

The Night of the Ninth

Historical · 3-character play · 2 women, 1 either · 45 min · Advanced · Ages 12+

East Berlin, 9 November 1989. Television has just announced that people will be allowed to cross to the West, and Lena, released from prison two years ago after a failed escape, wants to go over this very night. Her mother, Hanna, refuses to go down into the street. Then Alex, who lives across the landing, rings the bell with a bag in hand and a notebook to give to Lena before leaving.

A sixth-floor flat on Karl-Marx-Allee, East Berlin, the night of Thursday 9 to Friday 10 November 1989.

Casting

HANNA (Female role, Senior) 60, laid bricks on this avenue in 1952 and has lived on it ever since; retired since March.

LENA (Female role, Young adult) 26, her daughter; has worked in a laundry since her release from prison in October 1987.

ALEX (No gender marker, Adult) around forty, lives in the flat across the same landing; keeps the building's register of visitors.

ACT ONE: HALF PAST SEVEN

SCENE 1

(A room that serves as living room and kitchen. A table, an ironing board, a television set, a radio on the sideboard, a window onto the avenue. Hanna is sitting down, an open sewing box in front of her. She is sewing a button back onto a coat. On the television, the opening titles of the evening news are coming to an end.)

(A key in the lock. Lena comes in, out of breath, in her work jacket.)

LENA. Did you hear?

HANNA. Shut the door.

LENA. Did you hear, yes or no?

HANNA. I'll hear if you keep quiet.

(Lena shuts the door. On the television, a newsreader is reading a statement. We make out: "... private travel abroad can be applied for without any preconditions...")

LENA. That's it. That's what he said.

HANNA. Who?

LENA. On the U-Bahn. A man had heard it at six, at the press conference. He was saying it over and over to the whole carriage, standing up, with a piece of paper, he'd copied it down. Nobody believed him. A woman told him to sit down.

HANNA. She was right.

LENA. Somebody asked the man from the Politburo when it started. He looked through his papers. For a long time. He turned the pages over. And he said: immediately. Without delay.

HANNA. He was looking through his papers.

LENA. And he found it.

HANNA. Listen. They're reading it again.

(On the television: "... permits will be issued at short notice by the passport and registration offices of the People's Police...")

HANNA. Did you hear that? The passport offices. The police. Issued. That

means a counter. A form. A stamp.

LENA. At short notice.

HANNA. Tomorrow morning. The offices open at eight. You go with your identity card, you queue, and in a week, perhaps...

LENA. With my identity card.

(A pause. Hanna bites off the thread.)

HANNA. Did you eat, in the canteen?

LENA. Mum. I don't have an identity card. I have a grey paper folded in four, with a number on it. The PM 12. You think at the counter they'll give a visa to a grey paper?

HANNA. I think they wrote it for everybody.

LENA. That's what you think.

HANNA. I read what's written. They wrote: apply. You apply, and you wait. That's how we've always done it.

LENA. I applied to leave, last year. A letter, two copies. They called me in twice and told me my case did not lend itself.

HANNA. Your case.

LENA. That was their word, not mine.

HANNA. Tomorrow I'll come to the office with you.

LENA. You.

HANNA. I'll put on my good coat, we'll go at seven, before the queue. I'll do the talking. I have an identity card, a real one, a pension, a medal from the building site in the drawer. They listen to old ladies with medals.

LENA. And what will you tell them?

HANNA. That you're my daughter. That you want to see your aunt in Wedding. That you'll come back.

LENA. You don't know if I'll come back.

HANNA. Neither do they. But they like to be told.

(Hanna looks for another reel of thread in the box. Lena looks at the box, then at the window.)

HANNA. Your button was hanging by a thread. You were going to lose it.

LENA. I don't care about the button.

HANNA. I do. You can't get them like that any more. I tried three shops for those.

LENA. You never tidy anything in that box.

HANNA. Everything's in there. I know where everything is.

(Lena goes to the window, looks down at the avenue.)

LENA. There's nobody down there.

HANNA. It's dark. It's cold. People are having their supper.

LENA. On Saturday, on Alexanderplatz, there were half a million of us. I couldn't see my own feet. Nobody fired. Nobody came for anybody, afterwards.

HANNA. Not yet.

LENA. You didn't even go down to see.

