

# Salt of the Earth

A play

By U. Ondratschek /GS im Beerwinkel, Berlin Spandau 2012)

**Storyteller:**

*Class 6b is on a classtrip to Lüneburg.*

*Today they are visiting the Salt-Museum. At first all pupils are interested in the guided tour - as they have been working on the topic Salt for a whole year now and in the museum it all comes alive.*

*But - secretly they'd rather want to go shopping. On the way to the museum they discovered some really nice shops with nice prices, too.*

**Susi:** I hope we will finish the visit soon - then we 'll have more than an hour for going shopping.

**Vivien:** I still have all my pocket money and didn't spend a euro - I am not going to bring it home again!

**Teacher:** Shhhh, Stop talking and listen!

**Storyteller:** *Matthias and Sophie - best friends, of course - stayed a bit longer in the "Siedehaus" where the salt water was boiled and salt produced in Medieval Times.*

**Matthias:** Sophie, come on and test the salt water - really salty it is!

**Sophie:** Oh no, it makes me thirsty and I have nothing to drink anymore. God knows when we will get out of here!

**Matthias :** Then at least take some salt grains in your hand - I am going to get you some.

**Sophie:** Oh boy, Matthias, you know that it is forbidden! "Don't touch anything in the museum!" - O-tone of Mrs Miller!

**Matthias ( mocking):** Don't touch anything in the museum. Come on - nobody is watching us!

**Storyteller:**

*Matthias takes a handful of salt out of the BoilingPan and throws it at Sophie. She shrieks: Ihhhhh ! - and suddenly the surrounding is changing in a flash. The Boiling House is becoming larger, the museum- plaques are disappearing. Fire is springing up under the boiling pan and Sophie and Matthias are wearing new clothes: an itchy woolen dress and woolen trousers with a linnen shirt tugged in. They are barefoot and have a cap on their heads - that is - Sophie has got a flouncy bonnet with a ribbon round her chin.*

*Appalled they look at each other - is this an adventure on PSP? No, it can't be- they left their PSP in the youth hostel and they have not got a medieval game on it.*

*And - that they have been transported to Medieval Times they immediately know - where else do you wear such clothes? Where else is a Boiling House and no electricity?*

## **1st Scene:**

*(A door is creaking and slowly the door to the Boiling House is opening. Matthias is just able to say to Sophie):*

**Matthias** : Pssst, keep quiet for God's sake, only say yes or no - we must not give away our secret - Medieval Times have been sooo cruel!

**Storyteller:**

*In comes the son of the "Sulfmeister" or Saltmaster - Johannes.*

**Johannes:** What are you doing here? Aren't you the new servants who have been hired to accompany the Salt transport to Lübeck tomorrow morning? What is your business here? This is a forbidden place!

**Matthias** (*stammering*): Yes, sir, we got lost - we were looking for our place to sleep.

**Johannes** (*a bit more friendly*): Well then, I am Johannes, son of the Sulfmeister Sigbert and tomorrow I am allowed to take part in the journey to Lübeck - for the first time! Maybe it is not such a bad idea to have someone my age with me - adults are always so occupied by their own business and often send me away.

**Matthias** : Yes, Sir. We are from the village of Lüdershausen - my sister Sophie and me, Matthias. We don't know anything about boiling the salt. Could you tell us more about it?

**Johannes** (*generous and a bit patronizing*): Of course I can! Here in Lüneburg we pump the saltwater from a spring right under the earth, lead it into the huge boiling pans made from lead and boil the water until it is evaporated. Then the "White Gold" appears as father uses to say. When we have produced a certain amount so that we can load our wagons with salt barrels we go together with other Sulfmeister on a great trek to the Hanse town Lübeck and deliver the salt in the harbour to the big ships, called Hansekogge. They are bringing it to all countries round the Baltic Sea.

**Johannes** (*looks at the two critically*):

Are you hungry? I can give you bread, butter and salt - there is enough here and I am allowed to use it.

**Sophie:** What do you need all this salt for? Only for cooking?

**Matthias:** We will find that our later, won't we, Johannes?

**Johannes** (*proud*): I know everything about it! But now come with me to the kitchen!

*The three withdraw from the Boiling House.*

## 2nd Scene

**Matthias:** Sophie, wake up! This is a horror dream - look out of the window! We are really in a courtyard of a Sulfmeister's house and have to go with them to Lübeck today!

