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Thuringian Scenes

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Roles

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Thuringian Scenes

Abstract

"Thuringian Scenes" is an ironic name for the twenty-five matter-of-fact statements by a teenage victim of political repression driven to the murder of his tormentor in juvenile detention. The setting is the picturesque Thuringian region of the former East Germany.

Keywords

East Germany, German, political repression, juvenile detention

Disciplines

German Language and Literature | German Literature

Utz Rachowski Thuringian Scenes

Translated from German by Michael Ritterson

FOR TONI WEBER

1

How to tie a hangman's knot. The real kind, I mean—coiled, tightly wound, like in the movies. He showed me how to do it.
Then I killed him and strung him up.

2

On visitors' day my mother asked me what it was like when they drove me from Jena to Erfurt. Asked if I'd seen the Ettersberg, Buchenwald, the concentration camp with the memorial and the tower.

3

Her name was Sylvie and she sat three rows behind me. The very first time I walked into the classroom I fell in love with her. First her eyes. I'd never seen anything like them before. They'd change color when I looked at her, from dark brown to pale blue, and they'd just light up. All I had to do was turn around.

4

Once, gym class was cancelled and we happened to meet all alone in the hall. Through the closed doors of the other classrooms you could hear somebody's explanation of the universe, while Kolbich had the third graders rehearsing the national anthem.

So I pressed her back against the coats hanging there and pulled her skirt up. She pushed my hands away and opened her mouth and tried to get her tongue into mine. She must have read about that somewhere.

5

At lunchtime recess they were waiting for me in plainclothes.

6

We also went to the outdoor movies a couple of times. She wouldn't even let me kiss her. No action with her.

7

Slandering an official of the state.
I was sixteen, so I went to juvenile detention.

8

He was in for breaking and entering and he was my brigade leader. We worked at the die press, just eight-hour shifts, because we were all minors.

9

The concentration camp with the memorial and tower, where your brother died, dear Mama? No, I didn't see it, because I rode from Jena to Erfurt in a closed van with no windows.

10

At the trial, my chemistry teacher asked for acquittal.

11

After work came structured free time. The barracks monitor was in charge of that.

12

The first time was in the shower. The brigade leader told me to stay and mop the changing room. He was waiting with the barracks monitor.
They dropped their pants and held me down. I had to give them oral sex.

13

They gave me chocolate, and our quota on the die press was reduced by 200 sheets.

14

The second time was when our whole shift was supposed to see the movie *I Was Nineteen* during structured free time.

The barracks monitor held the door on the toilet stall shut so I couldn't get to the movie on time.

15

They protected me from the guards when it was my turn for barracks duty.

16

The third time was in the die press storage room.

17

The following Friday was my eighteenth birthday.

18

The following Friday I asked the barracks monitor to show me how to pick a padlock with a pin. He didn't suspect a thing.

19

In the afternoon I had a visit from my mother. She cried and asked me again if I'd seen the Ettersberg and the memorial.

20

One week later I asked the barracks monitor if he knew how you tie a noose, like in the movies, with the winding and all.

21

He knew how.

22

At twelve on the dot, when the siren wailed out the end of lunch break, I killed the barracks monitor in the storage room. The siren was still wailing as I took a rope with a proper noose that I'd tied myself, threw it over the rail for the overhead crane, and hoisted up the barracks monitor.

23

Then it was all quiet.

24

I'm on the way to Brandenburg Penitentiary now, for premeditated murder.

25

That's my life. I'm eighteen. Time for bed.

Note: Told in the basement holding facility of the county prison in Weimar, Germany, April 1980.