

Schöffling & Co.

foreign rights

author Guntram Vesper

title FROHBURG

original title FROHBURG

© 2016 by Schöffling & Co.

English sample translation

translated by Mike Mitchell

copyright for
the translation Mike Mitchell

contact Schöffling & Co.
Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH
Foreign Rights
Kaiserstraße 79
60329 Frankfurt am Main
Germany

www.schoeffling.de

((pp 5-13))

Furniture. Walls. Door. The long narrow corridor. Brown linoleum. Semidarkness. Echoing footsteps.

The stone steps down. The entrance at the bottom. The passage. On the right the kitchen, on the left the restaurant. The landlord's dog, white spots, tripod, blind, listening, sniffing in all directions, snapping in all directions. The dog was called Hink, the landlord Kuntz, people used to say Hink and Kuntz. One day no more Kuntz, no more Hink, nor the rest of the family. Vanishing point: the Black Forest. The mutt died there. From homesickness, Frau Kuntz wrote back to Frohburg. In the familiar confines of the *Posthof* he knew every corner, every fraction of an inch, in the wide-open spaces of the Black Forest nothing. Mother read that out to father and stared, wide-eyed: There, you see.

The back of the *Posthof*. Loading ramp. Hatchway for barrels. Washhouse. Rabbit hutches. Sheds for firewood, briquettes, handcarts, petrol cans, bicycles. In the coach-house the red delivery van. At half five every workday morning up the Kellerberg to the station, almost silent, just quietly humming, to the train from Leipzig, then round the town from door to door. Battery driven, rectifier, charge-lead. From the year of the Nazi Olympics.

Out through the gate: out into the world, onto Thälmannstrasse.

Round the corner our pride and joy, the spacious market square. Thirty-three, 1st May, photo of the celebrations. Good God, a sea of flags. Every one black-and-white and red from Braunsberg's printing machines. The big square overflowing with uniforms, grey overalls, white coats. In the foreground, detected with a magnifying glass, Mother, twenty-one, astrakhan coat, a book under her arm, *The Count of Monte Christo*, as I later heard. Twenty years passed, then a new round-up, Nuschke came, the old man from the government, born in Frohburg. Kidnapped and taken to West Berlin on 17th June 1953, returned the next day from Yankee protective custody, now a

freeman of the town as a reward, guard of honour on the town hall steps, applause. Our very own thing, our speciality: the infinitely long summer evenings. Football. Cops and robbers, hide and seek, run for your life, otherwise well beaten, eliminated, withdrawn, out. *Igelitt* plastic sandals flip-flopping in the August dust, resounding cries, shrill screams, bawling, squealing, sent back by the murky-grey square of the rows of houses. Pushing, shoving, tugging, tussling, the girls of course, who else.

Brückengasse, the bridge over the Wyhra. Cast-iron construction from Kainsdorf, Königin Maria Ironworks. Trembling, quaking, vibrating under every truck. At high water and drift ice as well: hit by flotsam, beams, floes.

Töpferplatz. The mulberry hedge. Edible aren't they. Three wooden steps to the water butt. Old Prause the brushmaker up to his knees in the shallow river: Farewell world. Dragged back into the house by his daughter and locked in, why not, has to be. Row of limes. During the weeks of the dog-days, before storms, black-and-red swarming masses of cardinal beetles. Greifenhainer Strasse.

The grandparents. Bought the house by the river after the big fire on Market Square. Was born there.

On the right from the entrance the vet's room. Glass display case. Pale boiled skulls of marten, badger and cat. Was that in your cooking pots just after the war, Grandma. On the medicine shelf the packet with the white powder. For God's sake children, even swirled-up dust can be fatal. Crossbones, skull. Arsenic.

On the other, left-hand side of the hall the people from Silesia, pushed out by the Russians, the Poles, blown in by expulsion, squeezed into the ground floor, the Leibigs, five individuals, crammed in together. Pinched the new bicycle inner tube. Who else.