HANNA. I saw it on television.

LENA. On ours?

HANNA. They showed it. For once, they showed it.

LENA. They show everything now. They all resigned on Tuesday, the whole government, they showed that too. Did you see their faces?

HANNA. I saw they'd put their ties on.

(A pause. Lena takes off her work jacket and throws it on a chair.)

LENA. I'm going to Heinrich-Heine-Straße. It's twenty minutes on foot.

HANNA. What for?

LENA. To see.

HANNA. To see what? A barrier and two soldiers? You've seen barriers.

LENA. If it's without delay, it's tonight.

HANNA. Tonight the offices are shut.

LENA. It's not an office, it's a border.

HANNA. Here, a border is an office. With a rifle next to it.

LENA. You say it like a recipe.

HANNA. I say it the way it is. You're working at six tomorrow.

LENA. I sort hospital sheets. The sheets can wait. They're used to waiting, at the hospital.

HANNA. And your boss?

LENA. My boss told me this afternoon he was thinking of applying for a visa to see his aunt in Spandau. He told me. Me. In two years he's never once said good morning to me.

(Hanna holds out the coat, the button sewn back on.)

HANNA. Try it on.

LENA. Mum.

HANNA. Try it on, so I can see if it's straight.

(Lena puts on the coat. Hanna does up the top button and steps back.)

HANNA. It's straight.

LENA. Thank you.

HANNA. Keep it on, now that it's on. You're cold, you're shaking.

LENA. I ran up the stairs. The lift's broken again.

HANNA. Since Monday. I told Alex. Alex says telling won't make it go any faster.

LENA. Alex says a lot of things.

HANNA. Alex writes down what's asked for.

LENA. Yes. That's exactly my point.

(Hanna gets up to turn off the television. Lena takes her hand.)

LENA. Wait. Leave it on.

HANNA. They've finished.

LENA. The West hasn't.

SCENE 2

(Eight o'clock. Hanna has put the sewing box away. Lena is standing in front of the set, in her coat, waiting. She turns the channel knob. A different picture, different opening titles: the news from the West. A man's voice announces that the GDR is opening its border. Hanna sits down again.)

LENA. Did you hear?

HANNA. I heard.

LENA. They're saying it too.

HANNA. They say whatever pleases them.

LENA. For twenty years you've said they lie less than ours do.

HANNA. I never said that.

LENA. You turned the sound down whenever Alex went past on the landing. It's the same thing.

(On the television, the press conference: a man in glasses, papers in his hands. Lena goes closer to the screen.)

LENA. Look. Look at him searching. He doesn't know. He doesn't even know what he's holding.

HANNA. And that's the man you're counting on?

LENA. I'm not counting on him. I'm counting on what he said in front of everybody. That can't be taken back.

HANNA. Everything can be taken back.

LENA. Not in front of everybody.

(Lena goes to her bedroom door and disappears for a moment. Hanna watches the screen, then turns off the sound. Lena comes back with a postcard, which she slips into the coat pocket.)

HANNA. You're taking his card.

LENA. I'm taking the address.

HANNA. You know the address by heart.

LENA. There's a map on the back. He drew the way from the U-Bahn.

HANNA. He sent it a year ago.

LENA. Fourteen months.

HANNA. Three lines, in fourteen months.

LENA. Four. He asks if I'm all right. He says he does deliveries for a printer's, he's got a bike. He doesn't ask anything else.

HANNA. Maybe he's moved.

LENA. Maybe. Then I'll ring the neighbours' bell. They have neighbours over there too.

(Lena opens the sideboard drawer and rummages.)

HANNA. What are you looking for?

LENA. My PM 12. I always leave it here, under the bills.

HANNA. It'll be in your jacket.

LENA. It's never in my jacket. I never put it in my work jacket, it goes in the wash with the sheets.

(She takes a handful of white candles out of the drawer, then another. She puts them on the sideboard.)

LENA. Why are there so many candles in here?

HANNA. For the power cuts.

LENA. There hasn't been a power cut since last winter.

HANNA. There'll be others.

LENA. There are enough here for ten winters. They've all been burned a little. Every one of them.

HANNA. You light them again. You don't throw a candle away because it's been used.

(Lena shuts the drawer.)

LENA. It isn't there.

