

T
TAU

by

Simon Meyborg

BLACK.

The sound of a house at night: wood settling. Wind in a chimney. Very far off: a dog.

1 **INT. HIDEOUT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN**

1

Floorboards, very close. A strip of light lies on them and does not tremble.

A CHILD'S HAND comes into the frame. In it, small, wooden: a SPOOL OF THREAD. The hand sets it on the floorboards and gives it a push. It rolls into the strip of light, a length of thread trailing behind it, and comes to rest. In the light.

We are at floor level, under a table. Of the world there are only undersides: chair legs. The hem of a curtain. A kerosene lamp standing on the floor, throwing a yellow circle. In the circle, among the things: a small glass vial with a beautiful stopper.

Two voices whispering, a woman, a man. No words, only sound – the sound of people who have been speaking softly for years and are good at it.

Then, for the length of a breath, the woman's whisper becomes speech:

MOTHER (O.S.)
(whispering)
... high above everything, a place.
You take the path that turns...

The hand takes the spool back. Pushes it again. It rolls.

A KNOCK.

The spool rolls to a stop. The whispering stops.

A bolt. A door opens.

FATHER (O.S.)
(loud – loud for the first
time)
... !

NOTE ON SOUND: The father has seen who is standing there, and the first moment is a good one: he says a single word – a name. It does not sound like fear. It sounds like recognition, almost like joy that ought to know better. The word is spoken, not mumbled; but room, furniture, and heartbeat lie in between: it does not come through. Not on first viewing, not on the second. Only in the night's third return (scene 129) does it become almost speech – two syllables.

A man's legs in the doorframe: work boots, wet pant cuffs that stop dripping. A voice — too deep to hold words — breaks. Starts over. Breaks.

Then an arm reaches into the light of the lamp. In the hand: a gun. Above the wrist, where the sleeve slides back, a dark mark on the skin. Small. Shaped like the shadowy head of a horse.

The mark fills the frame. Nothing else is left.

The first SHOT: only a flinch of the light and a fall — something comes down on the floorboards, heavy, and stays.

The frame stays where it is. Down here.

At the second, something throws itself in between — a skirt, a familiar fabric, it takes the whole frame. The floor shakes. Once. Then the fabric lies on the floorboards, a hand's width away, and doesn't move.

Then the world stands still. The boots stay. Longer than boots are allowed to stay. A sound, maybe a whimper.

Then they're gone.

The lamp goes on burning. The yellow circle. The vial is still standing. Beside it, in the light: the spool. The child's hand doesn't come back into the frame.

BLACK.

TITLE: **τ** (the greek letter tau)

HARD CUT:

2 INT. DORMITORY, THE HOME — PRE-DAWN — THE CHILDREN

2

A face, fourteen years old, awake. ANNA.

No title card. No transition.

A dormitory, thirty beds. All the sleepers about the same age, fourteen, fifteen — as if someone had locked up an entire school and forgotten the grades before and after.

Anna lies still, eyes open, and listens to the house:

A floorboard creaks, far off. Her eyes go with it. A key, two doors down. Her eyes go with it. A cough, a second one — she knows before we do which bed the third will come from.

3 **EXT. YARD, THE HOME / SKY - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

3

A SIREN. Doors slam, thirty children run out into the yard as if they had never done anything else.

In the sky: a helicopter drops padded crates. The DROPS.

The crates hit. The children get there first, open, sort, carry – a well-drilled system with rules nobody explains.

The GROWN-UPS arrive last: few, gray, thin, all in long sleeves, despite the sun.

4 **EXT./INT. YARD / STOREROOM - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

4

The storeroom: shelves with a few Drops rations, two lists on a nail.

Two children set down the last two of the ten crates. A HOUSEFATHER (50s, fleshy face, quick hands) counts them off with his chin. He eyes the children, arrogant and contemptuous.

On one crate, stuck to the underside: a SLIP OF PAPER. Cleanly printed, from over there – a leftover from the packing that nobody over there bothered to remove. Beneath symbols that are nobody's business here, a number:

16

The housefather sees the slip. Tears it off in passing, without breaking stride, and makes it vanish into his pocket. Quick hands.

Anna sees it.

5 **EXT. YARD, THE HOME - LATER - THE CHILDREN**

5

At the edge of the yard. A BOY plants himself in front of Anna, half a loaf of bread in his hand. He holds it out, half offer, half question.

BOY

The sugar.

Anna looks at the bread. Then at him.

ANNA

Room behind the coal chute. Third crate. Under the empty ones.

The bread changes hands. The boy leaves.

Anna eats half. The other half she wraps up and hides – behind a loose brick.

6 INT. CLASSROOM, THE HOME - DAY - THE CHILDREN

6

Thirty bowed heads. A HOUSEMOTHER (60s, gray, long sleeves) dictates in a voice that has dictated this kind of thing too many times already:

HOUSEMOTHER

... destroyed by the terrorist
attack - comma - which the traitor
carried out against his own city -
period.

On the wall: a yellowed poster. A massive building, proud, cropped from below; in front of it, small, four people with flags. Three of the faces someone has scratched out in pencil - years ago, the gray has long since gone greasy. The fourth nobody has touched: a young woman, a child on her arm.

HOUSEMOTHER (CONT'D)

He evaded justice as a victim of
his own deed.

Anna takes it down neatly. Beautiful, even handwriting. Her face says nothing.

7 EXT. THE FIELDS - DAY - THE PARENTS

7

So much color that the eyes have to sort it first: fields to the horizon, stalks as tall as a man, in bloom. People in rows between them, bent over, with knives. Over everything a scent you'd swear you can see - as if the air stood a little denser above the rows.

CARTS roll along the track, piled high with flower heads, one behind the other, in behind a yard wall. Above the gate the Greek letter τ , in iron.

8 INT. STORE, CITY - DAY - THE PARENTS

8

A store window with a single display: a FLACON, smaller than a thumb, on velvet, under a glass dome. In front of it a child, nose to the glass. Behind the child, reflected in the window, the carts roll past - wagon after wagon for this one little bottle.

The child is pulled away. The flacon stays.

9 EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELD - DAY - THE PARENTS

9

At the edge of a row stands a young man in CITY SHOES, which are wrong here. PAUL JAHN, late twenties, a face that knows how to listen. A folder under his arm. He waits the way a man waits who knows he's in the way.

A FOREMAN comes down the row, in no hurry: LENZ, thirty, hands like root wood. He sizes Jahn up the way you size up a tool that's no good.

LENZ
You're the one they told me about.

JAHN
I was told you know the plant.

LENZ
Everyone here knows the plant.

JAHN
I was told: you know it with your hands. I only know it from papers.

Lenz looks at the folder. Then at Jahn again. He waits for the question everyone asks – when it blooms, how much it yields.

JAHN (CONT'D)
The analyses vary. Same variety, same field – and the values lie so far apart they could be two plants. I don't think the analyses are wrong.

(Beat)
I think it depends on when you cut.

Lenz says nothing for a while.

LENZ
Come on.

They walk the rows.

LENZ
The row by the ditch first. It gets the sun from five-thirty, by eight it's done. Cut it at noon and you're cutting straw.

(walking, without turning around)
This one here can take noon, because of the shade. That one over there can't. It holds it against you – not right away. Three days later the blossom is dull, and nobody knows what from.

JAHN
(writing as he walks)
And none of that is written down anywhere.

LENZ

Where would it be written. It's written in the rows.

(he stops, bends a flower head aside, lets it spring back)

Cut too early, it's water. Too late, it's hay. In between there's an hour. Some days, half of one.

JAHN

How do you tell?

LENZ

When the row smells like it's already been cut. Then.

Jahn takes notes. Then he stops writing and just listens.

LENZ (CONT'D)

The workers don't care. Neither does the factory. They pay by the kilo. A kilo at four is a kilo at two.

(Beat)

Except it isn't.

He stops. Breaks off a blossom — from a plant standing in the shade, still damp. Breaks off a second, a little farther on, out of the sun. Crushes one in his left palm, the other in his right. Holds both hands out to Jahn.

LENZ (CONT'D)

Don't smell. Feel.

Jahn lays two fingers in the left hand, then in the right. On one, a film that sticks. On the other, one that pulls like oil.

JAHN

It's — a difference.

LENZ

A difference.

(a short laugh)

That's day and night, Mr. Jahn.

That's half the plant.

Jahn looks at his fingers. To him it's subtle. To Lenz it's stark.

In montage we see the two of them move through the field: workers introduced, harvest work shown.

The sun is already somewhere else by the time they reach the end of the last row. Three hours.

By the track Lenz ties three small bundles: stalks, separated by the hour they were cut, each marked with a straw – one knot, two knots, three.

LENZ (CONT'D)
 Four o'clock. Seven o'clock. Noon.
 (he presses them into Jahn's
 hand)
 Don't cook them together.

Jahn takes them the way you take something worth more than it looks.

10 INT. DISTILLERY, STILL HOUSE – DAY – THE PARENTS

10

A long brick building, tall windows, copper. STILLS in a row, each with a pipe that winds; beneath them fire, tended. Men in aprons, a rhythm of hatches, stirring, waiting.

The MASTER, sixty, stands at the third still, looking into the sight glass. He isn't satisfied and doesn't know why.

Lenz comes in – here he isn't the foreman, here he's the nose. The master steps aside without a word. Lenz lifts the lid of the sample cock, holds his hand over the mash, fans once, draws the air in through his nose.

Once.

LENZ
 Too hot. By a hair.

MASTER
 The thermometer says –

LENZ
 The thermometer can't smell.

The master looks at Lenz. Then he turns the valve – a quarter turn. No more.

Two WORKERS at the next still have been watching. One nods to the other.

Lenz is already on his way out. At the door he wipes his hands on his pants.

11 INT. STOREROOM – DAY – THE CHILDREN

11

His jacket hangs over the edge of a crate while the housefather stacks. Anna walks past; once, her hand brushes the jacket. It looks like nothing.

12 INT. THE JANITOR'S ROOM - DAY - THE CHILDREN**12**

Anna walks down a corridor; from a small room comes a whimpering.

A narrow room, a bed, the smell of cold smoke. The JANITOR (old, gray) lies in the corner.

JANITOR

Water.

Anna doesn't hesitate long. Next to the janitor stands a small cup. She takes it, goes out, and comes back. She hands it to the sick man.

As he drinks, his sleeve slides back. A strip of skin above the wrist: something dark, several of them. We're too far away to make out shapes.

Anna isn't. Her gaze rests on the strip of skin, two seconds, three - then the cup is empty, the sleeve is down, her gaze is elsewhere.

She leaves without a word.

13 INT. NOOK UNDER THE STAIRS, THE HOME - DAY - THE CHILDREN**13**

Anna's spot: a nook under the stairs, with a view of two escape routes.

She has the dictation in front of her - and turns the sheet over. On the back she draws, from memory, with a hard pencil: a small mark. The one from the janitor's wrist.

She looks at it. She compares it to nothing we can see.

Then she crosses it out - one stroke, clean, final.

Then we see THE NOTEBOOK whole: a thick, hand-bound thing made of other people's paper - sheets printed on one side, dictations, forms, all written on from the back. Page after page of small marks, every one crossed out.

At the very front a first page, older than everything else, worn soft at the edge.

Anna leafs past it without opening it.

14 EXT. HOME ADMINISTRATION, WINDOW - EVENING - THE CHILDREN**14**

Anna walks past the open window of the administration office - for a moment there's a slip of paper in her hand, then there isn't. You can see it. You don't have to.

15 **INT. DORMITORY — NIGHT — THE CHILDREN**

15

Anna jolts out of sleep. Not a sound. Only her breath, too fast, and her hand already on the bed frame before she's awake.

We don't see the dream.

She lies back, stares into the dark. Then her lips begin to move — soundless, practiced. We hear scraps, less than a whisper:

ANNA
(barely audible)
... high above everything ... the
whole city ... and in the evening
comes the —

She falters.

She starts over, reaches the same spot, falters.

Then, instead of going on, she begins to count. Her lips form numbers, soundlessly, one after another, the way other people count sheep.

That's how she falls asleep.

16 **INT. KITCHEN, KESSLER HOUSE — EVENING — THE PARENTS**

16

A kitchen too small for the people in it. Twelve, fourteen people around a table for six, on chairs, on the bench, on the windowsill. Bread, sausage, a pitcher making the rounds.

RUTH, broad-built, hair pinned up, stands at the stove and laughs — and you can hear it two houses down. A child, ANTON, six months old, sleeps through all of it in the next room.

Jahn sits at the end of the table, where you put guests you don't know yet. He has pushed the city shoes under his chair.

Lenz is telling a story. A bit about the master and the apprentice he once was — he plays both: the master with his shoulders hunched up, the apprentice with big eyes.

LENZ
(shoulders up, the master's
official tone)
"The heads go out. They make you
blind."
(eyes wide — now he's the
apprentice, sixteen)
"And what do I do with the tails,
master?"

(MORE)

LENZ (CONT'D)
 (shoulders)
 "Out too. They make you stupid."

RUTH
 (from the stove; she knows
 the bit, she feeds him the
 cue)
 And the part in between?

LENZ
 (shoulders, dead serious)
 "The part in between makes you
 rich."
 (eyes)
 "Who, master? Who?"
 (shoulders, a look down at
 the apprentice)
 "Well. Looks like somebody's been
 sneaking sips of the tails."

The table laughs. Ruth laughs loudest.

Jahn laughs longest. And most awkwardly — a beat too late, as if he'd had to work out the punchline first. Ruth sees it. She likes it.

RUTH
 He laughs like someone who's still
 learning.

LENZ
 He learns fast. He listened for
 three hours today without once
 saying what he knows.

RUTH
 (to Jahn)
 Then you're the first.

The pitcher reaches Lenz. He drinks. Sets it down. And says it in passing, between two sips, to nobody:

LENZ
 Really, the fields belong to the
 ones who know them.

He goes on drinking. At the table somebody is already talking about something else.

Only Jahn sets his glass down.

He says nothing. He looks at Lenz, who has already forgotten it. And you can watch a sentence find a place inside a man that it will never give up again.

17 INT. JAHN'S LABORATORY — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

17

No institute. A back room with shelves, glass, a small kettle on a burner. On the wall, sheets with curves, orderly. On the table the three bundles: one knot, two knots, three.

Jahn works the way he always works: thoroughly, without hurry. He puts the one-knot bundle into a vessel, seals it airtight — the routine of the scent kitchen, everyone here cooks the plant this way — and sets it on the burner. Notes the time.

LATER. The kettle is off the fire. Jahn lifts the lid, lets the vapors clear, waits. Then he reaches in, bare-handed, for the stalks, half cooled —

A SHOCK.

Small. Sharp. Like a fence in a pasture.

He yanks his hand back. Looks at the hand. Looks at the vessel. Nothing's burning, nothing's smoking. A pot of plants.

He reaches in again. The shock.

And again. On purpose this time, with one finger, slowly — and it comes, every time, out of the stalks themselves.

JAHN
(quietly)
What the hell.

He stands in front of the pot a long time. Then he takes the three-knot bundle — noon — and sets it going: same vessel, same fire, same time.

LATER. The noon stalks. He reaches in.

Nothing.

He looks over at the three bundles. One knot. Four o'clock.

18 INT. JAHN'S LABORATORY — DAYS LATER — THE PARENTS

18

Two wires on a stalk, a jar with a solution, a strip of copper. Behind them, on the wires: a LAMP, small, unscrewed from a bicycle headlight.

Jahn closes the circuit.

The lamp flickers.

And holds.

He sits in front of it and doesn't move. A tiny light in a back room, fed by a flower. He marvels.

19 INT. CORRIDOR, THE HOME - DAY - THE CHILDREN

19

Anna walks down the corridor - and stops. In front of her stands a man she didn't hear coming.

