

Leseprobe

Ann Angel's Freedom

written by Katharina Kolata
research by Anke Waldmann

Foreword

Of course, I know that nobody likes to read a foreword so I will keep it short.

The story has been translated by Anke Waldmann, me (Katharina Kolata) and a cousin of mine. Since we are no professional translators, there are some flaws that we were not able to eliminate.

In some instances, we did not translate words or phrases in Lower German, the language spoken in northern Germany at that time. We decided to keep them for they were used, traditionally. However, we included a translation or description as a footnote and in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Also, the language should have been far more old fashioned. Words like “energy” or “pedestrian” either weren’t known then or were only used by the gentry. Since we did not find suitable alternatives we used them. Please forgive this inaccuracy.

Otherwise, we took great care to portray the historical time as exact as possible. The research took five years and still goes on (see www.die-waldmanns.de for more).

The story itself is based on true events in the Waldmann family history. All relevant dates are included in the timetable at the end of the book. Be forewarned, there are some spoilers if you read it first.

Beside the story, the book gives a good impression of what life was like at the end of the 18th century in Northern Germany. For people interested in that time, we advise a visit to the Museum-village Cloppenburg or the Bormann-Museum in Celle.

Whenever I took the liberty to embroider facts with my imagination, to give them a new meaning or to distort them slightly, it happened to increase the pleasure of the readers. I hope that I have succeeded in this.

We hope you will enjoy the book,

Katharina Kolata

Anke Waldmann

Prologue

Anke Waldmann checked the knot of her head rag. She decided to enjoy the summer sun later. She wanted to do the work she had deferred so long. She pushed the last strands of hair under the rag and looked into the mirror.

Ok, I should be able to cope with the dirt.

She went to the utility room beside the kitchen, where the washing and the tumbling machines stood and the stuff she used for cleaning. She took a broom and a bucket.

“Let’s get started” she ordered herself. A little later, she climbed the ladder to the attic of the old farmhouse. Hugh piles of straw swirled gently under her steps. Finally, she reached the corner with the junk that she wanted to clean up.

My oh my, it looks worse than I thought.

Anke rolled up her sleeves and started to work.

Hours later, she returned to the utility room. She was dirty but happy. Her father came out of the cow shed. He laughed when he saw her. Anke removed the head rag and threw it in the laundry basket.

“Would you cook dinner today?”, she asked her father. “There are enough leftovers in the pantry.”

“No problem. You go and have a shower, you monster. I want to have my daughter back.”

Anke laughed.

“I will just throw these old papers in the bin.”

She bent down to take a box she had brought from the attic. It was stuffed with yellowed paper.

“Wait, I’ll help you.”

A brown head knocked a blonde and a rush of paper spilled on the tiles.

“Ouch!” Anke grimaced and touched her head. Her father rubbed the same place on his head.

“Anke! Tell me I’m not dreaming.”

Between the old newspapers were lots of fragile looking papers. Anke understood her father immediately.

Is it possible? Can it really be the estate archive we were looking for, for so long, she asked herself. She barely dared to breathe. Gingerly, she picked up one of the sheets

and started reading. The clean handwriting was in Sütterlin¹. The last time she had read it was at her primary school. So it took her a while to decipher the first few lines. It was a contract about buying some land dated 1756. It was the oldest piece of writing Anke ever had held in her hands. She swallowed and looked at her father.

“You are not dreaming. It really is the estate archive.”

Carefully, they picked up the papers. Anke found a worn booklet and flipped through it.

“Look how even the writing is. It looks as if someone drew short, parallel lines on the paper.”

“It’ll be fun deciphering it”, her father said, slightly sarcastic. He picked up the box and carried it to the living room where he put it on a chair next to the big table. Anke followed him and started to sort the documents by their dates, although she would have preferred to start reading the booklet.

It did not take her long to get used to the script. She admired the elegant handwriting though sometimes it was very small and hard to read. Finally, she looked at her father.

“I should translate the documents in today’s script, after sorting them.”

Her father agreed because he did not have the time to do anything with the treasure they had found. After all, he had to tend the farm. In the evening, Anke told him what documents she had found. Only after she finished talking, she allowed herself to open the booklet. On the first page she found a short note in tiny but accurate letters.

“What happened lies so far in the past, now. Many things turned out differently from what I had hoped or feared. Nevertheless, I do not repent my decision. It was the best for all of us. Although I don’t want anyone of my time to know the truth I wish I could tell it to somebody. Silence is hard on me. That is the reason, why I decided to write down the events of the time my family bought our freedom. A. A. Waldmann.”

Curious, Anke turned the page. She started reading, and soon she lost herself in a different time.