On the first floor the living room. Grandfather, up on the chair beside the piano, wound up the wall-clock every day, still did at eighty-nine. Westminster chimes. The full hour unimaginable without them. Dining room. Against the back wall the *art nouveau* surround of the sofa with shelf. On it Brehm's large-format *Life of Animals*, ten volumes, chromolithographs under tissue paper,

and the Meyer's big *Lexikon* of 1906, with coloured plates just as in the Brehm, and then thirty or thirty-five classics, including Novalis and Heine. One door further on: sleeping-room. The marriage-bed. Eleven births in thirteen years. The kitchen opposite. Under the window the cast-iron bathtub on four feet, covered, on Sundays the bath-time round dance with eight, nine, sometimes ten people, three each using the same water, clouds of steam drifted down the corridor, into the rooms, open the windows or the mould will get established.

Attic apartment. After the great conversion in 1909. When Great-grandfather moved in, a widower, from Freiberg, with his money.

Loft. Cupboards, chests of drawers, trunks. Father's dented fencing mask. The words duelling floor, fencing bout, scar when I took it downstairs on Sundays and looked through the narrow grating at the grid-screened coffee party. Cousins' postcards from Bohemia, called a protectorate. The flag. Rolled-up swastika. War-time magazine, *Signal*, tied up in bundles, with pictures of blond-haired men, some in colour, photos of heroes, battle reports, Stalingrad stormed, sure of victory, the names of the reporters were not yet known, Buchheim, Maegerlein and Nannen. Peter von Zahn perhaps, him yes, because wife and mother lived in Frohburg, his star was later in the ascendant, North-West German Radio, the Windrose reporter, the Federal Cross of Merit on its ribbon.

The view from the attic room. Almost unique, according to Grandmother. You can see down into all the streets, all the alleys. A panorama of the surrounding area.

The bank of the Wyhra over there. Wooden railings. On the right the Rifle Clubhouse. The landlord a victim of the Russians without trace. Four huge chestnuts. The hall on the Eisenberg. Rifle champion Medelssohn, a man with a private income. Newly built villa above the Kellerberg. Three years later Grandfather with the champion's chain.

The millstream. The miller's daughters, all in white, with hats, drifting past in their boat. Dream vision on a summer evening. Their father did well postwar too, ground unauthorized flour, set a portion aside. Self-interest doesn't have to

be ugly. Newt meadows by the Eisenberg. Wading through the pools, lying in wait, with a tea strainer and with a preserving jar. The two males, crest in wedding colours, in the aquarium. Disappeared immediately. One month later dried out under my bed, a thumbnail's worth of muck.

Shack of the tank commander. Burnt face eaten away with scars. Better not to look.

The rubbish pits. *Mein Kampf* scorched. Beside the pits the embankment of the Kohren Railway. The Italians who laid the track in 1907. A dance. Stabbings. As the know-alls foresaw. Old cemetery, new cemetery. Church tower. District court.

School. Public library. Police station. The body of the rabbit thief who'd been shot lay on the road in the morning sun, for hours. The ice-cream parlour of the taciturn unshaven Herr Wanzig. Two scoops for ten pfennigs. Could draw the pennies out of the kids' pockets as if by magic, wasn't difficult. Stationery shop on Karlfranzberg. Heil Hitler, Karl Franz. Still in the last local history before the collapse. Naive, said Father. Dallmer's liquor store. Slipped in on the way to confirmation classes. Two-eighty for the pocket flask. In the neighbouring house on the first floor Mäser who'd been in the Security Service. The pharmacy on Market Square: pill machine in the corridor, in the yard scooters and four-wheelers with a crank-handle to propel it, you steered with your feet. Luger 08, touchable in the 9-inch-high corner of the summerhouse roof. The eldest son infantile paralysis. Died. Four other children survived in the town. The *Roter Hirsch* inn, cinema on the upper floor, condom machine in the men's urinal. On the upper ground floor next door Müllerfred, the misshapen owner of the clothes shop, bent forward, dwarflike, spondylitis. Preferred men. The young football players below his window, every late afternoon.

Labour-Service shacks on Wolfslückenweg, every last square inch crammed full during the war and postwar years, people who'd done forced labour, been bombed out, driven out of their homeland, all thrown in together, each telling a different story. Or not telling it. All from the same book. The Braunsberg Brothers' textile printing works. Mother in the office until thirty-nine. The

Jewish question. After expropriation Wäsche-Union Mittweida, Works II. Sheds with sawtooth roofs. Three-shift system.