THE PENCIL (50s, long, thin, gray - the children's nickname explains itself).

Without a word he holds out a stack of paper to her. Old paper, printed on one side, neatly bundled.

Anna takes it.

He walks on as if nothing had happened.

20 EXT. YARD, THE HOME - DAY - THE CHILDREN

20

The HOUSEMOTHER comes stomping fast toward the HOUSEFATHER.

HOUSEMOTHER

Hey!

She holds his list in one hand and waves the HOUSEFATHER over. In the other: the slip with the 16.

The HOUSEFATHER understands at once.

The children sense something's rotten and gather around the two of them.

She isn't loud. She just reads it out.

HOUSEMOTHER

It says here: sixteen apiece.

(Beat)

There were ten crates.

(she raises the list)

Your list says: a hundred and fifty. Always a hundred and fifty.

The children say nothing. Thirty pairs of eyes do the math. It isn't hard math - and it runs itself backward through the years.

HOUSEFATHER

Fifteen. There were always fifteen in there. Always. Ask - ask anyone you want -

(faster)

They print it wrong. What do they know, out there - there were spoiled ones in there, I took those out, that's not on there -

(MORE)

HOUSEFATHER (CONT'D)

Who —

He breaks off.

The silence of thirty children is not a quiet sound.

HOUSEMOTHER

(to all of them)

To your places. All of you.

Nobody goes. Not hostile. Just: nobody goes.

The housemother looks from the children to the papers in her hand. She is the only one who understands at once what has just come to an end here.

Anna stands nearby. She watches.

21 **INT. THE LITTLE ONES' DORMITORY — EVENING — THE CHILDREN** 21

Five LITTLE ONES (the youngest: 3, 7, 10, 12, and 12) crowded onto one bed.

Anna stands in the aisle between the beds. And does the housefather:

The walk — the arrogant, contemptuous look. Then the pious face, the glance upward when he lies.

Soundless. Exact. Devastating.

The little ones laugh. First one, then all of them — the smothered, snorting laughter of children who know they could be heard.

Anna doesn't laugh. She does a second round: the thief sliding a ration into his sleeve while gazing piously upward. The little ones nearly shriek.

At the door, in the dark of the corridor, stands one of the BIG ONES, watching. He doesn't laugh.

22 **EXT. YARD, THE HOME — MORNING — THE CHILDREN** 22

At the food line a BIG ONE reaches across the table and takes what isn't his. The THIEVING HOUSEFATHER holds on to the crate — two seconds, then the boy tears it out of his hands, and the grown-up falls. Too easily. Frighteningly easily.

After that it goes fast: crates changing owners; a door kicked off its hinges; children beating on houseparents, other houseparents trying to flee. Somewhere something small is burning, and nobody puts it out.

Fourteen-year-olds aren't children you can stop. The old ones have no strength.

Anna leads nothing. She stands in the smoke at the edge of the yard, the notebook already under her arm, and watches – not triumphant, not frightened. Keeping the books.

23 **EXT. GATE, THE HOME – DAY – THE CHILDREN**

23

The gate stands open. Nobody guards it anymore.

Anna walks through, without running. The notebook under one arm, the bundle with the half ration under the other.

In the doorway of the side wing – ARCHIVE above the door, in old paint – stands the Pencil, watching her go.

He doesn't raise his voice. He doesn't raise anything at all. He just stands so that she knows he has seen her.

Beyond the gate: the city. Gray, in tiers.

She walks in.

24 **INT. HALL – EVENING – THE PARENTS**

24

A hall, half full: chairs in rows, a podium, a glass of water. Up front a banner, hand-painted. The audience: field workers, tradesmen, a few curious people from the city, hats on their knees.

Jahn is speaking. In public for the first time – you can tell by the hands, which don't know where to go yet. But he speaks well. Too well, by a shade: the sentences are built, every one of them carries.

JAHN

– and I tell you: this plant can do more than smell sweet. It can shine. I've seen it, in a back room, with a lamp off a bicycle. Picture that lamp a thousand times over. A city that draws its light from its own fields –

(he raises a hand, a little too solemnly)

– a city that would no longer have to belong to anyone. That belongs to itself. Like a man who for the first time stands upright –

Right into the middle of it, someone LAUGHS.

A woman, fifth row. Loud, short, involuntary – the laugh of someone who has heard an unintended joke that everyone else swallowed reverently.

HELENE, late twenties, an alert mouth. She claps a hand over it. Too late.

Jahn loses the thread. Two seconds of silence in the hall. He looks over at her. She looks back, not embarrassed – more like: apologetic, but not sorry.

And Jahn finds the thread again. Differently. Simpler.

JAHN (CONT'D)

I mean: light. For everyone. Out of what grows here.

(Beat)

That's all.

He sits down. The applause is more honest than what he would have gotten for the sentence about the upright man.

LATER, AT THE EXIT. People stream out. Jahn stands at the podium, packing up papers he didn't need. Then he sees her, at the door – on her way out, coat already half on.

He leaves the papers and goes after her. Not the other way around.

JAHN (CONT'D)

You laughed.

HELENE

You said "upright." In front of a roomful of proud field workers who spend all day bent over.

JAHN

(after a second)

That was – not good.

HELENE

That was funny. The rest was good.

She buttons her coat. He searches for something to say and finds only:

JAHN

Will you come again?

HELENE

If you say something funny again.

She goes. He stays standing at the door.

25

INT. CLASSROOM, SCHOOL — DAY — THE PARENTS

25

Thirty children, quiet. Not the quiet of fear — the quiet of listening. Up front Helene, sitting on the edge of the desk, no book in her hand.

HELENE

— and the snow lay up to the window, and the father was in the village and wasn't coming back, not tonight. And the boy was alone in the cabin. And then he heard it. At the door. From outside.

(she drags her fingernails
along the edge of the desk,
slowly)

Scratching. Quiet at first. Then harder. And then something breathed through the crack under the door.

(Beat)

And the boy knew what a wolf is.
And he knew: the bolt is old. And
he braced his back against the door
—

She stops. Thirty faces wait. She makes them wait exactly as long as it can be done.

HELENE (CONT'D)

— and the door held. All night
long.

An exhale in the room, thirty times over.

In the door to the corridor, half in the frame, stands Jahn. He came with a pretext — a note in his hand, something to do with the Movement — and has forgotten the pretext. He listens like the children.

Helene sees him. She doesn't break off.

HELENE (CONT'D)

And behind the door?

A CHILD

(blurting it out)

The wolf!

HELENE

No wolf. His father.

The bell rings; the children get up and run out of the room.

HELENE (CONT'D)

White as chalk, and cold.
(MORE)

HELENE (CONT'D)
 (she shakes her head, laughs)
 So we did finish on time after all.

The last child runs past Jahn. Helene wipes the board.

JAHN
 Interesting story... Maybe a touch
 too dark?

HELENE
 I have to like it too.

JAHN
 I tell a thousand people my story.
 I don't get thirty who hang on it
 like that.

HELENE
 Mine are seven. They listen if
 there's a door in it.
 (she looks at him)
 Put a door in.

JAHN
 In a speech about energy?

HELENE
 In everything.

She hangs up the sponge. He still has the note in his hand and
 still doesn't know what's on it.

26 **INT. JAHN'S LABORATORY — EVENING — THE PARENTS**

26

The back room. Shelves, glass, the sheets with the curves. On
 the table, under a cloth: something he doesn't dare announce.

Helene stands in the doorway, coat still on. She's here for the
 first time; you can tell by the way she looks at everything.

HELENE
 So this is it.

JAHN
 This is it.

HELENE
 I'd pictured more smoke. And a
 hunchbacked assistant.

JAHN
 He's off today.

She laughs. He takes the cloth off the setup: the stalk in the jar, two wires, a strip of copper. The little lamp from the bicycle headlight.

HELENE

That's it?

JAHN

That's it.

HELENE

It's smaller than the way you tell it.

JAHN

Everything is smaller than the way I tell it. That's why people come.

(Beat)

Would you like to -?

She would. He shows her where the wires go - her hands, his hands; it takes a moment longer than necessary, and neither of them hurries it.

Then she closes the circuit.

The lamp flickers. And holds.

Helene says nothing. She, who has something to say about everything.

Jahn isn't looking at the lamp. He's looking at her. Then he puts out the light in the room, so that only the lamp burns.

HELENE

(quietly)

And that comes out of the flower.

JAHN

Out of the flower.

HELENE

Why are you showing me this?

JAHN

Because you laugh when I exaggerate.
I wanted to have one thing you wouldn't laugh at.

The little light burns between them.

Then the stalk gives up. The light grows weaker, quite calmly - and goes out.

It's dark. Neither of them turns on a light.

HELENE

You don't exaggerate at all.

JAHN

Not here.

It stays quiet in the dark room. Neither of them looks for the door.

27 **EXT. STREETS - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

27

The city by day: emptier than a city is allowed to be, and not empty enough to be dead.

Anna walks - and learns.

At a corner: a CHALK X, hip-high, retraced many times. Ahead of Anna a shrouded FIGURE with a bucket turns off without looking at the X. Anna turns off too, behind it.

A well with a bucket on it, upside down. The figure doesn't draw water here; it walks two streets on to a well without a bucket. Anna notes both.

Doors with signs hanging on them - on the post, at hand height: a strip of cloth, a piece of tin, once a child's shoe.

You pass these doors on the other side of the street. Anna walks on the other side of the street.

Nobody explains anything. Anna asks nothing. We learn the way she learns: by watching.

28 **EXT. BLANK WALL - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

28

A windowless wall, six stories high. On it, huge and faded: a BILLBOARD.

A glass flacon, perfect in form. A flower, painted like a promise. And a sign, curved like a signature - the Greek letter: τ. Beneath it, in elegant lettering: TAU.

Across it, in tar, in letters that dripped as they were written:

CAN YOU STILL SMELL IT?

Anna walks past without reading.

29

EXT./INT. OLD DISTILLERY - DAY - THE CHILDREN

29

A long brick building behind a yard wall, dead chimneys. Above the gate, in old paint, a remnant of the curved sign: T.

Anna climbs in through a window that isn't one anymore.

Inside: gutted halls. What was wood has been burned for heat; what was metal has been built into something else. The city has eaten this house like all the others.

Anna works her way through the rubble. At a dead machine she finds what she needs: wire, spring-hard, as long as her arm. She coils it up.

Then, at the end of a corridor: a door that is still a door.

It opens without a sound.

Behind it: DRUMS.

Two dozen, lined up along the wall, skinned and taut, the heads dull with grease. No dust. Dust lies over this whole city - not here.

Anna stands in the doorway and touches nothing. Her gaze does what her gaze always does: count, file away.

She pulls the door shut, as quietly as you shut doors in other people's houses.

On the way back, across the yard: the YARD WALL. Names, written in chalk, one beneath the other - some weathered, some fresh.

Anna walks past without reading.

30

EXT. WASTELAND - DAY - THE CHILDREN

30

Anna, motionless behind a remnant of wall, a wire snare in her hand, her eyes on a PIGEON pecking among the rubble.

She throws. Too late -

Something yellow is faster. A DOG, thin, yellow, takes the pigeon in mid-leap, lands, stands.

He doesn't eat. He looks at Anna, the pigeon in his mouth.

Anna looks at the dog. And you can watch her do the math - it's the same face as with the sugar, the thief, the lists: meat for two days. Or that - what he just did - every day.

She crouches down. Waits. The dog comes, in a wide arc, and doesn't put the pigeon down - but he lets Anna lay her hand on it.

She shares. Half, half. He eats his at once. She wraps hers up.
The dog stays.

31 EXT. ALCOVE BETWEEN TWO HOUSES – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN 31

Anna sleeps sitting up, her back against the wall. The dog lies behind her, a warm half-circle around her back.

Half asleep, the dog lays his head on her leg.

Anna's hand is in his fur before she notices. For a moment her face is fourteen years old and nothing else – no bookkeeping, no math.

She notices. Starts. Pulls her hand away.

The dog lifts his head, looks at her.

She puts her hand back.

32 EXT. ALCOVE BETWEEN TWO HOUSES – MORNING – THE CHILDREN 32

The smell wakes her before the light does. The dog is gone.

At the mouth of the alcove, one step from her feet: human waste. Fresh. Somebody was here in the night, that close.

Anna gets up, the bundle already in her hand. The disgust is one thing.

The other: she heard nothing. She, who in the Home heard every key two doors away, slept through somebody coming within a step of her.

Down here you sleep like a thing left by the road.

Her gaze goes up, along the facades.

The dog comes around the corner with a rat in his mouth.

33 EXT. MARKET SQUARE – DAY – THE PARENTS 33

A gathering bigger than the hall: the square full, people on steps and walls. Up front Jahn on a crate; the voice carries now.

Beside him, half a step back, stands Lenz. He gives no speech. He stands there, with the hands people know, in the shirt people know – and his standing there is the speech: an educated man preaching common ownership is suspect. A field worker standing next to him makes it true.

JAHN

People ask me: who is this going to belong to, when it comes — the light, the Works, the whole new life? And I listed it off like the educated man I am: to the city. To the Movement. To the cooperative.

(he lets it go quiet)

All correct. All too small.

(Beat)

I walked the fields with a man who knows them. Who smells a row and tells you what the still will do tomorrow. Don't ask him for papers — he has none. He has it in his hands.

(Beat)

And so I say it the way one of you said it, at a kitchen table, and he doesn't even remember it was him:

(Beat)

The fields belong to the ones who know them.

The sentence goes across the square like a wind. You can see it arrive: heads lifting; a man repeating it to his neighbor; a woman nodding as if she had always known it.

Lenz, beside Jahn, doesn't move a muscle. Only his hands, at the seams of his pants, close once and open again.

Nobody on the square knows whose sentence it is. He himself didn't know until just now that he had said it.

34

INT. KITCHEN, KESSLER HOUSE — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

34

The same kitchen, emptier now — just the four of them: Jahn, Lenz, Ruth. And Helene. Ruth has pressed a dish towel into her hand instead of offering her the chair at the end of the table; the two women stand at the sink, backs to the men, drying dishes. Papers on the table, a pitcher, the remains of the evening.

Jahn rehearses. He stands at the window and speaks a paragraph to no audience, and Lenz sits beside him like a prompter in the box.

JAHN

— and when they ask who's going to pay for it, I say: the same people who have paid for it so far. Only this time they —

LENZ
 (cutting in, half aloud)
 - get something for it.

JAHN
 - this time they receive something
 for it.

LENZ
 Get. "Receive" is city hall.

JAHN
 Get.
 (he tries it)
 Only this time they get something
 for it.

Ruth laughs. Not at the line - at the two of them. Helene
 laughs with her. At the same spot.

RUTH
 (to Helene, without turning
 around)
 He says it like he wrote it down.

HELENE
 He did write it down. I've seen it.
 With underlines.

LENZ
 I just told it to him.

Jahn starts over. Helene comes from the sink, the pitcher in
 her hand, and passes behind him on her way to the table - and
 kisses him on the temple as she goes by, without slowing down.

HELENE
 You're doing great.

He keeps talking. And ruins the line a third time, more
 thoroughly than before. Ruth laughs anyway. On principle.

Lenz refills the glasses.

JAHN
 (at the window, back in his
 speech voice)
 And then the ending.

LENZ
 You've got the ending.

JAHN
 (he says it anyway; for the
 first time tonight every
 word sits)
 The fields belong to the ones who
 know them.

For a moment the kitchen is quiet.

On the table, among the papers, lies the same sentence in Jahn's handwriting, underlined. Lenz looks at it briefly. Then he lays a sheet over it.