How do we get out of this nightmare?

**Sophie:** I am so tired - I can't think about it. And - my dress is itching. If I remember rightly children did not have a wide range of clothes in Medieval Times - probably they did not wash either!

I want my mum and my cosy bed! Even youth hostel would be fine actually.

**Matthias:** Crybaby! But we don't have time for that anyway - if we want something to eat we will have to go to the kitchen. Yesterday Johannes said that you are supposed to help the cook on the journey and I should stick to him. So we will not starve at least. Can you cook?

**Sophie (sighs):** Yes, bake up pizza and chips in the microwave - that will never be good enough. Best thing will be to watch and do what the cook says.

**Storyteller:**

*The two children go to the kitchen and look for something to eat. Johannes' mother is standing at the fireplace and is handing out bowls with millet gruel, a piece of bread and a wooden spoon.*

*Matthias and Sophie first pull a face but they have no other chance to test the pap - and astonishingly it is not too bad! It is sweet and salty at the same time and fills their stomachs wonderfully.*

**Mother Gertrude (smiling, friendly):** Well, you two, and that you take good care of my son Johannes! He is going on the journey for the first time and I pray to God that no bandits will dare to high jack you! Salt is so precious and very often people were murdered for it.

**Storyteller:**

*Sulfmeister Sigbert arrives. Sigbert owns the Boiling House with four huge Boiling Pans. He is selling his salt himself in Lübeck and does not trust other servants.*

**Sigbert:** Don't worry, wife, we are going with ten wagons and are well armed. We are taking the shortest way via Lauenburg and Mölln - although the road is quite worn out and bumpy.

If only there is no bigger gang of bandits than we can handle - they surely will take our precious barrels and sell it in a hostile town like Rostock.

**Storyteller:**

*Suddenly Sophie has an idea which she had read about in the museum. But because women - as she knows - are not allowed to speak up too much in Medieval Times - especially not little kitchen maids, she whispers to Matthias:*

**Sophie:** Matthias, do you remember the trick barrel in the museum which was filled with salt water? And the water was so clear that the robbers even did not try it and

went off without their prey, stupid fools! You could suggest that to the salt master - God knows what that will be good for.

**Matthias** : *(cautiously addressing the saltmaster)*: I am only a temporary helper - but if you would put a barrel with clear saltwater at the back of the wagons - just to show the robbers - then they might not inspect the other barrels.

**Sigbert**: You are rather cheeky, boy, but when I think about it - not stupid, not stupid!

**Johannes** *(having overheard the suggestion)*: And - in Lübeck we could evaporate the water again and sell the salt!

**Sigbert**: I have to talk to the other masters - immediately!

**Mother Gertrude**: I am very glad that such clever children will accompany my son. I will get you an extra coat and some shoes - now in spring it still can be rather cold during the nights.

**Sophie** *(to Matthias in a very low voice)* .You see, we only have to remember the guided tour through the museum - maybe we will find a way home then.

**Matthias**: You are right but don't tell anybody where we are really from - it would cause an uproar! We would end up the gallow or on the stakes like witches.

**Sophie** *(shudders)*: You and your stories!

### 3rd Scene

**Storyteller:**

*Slowly the treck is arranged. The wagons look similar to the wagon in the museum - open covered wagons where you can also sleep over night - only the masters, of course. The wagons are four-in- hand but you also can change to six horses. Sulmaster Sigbert is the first one to leave the court yard and the other wagons follow him slowly.*

*The provost of St Johannis issues a blessing over them:*

**Provost**: O Lord, let this transport with our precious white gold get to the Hanse town Lübeck save and sound, in the year of the Lord 1402. Amen!

**Storyteller:**

*He will write this event into the church' book - the provost is an educated man and one of the few who can read and write.*

*Now the trail is leading through the Neubrücke Gate and from now on it will be more than three weeks until they reach Lübeck - a slow and dangerous journey.*

*First the road is quite comfortable and well kept - cobble stones and wide enough for a wagon. But that is changing quickly. The roads become sandy and soft when it*

rains. That means to push the carts through muddy ground if they don't find another better route.

