

Leni, an Orphan

Glogowatz and Sanktanna were connected by their common history. Through the centuries, marriages and exchange of family between these communities in the district of Arad took place again and again. Something similar holds good for Neupanat and Sentlein, above all in the course of which numerous homeless families resettled to Sentlein and also to Neupanat after the great Marosch flood of 1879 in Glogowatz. Family changes of residence took place again and again, and after 1900 the surge of emigration to America began.

Jakob Gets His Wife from Sanktanna

Leni's parents were Jakob Baumgartner from Glogowatz and Anna Mayer from Sanktanna. The two married in 1850. They became acquainted with one another when Jakob hired out with Anna's parents at the harvest. He pleased her parents since he was a capable and industrious helper during the reaping. Also when the harvest work stopped during a rain because with wet stalks the sheaves could go moldy, Jakob demonstrated his skill. He helped with the repair of the roof of the shed and also repaired the fence with a lot of skill.

Jakob had taken to Anna, the youngest daughter of the farmer, and she also like to linger in his vicinity, but they only spoke about trivial things. Jakob was the youngest of six children, so he could be spared during the harvest at home and earn a good wage out of town.

At home, Jakob was a changed person; his thoughts often tarried in Sanktanna with the farmer's daughter Anna. One day, he asked his parents whether they would have anything against it if he took a girl from outside the village for his wife. At first, they were very surprised and asked many questions. But finally they said: "If you like her and want to fashion your life with this girl, then you have our consent to it."

And so between Christmas and New Year, Jakob and his brother Anton rode to Sanktanna on well-groomed horses. The brothers always got along well, and since at this time there was no urgent work in the yard or stable, Anton readily accompanied his brother on the long ride.

When the two handsome fellows arrived at the Mayers' house, the latter were very surprised. Jakob was recognized right away and greeted like an old friend, but everybody was also well-disposed towards his brother. One invited them in as guests of the house and also asked immediately whether they were hungry, which both answered in the affirmative. At this time, there had been slaughtering in every farmer's house and there was no lack of good food. Anna was sent to the larder to fetch sausages and headcheese. Mrs. Mayer brought a loaf of fresh coarse brown bread. Anna set the table and her father went to the cellar to fetch some of their own wine. The fellows helped themselves heartily, which pleased the hosts.

There was a lot of inquiring and answering. But only in the evening, after Anna's brother Johann had gone to his friend's house with Anton, Jakob brought

up the reason for his visit. He had to clear his throat several times until he found the courage for it and spoke. "I don't know to whom to turn first, because I esteem each of you and an answer also depends on each of you. Namely, I would like to ask whether I can have your daughter Anna for my wife," he said turned towards Mr. and Mrs. Mayer. "I would like to include Anna in the same breath, however, because her answer is the most important for me." The Mayers were astonished, but had already thought of something like that since Jakob did not go away with their son and his brother. For a while it was so quiet in the room that one could have heard a needle fall.

Finally, Mr. Mayer said: "Jakob, you have surprised all of us with your words; that's quite something. Now, we only want the best for Anna and for all our children. Perhaps, we would accept right away on our part, but it is her will which we will heed and respect."

Now, everybody looked at Anna. Nobody could foresee what went on inside her. Her heart immediately said, "Yes." But the idea of going away from all her loved ones made her think. When she was silent too long, Jakob said to her: "Anna, you should not be in a hurry with your answer. If it suits your parents, we will remain in Sanktanna a few days."

After that, nobody was able to give an answer because Anna's Aunt Kathi and her Uncle Josef Weckerle came right in the door. Both were amazed about Jakob's visit now in winter. They had, of course, recognized him at once from the harvest help in the summer. Anna's mother asked her sister Kathi, who had no children, whether Jakob and his brother would be able to sleep a few nights with them. When Kathi and her husband assented, as if with one mouth, it was a great relief for everyone.

Anna hardly slept a wink this night. She liked Jakob, but how was she supposed to live without all her loved ones, especially without her sister Mathilde, whom she just called Thilde and with whom she got along best? Things didn't fare better with her parents, but they were a twosome and were able to exchange their opinion with one another. But Jakob got no sleep, either; after all, he didn't know how Anna would decide. In the morning, the brothers came to the Mayers' house after they had received a substantial breakfast with the Wickerles. Everybody was happy and in a good mood; nobody asked Anna a question and the day passed pleasantly. After the evening meal, Jakob asked Anna whether she would go out with him for a while. She agreed, dressed warmly, and now they went to walk a piece together for the first time.

On the sidewalk, there were some small puddles which now were frozen over. Anna slipped on the ice and almost would have fallen down if Jakob hadn't caught her fast enough. Then he drew her arm under his and said as if it was the most natural thing in the world, "You will walk much more safely this way." Then a blissful shudder went through her body because, aside from her relatives, nobody had yet offered her protection and help against some trouble. They walked slowly up to the church, which was right on the next street. From there, they returned home on another street because it was really cold outdoors.

