

# The Reformation of Wolfshausen Teil Neun-und-Zwanzig, Dietrich's Dilemma, 1521

It was Frau Braun who first reached the pathway to Gretchen's cottage. Halfway from the town square to the piggery, a little red squirrel stood tormenting an acorn. Frau Braun tramped right up to it but the squirrel heroically held her spot and her focus.

"Get out of my road, greedy rodent! I have witchcraft to oppose and will not be delayed by a greedy, furry-tailed nutsmith!" She leaned her whole body as if she meant to step on the squirrel, but the squirrel kept her feet in place and Frau Braun did the same. Her assault on Gretchen and Vater Karl had divided the town, divided the Church Ladies Auxiliary and separated Frau Braun from the force of her own will. For almost a week, Frau Braun had lived in an altered world that no longer adjusted to her obstinacy, but she was not yet ready to adjust for the straightened spine of a new order. The result was a puzzled farmwife and a puzzled squirrel.

"Shoo," came a whisper from behind Frau Braun. The squirrel hopped off and the startled woman turned to see who had joined her, finding the widow Greulich at her shoulder, leading the ladies. A new feeling Frau Braun was willing to indulge was the relief she felt seeing that it was her friend and not the witch who had conquered the adamant squirrel. Together, the ladies continued their trek through the woods, while Dietrich was busy wending his way the long route around the eyes of the town and Gretchen was still in town, enjoying the flattery of her priest.

The thick forest was quiet but not silent and dark but not black. The trees were tall and robust, and except for the path, the ground was voluptuous with fallen leaves, needles and nuts. The woods were lively enough for imagination and too still for comfort. The ladies started at the sound of every animal scampering through the

brush, every creak from a bough and every note from every bird. There's strength in numbers and more anxiety. The path widened and the forest lightened and the small cottage appeared. The roof bowed a little in the middle, but the shingles were a complete set, a few new ones between the old ones. The outside walls were neatly tucked. Frau Braun's companions admired the maintenance of the home.

"She had help from the underworld," Frau Braun warned. "Is this the home of a girl alone? She traded her virtue for masonry and, no doubt, Dietrich's soul for the shingles before she ate him."

Frau Braun knocked on the door and immediately stepped back into the congregation.

"Sprouch!" was the answer from inside the cottage.

"Gretchen Oberweißer, you can't hide from me! Come out and answer for your crimes. Return Dietrich to us, whatever is left of him!"

"Sprouch!"

"Open this door or I'll open it myself!"

"Sprouch!"

Frau Braun looked at her companions and nodded at each in turn to open the door. None moved and so the still willful woman grasped the door and pulled it open.

A plague of piglets fell upon the terrified women.

"Oh!" "Ach!" "Dear God, have mercy on sinners" "Sprouch" and other oaths filled the forest. Then the squadron of women rallied and the battalion of piglets fell back or, rather, scrambled off to find acorns. With only adult hogs in the house, Frau Braun was bolder.

"If Dietrich is in there, all the hogs of hell shouldn't keep us out," Frau Braun stated firmly but it was the widow who entered first. She looked around and was surprised to see Gretchen's carvings along the walls featuring familiar religious icons as well as pigs.

“You see!” Frau Braun reported in a hoarse, low voice, “She worships swine. Haven’t I told you? Where’s Dietrich?” Witwe Greulich led the way to the fenced yard and Frau Braun hurried among the mangers, fathoming the water trough with a found stick, poking aggressively and repeatedly.

“Please, sister,” Hilda cautioned, “lance gently. I fear you’ll hurt the poor carpenter.”

Confounded, the women turned back toward the house and saw the cooling box, which was half Dietrich’s height but both wide and deep enough to hold a crucified carpenter, if you folded the legs just right. The women circled the box but made no move to pull aside the wet fabric that kept the box cool.

“Open it!” Frau Braun ordered. “Poor Dietrich must be cold!”

Her compatriots stood still. In fact they stood so rigidly and breathless, they appeared less poised to invade the larder but to have just escaped it. Several minutes passed until Frau Braun extended her hand, not quite reaching damp cloth. Hilda Greulich extended her longer arm and pulled her friend’s hand the rest of the way to the curtain. They pulled it open together revealing a box full of rhubarb and cheese.

“Bones and all,” Frau Braun lamented and the ladies sighed as one. “She must have eaten every clot of the poor enchanted carpenter.” There was a root cellar that opened in the back of the cooling box and extended under the house. As with the outer box, progress was slow and reluctant. It was impossible to see into the cellar so a member of the auxiliary went into the house for Gretchen’s lantern. She was met there by several homecoming piglets.

“Tchu! Tchu! Tchu!” the woman heard from just outside the front door. She ran back to her comrades who were standing around the cooling box inside which Frau Braun was poking a stick into the root cellar adit.

“Ah,” announced the currently wisest of the women, holding on to Gretchen’s lantern, “she has come home. I hope she isn’t really a witch.”

“Of course she’s a witch!” answered Frau Braun, with her head in the root cellar, to Gretchen who now stood alone just behind her. The colleagues had scattered into the yard. Frau Braun rose sharply, banging her head on the root cellar roof-beam, drew back and attempted to stand again, pulling down the wood frame of the

cooling box. The wet fabric that had been the door tangled on the older woman's head, a soggy turban."

"You are all welcome in my home," Gretchen laughed. "And under it as well. But I hope you didn't come all this way to preach Islam. My profession requires my faithful Christianity."

"You are no Christian! You are a witch! Satan's bride and swineherd. Where is Dietrich?"

Now Gretchen did not laugh. "The last time I saw him, he was in a heap on the brewhouse floor beside you. Did you check your skirts?"