

S K Y W A R D

BASED ON THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

written by
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SOARING THROUGH THE CLOUDS

Over majestic, evergreen mountains. Up on the horizon, a cold, eerie light glows across a thick, grey line gutting the forest valley...

EXT. BORDER OF EAST GERMANY - NIGHT

A mile wide stretch of bulldozed earth ringed by barbed wire, Doberman pinchers, machine guns on trip-wires, and keen-eyed BORDER GUARDS in WATCH TOWERS.

This is the DEATH ZONE-- an extension of the Berlin Wall. The deadly border divides the natural world into two sides.

FOOTSTEPS navigate around "**STOP! BORDER - NO CROSSING**" signs.

SUPER: April, 1976

MICHAEL GARTENSCHLAGER, 32, wild hair, determined eyes, hides behind trees, studying the Death Zone through binoculars. Waiting for his moment.

Guards change posts. This is it. Now or never.

Michael carries a ladder to the fence. Stops. An almost invisible TRIP-WIRE shimmers. It's attached to a mounted SM-70 antipersonnel land mine.

Michael lays out tools. His shaking hands carefully, gingerly dismantle the SM-70. And we realize-- *he's done this before*.

Michael places the ladder against the fence. Climbs.

A SPOTLIGHT hits him. Blinding. Alarms. Dogs barking.

BORDER GUARD

Halt!

Michael ascends the ladder. Bullets fly past. Bang! He reaches the top. Bang. Michael's SHADOW, cast in the spotlight, tumbles to the ground.

Michael stares up at the night sky, full of stars.

A gentle wind blows.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

Just beyond the Death Zone, over the dense Thuringian Forest we find a small, East German village. A decrepit, dystopian fairy tale patched up with communist-era concrete.

SUPER: June, 1978

"You Are Now Entering Possneck." Population 9,034.

OFFICERS STURM and DRANG, two VOLKSPOLIZEI, East German Cops, black boots, rifles, march down the cobblestones.

EXT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

Overlooking the town, the factory belches smoke into the sky.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

A blanket of noxious fog hovers around a sagging banner: "Serving our customers and our Republic." Hulking machines generating plastic.

A GREASE-COVERED HAND

Reaches out from the guts of a large machine, selects a wrench from a toolbox, pulls it back. Under the machine--

PETER STRELZYK, 36, intelligent eyes, lean, hungry face, cigarette clenched in his teeth. He angrily wrenches a bolt-- tighter, tighter.

PETER

Finished.

Peter slides out of the machine and stands before curious, apprehensive middle-aged SUPERVISORS and MANAGERS.

MANAGER

What is this?

PETER

Progress. Before, two workers had to push levers to trigger the hydraulic mechanism, but now--

Peter flips a switch. The press churns, operating on its own.

PETER

It can function independently.

Peter looks across the factory with grey-faced workers operating dinosaur-like machines.

PETER

In six months, I could have the whole factory fully automated.

SUPERVISOR

You were just supposed to fix it.

PETER

I did. Well, improved it--

MANAGER

What about the workers you just put out of a job?

PETER

They'll be free to do better jobs.

SUPERVISOR

Jobs like mine? Jobs like yours?

PETER

I think you're missing the point--

MANAGER

No, you are. The workers like what they do. They're happy.

PETER

They're ill. From the fumes. We need proper ventilation in here.

Peter points to the hovering cloud of fog in the factory.

SUPERVISOR

I bet you have an invention for that, too.

PETER

(reaching for his sketchbook)

As a matter of fact--

SUPERVISOR

Peter, I have personally overseen the air quality of this factory and it is in top condition.

MANAGER

Top.

SUPERVISOR

If you wish to improve the air, I suggest you stop smoking so many cigarettes.

They stare at him, challenging him to speak out of line. More is at stake than just his job. Peter snubs out his cigarette.

PETER

Yes, comrade.

SUPERVISOR

Good. Now dismantle this monstrosity.

Peter contemptuously watches his bosses walk off.

CLOSE ON - A bootleg audio cassette: The Damned. It's slid into a tape player. "New Rose" erupts. LOUD, HARD, PUNK.

EXT. POSSNECK PARK - DAY - REVEAL

LUKAS, 18, black jacket, buzz cut hair, bops to the music.

His three FRIENDS laugh and jump around, passing a flask, looking through a paper bag full of BOOTLEG MIXTAPES: Sex Pistols, The Who, The Jam, The Stooges, David Bowie.

LUKAS

Have you ever heard anything like this?! No! No, you have not!

His friends laugh as Lukas thrashes like a wild rooster.

HIGH BLACK BOOTS stomping toward them. OFFICERS STURM and DRANG approach. Lukas hides the paper bag full of bootlegs.

OFFICER DRANG

Turn this off.

LUKAS

Sorry, can't hear you.

Drang angrily hits stop on the player.

OFFICER STURM

Identification. All of you.

The teenagers groan and hand over their ID's.

OFFICER DRANG

It is against the law to smuggle in Western goods.

LUKAS

It's just music.

OFFICER STURM

Illegal music.

Drang rips the tape out. It catches, unfurls.

LUKAS

Hey, don't--

Lukas grabs for the tape. Drang, taking it as a threat, snatches Lukas's wrist, twists, pins Lukas to the table.

OFFICER DRANG
On your knees!

His friends get on their knees. The cops inspect their identification. Officer Drang scowls down at Lukas.

OFFICER DRANG
"Private" Lukas Keller? You're in the Army?

LUKAS
Construction Unit.

OFFICER STURM
(chuckles to Drang)
Coward's unit.

