

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

Frau Braun opened one eye to see the floor of the alehouse touch her nose. "It's filthy," she thought. "Is nobody in charge here?" she shouted. Above her in a semi-circle she could see the merchants standing tentatively, staring like a dozen month-old calves around a new thing.

Gallantry beats in every male breast alongside lechery, larceny and treason. No sooner had Frau Braun fainted than the merchants from the caravan rose up to give aid. The prospect that she might revive, however, had stopped them cautiously, just out of her arm's reach. And so, when the farmwife opened her eye, they all leaned back. When she hollered, they stepped back and when she exploded to her feet like a set-upon barn cat, every chivalrous one of them leapt backwards, knocking down a tangle of local men who had known better than to get that close.

The pudgy specter pointed one accusing finger at Vater Karl who was still laughing. "Your collar belongs on a man like Dietrich. I hope it chokes you." Then she spun on one heel and kicked forward with her other toe and marched out of the alehouse. Although the door opened in from outside, it seemed to fall away in advance and she departed apparently without departing.

Frau Braun bounced across the small town square like a cannonball skipping along a battlefield until she banged her nose against the nose of a camel. The pack animals and children of the merchants were still standing around while the women made camp.

The farmwife had, in her life, walked through herds of cows, sheep, swine and men and nothing that walks, works, flies or creeps upon the earth had ever stood in her way. "Stupid beast! God gave us dominion for a reason! Move out of my way"

The camel stared at Frau Braun.

“Treat me however you will but these are God’s words. You will never. Never! Pass through the eye of a needle into the kingdom of heaven!”

The camel stared.

“Have I gone mute?” Frau Braun screamed as the children of the caravan started to giggle.

The camel stared. Frau Braun punched it in its intrusive nose. The camel lowered its head to comfort the nose on its right foreleg, which was tied at the fetlock to the left. Having soothed itself, it lifted its head and stared at the strange housewife.

“I said...

The camel spat on the cobblestone at Frau Braun’s feet and she turned on one heel, kicked out the other toe and set off a new course, leaving laughing children and smiling women behind her. She set off toward home. “My stupid husband will be there,” she thought. “Will he stand up for me? Will he stand for even the church? He is like a pebble in a sinner’s boot and I vomit him from my mouth!”

With purpose, she turned instead toward Witwe Greulich’s home in the farmland. “Poor Hilda, how those men have embarrassed her. One day not a stone of that alehouse will be left on top of another. That stupid, immobile camel. That pig girl probably kissed it on her way home. Enchanted beast.”

Arriving at the widow’s home, the door opened before her and as the farmwife strode determinedly in, she banged her nose on Julia Ausländer’s while Frau Braun’s neighbor strode determinedly out.

“Julia! What are you doing here?”

“Not that you care, but I am undoing an injustice.”

“That’s what I’m doing,” the older woman insisted.

“Honestly? Like when you gathered together all the farm wives of Wolfshausen and failed to invite your neighbor? You never tasted my cooking, but I suppose you don’t like the spice.”

“Julia, the smell of your cooking visits me every evening. I’m sure that’s why my husband is so skinny.”

“Crone, what are you playing at? A secret society of housewives? Of all of you, I am the only one who can keep a secret.”

The sun was sinking low and shadows from the hills across the Lahn were starting to cool the geese.

“I am not used to anyone speaking to me this way. So here’s a secret- your husband keeps friendships with drunkards. Now stand there and keep that secret while I see to my friend.” Frau Braun took a step forward but only knocked her chest against Julia’s much less agrarian one.

“Here is a secret for you then, neighbor,” Julia spoke in a voice so low it sounded like a barn settling. “Your friends will remain my friends. Your little order of sullied nuns will be my colleagues. And when we all count sins, we’ll be sure to leave room in the tally for yours. Now get out of my way” With that, Julia shoved Frau Braun who fell back several steps before she regained her balance.

“,” Frau Braun opened her mouth to answer but no words came. Julia Ausländer walked off in the direction of their homes. For minutes the pious woman formulated her complaint but Herr Ausländer’s laughter could be heard from far away and the confused woman’s speech had not yet returned. Then for the second time in an hour, Frau Braun collapsed, this time into mud.

The widow Greulich’s hand touched Frau Braun’s shoulder and gave it a pinch.

“Is something wrong?” the widow asked.

It had been a day of new things and Frau Braun didn’t answer.