

SHADOW FIGHT(S)

Novel



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A YOUNG GERMAN IN SWITZERLAND IN 1937

1.

Shortly after midnight in the moonlight on a clear night that could not be more idyllic, an elegant limousine floats as it were silently on 19 October 1937 over a pretty sleepy thoroughfare lined with pretty family homes through an orderly bourgeois-looking outer district of the Swiss capital Bern. Chauffeur S. drives his boss, Professor K., chief doctor of the "Heil- und Pflegeanstalt" (Psychiatric University Hospital) Waldau, from Bern's main railway station back to the hospital, popularly known as the loony bin.

K. returns home from a visit to a psychiatric congress in Berlin on a train that arrived punctually at a late hour in Bern. S., if he is to live up to his reputation as a reliable chauffeur and survive as K.'s chauffeur, must be on hand despite the unusual working hours.

K.'s presentation had deeply impressed his German colleagues, as had been pointed out to him several times. They had showered him with praise. K. is not aware of the fears that have recently arisen among some Swiss colleagues about working with German colleagues. He rejoices that this cooperation is highly profitable for him. The fact, that certain colleagues here turn up their noses at his behaviour, does not bother him. So they don't get in his way in the professional exchange with Germany. He survives gloriously in the tough professional competition. He benefits from an outstanding position in Germany. K. likes the Germans' brash, somewhat full-bodied and clearly determined manner.

S. slows down the limousine. K. abruptly wakes up from his thoughts. Straightening up on his back seat in the limousine. Looking out of the back of the limousine through the windscreen over S.'s shoulder into the darkness, approaching them not quite so dark. With shadowy outlines of the trunks and treetops of the avenue trees. Appearing ghostly in this light. S. steers the vehicle at walking pace, from the thoroughfare into the park area of the clinic. The avenue is the dead straight access road to the park of the clinic. To the imposing main building in neoclassical style. Which can be seen in the distance.

The park also contains, in addition to the huge main building, the other hospital buildings for the patients, the farm buildings and stables, the stately home of K. and his family, as well as buildings with flats and rooms for the medical staff and other employees of the clinic.

S. is alert. In the cone of the spotlight, in the middle of the now brightly lit part of the avenue, halfway to the main building, a tightly intertwined tangle of people emerges, clearly recognizable in the glare of the light. Instantly, the tangle breaks free from the conflation and becomes a woman staring terrified into the light and a man also staring terrified into the light. The two of them immediately scurry to the edge of the headlights, from the middle of the path to the edge by the tree trunks. They give way to the car. S. recognizes the two. Both employees of the clinic. The spontaneous joy at knowing about the relationship of the two, he has now caught, gives way to the equally spontaneous uncertainty whether the boss has also seen and recognized them clearly. Which could end fatally for the two of them. S. spontaneously slows down. He is about to drive past the two now standing in the almost dark on the left of the car.

„Blimey, the darn foreigner and that silly tramp, who falls for his smooching.“, S. presses out. Barely audibly, but with a clearly perceptible ironic undertone. He pretends his remark to be a soliloquy. On purpose. In reality he parodies the boss's pejorative phrase, recently picked up with genuine irritation. He now gleefully confronts the boss with his loose saying. That is stuck in his, S.'s, memory. S. knows, Doctor B. is thoroughly okay and a good chap. Although he is a German. The always cheerful nurse Hedy is a most attractive and beautiful woman. S. himself wouldn't mind, to have a date with her. He envies Doctor B. for his luck with women. Women think, it's smarter to flirt with a slick German doctor than with an uncouth little Swiss chauffeur and gofer at the clinic. He is surprised that the two of them, who, unlike other employees, always arrive on time for work in the morning, now only come home from partying in town at such a late hour.

K. is annoyed by the impertinent and out-of-place remark by chauffeur S.. How come, he dares to mimic him, the boss. How dare S. take a joking remark by his boss out of context and provocatively repeat it as a reproach. K. notices the two figures startled in the cone of dim light. He also recognizes the two culprits. Annoyed at their impudence in being caught red-handed in public. Where he, K., the boss, had clearly forbidden B., who himself is merely a temporary trainee among the doctors of the clinic, to have a flirtation with a nurse at the clinic.