Since the evening before, Anna had turned things over in her mind for many hours. Then, in the evening when all of them were sitting comfortable in

the parlor and it had become silent, Anna said round about: "I would like to say something to all of you which I have thought over well. I will take Jakob as my partner for life and will strive to be a good wife to him."

Jakob sat beside Anna and was very pleased with her decision. He drew her to himself and gave her a fervent kiss. Then he awoke as if from a dream and said: "Forgive that I have simply taken you by surprise like that; after all, our first kiss was supposed to come off quite differently. Can you forgive me?"

She just laughed and answered: "Yes, that I can, all right. This kiss, which I give back to you as thanks, should prove to you that I'm serious." Then she breathed a light kiss on his cheeks, but that said more to him than a thousand words would have been able to.

Jakob said to her: "I promise you that I will always be good to you; you shall never regret your decision."

Marriage and Procession

Since the couple was not from the same village, there had to be departures from the usual custom and it was agreed upon that the engagement should take place on Saturday. In the Jakob's brother Anton should be a witness. And at the end of January, the wedding will take place.

After the engagement, the two brothers got going on the way home to Glogowatz. The Baumgartners traveled to the wedding by two horse wagons, though only Jakob's siblings because the parents were not able to take on the long journey in winter. Before they drove off, the parents called their Jakob into the house again. Both were very serious and the father said: "My son, kneel down; your mother and I would like to give you our blessing for the big step which you will take tomorrow. We wish both of you a peaceful married life." After that, he gave him his blessing on his head and his mother did the same. When she had blessed him, she clasped his head with her hands and tears fell down on it. "Get lucky like your father and I always were with our children. And I would like to say just one thing: Do not forget our Lord God!"

Jakob pressed his parents to himself lovingly and thanked them for all the trouble and worries, all the love which they gave him to this day. The stepped out into the yard, where everybody sat on the wagon already wrapped up good and proper. The father said goodbye to them: "So now, go in God's name!"

The wedding took place in the Mother Anna¹ Church of Sanktanna on Saturday afternoon in the vespers prayers. Only the closest family members were invited to the wedding celebration. The old pastor already worked in Sanktanna for many years and still knew Anna from the Religion lessons in the school. He had remarked how difficult it is for the bride to move to a different village. Therefore, after the wedding the pastor said he still would like to direct a few personal words to the bride. And he spoke with almost fatherly affection: "I can almost envy you that you are resettling to the beautiful Glogowatz. I know the village because I worked there a short time as an assistant pastor. The highway goes through the village, the Marosch flows past close by; there one can

¹ St. Anna, mother of Mary

go bathing in summer and even a lot more. If I could choose where I carry out my service, then I would choose Glogowatz.” At that, all the wedding guests smiled a little, especially those from Glogowatz.

When the wedding procession went home from the church, a musician already waited with his concertina. Everybody was cheerful and contributed their own good food and drinks to it, so that everybody felt as good as was the case at all weddings in the Banat. The ancestors had brought along cheerfulness and joy from the old homeland and so a carefree celebration was held.

Already on Monday morning, three horse wagons stood ready. On one wagon was Anna’s bed with thick feather cushions and a feather-filled blanket and whatever else belonged to her dowry. As a beginning for her new life, she also received a cow, like all her siblings. The cow, however, remained behind until spring when the little calf would be born. The journey could have had bad consequences during this great cold. The parents suggested that somebody should bring the cow along with the calf to Glogowatz. Jakob said, “Anna and I will fetch them.” At this moment, he would not have been able to give her a greater joy.

Completely delighted, she said, “Then I can see all of you, everybody, again.”

“We should say goodbye in the house,” opined Mathilde, Anna’s favorite sister.

And the other siblings also opined, “It’s much too cold outside.”

Anna’s parents invited the young couple into the parlor, where they remained alone with them. Like Jakob’s parents previously, on the Saturday before the wedding, they gave the newly-weds their parental blessing. They wished them every conceivable good thing for their life together, above all a good understanding of each other and that they might never forget what their parents have done for them. Anna embraced her parents and pressed them to her breast like never before in her life. She wanted to say so much, but she choked up, and her parents hardly fared better. So the leave-taking lasted longer than one had thought. Everybody still wanted to give a good word or a piece of advice to take with. And everybody wept as if it was a burial, not a joyful event.

Then Anna’s uncle and aunt, the Weckerles, came. They asked: “What’s the matter? After all Anna isn’t going to America that one can no longer hope for a reunion. You soon will see each other again.” And Uncle Josef joked further, “Can’t you see that Jakob is in a hurry to leave at once?” Everybody endeavored to smile a little, but the good mood wanted to appear only with difficulty.

