

The Stowaways

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The Stowaways

Hans was a carpenter's son who lived in the village of Immenstaad on the edge of a big lake many, many years ago. In those days, not many children went to school; they helped their mother and father at home until they were old enough to go out to work. Every morning, Hans took the pigs that belonged to his family to the nearby forest to forage for food. When it was hot, flies buzzed around his face; when it rained, his feet sank into the stinking mud and it was cold.

One afternoon, Hans came back from the forest with a big frown on his face. He herded the pigs into the barn and banged the door shut.

"I'm sick of looking after pigs," he growled to himself. "I'm going to the city. I shall become a baker or a merchant!"

Loud sobs made him look around. His little sister Gritte was curled up against the wall of the barn, her face streaked with tears.

"What's wrong?" asked Hans.

"My Kitty's run away and now you're going too!" she wailed.

"Kitty will come back, I'm sure," said Hans. "I will too, when I've made my fortune."

Gritte flung her arms around her big brother. "Don't go!" she begged. "I'll miss you and mother and father will too. And who will look after the pigs?"

"Not I," said Hans. "Goodbye, little one."

Hans ran through the village to where the boats were tied up at the water's edge. He knew that the flat, wooden Lädine was taking a load of grain to the big town of Constance on the other side of the lake. While the boatmen were busy talking to the farmer, Hans slipped on board and hid between the bulging sacks. A few moments later, the boat rocked gently as the boatmen climbed on board and made ready to leave. Soon, a fresh easterly breeze filled the sail and they were underway.

Hans had never been on a boat. It was strange to hear the waves slapping against the wooden hull and he shivered at the thought of the deep water underneath his feet. Behind him, he could see his village get smaller and smaller until it disappeared altogether. There was a funny feeling in his throat.

What will it be like in Constance? He wondered. He had never been to the city before. *I shall knock on doors and ask for work. Anything will be better than looking after pigs.* He frowned. *But what will I do if no one wants me?*

His stomach rumbled and he suddenly realized he was very hungry. He imagined his mother cutting thick slices of bread and cheese for supper and tears filled his eyes. He swallowed hard but the lump in his throat wouldn't go away.

A gentle "Miaow!" interrupted his thoughts. Hans looked around and saw a little grey cat staring at him.

"Kitty!" he whispered. "You've stowed away too!"

The little cat didn't want to go to the city; she had been chasing the mice hiding amongst the sacks of grain. She jumped onto Hans' lap and he stroked the soft, warm fur gratefully. He couldn't possibly go to Constance now.

"I have to take you home," he said. "Gritte is missing you!"

Hans waited impatiently until the boat bumped gently to a stop at the next village.

While the boatmen were busy, he slipped unseen into the shallow water and waded to shore. With Kitty tucked safely inside his coat he hurried home along the muddy road and arrived just as his family was sitting down for supper.

Gritte squealed for joy when she saw her big brother and her little cat. "I thought you were going to..." she began.

"I found Kitty and thought I'd better bring her home," said Hans quickly.

His father looked at him. "Hans, today the village council has voted to keep animals out of the forest," he said. "They do too much damage. From now on, the pigs must stay in the barn."

Hans could hardly believe his ears. "I don't have to look after the pigs anymore?"

"No," said his father. "Tomorrow you start work with me."

"Hurrah!" cried Hans. "I'm going to become a carpenter!"

"You seem very happy to be home," said his mother.

"Where else would I want to be?" said Hans, winking at his sister.

Gritte smiled up at him as she poured milk into a dish. "Look how thirsty Kitty is!" she said as the little cat lapped eagerly at the milk. "Hans, I don't think you're the only one glad to be home!"

Did you know?

In 1981 two schoolboys, looking for prehistoric artifacts along the shore of Kippenhorn in Immenstaad, found the wreck of a boat from the middle Ages. The boat was later recovered and taken to the State Museum in Constance where it was dated at 1334, restored and put on display. Before this discovery it was little known that ferries had been sailing on Lake Constance for hundreds of years and despite long journey times, transport by water was faster than land transport. Trade prospered in the towns and villages directly on the lake, which were serviced by a number of freight ships.

The word “Lädine” comes from the alemannisch “Lädi” (Ladung = load). The boats on Lake Constance were 15-30m long and could carry up to 120 tonnes of freight or passengers (and probably the occasional stowaway!). The hull was planked and flat enough to pull right into the shallows for loading and unloading. There was a single rectangular sail and the rudder was situated sideways at the rear of the boat.

Immenstaad Lädine were used to transport large quantities of local goods such as wine, produce, stone and gravel but ships with freight from far off places also berthed at Immenstaad. With the development of rail transport in the 1920's the days of the Lädine were numbered and possibly the last Immenstaad Lädine was sawn up in 1925.

Immenstaad volunteers have recently built a reconstruction of a Lädine, which now offers regular trips from the wharf during the summer months. For safety reasons, some concessions had to be made to modern technology, but a ride on the Lädine offers a glimpse into transport as it was on Lake Constance during the Middle Ages.

And...

Immenstaad records show that in 1786, the council voted to ban pigs and other animals from foraging in the forest and fields because they caused too much damage.