



understand, they were an educational tools to keep traditions alive and they were parables about the good and the bad. There is a legend or a folktale tied to most magical natural phenomena and monuments in the Prešov region, most of which are based on real historical facts. Discover the charm of history retold in an unorthodox way and the places you visit will become one and for all unforgettable.

THE REGION OF FAIRY TALES





LOMNICKÝ ŠTÍT

How did Smokovecká kyselka (the mineral water from Smokovec) get its name?



Underneath Lomnický štít, in a place where the oldest town in the Tatras – Starý Smokovec – stands today, there was once only forest. Metalworkers who were melting down the iron ore lived there. Their life was not easy. They worked hard in difficult conditions yet hardly made enough for bread and certainly did not live in abundance. The chief of Lomnica furnace association, Master Gerhart, was an honest and prudent man. He divided work and money to his men fairly and those who worked and fulfilled their duties had the right to comment on and request things. One day, at dinnertime, a scruffy boy ran in to their group. His name was Maťko Rakyta. His family died of some disease in spring and since then he had wandered the world alone. Master Gerhart felt sorry for the poor boy and after he fed and watered him he offered him the position of a metalworker's apprentice. They did not take Maťko to the mountains, he was not strong



enough to mine and melt the ore but he was very useful for rubbing the pots clean and washing the shirts, and he did his job conscientiously. His childish mischief appealed to the patron of the Lomnica metalworkers, a kind-hearted dwarf called Zmok. He watched the daunting life of these brave men for a very long time and felt sorry for them. Therefore, he found the protector of Lomnický štít, Belan, and asked him for help. The good Belan, in a white shimmery coat, tried hard to discourage him. He watched the ways of human life from up above for a long time and knew people very well. He witnessed many times how money turned even the most decent people careless and villainous. But Zmok the dwarf insisted so

much and vouched for his metalworkers that Belan eventually agreed and established Zmok as the patron of the Lomnica metalworkers. Zmok chose his favourite, Maľko, as a tool to help the metalworkers. One day, on the way back from the village, he suggested to Maľko that he stop at the Mengusovská strážnica (guard-house) and ask to see the captain himself. Believe it or not, the captain did not only see him, but also sent him home with a big order for his army. From that point the metalworkers did not lack work again. The army needed so much iron that Master Gerhart had to hire new metalworkers to be able to finish the work on time. However, what Belan predicted came true. The more the metalworker-shad, the wealthier they were, the less happy they became. Many of them gambled or drank their earnings away. Those

who were losing money quickly envied those who were saving it, and they kept wanting more and more. They argued and created intrigues behind Master Gerhart's back and even openly laughed at him. Only Maľko Rakyta remained faithful to his benefactor. When Belan could look at the wickedness no more, he got angry and stomped his white boot. From that day, the furnace floundered, and one day the fire went out for good and the ruined metalworkers were scattered around the world. Only Maľko Rakyta was not affected. After the furnace was closed, he walked in the local woods and found a spring with tasty water that had beneficial effects on health. Everyone he brought it to miraculously felt better and he was never short of a livelihood. That was how Belan rewarded him for bravery, maintaining his morality and his effort to always do good. Smokovecká kyselka mineral spring can still be found in the Tatras. People from Smokovec have built a gazebo there and go to sit there and enjoy the beautiful scenery.



Smokovecká kyselka

The oldest written reference to the healing mineral springs dates from 1764 and is one of the reasons why people started settling there in bigger numbers in the second half of the 18th century until 1793, when the oldest village in the Tatra mountains – Starý Smokovec – was established. Smokovecká kyselka is high in iron and has a pH of 3.4. The spring is accessible on foot or by bicycle

from the Starý Smokovec train station. Cheered and refreshed, you can continue on an educational trail following the footsteps of the history in Smokovec. From a lookout at the end of the path, you can admire the beauty of the surrounding Tatra's peaks.



BREKOV CASTLE

Angry black horse



František Barkóci, the Lord of Brekov Castle, had a reputation for being a cruel feudal Lord. He was said to treat his horses better than his subjects and found many ingenious ways to torment them. He forced them to work on his fields from morning until evening so they could only look after their own small fields at night by the light of the moon using their last remaining strength. God forbid one of them should even think about complai-





ning out loud! They could expect a beating. The peasant Mišo lived in Brekov at that time. He was very clever and doing well. He bought himself a horse for the money he had saved and made a cart to go with it. Everybody was jealous of his horse and cart but most of all the Barkóci's Pandur soldiers, who made up a lie that the peasant had stolen the horse from the Lord's stables. Mišo ended up getting a beating and they took his horse. The dishonoured peasant, in a rage, cursed his master. The following night an earthquake struck Brekov. The castle crashed down and in its



ruins everyone, including the cruel master, were dead. Soon afterwards the people from under the castle started seeing a black horse wandering around the remains of the castle. People say it is the ghost of Františka Barkóci, who was turned into a horse by peasant Mišo's curse. He supposedly walks in the ruins of his castle until today and sometimes his evil neighing can be heard.



The medieval Brekov Castle was built in the 13th century on the Hungarian-Polish road. Its fortification system was reinforced in the 15th century and for a short time the castle played an important role in civil political struggles. In 1466, there was a battle beneath the castle between Mateja Korvín's army and the army of Polish king Kazimír IV. Between 1484 and 1488 it belonged to the aristocratic Zápoľský family who did further building work on it. The next owner, František Kendy, joined the anti-Habsburg opposition which led to its demolition by the king's army after it was conquered in 1558. Mikuláš Drugeth had it rebuilt in 1575 but in 1644 it was almost completely destroyed by the rebel army. Rock by rock the castle was falling apart, flooded by waves of anti-Habsburg aristocratic rebellions. Today, the preserved parts include an entrance gate and an entrance to the upper courtyard. Remains of the living quarters of the castle, including curved rooms, parts of window frames and doors can be observed in the ruins. An interesting artefact is a doorframe with the Latin inscription "Si Deus pro nobis quis contra nos" (If God be with us who can be against us).