Anna’s brothers Johann and Adam climbed onto the wagon which was loaded with her dowry. A further kiss for her parents then Anna got on, wrapped herself well in blankets and all the wagons set off. As long as the column of wagons could be seen, there was farewell waving again and again. Only when she turned off for the highway could she no longer be seen and the gate was closed. Those remaining behind went into the house and still had a lot of work after the wedding to clear away and clean everything and then arrange the room in which there had been dancing.

After a journey of many hours, Jakob and his young wife with their escorts

arrived in Glogowatz. Many Baumgartners had waited for them because everybody wanted to greet the young couple. To their great surprise, everybody was invited to a banquet with the young couple. Tables were set in the parlor, good food was served and all the guests helped themselves. Jakob heartily encouraged his Anna, "Please, do take from this and that." The long journey had made everybody hungry. There was also drinking to the well-being of the newly-weds now and then.

After the meal, Jakob's aunts presented gifts to the bride: silk headscarves and small under cloths, which one calls *Pretschl* in Glogowatz. Anna was surprised and very pleased about that. Her mother-in-law said to her, "Now you are a Glogowatzer and we hope that you will wear this little cloth like we do it."

And Anna replied cheerfully: "I will do it gladly and would not want to be conspicuous at all. I will live here and follow the customs and traditions which are cultivated here, but I also don't want to forget my traditions from Sanktanna."

Every day relatives and neighbors came to get to know Jakob's wife. So there was no boredom for Anna. She had little time to think of home and homesickness was hardly able to rise in her. Only one time, Jakob said to her quite affectionately, "my Anna from Sanktanna," but after he noticed how wistfully sad she looked all of a sudden, he resolved never again to use this expression.

In spring when everything built on was finished, the young people were able to move into the grandparents' house. They had not wanted for the old people to have to move in winter. After that, they traveled to Sanktanna. Anna had taken along her Sunday blouses (called *Tschurak*) for her sisters and sisters-in-law. These, however, did not want any gifts and even gave her money so that she would be able to buy material for herself and dress like the Glogowatzers. Everybody was happy that they were able to see each other again because previously they had never been separated for a longer time. The asking and telling didn't want to come to an end. They were, however, able to stay only two days because Anna already had some chicks, goslings and piglets which Jakob's parents looked after in the meantime. Jakob also had to hold his own daily during the field work, which still was carried out together by the whole family.

When they left again, they had loaded the little calf on the wagon and tethered the cow to the rear frame. Anna's parents gave them all kinds of things to take with them, which they were able to use well in the house. The farewell this time was heartbreaking: "God look after you" and "God look after you (plural)." It went back and forth like that. They choked up. They had intended to say so much and then they didn't find the word for it, after all. It was like their memories were wiped out when everything had been wiped off with a sponge.

Fate Pulls Out All the Stops

Two years later, in summer 1852 on the feast of St. Magdalena,² Anna gave life to a healthy girl. Both had expected a boy because Jakob had wanted it so much. When the birth was over and the midwife called him into the room, Anna

² July 22

told him that it is not a boy. Jakob kissed her and the tiny girl and said if only both of them are healthy that is the most important thing for everybody.

Anna asked him: "Is it okay with you if we christen the little one Leni? Then her birthday and name day will be the same day."³

It was okay with the young father. He thought Leni is a pretty name. Jakob helped a lot in the house to be easy on his wife and young mother. Anna had recovered quickly since the girl was healthy and well-behaved and slept through almost every night. Happiness and joie de vivre appeared in the eyes of the young family. Leni developed quickly and Anna was able to deal with all her work in the house and garden without difficulties.

In the year 1854, Anna expected a child once more. But she did her work in the house, yard and garden unperturbed and even went along to the field if someone had the time to keep an eye on Leni. But when the grain harvest came, Jakob told her she should stay at home from now on because the work is too hard for her. He would not want for her or the unborn to injure themselves. Instead, he worked, together with his siblings, all the more during the harvest. Early every day, the Baumgartners would travel to the field which sometimes was a long way from the village. Today, they again had to travel quite a long way, across the railroad line and really close to the Neupanater highway. It was very hot again, like already for more than a week, day after day.

After Anna had done her housework and also looked after the livestock and poultry, she went to the butcher's stall of the village to buy meat for the evening meal. This evening, the reapers were supposed to eat supper with them. Therefore, she bought good beef to cook Paprikasch.⁴ Anna had brought her little Leni along. The butcher came to the little one and gave her a slice of sausage. At that, she said, "*Papi esse*."⁵ The butcher also offered Anna a slice of sausage because she was expecting. She did not want to accept the sausage, but he insisted on it.

