

# The Reformation of Wolfshausen

## Teil Vier-und-Dreißig, The Temptation of Vater Karl, 1524

It was meeting day of the Catholic Ladies' Auxiliary in Wolfshausen. Since 1521, the band had continued to meet weekly at Witwe Greulich's home on the edge of town, mainly to knit. Neither Julia Ausländer nor Frau Braun had attended a meeting since the battle of Gretchen's cottage but Hilda Greulich always served a casserole of cheese and bread crumbs that her sisters favored.

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit," Hilda prayed on behalf of the assembled. "Amen."

The women ate and gossiped. A short but lengthening walk away, Frau Braun sat in her home and came to the notion that her friends were right now in communion. Since the time of her tribulation with Gretchen and Dietrich, and the scorn of her neighbor, Frau Braun had preferred to visit her friends singly at their homes. In particular, she had been regularly to see Hilda.

But on this cold, January morning, the thought of them all together warmed her spirit. "They have some nerve continuing to meet without me," Frau Braun thought.

She took an apple tart she had baked the day before and went to the door. The morning was late and bright and frigid. Snow plated the fields in a perfect marble armor, but for the paths the cows walked. Stacks of hay and oats were covered white except for one dark green, decapitated bundle which her husband had started feeding from the day before. Heinrich, who had remained kind to her when nearly all the world seemed intent on her vexation, was not around. "Probably off with that sot, Otto." she complained silently in her own mind.

Taking her pie, she walked in Heinrich's footprints to the gate that defended her farm from the other farmers downhill from Wolfshausen and turned right, heading south toward Hilda's house. She spared a glare for the Ausländer's home and sheep. This part of the walk, she always took briskly.

She started that way now, but as she reached the end of the Ausländer's property, something dark moved atop the final haystack. Frau Braun froze and stared. The dark object was a man, asleep on the snowy mound. He stirred a little, rolling onto his side, his back to his witness. From behind he reminded her of Dietrich. He had broad shoulders and long legs like the carpenter who had joined the priesthood.

From his shaggy black hair and unkempt black beard, the sleeping hay man had an air of danger about him. Besides his size and appearance, who but a lost soul sleeps in daylight? And who, his morality intact, would rest in a farmer's field among the animals? Very well, she had some experience shepherding the lambs who strayed. She had done well with Dietrich and could rescue this man, obviously a lunatic, as well. Frau Braun could imagine a new purpose for her apple pie.

She approached the fence near the newcomer. It occurred to her again that the man was sleeping on the Ausländer's property and she considered the possible implications of that. The man might simply have jumped the fence to get to the soft hay, but he might also be under the protection of Karl Ausländer. Or his wife.

If Frau Braun helped this man, and he was connected to the smart-mouthed Julia, she would end up hexed, vexed and insulted. And would a man in their custody be worth the aggravation? After death, unreconciled sinners were lost to the Devil. In life, they were often found allied to the sarcastic.

But the way is narrow, the number few and only the willing are called. Two years of relative satisfaction had not dulled her commitment to serve the holy mother church and her need for square-shouldered servants. Frau Braun walked to the nearest gate, opened it and turned toward the hay stack with the man on top.

"What are you doing in my hayfield?" came a shout. Frau Braun turned and saw her old nemesis, Julia, was the source of the question. The older woman knew there would soon be another. Frau Braun put a discrete finger to her lips hoping to quiet her neighbor's taunting. "Are the field mice insufficiently humble?" the younger woman yelled. "Did the cats not tithe? Will you baptize the creatures of the field with pie, that they may be born anew under crust? Oh, dear God!!!"

Frau Braun had realized that Julia hadn't realized the hay man was asleep in her field. At the question about the cats, the older woman simply pointed and was simply ignored.

Then the large unwholesome stranger shook and his right arm disappeared in front of him. The hand surged suddenly into the air holding a rat aloft for one long moment while both women watched in terror. In the next moment, the hay man's hand flashed and the rat disappeared. From the opposite side of the farm, more than 100 yards away came the sound of thin ice cracking and a soft splash.

Both women were still but the stranger's arm fell back limp, the hand landing on the back of his bituminous mane. After a moment, the man let out a snore and Frau Braun approached the house and Julia Ausländer whose eyes hadn't left the occupied fodder.

"Well, neighbor," Frau Braun said in a voice as cheerful as anyone had heard her use. "It looks like I might have an acolyte to help me baptize your vermin. Maybe he can even do something for your wild sons. Apple Pie?"

Frau Braun stood before the doorstep, the pie pan held out as an offering. Julia didn't move and the generous baker added, "Not to worry. I'm sure he'll get up, agile as can be, just as soon as the sense of calling comes over him again. Well, if you don't want the pie, I suppose I'll take it over to Hilda's. God bless!"

Frau Braun left the property with the gait of a younger woman. Frau Ausländer remained on her porch, as still as if she was supporting the roof.