

The Magic Pot by Kateřina Čupová

summary

A sad old man who lives in his house all alone sets off on a quest to find a pipe that has always lifted his spirits. He puts an old pot and hoe in his pack basket and ties a knot on his handkerchief so that he does not forget his mission. He is a *magic* old man, and the knot on his handkerchief turns into a pigeon and flies off.

The man meets a boy, Vít'a, who sees a spotted newt turn into a cat before his own eyes. The two start talking. Vít'a reassures the old man that the pigeon is sure to fly back home. The old man rewards the boy by giving him his pot. He warns the boy to use it for good.

Vít'a and his friends Jana and Míla, with whom he plays superheroes, discover that the pot is magic—it cooks porridge by itself. They decide to make costumes and go on a crime-fighting adventure. Vít'a becomes Porridgeman. They use porridge to intervene in a dispute between three older boys.

Meanwhile, the old man returns home but finds neither the pigeon nor the handkerchief. The children, like proper superheroes who do good, help their neighbor with her groceries. Later, they use porridge to stall a bus to help their friend, who would have otherwise missed it. But in order for the bus to leave, the passengers have to eat all the porridge.

Suddenly, the earth shakes mysteriously. The children train to fight evil, preparing themselves both in theory and practice using porridge from the magic pot. And then the earth shakes again. The whole village searches for an explanation.

The handkerchief-turned-pigeon ends up in the laundry basket at Jana's house and is washed by her mother. Jana goes to hang dry the laundry and the handkerchief flies away. She begins to suspect that something supernatural is going on.

Road work forces cars to take a detour through a village where it's impossible to breathe. The three superheroes use porridge from the magic pot to combat the smog, but the drivers curse them out instead of being thankful. And then they realize the cause of everything that is happening. They figure out that the old man had intended to use the porridge from the magic pot to lure in a monster that had eaten the old man's pipe. But when the knot on the old man's handkerchief flew off, he forgot all of this. The children wonder what the monster in question looks like. Then, as they are eating buchteln, the earth shakes again. The lost pigeon returns to the old man's home, reminding him of his quest. The old man heads out again to save the day.

Meanwhile, the children find the source of the earthquake. It's neither Kraken nor Godzilla, as they had imagined like proper superheroes—it's the tree they have taken up as their meeting place, devising their adventures underneath its branches. Realizing the tree is actually not a tree but Otesánek, a little boy who eats everything in sight, they command the pot to cook more porridge to save themselves. When the porridge doesn't help, they flee the scene, pursued by Otesánek. They are rescued by the magic old man with a hoe, who is subsequently reunited with his lost pipe.

The old man tells the children about how he used to roam the world and bring happiness to the people who needed it. While searching for his own happiness, however, he ran into Otesánek, who ate him. And now he's been eaten again. Bored with the old man's story, the children set off to fight Otesánek, taking the old man's hoe. They try and come up with a way to best him. Jana suggests coating a big boulder with porridge. Otesánek falls into the trap and eats the boulder, and then another and another, until he is finally defeated. The children use the hoe to cut open his stomach. They go in to find and rescue the old man, receiving help from a newt along the way. They eventually find him, but don't know how to get back out. The old man tries to remember how he managed to escape the first time. He recalls being helped by a girl whom he later married. They led a happy life, but a hundred years ago the woman died and the old man has been sad ever since. Eventually, they are able to find their way out of Otesánek's stomach. They see the mess their fight with Otesánek left and decide to put everything back in order with the help of the old man, including planting the tree back in the ground.

The old man goes out into the world again and once more, his handkerchief flies off. It ends up in a drawer at Míla's house. All the handkerchiefs and kitchen towels in the house take flight, and the children rush home for lunch.