¹ old style of German handwriting

1799

Angel moved a little on the wooden bench but the seat stayed just as uncomfortable as ever. An icy breeze came through small windows in the thick walls. Slowly, the cold of the winter froze her to the marrow. Despite the numerous believers, it didn't get warmer. Not even the candles helped that Count Schele, the owner of the castle, had provided for today's Epiphany service. Angel smoothed the black skirt of her Sunday best and tried to concentrate on the prayer but her thoughts wandered to her elder sister again and again. Grete did not come to the service. She was chosen to look after the house. Why didn't I stay with Grete? I could have helped her.

She shivered and drew her new white scarf closer around her shoulders.

The way she makes me work I would, at least, be warm.

She retied the bow of her white, embroidered cap. Her mother who was sitting next to her frowned. Angel laid her hands in her lap and forced herself to sit still.

Will this service never end?

Furtively, Angel looked to her younger sister, sitting calmly between her parents. Maria had the dark brown curls of her mother. Braided into two tidy tails they hung down the slender back. Attentively, she followed the sermon. Angel let her eyes wander from her sister to her father to Victor, her brother. The eight year old had the same problem as Angel. He always found it hard to sit still. When the community went up to receive the blessing of the Lord. Angel jumped to her feet, feeling relieved. In a few minutes she would be on her way home, wrapped in warm blankets. Happily, she sang the last hymn that accompanied the leaving of the community. She left her pew as fast as possible and wound her way through the people, leaving her family far behind. Outside, she turned and looked at the mighty walls of the Schelenburg. She did that every Sunday. The imposing construction fascinated her. The older part of the castle was rectangular and built into the middle of an artificial lake. It had very small windows that looked more like embrasures and admitted but little light through the massive walls. The chapel was built into this part of the castle. Here Count Georg von Schele's clergyman held services for the Protestants of the village.

It is rather nice of the Count to let us come here every Sunday. After all, his parson is not the youngest.

Slowly, Angel turned round to get a look of the newer buildings of the Schelenburg. In contrast to the massive walls of the old part they seemed remarkably light. The fine half-timbered buildings surrounded a wide inner court. Most worshipper stood there and

talked in small groups. Angel looked at the old part of the castle again.

How many sad and happy things these walls must have seen, she thought. Dreamily, she laid back her head and watched the clouds trailing over the castle's roof through the blue sky. She enjoyed the eerie feeling she got when the giant building looked as if it would topple over any minute. A strand of her blonde curls, freed from the solicitous twisted hair knot, was dancing in the wind. When Angel noticed it she put it back under her bonnet.

Suddenly, a shadow passed over the castle and Angel's heart missed a beat. For the part of a second, she was convinced that something bad would happen soon. She looked to the sky, again. One of the few bigger clouds had blocked out the sun. It passed quickly but the foreboding stayed. Angel's devotional mood was gone. Now, she felt the cold again. She rubbed her arms and looked for her parents and siblings. On the other side of a wide bridge, the visitor's carts drove leisurely past the groups of pedestrians. Jokes and laughter rang through the clear air and friends stopped to talk a while. It wasn't easy to find her family in the crowd. Luckily, Angel knew exactly where their cart stood. She pushed through the crowd over the bridge until she saw her father. Obviously, he was ahead of the others to get the cart from the wet grassland. After recognizing him, it did not take Angel long to find the others. Her mother pushed Victor and Maria through the crowd in front of her. She urged them to hurry.

Victor tried to run after his father but his mother grabbed his hand in time. Angel smiled. She knew that her small, wiry brother would not care about his Sunday pants although he looked like an innocent angel with his blonde curls. Out of breath she reached her family. All looked healthy and happy. Her worry seemed unfounded.

Surely, I have dreamt with my eyes open again, she scolded herself but the feeling of anxiety left only reluctantly. She grabbed Maria's arm who also wore the black Sunday dress but no bonnet. Maria would get the bonnet of unmarried women after her Confirmation in three more years. A husky man stopped and greeted Angel's mother.

"God bless you, neighbor" she answered.

"Where did you leave you husband, Catharina?"

"He went for the cart so our feet won't get wet from the grass. I will do the driving, later", Victor shouted. Angel smiled and the neighbor, Colon² Rahenkamp laughed, too.

"I hope you will take your mother home safely."

Angel did not listen any longer. She watched her father moving towards them through

² title of a farmer in the area of Osnabrück.

the throng on the grassland. Angel was relieved to see his slim, sinewy figure. His slightly angular face with the smoothly shaved, energetic chin was framed by dark brown hair. His unmanageable curls looked so wild under the Sunday hat that Angel had to laugh.