Only a few days or weeks ago, on the occasion of a social dance event of the staff in the clinic, K. had caught B. clearly overstepping the boundaries of decency and ignoring with a grin the rules of the clinic in front of everyone. In dancing lasciviously and demonstratively socialising as a doctor of the clinic with a nurse of the clinic, this silly tramp. K. had taken B. aside, not without causing a small

commotion. B. was told in no uncertain terms, that love affairs between doctors of the clinic and nurses of the clinic were strictly forbidden. Should B., as a minor intern, dare to violate this rule again, he would have to leave the clinic immediately. Which meant the end of his internship at the clinic. Which he, K., had had granted to him out of pure philanthropy. He, K., would then also no longer be available to him as a doctoral supervisor. B.'s future is none of K.'s concerns. Having joined the festivities again after having reprimanded B., K. boasted laughingly to his chauffeur S. in public, that he had really put the 'darn foreigner' in his place for fooling around with 'that silly tramp who, falls for his smooching'.

Let these young people have their fun elsewhere, but not in his, K.'s, kingdom. Here cleanliness, correctness and decency must prevail. This cheeky monkey of B. seems to be out, to get in the way of him, K., on whom he is still dependent as a doctoral student and subordinate. Unbelievable how this rogue dares to behave! Such good-for-nothings who have 'fallen off the devil's wagon' have no place in his clinic. K. does not understand how he could have fallen of all people for this guy, who by chance happens to be German. K. is outraged. Now definitely an alarm bell rings and it is high time to ...

K. gleefully seeks revenge. In a moment, the limousine will glide past the two, who have stepped aside into the darkness on the left in front of the tree trunks. K. turns his head to the left. Shoots his sparrowhawk glance out through the side window on the left. And sure enough, in a fraction of a second, the terrified grimace of B., staring stunned into the interior of the limousine, lights up. K. triumphs. B. must leave the clinic at once and for good. With a proper and heavy thrashing, that he will remember for his lifetime.

Doubts and fears make K.'s joy fade away. He absolutely must keep his composure and be strict. In front of B.. In front of S.. In front of the whole staff of his clinic. He has to show, what a tough man he is. At the same time he must avoid, to involuntarily cause new damage. Diplomacy and tact are required. To plan his further steps, he has to make sure, that the news about the two culprits spreads by tomorrow morning among the whole staff of the clinic. And his strict reacting at people who break the rules must be known by his staff. His reputation as a boss, who can't be fooled and who relies on morals and decency and punishes wrongdoers severely but consistently, is to be confirmed. Therefore he has to induce S. to be his perfect messenger and his willing tool. For this purpose he mumbles, astonishingly loud and clear, given as if it were a soliloquy, to the address of S., "the conceited B. will get a serious thrashing, just he wait!" It is still incomprehensible to K., how he had been deceived by B. in such a way.

About a year ago a German colleague he knew from a conference in Berlin had asked him, if he would be willing to be doctoral supervisor at the University of Bern for a young German. This young man has his degree from the the medical faculty of the university in Breslau. But he has not yet written his dissertation. He needs to write it, to get the finishing touch for his doctoral hat. To grant the young man at the same time an of course unpaid traineeship at the Waldau University Clinic for the duration of his dealings with the dissertation at the University of Bern. So he can get in touch with psychiatry. K. had been flattered, that his reputation had apparently reached as far as Germany. A young German even coveted him as a doctoral supervisor. From which K. concluded that the young German must be an exceptional student. Seven months were agreed upon. May, up to and including November 1937. „And now, in October, this awful surprise“, K. sighs.

