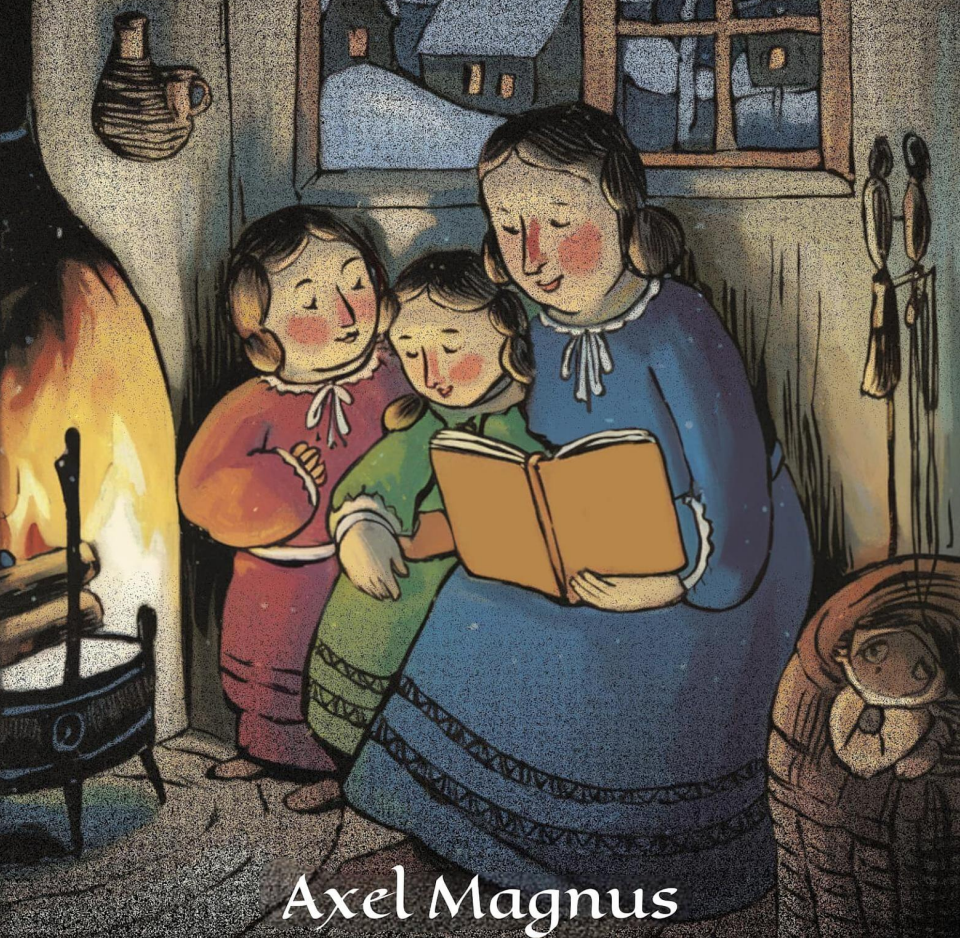


CZECH FOLK TALES

Wisdom, Wonder and Moral Teaching



Axel Magnus

AXEL MAGNUS

Czech Folk Tales: Wisdom,
Wonder, and Moral Teachings

*Ancestral Wisdom Through Storytelling. Stories we
recall and tell to ourselves shapes our world*

First published by LULU 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Axel Magnus

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

Axel Magnus asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Axel Magnus has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iv
<i>Preface</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
Introduction	1
I Section I: Tales of Virtue and Vice	
The Twelve Months	7
The Golden Fish	13
Marusa and the Strawberries	19
The Girl with the Golden Gizzard	24
Katcha and the Devil	31
Conclusion to Section I: Tales of Virtue and Vice	38
II Section II: Legends of Czech Heroes	
Libuše and the Founding of Prague	43
Horymír and Šemík	50
The Three Brothers: Czech, Lech, and Rus	59
Prince Bayaya	67
Zito, the Court Magician	78
Conclusion to Section II: Legends of Czech Heroes	88

III III: Supernatural Beings and Moral Dilemmas

The Golem of Prague	93
The Water Goblin (Vodník)	101
Little Red Riding Hood (Červená Karkulka)	108
The Mysterious Fires of Petřín	118
Boots, Cloak, and Ring	128
Conclusion to Section III: Supernatural Beings and Moral...	140

IV Section IV: Cautionary Tales

Otesánek	145
The Naming of Smíchov	154
Silly Jura	164
Sleepy John	175
The Bear, The Eagle, and The Fish	188
Conclusion to Section IV: Cautionary Tales	200

V Section V: Tales of Wisdom and Cleverness

Kojata	205
Vitazko and the Earth Sow	215
Shepherd Hynek	224
The Three Roses	233
The Enchanted Princesses	240
Conclusion to Section V: Tales of Wisdom and Cleverness	249

VI Section VI: Stories of Faith and Spirituality

The Water of Life and Death	253
The Pelican Bird	260
The Kingdom of Midnight	268
The Shrovetide Processions	276
Drowning of Morana	284
Conclusion to Section VI: Stories of Faith and Spirituality	291

VII Help to navigate

Appendix	295
Conclusion	307
Epilogue	313
Afterword	315
<i>About the Author</i>	317

Marusa and the Strawberries

The Tale

In a small village at the edge of a great forest lived a young girl named Maruša with her father, stepmother, and stepsister Holena. Maruša's father, a woodcutter, was often away working in distant parts of the forest, leaving Maruša at the mercy of her stepmother and Holena, who treated her cruelly.