HANNA. Look in your room.

LENA. I put it there this morning. I took it out of my jacket at a quarter to six, I put it under the bills, I shut the drawer. I've done that every morning for two years.

(A pause. Hanna looks at the silent screen.)

LENA. Mum.

HANNA. Come and sit down.

LENA. I don't want to sit down. I want my paper.

HANNA. Where are you going to go, with your paper? Two hours ago it was forbidden. In two hours it may be forbidden again. And you, with your grey paper, you'll be in the middle, caught between the two.

LENA. In the middle, yes. Not here.

HANNA. They know your name. They know it better than mine.

LENA. Come with me.

(Hanna doesn't answer.)

LENA. Come. Just to look. We walk to Heinrich-Heine-Straße, we look, if it's shut we come home and I'll make you some tea.

HANNA. I'm not going down.

LENA. You've been sixty since March. Pensioners, they've always let them through. You could have gone to see the West ten times this summer. You didn't even apply.

HANNA. I have nobody over there.

LENA. An hour ago I had an aunt in Wedding.

HANNA. My sister never invited me. You need an invitation.

LENA. She would have invited you. You never wrote to her.

HANNA. I don't write to the West.

LENA. Why not?

HANNA. Because letters get opened.

LENA. So what? What have you got to hide?

(A pause.)

HANNA. I laid bricks on this avenue. I was twenty-four, I carried the buckets, in winter we warmed the mortar over braziers. One day in June, the whole site went down into the street. I went down with them. We were

singing, we were happy, there were thousands of us, like you on Saturday. The next day there were tanks.

LENA. That was thirty-six years ago.

HANNA. So? It's the same avenue.

LENA. They're not the same tanks. They didn't move on Saturday. They didn't move in Leipzig.

HANNA. Not yet.

LENA. You always say not yet.

HANNA. Because it's always not yet. Until the day it's now.

(Lena holds out her hand, palm open.)

LENA. Give me my paper.

(A pause. Hanna takes the PM 12 out of her apron pocket. She looks at it, unfolds it, folds it again, puts it down on the table. Lena picks it up.)

LENA. You had it on you.

HANNA. It was lying about on the sideboard.

LENA. It was under the bills.

HANNA. It was lying about under the bills.

LENA. Why?

HANNA. I wanted to put it away.

LENA. You always put my papers away. You put everything away.

HANNA. Somebody has to.

(Lena puts the PM 12 in the inside pocket of the coat. She goes to the door.)

HANNA. Your scarf.

LENA. I'm not cold.

HANNA. You're not cold now.

(Lena comes back and takes the scarf from the coat stand.)

LENA. If it's open, I'm going across.

HANNA. I know.

LENA. I'm not asking you. I'm telling you.

HANNA. You haven't asked me anything for two years.

LENA. I've just asked you to come.

(A pause.)

HANNA. Go.

(Lena goes out. The door. Her footsteps on the stairs, further and further away. Hanna stays sitting. On the silent screen, pictures of the press conference, still. She turns off the television. She goes to the sideboard, takes one of the candles Lena left out, holds it for a moment. She puts it back in the drawer with the others and closes it.)

ACT TWO: TWENTY PAST TEN

SCENE 1

(The same room. The ironing board is set up, a pile of laundry beside it. Hanna is ironing. The radio is on, low. A man's voice, on Western radio, talks about thousands of people outside the checkpoint at Bornholmer Straße. Behind the voice, a crowd chanting.)

(The doorbell. Hanna puts down the iron. It rings again. She turns off the radio and goes to open. Alex is on the landing, in a coat, a sports bag in hand.)

ALEX. Good evening, Hanna.

HANNA. It's twenty past ten.

ALEX. There was a light under your door.

HANNA. You always see the light under doors.

ALEX. Is Lena here?

HANNA. No.

ALEX. Since when?

HANNA. Why?

ALEX. I heard someone run down the stairs, around eight. Just before I went

down myself.

HANNA. Don't you ever sleep?

ALEX. Not tonight. Nobody's sleeping tonight. I've just come from Bornholmer. There are thousands of them outside the bridge. People are shouting: open the gate.

HANNA. Come in. You're letting the cold in.

(Alex comes in. Hanna shuts the door. Alex keeps hold of the bag.)