35 **EXT. CHURCH — DAY — THE PARENTS**

35

The bells. The door opens — and the first thing out isn't the bride and groom, it's the noise coming in: on the square in front of the church stands a crowd nobody invited.

JAHN and HELENE on the top step. She in a light dress, hair done simply; he in the only good suit he owns. For one breath they stand alone.

Then the square starts up. Cheering, hats, raised arms. Someone shouts his name; then everyone does. It doesn't sound like a wedding. It sounds like the market square.

Blossoms fly — Tau blossoms, whole handfuls, wherever so many came from. They catch in hair, on shoulders, in Helene's bouquet.

The crowd comes up the steps. Hands upon hands. Jahn shakes them the way he has learned: look each one in the face, give each one a second. He has gotten good at it. He doesn't notice that he's working.

And the crowd pushes in between the two of them. Half a step at first. Then two. Then Helene is standing at the railing with her bouquet, watching her own wedding like someone who happened to be passing by. Beside her, strangers congratulate each other.

From where she stands it looks like this: a man covered in blossoms, shaking hands at his own wedding as if at a rally.

Helene laughs.

Loud, short, involuntary. The same laugh as back then in the hall, fifth row.

And as back then: Jahn hears it. Through the cheering, through the names, through the hands. He lifts his head, finds her at the railing — and lets go of a hand in mid-shake.

He goes through the crowd to her. This time he doesn't wait for the way to clear. He makes it himself.

JAHN
(reaching her, out of breath)
You laughed.

HELENE
You just can't help yourself.

JAHN
Sorry.

HELENE
I'm not letting go of you again
today.

Helene gives him a big kiss.

The crowd cheers.

36 **EXT. CHURCH — DAY — THE CHILDREN**

36

Anna and the dog come to a church. The windows have been smashed in. She goes inside. The dog follows her.

37 **INT. CHURCH — DAY — THE CHILDREN**

37

The church: high, cold, still. The light falls through smashed-in, blind windows as if through milk.

Anna looks around, fascinated; she has never seen a room like this.

The pews are gone. In the dust, the pale rectangles where they stood — burned for heat, row after row. On the side walls, a confessional torn almost completely away.

On the altar lies a BICYCLE.

Scrap, gutted like the houses: the spokes harvested, the tires gone, the chain gone.

From the handlebar dangles the SPEEDOMETER, its cable still attached — a wire, hidden in a sheath.

Wire is wire. Anna takes the speedometer off and sets her knife to it: prying, twisting. The housing doesn't give. Not on the first try. Not on the second.

She pockets it, cable and all.

38

EXT./INT. ATTIC ABOVE A DEAD ALLEY - EVENING - THE CHILDREN

38

Anna climbs a facade nobody considers climbable anymore - drainpipe, ledge, window.

The attic: empty, dusty, high. Two ways out - the hatch to the alley, the skylight to the ridge. Anna checks both. Only then does she set down her bundle.

The notebook gets a hiding place: under a floorboard. The food gets another: behind the chimney flue, two rooms over.

In the corner lies something: a SPYGLASS. Small, brass, a dent in the tube - blind. Whoever looks through it sees milk. Deep inside the housing, something loose rattles.

Anna holds it to her eye.

Then she wraps it up and hides it - not with the ration, not with the notebook. A third hiding place. The best one.

She goes to the skylight, takes off her shoes, and studies the right one in the moonlight. The sole is slowly coming loose. Then she sets it aside, carefully.

She lies down and looks down into the alley. Whoever sleeps high hears the city from above.

The dog has found the stairs she didn't take. He lies down at the door as if that were his post.

39

EXT. WASHHOUSE - DAY - THE CHILDREN

39

A low building at the end of an alley, and it does something no other house in this city does: it breathes. Steam from every crack, from blind windows, out from under the door.

People with bundles go inside. Anna stands on the other side of the street and watches. Beside her, the dog. She takes him into a side alley and hides him there behind a few barrels. With her hand she tells him to stay, and puts down a piece of bread for him. Then she goes to the washhouse.

Baskets are stacked outside the door. Beside the door a RACK, roughly built, full of shoes - pair beside pair, of everyone inside. Nobody guards it.

Anna takes off her shoes and puts them with the rest. Her hand stays a moment on the right one, the one with the loose sole. Then she lets go.

She picks up a basket and goes in, barefoot.

40 INT. WASHHOUSE - DAY - THE CHILDREN

40

A single room, and the room is steam. Tubs, washboards, benches, gutters in the floor. At the far end of the room a low door, firelight behind it.

The door opens, and TWO MEN come in, between them a VAT on two poles, rags around the handles. The water steams. Behind them, for a moment: the FIRE ROOM - a blackened kettle, and beneath it the only fire in this city allowed to burn by day. It eats what the houses give up: chair legs, floorboards, a length of banister.

Hot water, in this city, exists exactly here. Nowhere else.

The men go along the tubs, topping up - one measure each.

The GROWN-UPS OF THE CITY, for the first time many at once. Many shrouded, long-sleeved, gray - the MARKED; they wash what a sleeve will give up: hands, face, the neck down to the collar. Others have stripped: bare arms, bare backs, skin in the steam.

And you see the order of the house, which nobody explains. Those who can, wash themselves. The weak are washed - an OLD WOMAN who can no longer lift her arms, a MAN as thin as his cane. VOLUNTEERS wash them. Nobody assigns them, they come on their own. The hot water belongs to the weak first; nobody explains that either.

Anna sets the basket down. And watches.

The steam veils and unveils, in waves: arms, wrists, the strip of skin between glove and sleeve.

Anna gets herself a rag. A bowl. The next time the vat comes past, she dips the bowl in like everyone else. It takes less than two minutes, then she's kneeling among the volunteers, washing whatever gets pushed her way - a hand, an arm, a back. A child who works is asked no questions here.

The old woman holds out her forearm to her. On the inside: a MARK. Anna washes over it, once, twice. It doesn't come off. She looks at it - exactly as long as a washerwoman would look. No longer.

She doesn't look at faces. Only at forearms. One after the other, tub by tub.

41 EXT./INT. WASHHOUSE - EVENING - THE CHILDREN

41

The dog lifts his head. Anna comes out of the washhouse. He runs to her and walks along at her side.

42 **EXT./INT. ATTIC ABOVE A DEAD ALLEY - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN**

42

Anna sits in front of a small fire that gives light; in front of her lies the dog. On a spit, a skinned rat.

Anna draws marks on paper from memory, studies them and compares them in her head, and crosses them out one after another.

She lays the notebook aside.

Anna looks at the dog; he looks up at her.

ANNA
Nothing again.

She takes the rat and cuts it up with an old knife, tosses a piece to the dog, and bites into her own share.

43 **INT. THE MAGNATE'S HOUSE, RECEPTION ROOM - DAY - THE PARENTS**

43

A room in which everything is old and everything is real: wood with centuries in it, carpets that swallow footsteps. No gold, anywhere. This wealth has nothing to prove.

On a low table, on silk: a FLACON. Tau. Set down as if in passing. Nothing here is in passing.

JAHN sits on the edge of an armchair you're meant to sink into.

Of the MAGNATE we see the hands first: they pour tea, calm, precise.

MAGNATE
I was told you don't drink tea with me.

JAHN
I'm here.

MAGNATE
That's what I said too.

He hands over the cup. Jahn takes it and sets it down without drinking.

MAGNATE (CONT'D)
You know, I know people well. My father had a steward, a gifted man. One year he promised a double harvest - new method, everything calculated, the numbers were even right. The city cheered him.
(MORE)

MAGNATE (CONT'D)

People celebrated in advance.

(Beat)

It turned out a good harvest. The best in years — just not double. So they smashed his windows. A man who had given them the best harvest in years. Not for what was missing, Mr. Jahn. For the hope.

(he sets down his cup)

Half the city is reciting your sentence. I'll keep it short, you're a busy man.

(Beat)

I'm not offering you money. You'd refuse, and we'd both have lost an evening. I'm offering you an institute, here on the campus. You do your research in peace, come back with solid results. With instruments this country doesn't have. Your name over the door.

(he smiles)

And one day, perhaps, my chair beside yours. Not the other way around.

JAHN

Thank you, I truly appreciate the offer, but I have to decline. We have the studies, a plan. Out here — I wouldn't know what there'd be to do.

The magnate waits. Listening costs him nothing.

JAHN (CONT'D)

A hundred kilos.

(he nods at the flacon)

A hundred kilos of harvest for that.

MAGNATE

(grinning)

Two hundred.

For a moment Jahn is thrown.

JAHN (CONT'D)

Out of the same — two hundred kilos, I make light for a street. For a whole winter. Your fields can do both. You have to see that.

MAGNATE

Oh, I see it.

He takes the flacon off the silk. Holds it up to the light – with two fingers, like something alive.

MAGNATE (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea what people are willing to pay for this little bottle?

He puts it back.

MAGNATE (CONT'D)

The three hundred kilos are not a mistake, Mr. Jahn. The three hundred kilos are the price. I'm afraid you're confusing added value with yield. You're offering to turn the rarest thing in the world into the most ordinary. I decline.

Jahn stands up.

JAHN

The fields can make light. Sooner or later someone will do it. With you or without you.

MAGNATE

(pleasantly)

Without me, nobody builds here. You know that.

Jahn says nothing.

He goes. The flacon stays on the silk.

The magnate is left alone with two full cups. Then he takes the flacon and folds the silk back around it, corner by corner, carefully – the way you wrap something that still has a journey ahead of it.

He smiles as he does it. It isn't a wicked smile. That's the worst part.

44 INT. HELENE'S APARTMENT – DAY – THE PARENTS

44

A room with books, a window onto the street, a table where grading gets done.

A knock at the door. Helene gets up and opens it.

HELENE
Hello?

COURIER
Package for you.

HELENE
(puzzled)
For me?

Helene looks at the address. It says Helene Jahn.

HELENE (CONT'D)
Thank you.

She closes the door, sets the package on the table, and studies it.

No sender. No card.

Helene opens it. Paper. Inside, a fine box with no lettering. Under that, silk, folded corner by corner.

Inside: the flacon. Tau. The rarest thing in the world, in her hand, smaller than a thumb.

She looks at it for a long time. She isn't quite sure where it could have come from.

She takes a small BOX from the shelf — tin, with a pattern worn smooth — and opens it. Inside: a few bills, rolled up; a thin chain, a ring; a little wooden horse, small enough to fit in a child's hand. She lays the flacon back into the silk, the silk on top into the box, and the box all the way at the back of the shelf, behind the books. The fine box goes in the trash.

Then she sits back down to the notebooks. It takes a while before she sees the first mistake again.

45 **INT. HELENE'S APARTMENT — DAY — THE PARENTS**

45

The room with the books — but the books are already in crates. Pale patches on the wall where pictures hung. On the table where the grading was done, a last stack of notebooks.

Jahn carries crates. He does it earnestly and a little wrong, like everything practical: too many books in one, too few in the next.

JAHN
(lifts, sets down again)
What's in there?

HELENE

Seven years of classes.

JAHN

What?

HELENE

My kids. Every notebook since I started.

JAHN

All of them?

HELENE

You wanted to carry.

He carries. In the stairwell you can hear him talking to someone who's congratulating him. Somebody's congratulating him everywhere these days.

Helene alone in the room. She clears the shelf, row by row – and then there stands the TIN BOX. All the way at the back, the worn pattern.

She pauses.

She doesn't open it. She glances at the door – Jahn's steps below, voices – then she lays the box in the open crate, all the way at the bottom, the books on top, the notebooks on top of those.

When Jahn comes back she's just closing the crate.

JAHN

And that one?

HELENE

From before. Nothing important.

He nods and carries it out.

LATER. The room is empty. Helene stands in it a moment longer. Light falls through the window onto the table where nobody grades anything anymore.

She takes the key from the hook and pulls the door shut behind her.

A square that was once a market and is one again – except that all the vendors are fourteen. Stalls made of door panels, tolls at the entrances, rituals nobody explains.

Anna wants through. Two GANG BOYS step into her path, casually, the way a door swings shut.

She gives way to the left – there's a third. To the right: a stall, a wall. It looks like chance and it's craft: three steps, and Anna stands in a corner from which the only way on is through the boys.

The dog beside her. Quiet, for now.

THE LEADER comes without hurry: fifteen, wiry. He sizes Anna up. The bundle. The notebook under her arm.

LEADER

What's that?

ANNA

Paper.

He holds out his hand. Anna gives him the notebook.

The leader leafs through it. Crossed-out marks, page after page. He glances at Anna – a look like a shrug: crazy, but worthless. He hands it back.

Then he nods to the boys. One reaches for Anna's bundle.

Under Anna's jacket, at the waistband: the old knife. Her hand is on it without our having seen it go there.

She does the math – faster than you can breathe; we only see it because we know this face by now: three in front of her, one beside, a wall at her back.

The hand comes out from under the jacket empty.

And then there's something YELLOW between Anna and the boys.

The dog. Low, the fur on his back a crest, teeth bared – and out of the thin body comes a sound nobody thought he had in him. The boy in front snatches his hand back. The dog snaps – air, close. A warning, not a wound.

The boys give way. All but one.

The leader has stayed where he is. He looks at the dog.

LEADER

He hunts.

It isn't a question. Anna doesn't answer. That's answer enough.

LEADER

The dog, then.

Anna looks at the dog.

The dog still stands between her and the boys. Ready. He's waiting for a sign from her – and whatever it says, he'll do it.

Anna does the math.

She raises her hand. Flat, calm, downward: stay.

The dog stays. A gang boy slips the rope over him, carefully, with respect for the teeth.

At the edge of the square, a boy sitting bent over a trap has lifted his head. The spring between his fingers goes still.

From the boy's point of view: Anna doesn't turn around. She walks through the entrance they clear for her now and grows smaller between the stalls.

The boy watches her go.

At one of the stalls she stops: dishes, harvested from dead houses – pots, spoons, a TIN CUP with a dented rim.

Anna unwraps her bread, breaks off half, and lays it on the door panel. The VENDOR (fourteen, like everyone here) looks at the bread, then at her. Then he takes it.

The cup disappears into Anna's bundle.

47 EXT. EDGE OF THE TURF – DAY – THE CHILDREN

47

Anna passes the stall of the boy who just watched her go. She looks at him:

A BIG BOY making himself small, bent over a trap.

The boy glances up at her; their eyes meet. Caught, he turns away and goes back to the trap – a bar, a spring, a mechanism he sets and releases with two fingers, sets and releases.

As she passes, he looks at her shoes.

JAKOB. But we don't know that yet.

48 EXT. WELL WITHOUT A BUCKET – DAY – THE CHILDREN

48

The good well, two streets past the one with the upside-down bucket.

Four of the MARKED stand in line, with cans and pitchers, at the distance this city keeps between everyone.

Anna joins the end of the line, her tin cup in her hand.

Then the line moves. Not forward – apart.

The last one steps aside. The woman in front of him too. One after another, without a word, without looking at Anna: an aisle of waiting people, and at the end of it the well.

Anna stands still. You can watch her looking for the price. She finds none.

At the winch her gaze catches: the handle new, the rope freshly spliced – wirework, neat as stitches. Two seconds, three.

She draws water, fills her cup, and holds the well bucket out to the first in line. He nods and takes it. She goes and drinks. Behind her the line closes again, as if nothing had happened.

49 **EXT. WASHHOUSE – DAY – THE CHILDREN**

49

The breathing house. The baskets outside the door.

Anna puts her shoes on the rack – without looking, with the grip of a habit – picks up a basket, and goes in.

The steam takes her, the way the house takes everyone.

50 **INT. ATTIC – EVENING – THE CHILDREN**

50

Anna comes "home" and sits down. She takes off her shoes. Stops.