In the afternoon, it became cloudy and somewhat cooler. The reapers heaved a sigh of relief because finally a cool wind blew after the oppressive heat. The cow keepers in the meadow, with a wide view all around in connection with the easy work, saw that a thunderstorm was rising in the sky. As children of nature they knew a lot about these things, drove the cows together and took them into the village before the storm got going. Anna was very surprised when she heard the cows bellowing in front of the gate. When she went outside, she noticed how dark gray the wall of clouds was towards the southwest. After she had put the cows in the stable, she also looked after the hens and geese in the stable so that indeed no poultry got lost; after all, they needed every head for their daily food.

When the sun no longer shined so hot, Jakob and his relatives worked even more industriously. All of a sudden, one of the women shouted: "Oh God, just look towards *Dumelles Loch*!"⁶ What's gathering there looks really terrible."

³ Most commonly, the name day was celebrated rather than the birthday.

⁴ Beef paprika.

⁵ Food, food.

⁶ Dumelle's hole. Dumelle was a family in Glogowatz.

“What do we do?” everybody wondered. “We really no longer need a lot to harvest this field completely.”

But when Jakob looked up and saw the thunderstorm coming, he shouted: “Everybody to the wagon; Anna and Leni are alone at home.”

The others objected: “They are in the village and certainly nothing can happen to them there.” When Jakob ran to the wagon and harnessed the horses, everybody saw how serious it was.

After the reapers had just quickly stacked up all the bound sheaves into crosses, they already saw ominous sheet lightning in the distance. Jakob drove on the horses as he had never done before. It became darker and darker and quite suddenly the first fat raindrops also fell. The women sat on the wagon floor, the men on the sidewalls. As it rained harder and harder, everybody slipped under the horse blankets; only Jakob had none. He was dressed like all farmers with only shirt and pants made from hand-woven linen and wore a straw hat.

The rain drummed down harder and harder and all of a sudden only hail still fell in such an amount that the earth was white like in winter under a blanket of snow. The storm raged terribly and the brothers asked whether it would not be better to stop on the roadside until the thunderstorm eases off. But Jakob just drove the horses still more and they ran to the point of exhaustion. Now only hail still fell and the heavy ice stones beat mercilessly on Jakob's hands and thighs. The backs of the horses steamed like when one takes laundry out of the wash-boiler. With every flash of lightning, men and animals flinched together, and the thunder crashed and rumbled as if the end of the world has come.

The closer one drew to the village, the more wagons with reapers were on the road. Jakob overtook all the wagons as far as it was at all possible because he had a premonition of bad things. Where beforehand dust lay ankle-deep, everything now was covered with hailstones. The entire community field was white as if the earth was covered with snow. Everywhere in the field, sheaves lay scattered around and everything looked hopeless and devastated.

When they finally halted in front of the house gate, Jakob whistled between his fingers as usual, but nobody came to open the gate. Then Jakob and his brother Anton sprang from the wagon. Jakob said, “Unhitch and rub down the horses well with straw so that they don't get sick.” He ran into the house and found the door wide open. In the room, he found an indescribable sight: Anna lay in the bed as if dead. When he called her by name, she opened her eyes and called him to the bed with a faint voice. As if he had had a premonition, Jakob lifted up the feather blanket and saw the newborn lying between Anna's legs. Then he gave a shout, “Don't unhitch; go for the midwife!” With the shout, he woke up the little Leni, who had cowered at the foot end of the bed and cried herself to sleep there. The place where her little head lay was completely drenched.

Since Leni began to cry again, her Aunt Resi took her into her arm and calmed her down. Jakob quickly made a fire to prepare warm water for the midwife. Anton had left to fetch the midwife, who was always prepared for such unprepared cases. She immediately took her bag with the necessary things and climbed onto the wagon; after all, she knew that her help often was decisive with

regard to life and death.

Anna tried to tell quite softly how she had suddenly felt pains right then when the weather came. She, of course, tried to shout to the neighbor lady but with the crashing thunder, this person was not able to hear the shouting. She wanted to go to bed and thought that the contractions will pass all right since the time for the birth of her child still has not come. But then things turned out quite differently. Weeping, Anna said, "Jakob, I've shouted for you so much and beseeched our Lord God; after all, He is supposed to send someone to me, but I remained alone..."

"Anna, don't speak now," said Jakob full of tenderness. "You're so tired now; you can tell me everything tomorrow, my dearest."

Then the midwife also entered. When she stepped in the door, the sun just broke through the clouds and shined into the room, on Anna's bed. She immediately recognized Anna's deplorable condition and that a pool of blood had collected under the bed. She quickly separated the child from the mother. Warm water already stood ready, so she instructed Jakob's sister to bathe the child while she looked after the mother. She cleaned Anna, stopped her up with gauze and gave the instruction to get the other bed ready so that Anna could be moved to another bed. This person was more unconscious than awake due to the severe loss of blood. When Jakob along with his sister lifted her from the bed, he first saw the frightful.

