

a breakfast serials story

Janko and the Giant: A Tale of Old Slovakia

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Chapter 3 The Giant's Huge Hand

The story so far: Janko, a boy from a small village, has just discovered that giants are larger—and quicker—than he had expected. After taking Janko's sword, the hungry giant Velky is reaching out his tree-sized hand toward Janko!

Two things went through Janko's mind. The first was that this adventure might be shorter and unhappier adventure than he'd expected. The second? One of his grandmother's proverbs: *The earth does not shake when a flea coughs*. Janko was the flea.

"Old and a little skinny around the hindquarters," Velky rumbled, "but you will do." Then the giant picked up Gazda's mule.

Giants, Janko quickly discovered, do not bother to cook their meat. Gazda's mule disappeared in four bites,

head first. It was both horrifying and fascinating to watch.

Velky wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, picked up his ledger book, burped, and made a mark with the huge quill pen.

"Good enough," the giant said, "but next time I would prefer a cow." He stepped back inside and shut the door.

Janko stood there for a moment, stunned. Then, though not sure what the giant would do, Janko pounded on the door with his fists. It opened almost immediately. Velky looked down and smiled.

"Of course," the giant said. "How foolish of me. I forgot to mention when your next tribute is due. Six months from now will be fine." He started to turn away. Janko held out his hand. "I, I . . ."

"Sorry," Velky said, "I don't give receipts. Just show this as proof that you made your delivery." He dropped something into Janko's hand, turned, and closed the door behind him.

Janko heard a large bolt grating into place. He looked down at what Velky had given him. It was the tail of

Gazda's donkey.

As Janko walked dejectedly down the mountain, he knew he could not go home. How could he explain not just the loss of sword and donkey, but also that--thanks to him--Dedina now owed tribute to a large, hungry giant? What would his grandmother have said?

If your first seeds fall on stony ground, seek another field.

Janko nodded. He had to find a way to defeat the giant, but the answer was not in Dedina. Janko turned east, taking the road that led to Radnica.

With each step along the way Janko grew more cheerful. As that old saying goes "*Kde je Slovak, tam je piesen,*" or, "*Where there is a Slovak there is a song.*" Soon Janko was humming a tune.

Uphill and down, through the tall pine forest, across the river and through the valley he went. By the time Janko reached the Izba Inn at the edge of Radnica, he was covered with dust—thrown up on him by five rude riders who almost ran him down at the entrance to the Inn's yard before carelessly tying their horses and then stomping inside.

Janko did not follow them inside. He was hungry as a bear in spring--but, as usual, without a kopek in his pocket. Perhaps he could go around back and ask to work for a bed and a meal.

Janko washed in the trough. Then he filled a bucket and carried it over to the horse that had been tied to a post far from the water. The thirsty animal immediately dipped its head to drink. As soon as it was done, the horse looked up at him and cleared its throat.

"Take me," it said.

Another person might have assumed hunger and exhaustion had made him delirious. Janko, though, was delighted. Talking horses were to be expected in adventure stories.

However, Janko remembered how things had gone with the giant. If the innkeeper saw him engaged in conversation with a quadruped, he would likely drive him away as a loony. *Test the depth of the river before leaping in,* he told himself.

"Did you say something?" Janko whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

"Perhaps," said the horse. "What do you think?"

"Are you an enchanted princess?"

The horse looked insulted. "I beg your pardon!"

"Oh," Janko said. "Sorry. Enchanted prince, then?"

"*Nie*, no. Just a horse."

"Just a talking horse," Janko said, stroking the horse's nose.

"*Ano*, yes. Now are you going to take me?"

"I'm not a horse thief," Janko protested.

"The man who tied me here is," said the horse.

"Whom did he steal you from?" Janko asked, patting the horse's shoulder.

"My master Blaznivý, a powerful wizard. That man and his gang broke in late last night. My master, though, was prepared for thieves. He saw them in his magic mirror and confronted them in his stables before they could flee."

"If your master was so powerful," Janko asked, "how in Heaven's name did they get away?"

The horse scuffed the ground with one foot. "Alas, powerful as he was, Blaznivý the Great was indecisive. 'Shall I turn them into toads or statues?' he said to himself with a superior smile. '*Ako, ako*. Toads or statues, statues or toads?' He had so much trouble deciding, that he turned to me, tapped me with his wand, and gave me the power of speech. 'Kon,' he asked, 'what should I do?'"

Janko's hand strayed toward the horse's reins. Surprisingly, though they'd been firmly tied, the reins slipped free and coiled around his wrist.

"What," Janko said, shaking his hand as the reins wrapped tighter, "did you tell your master?"

Kon, the horse, looked embarrassed. "I tried to say, 'Look out behind you.' Before I could, Klinko the Robber hit my master over the head with a large club."

"*Ja rozumiem!*" Janko had heard of Klinko, the most ruthless and feared of all outlaws.

"Excuse me," said Kon, the horse.

"What?" Janko said.

"Look out behind you."

Next Week: First Battle

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