While Holena lounged by the fire wearing fine clothes, Maruša was forced to do all the household chores, dress in rags, and sleep on a straw pallet near the hearth. Despite this harsh treatment, Maruša remained kind and gentle, never complaining about her lot in life.

One bitter January day, when snow lay thick upon the ground and the wind howled like hungry wolves, Holena demanded, "Go, Maruša, and get me some strawberries from the forest."

"Alas! dear sister, where could I find any strawberries? Who ever heard of strawberries growing under the snow?" Maruša replied, bewildered by such an impossible request in the middle of winter.

"You wretched little tatterdemalion, how dare you argue when I tell you to do a thing? Go at once and get me the strawberries,

or I'll kill you!" Holena threatened cruelly.

The stepmother seized Maruša, pushed her out the door, and slammed it shut behind her. Alone and frightened, Maruša trudged through the deep snow toward the forest, tears freezing on her cheeks. No human footprints marked the pristine white landscape as she wandered, hungry and shivering with cold.

After walking for what seemed like hours, Maruša spotted a distant light glimmering between the trees—the same mysterious light she had seen before. Hope flickering in her heart, she made her way toward it. There in a clearing sat twelve men around a great fire—the twelve months of the year.

"Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at your fire. I am trembling with cold," Maruša asked politely.

Great January, who sat on the highest stone, nodded and asked, "Why have you come again, and what are you looking for here?"

"I am looking for strawberries," Maruša answered truthfully.

"But it is winter now, and strawberries don't grow on the snow," January replied.

"Yes, I know," said Maruša sadly. "But my sister Holena and my stepmother bade me bring them strawberries, and if I don't bring them, they will kill me. Please, fathers, tell me where I can find them."

Great January rose from his seat and approached the month sitting opposite him—it was June. Handing his staff to him, January said, "Brother, take the high seat."

June took the high seat upon the stone and swung the staff over the fire. Immediately, the flames leaped higher, and their heat melted the snow in one corner of the clearing. The ground turned green with grass, flowers bloomed, birds began to sing, and summer came to that small patch of forest. Under the bushes, white starry blossoms appeared, quickly transforming

into bright red strawberries.

“Pick them at once, Maruša!” June commanded.

Joyfully, Maruša gathered the strawberries until her apron was full. She thanked the months with all her heart and hurried home through the snowy forest.

When she arrived at the cottage, Holena and the stepmother were astonished to see Maruša returning with an apron full of ripe, fragrant strawberries. They rushed to open the door, and the sweet scent filled the entire cottage.

“Where did you pick them?” Holena asked sulkily.

“There are plenty of them growing under the young beech-trees in the forest on the high mountains,” Maruša answered.

Holena greedily devoured the strawberries, as did the step-mother. Neither offered even one to Maruša, who had braved the winter forest to fetch them.

A few days later, Holena’s capricious desires turned to apples. “Maruša, go into the forest and get me some red apples,” she commanded.

“But, my dear sister,” Maruša protested, “how am I to get apples for you in winter?”

“You wretched little tatterdemalion, how dare you argue when I tell you to do a thing? Go to the forest at once, and if you don’t bring me the apples I will kill you!” Holena threatened.

Moral Analysis

“Maruša and the Strawberries” exemplifies the Czech folkloric tradition of contrasting virtue with vice through clearly defined characters. Maruša embodies the virtues most cherished in Czech culture: patience, diligence, politeness, and perseverance in the face of cruelty and impossible demands. Despite her

stepfamily's abuse, she never responds with bitterness or seeks revenge.

The tale teaches that proper behavior—particularly showing respect to powerful forces (represented by the twelve months)—brings reward even in seemingly impossible circumstances. Maruša approaches the supernatural beings with appropriate humility and honesty, addressing them politely and explaining her situation without complaint or self-pity.

In contrast, Holena and the stepmother represent negative qualities consistently condemned in Czech folklore: cruelty, laziness, greed, and ingratitude. Their behavior toward Maruša—making impossible demands, offering no thanks for her efforts, and not sharing the bounty she brings—violates fundamental social norms of fairness and reciprocity.

The months themselves represent both natural forces and moral arbiters. They have the power to alter seasons but choose to use this power to help the virtuous and, as we will see if Holena attempts to find them herself, punish the wicked. This reflects the Czech folkloric belief that the natural world ultimately aligns with moral order.

Cultural Significance

This tale holds particular significance in Czech culture as it connects to the agricultural traditions and seasonal awareness that were central to rural Czech life for centuries. The personification of months reflects pre-Christian Slavic animism that attributed consciousness and agency to natural forces and cycles.

The tale gained prominence during the Czech National Revival of the 19th century when Božena Němcová and other collectors preserved folk narratives as expressions of authentic Czech

cultural identity. The story's emphasis on kindness, hard work, and proper respect for natural forces reflected values that distinguished Czech cultural identity during a period of growing national consciousness.

Regional variations exist throughout the Czech lands. In some versions, the months test Maruša with riddles before helping her. In Moravian variants, the months appear as brothers in a hidden mountain castle. These differences reflect the diverse cultural influences that have shaped Czech folklore across different regions.

Today, "Maruša and the Strawberries" continues to be told to Czech children not just as entertainment but as moral education. The tale teaches the importance of politeness, honesty, and perseverance—values that remain relevant in contemporary Czech society. It also serves as a cultural touchstone, connecting modern Czechs to their agricultural past and traditional worldview.