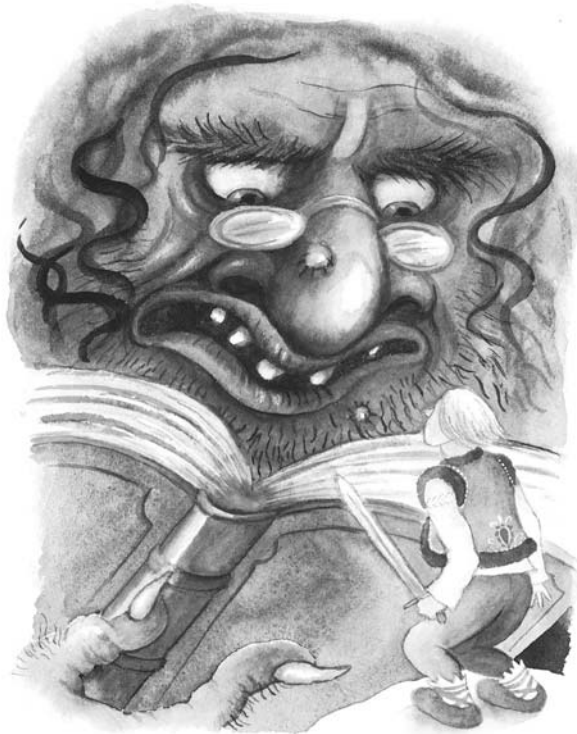


*a breakfast serials story*

# Janko and the Giant: A Tale of Old Slovakia

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## Chapter 2 The Giant

**The story so far:** Janko is a boy from a small Slovak village where nothing wonderful ever happens. But now, with a borrowed sword and mule, he has set out on a real adventure to the castle of a fearsome giant!

The giant's castle stood at the very edge of a high cliff. It sat perched like an eagle's nest made of boulders. Janko peered down at the river far below, so distant it looked like a silver ribbon. A small pebble, loosened by his feet, rolled over the edge and plummeted down and out of sight.

"No matter how far you fall, the earth will always catch you," he thought, somewhat annoyed that *Babicka's* sayings kept popping into his head. He stepped carefully back from the cliff, turned, and drew a deep breath.

The huge door to the giant's castle was made of split oak logs fastened together with massive iron bands. That impressive door was so large that Janko felt uncertain. It might not be easy to defeat a real giant.

Janko paused and took a deep breath. "Perhaps I should just go back to Dedina," he thought. Then another thought leapt to mind, as if it has been waiting there for the right moment. "*The pot that fears the fire never cooks a meal.*"

Janko knocked on the castle door with the butt of his borrowed sword, covering himself with flakes of rust as he did so.

"KTO? WHO IS THERE?" boomed a great voice.

The great door of the castle swung open and the giant stared down, a long way down, at Janko. Janko looked back up at him, feeling like the mouse who just stepped on the cat's tail.

"WHO ARE YOU?" roared the giant, looming like a storm cloud. Janko tried to speak. It was not easy, especially since his mind seemed to be quite busy taking note that a full

grown brown bear would look like a kitten next to the huge being glaring down at him.

"NACO?" rumbled the giant? "WELL?"

"I am Janko," Janko finally managed to say.

As soon as he uttered those words, Janko felt foolish. That was not what a hero in a book would have said. Better to have thundered back, "I am He who will destroy you." Even better not to have replied in a timid little voice that cracked.

"Hmm," the giant growled. "Why come you here, tiny one?"

Janko took a deep breath. He hadn't expected questions. "I . . . come from Dedina," he whispered.

"Ah," said the giant, nodding his head. "Of course. Wait here, please."

The giant turned and walked back into the castle. His feet made great echoing sounds as he disappeared into the darkness. Janko tapped his sword against the door, hoping it would stop the trembling of his hands.

From what he had read in his books, he had expected the giant to be large. So his size was no surprise. What he hadn't expected was how small that size would make him feel. Moreover, what was the giant doing now? Did real giants always ask heroes to wait for them? Janko looked up over the door, and for the first time he noticed a sign printed in large, scrawling letters.

VELKY'S CASTLE

HOME OF VELKY GIANT

BE WARE

(PLACE TRIBUTE BY DOOR, PLEASE)

The sound of booming footsteps drew Janko's attention away from the sign. Velky lumbered back into the doorway. He was now wearing a pair of glasses, each lens twice as big as Janko's head, and he held a massive, leatherbound ledger book in his right hand. The book was wider than a kitchen table.

"Dedina?" he asked.

"Ahno," Janko said. "Yes."

The giant placed one tree-trunk-sized finger on a page in the book. "Dedina, eh? Let's see. Dakto, Darcek, Dedicstvo, Divoky," he said, reading the carefully alphabetized villages' names. "*Nie!* No Dedina here. Are you certain you're from there?"

"Of course I am," Janko said. Things were not going

well at all.

The giant now produced a quill pen made from the feather of a bird large enough to carry off a cow. "De-dina," the giant said, laboriously printing this new name into his book. "And how large is your village? And what is your harvest each year?"

"We have twenty houses, well, actually sixteen since the landslide. As for our harvest," Janko drew himself up taller. Last year's crop had been the best he could remember. "Twelve whole bags of grain. . . including the four bags that were eaten by weevils."

"My, my," the giant said, shaking his head. "How pathetic. Even though I know nothing about Dedina and, even if I did, would probably demand nothing since it has so little, here you are. Sent by the terrified people of your village to the great and fearful Velky to bring me. . ."

The giant reached out one hand with surprising speed to pluck the sword from Janko's grasp. "One rusted sword formerly belonging to Slabost, the Unlucky." Velky held it between two fingers like a toothpick, then tossed it over his shoulder.

Immediately, and quite without welcome, yet another of Janko's grandmother's sayings leapt to mind. "What good does any weapon do for you when it is in someone else's hands?"

Janko opened his mouth to protest, but Velky was not done.

"And also," the giant said, with a wide smile that showed sharp and gleaming teeth, "something for my dinner."

With that he put down his ledger book and reached out one tree-sized hand toward Janko.

## Next Week: The Giant's Huge Hand

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