KRIVÁŇ

A folktale about the first Tatra gold digger



In a Tatra village called Štrba, lived the carter Krištof Špán. The people of Štrba were famous carters, but Krištof stood out because of his skill and effort. Thanks to this, he earned respect and a considerable fortune. He spent too much time on the road and so it happened that when the first grey hair appeared on his temple he was still single. When the word spread that the wealthy and decent Krištof had started to look for a wife, all the village matchmakers began coming to his house. The one with the biggest mouth and the hardest to turn away was Judita Hrubová,

who spared no effort to offer him Helenka Turiaková. Krištof knew her too well, that the girl was poor but also that he had looked at her with interest a few times in the past. He was a little apprehensive of her being twenty-five years younger than him, but when Hrubová emphasised that Helenka liked him too, he gave in and asked for her hand in marriage. He quit carting and focused on his estate. In the beginning the married couple enjoyed their life together and there was nothing strange about Helenka's behaviour. However, she became preoccupied

with thinking about how she wanted to become a respected housewife, to order everyone around and wear pretty clothes. For that to happen she had to take over control from her husband. Thus, she resorted to a typical woman's trick and using sugar-coated words talked him into leaving the settled way of life behind and going back to carting. While her husband travelled here-there-and-everywhere she was bringing lovers into the back room, treated the servants badly and when Krištof fell ill and died of a bad cold it did not take her long to remarry. Koloman Štrnoga was younger and handsome but had a

bad character. He turned the estate into a pub where he was giving out free drinks to everybody who was his friend and he himself was getting very drunk. Coin after coin, he drank Helenka's inheritance down his throat. When there was nothing left, he left Helenka and disappeared. Before long, all that Helenka had left was sold at auction. She had to leave her home empty-handed, forsaken, withered and plainly attired. Her story was carried far afield by a breeze from Kriváň and the shepherds from under the mountain put it in their songs so that bad women can learn their lesson early.



With a height of 2494.7 m, Kriváň falls significantly behind the other peaks as far height is concerned. In the Tatra mountain range it takes only seventh place, but it is an extremely important symbol of national awareness and identity for Slovak people. That is one of the reasons why, since 2005, you have been able to see it on the back of Slovak one, two and five cent coins. At first glance, Kriváň attracts attention for its atypical shape with a bent top. The protector of Kriváň is Modroň wearing a beautiful blue cape that changes colour according to its owner's mood. For this reason, the bluish light shining from the peak is sometimes sky-blue and other times ink-blue. When Kriváň is dark, Modroň is informing people that he is unhappy with their behaviour. On the other hand, when kind-hear-



ted and cheerful people come to him, they are welcomed with his billowing sky-blue cape. The crooked top of the peak is supposed to remind people that there is only one truth but there is always someone willing to twist it. A different legend says that it once stood straight and proud, just like neighbouring peaks and that its peak was once hit by a tired angle that broke it.



His wife Ilona retired to safety in far-away Transylvania. Before she left the castle she asked to see Trúda, a servant and a key master, and confided a big secret to her. Should the Lord of the castle appear there one day it means he is in great danger. He has to be told to look underneath the seventh tile by the stove. Trúda swore on the cross that she would keep quiet and disclose the secret to the Lord of the castle only. But it did not take long for the secret to start eating away at her. She suspected that the strange message Ilona left for her husband was nothing else but a clue to where some treasure was hidden.

KEŽMAROK CASTLE

The Black Lady and Imrich Thökölys' treasure



During the reign of the Thökölys, Kežmarok Castle was a representative place with many spacious ballrooms decorated with wall paintings. But it so happened that the Lord of the castle, Imrich Thököly seriously fell out with the Emperor. There was a big bounty for his capture, so he had to leave the castle and live on the run, hiding from the Emperor's armies.





The only completely preserved castle in Spiš, Kežmarok dates from the 14th century and was originally built in the Gothic style by Imrich and Štefan Zápoľský. Later it underwent various modifications that added Renaissance features. The golden age of the castle occurred whilst in the ownership of the Thökölys who gave it a very representative character. A Baroque chapel, built in 1658, comes from that time period. The last private owner of the castle was Ferdinand Reuber who sold it to the town in 1702. After extensive restoration, the castle currently serves a cultural purpose and houses a museum.

She searched, sniffed around and could not sleep. Then, one night she really found a key underneath the seventh tile by the stove on the ground floor of the castle. Underneath was a stone with an opening that the key slid into easily and which opened a secret hallway. A bulky chest stood in the hallway, full of valuable and beautiful jewels, which lady Ilona left there for her husband. The devil was tempting Trúda day and night... she dreamt of places she could move to in her old age, about clothes and a house she could buy with the money. But fear always stopped her from stealing the treasure. She held the key in her shrivelled hand every day and waited. One dark starless night there was a pounding at the castle gate. Trúda immediately recognised



her master's voice and she knew what he had come for. She was scared and horrified but she opened the gate and passed on the message just as she had promised to Lady Ilona before. But what a surprise it was when Lord Imrich lifted the tile and found no key there. He sensed Trúda's betrayal and had her brought out by the soldiers.

The old woman insisted she passed the message on and did not know about anything else. The Lord of the castle decided to get the truth out of her by torture, but before he could, the Emperor's armies closed in on the castle and Imrich and his soldiers had to flee to save their lives. Before he left, he put a curse of death on Trúda for betraying him in his hour of need. And indeed, the next morning they found Trúda dead in her bed. Since then she apparently can be seen wandering in the corridors of the castle jingling the keys. It is said that a daredevil decided to follow her, found the chest with the treasure and on the spot built a chapel, as a gesture of gratitude, which stands there to this day.





ČIČAVA

Elizabeth Báthory's dowry



When beautiful Elizabeth Báthory said her "I do" to the tycoon František Nádašy on May 8th 1575 in Vranov, she was given as her dowry a nearby castle called Čičava that had belonged to her family since the 14th century. It was that castle where a grandiose and flamboyant wedding feast took place and at which allegedly more than 4500 guests attended. The castle

stood on a 319 m tall, steep rock in a pass called the Polish gate, a guarded trade route. Surrounded by picturesque countryside and at the same time out of people's stern sight, it became Elizabeth's favourite residence and as later surfaced, probably also a torture chamber. A rumour about her taste for torturing young girls and hair-raising stories about how she was without fear and shame bathing in their blood to maintain eternal youth were spreading in the country, stories that also reached Čičava. It was on that day when the floor of the local church caved in during service, uncovering many bones in the secret corridors connecting the church with the castle. From that moment nobody had any doubts that Elizabeth was enjoying bloody pleasures in her residence in Čičava.