**Matthias** (*groans while helping to push the cart*): It is one week that we are on our way. Couldn't the weather stay sunny? Did it have to rain? This is really a struggle!

**Soldier 1**: It makes you strong! Don't wail and push on! Young people nowadays - wimps and not used to hard work.

**Matthias** (*mumbles*): I think I have heard that before! My real life seems to be so far away - I am lost here and slowly losing my memory.

**Johannes** (*is pushing on the other side of the wagon*): What are you muttering? Is something wrong? Don't you get enough food?

**Matthias** (*quickly*): No, no, everything's all right. I only thought that all adults are complaining about the youth. That will not change in centuries. Although we are working hard!

**Sophie** (*is coming from behind*): Over there will be a break - the road is going to improve, they say. We will make a fire and cook a vegetable broth (*proud*) - I found some young nettle leaves and some old suedes and some herbs. The cook has taught me about them.

**Soldier 2**: We are to reach the market town of Mölln soon. Hach - a good bed in a tavern, a real beer and good food!

**Sigbert is coming**: After the break we can hire some horses from local farmers. It is costing me a Heller but we'll get on faster than by only pushing the carts. We have lost too much time already.

**Matthias** (*musings*): Therefore the roads are in such bad condition and are not cared for - the farmers can let their horses to the merchants! Very cunning!

**Johannes**: You are quite right! But we are passing so many villages, monasteries and castles - you can wait forever before they all agree to a common right of way and set down the details for repair and all. For they all want a piece of the cake "The White Gold".

At least there was no attack till now, thank God. But father says we have to pay toll in Mölln to get into the town. And even if we didn't want to enter it- we are not allowed to drive around! It would cost even more fine than the toll. We are living in dangerous and expensive times!

**Matthias** (*under his breath*): You can say that again! I wish I'd be in my own time again. It is expensive, too, but not as dangerous as these Medieval Times.

**Soldier 1**: Hey - there are some wagons approaching us. What shall we do, sir? The road is too narrow for two carts.

**Johannes** (*commanding*): I know the rules exactly: If the wagons are loaded with goods the lighter ones shall give way. Go on, ride ahead and explore what they have loaded. But I think our salt wagons are so heavy that we can go first anyway.

**Matthias** (*quietly*): Such traffic rules might be sensible here - but you should see our traffic in the 21st century - what a chaos it would be!

## 4th Scene:

Write your own Scene about the events, incidents, accidents and adventures on the way between Mölln and Lübeck. The only rule is that the scene ends in Lübeck and connects with the next scene.

## 5th Scene:

### **Storyteller:**

*At last the caravan has come to Lübeck, the proud Hanse City on the Baltic Sea. They rattled through the Holsten - Gate to the salt storehouses on the Sea. In the tavern "Zur Bunten Kuh" captain Thomas is waiting for Sigbert. The children are allowed to join the meeting.*

**Sigbert:** God be with you, dear old friend Thomas, the sailor!

**Thomas:** God be with you, my old salt master Sigbert, distributor of the White Gold.

### **Storyteller:**

*The men are sitting down and Johannes, Matthias and Sophie get a weak beer and plates full of vegetables, meat and bread.*

**Sigbert:** Children, eat and drink, this is your reward for the labourious days of the journey. You have been of great help. Johannes, I am very proud of you - you will surely be a good saltmaster and merchant in future.

### **Storyteller:**

*The children are listening to the conversation of the two adults while they are stuffing themselves.*

**Thomas:** Well, Sigbert, has the journey been without terror? Or did you have to fight hijackers and robbers?

**Sigbert:** Thank God we are all save and sound (**maybe here he can give a short summery of the adventures in chapter 4?**) We had to fight greedy lords and predacious mayors who wanted toll after toll. I wish the Hanse would act here and make the roads safer. But tomorrow morning we can load the salt on your ship.

**Thomas:** Yes, better times are coming. Have you heard about the execution of Klaus Störtebecker and his pirates in Hamburg last year? Now the Sea is secure and we can sail on without fear.

**Sigbert:** That's true - the more towns become Hanse-towns the better it is for us. We are stronger against enemies and brazen lords and mayors.

And it is good for business - we can trust each other. Look how far our connections are going - to Bergen in Norway and Nowgorod in Russia - half the world is under Hanse rules.

Well - where to will you bring our precious White Gold this time? Who is going to buy it?

