

# Family tragedies, 1

Today I was amused to see this update to a news item:



Fake news, but once upon a time....

I'd been noticing this item for several days, and every time I did, I found myself thinking, "Hmmm....have they been listening to old Bulgarian songs?" So today I want to share with you a song about Jánko and Janínko. But first, I'd like to point out that anyone who gets involved with Bulgarian folklore will sooner or later bump into the 500 years of "Turkish slavery", when Bulgaia was ruled by Turks.

If you're dim on this important piece of history, check it out online. The [Wikipedia article on Ottoman Bulgaria](#) is a good place to start.

So, as you can imagine, a lot of terrible, tragic things happened to individuals and to families in that time. One that is well-represented in the Bulgarian song repertoire is exactly our "song of the day", the one about Jánko and Janínko. I just went searching through my lists to see when and where I've recorded it; I see that I have more than 20 versions of it (and counting)—plus an additional song I recorded in Bistritsa, that may be yet another version, or it might be an offshoot that developed in a somewhat different direction.

In other words, this is a *very* powerful story, that village people remember. I guess it all goes to show that "there's nothing new under the sun"! though I'd like to point out that most likely this Bulgarian song originated not in someone's fancy (like the news item), but in response to a real event.

Here is a nicely-sung version, which I see that I already gave you early last year, but I will re-post here, with its beautiful and haunting Samokovsko "harvest song melody":



**[К вечерум се робье продавая](#)** (*K večerum se rob'je prodavaja*), recorded in Kovačévtsi, Samokov region.

<http://marthaforsyth.fasterthan20.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2017/04/Kovachevtsi-85-23-K-vecherum.mp3>

You can find the text and translation for this version in my post from February 2016, "[Harvest songs...Part 1](#)".



Eléna Nikólova Božílova, Béli Ískâr 1988 (click on the picture to see it larger)

But, to give you something new this time, here is a version that I recorded three years later in Béli Ískâr, also Sámokov region, from Eléna Nikólova Božílova, born in 1931. Elena has given me many magnificent versions of songs, and I consider this the granddaddy of this song. It is a good example of the way a consummate singer can breathe life into a story-line. Here are two pdf files, one with the [original Bulgarian text](#), and one with a [translation](#).

Now, I know that if you read the translation carefully, you're going to wonder about some peculiar, even illogical, things about the plot. This was only the second song she gave me, and I don't think she'd yet gotten over her shock at

meeting me. You see, I had met her husband in the village square, and he took me to their home, certain that we would find her there. But no....she was nowhere to be found. He went out to look for her, leaving me alone in the house. It was a warm day and I started feeling a bit drowsy, so I lay down to rest a bit, when...Elenka walked in! She had NOT met her husband before coming home, she just walked in and found a total stranger lying down in her house! and she seemed pretty cross. I tried to explain calmly why I was there and what had happened, and she gradually relaxed. In the end she became quite friendly to me—you can see this in her smile here, but that took a little while. She gave me 21 fine songs, and when I saw her again in 1994 and she told me more than 30 more!