Although the Čičava Castle is only a ruin today, enormous treasures are hidden within its remains according to legend. It is also said that the notaries kept a Book of Lies and Liars into which they recorded all kinds of possible and impossible fraudulences and lies they encountered. It is rumoured that when somebody is caught lying around Čičava people say to them: "This should also be noted in the Čičava Book!". Elizabeth Báthory (7.8.1560 –21.8.1614) was a Hungarian countess and the most famous mass murderer in the history of Slovakia and the Kingdom of Hungary. Legend says she exercised sadistic practises where she was bathing in the blood of young female servants. She was said to burn the girls with candles and red-hot iron, prick them with skewers and pour cold water on them in freezing weather. Numerous complaints led to her arrest in 1610. Because she was from a very respected aristocratic family, the only punishment bestowed on her by the court was house arrest at Čachtice Castle, where she remained until her death.





A girl called Žofia lived in Ždiar. She had black curly hair, alabaster skin and a tall, slim figure for which she was nicknamed 'Fork'. She was not short of suitors but persistently rejected them. The more her parents pressed her the more stubborn she became about her only marrying someone who would make her heart sing. One day, a young man called Matej moved to the village from Poland. The boy was not very handsome, he had a big nose and was therefore quickly became known only as Raven to everyone in the village. He joined the local colliers but he knew other ways to



BELIANSKE TATRAS

A folk-tale about Raven and Fork



make extra money. He made various trinkets and decorations from metal so he was very popular with the local chic girls. When Žofka looked into his eyes for the first time they both fell in love, and from that time they often met on a hillside behind the village. They used to sit under a crab apple tree and spin their dreams about the future, fragile as dewdrops on a spiders web. Before long the local linguists conveyed a rumour about the young lovebirds to Žofka's parents' house. Her parents got angry because they did not raise their daughter for such a nobody and locked Žofka at home in a chamber under seven locks. The parents were determined to separate Žofka



from Matej and no pleading, crying or persuading would help. One night, when her parents were in a deep sleep, somebody knocked on a window in Žofka's chamber. It was Matej – Raven, with a big backpack, he came to take his beloved away. The girl needed little convincing. Fuelled by fear of being captured, they ran to hide in the mountains. When her mother found just a cold bed in the chamber she realised what had happened and immediately called for her husband and the servants. They saddled their horses and went to look for the young runaways. Armed with whips and knives they were calling upon Raven for revenge. The lovebirds saw them approaching fast and realised they will not escape their pursuers. They were swept



by sorrow and desperation. When out of nowhere the figure of a man appeared in front of them. They recognised him as Žiaroň, the protector of the local mountains, and knelt in front of him with a plea to protect their pure love. Žiaroň answered their heartfelt request and summoned a whirlwind to snatch Matej's hat from his head and Žofka's scarf and carry them into an abyss. When the girl's father with the servants saw the items at the very bottom

of the steep ravine, they lamented and thought the runaways already dead and returned home full of grief. The parents grieved for their lost daughter and cried for many days. Žiaroň felt sorry for the strict parents and, to cheer them up, displayed images of Matej and Žofka above the two highest mountains of the Belianske Tatras to let them know they were alive and well. The villagers however interpreted this miracle differently and considered the appearance of the lovebirds' as confirmation of their death. As a sign of grief they named those peaks Fork and Raven, names that they have kept until this day. When you look at them carefully you can apparently see the faces of the two young lovers there.





Her mad father was too quick in realising Sabína's plotted kidnapping and went to chase the runaways. When he spotted them he did not hesitate for a moment and put an arrow in his bow. But the hand of providence slightly deviated its path and saved Duke Štefan from a sure death. The arrow instead shot through his shoulder and at the same time beautiful Sabína fell in his arms. As a sign of their eternal love, Duke Štefan established a town on that spot, which bears his beautiful wife's name to this day.

SABINOV

A town created from love



being a hostile man. His mistrust of men however had its reason. He had a beautiful daughter, Sabína, who he watched over very carefully. Only a few people had managed to see her. The crafty Duke introduced himself to Kamenica's guards as Gergely, his squire. They let him in the castle where he sat drinking with a local castellan who described the beauty of the young woman so enthusiastically that Štefan got a strong desire to see her for himself. He managed to carry out his plan and once the two saw each other at breakfast they both fell deeply in love. They were only able to meet in secret because they knew too well that Knight Tarczay would not give their love a blessing. Therefore, they decided to run away from the castle.



The Lord of Šariš Castle, Duke Štefan, used to indulge in all sorts of activities. But he was not happy because his heart had never felt true love before. One day, on his wanders through the county, he strayed to Kamenica Castle. It belonged to the Knight Tarczay who had a reputation for





SLAVKOVSKÝ ŠTÍT

The white chamois



Believe it or not, there was a time when Slavkovský štít was proudly called the highest peak in the Tatras. There was also something else that made it unique. Since time immemorial, a herd of rare white chamois grazed on its slopes,

heavily guarded from people's greed by the Tatra fairies called Rojenice. They were covering them carefully with a veil of fog every time some daredevil with a weapon came close to the herd. Two retired soldiers, Borsuk and Čmeř, lived in the village of Slavkov at the time. They had fought many unkind battles side by side and so were joined by a strong bond of friendship for many years. They each led a very different life though. While Borsuk looked after his small farm, Čmeř was wasting money and always short of it. That was why he was always thinking of new ways to get easy money for spending. Sitting in a pub one day, he was spending his last coppers on drink when a local maneuverer, nicknamed Blenny by villagers for his fulsome character, came to him. He knew Čmeř well and exactly what was bothering the soldier and offered to him some great business by