Sometimes father looks like a little boy and not like the owner of one of the biggest farms in the area.

Angel watched her father guiding both horses with the cart to the cobblestone road. There he stopped and petted the two sturdy animals at the shaft. Proudly, he looked at his horses. Not all serfs³ could afford expensive animals. Angel let go of Maria's arm, ran to her father and hugged him.

"My Angel! There you are." Ludwig smiled at her with love, but Catharina was not happy.

"Ann Angel Waldmann! Behave yourself. At fifteen you should know how to act." Rahenkamp shook Ludwig's hand.

"Nice to see you, Ludwig. I have met your Count's advocate some days ago. He wants to know if you will buy your freedom or not."

"I will answer him one of these days. Do we see you later?"

"Sure. We don't want to miss the tapping of the new beer."

Rahenkamp said his goodbye and walked away. Ludwig took his daughter's hand and the last bit of Angel's anxiety vanished. She felt safe now. Happily, she climbed on to the cart. A few planks were laid over the sides for seats. Although it was a bit uncomfortable, it was better than walking. Angel wrapped herself in one of the thick blankets. Eleven year old Maria climbed on to the cart and snuggled up to her. Both watched as Catharina lifted Victor carefully onto the cart.

"I want to sit in the front. Father promised me that I could drive."

Catharina did not agree.

"That is too dangerous. You better sit next to me."

Ludwig eased her mind by saying: "Don't worry, dear. Let him sit with me. I will take care of him."

While Victor moved to the front Ludwig helped his wife onto the cart. Tenderly, he put a thick blanket around her shoulders. Happily, she smiled at him. Suddenly, Angel realized how young her mother looked although she was nearly fifty. Her gray hair was fixed in a tight bun, hidden by the bonnet worn by married women. It was embroidered

³ a person belonging to someone from the gentry (serfdom)

with gold and had a small lace brim. It emphasized Catharina's gentle features. The small wrinkles around eye and mouth stressed the agility of her gray eyes. She wore the same clothes as Angel and Maria, except for the bonnet and a scarf. It was white and very wide. Although all women wore this traditional costume Angel thought her mother was the prettiest of them all. For the first time in her life, Angel consciously realized that her mother was a beautiful woman and Ludwig, at the age of fifty-one, was still stately, too. He swung himself up to the front seat, wrapped Victor and himself in another blanket and took the reins. Before he could start, a carriage stopped next to them. It was Meyer zu Schleddehausen. He wore a fur coat that made him resemble a fury ball. He bent over and lifted his hat.

"I wish you a very nice Sunday. Enjoy it! It could well be the last before I finally own you."

The feeling of being threatened returned to Angel. Her heart beat faster. Laughing, Meyer hit his horses with the whip. The animals whinnied and jumped into action. The light two-seater sped past Waldmann's cart and clattered down the road to the village. Catharina was disgusted.

"Shame on him. That is no way to treat valuable horses."

Her husband also looked after Meyer and shook his head.

"I am not only concerned about the animals."

Ludwig Waldmann clicked his tongue and his horses started moving, too. Slowly the cart rumbled over the cobbles. At the end of the castle's entrance, the track to Schleddehausen started. The steel studded wooden wheels ground through the oozing mud. From time to time, a pothole shook the passengers. Angel watched fields and meadows and small woods pass. These lands belonged to the Schelenburg, but in a few minutes the first houses of Schleddehausen came into sight. The tower of the catholic church towered over them as black memorial to the past. With its sooty walls it seemed to frown. Angel looked at it dreamily. She thought of the fire that burned down the biggest part of the village on the 2nd June 1781, shortly before Pentecost. For a moment, she imagined the flames so vividly that she felt the hot air on her face. The flames ate through houses and stables, flaring, crackling, and hissing. The fire was graceful in a very dangerous way. People screamed and tried to save their belongings. In the middle of it all, the parson of Bad Essen, a nearby town, rode thrice around the church on a borrowed horse to save it from burning. At the last moment, the horse took its rider safely over the small brook. Angel was not sure if the old ritual or God's hand saved the church. Obviously, the parson thought it worth trying and the result proved

him right. Apart from the charred tower, the rest of the church wasn't damaged. Angel shook her head to free herself from this dream. The flames vanished. She looked around in amazement. They just turned on the road to their farm.

We are this far already? Mother is right. I am daydreaming too much. I really need to get myself together.

The pictures from the past were forgotten. The sun warmed the earth and on the front seat Victor asked his father a thousand questions.

"Father, can't we build a new roof for the church tower?"

"Only with a lot of money."

Catharina shook her head in disapproval.

"It looks terribly untidy, as if Schledehausen is a poor village."