HANNA. You're going on a trip.

ALEX. At the bridge, before I caught the train back, they started letting a few through. The ones closest to the gates, the ones shouting loudest. A guard takes the identity card, puts a stamp in it, and waves them on: go.

HANNA. So it's true.

ALEX. The stamp, they put it on the photo. Right on the face.

HANNA. On the face.

ALEX. A man next to me saw it, on the card of someone who'd come back to the gate to call to his wife. He said: on the photo, that means they're crossing you out. You don't belong here any more. You don't come back.

HANNA. Do people know that?

ALEX. The ones going through don't look at their cards. They run.

(Hanna looks at the door, then at the window.)

HANNA. Lena wanted to go to Heinrich-Heine-Straße.

ALEX. At Bornholmer there were people who'd come from Heinrich-Heine. Shut, over there. They'd come from all over.

HANNA. She has her grey paper. With her grey paper, they won't let her through.

ALEX. Tonight they're not looking at the colour of anyone's papers.

(A pause. Hanna picks up the iron again, then puts it down without ironing.)

HANNA. And you, you want your stamp.

ALEX. Yes.

HANNA. On the face.

ALEX. Yes.

HANNA. You've always lived here. Your parents are in the cemetery at Friedrichsfelde, you take them heather every autumn. You have a job. Your geraniums on the balcony, the only ones in the building that survive the winter. You've kept the house register for fifteen years. What's the great hurry, never to come back?

ALEX. I'd like to see Lena first.

HANNA. Why?

ALEX. I have something to give her.

HANNA. Give it to me. I'll give it to her.

ALEX. No.

HANNA. You don't trust me.

ALEX. It isn't about trust. It has to go from my hand to hers. Not through a third hand.

(Hanna reaches out for the bag. Alex clutches the bag tight.)

HANNA. It's in there.

ALEX. Hanna.

HANNA. If you didn't want to tell me anything, you wouldn't have rung. You'd have waited on the landing, ear against the door. You know very well how to wait on the landing.

(A pause.)

ALEX. The register. You know what it is. Who comes to stay with whom. The name, the date, the number of nights. The police look at it once a year, and that's all.

HANNA. I know what it is. I sign it every time my cousin comes up from Cottbus.

ALEX. There was a second register.

HANNA. I know.

ALEX. You don't know.

HANNA. A black notebook with an elastic band. You keep it in the left pocket of your coat. One evening, on the landing, you were writing in it and the stair light clicked off. You finished your line in the dark.

ALEX. A notebook doesn't mean anything.

HANNA. No. But one day a man told me what time Tobias came up to our flat in the evenings. To the minute. He knew Tobias wore Western shoes, too. There was only one door on this landing that could have known that.

ALEX. What day?

HANNA. In 1986.

ALEX. After the arrest.

HANNA. In 1986.

(A pause. Alex puts the bag on a chair, opens it, and takes out a black notebook held shut by an elastic band.)

ALEX. In 1979 they found records at my place, books, and a list of names for a letter to the newspaper. They gave me a choice between one thing and another. I chose the other. One meeting a month, in a flat on Frankfurter Allee, a polite man who served coffee. I told them about the building. Who has visitors. Who listens to Western radio. Who has new shoes. I told myself: they know already. I told myself: if it isn't me, it'll be somebody worse. And in the evenings I copied it all into this notebook. To know exactly what I'd given. So as not to give any more.

HANNA. And you gave them Lena.

ALEX. They're going to open the files, Hanna. Tonight the border, and after that, the files. Whatever anyone wrote, somebody is going to read it. I don't want Lena reading it in some office, with my name at the top of the page. I want her to read it tonight, in my own hand.

HANNA. And afterwards you cross the bridge, and you're not here to see her face.

ALEX. Yes.

HANNA. How convenient.

ALEX. Nothing is convenient tonight.

HANNA. What is there, about me?

ALEX. What I saw.

HANNA. Read me one.

(Alex opens the notebook at random and reads.)

ALEX. "12 April 1984. H. sings while ironing, window open. A song from before the war, all the way through."

HANNA. Is that all?

ALEX. That day, yes.

HANNA. And the other days?

(Alex closes the notebook.)

ALEX. The other days, Lena will read first.

HANNA. I don't sing when I iron any more.

