

## A DRAMA OF THE LIFE AND FOLKLORE OF GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

**NARRATOR:** To learn about the history of the Germans from Russia, our forebears, is to learn about two centuries of migrations and the building nations. It is to learn about their industry, their love of home and family, their customs, their folklore. Some of the history of our forefathers has come to us second and third-hand. It tells of the hardships they suffered, the strong religious faith that helped them endure, the closeness of family members, the friendship of neighbors. There was always the serious side of living, to be sure, but there was also time for fun, for celebration, and for the importance of special events.

Tonight we will take you back in time to relive some of the scenes that some of us who are older will remember from our childhood. Others of us have heard of them from our parents. Since we Lincoln folk are mostly Volga German descendants, you will see more of this group of Germans from Russia. Not all of us will join in and become a part of the action as we lend our voices to the singing of some of the songs that are familiar to all of us.

Our main characters tonight are Katrinlisbet and Hanyorg. We meet them as a young man and young woman of marriageable age. Whether or not it was their idea to marry each other, we leave to your imagination.

To set the mood for our first scene—The Freierel—we ask you now to join in the singing of:

Song -- Du, Du Liegst Mir Im Herzen

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### SCENE 1

The Freierel -- Asking for the girl's hand in marriage

Stage Set: Group is seated around and near the kitchen table. Cook stove is close by.

Cast: Mother, Father, Katrinlisbet, and perhaps several children who are sent off to bed when the action begins. Hanyorg, his godfather (pedder) and a good friend come in carrying canes with ribbons.

Action: Some of the other men are smoking pipes. The groom and his two companions enter conversing with each other and greeting the family with "Guten Abend." They have come to ask for the hand of Katrinlisbet in marriage. The conversation centers around this.

**FATHER:** "Hashta, du mohl die graffina bei." (Dear wife, bring the bottle.)

**GODFATHER:** "Wir hon mit gebracht." (We brought some with us.)

Action: During what follows they take drinks from the bottle brought by the godfather.

GODFATHER: "Der Hanyorg ded gleiche die Katrinlisbet heirate." (Hanyorg would like to marry Katrinlisbet.)

FATHER: "Ich vas net eb die Katrinlisbet heirate soll. Ich denk net." (I don't know if Katrinlisbet should marry. I think not.)

GODFATHER: "Der Hanyorg ist ein gute man." (Hanyorg is a good man.)

FATHER: "Wie alt bist du?" (How old are you?)

HANYORG: "Zwei und Zwanzig." (22)

FATHER: "Wo shafts du?" (Where do you work?)

HANYORG: "Ich schaffe im rund haus." (I work in the round house.)

FATHER: "Well. Van die Katrinlisbet will, bei mir ist es annerlei." (Well, if Katrinlisbet want to marry you it's alright with us.)

Action: Katrinlisbet smiles approval and the old folks drink again to the bargain.

NARRATOR: And so all is agreed and the group is ready to set the date for the big event.

FATHER: "Dann lossa mirs so. Du kannst die Katrinlisbet heirate." (We'll leave it that way then. You may marry Katrinlisbet.)

Action: And they drink again.

GODFATHER: "Bis wan kanne mir die hochzeit hahle?" (When can we have the wedding?)

FATHER: "Bei mir ist es annerlei." (It makes no difference to me.)

MOTHER: "Eins will ich euch sagen. Ihr must varte bis noch dem Ostern." (One thing I'll tell you. You have to wait till after Easter.)

NARRATOR: We know that marriages are made in heaven but in the German-Russian colonies and even in this country many of them were determined by parents. As time went on, young couples did convince parents that they should have a bigger part in this decision. Even so, the groom and his good friends went through the motions of the Freierei, and the groom and his prospective bride who had already made up their minds still wondered if the necessary consent would be given. Katrinlisbet and Hanyorg, at least, can now look forward to their wedding day which is set for the second week after Easter. With one more swallow to seal the bargain the three visitors leave.

Song -- Repeat chorus of Du, Du as the scene ends.

NARRATOR: Did the bride's parents send out engraved invitations? That would have been far too impersonal. They believed in the face-to-face approach. Here again the godfather, known in German as the "pedder" gets into the act.

## SCENE II

### The Invitation to the Wedding

Stage Set: A family (father, mother, several children) are seated in the kitchen around the stove.

Action: There is a knock at the door. Hanyorg and Katrinlisbet's father, and the peder are invited in. They carry canes to which ribbons are tied. The usual greeting is given.