Ludwig snorted.

"It's none of our business. The priest should handle it."

Vigorously, he pulled the cloth closer around his shoulders, steadily steering the horses over the winding road. Angel knew that he did not want to talk about the damaged church. Her father thought the priest to be a chatterer. When they passed the last houses of Schledehausen, Victor started begging.

"Can I drive the horses now, father? Please. You promised!"

Ludwig took his son between his legs and handed him the reins. That way, he could intervene at any time. Seeing him safe, Catharina relaxed. Angel sighed. Sometimes she wished her mother would be as anxious about her as she was with Victor, the only son and heir of the farm.

Angel moved a bit to one side to better see the road in front of the cart. After passing a rather steep part, it wound through the gently rounded hills of the Wiehengebirge⁴. This landscape she loved best. The forests on the higher slopes were still leafless and the fields seemed barren. In between, a handful of farms huddled together to form Astrup. Directly behind the small settlement open country rose more steeply. Other farms could be seen scattered between meadows and hills. The higher grounds were covered in forests, heather, and moors. Here and there, a leftover bit of snow sparkled in the sun, thawing already. The roads were wet and muddy. The weak sun did little to dry them. Angel was glad that she wasn't walking.

The permanent swinging of the cart made her drowsy. She enjoyed sitting quietly for a while. Such peaceful moments were rare. There was too much to do on the farm.

⁴ mountain range north-east of Osnabrück

Lovingly, she looked at Maria sleeping at her shoulder. Her little sister was able to sleep anytime and anywhere. Sometimes Angel envied her but right now she was happy looking around. As the cart turned one of the many corners Angel saw two pedestrians. Both tried not to soil their Sunday clothes on the muddy streets without success. The man was big and broad-shouldered although a bit gaunt. He bowed as if he had a heavy burden to carry. A dark-haired girl walked at his side and supported him. Her slim, boyish figure looked fragile though the traditional women's costume hid it well. Angel recognized the pedestrians at once.

"Father, it's Klara. Can we give them a ride? Please."

Angel held her breath until Ludwig nodded. Klara Dorsch was her best friend. Angel smiled at her father. She knew that he did not much like Klara's father, his tenant. Hinrich Dorsch was a weak man. Although he was stronger than most other men, his soul was fragile. The smallest problem scared him or made him nervous. Since his wife died, he took to drinking too often and too much. Even now, he seemed none too steady on his own two feet. Ludwig stopped the carriage when they reached the pedestrians.

"Hop on."

They did not hesitate. They thanked Ludwig and climbed on the cart. Klara squeezed herself between Angel and Maria. Ludwig got the horses going again and Angel made a little more room for Klara. Deep potholes shook the cart back and forth. The passengers needed to hold fast not to be thrown off.

"Maria would miss Armageddon if she was asleep", Angel whispered to Klara. Both girls giggled and snuggled closer to each other. The churchgoers shivered in spite of the blankets. The wind was cold, even with the sun shining. Luckily, it only took half an hour from Schleddehausen to the Waldmann Colonat⁵. The cart struggled over the muddy roads and through the hills, but it did not get stuck. The girls sat silently as close to each other as possible. They had known each other for so long that they did not need to talk. Finally, Angel asked: "Will you come to the tapping? After all, you helped with the brewing. The neighbors will all come. Gerhard Averbek has promised he'd order a fiddler and Grete has cooked the most marvelous things."

Angel always thought that her friend did not get enough to eat. She knew very well that Dorsch's larder was usually rather empty. The feast would be a nice diversion for Klara. Patiently, Angel waited for an answer.

"Better not. Today is Epiphany. I have to recite a Bible chapter for father."

⁵ farm in the area of Osnabrück

“Can’t he do without?”

“Our mental health is more important than the pleasure of our bodies. Besides, we prefer to stay at home since mother died.”

“What a pity.”

Klara put an arm around Angel’s shoulders.

“Don’t be sorry. We’ll come some other time.”

Angel promised herself to put some of the good food aside for her friend. She had done that before.

Finally, they moved up the last hill, rounded a narrow curve, and rolled down the smooth slope past Volbert’s farm. Angel looked at the well-tended houses, shadowed by a mighty oak and several leafless cherry trees. In spring this part of the way was her favorite. From here her home was visible for the first time, right on the base of the opposite hill.

A little later, they reached the entrance of the farm. The dark framework of the house and the thatched roof were visible through the leafless branches of the oaks at the end of the driveway. Klara and her father jumped off there. They opened the gates and thanked Ludwig again. Finally, they started walking the short way up the hill to the Leibzuchtskotten⁶. Angel watched them leaving. She knew that her father had taken the Dorsch family along only for her pleasure.