For the time being, B. had turned out to be a basically ordinary guy. Of small stature, slim and agile. Pays a lot of attention to his appearance. Always correct and well-dressed. And well-groomed. At first sight he seems inquisitive, of the best manners, extremely polite. B. is effusively enthusiastic about the topic K. proposes to him as a doctoral thesis. "Kinder im Wahnsystem der Mutter" (Children in the mother's delusional system). B. never stops emphasizing how interested he is in this very subject. K. regards B.'s ingratiating remark to his doctoral supervisor as somewhat aloof and improper. Then B. doesn't stop pretending, how happy he is, to have found in him, the honored Professor K., a mentor who is famous in professional circles and who has a wide range of interests. "If I have understood correctly, you, Professor, are writing poetry and theatre plays as well, just like I do." A few days later B. asks K., his professor and doctoral supervisor, if it were not advisable, to expand the topic to "Kinder im Wahnsystem der Eltern" (Children in the parents' delusional system). K. must admit, that B.'s suggestion makes sense and approves to it. But in B.'s style is too much unseemly familiarity and lack of distance. K.'s gut feeling tells him, that he won't be happy about this student. Has got himself into a tough situation with this young man. This feeling is strengthened more and more as the days and weeks go by. Somehow and unwillingly he even is impressed by B.'s snappy cutting and his snappy manner. He is so different from the locals. K. notices, how B. turns out to be in private a epicure, seeking pleasures, wherever possible, and a darling of the ladies. He developed to be the darling of everyone. A dazzler, a polished lacquer monkey, who carries his humanistic education in front of him like a placard. And yet, despite all his zeal, a good-for-nothing and a show-off. K. realizes that B. has two faces. A seemingly serious face, which in its exaggerated seriousness becomes a farce, as it were, when he stands opposite him, K.. And a laughing face

when he feels unobserved by his highest superior. And now, even after a warning, again this incident with this nurse. A brazen violation of a strict rule, that had been brought clearly to his attention.

As curious as K. is about B.'s networking in Breslau and Berlin with German luminaries in the field of psychiatry, the latter always keeps a low profile about his actual relationships. Wimps him, K., grinning cheekily with evasive answers and ironic remarks. K. must conclude from this, that B. is not connected to important professional circles in Berlin or Breslau. K. also has to admit to himself, that his willingness to take this young man on as a doctoral student and as a trainee in his clinic, turns out as a mistake. If K. now, as would be absolutely right, throws B. out of the clinic and refuses to be any longer his doctoral supervisor, there would come up a problem. B.'s doctoral thesis must soon be completed. B. would get most angry about K.'s acting. Probably he would after his prematurely return home badmouth him in Breslau and Berlin. As K. is not absolutely sure, if B. doesn't have after all some connections to important German psychiatric circles, B.'s outrage could gnaw on K.'s reputation in Berlin and Breslau. Which would be fatal for K.. K. must avoid this risk at all costs. The new situation requires a subtle approach. If, contrary to expectations, B.'s doctoral thesis turns out not to be totally flawed, K. will have the advantage of waving it through with a top grade. But B. must not get away without a good thrashing for his cheeky provocation and impropriety. A kick in his backside. Then sent back to from whence he came. Sent back as a sample of no value. The senior doctor, under whom B. works, must carry out B.'s thrashing! K. will give strict instructions to this senior doctor.

These thoughts flash through K.'s head in a split second, while his gaze is directed out the window to the left to gaze

at the culprit and his playmate for a brief moment in the gloom through the side window from the back of the limousine as they pass. Sure enough, B.'s noggin whizzes by with a bewildered expression on its face, staring into the dark rear of the limousine. K. has seen B. And B. seems to have perceived him, K.!

In the dark rear of the limousine, which glides past him and Hedy with a low hum, Hans Günther B. catches the face and the piercingly evil gaze of K., who is enthroned stiffly like a cardboard companion in the interior of the limousine. Hans Günther's teeth and all his limbs spontaneously chatter. The thought, darn it, it's all over now, flashes into Hans Günther's consciousness with a proper after-flicker. In a fraction of a second, he senses the catastrophe. The immediate expulsion. The failure with his dissertation. The hardest work during the last months here in Bern - all for nothing! The beautiful dream of professional success as a doctor in Breslau or Berlin, of marriage to his Uschi in Breslau and of the eagerly awaited offspring, who must be named Rainer in honour of Rilke, the poet colleague. Hans Günther spontaneously flashes the thought that only now, in retrospect, does he recognize the relationship between him and his doctoral supervisor and boss as having been a constant shadow fight since the beginning, which will now slide into an open fight.