He heard somewhere that Borsuk wanted to buy some mountain land to add to his farm but did not have enough money for it. Now he knows well from where to get it with only a little effort and tells him exactly what he found out from Blenny in front of the pub. Borsuk hesitates initially, but his desire for the mountain land is bigger than resentment towards Blenny and eventually agrees to accompany Čmeř on the quest. The old pals geared up and, ready with their bows and food, marched to the mountains prepared to track down the rare herd. In front of them the Rojnice are finding and driving the

which to make a lot of money because they need another strong man to join the group who can work a bow well. He does not want to say any more because, in a pub, not only the walls but also the table have ears. Outside he whispers to him that the folktales about the white chamois that graze the pastures of Slavkovský štít are not just some tittle-tattle and that he knows exactly where to look for them. Čmeř remembers his friend Borsuk and goes to look him to accompany him in his dubious adventure.



chamois to safety, constantly covering them with a veil of fog. But Borsuk and Čmeř are relentless. At dawn, the sun was so strong that the fog disappeared and the soldiers found themselves in front of the most beautiful chamois' herd the world had ever seen. But they did not come here to admire them and they start loading their arrows in their bows prepared to shoot all the males, females and even the young. They shoot arrow after arrow but all of them stop just in front of the animals. One after another the invisible hand of the protector of Slavkovský štít, Slavoň, catches them. The furious Slavoň shouts at the

hunters from the top of his lungs. But their hearts are too hardened and the divine voice does not get through to them. Then Slavoň hits the mountain peak with his fist and all his strength and breaks off a huge boulder from it. The boulder rolls at great speed with a ravaging avalanche of rocks and buries Borsuk and Čmeř underneath. Slavoň sacrificed Slavkovský štít this way and made it lose its primacy as the highest Tatra peak to save the graceful animals. He hid them from people's sight forever in the sky where they sometimes walk gilded by sunrays.



Legend says that when Prince Lubina and his sons reached the top of a 548 m hill, he was so stunned by the beauty of the surrounding countryside, the view of the river Poprad and the hills of Ľubovnianska vrchovina (Ľubovňa highlands), that he decided to build his residence there and sold his soul to do so... because, according to this legend, builders worked hard building the castle walls every day but overnight someone pulled them down. The Prince figured that some evil forces were responsible, so he ventured into a cave and found an evil spirit there who

promised him he would let him finish the castle in exchange for his soul. When the Prince realised what he had done he supposedly asked local monks for advice. They offered him shelter in their monastery where he was meant to free himself from the evil forces by praying. That made the evil spirits so angry they decided to throw a boulder on the castle. When the prince learned about that he started praying even more ardently and ringing the bell, which took the evil spirit's power away. However, supposedly the evil spirit still appears below the castle in the form of a strong north wind and local residents drive it away in same way as the Prince, with a prayer. It has never been confirmed whether this legend is true or not but the fact remains that the boulder meant to bury the castle dominates the waters of the river Poprad near a village called Hajtovka to this day...

ĽUBOVŇA CASTLE

An evil spirit





church from the village Matysová, built in 1833, dominates the museum. Besides a valuable iconostasis, a visitor's attention is drawn to an object that hangs down from a ceiling in the centre of the nave and was considered to be magical for a long time. Legend says it was made in the time of the plague, sometime

Those who don't believe the legends could be interested that according to documented archaeological excavations, the castle was built at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries as a border castle with a mission to protect trade routes to Poland. It was probably the Polish Prince Boleslav, King Bela IV's son-in-law, who started building it. A round tower and a Gothic palace on the highest rock come from this period. A newer palace was later added, which together with the original buildings made up the upper castle with courtyard. Other historical sources date the castle almost a whole century later and attribute it to king Robert of Anjou. In the following years, the owners of the castle changed frequently. Its current and partly preserved form, with numerous interesting features, displays several building styles. When you walk up the chestnut alley, consisting of 23 hardy chestnut trunks with an average circumference of 198 cm, and rest in



the courtyard for a while in the shade of a maple tree with a respectable age of 350–400 years and trunk circumference of unbelievable 450 cm, you can start your journey through history... In the immediate vicinity of the castle is Ľubovniansky skanzen (the Ľubovňa Open-air Museum), an ethnographic exhibition comprising 15 well-preserved houses in which Slovaks, Germans, Ruthenians, Gorals and Jews once lived in peace. The museum paints a perfect picture of the variety of cultures and life below the castle. A Greek Catholic



around 1633, following a dream. It is a symbolic spatial depiction of the throne of the god Yahweh Ridvan, and its form evokes a biblical revelation of God's throne. In addition to the church, it is possible to see various residential houses, a granary, a farm settlement, a carpentry workshop, a smithy and a mill displaying examples of the traditional technologies used to process grain.





JASTRABIA VEŽA

Elizabeth's ruby heart

In the town of Kežmarok lived one family. The father, a shoemaker, worked in his own workshop and had no problems keeping his wife, who looked after the household and their daughter Elizabeth very well. Elizabeth was fit for marriage but oddly enough she kept delaying choosing a husband, much to the disappointment of her parents. It was not her pride or even too much fastidiousness. Elizabeth's heart simply felt quite a different

and uncertain craving that could not be combined with the role of a wife. The people of Kežmarok lived an arrogant and vain life at that time, in which there was as much moral and justice as saffron. They drank, fornicated and stole a lot. Elizabeth wanted to help people and make them return to a righteous life somehow. She just did not know how. When her mother and father pushed her into marriage again she decided to leave their house. As she walked through an unknown county, a pretentious carriage stopped next to her. A respectable gentleman starts to question her about where she is headed into the night and he does not like her answers very much. But when she insists a few times that she only wish to help people, he offers to ask his master for help. Elizabeth does not have a clue as to who he is, but



feels she has nothing to lose and does not want to return home. The carriage dashes through the unknown county until, all of a sudden, the Tatra's peaks appear ahead. It almost seems like the carriage is going to crash into the rocks when the rock, as if by some magic, opens and Elizabeth and her mysterious companion find themselves in a cave full of light, in front of a beautiful being with glittering hair, dressed in light clothes. His name is Svetloň. He listens to Elizabeth with interest and ascertains for himself that her intentions are strong and pure. Once he is certain that Elizabeth is serious about helping the people of Kežmarok, he decides to satisfy her wish. He turns her into a dark red ruby and carries the gem to the top of a conical mountain. From there, a beneficial glow spread to light the path of good, truth and morality for the people of Kežmarok. Mystified by the glow of the gem,