“Thank you, father.”

Ludwig just nodded and drove the cart over the big yard. It looked as if he would drive right into the threshing barn⁷, but at the last moment he skillfully swerved in a half circle past the larger of the two sheep stables and stopped the horses directly in front of the big door of the main house. Behind the house Angel could just make out the small sheep stable. The new baking house, situated further away, was hidden by the massive half-timbered building.

As usual Angel admired her father’s driving skills. Ludwig had parked the cart so well that it could be pushed right into the cart shed after unhitching the horses.

I wonder if Victor will ever learn to drive that well? Hopefully, we will have a new cart shed by then, Angel thought. Critically, she looked at the damaged building. The Heuschüre⁸ next to it was even more ramshackle. The height-adjustable roof was not

⁶ small house originally built for Ludwig’s father and his wife, at this time used as a tenancy.

⁷ barn for threshing wheat, rye, barley and oats .

⁸ several wooden poles standing in a circle with a mobile roof, that can be pulled up or let down, hay or straw can be stored underneath to stay dry

yet leaking but it sagged a lot. Also, the jambs holding it up were rotten in parts. Angel knew that her father had to build a new one soon.

She watched Ludwig jump from the cart to help her mother descend. The Colona tried to hide her restlessness with little success.

“I hope everything is properly prepared. The guests will arrive any moment. I should not have left Grete alone.”

“Don’t worry. Grete has managed everything. After all, our eldest is a reliable girl.”

Angel did not wait for her parents. She woke Maria, jumped off the cart and ran after Victor into the house. For a short moment she could not see, but her eyes immediately adjusted to the usual twilight in the hall. Even without light Angel knew well how far it was to the Flett⁹. In the stalls on the left hand side the cows were peacefully chewing their cud. The stalls on the right were occupied by cattle¹⁰. Above the stables a lot of straw was stacked. Sometimes chickens went there to lay their eggs, but most chickens preferred the baskets hanging on the eight props. Angel ran through the hall avoiding the animals automatically. The stamped earth that served for a floor was swept clean. Even the cobblestones on the Flett were flawless. On the hearth the flames of the fire danced merrily. Above it on a Wenhäal¹¹ under the Führrahmen¹², a big pot was hanging on the Ketelhaken¹³. Angel loved the smell of smoke and soup. A young man leaned on one of the props. His dark brown hair matched the color of the prop. His arms were casually crossed over his breast. He flirted with the giggling maids that were stirring the pots. Angel knew him well. When his brown eyes rested on her, Angel’s heart jumped as it always did lately.

“Adam! You’d better leave. Mother will be here, soon.”

She sat down on a wooden bench next to the fire and stretched hands and feet towards the fire.

“As you wish, princess.”

Adam Averbeck smiled and vanished with hardly a sound through the side door. A little later Angel’s mother stood on the Flett. Critically she looked around. She realized that everything was prepared and seemed to be in good order. She sighed, relieved.

“Where is Grete? Angel, go and get her.”

Angel stood up and went to Grete’s bedroom that her sister shared with Philippina, the

⁹ kitchen area of the farm house (see illustration in appendix)

¹⁰ In this context, cows are of the milk giving variety and cattle are bred for meat.

¹¹⁻¹³ see graphics at the end of the book

youngest maid. The tiny room held two simple wooden beds with straw mattresses and a carved chest. Angel went back to the Flett.

“She’s not in her room.”

Just at that moment, a blond girl came out of one of the back rooms. Her gray eyes sparkled as she looked at Catharina. Angel was always surprised how similar her mother and her elder sister looked, though Grete was slightly taller than her mother.

“You are back. Good. Everything is prepared.”

Grete took her mother with her to the Stube¹⁴. Angel followed them hesitantly. Catharina looked through the door at Victor and Maria playing in the hall. Both were still surprisingly clean.

In the good room, Angel looked around. The table was covered with fresh linen and nicely decorated. It bent with the weight of the food. There was enough of everything to feed an army and the first barrel of newly brewed beer was there, too. Already Angel tasted the food on her tongue. She was looking forward to the feast. She could see that her mother was satisfied. Catharina smiled and hugged her eldest. She rarely praised her children but if she did it was for good reasons.

“You will become a good housewife. Your future husband can be proud of you.”

Grete blushed. Despite her eighteen years she did not think of marrying yet.

Embarrassed, she fiddled with the linen on the table, straightening it without needing to.

A familiar voice boomed through the house.

“Where is my beloved sister-in-law?”

“Henneken!”