ALEX. I know. Not since March 1986.

(A key in the lock. Hanna and Alex turn towards the door. Alex keeps the notebook in hand.)

SCENE 2

(Lena comes in, in coat and scarf, her cheeks red. She sees Alex and stops.)

LENA. What are you doing here?

ALEX. Waiting for you.

LENA. Why did you let Alex in?

HANNA. The bell rang. I opened the door.

LENA. You never open the door after nine.

HANNA. You came back.

LENA. I came back.

HANNA. It was shut.

LENA. Heinrich-Heine was, yes. Two soldiers who should still have been at school told us to come back tomorrow with a visa. A man shouted that they were getting through at Bornholmer. We ran for the S-Bahn, thirty of us, forty, and walked from Schönhauser Allee. There were people right out in the road, between the Trabants standing still with their engines running. People in slippers, Mum. A man in pyjamas under his coat.

(She goes to the television, turns it on, turns the sound down.)

HANNA. And you?

LENA. I was twenty metres from the gate. There was a couple in front of me. They only wanted to have a look. They'd left their children asleep, they told me so in the crowd, they showed me their door key. The guard took their cards, he stamped something, I couldn't see what. Behind me somebody said: those two won't be coming back. The woman asked: we can come back afterwards, can't we? The guard didn't answer. He looked at his boots. And they went through. They walked across the bridge looking back over their shoulders. She had the key in her hand.

(A pause.)

LENA. So I turned round. I came back to fetch you.

HANNA. To fetch me.

LENA. If it's for ever, you're coming. I'm not going over without you, never to come back. Not twice.

HANNA. Lena.

LENA. You take your coat, a bag, Dad's photos, your pension book. We leave the rest. The rest belongs to them.

HANNA. I'm not going down.

LENA. Then I'm not going across.

HANNA. Don't say that.

LENA. I stay here, I sort sheets, I climb these stairs, I walk past the door opposite. All my life.

(She turns to Alex.)

LENA. You're leaving, are you? Bag all packed?

ALEX. Yes.

LENA. Who's going to keep the register?

ALEX. Somebody else.

LENA. There's always somebody else. And you want the stamp as well?

ALEX. Yes.

LENA. For once your name will be on the right list.

ALEX. Before I go, I want you to read this.

(Alex holds out the notebook. Lena doesn't take it.)

LENA. I take nothing from your hand.

ALEX. You're not taking anything. You're reading. Afterwards you can throw it out of the window if you like.

LENA. What is it?

ALEX. What I told them about this floor. About you, about Tobias, about your mother. Since 1979. Every meeting. I copied it all down.

(A pause.)

LENA. I knew it.

ALEX. Yes.

LENA. Three years I've known. Three years I've come up those stairs watching your door. When I went past, the spyhole went dark. I counted the seconds until it was light again.

ALEX. Read it.

(Lena takes the notebook and slips off the elastic band. She leafs through it, stops, reads.)

LENA. "14 January 1986. T. comes up to the sixth floor at 21.10. Does not come down. Western shoes, brown, new laces." New laces.

ALEX. They wanted details. A detail meant one more meeting without them asking for anything else.

LENA. "1 February. L. and T. go out at 07.00 with a sports bag. Return at 19.00, hair wet." Hair wet.

ALEX. I didn't know why.

LENA. We went swimming. Every Saturday, in February. An hour of lengths, then an hour standing in the cold water of the showers, without moving, to get used to it. You saw our wet hair, and you wrote it down.

ALEX. I wrote wet hair. I never wrote why. I never knew why. They never told me anything. Read to the end, Lena. There's nothing. Not one word about the escape. Not the day, not the place, not the water. I didn't know.

LENA. You're lying.

ALEX. Read it.

(Lena turns the pages. She stops.)

LENA. "3 March. H. goes out alone at 22.00. No bag. Brought back at 00.40 in a grey car. A man opens the door for her. She does not shake his hand."

(A pause. Lena reads the line again, silently.)

LENA. The third of March.

ALEX. I don't know what it means. I wrote what I saw from the stairwell window. That's all I ever did.

LENA. "5 March. 05.30. Three men go up. Come down at 06.05 with L. and T." The fifth of March.

(She looks up at Hanna.)

