

How Pepíček went to hell

Now I'm all into Christmas, though it's still an awful long way off in about fourteen days' time. But I do keep thinking about it. I'm only sorry that Kačenka is in a huff with me again, and just before Christmas Eve I really cannot be doing with her thinking that I'm being very naughty, when I'm not being naughty, I'm just having all kinds of misunderstandings. That's how it was with those things I'd forgotten, and before that, with those pencils and erasers, only they weren't forgotten, they got stolen at school, but I didn't tell, cos if I had, she'd have visited the school again and I can't be doing with that.

Then they'd like me even less than they do now. Mostly cos I'm fat and cos I'm from the theatre, but Jarda Lagrón and Robert Lagrón are from the shooting gallery and that doesn't bother anybody, cos they're only in class with us during the winter, and sometimes they let the boys go shooting or riding on the merry-go-round for free.

And also because of those names. Cos I'm not really called Součková like Kačenka is, but Freisteinová like Karel Freistein, who was something like my Dad. But then he wasn't my Dad, cos I don't know him at all and he doesn't

know me either, and he doesn't live here at all, I just have him in my blood somehow.

Once I only had Kačenka, but now we've got Pepa and Pepíček, and Pepa's my real Dad. Only Kačenka is still called Součková as she always was, cos she's an actress, and that's how they do things. And Pepa's called Brdoch and Kačenka is sometimes Součková and sometimes Brdochová or also Součková-Brdochová. I'm the only one who's a Freisteinová, but I don't want to be one at all, and they laugh at me at school.

Our teacher, Mrs Koláčková, when she was completely new in September, and she wanted to know what we were called, she knew already, but she wanted to know it from us, so when she came to me, she said: "We-e-ll, children, have you ever seen anything like this? Helena here is called Freisteinová, her mother is called Součková and her father is called Brdoch. Well, I've never seen anything like it. It's probably not that important with theatre people. He's probably her stepfather, isn't he, Helena?" The whole class laughed at me, even though they'd all known for a long time and never laughed before—at least about that.

Kačenka was fuming when I told her about that. She said they were idiots and she went to ask Mrs Koláčková not to say that my Dad was my stepfather again and asked her to call me Součková, so that I wouldn't be left all alone with my name. Mrs Koláčková promised. She isn't a bad person, she just doesn't have nice manners like Mrs Freimanová, and she probably can't even speak German. But I still have to be Freisteinová in the class register. Nothing to be done about that, they say.

So I call myself Součková, like when I write to Santa or something, or for sculpturing, cos Mr Pecka uses that name. But the boys at school, and the girls, they're always messing around and calling me Moby Dick, which is supposed to be some big fat fish. Or they call me atom bomb. And now, thanks to Mrs Koláčková, they've started calling me Frankensteinová. I don't know what that means yet. I must ask Kačenka. But carefully, so that she doesn't want to go down to the school again.

So I thought I'd better not tell her about those stolen pencils and erasers, and now it looks like I'm being awfully naughty.

The same thing happened when I told Pepíček that he'd gone to hell. Pepíček was lying in his cot, and he'd been asleep for a bit when I sat next to him and started saying again and again: "You're in hell, you're in hell. I'm an old devil and you're in hell." And it worked, cos Pepíček believed me and started to cry. But then Kačenka came and heard everything, cos by that time I was believing it myself and not paying any attention. So Kačenka got cross and still is.

Only I didn't mean it badly, I really like Pepíček. I just wanted to see if he'd believe me, even though he could see that it was me, cos a true sculptor must be able to convince everyone of her truth and must have imaginative power, or something. That's what Mr Pecka says, so that was meant to be imaginative power. Except Pepíček is two and a half, so I'm told I'm never to try anything like that on him again.