Happily Catharina and Grete rushed out of the room. Angel watched them go. She enjoyed being alone for a few minutes. In the Flett, Catharina hugged her sister Angela and her brother-in-law, Henrich Huckeriede. Angela looked around admiringly.

“I love being here. It’s always so neat.”

“Only the best for you.”

Catharina and Angela giggled like schoolgirls despite their age. Finally, the Colona took her sister by the arm to show her the new fabric Ludwig bought her in Osnabrück. A little later Angel entered the Flett. Henrich whistled in admiration and scratched his nearly bald head.

“Is the cloth¹⁵ a new one? Come on. Turn round, so I can see it.”

¹⁴ German: good room; literally translated: parlor but that seemed to big a word for a room with little furniture, hardly any rugs and even less heating.

¹⁵ a very wide scarf, part of the traditional costume; brown for everyday use and white for the Sunday best

“It’s a present from my father.”

Angel turned around and Hinrich praised her accordingly.

“Today you are exceptionally beautiful, little Angel.”

Angel beamed at him. She really liked her uncle. Hinrich Huckeriede was stout and strong with a comfortably rounded belly. In his brownish vest and trousers he resembled a strong ox. Angel couldn’t help smiling when she saw him with her aunt. They were so different. With her black dress and the white cloth of womanhood, Angela Huckeriede looked like a slender bird. Though both were of similar height, it seemed as if Angela towered over her husband.

At this moment Ludwig arrived with the Rahenkamps and Mister Hoppe, the teacher of the protestant school. His wife and their children followed silently. Grete made them all feel at home. She told Angel to go and find Catharina. Angel grumbled, “Why always me? ”

She went to the sleeping room where Angela and Catharina were looking at the new fabric. Angel waited. She did not want to interrupt. Finally Catharina saw her.

“Do you need something?”

Angel delivered the message and both women put the cloth back in the chest. They closed the lid and left. Angel decided to change her white Sunday cap for a colored one and the delicate white cloth for the black one she wore everyday. The material was more robust. When she returned to the Flett the guests were huddled around the fire to get warm. Gerhard Averbeck and his wife, Anna, holding their half-year-old son in her arms, entered the house through one of the side doors. They brought a gust of cold air with them.

“This winter is awfully hard, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.”

Teacher Hoppe agreed. “I have even heard that wolves have been seen but I do not know for sure. Probably it is just a rumor.”

“I’ve heard of that, too.”

Colona Rahenkamp spoke so quietly that Angel found it hard to understand her. In comparison Hinrich Huckeriede’s bass boomed like thunder.

“Nothing but gossip. The last wolf in this area was killed nearly twenty years ago. None has ever be seen after that. I would really like to know where people get such stupid stories.”

A little bit later everybody was talking about the dangers of the winter. Grete, Angel and the maids were handing cups of fresh beer to the guests. When they finally settled down

around the table many beermugs were already empty. Angel was uncomfortable. Normally children were not allowed into the good room. There her mother's most treasured possessions were stored: the grandfather clock, the family silver and the china for special occasions carefully displayed in wonderfully carved boards. Angel only relaxed a little when the meal was served. Secretly, she'd rather eat at her usual place at the big table in the Flett. She envied the maids and the farm hands sitting comfortably together.

Everybody ate as if it had to last for the rest of the winter. For awhile silence reigned. Victor and Maria finished first. They got up and romped around the table. Ludwig ordered them out.

"No running in here. Go to the Flett."

"I just don't know where they get all that energy", Catharina said. She seemed worried as she looked for her son.

"Be careful, Victor dear."

"Why don't you let the youth have their fun", Henrich Huckeriede said. He was amused as he watched the children. Anna Averbeck sighed.

"You should be glad that they are wild. I wish my three would still be so.. " Tenderly she rocked her sleeping son. "...alive", she added quietly. Angel was surprised to see the face of her mother harden. Fortunately Adam came in and announced the arrival of the musician. Being glad about the interruption the guests rushed onto the Flett. Angel looked at Gerhard Averbeck, Adam's older brother. He put his hand on Adam's shoulder who still stood at the door. She thought how amazingly alike the two brothers looked. They were both broad shouldered and had the same strong hands, straight noses and disheveled dark hair. Still Angel liked Adam better than his older brother.

"Will you come to dinner tomorrow? Anna would be pleased", Gerhard said. He knew that it was Adam's free afternoon. Adam nodded.

"Sure. As soon as all the animals are cared for."

Angel's heart warmed. She loved Adam for the fact that the animals were more important to him than anything else. She did not realize that he would get into trouble should he neglect the animals.

Adam would make a magnificent Colon, she thought. Too bad that he has hardly a chance to become one. She looked at him with shining eyes. Adam noticed her looking and smiled.

