

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

On her way out the door, Gretchen's eyes stared wildly, her cheeks were drawn and her lips clasped tightly together. She passed unimpeded through the town square and out to the edge of the forest. There she shed a single tear and turned back to the alehouse in time to see Jeremiah Freulich scamper out the door, under a camel, around three of the merchants' children and across the square in her direction. She heard the roar of Vater Karl's laughter and started laughing a little herself.

Jeremiah ran on all fours the last 100 feet to Gretchen's pathway home and stood up only as he reached her. He kissed the back of his hand, his wrist and his forearm and grinned at her.

Gretchen laughed so heartily that her fair skin turned red and her laughter rose from rasp to cackle so that had any of the farm wives been around to hear, their suspicions of witchcraft could have been put to rest. She grabbed the child and tickled him and put him on her shoulder. Gretchen gave the wild boy a ride on her shoulders a short way up the path toward her cottage. A sound like a battle turned them around in time to watch and laugh as Frau Braun fought with a hobbled camel. A few minutes later, Dietrich stumbled out of the alehouse, obviously dazed. The pair only chuckled.

"Yes, boys," Gretchen said. "Poor things." She thought she should leave Dietrich to reel in privacy.

"I should get you back to Vater Karl, but first, I think I have some wild berry custard at home. Would you like to come have some?" The little boy nodded his

head vigorously, wondering what Gretchen's home would be like and if there might be rats.

Gretchen held the boy's hand as they climbed the path to her home. Before the cottage came into view a chaos of oinks and grunts hailed the return of the mistress. When they reached the door, the herald announced "sprouch!"

Gretchen opened the front door and a river of pink and black flooded out to greet her. The young woman bent to say hello to the boar and the sows and the legion of piglets and missed the sound of a splash behind her. But she heard the giggle and turned to see Jeremiah who had been washed in the flood, knocked from his feet into a puddle and was now nearly lost under a layer of snuffling pork. The young know their own and the sucklings happily sniffed and snuggled and stood on their new compatriot who, in other respects, reminded them of their queen.

"Tchu! Tchu!" Gretchen commanded and grabbed the hands of the cackling boy. Most of the piglets accepted their instruction but a few were raised with Jeremiah and tumbled from his belly, his knees, and his beltline. The more athletic stubborn dove and landed on extended front hocks. The less lucky landed on their noses, heads and backs in a heap. One little one remained on Jeremiah's shoulder and, to save its balance, sucked on Jeremiah's ear.

"I see you have already met Herr Detmärchen, Jeremiah. He commands the litter so I named him after my uncle. No pie awaits him, I can tell you."

The piglet's rough tongue slid inside Jeremiah's ear and the boy doubled over with laughter, while his rider scrambled down the boy's back to remain in the saddle. The action repeated, the boy straightening and bending and the piglet skittering down onto his back and up onto his shoulder. The piglet's scampering made Jermeiah giggle again and again he bowed and again the infant boar found purchase on the boy's back. Jeremiah straightened, the piglet clumb and, finally Jeremiah plucked his new friend from his shoulder and settled the matter with a compromise. The boy held the boar in his right hand and stroked his head with the left. The settlement was signed with a "Sprich!"

"Come in, you two clowns!" Gretchen offered. The herd, now including a boy and rider, entered the small cottage.

Jeremiah saw the house was chaos. Two coal-oil lamps were quickly lit and Jeremiah could see carved wood art and carved wood cups and carved wooden

plates and utensils on a counter. A wooden bed frame with a hay tick mattress lay against one wall. Carved icons were posted around the single room and an iron oven sat beside a fireplace in one corner. A metal basin sat on the oven and there was another on the floor near the bed. A single small table beside two ancient chairs sat in the middle of the room with a half-carved fork and a coarse file on the table top. In the back was another door that ran from it's upper frame two thirds of the way to the floor. The gap left at the bottom was barely big enough for the adult boar now scrambling through, squeezing a piglet beside him. To Jeremiah, the home looked like Eden.

There were sows standing in the two corners of the room not occupied with bed or oven, each suckling a full complements of little ones. There was wood stacked halfway up one wall. Piglets ran in and out from under the bed and in and out the back door and up and down onto the chairs. One piglet stood in the basin on the stove.

“Tchu! Tchu! Tchu!” Gretchen hissed. “Don’t you see I have a guest? Act civilized,” she told the pigs and Jeremiah stood at attention, causing his porcine parrot to rebalance. The cooling room is out back. Seat yourself. She pointed to the two chairs, but Jeremiah dropped cross-legged in the middle of the floor.

Gretchen soon returned with the wildberry custard. She placed on the counter and cut a piece onto a plate, put the rest on a high shelf and handed the plate with a wooden spoon to Jeremiah.

A custard is temptation enough for the swash-buckling piglet of daring to test his balance on a young boy’s scrawny arm. Soon enough, Detmärchen sprang over the wrist and nose first into the plate, scattering berries and custard onto the floor and Jeremiah’s shirt.

“Dear God, boy!” Gretchen yelled at the pig. But like the young, thieves know their own and Jeremiah was impressed. He scooped the dessert off of his shirt and fed it to the piglet. “Well,” said Gretchen, you are poor in pudding but richer by one friend. Come on, let’s feed the herd and get you back to Vater Karl.

The two went out the two-thirds door into the back, where several open acres, an ax, two troughs and a few small hog houses were visible across a fenced glade. One trough was filled with water that ran down one corner and across the glade and under the fence in a little babbling brook. The second trough was empty. Gretchen opened a barrel of grain. She filled a big bucket and a little cup, handing

the latter to Jeremiah. They spread the grain in the empty trough and the boar ate first, then the sows then ever weaned or half-weaned piglet other than the one in Jeremiah's hand which now climbed the boys shirt back to his shoulder.

“Put him down, now, Jeremiah. Vater Karl should be back in his room and I should get you home.” The boy hesitated.

Gretchen laughed. “You wish to keep him? He's too merry for an Oberweißer anyway. Very well, you can bring him along. Jeremiah and Detmärchen Freulich? Back to town with you both!”

“Sprich!” the pair replied.