FATHER OF FAMILY: "Vas volt ihr dann yetz?" (What brings you here?)

GODFATHER: "Mir hon vas neues. Die braut Katrinlisbet and der bräutigam Hanyorg volle euch besonders einladen zur Kerrich beir die Trauung zu sein." (We have something new. Hanyorg and Katrinlisbet want you especially to come to the Church for the wedding.)

CHILDREN: They jump and yell with excitement.

FATHER OF FAMILY: (To children) "Ruhig!" (Quiet!) (To guests) "Dos ist nix neues. Das hon mir schon lang gesehe." (That isn't new. We've noticed their interest in each other for a long time.)

MOTHER OF FAMILY: (hitting husband on arm) "Sei doch still!" (Why don't you keep quiet?) (to others) "Der schwezt immer vos net netig ist." (He's always saying things that aren't necessary.)

FATHER OF BRIDE: "Ihr dannst doch immer noch!" Die Musikanten spielen schon heftig zum bereite für die hochzeit." (You still dance, don't you? The musicians are already practicing for the wedding.)

PEDDER: "Und's gibt viel zu essen—zwei kalber, sieben schweinen, drei kerbe wurscht, frisch brot und koche." (There'll be plenty to eat too—2 calves, 7 hogs, sausage, fresh bread and cake.)

GROOM: (Breaks in) Brantewein , Schnapps, Bier ----" (Wine, liquor, beer)

CHILDREN: (Jump and shout) "Gehn mir ezt! Gehn mir mit?" (Do we get to go too?)

PEDDER: "Ihr seht Bänder am Stock. Ihr must such eins dran binden. Sag net na." (See the ribbons on the cane. You must add one.)

FATHER OF BRIDE: "Vergess die Govel und den Lövell net, sonst mustt ihr mit die Finger esse!" (Don't forget your fork and spoon or you'll have to eat with your fingers.)

PEDDER: "Vergess's Geschenk net!" (Don't forget the gift!)

GROOM: “Mir hon noch viele blätze.” S’ muss noch weiter gehe.” (We must leave as we have many more places to go.)

Action: They take leave with the usual farewells – “Wiedersehen! Bis dann! Bis später!” (Till then. Till later).

NARRATOR: And so they go from door to door inviting all the friends of both families to the wedding. By the time they finish, their canes are well filled with ribbons placed there by those accept the invitation. The guests have been promised a good time and they have also been reminded to be generous with the gifts.

The bride and groom know that much merriment – and also cash, as we shall see – is in store for them during the wedding celebration.

The wedding preparations go into full swing, good friends and neighbors help with the cooking, the musicians get into tune, the big tent is ordered for the dance.

In the good, old days, the groom didn’t have to wait until she came down the aisle, to see his bride in full array in her wedding gown. Nor did he have to risk being left waiting at the Church. According to custom our groom, Hanyorg, goes to the home of Katrinlisbet and they will go together to Church for the ceremony, perhaps on foot, or in the family’s buggy or even in a hack hired for the occasion.

But wait a minute! Every day has its pranksters. There is a problem. Some “friends” in the neighborhood have some ideas of their own.

### SCENE III

#### The Groom Goes to Pick up His Bride

Stage Set: Outdoors, outside the home of the bride.

Action: The groom is seen entering the house. As soon as he is inside a couple of young men appear and tie up the gate. When the bride and groom come out, they are stopped at the gate.

YOUNG MEN: “Wir mache die türye net uf bis du uns fünf dollar bezälst.” (We won’t open the gate till you pay us \$5.00.)

GROOM: “Ihr grüht nix von mir.” (You’ll get nothing from me.)

YOUNG MEN: “Mir volle fünf dollar.” (We want \$5.00.)

GROOM: “Ich geb euch \$3.00.” (I’ll give you \$3.00.)

NARRATOR: And they bargain. What young groom wants to appear cheap? But, in those days \$5.00 was a small fortune. She’s worth a fortune, he decides, hoping he has a \$5.00 bill.

YOUNG MEN: “Die Katrinlisbet ist fünf dollar wehrt.” (Katrinlisbet is worth \$5.00.)

GROOM: “Da. Yetst los uns geh.” (Here. Now let us go.)

Action: They untie the gate and the couple walks toward the Church.

NARRATOR: We’re glad that Hanyorg decided that Katrinlisbet was worth the \$5.00. We’d hate to miss this wedding.