"Well, princess. How about a little dance?"

Angel swallowed and tried to answer but nothing happened. Finally she shook her head

but Adam did not accept that. He took her arm and led her to the hall, which was lit for the occasion. Several candles and some oil lamps were hung up in different places, brightening the usually dim hall. Angel was happy although her knees felt as if they were made of jelly. The musician took his Fiddle and played a merry tune. Ludwig and Catharina opened the dance. In a close embrace they whirled through the hall. A little later other pairs started dancing too. Dancers and chickens avoided each other as if in mutual agreement. The cats had fled for security a long time ago. This evening none of them would show up. Adam put his hands on Angel's hip and pulled her along. Angel followed. She was surprised, how fast the first dance was over. Adam took her back to the Flett. He bowed, turned round and went to get Philippina, the youngest maid. Somewhat out of breath, Angel sat down next to Grete and observed the dancers. Her sister was talking to Teacher Hoppe, but Angel didn't listen. Her eyes followed Adam. Adam dances so lively. It's wonderful. What a pity that sometimes he looks as if he has swallowed a stick.

Angel waited patiently, but Adam did not choose her for another dance. She was jealous of every girl he danced with, talked to, or flirted with.

"But I'm the only one he calls princess!"

That thought soothed her feelings and she started day dreaming. In her mind Adam danced only with her the whole night through. The other girls watched them, enviously. She dreamed with open eyes until Grete nudged her with her elbow.

"Isn't it true, Angel?"

Confused, Angel looked at her sister. Since she had not been listening, she had no idea what her sister had said. Grete smiled.

"I just told Teacher Hoppe that I'm not much interested in the past. You like it better, don't you?"

In his spare time, Teacher Hoppe researched local history. When he found an audience he gladly talked about his discoveries. Although most people were bored beyond endurance Angel liked his presentations of historical facts very much. Thus she had learned about the Westphalian peace treaty that ended the 30-year war in 1648. It had surprised her that it had been signed in Osnabrueck. She also learned that the Kurfürst¹⁶ of Hanover was crowned King of England in 1714. She smiled at the teacher. "Oh yes, you taught me a lot of interesting things."

Teacher Hoppe was very pleased. Grete sighed in relief and disappeared as soon as it

¹⁶ electoral prince

seemed appropriate. The teacher watched her go.

“I hope I will not bore you as I do your sister.”

Angel smiled.

“I like listening to you. With you, history seems like something that happened just a short while ago. I think the best story you ever told us was the one where Justus Moeser¹⁷ ran away from home and had to beg. Did that really happen?”

“Everything I told you about this great man is absolutely true. He even helped to negotiate one of the most important contracts since the peace treaty of 1648.”

Eagerly, Angel waited for whatever Teacher Hoppe chose to tell this time. She moved closer so as not to miss a single word.

“In January 1784, four Catholics got together with Senior Counselor Justus Moeser and Vizecanzlei Director¹⁸ Gruner to regulate the religious state of two parishes. Just as today, the Protestants in Schleddehausen weren't happy that they had to attend catholic services. The Catholics in Fürstenau¹⁹ felt the same, vice versa. For four years Moeser, Gruner and the others negotiated. One of the problems was that too many people interfered. First of all, there was King George III of England. He was on our side. Being father to our Fürstbischof²⁰ Friedrich, he put in a word or two. On the other side, Max Franz of Austria had his say, being head of the Osnabrueck Catholics as well as archbishop and Kurfürst of Cologne. By the way, he is the youngest son of the Empress Maria Theresia of Austria. You do still know what I told you about her, don't you?”

Angel nodded and Teacher Hoppe continued to speak.

“Well, he interfered as well. Finally, in 1786 the Protestants and the Catholics signed and sealed a contract. It confirmed that in Schleddehausen the church was to be used by both faiths each with their own clergyman. In Fürstenau, the Catholics were supposed to get their own church. This treaty is called the Religious Comparison.”

Angel was surprised.

Why do we still have to go to the Schelenburg for our services, she thought, if this treaty has been signed thirteen years ago? She wondered secretly because she did not dare to interrupt Teacher Hoppe. Maybe he'd explain later.

“The treaty also determined that the Protestant clergy had to be paid by collections from their local congregations. At the same time the Catholic priests would continue to

¹⁷ the most famous man of Osnabrueck

¹⁸ official title of some sort of lawyer

¹⁹ a small town north-west of Osnabrück

²⁰ official title of the Bishop of the Protestant church and at the same time head of the state Osnabrueck

receive their money from the municipality as before. Catholic holidays were meant to be working days for the Protestants and vice versa. Working in public places was prohibited for both faiths on those days. The supervision was given to the bailiff²¹. That gave the Catholics a slight advantage as the bailiff had always been a Catholic.”