the people of Kežmarok changed a lot and led exemplary lives. The town flourished, trade thrived and it seemed that the 'Carbuncle', as they called the gem, was warding enemies off from right outside the city walls. The story of the Carbuncle spread across the county as if on the wings of birds. Crowds of travellers came to find comfort, but so did many opportunists who would have liked to steal the gem. The people of Kežmarok, however, looked after it well and did not want to show to anyone how to get it. A Count's son, Hubert, came to the town to find out about the ruby and headed straight towards a place where, since time immemorial one can learn the most, the pub. A few sips of delicious wine relaxed the tongues of local farmers and when Hubert insisted he only wanted to have a closer look at the jewel, one of them whispered to him the path to the mountain peak, which they called Carbuncle Tower. The next day he found himself underneath the mountain wall. A

reddish glow made him completely lose his head. It was not enough for Hubert to look at it; he had to own it for himself to be able to warm up in its light. Three times the mighty voice of the mountain protector Svetloň warned him but Hubert was not listening as he climbed the rock and reached for the Carbuncle. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck the mountain and knocked the thief down to the ground. Before he hit the ground, he was turned into a hawk, which, to this day, flies above the distinct conical peak that has been named Jastrabia veža (hawk tower). And the Carbuncle? When the dark clouds above the peak disappeared, there was no sign of it. As a punishment to the people of Kežmarok, for revealing the way to find it for a jug of wine, Svetloň took it from them. Elizabeth's ruby heart stopped protecting them. Vanity, fornication and stealing returned to town and the people of Kežmarok lived in fear for many years after that.



Another famous folktale about the gemstone on Carbuncle Tower talks about a snobby girl who lived in Kežmarok. A young needle-maker wanted to marry her but she kept rejecting him because he did not seem noble enough to her. But the young man was persistent, so she made him perform an uneasy task. She ordered him to bring her the gem from Carbuncle Tower. However, it was heavily guarded by the Queen of Zelené pleso (green mountain lake), who ruthlessly struck down any daredevil that came

close to it. But she liked the young man's courage so let him come to the top of the peak to the gem itself. The gem, however, had a special power so everyone who touched it fell from the rock unconscious. The Queen of Zelené pleso liked the boy so much that she sent the fairies to catch him when he fell and brought him to her. She made the rescued boy the King of Zelené pleso as a reward for his undying love to a dishonourable earthly woman.





SNINSA STONE

How Beelzebub tempted the righteous people of Snina

The people of Snina had a reputation for being righteous and honest. While everywhere else in the county sin flourished, all eyes were turning to the Vihorlat mountain range where its protector, called Iskroň, lived. He was protecting

them from all evil for their moderation. The master of hell, Lucifer, did not like it one bit and decided to allure the people of Snina to the evil side. He called for his faithful servant Beelzebub and sent him to Earth with the task to lure one of the people of the virtuous town to the evil path. Lightning struck above the Snina's cemetery and voilà, there he was, a darker gentleman in an elegant suit with hooves instead of feet and horns carefully hidden under his hat. Immediately, his first victim approached, farmer Vasiľ who was on his

way to a market in his cart. Other people are impatient and shout at him because his slow old horses are blocking the road and they worry that by the time they get to the market all the good spots will be taken. Beelzebub senses his opportunity and asks the farmer to give him a lift and starts coaxing him, that maybe he might need new horses. Indeed, the farmer replies, but there is no money for it. He got to the market as one of the last few and took very little money that day. So Beelzebub, disguised as a merchant, invites him to a pub. He feeds him and gives him good wine and offers better horses in exchange for a mere signature on some scrap paper. Vasiľ feels light-headed from the wine, does not think about the strange trade and is almost ready to sign the document with his own blood when he suddenly hears an unfamiliar voice in his ears cussing. It was warning him angrily and





servant's uselessness, flew out of hell, torn off a piece of rock from Vihorlat and went to punish the people of Snina with it. Iskroň sensed his intention and tickled him on the ribs with a tongue of flame. The boulder slipped out from Lucifer's hands and fell apart into many smaller stones. One of them landed in Vihorlat not far from Snina and for that reason they call it the Sninský kameň.

telling him to look under the table. And indeed when Vasif eventually bent down, he saw Beelzebub's hooves and immediately knows whom he is dealing with. As Beelzebub was not successful with Vasif, he tried elsewhere. At one end of the village, in a lonely house, lived a herbalist called Klára. She did very well once but was now old and could not manage going to the mountains for herbs. Furthermore, some said she was a witch. Again, Beelzebub senses an opportunity here to suggest bad thoughts to her. He tries even harder than before with the farmer and succeeds in convincing her to prepare a concoction following his recipe to put a spell on somebody in the village. Beelzebub was so close to taking the herbalist to hell with him, but as she was about to speak the last words, Iskroň's ghost appeared above

the cauldron in which she was cooking the medicine and revealed the traveller's true identity to her. Desperate Beelzebub did not want to make the master of hell angry, so he decided to try his luck for a the third time. He chose well this time. The musician Ignác never had money and when people paid well he gambled it all away playing cards. So Belzebub started playing cards with him. First he lets him win a few times and immediately after took everything from him and even lends Ignác money he cannot pay back. Thus, he gives him an audacious solution. A merchant sits at the nearby table and he must have something that can be stolen. All Ignác needs to do is wait for the merchant to move away from people and he can kill him. Ignác never hurt anyone ever before, but now he is cornered that

he has no choice. He sets off at night to follow the merchant down a dark street, but it is against his conscience to do such a horrible thing and he prays beseechingly in his head. Iskroň hears his prayer and advises him to go back to the pub and ask for a bunch of garlic. Beelzebub is unaware of the trap, sitting happily in the pub and, when he sees Ignác return he believes he has finished his task. Then Ignác throws garlic at him and no sooner than you can crack a whip, he finds himself back in hell. Lucifer got very angry at his