In those days, hymn singing had a part in every wedding ceremony. The congregation liked having a part in the proceedings and sang lustily, shedding a tear now and then, even as we do at weddings today. Let’s us join with the congregation gathered for the ceremony.

Song – Liebster Jesu, Wir Sind Hier

## SCENE IV

### The Wedding Ceremony

Stage Set: Interior of Church. Guests are seated in pews. The minister waits at the altar. The audience has joined the guests in singing the above hymn.

Action: The bride precedes the groom down the aisle, reaching the altar as the hymn ends.

MINISTER: “Katrinlisbet und Hanyorg wolle yetz heirate im Namen Christi.” (Katrinlisbet and Hanyorg wish to be married.) (He then turns to Katrinlisbet) “Katrinlisbet, willst du Hanyorg? Willst du ihm treu bleiben und gehorchen bis zum Ende?” (Katinlisbet, will you marry Hanyorg? Will you remain true and obey him until death?)

KATRINLISBET: “Ja!”

MINISTER: (Looks to Hanyorg) “Hanyorg, nimst du Katrinlisbet? Willst du für sie sorgen, bis zum Ende? (Hanyorg, will you take Katrinlisbet? Will you provide for her unto death?)

HANYORG: “Ja!” (He places ring on her finger)

Action: Minister raises hand in blessing and prayer while narrator speaks.

NARRATOR: In those times, the record will show, marriage vows were taken seriously. Couples stayed married and took heed of the prayer that was sealed the marriage:

Gott, der du Alles wohlbedacht  
Die gute Ordnung auch genacht,  
Das in den Ehe Mann und Weib vereinigt sei,  
Ein Fleisch und Leib. Im Namen Gottes, Amen.

A second hymn used almost always at the wedding ceremony was “Jesu, Geh’ Voran.” Please join in singing it.

NARRATOR: Did you notice that the bride went ahead of the groom on the way into the Church? Now, however, Katrinlisbet follows Hanyorg.

## SCENE V

### The Wedding Portrait

Stage Set: The photographer's studio.

Action: This is a silent scene. The groom is sitting on a chair and the bride stands beside him, with her hand on his shoulder. The photographer is at work taking the picture, as narrator says:

NARRATOR: The wedding picture was an important part of the eventful day. Usually the couple went to the photographer's right after the ceremony. How they posed gave the first indication of who was boss in the new family. See how he sits – like a king on his throne. But, if you will notice, that isn't just her hand on his shoulder. Katrinlisbet already has Hanyorg under her thumb.

## SCENE VI

### The Wedding Celebration and Dance

Stage Set: The guests are in the wedding tent and there is background music as the curtain rises on the all-action scene. What is going on is described by the narrator.

NARRATOR: There wasn't time for a honeymoon but there was time for three days of celebrating. Usually there was a tent for the festivities. Each day there was lots of good food, there was dancing until the early morning hours, and then a short rest until the next day's celebration. The dancers paid the fiddler with drinks. They also paid and paid for the privilege of dancing with the bride.

Traditionally, the feast was "Broda." On the second day there was schnitz suppe, grebbel, butterball suppe, kraut und brei. There was more dancing. And on the third day, when the bride returned in house slippers, all the left-overs were eaten. By this time there were plenty of "drolle" guests, the party crashers, but everyone was having such a good time that no one minded there being there.

Action: The guests are eating, the head cook goes around with her arm wrapped collecting money from guests to pay the doctor, really to collect wages for herself. Guests are then seated in a circle as the band starts to play and the bride and groom dance the first dance. They return after each dance to the band stand, where guests pin money on the bride's dress and veil for the privilege of dancing with her. The men also buy drinks for the members of the band. As the scene ends:

NARRATOR: The wedding celebration over, the young couple go back to their daily tasks – Hanyorg to the Round House and Katrinlisbet to keeping house and "working out" to help with the family budget.

## SCENE VII

### The First Arrival, a Daughter, is Baptized

Stage Set: Church interior. The minister is at the altar and in front of him stand 4 sponsors – 2 men and 2 women. There may also be people in the pews.

NARRATOR: A year has passed and we find ourselves once again in Church. The young couple has been blessed with the birth of a healthy who is about to be baptized. As the congregation sings the baptism hymn, the sponsors come forward.

Song – Wir Wollen Unsre Kindelein

Action: During the hymn the sponsors come forward. They pass the baby from one to the other down the line of sponsors. The last to hold the baby is a woman.

