

## A True Story by Sofia Gruber née Merle

As was still usual in the 1930s and 40s, in wintertime one went to the neighbors in the evening. At that time, there was hardly anyone who had a radio, even fewer a television; nobody had even dreamed about it. Things from bygone days were told, often news as well: who will marry this Shrovetide, also who had gone well with whom, or who has not made the right choice. Indeed, mostly there was something like that only about the village.

So it was that we were again with our neighbors one evening; this one time the grandmother also got a chance to speak. She was a dear, modest woman; I was able to get on well with her because when she got a chance to speak continually I really had questions without end.

Anyway, this evening she told what she experienced on a Sunday afternoon. Her husband Vetter<sup>1</sup> Johann and she were still recently married, still had no children, so she thought that she will fetch her husband from his work with the forest ranger. What he had to do was only supposed to be a small thing, but lasted just somewhat longer than thought. It still would need to be said as well that Vetter Johann spoke Hungarian perfectly; the forest ranger was a Hungarian because at that time our Banat belonged to Austria-Hungary.<sup>2</sup> Besl<sup>3</sup> Lis<sup>4</sup> was bored, so she made up her mind and went towards the woods.

When she was already far from the village, she turned around for some reason and saw a figure dressed like a priest, which was going in the same direction as she; then she became afraid to act because she thought it could be the Grobacher,<sup>5</sup> namely a ghost.

Therefore, she started to go faster and quite frequently looked back; the figure also began to go faster, and she still much faster. When she finally arrived at the forest ranger, she was bathed with sweat. One saw that she was very exited.

“Well, Lisi, what is with you, then? Don’t you feel good?”

She could say nothing, not after her husband asked her, either.

“Now, just have a rest,” he said. “You’ll be better again. Here, drink some fresh water.”

Not long after that, the putative ghost, the assistant pastor of the parish, arrived there. He told how he wanted to overtake the young woman so that everyone did not have to go alone; but, with the warm weather, he let it go because he also began to sweat.

When Besl Lis saw that it was not the Grobacher, she named the cause of her hurry and there was laughing almost without end.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally “cousin” which was used as a form of address and reference whether or not there was a blood relationship

<sup>2</sup> The Dual Monarchy; a member of the Habsburg family occupied the thrones of both

<sup>3</sup> Diminutive for female cousin; used like Vetter

<sup>4</sup> Diminutive of Elisabeth

<sup>5</sup> A legendary priest who made a deal with the devil 1000 years ago and now haunts the village

The whole family was well-informed, of course; only our mother and we children paid attention so that we get everything. Indeed, we sat still as in the church or school so that we do not miss a word.

It was something new to us because we still had not lived a long time in that area of the village. With these neighbors, we always got on well; we also got along with all the others.

Many of the dear neighbors already are in eternity. Some are buried in Glogowatz; others rest in their adoptive country; still others are perhaps in a mass grave due to the war. May their souls be in heaven. God, grant them that.

Translated by George Bretträger  
14 October 2006