KAPUŠANY CASTLE

How a runt became a doctor



For a long time now, above Kapušany, on a volcanic highland called Dubník, has towered the Kapušany Castle. It has belonged to different aristocratic families. Some of them honoured the king's majesty and some less so. At some point, a family called the Kapiovci lived here. The brothers had quite a bad track record but King Matej mercifully overlooked everything. That was, until the day when he found out that those two slanderers

were laughing at him behind his back and calling his son Janík illegitimate. That he refused to forgive. He therefore authorised the faithful and courageous Duke Zápoľský to organise an army and go to Kapušany to teach the Kapiovci a lesson and demolish their castle. Zápoľský and his soldiers left for battle and he did not hear the news that the king's son had been struck by some disease and was close to death. Not even armies of doctors, scho-

lars, witches or herbalists could help and the boy was getting sicker with time. This sad rumour reached also the Kapiovci and they saw it as an opportunity to make up with the angry king. They put a treasure of valuables together, though they knew well that gold and the gems would not grant them King Matej's mercy. Then they saw an old groom coming out of the stables with some runt of a horse, although one could hardly call it a horse. It was skinny,

bony and just a bit taller than a goat. The Kapiovci had it washed, shod, its hoofs cleaned so they shone and had a beautiful saddle made for it. They then sent this fitted sorrel to King Matej's court. They were right in assuming that the king would reject the treasure chest, but the servants took fancy to the small horse brought to the castle together with the chest. They wanted to show it to prince Janík very much but he was so weak he could not even lift his head off his golden pillow. So they secretly brought it to the Princes' bed. When Janík heard a happy neigh and felt a furry muzzle on his temples he miraculously laughed and became healthy again. King Matej forgave the Kapiovci, showered them with many treasures and rid Duke Zápoľský of his task to demolish the Kapušany Castle. The horse that cured the little prince was appointed a doctor at the king's court.





SPIŠ CASTLE

Armless Hedviga

The people of Spišské Podhradie and Spišská Kapitula enjoyed a view of the mighty scenery around the castle, where a good and fair castellan called Filip had lived for many years. He had no quarrel with anyone, got on well with the King, and for that reason his subjects beneath the castle had a good life. They respected the man, whose wife died and left him a young daughter called Barborka. His sister Hedviga was helping him to raise her. She was used to a very different life. Fun and the com-

pany of Knights was sparse, so she got together with the travelling musician and poet Leško. One day a new Lord, Mikuláš, moved into the neighbouring Ľubovňa Castle. His reputation as a thieving Knight preceded him and it did not take long for theft and disorderliness to increase on the trade routes between settlements underneath the castle and the rest of the county. The castellan Filip did not hesitate to try and re-establish order in his dependency and began preparing to catch the thieves. But Mikuláš kept escaping. One evening when Filip and his soldiers chased the thieves across the county, Mikuláš resorted to a horrible trap. He disguised his company as comedians and sneaked into the castle as such. Hedviga welcomed this unexpected amusement but when she saw that the comedians were not very good, ran to her lover Leško's arms for comfort. She did not even think about Barborka. Only when she could not find her did she realise that the comedians must have taken her with them. She was pulling her hair out and shed many tears but there was no use, the girl was gone. At the order of the king himself, it was that night when Filip and his soldiers attacked the castle of the good-for-nothing Lord of Ľubovňa. Amidst the unkind battle, a bloody sack fell in front of the castellan's legs and he recognised his dead daughter in it. Everyone from

Ľubovňa was, down to the last man, was slaughtered by those from Spiš and Lord Mikuláš was cut into pieces. But Filip did not enjoy the victory. He took Barborka to Spiš Castle and in his heart there was no room for happiness and forgiveness. In anger he uttered a terrible curse for his sister's arms to fall off because they could not protect Barborka. After his last word it was as if Hedviga got struck by lightning. She ran and jumped from the castle wall. Since then she watches over the castle carefully. The people of Spišské Podhradie and nearby Spišská Kapitula see her sometimes wandering along the castle walls crying aloud and shedding big tears. But she has nothing to wipe them off with...





ZBOROV CASTLE

The crafty Lord of the Castle



In time of Juraj Rákoci, old Gašpar Šerédy was the Lord of Zborov Castle. It is said that he built his residence with such love and attention that stories about its beauty were carried through the country with a breeze which blew from the east to the west and from the north to the south. Even Rákoci himself heard about it. Mesmerised by the beauty he found at Zborov he decided to buy the castle. Gašpar did not want to hear anything about it but it was rude to oppose the noble aristocrat out loud. That is why he pretended that it could be an option but he had one condition, he would only sell the castle for thirty thousand Transylvanian ducats, all stamped in the same year and all of them with Rákoci's imaged stamped on them. He did not believe for a moment that Rákoci could manage something like that. But exactly a year to the day, Transylvanian carts with ducats fulfilling all of Gašpar's requirements



stopped in the courtyard. Gašpar could not come to terms with selling his home and as he put his hand to his heart, died on the spot. At least one of his wishes came true that way. His soul found peace at Zborov Castle.





LEVOČA

The White Lady of Levoča and a betrayal for love



The lovely Julia fell madly in love with a man from an enemy army. After dark, she opened a secret door in the city wall with a key stolen from the town's guardian in a hope they would seal their love. But the enemy army rushed in with him, too. For treason, Julia was put in prison and sentenced to death by decapitation. The last time she saw daylight was in 1715, and since then her soul cannot find peace and sometimes she walks along the city walls feeling sad...



Juliana Korponaiová-Géciová

The Legend of Levoča is based on true events. Juliana Korponaiová-Géciová was a Hungarian aristocrat accused of treason. During the anti-Habsburg uprising of František II. Rákoci, she was the mistress of a military leader, Baron Štefan Andráši. In 1712, she supposedly accepted a letter from emigrants with a notice about a new anti-imperial uprising that was addressed to the

uprising's leaders. When questioned, she claimed she had burnt the letters. She was arrested and imprisoned at Červený Kameň Castle and later moved to Hungarian Győr, where she was tortured and tried. She was executed at a market in Győr on 25th September by decapitation. As for the alleged treason against Levoča she was supposed to have committed, it is clear from the historical information that she did not open the gate to the town. Štefan Andráši only delivered the notice to the town and letters about preliminary negotiations about capitulation to its defenders. The town apparently capitulated voluntarily after an agreement between the Town Council and imperial general.



