**Story**

**JAKOB MAKES A FRIEND**

When Postojna was just a larger village overlooked by a mighty mansion from the top of Sovič, everything was different around here. Houses were smaller and streets were narrow. Life was moving slower and everybody knew everybody.

There is only one thing that has not change at all since then. Then, as now, the wind *burja* liked to wander among the houses. When it was strong, it would whine around corners and chase people away from fields and courtyards into the houses with tightly bolted doors.

Well, there is something else that has not changed at all. After finishing their chores, people got together for a chat in the square. They discussed every available piece of news, and then spread them far. But no piece of news reached as far as that about the bravery of a little shepherd called Jakob who overcame the dragon from the might cave.

News travelled across Mount Nanos to Vipava Valley, and from there the *burja* took it all the way to the sea. It travelled across the Javorniki mountain chain and dark forests to the plains on which white Ljubljana stands, it reached the white Mount Snežnik and then travelled further down to the islands in the gleaming bay. People everywhere admired smart little Jakob, and many simply could not believe how he managed to defeat the scary cave monster for good.

But Jakob did not care about this. He did not pay any attention to admiring word. After all, he did not have time for that as his job of herding the many sheep in the village kept him busy. And because they were unruly, he sometimes had to run all day from one side of the pasture to the other to herd them together. But he was very gentle in doing this. He never spoke harshly, nor did he ever act angrily or hatefully towards animals. How could he? They were his friends.

There were, however, a few more peaceful days when animals grazed lazily. Then Jakob would remain seated on his favourite rock. It was high, and he had to climb to reach its peak from where he could watch the wonderful countryside. Then, his thoughts flew to the land his father told him about. And his father had been told about it by an old sailor who once came to Jakob's village upon his last sea journey.

He spoke of a land of red soil and hot sun far on the other side of the greatest ocean, where people with big white smiles and with skin as dark as charcoal lived, where gold ran in rivers and amazingly sweet fruits grew on trees. Jakob could vividly picture everything his father had told him about this faraway land. How he would love to walk just once across it, to taste the sweetness of the fruits enticingly hanging from long branches and to hold in his hand a grain of true gold. But what he wished most was to befriend a boy his own age. Would he also be a shepherd, he wondered, while immersed in his imaginary trip across this foreign land.

Once he drew with a piece of charcoal the features of his dark friend on the rock. First he drew a head with wide smile, the same as his father had describe it to him. Then he drew long arms and a strong body. His friend had to be at least as strong as he was, he thought. Finally, he drew agile and fast legs so that they could compete in jumping over bushes on the pasture. He pondered and then drew a boy from a faraway land on the rock. When he put the charcoal down, he looked at him.

He placed his hand on his, and realized they were similar in size. He lowered his face close to his, grinned and looked into his big, dark eyes. He is exactly like me, he said to himself. When he made a step back, he was proud, but did not know if it was because of the drawing or his new friend.

The following day he ran to the pasture early, stepped onto the rock, and was overcome with immense joy at the sight of his new friend who was waiting for him on the same spot where they had said goodbye to each other the previous evening. He was elated. He thought how happy someone who has a friend, a dear friend, must be.

The entire day he kept his new friend informed about what was going on. He confided in him that he still occasionally woke up in the middle of the night scared of the dragon from the cave, and that sometimes, especially during long and harsh winters, he was burdened by worries when his mother was forced to bake ever smaller loaves of bread.

His friend looked at him clearly and fixedly, and followed him with his eyes. Jakob felt that he finally found someone he could trust and could keep a secret.

That spring Jakob's days went faster as he was sharing them with his new friend. In addition, all his worries miraculously subsided after confiding in his friend. Something strong and warm grew in his young heart.

And then the strong April rain came. The *burja* was dissecting the clouds and rain poured onto the earth. Jakob was looking sadly through a door at the rock where his friend was waiting for him.

When the rain stopped and the first rays of sunshine peaked through the gray sky, Jakob sprinted towards the pasture. He was so eager to see his friend that he did not feel the wet ground under his feet or pain when he occasionally stepped on sharp stones. He was eager to talk to him again.

He almost ran into the rock and stopped petrified in front of its wall on which everything was as before, only his friend was gone. The figure drawn by Jakob's small hands had been washed away by the heavy rain, and the sun had cleared the last traces of the image that made him so happy.

On his face sweat was mixing with tears running from his dejected eyes. He collapsed with his back pressed against the rock and closed his teary eyes. I am alone again, he sighed.

Then his dark friend surprised him by sneaking into his thought. Actually, he had been there all the time, only Jakob was not aware of it as he was so fascinated with the image he was observing on the rock.

We are friends also when you do not see me, a sweet voice told Jakob. I am beside you even when I am not here, because we are connected by the strongest possible bond among people, which cannot be broken by anything. Not even heavy rain or the *burja* can destroy it. Do you understand?

All of a sudden Jakob felt that he was no longer alone below the rock.

His best friend accompanied him long, long after that. He settled in Jakob's heart which became even bigger and braver because of him.