The torn sole of the right one: mended. Neatly, with wire and a piece of rubber.

Anna looks at the sole for a long time. She doesn't know when it happened. Neither do we.

Her gaze goes to the door. To the empty spot where the dog used to lie.

For the first time since the Home she looks as if something had gotten past her.

51 **EXT. MARKET SQUARE – DAY – THE PARENTS**

51

The same square, but the crate has given way to a stage: boards, a railing, flags. On a board, large, a date. Beneath it: THE WORKS – CORNERSTONE.

A city SPEAKER, whom people know and don't like, addresses the crowd. Beside him sits Jahn, whom people know and do like, and

he isn't allowed to speak — he has spoken already, yesterday, the day before.

SPEAKER

— and who would have thought that our greatest son, of all people — yes, I'll say it: our greatest son — would not have to build his Works alone? That the city stands behind him, its citizens, its businesses —

Applause, steered. At the edge of the square: wagons bringing lumber. Already.

SPEAKER (CONT'D)

— and that the most generous hand in this city has opened without our having to ask? Ladies and gentlemen: we are building. Not in five years. Not in three. We are building now.

Applause, honest this time.

SPEAKER (CONT'D)

Faster, friends. The future doesn't wait.

Jahn applauds along. You can't see anything in his face. Only that he starts half a second later than everyone else.

52

INT. OFFICE OF THE MOVEMENT — DAY — THE PARENTS

52

A room full of paper. On the wall a PLAN of the Works — bigger than Jahn ever drew it; his own draft hangs next to it, smaller, in pencil. On the table newspapers: THE FUTURE DOESN'T WAIT. A photo of the magnate, smiling, beside a photo of Jahn, not smiling.

Jahn alone. He lays the two plans on top of each other, against the window. The big one swallows the small one whole.

A STAFFER, young, in the doorframe:

STAFFER

They're asking whether the date for the topping-out is set. The press wants —

JAHN

Which date?

STAFFER

The one on the board.

Jahn looks at the plan. Calculates. Says nothing. Then:

JAHN
Tell them it's set.

The staffer leaves. Jahn stays at the window, with two plans, only one of which still counts.

53 **INT. LABORATORY — DAY — THE PARENTS**

53

No institute. A converted storeroom: shelves, glass, two small kettles, on the wall a row of atomizers. On a shelf, in chalk: TAU. Beneath it stalks, bundled, sorted by harvest day.

On the wall a board: curves, data, orderly. All the curves flat.

THE ASSISTANT (twenties, quick, talks while he works) sets a new batch in the small kettle: pure Tau harvest. JAHN takes notes at the table. Two OTHERS weigh out.

ASSISTANT
Third row's done. If it keeps up
like this we'll be finished before
the rain, and then —

He opens a valve. A fine mist hangs in the backlight.

It smells good. Then it smells too good. Then sweet — and somehow wrong.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
— then tomorrow we can get the
fourth —

He drops. Mid-word, no knees, no grasping at air: like a light switched off.

For a second it's completely still. The mist hangs.

Then JAHN wrenches the window open. One word, more breath than voice:

JAHN
Out.

The others grab the assistant by the legs, by the jacket. The door stays open.

54 **EXT. YARD OUTSIDE THE LABORATORY — DAY — THE PARENTS**

54

The assistant lies in the yard, three faces above him. Long seconds.

Then he opens his eyes. And finishes the sentence:

ASSISTANT
— done.

He looks into the faces above him. He doesn't understand them.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
What?

For him, no time is missing.

One of the others laughs, thinly. It stops on its own.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
(sitting up)
What happened?

JAHN
You took a break.

It's built as a joke, and it works, more or less. The assistant grins crookedly. The others too.

Only Jahn goes back to the laboratory door and looks at the row of atomizers. Behind them, on the wall, the board with the curves. All flat.

He says nothing.

55 **INT. LABORATORY — EVENING — THE PARENTS**

55

The window is still open. The others have gone. The assistant is cleaning up; Jahn sits at the table, the lab book in front of him, open to today.

The line for the afternoon is still empty.

ASSISTANT
Want me to log it? I've got the
time, roughly —

JAHN
I'll do it.

He writes. The assistant looks over his shoulder — and reads, slowly, what's there:

ASSISTANT
"Batch seven, valve opened too far
by mistake. Work interrupted.
Ventilation improved."
(Beat)
That wasn't an interruption.

JAHN
It was a break.

He says it kindly. Exactly as kindly as in the afternoon.

ASSISTANT
Mr. Jahn —

JAHN
If this is in the paper tomorrow —
"Jahn knocks his own people out
cold with the stuff he wants to
hook up to the city's grid" — then
they build the Works anyway. Just
without us. Without the one man who
knows how strong the stuff is.
(he closes the book)
Now we know we have to ventilate.
So we ventilate. Nobody needs to
know more than that.

The assistant says nothing. He looks at Jahn the way you look
at someone you believe, and not quite.

ASSISTANT
And the curves?

JAHN
We measure again. With pure
harvest. Starting tomorrow.

The assistant nods. Takes his jacket and goes.

Jahn alone. He opens the book once more. Reads the line. Lets
it stand.

56

EXT. GANG TURF, WORKSHOP CORNER — DAY — THE CHILDREN

56

Anna comes back. Her sole has been mended, and she doesn't know
what it cost — an unpaid debt she can bear less than hunger.
The pretext: a rusty padlock without a key, which she lays on
the board in front of Jakob.

He takes it without asking where from, what for.

Anna waits for the question. For any question. None comes. She
sits down on a barrel that stands by his stall.

While he works, we see his place in the tribe:

A gang boy brings a cart with a broken axle and leaves it there
without a word. The leader picks up his trap, set, oiled. He
inspects the trap, tests it, makes a half turn, and gives Jakob
a respectful nod.

Jakob is the tolerated one, the one who gets things running. The only one, his whole bearing says, who was taken in here without a beating.

He wears a jacket that almost fits him. Almost – the way things almost fit that you grow into.

The lock springs open. He hands it to her, with the new key made of wire.

Anna lays half a pigeon on the board, wrapped – the toll you lay for work in this city.

Jakob looks at the little bundle. Then he pushes it back, with one finger, and goes on working.

57

EXT./INT. THE HOUSE WITH THE CHILD'S SHOE – DAY – THE CHILDREN

57

The door with the CHILD'S SHOE on the post. We know it. You walk on the other side of the street.

Anna stands on the other side of the street and watches. For a long time, the way she watches: on the chimney a bird's nest. The windows blind for years. No path in the rubble in front of the door.

She crosses the street. And goes in.

INSIDE: dust like snow. A living room nobody moved out of – it simply came to an end.

Anna works quietly and fast, with practiced hands: a candle stub. A piece of rubber. Matches, swollen, maybe still good. What burns and what mends. Everything else she leaves.

Then the second door.

A CHILD'S ROOM. A bed too small for anyone this city still has.

Anna studies the doorframe: HEIGHT MARKS, in pencil, one above the other, each year a little higher. She traces them with her fingers.

They stop.

Anna stands in the doorway and takes: nothing.

She pulls the door shut the way you shut doors behind which someone is sleeping.

OUTSIDE: Anna steps into the street. In passing, with a movement that looks like nothing, she straightens the shoe on the post, which was hanging crooked.

Then the street is empty. The shoe hangs straight.

58 **EXT. ALLEYS / WASTELAND - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

58

A beating in the air, still far off.

The city reacts before we understand: doors, footsteps, running – children in front, out of every alley in the same direction, the marked behind them, as fast as their legs will go. For the first time, the whole city runs.

Anna runs with them.

THE WASTELAND. The HELICOPTER: high, too high for faces. It circles once, drops – padded crates, tumbling – and banks away before the first one hits. No wave, no sign. Over there drops the way you feed something you don't want to touch.

The gang is there first – of course it's there first. But nobody grabs anything for himself. The boys open the crates, count, stack; the scramble becomes a handout, the running becomes a line.

The LEADER stands on a remnant of wall and conducts with his chin: those over there, open that one, you wait. At the market his gang takes a toll. Not here. What the sky drops belongs to everyone first.

One crate bursts on impact. CANS roll, the little ones chase them – one catches a can and lets it vanish into his jacket.

LEADER

(without raising his voice)

Back.

The boy puts the can on the stack. Nobody looks at him for it.

The marked arrive last – and don't leave empty-handed: things have been set aside for them, without anyone having said so.

Anna, too, gets her share, counted out, without a word – from the same boys who took her dog at the toll.

59 **EXT. GANG TURF, WORKSHOP CORNER - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

59

Anna comes. Jakob is waiting.

In front of him a board across two barrels, tools on it, and beside them, wrapped in a cloth: the speedometer from the church – the thing Anna couldn't get the wire out of.

Jakob unwraps it. Round, glass, a needle at zero. He hands it over with both hands, solemnly, like a medal.

JAKOB

Fixed.

Anna turns the thing over. No crack, no rust. And no bicycle, anywhere – there are no bicycles left in this city.

ANNA

It doesn't show anything.

JAKOB

(gravely)

Zero. Exactly right.

Anna looks at him for a long time.

Then she stands differently – chin up, a half turn, and pays him respect: the GANG LEADER, down to the millimeter. Soundless. Exact.

Jakob's laugh comes too late. Then it comes all the way – the whole body, a laugh that falls over. He's embarrassed at once, right in the middle of it, and keeps laughing.

Anna smiles a little. She pockets the speedometer.

She leaves. Jakob watches her go. Anna looks back and, smiling, shakes her head.

JAKOB

(calling after her)

What's your name?

She lifts the speedometer into the air.

ANNA

Anna!

Jakob looks lighter. Then he sorts tools.

60

INT. JAHN'S STUDY – NIGHT – THE PARENTS

60

A desk, a lamp, a window behind which the Works are growing – you can see the cranes as black strokes against a lighter sky.

On the desk two papers. On the left, a few weeks old, with pencil notes in the margin: the first report. You can read the heading if the camera gets close enough: TOO SOON. TOO BIG. On the right, fresh, in ink: the second.

Jahn is writing the second. We read along, in excerpts:

"...the effect of the vapors in open air is considerably stronger than assumed in the previous series (incident of the 14th, see appendix). Cause: pure early-hour harvest, where the studies were based on mixed day harvests..."

He pauses. Writes on:

"...from this follows a second consequence. With pure harvest the pressure in the boiler rises above the values determined for mixtures..."

He looks up. To the window. To the cranes.

Then he gets up, goes to the shelf, pulls out a binder: PRESSURE VESSEL – INSPECTION. Leafs through it. A value, underlined, with a safety margin that was once generous.

He calculates in the margin. Crosses out. Calculates again. The number that remains isn't bad. It just isn't generous anymore.

He sits down. Writes the last paragraph:

"...the boiler is designed for an overpressure that covers the values to be expected. A modification is no longer possible at the current stage of construction without delaying completion by several months. The design will ..."

He falters for a moment.

"hold."

He reads the last paragraph through once more. The pen wavers, hesitant, over the paper.

He signs.

Then he puts the first report in the drawer – not in the wastebasket, in the drawer – and closes it.

The second he takes with him.

61 INT. JAHN AND HELENE'S APARTMENT – LATER THAT NIGHT – THE PARENTS

61

Helene is asleep. On the nightstand beside her: a stack of notebooks, graded. Jahn comes in quietly, lays the report on his table by the window, face down.

He looks over at her. She doesn't wake up. She won't read it – he won't give it to her, and she won't ask; she has other notebooks.

He puts out the light.

62 INT. THE MAGNATE'S HOUSE, STUDY – DAY – THE PARENTS

62

Not the reception room. A smaller one, without silk: a desk, a window, a man at work. We see him from behind – the immaculate back, the hands closing a folder.

A VISITOR stands in front of the desk. We see only half of him, a coat, a hat in his hand. No face we need.

VISITOR
— in the laboratory. Two weeks ago.
One of his people fell over. They
didn't report it.

MAGNATE
Fell over.

VISITOR
Keeled over. During a test. He got
up again. They say they ventilate
more now.

A pause. The hands set the folder aside.

MAGNATE
Anything else?

VISITOR
Nothing else. They're measuring
again.

MAGNATE
(after a while)
A man who keels over and gets up
again.

It sounds almost amused.

MAGNATE (CONT'D)
Thank you. That's all.

The visitor leaves. The magnate sits still for a moment. Then he pulls over another folder: CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE. Leafs to the topping-out. Takes a pen.

And doesn't move the date back. He moves it forward. One week.

A man who keels over and gets up again — that is the size of damage he's reckoning with. A stuttering Works, an embarrassed Movement, a politician who got his math wrong. No more than that.

The workshop corner. On the board, half taken apart: the SPYGLASS — Anna's spyglass, at last a real defect. Lenses, rings, the empty tube: parts in a row only Jakob can read.

Jakob works. Anna sits on the second barrel, in a waiting position that stopped being one long ago.

Then Jakob looks up – not at Anna: at the light. The height of the sun above the roofs.

And packs up. Without a word, hurried, with an order that knows no haste and is haste all the same: parts into the cloth, cloth under his arm. He takes everything with him.

ANNA

Where are you going?

JAKOB

Gotta go.

No invitation. No look back.

The boy has a clock in his body.

Anna stays seated a moment, thinking it over. Then she follows him.

64 **EXT. ALLEYS – LATE AFTERNOON – THE CHILDREN**

64

Through alleys she doesn't know. Jakob walks fast and as a matter of course; Anna keeps her distance like an investigator.

A neighborhood, narrower, lower. Clotheslines without laundry. The door signs hang closer together here – a strip of cloth, a piece of tin, one every few houses.

Then a door. Jakob goes in without closing it and climbs the stairs.

Anna stops. At the threshold. Then she follows him up.

65 **INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT – LATE AFTERNOON – THE CHILDREN**

65

From the door, with Anna: a room that is workshop and home at once. Tools on the wall, neat. A bed by the window.

In the bed lies a WOMAN. RUTH (now around 50, built broad and made narrow by the illness; a face that has laughed a lot, and you can still see it).

Jakob already sits at her bed, a bowl of water beside him, washing her arms.

The arms are covered in marks. Many, old and new. Jakob washes them with the offhandedness of a boy who has never known anything else.

Anna, in the doorway, watches.

Ruth turns her head. Sees Anna. Seconds.

RUTH

In or out. But don't stand around
in the light - I don't have much of
it left.

She steps across the threshold.

Ruth watches Jakob wring out the rag.

RUTH

He washes me every day. I tell him:
boy, save yourself the trouble, the
worms will take me dirty.

(pause)

But no. Jakob wants it done right.

(to Anna, confiding)

He didn't get that from me.

Anna laughs. Short, through the nose, against her will - we
don't know this laugh yet, it's as new as the room.

Jakob gets up, puts the bowl away, and goes out.

OUTSIDE, in front of the door: Jakob breathes. Once, twice,
three times. Deep. Then he goes back in.

66

INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN

66

The spyglass, half reassembled, on the workbench. It has gotten
late; the kerosene burns low.

Nobody sends Anna away.

She sits in the corner by the door. Ruth sleeps. Jakob puts
away tools that are put away.

In the other corner: a COT. Stretched smooth, unused. A bed a
man should be lying on who isn't there. Beside it, on the
floor: a folded blanket, a pillow on top - Jakob's place, a
hand's width from the empty bed. Anna sees it. Catalogs it.
Doesn't ask.

LATER: Anna, half asleep, on a blanket on the floor.

Next door, behind the thin wall: sounds. An awl through
leather. Thread being pulled through. Even, practiced.

Anna falls asleep before she can decide what it is.

IN THE MORNING: The cot is as smooth as it was in the evening.
On the workbench lies the spyglass. Finished. Nobody's there
who could have been the one.