LIPOVCE

The stone lovers



There is a village called Lipovce located near Prešov. Above the village, a castle rises where once there lived a Lord who had a son fit for marriage. One day, there was an unexpected storm and the son was given shelter in a village hut. There, a beautiful girl brought warm milk to him and he fell head over heels in love and she felt the same. When the storm ended he returned home, where his father was waiting for him with bad news. Apparently he had finally found a bride for him. Neither resisting nor begging for help, the father organised his marriage to a noble girl from noble family. The news about the wedding went from house to house until it reached the girl who gave the son milk during the storm. In the evening she ran to assure herself whether or not the talks about the wedding were true. She climbed the castle rock and when she saw a pretty bride dancing with him, her heart burst. Her body slowly

cooled down and eventually turned into a limestone statue. But the groom could not say his I do to a girl he did not love. He ran out of the chamber and went to see the one he loved. When he saw her turned into stone he slid into her arms and begged her for forgiveness. His tears dissolved the limestone and he became a part of her. They stand there like this until today.



You can find the limestone statue of the lovers at a picturesque location of Kamenná Baba near the Lačnovský stream, which is approximately two kilometres long and its sides reach up to a hundred metres high. There you will find several bizarre stone formations. As well as the lovers, there is Moses' column, the Chimney and the Old Stone Woman.



The history of this castle dates back the first half of the 15th century. Until recently, it was assumed that the castle was pulled down in 1711 after suppression of the anti-Habsburg revolt. This assumption was later proven to be a mistake when the castle's footprint from 1767 was discovered. It seems to have fallen victim to a fire that also destroyed most of the town centre, of which remains a mansion and the Gothic sanctuary of a parish church. However, the castle tower still attracts a lot of attention because of reported sounds of pleasure echoing from beneath it. They come from beautiful Ajka, who was murdered by the women



STROPKOV CASTLE

Sinful Ajka



of Stropkov because she was seducing their husbands. They still do not like their husbands to go there because Ajka's moaning is supposed to be so passionate it makes the men forget about their wives. There are no nice references to Ajka. It is said that she was a woman of loose morals who had more fun with other men than her own husband, even at her own wedding.



THE TATRA MOUNTAIN LAKES

A golden duck, gemstones and the ghost of a dead fairy



Far away over the mountains, across the valleys and at the bottom of the oceans lived the King of all the seas. One day he was walking on the surface, admiring the beauty of his kingdom when a beautiful fairy flew over to him. The King fell deeply in love and asked the beauty to become his wife and stay to live with him forever. She liked the King too but she could not imagine a life at the bottom of the sea without the Tatra peaks. Thus she returned back to the Tatras very upset and thinking about the King. The King consulted his advisers about the easiest



way to the distant Tatras so he could at least catch a glimpse of his beloved. Wise men advised him to dig an underwater tunnel under the entire continent that would lead straight to the Tatars. The King did just that and with a thousand dwarfs he submerged into the sea to then appear in the Tarta fairy's home one day. His presence made her happy but she still refused to go with him to his kingdom. The rejected King went home the same way he came. To please himself by seeing the beautiful fairy from time to time, he left the eyes of the sea in many



refused to become his wife. Only a righteous man, for whom she always waits here on the twenty-fourth day of June, can free her from the spell. A huge treasure is supposed to be hidden at the bottom of Satanovo pleso (Satan's lake) too. A certain king who was about to meet his enemy in battle deliberately drowned it here. He threw it into the lake to protect his wealth from his opponent in case he was defeated. On a clear night, by the moonlight, the surface glitters with a golden shimmer. It is a reflection of golden ducats at the bottom. Around Štrbské pleso (Štrba lake), a loving couple can be seen flying by the full moon. They are the ghosts of a fairy and a Prince who found death at its bottom once. Where Štrbské pleso is today, there used to be two lakes.

The fairy lived in one of them and the Prince in the other. They fell in love and became lovers, which made the queen very angry because she was interested in the Prince herself. She had the Prince's lake drained in an act of revenge. The lovers were together at the bottom at that moment and, unable to live without water, died. Their ghosts however can be seen embraced and dancing above the surface of the remaining lake, but only by people with pure love in their hearts.



places and the people of the Tatras have named them mountain lakes. Zelené pleso (the green mountain lake) is one of them. It is said that there are hoards of golden eggs at its bottom. For centuries, a black duck has come to lay them there, always at night on the Festival of St. John. It comes, sits on the water's surface and lays one golden egg. People say that the black duck is actually a girl under a spell put on her by an evil wizard because she





HANIGOVCE CASTLE

A poisoner in a cassock

The Hanigovce Castle was experiencing a busy period. Its owners were changing faster than the seasons of the year and below its walls fights for love and fortune were fought. Sometime around this period a certain Father Francesco came to Slovakia from the Vatican. Mean people were saying that he knew about poisons

made up a plan in which all the respected aristocrats from the surrounding areas were meant to die a horrible death. The Lord of Hanigovce Castle had an alchemy workshop built for Father Francesco and assigned personal guards to him. You have to say one thing about the Father, he was no doubt wise and educated, but he used his skills to perform ugly acts. Imagine him bending over his cauldron, cooking something with a devilish look on his face, an intoxicating yellow vapour rising. It might be a potion from some mushroom they used to call the black spider back then. Its toxicity is cunning because it advances very slowly and the victim is infected for a few weeks without any symptoms showing, although it is already eating away at the kidneys and turning them into sieves. After some time the poor soul who drank the potion was beyond help and the cause of the death was untraceable because the black spider does not have a smell or a taste. A death exactly like that was planned by the good-for-nothing Father and the Lord of the castle for everybody who in honour and rank, had outdone him. Fate however played an ugly game with Mikuláš Tarczay. Before they managed to execute their devilish plan, he was summoned by the King Louis II to fight and kill the Turks

and helped to resolve many property disputes with them. Mikuláš Tarczay was then Lord of Hanigovce Castle and his success and honour was a thorn in the side of many other aristocrats in the King's court. He wanted to enjoy the King's favour but he had no opportunity to prove his courage and loyalty. The crafty Father recognised Tarczay's weakness and wormed into his favour. Together they



side by side with him. He equipped himself with a dagger and a long sword, put on armour and, full of courage, accompanied his king. Fate did not foretell him a long life at his birth. A sharp Turkish arrow went through his thin armour and Mikuláš fell to the ground dead. He never knew that his body stopped an arrow meant for Louis, for which he was rewarded after his death when the king gave Hanigovce Castle as a gift to his daughter, Anna Tarcay, as gesture of gratitude for her father's heroic act. And Father Francesco? When news of the Lord's death reached Hanigovce, he packed his deadly ointments and ran away.