The midwife did everything that was in her power. Jakob asked whether one should not take Anna to the hospital in Arad, but the midwife replied in the negative; the shaking about on the wagon could even worsen the bleeding. She gave the newborn an emergency baptism. When one told Jakob that the child was christened in his name, it was okay with him. How much he would have rejoiced over his little son if everything good had not come to an end, the worst was not imminent for his beloved wife and also the life of the child was not in danger because he had little chance to survive.

Jakob still had the damp clothing on, in which he had been soaked to the skin. One had tried to take him away from the bed so that he would change his clothes, but he heard nothing at all that anyone said to him. The midwife tried twice to place the infant on the mother's breast so that he would get a little nourishment but he was too weak even to try it. His mother no longer was able to perceive what went on around her.

As night fell, all the relatives were present. Everybody would have gladly helped in any way, but unfortunately nobody was able to change any part of the situation. Nobody noticed when the infant died, since everybody was concerned about Anna. In the wardrobe, the relatives found the things which were intended for the baptism of the newborn and now were used as a shroud. The invalid got weaker and weaker. Relatives and neighbors prayed the Lord God might preserve her to her family. With the words of the Lord's Prayer: *Your will be done*, somebody bitterly sobbed convulsively as if he wanted to say: "Lord, this one time let our will be done; after all, we only ask that a family is spared from a great loss."

When Leni awoke, her father took her onto his arm and stepped to the bed

of the dying woman. He no longer was able to control himself and shouted: "Anna, my dear Anna, stay with us. Leni and I need you so much; how is our life supposed to go on without you?"

Then Anna opened her big blue eyes again and, full of love and kindness but also full of sorrow, looked at both her dearest persons, as if she wanted to imprint their picture in her heart for all eternity. She was able to say nothing and tears ran over her pale cheeks. She closed her eyes and a great weakness prevented her from defending herself against death. Although early in the morning she was still healthy and strong, now her end was drawing close. Before it struck midnight, she was united with her little son again.

When the carpenter brought the coffin for the little child, one told him he could take it with again because they now needed a big one for the mother. The name was very touched by the sorrow that had happened to this young family. When Anna lay in state in the coffin, one gave her the dead little boy in her arm. That was the saddest sight that many of those present had ever seen. Jakob took Leni in his arm and carried her in front of the coffin in which her mother and little brother lay. She said in her childlike language, "Mami, Brudi, heiija, heiija."

"Yes," said her father, "they're sleeping, the poor souls." Still, the sorrow and pain which had overtaken her and her father was unknown to Leni.

Before the next day dawned, Jakob's brother Anton rode to Sanktanna, this time with a sad message. The relatives were not at all able to grasp that their dear Anna is said no longer to be alive. Those, to whom it was possible in the harvest time, traveled with immediately to the burial. When it rang out in the morning with the prayer ringing for a deceased person,⁷ the people were taken aback by the news what cruel fate had befallen Jakob and his girl. Everybody was full of compassion and sorry about her. Everybody had only good things to say about her and they understood why Jakob had taken her for his wife.

The burial took place on the following Sunday. Almost all the village inhabitants took part in it and showed the family their sympathy and offered their condolences. Jakob wondered again and again why that did not happen in the night or on a Sunday when he was at home. If help had been at hand, his wife would have survived. Lord God, why did it have to happen like that? But he received no answer to all the questions. Whoever tried to comfort him came across deaf ears. The pastor also tried to comfort Jakob and all his relatives in his funeral oration. He said: "God's ways are not our ways. We will never understand His decision on earth, in our present life. But as Christians we believe and hope for a reunion with all our loved ones in the hereafter. Anna, the young mother, has taken one of her loved ones along. They look down on you now full of love and pray for you in your great sorrow." No eye remained dry with these sensitive words and perhaps some funeral guests thanked our Lord God that they have been spared from such a misfortune. And those who had ever gone through such a misfortune were best able to understand their fellow.

On Sunday evening, Jakob went to the carpenter, to the grave digger and last to the midwife to settle his debt. Everybody said there really was time but he

⁷ Deaths were announced by ringing the church bells; the pattern indicated whether it was a child, adult woman or man.

was an honest man and with him there always had to be order. Perhaps he thought if everything is taken care of it will be easier for him, but there he was very mistaken. The midwife was a woman with a lot of feeling; she knew well how one has to speak to people in misfortune or sorrow. It did not escape her practiced eye that a shiver went through Jakob's entire body although it was pretty hot. She knew that something was not in order with him. Therefore, she asked about his health, but he evaded her words. She asked him once again, however, and then he thought it is nothing that will ever pass.

