

## Story: A Severe Threat

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[Translator's Note: This document lists no author, nor indicates when written. Found in a folder of documents about customs and practices of Bessarabia, probably written shortly after the Resettlement of 1940. Boys get into a fight at the swimming hole on the hot prairie in Bessarabia.]

[Begin Translation]

### A Severe Threat

The sun burned hot down from the cloudless sky. The breeze brought no cool, only waves of oven warm heat. The green flat meadow of spring was parched and only in isolated places stood the disliked, bowed down (*gramgebeugt*), tall growing “horse flowers” (*Rossblumen*). With their large round red mouths, they were the only guardians of the steppe that defied the dryness—but they also were parched with thirst for water and sunk their roots deep into the soil. Even the thistles and thorns wilted. The spacious steppe threatened to die of hunger and seemed to greedily suck the juice out of the plants. Water carefully gathered by dams in the valleys evaporated. Only individual puddles of water remained.

This ended up being the bath water for the little ones. What did we know about the up-coming crop failure and its devastating consequences? What did that concern us that our parents went about with worrying expressions and complaints—of course, we heard the ringing of the bell which called all believers to the church to pray for rain. We took no notice of any of this and went about “bathing”.

We were boys of the same age. It was a strict village custom for comrade groups to be made up those of the same age. We splashed around bare-footed in the swimming holes, undressed zip-zip and into the water like frogs. This was refreshing considering the heat. Fritz held shut his eyes and ears with his fingers and shouted, “Guys, watch this!” and dunked his head under the water but with his back remaining exposed above the water. Christian, the prankster, quickly formed a clump of mud and plump!, right on the back so that it made a loud smack. The rest of us roared and laughter at the successful prank and splashed each other with water.

Fast as lightening, Fritz came up from under the water, wiping the water from the face with both hands, opened his mouth in order to gasp for air just as another splash of water shot into his mouth, which resulted in more puffing and gasping for air. You could tell by his gestures that he was mad as a fox and he got out of the water and bombarded Christian with mud. Hätte and Jäckel immediately joined in the game and so came about a veritable battle that seemed to degenerate more and more. Soon there were opponents on either side of the water and the

throwing continued with fervor. Vengeful Fritz found himself on the right side of the water, where the clothes were lying. Häbbe and Christian were on the other side to the left. Häbbe had the misfortune of making a direct hit on Fritz. This outraged him and, knocked senseless, he scooped up the clothing of the enemies and then and there, like the wind, headed for the village.

Christian and Häbbe came out of the water quickly and took up the chase. But before this happened, the other two sensed the significance of events and took off and, strange to say, were already in their pants. This was a new incitement to fast track for the opposition. Closer and closer they raced to the village, Fritz and Häbbe close behind. But eventually they let up. There was no way in all the world that they would be able to race into the village under their given circumstance, and besides, Häbbe was out of breathe. Close to the edge of the village was an orchard where the two stopped to rest, sat down in the shade and put on their shirts. There were people working in the garden. When mischievous Fritz realized this, in an instance, he bundled the clothing of his enemy and, in anger, hurled them into a high branch of a pear tree, hissing at him, "Here, get them for yourself!" He quickly took off for home.

What happened to the other two unlucky birds? They were already sneaking closer to the place. Jäckel had pity, climbed the tree and brought down the clothing of the deeply outraged. Of course, he insisted on something for himself, which was generously promised to him. Christian vowed a terrible revenge on Fritz. However, he remained silent because of the help of his older brother. He was quite certain that a duel was still going to take place between him and Fritz. The other three spurred on even more hatred.

Soon afterwards, Fritz and Christian meet up in the vineyards. They were alone.

Fritz: "So you wanted to "stick it to me"?"

Christian: "A thrashing is what is waiting for you!"

Fritz: "Oh you odd-ball (*Kautz*)! Come on over here!"

Christian (inwardly trembling): "You come over here!"

Immediately, Fritz comes closer and stands firmly in front of him, his composure getting always more threatening. Christian wants to take a swing, but gives a loud roar when the other one applied his mischievous nature, lands him a blow with the leg and sets him down lightening fast so that Christian landed on the ground and gave out a loud scream. Christian did not stir from the spot, did not follow up, raised his head in deep sadness and called out with dull faint threatening words, "You just wait, fellow (*Mändle*), I'll get you another time!"

[End of Translation]