

The Reformation of Wolfshausen Teil Acht, 1521

The night of the storm Vater Karl spent with the little orphan boy in the Greulich's loft, getting to know him. As the boy ate a rat he had found, Vater Karl asked the boy about himself and described the value of education, the warmth of human homes and hearts, and the intrigue of cooked food.

Some ways away, in the bed shared by Heinrich Braun and his wife, the couple lay asleep. Frau Braun dreamt she was in Mainz, in Albrecht's court. The Archbishop stood before his throne. Frau Braun stood opposite him at the entrance. Dietrich was by her side, dressed in the simple white gown of a monastic novice. Frau Braun and the Archbishop wore matching ermine robes and held jeweled scepters with their right hands.

Albrecht spoke. "As you well know, the Holy Church is the Holy Mother's surrogate on Earth. Like her, you have given a boy, given to you while your flesh remained pure, for service to the Church. In you, Mary, too, is resurrected."

In her dream, Frau Braun did not speak but nodded modestly. She watched Dietrich walk forward into a crowd of novices in the white gown that clung lightly to his body. Her husband awoke her with a snore and her face set with determination. The time had come to take Dietrich to Marburg and to introduce him to the most important priests there.

In a tiny room in Wolfshausen, Dietrich slept on a table with his brother and a cat. He was having a dream of his own. In the dream he was a child, a little girl in an olive skirt, sitting on his knees in Heinrich Braun's lap, his right eye pressed into the farmer's beard. Dietrich wept with regret for some error he couldn't remember.

Herr Braun simply held Dietrich close, and ran his fingers through Dietrich's long hair. "There, there," the farmer comforted. In a warm tone, Herr Braun

reassured, "There are no sinful thoughts, only sinful actions. Whatever you wish to do, I will forgive you, but always try to do right."

Just then, the cat stirred, waking Dietrich up and his face set in determination. However much Frau Braun's lectures and lechery might annoy him, he would do almost anything for her as long as it meant a few moments in view of her good-natured husband.

In the little cottage in the woods above town, Gretchen dreamt a child of her own, a son. She nursed it at her breast and danced with it in the mud. She saw her baby boy's face grow fuller and his hair coarsen. She saw it smile and babble and try to stand. Then, when the baby was not even a year old, he left her for Marburg with an apple in his mouth to apprentice with the sausage-maker. Gretchen came awake with a sob loud enough to wake the pigs from their dreaming.