A small dictionary of fairies, ghosts and bogeymen

Bazilišek

A legendary animal with ancient origins. It looked like a four-legged cockerel with a serpent's tail and a white diadem on the head, and was hatched from the round egg of an old cockerel buried in manure and incubated by a serpent or a toad. That explains Basilisk's ugly appearance. His character is also ugly. He turns his victims into stones with his hot breath and gaze. He can only be killed by a cockerel's cock-a-doodle-doo.

Bes

An ancient Slavonic demon (also) identified as the Devil.

The White Lady

A lady dressed in white who appears in various places. It is often possible to see her at castles, palaces, and mansions or near springs and chapels. The white robe symbolises sadness. The White Ladies are not dangerous and they appear mostly where an injustice occurred to them. The most famous one can be seen on the city walls of Levoča.

Bludičky (Will-o'-the-wisp)

Dangerous beings that should be avoided especially after dark. They lure travellers onto wrong paths with bright green-white or blue light. Sometimes they deliberately lead the travellers to a bog from where there is no way back. It is said that they are the souls of the dead, unbaptised children or of witches.

Bogynky

Evil fairies that you can encounter mainly in the High Tatras. Their biggest concentration was recorded in and around Ždiar. They appear after sunset and steal human children.

Bosorky (Witches)

Ugly bad women with crooked noses and warts that like to cause harm to people. You can protect yourself against them by different magic formulas.

Čert (devil)

A hell-boy who appears amongst people in a nice suit with a hat and a cheeky moustache. He is a well-known tempter who makes people do bad things and tries to wheedle their souls out

of them by signing a document with their own blood. He can be recognised by his sulphuric smell and hooved feet. He can turn into a cat, raven, billy goat, black dog or headless horse.

The Black Lady

The younger stepsister of the White Lady appears in a long black gown. If you see her wearing black gloves, somebody will die. White gloves, on the other hand, mean good news.

Divožienky (Wood nymphs)

Beings from the woods with split characters.

Some are good and others steal human children and swap them for their own who are ugly and have big heads. Young men should be extra careful because they like to take them as husbands.

Drak (Dragon)

Lives in caves and rock cavities. Often has several heads from which it spits flames. It is a symbol of a fight between good and evil. Its presence is given away by whistling, wheezing and hissing.

Mora (Nightmare)

A night spirit that chokes people in their sleep and hurts animals and plants. You can get it on your side by offering it fresh bread. You can also protect yourself with a mirror that is faced in such a way that the mare can see its reflection.

Permoník (Mining dwarf)

Always the companion of miners and living anywhere where gold and silver are mined.

He can be recognised by his short stature, big head, conical hat and miner's lamp. Miners have always respected him and never wanted to fall out with him.

Poludnica (Lady Midday)

A spiritual being who guards the sanctity of the midday when the sun rises high above the mountains. In Slovakia, she takes a form of an old hag. She was used to scare children who did not want to eat lunch.

Rarášek (Imp)

A small domestic ghost that can look like a dwarf with a red hat but also a small weasel or a spider. Of all domestic ghosts, these are the least dangerous but enjoy a bit of mischief. They deliberately move and lose things and they are also responsible for making you trip over. They can be temporarily won over with sweet music but they cannot be re-educated completely.

Skalník (Rock ghost)

You can meet it anywhere in the rocks on All Soul's Day and All Saint's Day. This rock ghost often appears with a triple raven's head from which fire sparkles.

Stodolník (Barn ghost)

Stodolník is best-known to farmers and peasants. It is a tall man with a wide hat and iron bones. He is the patron and protector of an abundant crop.

Škriatok (Dwarf)

A person of a short stature and a domestic spirit attributed with a malicious character. Often takes the form of a black chicken or a fiery red cockerel. If he moves into your house, you will have bad luck for seven years and afterwards your souls will be forfeited to hell.

Upír (Vampire)

According to Slavic mythology, vampires are people who died in an unclean way like suicide, execution or another foul death. Our ancestors also believed that a person buried without due ceremonies, for example not being baptised, could become a vampire. The vampire then comes out of the grave at night and lives from human blood. They can be recognised by pointy ears, pale faces and sharp fangs.

Víly (Fairies)

Fairies are beautiful slim beings that often appear in mountain meadows or by water. Slovak fairies are supposedly the souls of girls who died after their engagement and who now wander restlessly at night. They are fragile creatures that love singing, music and dancing. Some are good but there are some amongst them who hunt young men down and then dance with them until they die.

Vlkolak (Werewolf)

You can meet this monster in Slovakia at the full moon, and that means twenty-eight days per year. It is a person who turns into a bloodthirsty beast and commits many atrocities, mostly involving

wandering the woods and killing people. Their numbers increased mainly in the Middle Ages in times of famine when there were also cases of cannibalism reported. Apparently, it was connected to a mental disease, lycanthropy, when affected people believed they could turn into a wolf.

Vodník (Water spirit)

A spirit from the water realm who has lived in the rivers and lakes of a region, mostly near a mill, for a very long time. He took care of the souls of those who drowned or, if it was a bad one, drowned them himself and then hid them in cups with lids on them. It is said that water spirits used to be angels who somehow did wrong by the heavenly order and were struck down to the water. Today you can see them at Domaša, where they unlock its waters regularly at the beginning of the summer.

Zmok

This spiteful elf likes to make fun of people. Sometimes he brings bad luck. But a cockerel's cock-a-doodle-doo can scare him away. If you see him and he moves into your house you need to take him back to where you found him. While doing so you cannot say a word and you cannot turn around.



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