67

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE OF THE WORKS — DAY — THE PARENTS

67

The shell, vast against the sky: concrete, steel, the skeleton of a hall in whose middle something round is growing — the boiler, still open, like an eye without a lid.

Topping-out. A wreath on the highest girder, flags, a band playing too loud. The drums we already know. Workers with beer mugs. The Movement with banners. The city, watching.

Above the main gate LETTERS are being mounted, each three meters high, one after the other, on ropes:

J — A — H — N

Then a gap. Then: W — O — R — K — S.

JAHN WORKS.

Jahn stands in front of it. Beside him Lenz. They watch the last letter click into place.

Lenz lays his hand on one of the girders — not like a man testing steel; the way he'd lay his hand on a plant, to feel whether it's healthy.

LENZ

Grown big.

JAHN

Bigger than it should have.

LENZ

Everything grows bigger than it should. Anton too.

JAHN

(smiles)

How old is he now?

LENZ

Two. He can say "no" already.
Nothing else yet, but that one he's got down.

They both laugh, briefly.

The band starts up again. Someone calls for Jahn — the press, a photo. He goes. Lenz takes his hand off the girder, slowly, and wipes it on his pants.

68

**EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE OF THE WORKS, IN FRONT OF THE
SHELL — DAY — THE PARENTS**

68

A PHOTOGRAPHER for the Movement, with a camera on a tripod, is arranging people. The shell in the background, cropped from below, proud.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Four. Four will do. With the flags.
— You, Mr. Jahn, in the middle. Mr.
Kessler next to him.

Lenz comes, reluctantly, with a flag somebody pressed into his hand.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

And the ladies. Mrs. Kessler — with
the little one, yes, with the
little one, that's good. And —

He searches. His eye falls on Helene, standing at the edge, without a flag.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

You. Please. Far left.

Helene steps into the picture. Takes a flag. Stands there, turned a little, the way you stand when you don't like being photographed — and one hand lies on her dress, low, the way hands lie when they're guarding something.

Ruth, with Anton on her arm, laughs at something Lenz has said. The photographer raises his hand.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Hold it.

One breath. Then it's a picture.

It will hang all over the city, in classrooms and government offices.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Thank you. That's it.

The four come apart. Ruth hands Lenz the child. Helene lets the flag drop as if she had never held it.

69

EXT. MARKET — DAY — THE CHILDREN

69

The gangs' market, everyday life: trading, counting, tolls.

Somewhere in between: two GANG BOYS on the ground, a tangle of sleeves and dust. Then one tears free and runs — something in his fist. What, you can't see.

The other picks himself up and shouts after him:

GANG BOY
Go to Jahn!

Nobody on the square turns their head.

Anna and Jakob at a stall – she's trading her half pigeon for potatoes and eggs, he's waiting.

At the other end of the square: movement. A MAN (Lenz, gaunt, long sleeves), drunk – the slow, concentrated walk of a drunk who knows that everyone knows what he is. He crosses the market.

Jakob sees him first. Long before Anna could have.

And then, casually, as if by chance: Jakob switches sides, takes half a step to the left, turns to Anna, shows her something at the stall – onions, a sieve, whatever.

He puts himself exactly in her line of sight. He stays in it, with small corrections, until the man is off the square.

Anna has seen nothing.

70

INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT – DAY – THE CHILDREN

70

The apartment has gotten used to Anna. She sits in her place by the door; Jakob is looking for a tool he put away himself.

RUTH
You two, honestly. One puts things
away, the other guards my door.
(pause)
And keep the chatter down – I need
my sleep.

Anna laughs. Through the nose, against her will.

And Ruth goes still.

She looks at Anna – too long, and all at once perfectly clear and very far away at the same time: the way you look at something that last stood in a room half a lifetime ago.

RUTH
Anna, let me look at you... Feels
good, having you here. Finally
somebody's laughing in this place
again. I've missed having one like
you around.

ANNA
It used to be funnier here?

RUTH
Much. ...Long time ago.

They look at each other and smile.

71 **EXT. PATH TO THE LOOKOUT - LATE AFTERNOON - THE PARENTS**

71

A path that turns in switchbacks up a hill. A railing, freshly painted. Two people climbing - she ahead, he behind, a little out of breath because she's faster.

HELENE
Count along.

JAHN
What?

HELENE
The steps. You count the steps here. My father did it, and his father before him. Whoever reaches the top and knows the number, the place belongs to them. For the day.

JAHN
And if I lose count?

HELENE
Then it belongs to me. As always.

72 **EXT. THE LOOKOUT - LATE AFTERNOON - THE PARENTS**

72

The top. A railing, a patch of meadow, a bench somebody knocked together long ago.

And the view.

The whole city at once: the roofs, the river, the fields to the horizon - in bloom, a sea of color. And in it, by the river, new, vast, the crane still beside it: the Works. Almost finished. Above the gate the letters, just barely legible from here.

Helene goes to the railing. Jahn beside her.

HELENE
This is my place. Since I was six. I've never shown it to anyone who wasn't family.

JAHN

And now?

HELENE

Now it's yours too. A little.

(Beat)

If you know the number.

JAHN

Two hundred fourteen.

HELENE

Two hundred twelve. You stumbled twice.

She looks out over the city.

HELENE (CONT'D)

We're still a little early.

She leans over to him and whispers it into his ear – not spoken out loud, only into the ear. He hears it. We don't.

Then, without taking her eyes off the city, perfectly calm:

HELENE (CONT'D)

I'm expecting a child.

Jahn turns to her. She still isn't looking at him. She's looking down at the city, at the fields, at the Works by the river.

HELENE (CONT'D)

I wanted to tell you here. It's the only place that's beautiful enough.

Jahn takes her hand.

JAHN

Two hundred twelve.

(Beat)

Next time the three of us count.

She laughs. She lays her head on his shoulder.

And over her shoulder he looks at the Works. Almost finished. Above the gate, his name.

She sees the happiness. He sees it too. And he sees what lies beneath the happiness – he alone, because only he knows the number that is no longer generous.

He says nothing. He holds her hand tighter.

Below, the sun goes down behind the Works, and its golden light settles over the city.

73

INT. KITCHEN, KESSLER HOUSE — EVENING — THE PARENTS

73

The kitchen, emptier than it used to be. The table for six, and two sitting at it: Ruth and Helene. The pitcher is there, but nobody drinks much. Anton is asleep in the next room.

The men are out. They're often out now.

RUTH

Show me.

HELENE

There's nothing to see yet.

RUTH

I'll see it anyway. Show me.

Helene stands up, a little embarrassed. Ruth lays her hand on her belly, flat, with the matter-of-factness of a woman who has done this before.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Nothing. There's nothing there at all yet.

(Beat)

And still I saw it on you when you came in. You educated ones look different when you're pregnant. Like you read up on it in a book.

Helene laughs.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Anyone else know?

HELENE

Paul.

RUTH

Anyone else?

HELENE

Nobody else. I wanted to — I don't know. Keep it to myself first.

RUTH

Then I'm the first to know. After him.

(she sits down)

I'll remember that.

She takes a sip. Then, casually, as if it were nothing:

RUTH (CONT'D)

Me too.

HELENE

You too — what?

RUTH

(she lays her hand on her own belly)

Two months. Lenz has known since yesterday. Anton doesn't — he'll scream.

(she laughs her laugh)

Two at once. The kitchen's going to be too small.

HELENE

It's always been too small.

RUTH

That's what makes it good.

They clink, pitcher against glass.

RUTH

My grandmother used to say: a man builds you a house or a child. Never both at once — or one of them comes out crooked.

(she raises the pitcher toward the city, where the building is going on)

Now our two are building the biggest works in the country. And here we sit —

(the free hand on her own belly)

— both of us. So you figure out what —

Helene is already laughing.

RUTH (CONT'D)

(tells the ending anyway, for herself)

— what comes out crooked. I'll tell you what: the Works. My children don't come out crooked.

She herself laughs loudest of all.

RUTH (CONT'D)

In spring they'll both be here. Then we'll have a party. Here.

HELENE

Here?

RUTH

Where else. One table, both kids on it -

HELENE

On the table?

RUTH

To show them off. And the kitchen full like it used to be. And the men have to sing.

HELENE

Can Lenz sing?

RUTH

No.

(Beat)

Exactly.

74 **EXT. ROOF ABOVE THE ALLEY - EVENING - THE CHILDREN**

74

Two children, a flat roof, remnants of food between them.

Anna's notebook lies beside her - the binding has come loose, the endpaper hangs.

Jakob sees it. Holds out his hand.

Anna looks at the hand. One second. Two.

Then she gives him the notebook - closed.

Jakob sews the binding. Awl, thread, the sounds from that night. He doesn't open the notebook while he works. Not even halfway. He works on the closed book, more awkwardly than he'd have to.

Anna watches him. Closely. The whole time.

He hands it back. The binding holds.

JAKOB

The thread's better than the notebook.

ANNA

I know.

75 **INT. - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN**

75

Again the floorboards. But the strip of light is missing: the lamp stands on the table, not on the floor. The light comes from above, over the edge of the table; the floorboards lie in

shadow.

THE NIGHT, SECOND TIME. But:

The child's hand, the spool. She gives it a push. The spool tips over. It doesn't roll true — it has grown edges it didn't have the first time — and comes to rest after half a turn. In the dark, not in the light.

The curtain hangs at a different window. And the whispering woman's voice says words we know:

MOTHER (O.S.)
(whispering)
... a place, high above
everything ...

A KNOCK. The bolt. The loud word that doesn't come through.

The arm reaches into the light: the gun, the mark — hyper-sharp, exactly like the first time. Only everything else has moved. The thing in her hand, too.

Whoever was paying attention now distrusts their own memory for the first time: that isn't how it was.

Or is it?

Anna jolts out of sleep. Attic, darkness, her breath.

Her lips begin to count.

76 INT. CORRIDORS OF THE DYING ROOMS — DAY — THE CHILDREN

76

A long corridor in a house that was once something else. Doors behind which people are dying. VOLUNTEERS carry water — buckets, pitchers, cups.

Anna carries water.

We know this already. It has become everyday life: another house, the same work, the same gaze. She holds cups, supports arms, sees wrists.

And casually, in the passing of the days: whoever brings water eats too. A DYING WOMAN pushes half a plate toward her without a word; an OLD MAN lays bread on the rim of her bucket without looking at her. The dying share what they no longer need.

77 INT. HALL — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

77

The same hall as at the first speech — empty, only the floor and the stage. Stacked against the wall: CHAIRS. Four hundred. You can't see it all at once, but you can sense it.

Lenz is setting them out. Row upon row, with a string as a guide so the rows come out straight. A second HELPER has given up; he sits on the edge of the stage and drinks.

HELPER

It's four hundred. It's past midnight. Nobody's going to count the rows tomorrow.

LENZ

I'll count them.

HELPER

You count everything.

LENZ

Somebody has to.

(he shifts a chair, a
finger's width)

The guy can't drive a nail in straight. He holds a hammer like a fountain pen.

(he laughs)

But he stood in my field for three hours and kept his mouth shut till I was done. Nobody else can do that. So I do the nails. And the chairs.

HELPER

And him?

LENZ

He talks.

(he sights along the row, one
eye shut)

And tomorrow he talks, and the chairs stand straight, and nobody notices. Good. It's him they should notice, not me.

He sets the next one. The helper shakes his head, and gets up after all, and helps.

78

INT. A DYING ROOM - DAY - THE CHILDREN

78

A bed by the window. THE OLD WOMAN (80s, small, tough). She drinks Anna's water in small sips. Anna lays her notebook on the windowsill. On a leaflet that slips out, you can see a headline, "15 Years of Terror," yellowed. The old woman looks at it and taps her fingers on it.

THE OLD WOMAN

Is that from today?

ANNA

What? That – nah, probably not.

THE OLD WOMAN

Well? What do you think?

ANNA

Don't know.

The old woman looks at her. Then she laughs – a short, hard laugh that delivers the beat along with it.

THE OLD WOMAN

Terrorists don't build power
plants, child. Nothing could ever
go fast enough for them.

(she taps the beat on the
edge of the bed)

Faster. Faster. Faster.

She hands Anna back the glass.

79

INT. KESSLER HOUSE, BEDROOM – NIGHT – THE PARENTS

79

Ruth sleeps, heavily, on her side, her belly in front of her. Beside her, in his little bed pushed up against the big one: Anton, two years old, one arm over his head, the way children sleep who fear nothing.

The window stands open a crack. It's warm for the time of year.

You can hear, very far off, the river.

80

INT. HALL – NIGHT – THE PARENTS

80

Lenz sets the last chair. Four hundred. He steps back, looks at the rows – straight, all of them. He's satisfied the way you're satisfied with a thing nobody will see.

He takes his jacket.

Then the night sky loses its color.

Not loud. At first only this: through the tall windows it grows light, wrongly light, a light that doesn't come from the street. A trembling in the panes. Then, late, the sound – a blow so deep you feel it in the floor before you hear it.

Lenz stands with his jacket in his hand.

Then he runs.

81 EXT. STREETS - NIGHT - THE PARENTS**81**

Out of the hall, into the street. Above the roofs, toward the river: a light that won't go out. A glow that colors the sky from below.

People. A few at first - windows open, doors. Then more. Then the street is running. All in one direction: away from the river.

Lenz runs in the other.

Against the stream, past shoulders, against faces. Someone grabs his arm - "Not that way!" - he tears free. Street after street.

Over everything, already: a smell. Sweet. The smell of the fields, but wrong, too much of it, as if someone had set a whole year's harvest on fire at once.

82 EXT. KESSLER HOUSE, YARD - NIGHT - THE PARENTS**82**

His house. The roof is standing. The windows are not.

In the yard: Ruth. On her knees, alive, in her nightgown, with glass in her hair and Anton in her arms - lifeless. She's screaming. It isn't a word. It's only a sound, always the same one.

Lenz comes through the gate.

He sees her. Freezes.

Then he goes to Ruth and kneels down in front of her, takes them both in his arms, and she goes on screaming, into his shoulder. He holds her, and above them the sky stands in a wrong light and smells of flowers.

LATER. Dawn is breaking. The glow by the river has grown smaller, not gone out.

Lenz sits outside in the yard. Ruth sits leaning against him. Neither of them has closed an eye tonight. In front of them, wrapped in cloth, lies Anton.

83 INT. RADIO STUDIO - MORNING - THE PARENTS**83**

A small room, a microphone, a man with headphones. In front of him a sheet, freshly typed, with a STAMP that has only just dried.

The man at the microphone clears his throat. Reads.

Meanwhile: we see a desk in another room, hands laying a sheet into a folder. Hands we know.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Attention. An announcement from the city administration. Last night an explosion occurred at the power plant on the river. According to initial findings, this was a terrorist attack from the circle around the politician Jahn, who had the plant built under his name.

84 **EXT./INT. CITY — MORNING — THE PARENTS**

84

Radios. In kitchens, in stores, on a windowsill in a yard where people stand with blankets around their shoulders. The voice runs everywhere at once.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

According to the authorities, the politician Jahn was killed while attempting to flee. The public is asked to avoid the vicinity of the plant and to follow the instructions of the security forces. Further announcements will follow.

85 **INT. KESSLER HOUSE, KITCHEN — MORNING — THE PARENTS**

85

The radio on the windowsill. Lenz stands in front of it, alone, and turns it off.

86 **EXT. BACK COURTYARDS — NIGHT — THE PARENTS**

86

The same night, earlier. While it's still burning.

A back courtyard, then a second, a wall, a passage. Two figures in coats, without light: a MAN who goes ahead and keeps turning around. A WOMAN who doesn't slow down; she holds one hand on her belly, under the coat, where nothing shows yet.

