, I had decided to plant azaleas. I was about to water them when I saw the child fall from the walnut tree. So I went into my house to look for my mobile and call for help. It's true that it took me a while because I couldn't remember where I'd left it. When I got back to the garden, to my surprise, the boy had vanished. Mrs. Marinetti's dogs had stopped barking and were lying on the grass. I should confess that I am the only neighbor who she has not sued in recent years.

After the episode with the walnut tree, the next day, I saw the boy again. He was in the same place where he had disappeared and he was brushing the lawyer's two canine mastodons as if nothing had happened.

"What a change!" I exclaimed, leaning on the small wooden fence that separated us.

"There's nothing like a good haircut with some scissors," he answered with a smile.

"Did my neighbor hire you to take care of her dogs?"

He didn't answer me, although he approached curiously.

"What are you doing?"

"Watering the azaleas."

"You're drowning them."

"Do you think?" I asked.

He nodded, with assurance.

"I don't know." I wondered if I should confess, and meanwhile turned off the hose. "It's just, I'm no good with plants. I don't have a green thumb."

"My father was a gardner and he used to talk to them in a soft voice. Sometimes, at sunset, he sang to them."

Then the boy crouched down and began to whisper words in a foreign language. He stayed that way for a long time. He took the leaves and dried the drops of water from them. After a few days, the azaleas began to flourish.

I realize that, from the first morning we met, I eagerly awaited the moment I would reencounter my new and mysterious friend. Because the truth is that I was lonelier than the number one.

And he knew the secret of plants. I usually made him breakfast, which led him to give me a big smile in return, and after a few days I revealed the biggest secret I knew about Rossana Marinetti's house.

"Underneath that flowerpot, the one shaped like a snail, she usually keeps a back up set of keys. In case she needs them," I said, casual as could be. "She is a lawyer, I imagine you knew that, and she spends all day at the courthouse."

"Does she work a lot?" he asked with interest.

"Too much. I think she does it so as not to think."

"About what?"

"About her parents. They died in a fire in a hotel. It seems the building didn't have the necessary safety requirements. So she sued the company. She didn't get anything, beyond a small indemnity. And after that, Marinetti began to change."

## What a Walnut Wants

During the recess, the judge summoned the boy and had him enter his office. He wanted to speak with him alone.

"The file from the refugee center lists your full name. According to this information, you are ten years old, an orphan, and you have escaped," he began, trying to catch the boy's eyes. "Your file says you've been in Italy for only three months. I must congratulate you," he admitted sincerely, "because, in such a short time, you speak such fluent Italian. In short," he went on, as if regretting what he had just said, "we must set aside foolishness, we all know that this suit doesn't have a leg to stand on. Who is going to believe that you are a walnut?"

"Miss Marinetti believes it."

"Is her opinion so important?"

"It is for me."

The judge raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Why?"

"Because I trust her."

"That is not enough to win a lawsuit."

"She has based her argument on Italian law."

"By all that's holy! It's a law from ancient history!"

"It is a law and establishes jurisprudence."

His honor opened his eyes, impressed. "She will have taught you that, of course. Who knows what other nonsense she's filled your head with.

The boy wouldn't give up. On the contrary, he seemed even more determined in his defense.

"Besides," he added hopefully, "we have witnesses who will confirm our version."

"But, what do you hope to achieve with all this?"

The curly-haired boy remained quiet for a moment.

"What is it you want?" the judge sallied forth once more.

"I want to remain with Ms. Marinetti."

"What for?" the judge spat angrily. "Can't you see she's acting like she's lost her marbles?"

"We need one another," he replied simply.

"Then let her start the process for adoption! She's driving me mad with her nonstop lawsuits and now she comes at me with this!" Bruno Panatta took off his wig and angrily tossed it onto the table.



Adoption? Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Mountains of papers. And what's more, they'd object to Marinetti's age. She must be at least 50. Both of them thought this, although neither said anything. There was a tense silence in the office. His honor stared closely at the young boy with dark eyes.

"So?" the judge insisted, uncomfortably. "What do you say? Why don't you ask her to adopt you?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders and gave a slight smile.

"How is she going to adopt me if I'm a walnut?"

Omar

My name is Omar. My father was a gardener and my mother smelled of cinnamon. He drew animals with the leaves of the bushes and she used to make a delicious dough covered in honey. Both of them were swallowed by the sea shortly before we reached the beach. I saw them disappear while I floated in that nutshell together with other strangers. My shouts were no use because water has no ears. Of the three, only I wore a little lifejacket with my name on it. My mother had written it with a worn out marker so I would never forget it.

The Fabric Specialist

Marinetti's second witness was a bent old woman whose hands were skilled with all kinds of fabrics.

"Mrs. Lambert, would you be so kind as to tell us what you do?"

"I've sewn, embroidered and knit my whole life," she replied calmly. "I devote myself to the art of tailoring. I am a dressmaker and I studied in Paris."

"Could you then state that your sense of touch is extremely refined?"

"Needless to say," she said.

"You could distinguish any texture with your fingers?"

"Even with my eyes blindfolded."

"Will you allow me to cover your eyes?" Marinetti asked, as she pulled a silk scarf from her pocket.

"I object!" the prosecutor shouted, standing up from his seat. "They are using cheap theatrical tricks!"

"The prosecution is correct, counselor," the judge warned. "We are not in a circus!"

"Your honor," she replied seriously, "this is a necessary and relevant test."