Then the midwife came next to him and felt his forehead which was glowing hot. She now knew that he had a fever and advised him to remain in bed for some time and his mother should make him cold compresses. Jakob, however, was not interested in it and said upon departure, "Tomorrow, if I am in the field in the open air everything will already be all right." Admittedly, she considered that impossible. The next morning, only the men folk went to the field to bring in what of the harvest had escaped the hail. All the women together helped to wash and carry out everything in Jakob's house that there usually still was to do after a funeral. Often they had to interrupt their work since one or the other began to cry bitterly. Leni and her cousins played as if nothing has happened; what did the little ones know of what has happened to this family? Leni was not able to guess that her mother would never come again.

Jakob was not able to eat a bite and consequently not carry out his work as usual, either. He spoke hardly a word and answered only yes or no. Although he constantly had a fever and his relatives protested they could manage the work without him, he helped in the field the whole week. In return, he was so weak the next week that he himself admitted he would have to remain in bed a few days. His sister took Leni in, where she was able to play with her children. Everybody knew that things were bad with Jakob since he had never lain in bed if he just did not feel so good, and everybody wished that their brother soon gets well again. His mother came and took over all the housework and took care of the livestock.

Since Jakob's illness did not get better, they asked him whether he would not like to go to a doctor in Arad because he really had to get healthy again for himself and his child. On the next day, his sister and brother-in-law traveled with Jakob to the doctor, who diagnosed double, already somewhat advanced pneumonia. Then his sister remembered the thunderstorm. Once during the trip home, she raised the blanket and saw how the hailstones stuck on her brother's back. Jakob sat hunched over on the wagon to protect his face from the hail, which then turned into ice cold water. Yes, he really would have changed at home and put on dry clothes, but at that time he did not think of himself but solely of his beloved wife. Certainly, these wet clothes gave him pneumonia. The doctor prescribed a medicine and also gave some instructions how the sick person should act. But Jakob hardly listened because his will to live was too low.

The relatives began to take the grain home without Jakob. On the threshing floor in the backyard, the wheat was separated from the straw and chaff. Jakob really wanted to help, but the great dust caused him violent fits of coughing so that his siblings begged him to let everything lay and go into the house. He only lay down awhile, then stood up, took Leni by her hand and they

went to the cemetery, which was a few minutes away from home. Everything was so quiet and empty here because all the people had work to do in the field or with the threshing. There, Jakob opened his deeply-saddened heart and wept bitterly so that Leni looked up to her father, full of astonishment. He pointed to the grave mound and said, "Your mother is sleeping in there."

Leni dug in the mound with her little fingers and said, "*Mama haamkumme, Mama haamkumme!*"⁸ But the mother no longer came home to her loved ones.

No medicine helped Jakob and no exhortation he should eat more so that he will regain his strength. He listened to all the good pieces of advice but he followed none. The inevitable happened. At the beginning of September, the illness was so far advanced that Jakob vomited blood. His sister and brother-in-law took him once again to Arad to the doctor, but he said a miracle has to happen for the young man to get healthy again. The miracle, of course, failed to materialize and Jakob followed his beloved Anna and his little son into the grave. What had begun five years ago so beautifully had come to an early end in a sad way. The little Leni now had turned into a full orphan.

Life as an Orphan

The household of Jakob and Anna was dissolved and it was decided that every year Leni will live with a family of her relatives until she becomes an adult. That went well several years. Then when Leni's grandparents died and the property was distributed, Leni encountered a new injustice. When the family members wanted to register her share in their names, they learned that Leni's share had to be sold and the money deposited for her in the orphan office until she is of age; the new law decreed it like that.

Leni often asked for her parents and was not able to hear enough about them. But they never came back again. If she saw other children with their parents, she felt so all alone. She got along well with her many cousins and obeyed all the grown-ups. When she was nine year old, there was a great crop failure. The grain stalks grew barely one hand high and most of the stalks had empty ears. The seeds were lacking for flour and the straw was not sufficient for the coming year either, neither as animal fodder let alone as litter. The farmers had to take the straw down from the roof of the shed⁹ to be able to feed the livestock.

Now, poor Leni was looked at as a burden; none of Jakob's siblings wanted to take her in with them anymore. All the relatives assembled on a Sunday afternoon to discuss what should be done with her. Everybody said they had enough to do with their own children and were not still able to look after someone else's. Each found a credible excuse which left Leni not a single chance for her future.

Only Martin, her oldest uncle, had agreed with none of these excuses, which came from all the siblings in turn. He asked in the silence which occurred

⁸ Mama, come home!

⁹ The roofs were mostly thatched.

suddenly: "What is your plan? What, according to your opinion should be done with Leni?"

One of the brothers said, "One certainly could send her begging for alms."

