

## Happening

So — house christening, Devischeit had said, and there won't be any inviting either. So Reverend Parson had been fetched, the midwife had come. Devischeit and old man Saborovski had stood godfather. Put the bowl here, the Parson had said, then everything was over quickly, Lene Devischeit's boy had a name.

Not good enough for him, just yeast scones. A tear came to Saborovski's eyes, he stared at the screaming baby, whom Lene carried out. Thus the happenings fade away, but is that really a happening? Bit of wood chopping and stacking up, and then methylated spirit, whole bottle, it's better, yes.

Anyhow, there was coffee. They sat down round the table, beneath the petroleum lamp, which hung from the ceiling on bronzed

chains. Woman, stop running about, help yourself, Reverend, said Devischeit when the scones appeared. He himself didn't feel like food. The midwife settled herself in the chair, eyed Mother Devischeit. Do you want a cushion, asked Trude Devischeit, who sat there small and gray, near to the door, her head with its thinned out hair raised, her arm around Lene, who was balanced on the front of the chair, a little white-blonde heap of affliction. But the Vildermuth woman was not to be stopped, now she had settled herself, another gulp and the sad flat scone in her hand. Devischeit made a hopeless gesture, laid his hands on the table, and then on his knees, at which the midwife burst out with clear voice: The honored father of the child isn't likely to come, eh?

Couldn't the Parson say something! Confirmed the kid after all, knows all about it. But old woman Vildermuth talked of honor and conscience, at last the scone has reached her mouth.

Now Lenny, my child, said the Parson, fingered a crumb out of his beard, they sometimes turn out to be the best people. He began to talk about Ernst Kalveit, who had served in the horse-drawn artillery, now he was treasurer on the estate and he too started off a miserable worm. But a good child, ask my wife, Mr. Devischeit, even now, every

Whitsuntide, he brings the birches to the church.

He turned to Saborovski, who was sniffing away to himself and was just raising his finger because it itched up inside his nose. Startled, the old man bent his head to the side, his finger stood still, goodness, he said, and Devischeit had already heard it too, a wagon turned in to the yard, so some folks were coming and uninvited.

Perhaps it was turning into a happening after all. Saborovski wasn't for groundless expectations, but you could at least go to the window. Wilhelm Devischeit had to hold on to the table while getting up, but now he was in a hurry to get outside. Oh, Emil, he said and: Hello, Manthey, and Emil Aschmoneit, who was already taking care of the horses, growled back: Well, so what's his name?

Tall man Manthey first helped Mrs. Aschmoneit from the wagon, then turned slowly to Devischeit, straightened up and said: Congratulations. And now Mrs. Aschmoneit, crying loudly, as is proper, fell upon Mother Devischeit's neck, who was standing at the door with her untied apron in her hand.

Happening. Guests had come. The christened child was sleeping, Lene bustled about at the stove, Mrs. Devischeit buzzed back and forth between parlor and kitchen. See

the child? Yes, afterwards. But Manthey wasn't so easily pacified as the two Aschmoneits. Finally something occurred to him about the pigs, and with that he was able to get Mother Devischeit out into the yard.

What about the powder, he asked hoarsely.

I don't have, said Trude Devischeit.

You have.

No.

You have.

No I haven't, said Mrs. Devischeit.

You gave some to that Bartschat guy.

Just a little bit.

What d'you mean, a little bit?

I've got to go in now, said Mother Devischeit, and Manthey strode behind her, red with rage, and let loose while entering the parlor: Well you see, Wilhelm, gettin' old — Granpa! Keep it up.

Who's keeping it up? Devischeit kept control of himself. What'd been the matter with that guy outside. Because of the pigs, I don't believe that. And Aschmoneit too was funny, he kept pulling his watch out and comparing it with the regulator above the sofa. Nice piece of work, he said.

The Emperor Wilhelm is on the pendulum, said Devischeit, and that was true all right. It was just with Aschmoneit that things weren't all right. Now he's got up and gone

to the door. And Saborovski behind after him. There is something up after all.

Wilhelm became uneasy.

Mr. Devischeit! Now even the Parson wanted something. Yes, Reverend, said Wilhelm. Here I am, he would have loved to say.

I'm going now, said the Parson, shook hands with the Vildermuth woman, with whom he had been occupied the whole time talking about her son, the chimney-sweep, who had a motorcycle. Mr. Devischeit, come outside please. As if I wouldn't have come anyway! Wilhelm followed the Parson, who had no time for long farewells, into the kitchen. He stopped at the table. Devischeit counted out the money, there it lay, one hand was quickly placed over it, a voice, melted tallow, said: But that really isn't necessary, you know. The hand stuffed the bills away. Good-bye, said Trude Devischeit.

Adieu, answered the Parson, in other words: God be with you. And His blessing for mother and child. Then he was gone.

And Aschmoneit?

Wilhelm walked slowly to the barn, there he saw him.

Emil Aschmoneit was standing at the fence. That scheeyit still ain't burnin'! he heard him say, and at the same moment he knew what was what. Set fire. On account

of the insurance. And then comes to us. To celebrate.

Not burning, said Wilhelm and stepped up to Aschmoneit.

What do you know, said Aschmoneit.

Nuttin, said Wilhelm.

But that wasn't the end, now it was burning. The hayloft over the barn probably.

Emil, fire, said Devischeit. Lene came across the barn yard with the water bucket. There's a fire at your place, Mr. Aschmoneit, don't you see? And Wilhelm Devischeit was already going to the wagon to hitch up the horses.

Aschmoneit stood at the fence and looked out across to his farm. Then he turned around, wanted to go in the house again. You've gotta drive over, said Devischeit. Everyone was standing in the yard.

So Aschmoneit sets off now. Slowly, for it's already getting dark. Slowly, so that the horses suffer no harm. Slowly, so the barn, which lies in the direction of the wind, can catch fire. When he's five hundred yards outside the farm there'll be nothing more to save. Then he can beat the horses and begin to scream. So that everyone sees and hears it.

Saborovski has gone to Brenneisen. For spirits. Advance payment for stacking up wood. Because it still could have turned into

a happening. And Manthey got his powder. Old Squatters' Powder as it's called. They can ruin a farmstead, those old people. What do you do if they take a mind to live another ten years. Every day fifteen eggs, three pounds of butter, and hitching up the wagon always just when the horses are needed. But it's in the contract after all; else, deary, we'll have to file a suit, we'll go to district court.

And now the Vildermuth woman has gone too.

Just like something out of the almanac, says Devischeit.

Mother Devischeit sits in the kitchen and thinks that was the last time with the powder, that's for sure — Till before my Father's throne I shall know as I am known.

Lene pours the last bucket of water into the barrel. Devischeit comes into the kitchen. Oh well, he says.

In the next room the baby was woken up. He walks in, it's lying there swaddled and rolled and crying. Jus' you go ahead and cry, he says, it'll soon pass, and sits down. Tomorrow'll come Mr. Meyer. Have a look at his child.

What's a kid gonna look like anyhow?  
Better 'n that guy Meyer anytime.