The judge pressed his lips together and nodded. What the devil could they be planning with that scarf? He couldn't deny that he was intrigued.

"Proceed," he authorized, "but be brief."

"Thank you, your honor."

Marinetti blindfolded the old woman and then made a silent gesture for her client to approach her. The boy stopped a few centimeters away from her expert hands. With the lawyer's help, the witness' fingers travelled all over the face before her and she began to smile.

"Well, Mrs. Lambert," she continued with her questioning. "As a specialist in textures, what is this?"

The judge and the prosecutor stared at her perplexed.

"I am quite clear," she said after a few seconds. "You've tried to trick me with something other than a fabric, but, there is no doubt that I am touching a walnut."

"On what do you base that?" the judge asked, astonished, as he pushed aside another errant strand of his white wig.

"I base my conclusion that on its roughness, on its unmistakable feel, its hardness and at the same time its fragility. It is a walnut."

Rosanna Marinetti smiled satisfied.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Lambert, you can remove the scarf. I have finished with my witness."

The prosecutor shot to his feet as if he had a spring in his buttocks.

"I have not yet begun!" he shouted. "And I have a question for you." He fixed the old woman with a feline gaze.

"Proceed!" the judge encouraged.

"Mrs. Lambert, do you have some kind of friendship with the lawyer?"

"No, not at all."

"Remember that you are under oath," the judge reminded.

"I have no friendship at all with my neighbor."

"Didn't you prepare this entire show together?" the prosecutor insinuated with disdain.

"You are offending me!" the fabric expert cried. "Everyone knows that I won't even greet my neighbor ever since she sued me because the sound of my sewing machine bothered her."

The astonishment of those present in the courtroom could be heard: "OHHHH."

"It's true," Marinetti admitted. "I have very sharp hearing and it's hard for me to fall sleep when there's noise."

"And I have double glazing that isolates perfectly!" Mrs. Lambert stated, with ill humor. "That woman," she pointed her finger at the lawyer, "forced me to soundproof the walls of my living room as if I were playing the drums! It cost me a fortune! Let the record show, or however one says that, that I can't stand to see her even in a photo!"

The murmuring in the courtroom grew: "OOOOHH."

Rossana Marinetti's activities, they all thought, was fodder for Night Court.

"That's fine, please calm down, Mrs. Lambert. A bit of order, please!" The judge banged his gavel and the courtroom fell silent. "Any other question for the witness?"

The prosecutor shook his head no and lowered his gaze. He could feel that both his cheeks and ears were burning. Red as a tomato for a damned question. He'd really stuck his foot in it and he knew it.

Madame Lambert

My name is Juliette Lambert and I don't lie when I state that I saw the boy fall from the walnut tree and that I witnessed a miracle. That afternoon he was being chased by three vandals of around fourteen. How did I know? Because I saw them from my terrace. Why was I watching them? Because I was bored out of my mind. Any objection? The thing is, those hoodlums were on the other side of the wall of my neighbor, the insufferable lawyer.

"The little squirrel is afraid!" mocked the largest of them. "Look how he climbed up the tree!"

"Shall we go after him?" the redhead asked, rolling up the sleeves of his leather jacket.

"Are you crazy?" replied the third, who had shaved his head with his father's clippers committing, in my opinion, a terrible hair disaster. "This is the house of the crazy lawyer! My mother is in a lawsuit with her and she's very worried. The lawyer sued her for not returning the shopping cart to its proper place on a few occasions. My mom says she's going to lose and have to pay a fortune. I'm out of here"

He had barely spoken those words when Rossana's two large hounds, who had been wandering around the back of the garden, started to run like mad. On hearing their powerful barks approaching quickly, the biggest one ordered, "Let's get out of here, I thought those hairy demons were tied up!"

And before running away, staring into their victim's eyes, he shouted, "Little squirrel, I hope they eat you up and devour your heart!"

A few seconds later, the branch of the walnut tree broke and the boy fell to the ground. What was surprising, the miracle, was that the dogs, instead of attacking him, approached the boy and licked his ankles. At that same moment, it smelled of something burning. I had left the toaster on. I ran to the kitchen with the help of my cane. When I got back to the terrace, the boy had disappeared. The dogs, too.

I waited until the next morning to look over the balcony and I found him once more. The boy was speaking with the man next door and soon he crouched down over some azalea bushes. He stayed like that for a long time. I waited until Mr. Peterson went back inside. It seemed like they had said goodbye. And thus, without anyone seeing me, I decided to go out and cross the street. "Shhhh!" I hissed to him furtively from the gate.

He stopped petting the dogs and turned toward me. Without saying a word, I threw a sports bag over the door. I felt like I was committing something illegal, secret or forbidden.

"My only grandson must be around your age," I said without beating around the bush. "But he hates my clothes. He only wants brand labels."

"Wow!" he didn't know what to say

"He says that I'm old fashioned."

"I'm sorry." The boy sounded sincere.

"Perhaps," I admitted unwillingly, "I am a bit daring with color combinations."

He knelt down and opened the zipper. He pulled out a pair of tops from inside the bag. One pistachio green and the other brown with fuchsia stripes.

"I love them," he said.

He took off the one he was wearing and out on the pistachio colored one. It looked great on them.

"I also put in a few pairs of pants, socks, and some underwear," I whispered. "There are ten pairs of cotton underwear that my grandson rejected. But don't worry," I assured him, "they've never been worn."

He smiled again. His dark eyes shone as if they had stars inside them or as if he were about to start crying.