They stop at a corner. Above the roofs the glow. From a window somewhere, the radio: "— from the circle around the politician Jahn —"

The man looks at the woman. The woman looks at the man.

HELENE

(whispering)

They're saying you're dead.

JAHN
 (whispering)
 Then that's what I am.

It is the last time Paul Jahn could have spoken out loud. He didn't.

87 **EXT. RUIN BY THE RIVER — EVENING — THE CHILDREN**

87

The Works. Huge, burst open, gnawed at by plants — the ruin of a pride.

Above the main gate, letters three meters tall, half fallen:

JAH ORKS

What's missing lies below in the rubble and has been burned for heat, built into something else, vanished, letter by letter.

Anna walks past it along the bank of the river.

88 **EXT. THE FIELDS — NIGHT — THE CHILDREN**

88

Beyond the last house: the FIELDS. Stalks as tall as a man, as far as the moonlight reaches, a blooming that looks gray in the dark — and a smell that numbs; you can see it on the faces.

The gang heads out, a dozen children with knives and sacks. Anna goes along; her place is at the back, Jakob beside her.

LEADER
 (half aloud, walking)
 Cut, don't tear.

They cut: flower heads, in a rhythm the smallest ones pick up fastest. Pressed into bales, tied up.

Anna cuts, presses, carries.

At the BARRIER — concrete, wire — up top stands a man with a rifle.

MAN WITH RIFLE
 Come on, come on. Everybody back a step.

A section of the barrier is opened from the outside.
 A hole.

MAN WITH RIFLE (CONT'D)
 (points at two children)
 You two.

The two children step forward and take over the handover.

The bales change sides without a word. From the other side come chocolate, liquor, kerosene, and cigarettes.

On one of the crates, absurdly clean in all the mud: a LABEL with a curved sign: T. We know it. From the billboard.

Later.

The two boys from the handover divide up the haul.

Anna gets her share: a chocolate bar.

89

EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELDS - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN

89

On the way back, where the field turns to mud: something gleams.

Anna bends down. A FLACON - the glass from the billboard, gone dull, the beautiful stopper tarnished. Inside: a small remainder, a few drops, darker than water.

She looks around. Nobody. She opens it.

Her knees give way. She sits down in the mud, right in the middle of it. Her eyes overflow - without anything being sad. Her face knows nothing, only the tears run.

She holds the flacon in both hands like a chick.

That's how Jakob finds her. He's trailing the others a little, as always. He stops. Looks at her, in the mud, with the little bottle.

He doesn't ask.

He crouches down next to her, within reach, no closer. After a while, dead serious:

JAKOB

If you want to eat them - the
flowers taste like soap.

Anna laughs. And cries. Both at once, and she can't explain either one.

The stopper goes back on the flacon. The flacon disappears into her jacket, where the notebook lives.

NO INSERT on the vial. No memory. Whoever carries the hideout from the first night is allowed to remember. Anna can't.

90

EXT./INT. CITY — VARIOUS DAYS — THE PARENTS

90

The city dies in months. It isn't told. It's shown:

— A market where the stalls grow fewer. Where one is missing, a strip of cloth hangs on the door behind it.

— A man at the well pushing up his sleeve — and on the inside of his arm there's a mark, dark, small. He looks at it. Pulls the sleeve back down. Long sleeves from now on.

— A truck with soldiers unrolling wire. Concrete blocks set down on the street. A sign, fresh: RESTRICTED AREA. KEEP OUT. The truck drives away, outward. It doesn't come back.

— The fields. Uncut. The stalks stand and bloom as if nothing had happened, as tall as a man, to the horizon. Nobody harvests anymore. The smell still lies over everything — and now people know what it is.

— The distillery: the gate shut, the τ above the gate already paler.

91

INT. JAHN'S APARTMENT — EVENING — THE PARENTS

91

Months later.

On the door a SEAL — paper, a stamp of the city administration. It's torn. Somebody was here before her.

Helene, shrouded like everyone: coat, scarf, long sleeves. Heavily pregnant. No light. She knows the apartment in the half-dark.

The apartment has been cleared out. Not searched — cleared out: the furniture gone, the books gone, the curtains gone. Pale patches on the wall where pictures hung. On the floor, what nobody wanted: a single shoe, paper, glass that crunches under her soles.

She goes through the rooms without stopping. At the door to the study she stops after all. The desk is gone. Behind the bare window: the Works, what's left standing of it, black.

In the farthest room, in the corner: the CRATE. Flipped open, rummaged through, a little dust on it, smooth. Nobody wanted old school notebooks.

She kneels down and opens it. The notebooks. The books. She lifts them out, stack by stack, quietly, onto the floor.

At the very bottom: the TIN BOX.

She lifts the lid, just a crack, and feels inside: the bills, rolled up. The chain. The little horse. And the silk, with

something in it she never wanted.

She tucks the box under her coat.

Then she puts the notebooks back into the crate, stack by stack, and closes it. At the door she presses the torn seal back on, as well as it will go.

92 **EXT. STREET — DAWN — THE PARENTS**

92

The first store with a light on. Bread. Two people ahead of her.

Behind the counter the BAKER climbs onto a stool, wipes the prices off the board with his sleeve, and writes them up again. The numbers get longer. Nobody says anything about it.

Helene pays with a bill and gets a few coins back, small ones; she doesn't count them. The bread disappears under her coat, next to the box.

She goes.

93 **EXT. ROOF — EVENING — THE CHILDREN**

93

Over the city comes a sound like a second heart: DRUMS. Not fast. Deep.

Anna is up first — of course she's up first. Jakob follows, grip by grip, gray in the face. He hates heights. He comes anyway. Anna sees it.

From up here, across the street canyon:

The MAIN STREET. Torches, a procession. DRUMMERS at the front, then — two dozen RUNNERS, old men and women, in light clothes. With BARE ARMS.

For the first time in this film, somebody shows off marks like medals.

Anna, at the edge of the roof. From her jacket: the spyglass.

For the first time through unbroken lenses — and the first thing she sees sharp is bare arms in torchlight.

The city stands along the edges of the street, dense, still — and sings. Something half-forgotten, more hum than song — drawn out, heavy, in repetitions, like something that must have come into being at work. It doesn't sound sad. It doesn't sound glad either. It sounds old.

At the edge of the city, where the street opens into the fields, the runners begin to run.

Really run. Like children. Like lunatics.

The stalks swallow them one after another. The singing stops, not all at once – it frays out. Then only the blooming is there, and the drumming, slowing like a dying heart. Then that stops too.

94

EXT. BACK ACROSS THE ROOFS – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN

94

Two children on a ridge, one behind the other, slow. For a long time nothing but their steps.

Then, out of nowhere:

JAKOB

The old people say it's like a holiday. Only more honest.

He says it like a joke you inherited and don't quite understand.

Anna doesn't answer.

95

EXT. DISTILLERY COURTYARD – MORNING – THE CHILDREN

95

The morning after the run. Anna has followed the route of the procession – backward, to where it began; we know the house from the beginning.

The courtyard: kettles, cold, stacked inside one another. Wrung-out cloths hang over the wall. Something happened here yesterday that we didn't see.

In the middle of the courtyard: a TABLE. On it, in good order: the runners' things. Jackets, folded. A comb. A knife with a horn handle. A pair of boots, soles side by side.

Nobody guards it.

Anna takes her place in the archway and watches.

Over the course of the morning they come, one at a time, with time in between: one of the MARKED takes a jacket, holds it against herself for a moment, and takes it along. A GANG BOY – at the market he'd be loud – takes the knife and is quiet about it. An OLD MAN takes the boots and puts his own in their place, the worse ones.

Nobody takes two things.

Toward noon the table is almost empty. The comb is still there.

Anna has watched the whole time. She leaves without having taken anything.

96 EXT. WATER TOWER — DAY — THE CHILDREN

96

Anna climbs the water tower — routine, grip by grip, the highest point in the neighborhood. At the top, from her jacket: the spyglass.

She looks out over the city.

Suddenly a HILL, at the far end, behind an old depot. A path turning upward in switchbacks, a railing as a thin line — and at one spot, where the path disappears behind the sheds, it breaks off. A gap in the picture.

Like a staircase with one step missing.

Anna looks. Looks away. Looks again.

97 INT. KESSLER HOUSE, BEDROOM — DAY — THE PARENTS

97

One bed too many: the little one, up against the big one. Nobody has cleared it away.

And beside it, in a basket, new: an infant. JAKOB. He cries the way infants cry, for no reason and with every right.

Ruth lifts him up. She has grown thinner since the night — not much, but you can see it. And on her forearm, as the sleeve slips: a mark. One. Small.

She doesn't look at it. She looks at the child.

Lenz stands in the doorway. He has a sack in his hand — from somewhere, bartered, begged. He sees the three things in the room: the woman, the new child, the empty bed.

There are houses with one bed too many in them. Into this one a child is born.

98 INT. KESSLER HOUSE, KITCHEN — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

98

The kitchen that was once too small for twelve. Now one man sits in it.

On the stove an apparatus Lenz has built from copper pipe and a pot — a small still, crooked, but it runs. It drips into a glass. He holds the glass up to the lamp. Clear. He smells it — once, one draw through the nose, like at the mash back then.

Then he drinks.

It's the same man who once distilled Tau, with the same nose, at the same copper. Only what comes out is rotgut. The same skill, fallen.

99 INT. KESSLER HOUSE, BEDROOM — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

99

Ruth is asleep. On her arm, lying over the blanket: two marks now. Lenz sits beside the bed, the glass in his hand, and looks at the arm. Smells — involuntarily, he can't turn it off — and reads what the smell says.

He drinks.

He sets the glass down. Lays the blanket over Ruth's arm. Sits.

100 INT. HIDEOUT — DAY — THE PARENTS

100

Three rooms. We never see them whole — always only a section: a corner with a table, a window with a curtain that never opens all the way, a door with a bolt on the inside.

The man who once spoke to a thousand people sits at the table and whispers. He whispers everything now. Professionally.

The woman is dressing to go out: coat, scarf, long sleeves — like everyone outside. Hardly anyone knew her face; she can go. He can't.

HELENE

(whispering)

Bread, if there is any. And the woman at the well says a delivery is coming.

JAHN

(whispering)

Be careful.

HELENE

I'm always careful. That's my job now.

She smiles. She kisses him. She goes — the door, the bolt from outside, her steps on the stairs.

He stays seated.

From the next room: a child waking up. A small crying, then a calling — not a word, not yet.

He gets up and goes to it, and we hear his voice, very softly, saying something soothing.

JAHN

Well, are you awake?

It's ANNA. She is one year old and knows the world as what falls through the gap in a curtain.

101 **INT. HIDEOUT, SLEEPING CORNER – EVENING – THE PARENTS** 101

A mattress on the floor, a blanket, the kerosene lamp turned down low. Anna lies with her head in her mother's lap, the little wooden horse from the box in her arms. Tired. Helene sits with her back against the wall.

HELENE
(whispering)
Anna, little Anna. You know. Up
there, high up above the city,
there's a place.

102 **EXT. PATH TO THE LOOKOUT – DAY – THE CHILDREN** 102

The path in switchbacks, the railing: rusty, gone in places.

Anna walks ahead – and her lips are counting. Soundlessly. Jakob is along too, at the back. Pale. Carefully he walks behind her. Helene speaks over this image, from the hideout.

HELENE (V.O.)
You take the path that turns. Along
the railing. You count the steps.

103 **INT. HIDEOUT, SLEEPING CORNER – EVENING (CONTINUED) – THE PARENTS** 103

ANNA
Mama, I know.

HELENE is moved. A tear runs down her cheek.

HELENE
And in the evening..

HELENE bends over Anna and whispers. Strokes her hair and kisses the top of her head.

ANNA
(whispering)
When are we going?

HELENE
When you're big. The three of us.
And you count.

ANNA
I can count to twenty.

HELENE
That'll do for now. Sleep.

104 EXT. LOOKOUT - DAY - THE CHILDREN**104**

At the top.

The wide view: the whole city at once. The ruin with its fallen letters. The fields, a gray sea to the horizon. The barrier: a thin line. And beyond it, unfathomably -

World. Simply going on.

Jakob arrives, his eyes opening wide. He tries to "breathe in" the view. He comes to stand next to Anna. We see both faces.

For the first time Anna stands at a high place and isn't alone. Jakob, with his fear of heights, even less so.

Anna takes his hand.

105 INT. HIDEOUT, SLEEPING CORNER - EVENING (END) - THE PARENTS**105**

Anna closes her eyes. The little horse slips out of her hand. Helene lays it down beside her, against the wall, where it belongs.

In the other room, by the door, sits the father; that's where he sits in the evenings - whoever sits by the door hears the stairs first. You can hear him, barely, turning a page. That too is one of the sounds of this family.

106 EXT. PATH DOWN FROM THE LOOKOUT - DAY - THE CHILDREN**106**

The way back, in switchbacks. Anna ahead, Jakob behind, one hand on the railing where there is one.

ANNA

Has anyone ever made it through,
back there?

JAKOB

(without stopping)

At the start, supposedly a few.
Then nobody, I guess. I think it's
too late for most of them now
anyway.

ANNA

And you?

JAKOB

Maybe. Someday.

ANNA

I wonder if anybody's even still
looking.

107 EXT./INT. OLD MOVIE THEATER — LATE AFTERNOON — THE CHILDREN

107

Anna and Jakob walking, a route like so many: alleys, dead stores, facades with their lids lowered.

Then Jakob stops.

Above an entrance Anna wouldn't have looked at: a MARQUEE on thin struts. Beneath it, behind blind glass, a LETTER BOARD — black grooves, push-in letters. A few letters have fallen off or been taken; what's left stands with gaps — the way the ruin by the river wears its name.

The program from back then. Three lines, three titles, half legible. Nobody ever took them down. The same week has been playing for fifteen years.

JAKOB

Come on.

And he's already inside.

INSIDE, THE AUDITORIUM: high, dark, cool. Jakob's steps know the way.

Light falls through a burst skylight. The floor: empty. No chairs, no benches — only SCREW HOLES in the concrete, in rows, dozens of them, like a dictation without words.

The rows of seats have been burned for heat.

Up front: the SCREEN — what's left of it. A remnant, cut off at a slant; cloth is precious. The frame still shows how big it was.

Anna stands among the screw holes and looks around. She catalogs — and comes up with nothing.

ANNA

What was this?

JAKOB

They threw light at the wall here.
Stories.

(pause)

Everybody looked in the same
direction. There were chairs here,
in rows.

Anna looks at the remnant of the screen. Then across the screw holes, the rows. She tries to picture people, that many, all with the same gaze. You can see it doesn't work.

JAKOB (CONT'D)
Come on, it gets even better.

THE PROJECTION BOOTH: a steep stair, a cubbyhole with a view of the auditorium. In it, under a tarp: the PROJECTOR.

Jakob lifts off the tarp. Metal, lenses, a crank. His reflex reaches out ahead of him: he opens a flap, turns, checks. The machine is heavy and whole. It could be saved.

Jakob's eyes search the booth, the shelves. Empty film cans, stacked, open.

JAKOB
(dry; the speedometer tone)
It works. There's just nothing left
to put in it.

Anna, at the booth door:

ANNA
I have no idea what you're talking
about.

JAKOB
Must have been great, back then.

They go. At the door Anna turns around once more.

Through the open door the afternoon falls into the auditorium – a bright, slanted RECTANGLE on what's left of the screen.

It's the only picture this theater still shows. It runs as long as the door stands open.

108 INT. HIDEOUT – DAY – THE PARENTS

108

A gray day. In the back room the father is sleeping – he keeps half the night by the door; the morning he sleeps through. These are the hours when the apartment belongs to the two of them.

Helene is straightening up – what you straighten up in three rooms: a crate, a bundle, things that migrate from one place to another.