A hand - a female hand - touches Hans Günther. Warmth trickles through his body, which had previously frozen into a block of ice at the perception of K.'s mask-like grimace. The touch of the warming hand and the subsequent embrace, which he returns only too gladly and hotly, melt all ice. The bliss is sealed with a never-ending succession of the hottest kisses. In the middle of the avenue leading to the main building of the clinic. On this glorious autumn night with a full moon, 19 October 1937.

When he starts work the next morning, Hans Günther is ordered by K.'s secretary to see his senior doctor without delay. Hans Günther is frightfully agitated. He gets on very well with his senior doctor. But this time he must act on K.'s command. Hans Günther fears the worst. That this senior doctor, who is usually easy-going and most friendly, will have to address him this time in an entirely different tune. Already in the corridor in front of the senior doctor's office, Hans Günther comes across him. He approaches his senior doctor with his eyes downcast. Hoping that the terrible moment will soon be over.

The senior doctor holds Hans Günther with brute force. Shakes him vigorously. Until Hans Günther looks up at him. Then the senior doctor lets go of Hans Günther. He poses opposite Hans Günther. He puts on a stern, bitterly angry face. Like Hans Günther has never seen on him before. Hans Günther begs heaven for a smooth landing. The senior doctor begins to wave his right hand, clenched in a fist, and his extended index finger in front of Hans Günther's face. As he does so, he utters in a threatening voice, "Oh dear! Mei, mei, mei." (In Swiss dialect this sequence of syllables is an exclamation of threat, but sounds as if three times the month of May were pronounced!) Hans Günther suspects that something is not quite right. That the senior doctor is suppressing laughter at his threatening gesture. That the exaggerated threat is just an act. Hans Günther is already so familiar with the idiom of his host country and specifically with the Swiss dialect that he understands the threatening content of the to him otherwise meaningless syllable sequence of 'mei mei mei'. Spontaneously, he plays dumb.

"If Mister Senior Doctor allows me the remark, we are no longer in the merry month of May. It is already October!"

They both burst out laughing. With furtive glances to the left and right, the senior doctor resumes a serious posture.

Hans Günther does the same.

"You know very well that, as a doctor at the clinic, it is strictly forbidden for you to have a love affair with a nurse at the clinic. One more time and you will experience the worst. The boss has instructed me to give you a good thrashing. You've been warned," the senior doctor says in a stern, firm, loud voice, then whispers to Hans Günther, "so now I've carried out the boss' order and reprimanded you. Please don't get caught next time. A little more discretion. Watch out, boss approaching! Mime a beaten dog."

The senior doctor lets his gaze dart discreetly in the direction from whence danger is in the suit.

Hans Günther snorts briefly and then goes up to K. in a humble posture and smiling. Stooping to indicate that he has something to say to him.

"If you wish to address the vexed matter, don't bother. The senior doctor will have clarified it for you, what decency and a sense of honour require of a budding doctor."

"Professor, you are right as usual. I was going to ask you for an appointment. I have finished my thesis and would like to deliver it to you."

"Get an appointment from my secretary. Anything else? I'm in a hurry."

Hans Günther lets out a sigh of relief. Lucky him. The whole thing has gone off without a hitch. As he considers this, the thought flashes spontaneously: And what will happen to Hedy? He thinks in horror that she, poor thing, is at the mercy of the head nurse's sanctions and will certainly not know how to defend herself. He is so ashamed that he has put poor Hedy in such a situation. On the spur of the moment, he rushes into town to buy a box of confectionery for Hedy. On the way to town in the bus, he scribbles with his Pelikan fountain-pen on a piece of paper the mini-poem

that had occurred to him on waking up. Now suddenly it comes back to his memory. He can write it down from his mind. ,O Psychiater junger / lass ab vom Liebeshunger / zur holden Schwesternschaft / es könnten sonst wir Alten / nicht mit euch Tempo halten / drum opfert euch der Wissenschaft!' (O psychiatrist, young / Let go of your hunger for love / To the fair sisterhood / Otherwise we old people / Could not keep up with you, / So sacrifice yourself to science!). Hans Günther hopes that no one at the clinic will notice his brief absence. He buys a pretty box of confectionery in the confectionery shop. He sticks the note with the verse on top of it.

