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Autor: Ehrismann, Albert

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In Uitikon, I met a carpenter named Heiri, but he turned out to be the wrong one. He was decent enough about the error—considering that I discovered him with his mistress—and he gave me a new list of villages I should try in order to find the real Heiri. Uitikon, he told me, could easily be confused with Witikon, Wiedikon, Uetikon, Uerikon, Uelikon, Uessikon, Uerzlikon and Uffikon.

“And when you’ve finished with those places,” he said, “you might as well try Zezikon, Zimikon, Zumikon, Zünikon, Zufikon, Zollikon and Zwillikon. And how about Wallikon, Waltikon, Welsikon and Wetzikon, of which there are even two—one in the Canton of Zurich and one in the Canton of Thurgau?”

Now I was definitely in a muddle, because I had always imagined that Canton was in China, which in itself was a soothing thought, because Cian-Ciao near Tsutsin was no doubt easier to find than my friend’s cousin’s village in Switzerland.

I thanked the wrong Heiri from the bottom of my tired feet, deciding that I would carry on my crusade alone—for where there is a will, there’s a way. As a matter of fact, I discovered during my research that where there’s a Willikon, there’s bound to be a Waylikon. There was virtually no configuration of letters and syllables that the Swiss hadn’t already turned into a town ending in “ikon”. What bothered me most, though, was how the Swiss themselves manage to find each other so readily. Or perhaps they don’t, which could explain why the wrong Heiri in Uitikon was so surprised when I met him with that lady.

I began to look for the real Heiri with a vengeance. I visited Mörigen, Möriken and Mörikon, passing through Oetlikon, Opfikon, two Ottikons and an Oppikon. I asked questions of passers-by in a pair of Pfäffikons, one Pfeffikon and a Pfeffingen.

I tried Hellikon, Hemmiken, Hermikon and Hilfikon, not to mention Hüniken, Hünikon, Hunzikon, Hüttikon and Hutzikon. And everywhere I went, I asked for Heiri. I’m sure I met every Heiri in Switzerland—Heiris two years old and Heiris eighty-four years old. And most of them were so helpful. They gave me new lists to assist in my search for Cousin Heiri of Switzikon—I mean, Switzerland. Now I really began to organize myself. This must be a bad dream, I thought, for I had made up my mind to find Heiri or commit Heirikiri, as the Japanese would do under similar conditions.

Gerlikon, Gisikon, Göslikon, Gräslikon, Gündlikon were further stops on my tour. Bänikon, Bellikon, Berikon, Binzikon, Bisikon, Böbikon, Bubikon, Büblikon, Büschikon, Büttikon, Buttikon.

I couldn’t sleep anymore. I often awoke in the middle of the night screaming things like: “Heiri, Heiri, where art thou for heaven’s sake? What ‘ikon’ do you live in—tell me, for the love of good, sweet Helvetia, tell me which ‘ikon’ is your ‘ikon’.” And the pulsating rhythm began beating in my head as I tossed and turned in my Swiss bed:

Heiri, Heiri, which ikon, what ikon,

Oppikon, Redlikon, Medikon or Mellikon?

Heiri, Heiri, tell me, tell me!

Nänikon? Nebikon? Ebikon? Nossikon?

Whichikon, Whatikon, Thisikon, Thatikon!

It was pointless—I couldn’t sleep. Perhaps I should quickly run through all the names in Switzerland. Perhaps I would subconsciously choose the right one.

All right! Blast this country! Blast all the Heiris in this world and all the Swiss women who want the right to vote, just because they live in a democracy. If I had the right to vote in Switzerland, I’d abolish all towns ending in “ikon”, and I’d do it pretty fast, too.

All those Isikons, Islikons, Itzikons and so on. And such places as Landikon and Lendikon, Medikon and Mesikon.

I mean, for God’s sake, what kind of place is this anyway? Anybody who thinks he can find Heiri should go right ahead and try. Begin with Ringlikon and Rümikon and Rumlikon and Russikon. I’ll make an exception with Rüslikon, because Johannes Brahms lived there once, and, anyway, they called him Hans, not Heiri.

Seventy-three years have gone by and I’m still looking for Heiri, with or without his mistress for all I care. My list has now been cut down to the bare essentials. There’s hardly anything left on it except Adlikon, Amlikon, Attikon, Auslikon, Eschikon, Eschlikon, Etziken, Ehriikon and Ellikon. Then, when I’ve finished with those, I seriously intend to try Kefikon and Kölliken, Schleinikon, Schmerikon, Schottikon, Sisikon, Stallikon, Sünikon, Winikon, Wolfikon and Vollikon... Damnikon, Blastikon, Hellikon!

MAN HEISST SIE FRÜHLING

*Aus den Betten, Betten, Betten!
In die Schuhe, Schuhe, Schuh!
Durch die Wälder, Wälder, Wälder
fernen grünen Hügeln zu!*

*War die Welt in weissen Schleiern
eine Schneebräut – war sie’s nicht?
Und man brauchte früh schon abends
in der Stube Lampenlicht.*

*Aus der Städte finstern Winkeln
in das gelb gefleckte Land!
Macht nicht Schnee die Schuhe knirschen –
Erde ist’s und Stein und Sand.*

*War’s wohl heisse Lust, zu jagen
auf der Piste, hart und blank:
Ehrenzeichen, Schlüsselblumen
leuchten wieder – Gottseidank!*

*Murmeltiere, die lang schliefen,
wachen, schmal die Bäuche, auf.
Ziehn noch immer die Gestirne
den uralten Lichterlauf.*

*In die Schuhe, Schuhe, Schuhe!
Aus den Betten, aus der Stadt –
weil die Zeit, man heisst sie Frühling,
jetzt nicht Zeit zu schlafen hat!*

ALBERT EHRISMANN