That made Martin very sad and he said: "Jakob's child has not deserved that. Jakob would be astonished if he could hear you." Then he continued: "If none of you has anything left for the child, then my wife and I will take her in. Because where seven are able to eat, something will still be left for an eighth as well."

All of Leni's relatives heaved a sigh of relief. None of them wanted to do anything bad to the child, but they were not alone, in order to be able to decide freely.

Leni, therefore, stayed with her Uncle Martin. She got along well with his children and shared the work, which was the duty of the children, with them. Up to her twelfth year of life, she lived with Uncle Martin, then she found a position in the village as a housemaid. Leni was hard-working, obedient and quick to learn. Since she carried out her work conscientiously, she was popular with her employers.

The years went by and Leni grew up into a pretty girl. Her life proceeded as well as the life of every other girl in the village, if she also was an orphan. Early on Sunday morning, everybody went to church but in the afternoon all the maids had a holiday. Then, the girlfriends went to the dance or visited a grandmother or relative. With nice weather, Leni often went to the cemetery. She liked it best if no person could be seen far and wide. Then, she communed with her parents and told them about good and less good things, how they just happened in her life. She also told them about the sorrow and the loneliness which often crept up on her. She missed father and mother the most if she saw how kind and good the other parents were to their children.

On one fine Sunday afternoon, her girlfriends came to take her away to the dance but she wanted to go to the cemetery. She found all kinds of excuses to persuade her girlfriends to go to the dance without her, but these girls really wanted her to come with them. One of the girlfriends said to her, "How can you just stay home when all the guys like to dance with you, even the rich ones?"

To that, another opined, "How can you ever say something like that; can't anyone dance with whom he wants?"

Mathias, a nephew of Leni's employer, had passed by with his friends before they went to the dancehall. He got angry with Leni's girlfriend and said to her, "Sali, you have a mouth as big as my hat," and pointed to the inside of his hat. "Do you see, big like this?"

His grandmother interrupted and said, "Sali didn't mean it badly; sometimes she merely speaks before she thinks."

Baschtl, a friend of Mathias, opined in addition, "Yeah, the guys have found out, all right, the Leni doesn't have two left feet; therefore, they all like to dance with her."

The girls tried again to change Leni's mind, but she stuck with her decision.

Sali said again: "I can't understand you. You go with us if it's raining and

today is such a nice day.”

The grandmother stepped in again. “Leni promised me that she will help me weed the vegetable beds because there will be no time for it in less than a week.”

Then the young people went without Leni. When they were outside, the grandmother said, “So now you can change and go to the cemetery.”

Leni answered her: “Thanks a lot for speaking for me. It’s so hard to make excuses if I don’t want to tell the real reason. The others can’t understand me and my situation well.”

The grandmother asked, “Leni, will you go to see my grave, too, when I’m dead and say a Lord’s Prayer for me?”

To that, Leni opined: “How can you ever ask something like that? You’re still healthy and work more than many young people.”

The grandmother answered, “At the moment, I’m in good shape but the end will come for me, too, like for everybody.”

Leni declared: “Most certainly, I’ll never forget you and will include you in my prayers. You offered to me that I’m allowed to call you grandmother if I want, and I’ve only too happily made that a custom.”

Smiling, the grandmother said, “I really knew that, but liked to hear it from you.”

Now, Leni was ready; she cut just a few flowers in the garden, took the bouquet and went to visit her loved ones in the cemetery.

Life Repeats Itself

The year 1869 brought a big change for Leni. One morning, she was so busy with her work that she did not notice at all how late it was. Then she heard the cow keeper blowing, who collected the animals for the pasture. She hurried to the stable to water just quickly the cows, but after that the entire herd already had stamped past her house. Despite all the hurry, nothing was left for her but to drive her cows to the herd. On the way home, she was involved in a conversation by a young farmwoman. They spoke awhile about trivial things but just when Leni wanted to say goodbye, the farmwoman said she still would have a question. “Leni, would you like to marry my brother Peter?”

Leni was very surprised; at her age of seventeen she really still had not thought of getting married. And she answered: “I still have to think it over. Moreover, I’d like the advice of my Uncle Martin whether I should make this decision, since I’m still very young.”

When Leni talked about this marriage proposal with Uncle Martin, he thought and opined: “Leni, I won’t encourage you. You’re still very young, but Peter is really a good catch. Also, you wouldn’t have to work for strange people even though you’re with good people.”

Leni thought everything over thoroughly and came to the decision that it would be better for her to have her own family. Therefore, she accepted the proposal. When she told the news to the family with which she had already worked for years, everybody immediately congratulated her, but also said to her

that they will miss her, especially the grandmother. Of course, they also know that it would happen one day.