LENA. You never go out in the evening.

HANNA. No.

LENA. You've never gone out in the evening. Not once since I was born.

HANNA. Once.

LENA. Where were you?

HANNA. Alex, leave us.

(Alex doesn't move.)

LENA. A grey car. A man opening the door for you. Where were you, on the third of March?

(A pause.)

HANNA. It was me.

LENA. You what?

HANNA. On the third of March, at ten at night, I went to the police station. I asked to speak to someone. They made me wait on a bench. A man came, not in uniform. I told him the day and the place.

(Lena has gone completely still. The notebook lies open in her hand. Alex slowly closes the bag, eyes on Hanna.)

(On the television, which nobody is watching, a Western newsreader says that tonight the gates in the Wall stand wide open.)

ACT THREE: A QUARTER TO MIDNIGHT

SCENE 1

(The same room. The television is off. Alex's bag is gone. Lena is sitting at the table, in her coat. In front of her: the closed notebook, a full cup of tea, and a big plastic bag, full, its handles knotted. Hanna is standing by the sideboard. Outside, every now and then, a car horn.)

HANNA. Your tea's getting cold.

LENA. I've packed my bag.

HANNA. So I see.

LENA. The Hoheneck bag. They gave it to me when I got out, with my things in it. It's still holding up.

HANNA. They make strong bags.

LENA. I'm going back to Bornholmer. I hand over my grey paper, they put their stamp on it, and I don't come back. This time I want it, the stamp. Like Alex.

HANNA. What are you waiting for?

LENA. For you to tell me why.

(A pause.)

HANNA. You'd put a letter in the sewing box. Under the reels. You'd folded it in four, like your grey paper. On the envelope you'd written: to be opened after.

LENA. After.

HANNA. After the sixth. You thought I wouldn't be sewing anything for a week. On the Monday, Tobias caught his heel in the hem of his trousers on the stairs. He left them with me to mend. I was looking for grey thread.

LENA. You opened it.

HANNA. It was my name on the envelope.

LENA. It said after.

HANNA. I know what it said.

LENA. On the morning of the fifth they searched everything. The mattresses, the drawers, your box tipped out on the rug. I thought that's where they found it. And the day, the place, I thought Alex had overheard us, Tobias and me, one evening when we were talking about it on the stairs. Three years I've believed that.

HANNA. And the box?

LENA. Since I came home, I haven't opened it. Not once. I didn't want to know if the letter was still in it.

HANNA. On the fifth, it was in my apron pocket.

(A pause.)

HANNA. I read: the canal, at Treptow. The night of the sixth. Tobias goes first, he's the better swimmer. Don't worry, the water isn't so cold when you keep moving. Mum, I'll write to you from the other side.

LENA. You know it by heart.

HANNA. In March the water is four degrees. I asked at the swimming baths, that same afternoon, the woman at the till. I told her it was for a crossword. Four degrees. And the searchlights. And the dogs on the bank. And the ones who shoot, who are nineteen, and get a bonus when they hit. Tobias is a good swimmer. You swim like me. You do ten lengths and then you hang on to the side.

LENA. I'd been training.

HANNA. Three Saturdays.

LENA. Five.

HANNA. Five Saturdays under the showers.

(A pause.)

HANNA. I put on my coat. I walked to the police station. I told myself: I'll tell them the two of them are planning something foolish, they'll call them in, give them a fright, and on the sixth nothing will happen. The man not in uniform listened to me. He was polite. He said: we'll summon them. A summons, a warning. They're young. He said it again in the car, driving me home. Summons. He said the word three times.

LENA. And you believed him.

HANNA. I wanted to believe him. It's the same thing.

LENA. It isn't the same thing.

HANNA. On the fifth, at half past five, the bell rang. I thought: it's the summons, they've come to deliver it themselves, at that hour, to frighten you. I opened the door. I even put water on to boil for the coffee.

LENA. And Tobias?

HANNA. What about Tobias?

LENA. You gave them the day and the place. He was in the day and the place too.

HANNA. I only thought of you.

LENA. During the interrogations, before the West bought him out, they told him it was me. That I'd told them everything, to get less. They showed him my signature at the bottom of a sheet of paper.

HANNA. Your signature.