Back in the clinic, as soon as the coast is clear, Hans Günther sneaks into a hidden place from which he can spot Hedy and Hedy him. Discreetly, he beckons her to come to him. To his astonishment, Hedy is amused. She is delighted with the box of confectionery. Gives Hans Günther a slap on the right cheek as a thank you and playfully reproaches him, "You are mean, you want me to get fat!" Then they spontaneously fall into each other's arms. Only to part again with furtive glances around. Hedy contorts her mouth into a grin.

"The head nurse's scolding clarified for me, that I don't need to feel guilty about quitting my job at the Waldau. I was spot on with my resignation some time ago. The fact, that she now tried to finish me off again, is ridiculous. Congratulate me on my new job at the Bircher Benner Clinic in Zurich!"

Hans Günther, who had just been so elated, is knocked off his feet by the words Hedy throws at him. He no longer knows what to think. His lover had kept the most important things from him for days or weeks.

"Don't look so horrified! Zurich is not out of this world. Visit me in Zurich."

Hans Günther doesn't brood for long. He whispers in Hedy's ear, "I'll be with you in Zurich every free minute. Just you wait!"

Hedy pushes him away, laughing.

"I have to get back! And thank you for the confectionery."

"And hopefully also for the verse, so prettily composed especially for you."

"Oh yes."

Hans Günther hates to be overwhelmed by new developments that he had imagined differently. Of course, he had had no specific ideas about his relation to Hedy. With her, he enjoys the moment. But now, that she will leave for Zurich, what he only learns by chance, and she has kept this decision from him for a long time, he has to question the carefree familiarity that has prevailed between them until now. His trust in Hedy is shaken. Fortunately, he still has his fiancée Uschi in Breslau, about whom he never had talked to Hedy. She is waiting for him there. Whom, he now will not have to face with the accomplished fact of a separation, as he had feared, if his relation with Hedy would have got really serious. He is delighted that he will soon have his doctorate in his pocket and can finally run away home. He had already passed the oral doctoral examination at the University of Bern in the summer. His trainee position at the Waldau expires at the end of next month. In the next few days, he will hand in his finished doctoral thesis to K.. Everything will be wrapped up by the end of the year. And he will be happy at home, in the arms of his flame Uschi in Breslau, whom he will marry as soon as possible and with whom he will beget the longingly awaited son and heir named Rainer.

Wolfgang F. invites Hans Günther to the Kursaal to celebrate his doctorate. F. has made it. And the whole stress

with the dissertation lies behind him. A Hungarian ladies' band plays lively tunes in the Kursaal.

Like Hans Günther, F. is from Breslau. Hans Günther had not known him at home. F. is the son of friends of Mottl and Vatel, Hans Günther's parents. He had come to Bern to do his doctorate in pharmacy. Mottl had told Hans Günther that the son of friends, Wolfgang F., was also doing his doctorate in Berne and had given Hans Günther his address. So that they would not be completely lost in a foreign country, it would be nice if they could keep in touch, which would make both their parents happy. Hans Günther does not feel lost in Bern at all. Since the beginning of his stay in Berne, he has had very pleasant contact with his colleagues at the Waldau. But is always curious about new acquaintances. F. turns out to be a fussy, correct type. From time to time, they meet in dance clubs to get to know the local wine and the Bernese girls.

Now Hans Günther and F. sit together in the Kursaal with Blauburgunder wine and fiery sounds of the Hungarian women's band.

"And just imagine, B., I have already been accepted for a job in a pharmacy. In Shanghai. Next week I'll travel to Marseille, and then I'll steam off to faraway China. My fiancée at home has also found a job in Shanghai independently of me. She will be joining me in a few months. Am I not a lucky man?"

Hans Günther congratulates F. effusively, although he would cross himself not to be able to work in Germany and to plan his future elsewhere. Moreover, he feels that fleeing abroad, especially in such times, is cowardice. Nevertheless, he raises his glass and toasts F. to a happy future.

"And what about your thesis, B.?"

"Next week I have an appointment with Professor K., my boss, and I will press the completed thesis into his hands and be back home by the end of the year! In the arms of my beloved Uschi, who is waiting for me in Breslau. We will get married, have children and lead a leisurely life. Yes, yes, F., that's just how different plans and life concepts are."