**Thomas:** There is big demand for salt. Norway, Sweden and Danmark are catching a lot of fish and herring - they have to salt and cure them. And not to forget the meat for the winter!

This time I will sail to Reval in Estonia - our Kontor, the branch office in Reval, is waiting for the salt to sell it to Nowgorod and Russia. It is even a better bargain than with Norway. I am sure that Reval will become the town of the White Gold.

**Sigbert:** Next time I will come with you - I'd love to see how Reval is smartening up in these times. Johannes is grown up now and can take over the business for a while.

**Thomas:** Very well - promised. Let's drink to the excellent deal and the future.

## 6th Scene:

### **Storyteller:**

*After having loaded the salt onto the Hansekogge the people from Lüneburg are making their way home.*

*Matthias and Sophie still hope to find a way back into their time. They fear that they could get used to Medieval Times - at least they have found a friend and a rather wealthy family and they do not have to work too hard like other poor children in that time.*

*On the way back the wagons are not heavy anymore - but not for long.*

**Johannes:** We are going to pick up fire wood in the forests round Mölln. Thank God that we are with so many wagons - then it is worth it.

**Matthias:** Why you need fire wood - that I understand. You have to heat up the salt pans for evaporating the water - but why do you want to bring the wood home on the way back? With empty carts we would be much faster.

**Sophie:** Did you have a look round Lüneburg when we started the journey? There is virtually no tree round the town, not to mention a forest!

**Johannes :** That's true - we had to cut down all the woods in the last century - it was necessary for the business and on the way back from Lübeck we can always bring wood from Mölln!

Ho Ho, there in front - Stopp the wagons

**Matthias:** If they knew that in 610 years the Lüneburger Heide will be a tourist attraction - just because they cut down the forests!

**Sophie:** Quite right - there is only heather and Erica and some juniper bushes. In some way it is an exploitation of Mother Nature - not ecological, Mrs Miller would say.

**Matthias:** God, it is time to find a way out of here - I am homesick! Have you got an idea?

**Sophie :** I am working on it - I have heard some things about witches from the cook. I don't believe in witches myself -remember we learnt that it mostly have been old women and midwives who knew about herbs and medicines who were accused to be witches - or they had been accused by greedy neighbours.

But maybe the saying the cook always mutters has got a meaning: Throw salt with your right hand over the left shoulder. That is good luck and helps against witch craft.

How did we get here, by the way?

**Matthias:** I threw some salt at you because you were bitchy!

**Sophie:** There we are - you strew some salt - that is bad luck as we know now because salt is so precious. And as a remedy you can throw salt over your shoulder - logical, isn't it?

**Matthias ( unconvinced):** Well, I don't know but I will try everything that would work somehow.

If I could choose what to take back home I would only take my wooden spoon with me - I have grown fond of it.

**Sophie (proud) :** And I would take my pouch with spices and herbs - I can detect them by their aroma now.

**Matthias:** Can't you pinch some salt from the cook's salt chest? Yeah, I know that it is forbidden - but after that we will be gone!

**Sophie:** And if not? They will blame and punish me!

**Matthias:** Please, if it works I will never tease you again!

**Cook (gruffy) :** Sophie, lazy thing, come here immediately and help to prepare the fish they have caught.

**Storyteller:**

*Only after they have returned to Lüneburg Sophie can manage to take some salt aside - bit for bit so that nobody notices.*

**Matthias (urging):** Come on Sophie, let's go to the Boiling House where it all began!

**Sophie (longing):** Oh, if it would work! First I will have a big ice cream!

**Matthias (quick):** And I ...



## 6th Scene:

### **Storyteller**

*But at that moment Sophie has thrown the salt with her right hand over her left shoulder ...*

### **Teacher (impatient):**

Sophie, Matthias, where are you? You always have to hang back! It is nice that you are so interested - but now the others want to go shopping and I need a cup of coffee.

### **Storyteller:**

*Matthias and Sophie look at each other - what happened? Why did the teacher keep on at them? They only had looked at the Boiling pans!  
Suddenly they notice - a wooden spoon and a pouch with herbs? How did they get into their hands?*

**Matthias** (whispering) : Secret?

**Sophie:** Secret! Nobody would believe us anyway!

*(They give five)*

**The End**