



South Tyrol – Land of Myths and Legends

Black Hansele

Black Hansele was the nickname of a field hand who served at the lower Bachhütt hut in Signat: they called him “Hansele” (the diminutive of Hans) because he was small and “Black” because he was well versed in the black arts. He had learned these arts from a black book that he had obtained from gypsies in exchange for two brand new shirts.

Black Hansele was seen at all hours on his horse cart, where he discussed central points with the devil. He was strong as a giant, and everyone avoided him because he could blind and corner people. One day, he went to dance near Kollmann. He danced like crazy, lifting the girls up so high in the air that it seemed that something strange must surely be afoot. When he was supposed to pay, he refused to give even a penny and began to haggle. The boys wanted to throw him out, but before they could touch him, he laid hold of them and, in an instant, the boys were lying in front of the Stube parlour, the musicians on the table – and no one knew how it had all happened. He then went outside and bent the strong fence as easily as a whip.

As Hans grew older, though, he no longer felt at ease with himself and took the book to the priests in Bolzano (Bozen). When he came home, the black book was still there: it was lying atop the locked chest! He grabbed it and took it back to the monastery, where it was decided that it should be burned. The fire, however, could burn the book. Then the priest threw something consecrated on it. It crackled and spat very ominously and, page by page, finally burned up. When he went home, Black Hansele heard crying and weeping, which continued until he was in his room: it was the witches who were roasted in the book.