LENA. Everybody signs sheets of paper in there. You sign so they'll let you sleep. Four lines in fourteen months, Mum. That's why. He thinks it was me.

HANNA. Tell him it was me.

LENA. Tonight?

HANNA. Tonight. Tell him about the bench, the time, the grey car. Tell him I put water on for the coffee.

(Lena doesn't answer. She gets up and goes to the window, her back to the room.)

LENA. Do you know what there is at Hohenschönhausen? In the cells?

HANNA. No.

LENA. Nothing. A bed, a bucket, a window of glass bricks. You can't see the sky. You sleep on your back with your hands on top of the blanket, or they bang on the door. Every ten minutes, the spyhole. All night. Six months. Then Hohenek, a castle with bars. We sewed sheets. Sheets for the West, for a mail-order catalogue. I sewed sheets that people in Hamburg were going to buy and sleep in.

HANNA. I didn't know where you were. For three months nobody would tell me where you were.

LENA. Nobody knew anything. Everybody knew everything, and nobody knew anything.

(A pause. She comes back to the table, opens the notebook and turns the pages, past the line for the third of March.)

LENA. "6 March. Candle in H.'s window, 22.00." "7 March. Candle." "8 March. Candle."

(She turns several pages.)

LENA. Candle. Candle. Candle. That's all there is. Pages of it. June. December. "24 December. Candle. Two." March, the year after: candle. "17 October 1987. L. comes home at 15.00, with a plastic bag. No candle."

(She closes the notebook.)

LENA. So that's what the drawer is.

HANNA. You were somewhere in the dark. I told myself: if she's in the dark, at least there's this one light. Even if she can't see it. It's stupid.

LENA. At Hohenschönhausen it was never dark. That's what they do. The light stays on, and the spyhole opens all night long. Six months, and I never once saw the dark. At Hoheneck, the dark was the punishment. A cell in the cellar, no window, no bed. Three days, for answering back to a warder.

HANNA. I didn't know.

LENA. No.

(A pause. Hanna goes to the sewing box, lifts out the reels, and takes out a folded envelope. She puts it on the table in front of Lena.)

LENA. You kept it.

HANNA. Where did you want me to put it?

LENA. In a drawer at the police station. Have they got it now, or haven't they?

HANNA. The man read it. He gave it back to me. He said: keep it, madam, it was your daughter who wrote it.

LENA. He made you sign something.

HANNA. A sheet of paper. I didn't read it.

LENA. When they open the files, I'll read it. I will.

HANNA. You'll read it.

LENA. Why didn't you say anything when I came home? Two years. Two years sitting across the table from me.

HANNA. You opened the door with your key. You put down your plastic bag. You said: I'm hungry. I cooked you something. The next day it was one day too late. And the day after that, two days. You can't catch up with that. You get up, you make the coffee, you sew the buttons back on.

(Lena takes the envelope, doesn't open it, puts it in her coat pocket. Outside, car horns, more and more of them. Lena turns on the radio. A man's voice, speaking fast: at Bornholmer Straße the barrier is up, the guards have given up, people are going through without showing any papers. Behind the voice, shouting, laughter.)

LENA. Listen.

(On the radio, the voice says that some people are already heading back, and that they are being let back in.)

LENA. They're coming back.

HANNA. They're coming back.

LENA. They're not stamping anything any more. You go and look, and you come home to bed.

(Lena looks at the plastic bag on the table. They listen. A knock at the door, three small knocks.)

SCENE 2

(Hanna goes to open. Alex is on the landing, the sports bag in hand, coat open.)

ALEX. Did you hear?

HANNA. We're listening.

ALEX. They've raised the barrier. They're not looking at anything now. Not the cards, not the faces. People are going through with their dogs. There's a woman pushing a pram, at this time of night. Down in the street they're saying the first ones are already back: they had a coffee on the other side and now they're coming home to bed.

LENA. Come in.

(Alex comes in. A pause. Nobody sits down.)

ALEX. Earlier, after "It was me", I couldn't take the bridge. I put the bag down in my hall and waited behind my door. An hour. The notebook was in here, and the two of you, with that, on the other side of the landing. I listened for anybody going down. Nobody. When the radio said they were raising the barrier, I picked up the bag again. I went down the six floors. In the street, people are walking to Alexanderplatz down the middle of the road. Trabants hooting, windows down, people slapping their roofs. A girl gave me a swig of sparkling wine, straight from the bottle. I had the bag in my hand. I came back up the six floors.