Anna on her arm, because she wants to be carried, even though she's long been able to walk.

All the way at the bottom of the crate, under the little that's left from before: the TIN BOX.

She listens for a moment toward the back room: the breathing of sleep, even. Then she sets Anna down on the crate, opens the box. Silk. The FLACON.

ANNA
What's that?

HELENE
That's -
- that's from before. It smells
nice. Want to smell it?

She opens it - very carefully, the way you open something there's only one of - dabs a single drop on the back of her hand. She tests it first. Then she holds her hand in front of the little one's face.

Anna smells.

Her face: first nothing. Then something that has no word. She smells again. She lays her own small hand on her mother's, as if you could hold on to a smell.

ANNA
That smells good. Again?

HELENE
No. That's enough. Or it'll be
gone.

She closes the flacon. The silk. The box. Puts it back in the crate, all the way at the bottom.

But she keeps the hand near Anna a while longer, and Anna has her nose against it, and neither of them says anything.

109 **INT. HIDEOUT - EVENING - THE PARENTS**

109

Helene comes back the way she always comes back: the bolt, the coat, the bundle. But she doesn't put the bundle down. She stands in the doorway.

Jahn looks up.

HELENE
(whispering)
I saw Ruth. At the well. She didn't
recognize me.

JAHN
And?

HELENE
She had a little one on her arm.
(MORE)

HELENE (CONT'D)
 A boy, a year old maybe.
 (Beat)
 And Anton -

She doesn't have to go on. He knows it before she says it.
 Maybe he has always known it, since the night.

HELENE (CONT'D)
 That night. In the house. He was
 asleep.

Jahn sits at the table for a long time.

Then he pulls a sheet of paper toward him. And a pen. And
 begins - a line, any line, a sign that he's alive, that he
 knows, that he -

He writes three words. We don't read them.

He looks at the three words.

And then he looks at the door. At the curtain. At the room
 where a child is sleeping who wouldn't sleep anymore if this
 line took the wrong way. A sheet of paper, a messenger, one
 word too many at a well - and the version that declares him
 dead would suddenly have an address.

He puts the pen down.

He takes the sheet and holds it into the lamp until nothing of
 it is left.

Helene says nothing. She understands.

110 EXT. WELL / ALLEYS - DAY - THE PARENTS

110

A woman goes shopping. That's all you see: a woman in a coat,
 with a scarf, with long sleeves, among women in coats with
 scarves and long sleeves. She waits in line. She barterers. She
 goes.

For four years she has done this right: never the same time,
 never the same route, never one word too many. She is the most
 inconspicuous of the inconspicuous.

We follow her from behind.

A few people come toward her. Among them a man. He looks past
 her - at first. Then he stops, we with him, Helene walks on. He
 sorts his thoughts.

Turns around and follows her.

111 INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT - MORNING - THE CHILDREN 111

Ruth's good day. She's half sitting up, there's light in the room, and she's talking.

RUTH
Ten years now they've been dropping
crates on us out of the sky. You
know what I've kept, out of that
whole sky?
(pause)
The condensed milk.

Jakob grins over his work. Anna, at the table, laughs her nose-laugh.

112 INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT - MIDDAY - THE CHILDREN 112

The light has moved. Ruth is lying down again. Her gaze finds Jakob, and something in it has slipped.

RUTH
Anton. The window.

Silence.

He closes the window. He holds her hand until she sleeps.

Anna watches.

113 INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT - EVENING - THE CHILDREN 113

The light is almost gone. Ruth wakes up. She looks at Jakob - perfectly clear, clearer than all day.

RUTH
Jakob.

Once. Right. She reaches for his hand.

Jakob holds still, mid-movement.

She says nothing more. She falls asleep again.

114 EXT. WORKSHOP YARD - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN 114

The window of the workshop apartment: lit, small. Inside, Jakob sits at the bed.

In the yard stands the man from the market.

LENZ (now late 50s, gaunt, long sleeves; hands that were once good at something). Jakob's father.

Beside him, on the ledge of the wall: a bottle. Liquor, full, the cork in.

Lenz stands and drinks nothing.

LATER. The light in the window has grown small.

Jakob sits at the bed. Rises and stands at the bed for a long time, without moving.

Then he opens the window. Wide.

Lenz looks at the open window. He understands it the way you understand something you've waited for all night.

He sits down on the ledge, next to the full bottle. He leaves it closed.

That's how the two of them stay, each on his own side of the night: the boy at the open window, the man by the full bottle. Until it gets light.

A quiet death.

115

EXT. WASTELAND / BURIAL GROUND - DAY - THE CHILDREN

115

A piece of wasteland the city has turned into something like this - rows of flat stones, wooden markers without names.

There are no coffins; wood is warmth. The dead are sewn into cloths, the flat stones from the ruins lie on top against the dogs. No names stand here.

Ruth's cloth is neatly sewn. The seam is fine.

Few people. Jakob. Lenz, two steps beside him - two steps nobody closes. The leader has come, with two of the gang; they stand at the back holding their caps in their hands, and you can see: they've done this too often for their age. Behind them, the cart from the scene "The Fixer."

Words are spoken, few. We don't hear them. We don't need to.

Anna stands at the edge, where you stand when you belong to nobody.

116

EXT. CITY - DAY - THE CHILDREN

116

After the grave. They walk.

For a long time, nothing.

Then, mid-stride, without a run-up:

ANNA

At the Home I knew things. Where
the sugar was. Who crossed the yard
at night.

Jakob doesn't look at her. That's his way of listening.

ANNA

Everybody wanted sugar. I handed it
out. For half a loaf.

JAKOB

And if they'd caught you?

ANNA

Not me.

Jakob nods.

ANNA

One of the houseparents was
stealing. From the rations, for
years. Everybody knew.

(pause)

One time, there was a slip from
over there stuck to one. With the
number of rations.

JAKOB

And?

ANNA

Left it at the administration.

JAKOB

And then?

ANNA

Waited.

Jakob almost stops. Then he laughs – the laugh that falls over,
in the middle of the street, on the day of a funeral. He's
embarrassed at once and keeps laughing.

JAKOB

Waited how. Until somebody reads
it?

ANNA

Was safer.

JAKOB

(still laughing)

And the housefather?

ANNA

Then the Home was over.

Jakob looks at her from the side – for a long time. For the first time since the grave his face isn't gray anymore.

117 **INT. THE MAGNATE'S HOUSE, STUDY – DAY – THE PARENTS**

117

The small room. The hands on the desk. In front of them an ENVELOPE, open, and beside it what's going in:

A slip of paper with an address – a street, a house, a floor. And a second paper, several sheets, a copy, neatly typed. You can read the heading if you want: REPORT. And further down a sentence that's underlined: "...the design will hold."

The hands lay the sheets into the envelope. First the address. Then the report.

You see no face. You hear a voice, tempered, saying one sentence – to someone standing in the room whom we don't see:

MAGNATE (O.S.)

I think the man has a right to know.

That's all. No order. No name.

The envelope changes hands. The hands stay behind, empty, clean.

118 **INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT – DAY – THE CHILDREN**

118

The room is the same and isn't: the bed Ruth lay in is made. The tools on the wall, neat. The cot empty.

LENZ sits at the table. In front of him stands water he doesn't touch. He's sober.

ANNA sits on the stool across from him – which she has turned, without thinking, toward the door. Jakob is out getting food.

LENZ

The fields. Four in the morning, in summer. That's when the smell was best – before the sun, while the dew still holds it down. We ran, to be out there by four. Ran. To work.

ANNA turns toward him.

Lenz looks at her. For a long time. Almost a smile.

LENZ

I had a friend who couldn't tell a joke. Smartest man I ever -

(breaks off, starts over)

He could explain the plant to you till you cried, that's how beautiful it was. But a joke, three sentences - he couldn't get one across the street in one piece. He always said the punchline first. Always. Worried you might miss it.

Anna listens the way she listens to everyone. Her eyes go once, casually, to his sleeves. Buttoned.

ANNA

(casually; the casualness of an investigator)

What was his name?

A breath. Lenz's thumb rubs along the edge of the table.

LENZ

My friend.

Anna registers it.

And Lenz talks on as if nothing had been asked:

LENZ (CONT'D)

Ruth always thought he was a little stiff - she liked his girl better. (smiling to himself) The two of them always had plenty to laugh about....

I fed him everything. For years. I stood next to him like at the theater. Sometimes I fed him his own jokes, half aloud, and people laughed, and he took the bow.

(pause)

That was my best one. That nobody noticed who was telling it.

Anna says nothing. But she doesn't get up.

LENZ (CONT'D)

This one he never got across the street in one piece. Watch.

He straightens up. Barely. But he straightens up.

LENZ (CONT'D)

Somebody asks the drunk: why do you drink? Says the drunk: so I forget. Asks the other one: forget what?

Lenz lets the pause stand. Exactly as long as it has to.

LENZ (CONT'D)
Can't remember.
(Beat)
So it's working.

Anna laughs. Once, short, through the nose. Against her will.

Lenz looks up as if a light had come on. He goes to the window, sees nothing.

LENZ
(quietly)
Another one?

119 **EXT. STREET / X STREET - DAY - THE CHILDREN**

119

Anna, alone, on one of her rounds.

On the other side of the street, at a trot: the DOG.

Anna stops. He doesn't. He hasn't seen her.

She follows him. Not like someone calling - like someone watching: at a distance, along the house walls.

The dog slips through a half-collapsed archway - and is gone.

At the corner: a CHALK X, hip-high, retraced many times.

Anna stands in front of the X. The dog is beyond it.

Chalk doesn't apply to dogs. The pigeons nest where nobody goes - the X streets are the best hunting ground in the city, and it belongs to no one, because no one sets foot in it.

Anna looks up the street, down the street. Nobody.

Then she walks past the X.

THE X STREET: quiet in a way the city doesn't know otherwise. The facades are standing. Behind them stands nothing - through the windows you see sky. What was wood has been burned for heat; what was metal has been built into something else. The houses have been eaten hollow: faces with nothing left behind them to bear the load.

Everywhere: PIGEONS. On the ledges, in the window holes, under the roof. The only place in the city where something lives in abundance.

The dog is on a BALCONY on the second floor - up a slope of rubble. Under the eaves: nests.

Then he sees Anna.

He goes still. Completely still. Ears forward.

Anna comes closer, below, in the street. Slowly. She wants to say something – and has nothing. She never gave him a name. There's no word to call him with.

Her hand rises. Halfway. Flat.

The dog stays.

Anna slowly climbs the same slope of rubble.

At first it's only a trickle. Plaster, a fine curtain of dust. The dog looks at Anna, Anna looks at the dog.

Then the balcony tears out of the wall.

Not a sound from him. Only the house: a breaking, a blow, dust that takes half the street. The ground shakes. Once.

Then the dust hangs in the air, and nothing else.

Anna digs. With her hands, without a sound, stone by stone. She digs until she reaches a slab that won't lift. She tries anyway. Then she stops trying.

She kneels in the rubble and is fourteen years old.

Then she stacks the stones back, the ones she lifted. Flat, one on top of the other, neatly. We know these stones. That's how they lie at the burial ground – against the dogs.

She goes. After a few seconds. The pigeons come back, one after another, onto the ledges, into the window holes.

120

INT. KESSLER HOUSE, KITCHEN – EVENING – THE PARENTS

120

Lenz at the table, the glass, the still dripping. A knock.

Not at the door – at the window, from the street. When he looks, there's nobody there anymore. But on the windowsill, outside, leaning against the pane: an ENVELOPE.

He brings it in. No sender. His name on it, in a hand he doesn't know.

He opens it.

First the slip. An address. Nothing else – no explanation, no name. Only a street, a house, a floor.

He doesn't understand.

Then the sheets. REPORT. He reads the name on it. He reads the sentence that's underlined. And then – because he's the man he is – he reads the whole thing, slowly, with his finger on the line, the way a field worker reads.

"...the effect considerably stronger than assumed... the pressure in the boiler rises above the values determined... a modification is no longer possible at the current stage of construction... The design will hold."

He reads it twice.

And then he looks at the address. And suddenly he understands it after all.

He folds the sheets. He pockets them. And he doesn't drink. For the first time in four years the glass stands full on the table and he doesn't touch it – because all at once he has something he wants to think about sober.

121 **INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT – DAY – THE CHILDREN**

121

Another day. Jakob is out.

When Anna knocks, the two cups are already on the table.

Lenz has grown thinner; it's going fast now. On his neck, above the collar: a new mark.

He sees Anna's gaze – the gaze that always lands on marks, she can't turn it off. He points his thumb at it, with the precision of an expert:

LENZ

This one's new. I call him the mayor. Sits up top and does nothing.

His laugh is dry as brushwood.

Anna looks closer. Under the collar, half hidden: another one.

ANNA

There's another one under your chin.

LENZ

The deputy.

Anna laughs through her nose. Lenz looks at her with that hungry look, and for a moment these are two people who are doing fine.

The clock in him is running. We can see it with the naked eye now.

122 EXT. WASTELAND / BURIAL GROUND – DAY – THE CHILDREN**122**

Ruth's stone. Jakob crouches in front of it, straightening what hasn't slipped: the flat stone, the wooden marker. Work that isn't work. Anna stands beside him.

For a long time, nothing.

ANNA
Who's Anton?

Jakob moves the stone a finger's width. And back again.

JAKOB
My brother. Never met him.
Died back then, that night, with
the others. He was three. That's
all I know.

ANNA
Hm. Weird.

JAKOB
Mama doesn't mean anything by it.

Anna looks at him.

Anna sits down on the remnant of wall beside the grave. And pays him back:

ANNA
I don't know who mine were.
Parents.
(pause)
I've got voices. Whispering,
nothing more. One word that was
loud – once. And a story that keeps
coming back and somehow stops.

JAKOB
Will you tell it to me sometime?

ANNA
(after a while)
Maybe.

They stay until it slowly gets dark.

123 EXT. STREET, OUTSIDE THE HOUSE – EVENING – THE PARENTS**123**

A street like a hundred others. A house, a floor, a door.

Lenz stands on the other side, in a doorway, like a man waiting for nobody. He didn't bring the slip. He doesn't need it; the address has been in him since he read it.

For a long time nothing happens.

Then the door opens – a crack. A woman steps out, coat, scarf, long sleeves, like everyone. As she steps out she turns and speaks back through the crack into the apartment, quietly; we're too far away to hear. It isn't much. It's what you say when someone stays inside.

She pulls the door shut and goes down the street, past Lenz, without seeing him.

Lenz sees her face.

He doesn't move. He stands like a man who has seen a ghost. She goes around the corner. He's still standing there.

Then his knees give way. He slides down the wall of the doorway until he's sitting on the step, and stays like that, his hands over his face.

124 EXT. RUIN BY THE RIVER – NIGHT – THE PARENTS

124

He has walked without knowing where. Now he's standing in front of it.

The Works. Huge, burst open, black against the night sky. For four years he has avoided the way here. Above the main gate, three meters high, hang the letters – still all of them, back then; the rust hasn't taken them yet.

JAHN WORKS.

He looks at it. For a long time.

Then he climbs over the rubble in front of the gate, chunk by chunk, until he's close enough. He bends down, picks up a stone, weighs it in his hand – and throws. With everything he has.

The stone hits the wall and drops. A small sound against a very large wall. Nothing else. The letters stay where they are.

He sinks to the ground, in the middle of the rubble, and cries.

125 INT. WORKSHOP APARTMENT – DAY – THE CHILDREN

125

Another day, the same water he doesn't drink. The bits are getting darker; they slide closer to something.

LENZ

I set up a hall once. All night long. Four hundred chairs. For a meeting,...