Hans Günther notices that F. is puzzled. He, the conservative conformist, is probably a little confused, Hans Günther thinks, that in addition to Hedy and others, there is suddenly talk of a lover in Breslau. To his relief, F. does not mention his polygamy. Which does not surprise him. He and F. are not that intimate, after all. F. starts an exclamation of horror.

"Back home, B.? Are you out of your mind! The political developments there, our poor professional prospects there ..."

"Doctors are always needed, thank God! Also and especially in our homeland, where it is important to show that our heart still beats for the good of Germany, the land of poets and thinkers, our homeland," Hans Günther throws out and then adds with a laugh, "by the time I return home to the Reich, Hitler and the National Socialists will have long been history. Don't look at me with such astonishment. My curiosity and my instinct to look closely always show me a way out of every mess. Anyway, I feel like throwing in the towel with my doctorate and following my true vocation. To devote myself to writing. But I can't do that to my old man. He wants me to wear a doctoral hat. Without a doctorate, I'm no good to him."

Punctual as a perfectly ticking clock, Hans Günther arrives at Professor K.'s secretary's office two minutes before the agreed time for the meeting. K. keeps Hans Günther waiting for ten minutes. Beaming, with a bend, Hans Günther hands

K. the typescript of his doctoral thesis. K. accepts the thick bundle of paper. Moves it back and forth. Looks at it. His face is puckered.

"Fine, your doctoral thesis. Thank you. The scope is huge, almost too huge."

Hans Günther listens up. K.'s usual condescending tone has a mocking, derogatory undertone today. Hans Günther suspects that something is fishy with this noble Professor K.. Hans Günther had been lately looking through several dissertations by other persons. Several of those were as extensive as his. Or even longer with many more pages.

"Allow me, Professor, to mention, that the topic you suggested to me, which I worked my way into with full interest, has so much in it."

"Until I have fought my way through it! Gosh, it will take time! B., you can't expect a report from me before the end of the year. Your internship here at the clinic will end in a month. Then you will be a free man. Enjoy the time until I give you notice, that I am through with your manuscript."

Hans Günther swallows empty. He had imagined the conversation with K., which is most important for him, differently. He is dismayed. And he is amazed at how quickly he is being led out of the lion's den. In this case he will return home in November and has later to come back to Bern to have the final talks with K. about his dissertation and get the confirmation paper of his successfully made degree. He will forget Hedy, with a tear in his eye. At home, he will renew his love for Uschi. Uschi as the mother of his planned son Rainer is also totally okay. At home, he can take his time to see what doors and gates will open for him professionally with a doctor's hat. If all else fails, he will devote himself entirely to writing and intellectual life, much to the dismay of Mottl and Vatel. Hans Günther informs his parents that he will be returning home at the beginning of

December and will then go on a short trip to Bern at the end of this year or beginning of next year to deal with all the final formalities of his degree from the Bern University.

Hans Günther and Hedy celebrate Hedy's departure from Bern and the abrupt end of their oh so fine love affair with champagne and dancing in the bar of the Bellevue Palace Hotel. Hans Günther is annoyed that he had not brought his evening suit from home in his luggage for this so dignified occasion. He is ashamed of his knickerbocker suit in this elegant atmosphere. Hedy says, 'screw it, come on, come on, dance now!' They celebrate exuberantly. Hans Günther is blissful and enjoys the moment.

Mottl and Vatel implore Hans Günther in writing not to dare show up at home without his doctor's hat in his luggage. They bombard him with postcards and letters every day. Hans Günther pauses. It is not usually Mottl and Vatel's style to pester him so much. There must be something behind it that they don't want to - or can't / aren't allowed to - write in a letter. The postal censorship! In a postscript, they add that Germany's foreign exchange office no longer approves money transfers to him in Switzerland after his unpaid traineeship at the clinic expires. Hans Günther's breath catches in his throat. He is sure that Mottl and Vatel are not sending out these alarm signals for no reason.

Hans Günther sees himself at the mercy of the situation. Willy-nilly, he has to hold out in Bern, in Switzerland, until he gets the proper document of his successful doctoral graduation. His parents cannot continue to support him financially. Now he has to see for himself, how he will survive financially for at least one or maybe two more months in Switzerland. He could tear his hair out one by one for not having managed more carefully with the monthly