I'm glad we have Pepíček, though I'd be gladder if they'd called him Marcel. But Mum and Dad didn't want to, cos then he wouldn't like them when he grew up. I don't really know why—I think it's a lovely name. I have a hare and he's

called Marcel. Pepíček is called Pepíček after his Dad and Grandad. After his Grandad Brdoch from Prague. Grandad Souček from Zákopy is called František, and as for my Freistein Grandad I don't even know what he was called. But he's dead anyway, and his wife is too. She was called Helena like me—I do know that. Grandma from Zákopy said the Germans killed them in the war. They baked them in an oven or something, but I don't know if that's true. Probably definitely isn't. Grandma thinks I'm still too young to have any sense, and she goes out of her way to say nice things about Freistein to make me like him. But I don't like him, I only like Pepa. But then Grandma doesn't like Pepa, cos she likes Freistein, and she writes letters to him, and also cos Pepa wants me to keep to a diet, so I'm not fat. And there's always arguments. But I do have some sense and I think Pepa is right, even though I do like the cakes and buns which Grandma from Zákopy always makes a point of baking and jamming me up with.

Grandma from Zákopy is very nice, but she's stubborn and throws her weight around a lot, even with Grandad. We visit Zákopy every Saturday and Sunday, and there's always a big row, usually between Kačenka and Grandma. So I'd really rather not visit, but I have to, cos we like each other.

And all this is because of Freistein, cos Grandma keeps writing to him in secret to say that I'm sad, that I have pneumonia, that I'm not allowed any buns, but that I'd like some, and it's all like true but not true. Freistein is abroad, which is an awful long way away and called New York. And I'm always afraid that he might come for me. Mr Pecka laughed out loud when I once told him, and said I needn't be afraid. But it doesn't seem so funny to me, even if it is a long way

away. Grandma will keep writing to him that I'm sad, until he gets mad and comes over.

Once he sent me a doll, which is called Karla after him, but I don't like her, so I call her Mrs New York. But this New York isn't a country. It's a town like Ničín, for example, but more people live there and the country is called America.

At the theatre they once had a play called *Shame on America*, or something like that, and Pepa and Kačenka played some wicked American people and said they didn't enjoy it, and I didn't enjoy it either. I actually enjoyed *Oldřich and Božena* more, where Pepa played the murderer and I was terribly afraid of him. But I was still small then and Pepa was still Mr Brđoch, who only came to visit occasionally.

Oldřich and Božena was written by the famous writer František Hrubín, who wrote *The Chicken and the Wheat*, and Kačenka said he wrote it against the Russians. Like *Jan Hus*, for example. They also played him against the Russians, but that wasn't written by František Hrubín, but by Josef Kajetán Tyl, who also wrote the Communist Czechoslovak anthem. František Hrubín died last autumn, and we had him on the notice board. Now we have the Great October Socialist Revolution on one and Christmas on the other.

Yesterday they had a St. Nicholas Day Show at the theatre for the theatre children, but there was no Nicholas. There was Mr Dusil and Andrea Kroupová pretending to be Comrade Frost and Comrade Snow White and giving us Christmas chocolates. At home we had the real Nicholas with a devil, and it was really nail-biting, wondering how it would all end up, cos Nicholas knew I'd told Pepíček he'd gone to hell, and he knew everything about Pepíček too, and

the devil growled horribly, and Nicholas had a job making sure he didn't bite us or really take us back to hell with him. We had to recite some rhymes and sing, and Pepíček cried and I was awfully scared too. But when we promised them everything they wanted, they left us alone and gave us presents. That was a relief! But it was also nice, the way Nicholas had this amazing smell, a bit like the theatre, but more a kind of holy smell to explore...

So now there's just Christmas and then there's nothing else to look out for. Before we go to Zákopy, Grandad Souček will come and take us to the manger scene at Holy Hill, and I still have an awful lot of praying to do for everything to work out well for me and the modelling clay and for everyone to stay alive. Maybe I could also ask Santa to change my name from Freisteinová to Součková. I can't be a Brđochová, because then they'd all call me Brrrrr-đochová, or they might even call me Birdy Birdy, and that really wouldn't be any help to me at all.