The teacher sipped on his beer and continued his explanations.

“The contract demanded that a second vestry had to be built to our church. As you know, it has long been finished. Your neighbor, Colon Rahenkamp, collected the money for it. He even traveled to Holland for funds.”

Again Angel was surprised. She had not known that their neighbor had traveled that far. The teacher interrupted her thoughts.

“Now, there is only one thing left to do. The Protestants in Fürstenau have to build a new church for the Catholics. And that is the reason why to the present day the treaty has been disregarded. For several reasons the people of Fürstenau refuse to build this church.”

“Is there nothing anyone can do?” Angel asked. She was surprised at herself. At school she hardly ever dared to ask questions. Smiling the teacher answered.

“The two faiths have been negotiating all the time. The two of us can only wait and trust in God. He will arrange it eventually.”

Thoughtfully, Angel bit her lower lip.

I never would have thought that the Protestants would oppose such a contract. Father always says that the Catholics are the thick headed ones. In this case, though, it doesn't seem to be true. It's a pity I don't know more Catholics. The only ones are Klara and her father and she is my best friend.

Suddenly Angel realized that Teacher Hoppes glass was empty. She rose, fetched a jug of beer, and refilled it. The other men at the table in the Flett were pleased about that.

They waved their empty mugs. Playing hostess Angel refilled their mugs, too.

“My little Angel. You are quite a young lady already. Soon the boys will fight for your favors”, Ludwig said. He loved to tease her. Angel felt herself blush. To escape the friendly laughter of the men she left the table pretending to get more beer. When she returned, the discussion had turned to another topic.

“The Parson said that every man has to have certain liberties.”

“Yes, but he was talking about religious liberty”, Teacher Hoppe said.

“It is wrong that we still have to attend Catholic services although we all are

²¹ a mixture between chief of police and administrator

Protestants.”

“It is an injustice. That’s what it is”, Henrich Huckeriede said and slammed his fist on the table. The oldest son of Colon Rahenkamp joined the discussion.

“It’s just as unjust that we belong to Count Piccard of Krebsburg. Are we cattle that someone can own us? We should be free like the birds in the field - or like the Frenchmen!”

“Stop it this moment! These are unchristian thoughts”, he was reprimanded by his father. “The Frenchmen even beheaded their God-given king!”

Shocked, Angel took a few steps backwards. If that was the price of liberty she would rather not have it. She relaxed a little when Ludwig spoke again.

“That’s all very well. However, what if it is the desire of your Count that you should buy your freedom?”

Surprised, his guests looked at him. He continued.

“As you well know my owner, the Count zu Münster-Langelage, has asked me several times to do just that. Thus far, I’ve rejected that idea, but the lecture today made me think. Perhaps it is my christian duty.”

“What a great idea!”

Henrich Huckeriede was already in high spirits although Ludwig had not yet decided. He still hesitated.

“I’ll think about it for a while. If I do it, it will cost me a fortune.”

“Your Count needs every penny of it. He is always short of cash.”

Henrich gloated. Gerhard Averbeck lifted his glass to Ludwig.

“Don’t forget that as a free farmer there is no more unpaid labor for the Count, no tenth and no payment for marriage or death. You will recover your costs in no time.”

“The money the Count will get is my smallest concern. Surely it can be negotiated. But what about afterwards? If I don’t keep back enough money I will then be a slave on my own farm, working just to survive.”

Gerhard nodded gravely but Henrich shook his head.

“Don’t think about that. In case of an emergency, I will lend you some money.”

Ludwig shook his head.

“That is not necessary, but thanks for the offer, Henrich.”

Gerhard Averbeck put his glass down and looked at Ludwig thoughtfully.

“If anyone can make it, it’s you, Ludwig. And you shouldn’t forget the advantages. The word of a free man has a lot more weight in important decisions. I know from my own experience how useful that can be.”

Ludwig thought. Suddenly, he noticed Angel observing him. He smiled at his favorite daughter.

“Darling Angel. How would you feel as the daughter of a free Colon?”

Angel swallowed in surprise. She considered carefully. Finally, she answered.

“I don’t know, father. I might feel confused at first, but I’ll probably like it later.”

Ludwig laughed out loud.

“She’ll like it. That’s great. That’s settled then. I’ll tell the Count that I am accepting his offer. That is, if he doesn’t ask too high a price.”

Angel would have liked to go on listening but Colon Rahenkamp’s son asked her to dance. She let herself be pulled along. While they spun around to the music she wondered what it would be like to live as a free person.