LENA. Why?

ALEX. There's no stamp any more. Do you understand? I packed my bag so I'd never come back. And now everybody's coming back. I can't even leave for ever any more. They've opened it too wide.

HANNA. You can still choose not to come back.

ALEX. The files don't move. They're on Normannenstraße, with my name in them. The bridge changes nothing.

(Alex puts the bag down on the floor, by the door.)

LENA. Do you know what's written at the end of your notebook?

ALEX. Candle.

LENA. For nineteen months.

ALEX. I didn't know what else to write. I had to write something about this floor. There was nothing else left, at night, in your window. One day the man on Frankfurter Allee told me to stop putting it down. He said: a candle is not information. I went on writing it anyway. In the notebook. Not for him.

LENA. For who, then?

ALEX. I don't know. So that somebody had seen it.

(Lena picks up the notebook from the table and snaps the elastic band round it.)

LENA. I'm keeping it.

ALEX. It's yours.

LENA. It isn't mine. It's yours. I'm keeping it. When they open the files, I'll put the two side by side, yours and theirs. I'll see whether you copied everything.

ALEX. I copied everything.

LENA. We'll see.

ALEX. Yes. We'll see.

LENA. On the third of March you saw the grey car. You wrote it down.

ALEX. Yes.

LENA. And on the morning of the fifth you saw them take me away.

ALEX. Yes.

LENA. All that time, you knew it wasn't you. You saw me looking at your spyhole too.

ALEX. I knew.

LENA. You could have told me. One line. You write such good lines.

ALEX. And told you what? Your mother came home late in a grey car? I didn't know any more than that. And you were right to look at me like that. Not for that day. But you were right.

HANNA. Alex said nothing, for my sake.

ALEX. For mine too. If I'd mentioned that car, I'd have had to say where I was watching it from.

(Lena puts the notebook in her coat pocket, next to the envelope. She does up the top button again.)

LENA. I'm going to see.

HANNA. Where?

LENA. The other side. Bornholmer, or somewhere else. They say it's opening at Invalidenstraße too. I'll walk until I find a place where they're letting people through.

HANNA. And Tobias?

LENA. I don't know if he's waiting for me. I don't know if I'm waiting for him. I haven't seen him for three years and eight months. I can't even remember his voice. I know the colour of his laces because it's written in a notebook.

(A pause.)

LENA. Are you coming?

HANNA. No.

LENA. They're coming back, Mum. You heard. We go across, we have a look, we have a coffee in the West, and we come home.

HANNA. I know.

LENA. Well, then?

HANNA. Go and see for me.

LENA. It's not the same.

HANNA. No. But it's what I can do.

(A pause.)

HANNA. Bring me back a button.

LENA. A button.

HANNA. For your coat. There's one missing at the bottom, since last winter. Over there they're bound to have some like that.

LENA. At midnight the haberdashers are shut. Even over there.

HANNA. Tomorrow, then.

(A pause.)

LENA. Tomorrow.

(Lena goes to the door, without the plastic bag. She stops, takes her key out of her pocket, looks at it.)

HANNA. You've got your key.

LENA. I've got my key.

(She puts the key back in her pocket. She looks at Alex.)

LENA. Are you coming, or are you staying at the stairwell window?

ALEX. With you?

LENA. In front. Not with me. In front of me. Where I can see you.

(Alex looks at the bag by the door.)

ALEX. Can I leave it here? Until tomorrow.

HANNA. I keep everything. You know that.

ALEX. I know.

(Alex goes out, without the bag. Lena stays a moment in the doorway.)

LENA. I'll be back.

(She goes out. The door closes. Their footsteps on the stairs, together, then only the noise of the street.)

(Hanna is alone. She opens the window. The noise comes in: car horns, voices, someone singing. She goes to the sideboard drawer, takes out a candle and a box of matches. She stands the candle on the sill, behind the glass, and closes the window. She strikes a match and lights the candle.)

(She takes her coat from the coat stand, puts it on, and buttons it right up to the top. She sits down on a chair facing the window, her hands on her knees. The light in the room fades. Only the candle is left.)



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