MINISTER: “Liebster Jesu! wir sind hier  
Deinem wort nachzuleben;  
Dieses Kindlein kommt zu dir  
Weil du den befehl gegeben,  
Das man Kindlein zu dir führe  
Denn has Himmelreich sei ihre. (Places hand on baby’s brow.)  
(Resting hand on the baby’s brow)

NARRATOR: And so the child is baptized Annalisbet, named for her Mother and Grandmother. Where is Katrinlisbet? She is at home to prepare the meal to which all the sponsors and close relatives have been invited.

## SCENE VIII

### The Saturday Night Bath

Stage Set: This is in the family kitchen. There is a large galvanized tub on the floor ready for the children to have their Saturday night bath.

Cast: Mother, Father, Annalisbet and 3 more children, one small enough to sit on her father’s knee.

NARRATOR: Years have passed and three more children, Phillipya, Wilhelm and Martha. It is Saturday night, time to get ready for Sunday. That meant a bath for everyone in the household and when you had to carry the water into the house from the outdoor well you used it sparingly. So between baths, a little more hot water from the range was added to keep the water as fresh as possible.

After the bath there was time to review each child’s memory verse for Sunday School.

Action: Mother is bathing the children. Annalisbet is just getting out of the tub and the two boys get in together after a little more hot water from the stove has been added. As this is going on the father is bouncing little Martha on his knee to the jingles:

FATHER:	“Tros, tros, trilia Der bauer hat a filia Filia kont net laffa Volts der bauer verkaufe Lefts filia weck Hat der bauer dreck.”	“A    B    C Cats leit im Schne Schne geht weck Cats leit im dreck.”
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Action: As children finish their baths they sit waiting to review their Sunday School verses.

MOTHER: “Yetz horch, Baba. Die kin wolle yetz ihr Sonntag Schule spruch sage.” (Listen, Papa, the children want to say their Sunday School verses now.)

PHILLIPYA: “Gott ist die liebe.” (God is love.)

WILHELM: “Danket dem Herrn den er ist freundlich und seine güte vöhret ewiglich.” (Praise the Lord.....His goodness is everlasting.)

ANNALISBET: “Singet dem Herrn eim neues Lied  
Singet dem Herrn , alle Welt. (Praise the Lord.....All Ye People!)

FATHER: “Gut. Ihr seid gut kinder.” (Good. You are good children.)

MOTHER: “Yetz, bette mire. Dan ens bet.” (Now we’ll pray. Then to bed.)

ALL: “Ich bin klein, mein herz ist rein;  
Kann niemand drin wohnen als Jesus allein. Amen.” (I am small and pure in heart. Noone can live therein except Jesus alone.)

NARRATOR: And so to bed.

## SCENE IX

### The Christmas Eve Sunday School Program

Stage Set: Interior of Church. A Christmas tree.

Cast: All the children, the minister, adults in the pews.

Action: The children will take turns speaking, bowing before and after they say their verses. Everyone joins (including the audience) in the songs.

NARRATOR: Again we find ourselves in the house of God which was so much the center of the German-Russian communities of the great plains of the United States as they were also on the Russian steppes. It is Christmas Eve and it is about time for the Children’s program to begin. The young people enter the Church as the congregation sings “Ihr Kinderlein Kommet.” Let’s all join in singing with them.



## Song – Ihr Kinderlein Kommet

Action: The minister leads his little flock down the aisle of the Church as they sing.

NARRATOR: Every child participated, sometimes more than once. Sometimes if they couldn't be heard, they were asked to repeat the verse they had learned. Let's listen as the minister calls on each child. And let's all join in singing on the familiar carols. Christmas should be celebrated all year long.

MINISTER: "Annalisbet and Magdalena."

ANNALISBET: "Der Christbaum ist der schönste Baum  
Den wir auf Erden kennen;  
Im Garten klein, im engsten Baum,  
Wie lieblich blüht der Wunderbaum,  
Wenn seine Blümchen Brennen."

MAGDALENA: "Denn sieh', in dieser Wundernacht  
Ist einst der Herr geboren,  
Der Heiland, der uns selig nacht!  
Hätt er den Himmel nicht gebracht,  
Wär alle Welt verloren."

## Song – Oh, Du Fröhliche

MINISTER: "Phillipya, bitte!"

PHILLIPYA: Alle Jahre wieder kommt das Christuskind  
Auf die Erde nieder, wo wir Menschen sind.

MINISTER: "Und yetz der Wilhelm." (And now Wilhelm.)