Wiesenmühle cardboard factory. Edge runner mills pushing, hitting, grinding all round the clock. Original editions of Karl May among the waste paper. Hastily fished out the dark-green volumes. Watch out for your fingers.

Valleys and streams. Mouse, Rat. Cat. Saying from earliest childhood: The mouse is eaten by the rat, the rat by the cat, and the Wyhra sends the cat to kingdom come. Kingdom come. First time I'd come across the expression. Magical word. Undreamt-of growth in meaning.

As well as that the many many forests, woods, areas of scrubland where you could disappear, go to ground, get lost for an afternoon, give it a go and see what's possible, what works. Where today. Possibilities are Hölzchen, Erligt, Eisenberg, Himmelreich, Harzberg, Tannicht, Mittelholz, Rohrwiesen, Probstei, Stöckigt, Streitwald, Deutsches Holz. Sometimes a bit scary. Old hand-grenades under the dead leaves. Cries in the distance, as if for help. Or the buried woman's body found when clearing tree stumps, dismembered, wrapped in brown paper, tied up. You could hear Krusche, the forestry worker, telling people about that almost every day to the end of his life.

The porphyry quarry on Gautenberg. Falling five meters into the bushes, still holding—the hammer I'd lost—the lump I'd knocked off, the precious amethyst. Eyebrow clipped together, scar. Sandpits on the Harzberg. Danger of being buried alive when digging caves. One case of feeble-mindedness from the air being shut off for minutes on end. The little long eternity before we managed to drag him out by the ankles. The lime quarry beyond the ponds. The embrace in the reeds that you once came across, you found half repulsive, half gripping. Only after a while did I realise: I knew the girl.

And then all those ponds. Castle Pond, Wall Pond, Upper and Lower Cock Pond, Street Pond, New Pond, Brick Pond, Long Pond, Children's Pond, Big Pond, Old Pond, Potter's Pond, Seebich's Pond, Oil Pond, Brother's Pond, you could drown in every one of them if things went wrong, be shot on every shore if things went even more wrong. In the old days by the huntsmen from the castle and after the war by Russians. Later on by the chairmen of the collective

farms, the bosses of the district council, with rifles from Suhl, just like William Two, Goering and then Honecker and Mielke, who knows who now, who in future. I say ambush. Not what hunters like to hear.

The Russian quarters. In Borna between the station and the bridge over the Wyhra, in Altenburg on the Weisser Berg. Wooden fences you can't see through here and there. Behind them the Russkis thrash their own squaddies. The shots in the ceiling of the hall at Aunt Hannchen's: Woman, give schnapps.

Neukirchen briquette factory. Father company doctor. My picture of the coal storage by Felixmüller. On the conveyor plough, that's, yes that's old Zetzsche, that's him, from Benndorf, with his round, apple-cheeked face. First a farm labourer, then the war, the next thirty-five years at the conveyor belt, with his shovel.

The Espenhain and the Böhlen works. Miles and miles of opencast mining. Bubendorf shaft residual hole. Skinny dipping, at five in the morning, half past. Water cold from the night. Dive. Slapping the water. Doing the crawl. Cries from you to me, from me to you, like fire and like ice, skin on skin. Power lines heading south, towards Wismut. Black cables as thick as your arm, as far as the terminuses at Johannegeorgenstadt and Aue. Nasty droning, abominably deep, that made you vibrate.

(...)

((pp 48-50))

My first years, the first decade and a half, over there, at the back of beyond, in Frohburg. As if they'd been spent in the back room of a gigantic, ceaselessly pounding mill that ground ideas and feelings and even the slightest stirrings into tiny pieces and used up people in inordinate quantities, whole towns, areas, provinces and countries were turned into rubble and memory, while you yourself were learning to read and write, and seeing the sun rise and then sink

below the horizon again. Trembling leaves, trembling ground. Continuing to gnaw away at us, you'll see.