So, Leni and Peter married. The parents and siblings of the groom amiably took Leni into their family. At the wedding, all the relatives from both sides took part and both families were pleased with the new relatives. After the wedding, Leni and Peter went to Arad to the Orphan Office where her assets had been deposited until her majority. The disappointment was great when they learned about the big currency devaluation. With her inheritance, she was not able to buy as much arable land as she would have inherited from her parents. Before the Hungarian official handed over the value of her assets to her, he instructed her to press her thumb on the ink pad and after that to put in on the place where he will write an "x" on the paper. Leni knew what the official implied with his remark, namely that she—like so many farm children at that in time—would be illiterate. Because of that, she said to the official, "Sir, I can write my name."

The latter was speechless and mumbled something into his beard. It was better that she was not able to understand his opinion.

Everything went well in their marriage; they had dreams and wishes like all young people. Their happiness was complete when Leni gave life to a little girl. Before the baptism, she asked her husband: "Would it be okay with you, if we had the little one christened with the name Anna? It was the name of my late mother, whom I've already lost so early."

How could he refuse his wife this desire? He would like to exchange nothing in the world with this dear, good person, whom he had so pleasantly acquired in barely one and a half years since they married. They led such a beautiful, peaceful life and Leni now was a member of a large family through her husband.

Throughout the year, there was work in the yard and field, but in winter time was left for rest and conversation. Then one went to visit one another and there was fun and pleasure for young and old. In the course of this, the children got to know and learned to tolerate each other. The relatives helped one another with the swine slaughter since they were always cheerful. Leni had never before experienced so much cohesion of an extended family.

One scarcely thinks that everything is going well; a misfortune unexpectedly happens. It was in the year 1876; the little Anna was two and a half years old. Peter's parents had taken the little one away with them so that her parents were able to go about their work in the grain harvest without any worries. Then, one of the numerous epidemics of that time came into the area; cholera also descended on the Banat. As Leni and Peter brought in the harvest with his siblings, Peter became sick. At first, he just lay down in the shadow under the wagon. He thought that it would surely have to subside now when we have so much work. When it did not get better, he rode home on a horse. Those left worked on undeterred, but Leni was not able to drive out her apprehensive thoughts that things did not look good for her husband.

In the afternoon, she let all the work stand and went home as fast as she possibly could. When she arrived in their yard, her husband lay near the well,

had the well bucket and the water jug next to him and constantly drank from it. He was so weak that he no longer was able to stand. Leni ran in the neighborhood for help and the good neighbors helped carry the invalid into the house. The illness proceeded terribly quickly. The parents had come to him but by the time the reapers already lay on the corn straw bed¹⁰ on the *Schab*.¹¹ He had fallen victim to the last cholera epidemic in the Banat.

The poor Leni was still so young but already at the age of twenty had turned into a widow! Her little daughter was approximately the same age as her when she had lost both parents. Leni, thus, cried a lot about her husband, who always so good to her and also about her child. How often she prayed, "Lord, don't let the same fate be in store for my child as mine; don't let her turn into an orphan!"

Peter's parents took Anna into their family as if their son Peter was still alive. And they looked after little Anna so that her mother was able to help with the field work.

How Things Went On

After several years, the opportunity presented itself for Leni to marry the second time. Anna got a little brother, who was nine years younger than her, but she loved him his whole life. Now, Leni again had her own family and lived with her second husband until 1917. Both died in the interval of just six weeks.

Leni would not have let herself dream that she would be permitted to experience her life up to great-grandmother. She died on the 17th of November 1917, on the feast of St. Elisabeth. When her son-in-law showed the grave digger the place where the grave should be, it began to snow. During the exit from the cemetery, one already could see footprints in the snow. On the following day when the burial took place, a peaceful white blanket lay over the entire cemetery.

Anna, Leni's daughter, had a large family: three daughters and three sons and with it two grandchildren as well. When one of the granddaughters married a widower, Leni said to her, "You know, with this child you can gain your heaven." She knew only too well what it meant to be an orphan.

Leni was granted the privilege of enjoying Anna's children. Since one of the sons emigrated to America, she was far from a part of her descendants and loved those who remained near her all the more. One granddaughter, she had especially taken to her heart and this one loved the grandparents a lot, too. Since the old people lived alone and were often ill, the granddaughter looked after and nursed them lovingly. Here, she learned a lot for her later life, which came in useful to her. With her, the proverb, "Practice makes perfect," had proved true. That holds true in work and in life, too.

Note:

¹⁰ The mattress was stuffed with corn husks.

¹¹ Peter was dead. Earlier, it had been customary to lay a dead person on a bed of rye straw.

My story is based, on the one hand on accounts from the life of a good human being, on the other hand on characteristics and actions which I have ascribed to other people. Unfortunately, I was not able to get to know this part of the family and have only heard about him. In the 19th century, many Banater Swabians lived through fates similar to those describe here.

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