WILHELM: "Du lieber, heiliger, frommer Christ,  
Der für uns Kinder kommen ist,  
Damit wir sollen fromm und rein  
Und rechte Kinder Gottes sein."

NARRATOR: The program always closed with singing Stille Nacht.

## Song – Stille Nacht

NARRATOR: As the children filed out, each one received a bag of candy, nuts and fruit, prepared the night before by the trustees or the Ladies Aid of the Church. Christmas greetings were exchanged. This was the happiest time of all. Once at home, the family sat around the table to enjoy the candy and peanuts found in their bags.

## SCENE X

### Happy New Year

Stage Set: Children are at the door of a friend's home.

Action: Children knock at door. Adults open door to see children. They have been expecting visitors.

NARRATOR: New Year's Day was special. Children – and some of them got to be rather big – went to homes of friends of the family to wish them a Happy New Year in exchange for a treat or a few pennies.

ALL CHILDREN: "Ich bin ein kleiner König  
Geb mir net zu wenig,  
Lass mich net zu lange steh,  
Ich mus ein häusye weiter gehn.  
Glücklich Nei Yahr!"  
(I'm a little king, don't give me too little,  
don't let me stand too long, I must go to another house. Happy New Year.)

## SCENE XI

### The Brotherhood

NARRATOR: The religious life of Germans from Russia went with them from the cradle to the grave. It was expected that Katrinlisbet and Hanyorg should become active in the Brotherhood. On Wednesday and Saturday evenings and on Sunday afternoons they attended the prayer meetings at Church or perhaps in the home of one of the members of the Brotherhood. Sometimes they took their children with them. They believed and practiced the philosophy that the family which prays together stays together. Singing was lively and prayers were sincere.

Stage Set: The Church interior. Adults and children are entering. Men walk ahead and are seated on one side with women on the other side.

Song – Gott Ist Die Liebe

NARRATOR: Though their song books were without music, the tunes were lilting and the harmony full. And they didn't need an instrument to accompany them. Each one present was a leader and capable of starting the next song.

## SCENE XII

### The Daughter is Confirmed

Stage Set: The Church interior. 2 girls are in white dresses. With 3 boys they walk down the church aisle led by the minister as the congregation sings, Lobe den Herren

NARRATOR: The years pass all too quickly. Annalisbet is about to be confirmed. She has learned her catechism and with the others in her confirmation class will be questioned at the services on Palm Sunday.

The members of this class have learned their lessons well and are ready to receive the minister's blessing. Some of us will recognize the prayer we hear him say now.

MINISTER: "Lass mich Dein sein und bleiben,  
Du treuer Gott und Herr!  
Von Dir lass mich nichts treiben,  
Halt mich bei reiner Lehr.  
Herr, lass mich nur nicht wanken,  
Gib mir Beständigkeit;  
Dafür will ich Dir danken  
In alle Ewigkeit! Amen."

NARRATOR: Then the minister recites for each confirmant a denkspruch.

MINISTER: "Annalisbet,  
Der Herr ist mein Licht und mein Heil;  
Vor wem sollte ich mich fürchten?  
Der Herr ist meines Lebens kraft;  
Vor wem sollte mir grauen." Psalm 27, verse 1

NARRATOR: Once confirmation is over, the years go by all too swiftly.  
To Hanyorg and Katrinlisbet it doesn't seem possible that their Annalisbet is no longer a child.  
But wait---

### SCENE XIII

#### We Have Gone Full Cycle. History Repeats Itself.

Stage Set: The home of Hanyorg and Katrinlisbet. Around kitchen table.

Cast: Hanyorg and Katrinlisbet, Annalisbet, children as in Scene I. A young man, his pedder and a friend come carrying canes.

Action: As in Scene I.

HANYORG: "Hashta, du mohl die graffina bei."

GODFATHER: "Mir hon mitgebrucht."

(Lights dim on scene)

NARRATOR: And so we have completed a full cycle and we find history repeating itself.

NARRATOR: We hope you have enjoyed looking in on the life of the family depicted here. We hope this evening has brought back some fond memories of days gone by, friends you once knew, and family members who were dear to you.

Your singing made this program more memorable and we can't resist asking you to join in one more song. It is the last one on your program -- So Nim Den Meine Hände.

Then, as you leave, we want you to have a small remembrance of this occasion – a gift from the Lincoln, Nebraska, Chapter of this great organization. We hope you will enjoy reading over and over again this booklet on some of the folklore of Germans from Russia.

Song – So Nim Den Meine Hände