

# *Schöffling & Co.*

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### Conrad comes in

The door opens.

‘Besides,’ says Conrad, ‘it’s really bright outside.

It’s pretty bright inside the bedroom as well now, because the light’s coming in from the landing. It allows Conrad to observe one of the two persons lying there whip the covers over their head, at the same time saying a rude word Conrad would never be allowed to say.

This person is: *Dad*. Outside the house he is Herr Bantelmann. Inside: Dad, of course; and, very occasionally, Wolfgang.

This person was not always a Dad. That is very important to him and he talks about it quite a lot. Conrad knows all about it. For 31 years Dad was, amongst other things, a son and a constructor of model gliders, the proud possessor of a driving licence and a beard, later on the *boyfriend* of the person lying next to him in the big bed. He’s only been a *Dad* for 10 years and, although 10 years is a pretty long time, Dad still isn’t entirely accustomed to Dadhood. And at 8 minutes past 6 on a Sunday morning he’s accustomed to Dadhood least of all. And that is exactly what he says. It’s perfectly comprehensible, even though he has the covers over his head.

Dad presumably knows it’s 6.08 because he’s left a tiny gap between the mattress and the covers, so he can breathe. 6.08 it says in red numbers on the illuminated display of the alarm clock.

‘Conrad,’ says his Dad from underneath the covers, ‘do you remember the rule?’

Conrad thinks about this. Rule? Rule? His Dad has made rules about almost everything. How is anyone to know which one he has in mind.

Luckily Conrad is given some help. It comes from the person lying next to Dad in the bed, someone who was once his *girlfriend*. This person is: *Mum*. Outside the house, Frau Bantelmann. Inside: Mum, of course; occasionally Edith

‘It’s to do with coming in,’ she says.

Oh yes. Of course. Now it all comes back to him. However could he have forgotten. There’s a particularly strict rule about coming in on Sunday mornings. You must not, you must not — now don’t get it wrong — on Sunday mornings you must not come in before . . . a certain time. Unfortunately Conrad has forgotten what time. How idiotic. And so as not to get it wrong, he says nothing at all. Just to be on the safe side.

Luckily Mum helps him out again. ‘What time is it now?’ she says. She says it in a reproachful tone.

Conrad looks at the clock. ‘6—0—9,’ he says. At least that can’t be wrong.

‘Superb!’ says Dad from under the covers. It sounds like a nasty word. ‘And what is the rule?’

All at once it comes back to him. ‘On Sundays I must not come in before 8 o’clock. Except in case of emergency, serious illness, fire.’ Not bad, eh?

‘Besides —’ says Conrad.

Dad lets out a wail of despair. ‘And what is the other rule?’

Another minor point promptly occurs to Conrad. If at all possible, you must not come in before 8 o’clock on a Sunday morning, and when you do come in, you must on absolutely no account whatsoever never ever start your first sentence with ‘besides.’

His Dad has explained it. In fact, he’s explained it several times. Most recently last Sunday. At almost precisely the same time when Conrad had just come in. The word ‘besides’, his Dad had said, is a word you use to link a new topic of conversation to the previous one. And he demonstrated it, joining his two hands together.

Conrad got the picture. ‘Besides’ is a tying word. You use it like a piece of string to tie two pieces of conversation together so they don’t fall apart.

‘Correct,’ his Dad had said. And from that it followed, as night follows day, that you couldn’t start a conversation with ‘besides’. For a ‘besides’ you need at least two topics. Two! And at 6.0-something on a Sunday morning there wasn’t even one topic. In fact there was nothing to talk about at all.

At this point in the conversation his Dad started to get just a little bit heated, despite the fact that it was so early. ‘There’s nothing to talk about!’ he said. There was nothing to talk about because he, his Dad, was not engaged in a conversation, but in a deep sleep. And when one of the potential participants in the conversation is still engaged in a deep sleep, the other participant bloody well ought to respect that and must under no circumstances whatsoever come bursting into the room with a great big ugly ‘besides’.

They’d practised this coming-in-at-8-o’clock-and-starting-a-conversation last Sunday. Until he got it. Uhoh! Now Conrad has a sneaking suspicion he knows what’s going to happen. And he suspects correctly.

‘Out you go and come in again,’ says Dad from underneath the covers.

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