Childhood with no goal, no centre. Music was church hymns or Free German Youth songs, you hardly if ever heard words such as opera, symphony, string quartet, if you think about it they simply didn't occur, simply, that's so easily said, not even a hint of Mozart, Beethoven, of Hans Pfitzner, father born in Frohburg, and Schönberg. Retrogression that was called progress. And then the teachers, yesterday's photos in uniform very well hidden, if not burnt, not a word about what they'd done as young officers and NCOs on the eastern front or in the occupied territories, they spoke more highly of Johannes R. Becher and Kuba than of anyone else and parroted every word in praise of Azhayevev and Babayevsky they read in the newspapers, *Far from Moscow*, *The Golden Star Chevalier*, preferring to keep what they really thought to themselves. A Pushkin Square and a Maxim Gorky School in every town. Pushkin especially, the noble dandy and king of duellists as a genius, as a belated Goethe. Not to mention Gorky, author of *The Mother*, bosom friend of Yagoda. Stalin went to visit him once a week in the Peshkov mansion, right in the middle of the worst period of purges during which, every other day, at times even daily, he signed lists with thousands of names: the maximum penalty. That meant death. Writers as engineers of the soul, it was Gorky's idea that Stalin took up. And it was hard luck on anyone who didn't fit in with that or, above all, didn't any longer. Trotzky, Kamenyev, Sinoviev, Bukharin, all names of the greatest significance, colleagues of Lenin moreover and, just like him, set in their inflexible and incorrigible ways. Had to be wiped out and some even understood that in a more than crazy world. And, a further miracle, the well-known authors Mandelstam, Kolzov, Isaac Babel, Pilnyak and a hundred others had never even lived. And in our country as well, in the eastern third, this sieving and filtering went on, for us or against us, with the most ludicrous newspaper names in the most ludicrous rising sequence: *New Germany*, *New Day*, *Leipzig People's News*, *The People's Voice*, *The People's Watch*, *The People*, *Free Press*, *Free Word*, *Free Earth*. Freud and Brecht and Peter

Huchel, along with *Form and Meaning*, however, only made it as far as the area round Leipzig, not a word where we lived, not a whisper, nothing. Such times, such teachers. Tinged with bitterness.

(...)

((pp 217-218))

The book about dominant women was a winner, and not only with the students of medicine. We loaned it out, Ferdinand's idea, to anyone, regardless of faculty, for twenty-four hours and had recovered the purchase price after just six months. Ferdinand had kept a register, the philologists and, even more so, the theologians showed the greatest thirst for knowledge. And it was the future pastors of all people who were most likely to overrun the return date, after which a one mark fine was due. In the café we spent a long time puzzling over why the parish priests-to-be of all people should be such dilatory readers, especially given the smutty nature of the material. Until we realised that almost none of the theology students we knew had a girlfriend in Leipzig, the daughter of their landlady or the baker on the corner, but often a fiancée out in the country, in a manse, the daughter of a colleague. These often very pretty daughters of the clergy occasionally came to the city over the weekend; they would stay with a better-off aunt in the Waldstrasse area or the Musicians' District, but were allowed to go to the digs of their actual or supposed fiancé in Windmühlen-, Sternwarten- or Seeburgstrasse, until eight as a rule. There, in the late afternoon, there was amorous dalliance and reading over tea and cakes, and the overdue fee was gladly paid because it was a more than alluring prospect to enjoy, snuggled up against the cuddly, willing daughters of the manse, the story of the severe, unmerciful and, at the same time, arousing governess, who resorted to every means of discipline in artful succession: the adept's humiliating women's clothes, the rod, an enema, peeing and the threat of even worse being administered. It was a nice piece of business for us, this

lending out. Back then you, Wolf, used your share to buy—as something that came closer to reality—Ivan Bloch's *The Sexual Life of our Time* with its extremely explicit collection of cases, as I can still remember, I also had a peek at it. What we hadn't foreseen, of course, was that our rare book on dominant women would end up as a tatty old tome that had come apart, grubby and well-thumbed, the pages covered here and there with stains of dubious origin. But that didn't matter, in a way that's typical of any kind of pornography, whether writing or pictures, the initial attraction was quickly gone. Sadism, masochism, Father used to say, once you've worked through all the variants, there's hardly anything new about it, or what do you think.

This excerpt is presented for informational purposes only – any use or copying for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited. For further information on international rights for this title please contact:

Kathrin Scheel
Schöffling & Co.
Foreign Rights
Kaiserstrasse 79
60329 Frankfurt am Main
Germany

phone: +49 69 92 07 87 16
fax: +49 69 92 07 87 20
kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de

www.schoeffling.de/content/foreignrights/news-start.html