(MORE)

LENZ (CONT'D)
 (he aligns invisible rows of
 chairs)
 Chairs, child. I hauled chairs for
 the future. And then..

He breaks off.

But nothing more comes. LENZ struggles for composure. Then, out
 of nowhere:

LENZ
 How old are you?

ANNA
 Fourteen.

Lenz nods and, ashamed, puts the cup away.

126 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN

126

Anna lies awake, eyes open, the skylight a gray rectangle.

And the sentences come, repeating. As voices, quiet, out of the
 dark - in her head, with us as witnesses:

RUTH (O.S.)
 Anna, let me look at you...

LENZ (O.S.)
 ... she liked his girl better. The
 two of them always had plenty to
 laugh about ...

MOTHER (O.S.)
 ... a place, high above
 everything ...

LENZ (O.S.)
 How old are you?

Silence.

Anna sits up.

She looks to the skylight. Sets out.

127 EXT./INT. THE HOME, ARCHIVE WINDOW - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN

127

The Home at night, from outside: grown darker. Somewhere a
 little light is burning.

Anna climbs. The archive window she knows from before: the
 latch that doesn't quite close.

She slips inside -

In the archive room a light is burning.

THE PENCIL sits at the small table between the shelves. In front of him: a pot, two cups.

Two.

THE PENCIL

I have tea.

As if that were an explanation.

Anna stands at the window, half in, half out.

She comes all the way in.

He pours. The pot doesn't shake.

THE PENCIL

"Tea is the only drink that stops time."

(pause)

It was in a book. The book got burned for heat. The sentence didn't. Hello, Anna.

ANNA

(surprised)

Hello.

Anna drinks. It's the best thing anyone has offered her in weeks.

Anna looks around. In one corner the Pencil has set up a makeshift sleeping spot. A candle, a few books.

THE PENCIL

I always make enough for two.

128

INT. ARCHIVE - NIGHT - THE CHILDREN

128

Shelves, binders, the remains of an administration. Anna stands at the table.

ANNA

My intake. There has to be something. A paper. Anything.

The Pencil looks at her. Then he gets up - and doesn't fetch a paper.

From the bottom shelf, behind the binders: a small bundle of cloth, tied up, ten years of dust in its folds.

He lays it in front of her and unwraps it, carefully, with his long gray fingers.

Inside lies a little WOODEN HORSE.

Small, smooth in the hand, the mane almost loved away – a thing that has spent a thousand hours in a child's hand.

THE PENCIL

This was with you when you came.

Anna doesn't move.

ANNA

Who brought me?

THE PENCIL

That I don't know. Not anymore, probably. The horse I hid back then, just in case. ...

It fits her hand as if the hand had waited ten years for nothing else. Her thumb finds a spot on the mane on its own.

The notebook in her pocket grows as heavy as a millstone. She doesn't reach for it.

We understand one second before she does, and then she understands.

129 **INT. – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN**

129

THE NIGHT, THIRD TIME. The strangest:

The room is almost empty. The furniture wrong, too little of it, in the wrong places. Where the vial stood: nothing.

And the voices are switched – the woman's voice, whispering, says the man's words; the man's voice is a sound without words.

The child's hand. In it, as a matter of course, as if it had always been there: the little horse.

She holds it the way you hold a little horse: between two fingers, her thumb on the mane, on the spot it finds by itself. She walks it across the floorboards, into the light, four legs, step by step, and out again. It doesn't roll. It walks.

(Was it there? Was it ever there?)

A KNOCK. The bolt. The door.

And the father's loud word – ten years of nothing but sound – is for the first time almost speech: two syllables.

Two syllables that could be "Lorenz." Or anything else.

Whether memory is finally releasing the word or only now building it cannot be decided. We've just seen what it can do with a little horse.

The arm reaches into the light. The gun. The mark in the shape of the little horse's head. Hyper-sharp – the only thing that always stays the same.

In front, in the child's hand, the little horse. Behind, in the light, the mark. In one frame for the first time. The same shape.

And we don't believe a single image anymore.

130 EXT. ROOF OF THE HOME – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN 130

Anna sits on the ridge of the Home, where she sat as a child. Below her the dark house, before her the darker city.

The little horse in her fist. The notebook on her knees.

Anna's hand lies on the first page of the notebook.

She doesn't open it.

131 INT. CLASSROOM, THE HOME – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN 131

The way down from the roof leads through the house. A corridor, an open door: the classroom. Moonlight on empty benches.

Anna means to pass by. And goes in.

On the wall the poster still hangs. The Works, proud, cropped from below. In front of it, small, the four people with the flags.

Anna has looked at this picture for a thousand hours and never seen it.

Three faces are scratched out, the gray greasy with years. The fourth nobody has touched: a young woman, laughing, a child on her arm.

Anna knows the face. She last saw it when there was less of it left.

Ruth.

And next to her, one of the scratched-out ones: the face is gone, the bearing has stayed. She stands turned a little, and one hand lies on the dress, low, the way hands lie when they're guarding something.

Anna stands in front of the picture for a long time and strokes the woman's belly.

132

INT. KESSLER HOUSE, BEDROOM — NIGHT — THE PARENTS

132

Ruth is asleep. She sleeps a lot now.
Lenz sits down beside her. He has the sheets in his jacket. He has made up his mind to tell her. She's the only one he could tell; she was there, back then, in the kitchen, when the friend was still the friend.

RUTH
(half awake)
That you.

LENZ
It's me.

RUTH
The little one?

LENZ
Asleep.

She reaches for his hand. Finds it. Keeps it.

RUTH
You don't smell like — not tonight.

LENZ
No.

RUTH
Good.
(she closes her eyes again)
Then talk to me. When you're sober
you never talk.

He looks at her. He opens his mouth. The words are there: He's alive. He knew. I have the address.

They don't come out.

He looks at her arms. At what the night did to her back then and what it keeps doing to her, one more mark every day.

For four years the account has had only one side: I was in the hall. I set out the chairs. I was with him instead of with you. — And now on the other side stands a name. A man who knew. Who wrote it soft. Who ran away. And because of whom I was in the hall.

Whoever can't forgive himself will take any address the guilt can be sent to.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Lenz?

LENZ

Sleep. It's ... nothing.

He strokes her arm, over the marks, very lightly. She falls asleep. He sits until her breathing is calm.

133 INT. KESSLER HOUSE, KITCHEN / HALLWAY - NIGHT - THE PARENTS 133

From the drawer under the sideboard, all the way at the back, under cloths: a GUN. Old, from a time before everything. He has never needed it. He weighs it in his hand.

He pockets it.

He goes down the hallway. In front of the door to the small room he stops. Inside, a three-year-old is sleeping, Jakob.

Lenz looks at him, through the crack of the door. For a long time.

Then he pulls the door shut, quietly.

134 EXT. DISTILLERY, WALL - DAY - THE CHILDREN 134

The old distillery: a long brick building, dead chimneys, the smell of back then long gone from the walls.

On the yard wall: NAMES. Written in chalk, one below the other, some weathered, some fresh. A list nobody manages and everybody respects.

JAKOB stands in front of the wall. Alone.

His gaze goes down the names - and catches.

There, in neat, old-fashioned handwriting, with the full name, first and last, fresh:

LORENZ KESSLER

Jakob stands very still.

135 EXT. OUTSIDE THE WORKSHOP - DAY - THE CHILDREN 135

Anna comes - and Jakob is already standing there, outside the door, as if he hadn't been able to go in.

JAKOB

He put himself on it. Neatly. Full name.

Anna understands at once what's meant.

JAKOB

Lorenz Kessler.

Silence.

Something rings in Anna – two syllables, deep under ten years. Or she's building it in this moment. It can't be decided, not for her, not for us.

Then, for the first time since we've known him, Jakob wants something:

JAKOB

You're quick. You come up with things.
Help me get him down off there.

Anna – who has never refused him a request, because he never had one – says nothing.

One second. Two. One second too long.

Jakob looks at her. Sees something he can't name.

JAKOB

You look at him like your grown-ups.
Like one out of your notebook.

ANNA

Get him down. How. Tell me how.

JAKOB

You come up with things everywhere else. With the sugar. With the lists. With your dog you came up with something too –

ANNA

The dog was a toll.

JAKOB

The dog was yours. You didn't even wait for them to get hold of him. You nodded and walked.

ANNA

And you climbed after me onto every roof, gray as ash, and never said a word. You hid your father. I see everything.

(pause)

You take a look at him. He doesn't have long – off the wall or not.

(calm)

And if that's his last wish, then let him go.

JAKOB

Yeah. You see everything. And say nothing. You sit with him, you listen to him, for weeks – and the one time I need something, you calculate.

ANNA

I don't calculate –

JAKOB

I watched. One second. You calculated. Like at the toll.

Anna is silent.

JAKOB

People who only ever take – I know those. The whole city takes. I thought –

He breaks off. He doesn't say what he thought.

Jakob goes. Anna stays standing and watches him go.

136 **EXT. OUTSIDE THE WORKSHOP – NIGHT – THE CHILDREN**

136

Anna doesn't come to knock.

Through the window, from the dark of the alley: inside, the small lamp is burning. Jakob sits by the cot – on which the father now lies, sleeping; for the first time we see Lenz on this bed. Jakob just sits there. Keeping watch.

Then she steps up to the door. From her jacket: the spyglass.

She sets it on the threshold. Centered. Neatly.

And goes.

137 INT. HIDEOUT, LIVING ROOM — NIGHT — THE PARENTS**137**

An evening like a hundred before it.

The kerosene lamp stands on the floor, because there it lets the least light through the curtain; it throws a yellow circle.

The parents whisper.

HELENE

(whispering)

... let's go there. Anna can't rot away in here. Neither can you. I want to show it to her. Anna, you know, the place, high up above the city. The path that

A KNOCK.

The whispering stops.

In four years there has never been a knock.

A look between the parents. Jahn goes to the door.

We see Helene, tense, following her husband with her eyes. She takes a step back to the edge of the table.

The camera takes her arm, then her hand, into the center of the frame. It comes down, flat, calm, downward. The camera travels down with it, under the table. We see Anna, who knows the sign and is calm. We stay on her.

The bolt. The door. Everything muffled. Slow motion. A flash of light. We see, blurred, only cropped, Helene running forward. Another flash of light. Then nothing more. We stay on Anna a few seconds longer.

138 EXT. DISTILLERY COURTYARD — MORNING — THE CHILDREN**138**

Cold you can see your breath in. Kettles of warm water, carried by VOLUNTEERS — nobody assigns them, they come on their own. The dying arrange it themselves.

Steam hangs over the courtyard.

The RUNNERS, a dozen, take off what they've carried: jackets, shirts, things. A TABLE for the things. Nobody guards it.

The volunteers wash the ones who run today. Arms, face, neck — slowly, thoroughly, without ceremony. It looks like what it is: people washing people.

And with the taking off and the washing there are — arms. Bare arms, everywhere in the courtyard, marks in every script. What

the city has shrouded for as long as we've known it is simply here.

On the other side of the courtyard: LENZ, with bare arms.

Marks, many, old and new – a whole script. We see him without sleeves for the first time, and it's as if we were seeing a man naked for the first time.

In front of him, JAKOB. The camera's eye catches his shoes.

Freshly mended.

Jakob says nothing. Lenz says nothing.

Then the father's hands rise. Halfway. At half height they stop and fall back down.

Between the two of them stands fourteen years of air.

ANNA stands at the edge.

Anna's gaze does what her gaze always does. It falls on the arms.

The steam opens. Two seconds, three: on the inner forearm, among many – a mark in the shape of the horse's head.

Maybe. Maybe not. The steam moves back in between.

NO INSERT. NO CLOSE-UP. NO MUSIC. We're too far away to swear to it, and we stay that way.

Anna closes her eyes.

She opens them again. Now she looks at his face. Lenz returns the look. Briefly, then back to Jakob.

Again we're on Anna.

Then she walks to the table with the things that were taken off. Lays, between the jackets and shirts, the little wooden horse. She simply does it.

The camera stays with her and with the table until she turns away.

The DRUMS set in, deep, like a second heart.

The procession: the drummers up front, then the runners, in light clothes, with bare arms. Lenz among them – more upright than we last saw him, and not yet upright.

The city stands along the edges, dense. And sings the half-forgotten thing. Closer now, close enough for words – a work song, drawn out and heavy: one line that repeats as if it had to keep a back straight, and a third that answers.

Four in the morning, before the sun is high,

four in the morning, before the sun is high,

I go out in the dew before the dew runs dry.

Old voices carry the words; the children only half know them and hum the gaps. It's the harvest song. The city sings its runners off with what it sang all its life on the way to work.

JAKOB runs the first stretch along the edge, level with his father.

The corner where the street opens into the fields. There the living stop. That's the rule nobody explains.

Jakob stops. The procession runs on. From behind, Anna comes running up.

140 **EXT. THE FIELDS – DAY – THE CHILDREN**

140

The street becomes a field track, the track becomes a trail, the stalks stand as tall as a man and bloom.

At the edge of the fields the runners begin to run.

Really run. Like children. Like lunatics.

And Lenz runs.

As he runs, something in him straightens up: the shoulders come back. The stride takes hold. The field worker finds a ground he knows – this ground, there's no other he knows like this.

The stalks close over the first one. Over the second.

Just before the blooming takes him, Lenz turns his face into the smell – the best nose in the city, in the smell of its life –

and LAUGHS.

Then there's only the field.

The drumming slows. Stops.

141 EXT. CITY / PATH TO THE HILL - DAY - THE CHILDREN**141**

The city is very still.

Anna and Jakob walk side by side. Without touching. Without talking.

Around Jakob's neck, the spyglass.

They walk the path up the hill, in switchbacks, along the railing.

142 EXT. LOOKOUT - DAWN - THE CHILDREN**142**

The city below is gray and still and all accounted for. The thin line of the barrier. Beyond it: world, simply going on.

ANNA and JAKOB sit side by side at the railing. Not touching. The distance: a hand's width.

For a long time, nothing. Then:

ANNA

Mama always talked about how
someday we'd sit up above the city.
I think it's here.

Anna looks at the city. Then she recites it — not the way you tell, the way you recite: a text that has been by heart for ten years.

ANNA

High above everything there's a
place. You take the path that
turns, always along the railing,
and you count the steps. And up
there the whole city lies at your
feet, like an open book. And in the
evening comes the —

She stops.

Not like someone thinking. Like someone walking a staircase in the dark, one they know — and the step isn't there.

Jakob doesn't ask.

JAKOB

(quietly)

Go on.

ANNA

— and it settles over everything,
and everything that's broken looks
whole from up there. At this place
we promised you your life. And
whoever has been up there knows:
the world doesn't end behind the
city. When you're big, we'll go up,
the three of us. And you count the
steps.

Jakob nods. Looks at the city, the barrier, the thin line.

JAKOB

Mine kept nothing from the Drops
but the condensed milk.

Anna laughs. Quietly, through the nose. She doesn't lean
against him. She just sits a little less alone.

Then Jakob lays his hand on the railing, next to hers.

143

EXT. ROAD TO THE BARRIER — DAY — THE CHILDREN

143

A road between fields, toward the thin line on the horizon.

By the roadside, crooked in the earth: an official SIGN from
before. The lettering almost gone, eaten by weather:

RESTRICTED AREA

KEEP OUT

Nobody looks at it.

Two children walk beneath it, each with a bundle, toward the
horizon behind which the world simply goes on.

144

EXT. THE GANG'S WALL — DAY — THE CHILDREN

144

On a wall, far behind them, at the edge of the turf:
the yellow DOG.

He sits and watches them go, the two shrinking figures between
the fields.

He doesn't run after them.

Whether they make it through, we don't see. The hope of a way
out weighs more.

BLACK.

THE END