OFFICER DRANG
Why aren't with your Construction Unit?

LUKAS
I got time off and wanted come home to visit because everyone here is so lovely.

OFFICER DRANG
I should arrest you for possession of illegal goods. But instead, I'm going to call your Commanding Officer. His name?

LUKAS
Can't remember.

OFFICER DRANG
We'll find it. I'm going to suggest you be transferred to an army base where this behavior is not tolerated.
(leans close to Lukas)
Have you ever been to Siberia? I was stationed there. And I assure you, it is hell on Earth.

Sturm drops the tape, smashes it under his heel.

OFFICER STURM
Enjoy your time at home.

They exit. Lukas gives their backs a trembling middle finger.

INT. POSSNECK TAVERN - DAY

Golden beer flows. The local pub is packed with workers drinking at the end of a long day.

GUNTER WETZEL, 24, a bricklayer with a young, cherubic face, and a shaggy mustache takes a beer from Peter.

GUNTER
To your health.

PETER
We're longer dead than alive.

They take their first frothy sips.

PETER
How are you, Gunter?

GUNTER
Good. Family's good. You?

PETER
Good. Kids, Doris. We're good.

GUNTER
Good.

Peter leans close, conspiratorially.

PETER
So. How are we really?

Gunter drains his beer. Wipes his mustache.

GUNTER
Lousy. Petra made this new coffee this morning, Kaffee Mix-- it's unholy. They cut the coffee with roast peas and rye and, and, and beets. Beets. It's disgusting.

PETER
The State can no longer afford to import real coffee. So they sell us the lie.

GUNTER
Well, the *truth* is it tastes like it was made in a goat's ass.

PETER
Just like the news.

GUNTER
Careful. That's a five year joke.
Three in prison for the one telling
it--

PETER
-- two for those who laugh at it.

They clink beers.

PETER
I went to buy socks the other day.

GUNTER
Let me guess...

PETER
No socks. And yet our leader tells
me clothing production in East
Germany is at an all time high.
Crops are growing. Workers are
happy.

Peter looks at the men in the bar. Tired, gaunt pale faces.

PETER
Anyone here look happy?

GUNTER
They look dead. Oh, wait. That's a
mirror.

PETER
And now the State passed a new law.
"Crimes Against the German
Democratic Republic." We can get
eight years in prison for any anti-
Socialist remarks. Our government
is so insecure that it can't take
the tiniest bit of criticism!

GUNTER
Least the beer's good. Probably why
I drink so much of it.

PETER
Couldn't possibly be because we'd
rather be drunk than face living in
hell another day.

Gunter sees an OLD MAN watching them, eavesdropping.

GUNTER

Well. Life isn't a place for riding ponies.

(trying to diffuse the conversation)

How'd your invention go at work?

PETER

They value progress as much as they value good coffee. You know who drinks good coffee, Gunter?

(points out of the window)

The West.

Peter looks West. Into the blue sky.

PETER

Only eighteen miles away. But it might as well be another planet... A free planet.

GUNTER

Well. Hey. Whataya gonna do?

PETER

Escape.

Gunter shifts, very uneasy.

GUNTER

That never goes well. So what else is new?

PETER

How would you do it?

GUNTER

I'm not-- this isn't--

PETER

We're just talking, Gunter.

GUNTER

Well, talk *softer*.

PETER

Tunnels worked twenty years ago. But the guards are expecting tunnels. We need something unexpected. Something creative.

(beat)

You're creative.

Gunter picks at the label on his beer bottle. Shrugs.

GUNTER
Submarine?

PETER
We'd need something big enough for everyone. And I don't see how we could build a deep sea submersible capable of carrying eight people fifty miles across the ocean without someone noticing.

GUNTER
I thought we were just talking.

PETER
We are. 'Nother round?

IN A BOOTH IN THE BACK - Peter whispers with Gunter.

PETER
This isn't just a wall we're talking about. This is the Death Zone.

Peter sketches a map of the Death Zone.

PETER
A mile of barbed wire, SM-70 antipersonnel mines, double rows of wire-mesh, trip-wires attached to machine guns mounted at leg, mid-section, and head level. Not to mention the dogs.

GUNTER
I hate those dogs. And I like dogs.

PETER
Beyond that a concrete trench. And beyond *that* another half mile strip patrolled by watch towers and guards with orders to shoot on command.

GUNTER
You've... done your homework.

PETER
And then, another wall, a crossing checkpoint, and three miles from that acoustical sensing trip wires and more land mines.

GUNTER
They've made it impossible.

Peter nods, studying his sketch.

PETER
"The antifascist protection
rampart." They told us the wall was
to keep our enemies out. It's to
keep us in.

Peter looks out of the window.

PETER
They've made us the enemy.

EXT. POSSNECK HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A Russian flag and East German flag fly over the school.

FRANK STRELZYK, 15, skinny, pale is at SOCCER TRY-OUTS.

But all Frank is interested in is a beautiful, freckled girl
named SONJA, 15, standing on the sidelines. An angelic
redhead--

WHAM! KURT, 16, muscles, cobalt eyes, charges past Frank,
knocking him to the ground.

Frank is nearly trampled by a stampede of cleats.

Covered in mud, Frank hobbles to his feet. Sonja cringes.
Frank hangs his head, ashamed.

EXT. POSSNECK MAIN STREET - SUNSET

Peter is exiting the tavern. LUKAS rushes up.

LUKAS
Hey, Mr. Strelzyk!

PETER
Lukas. How's the Army?

LUKAS
Oh, y'know. *Shit.*

Peter laughs.

LUKAS
Hey, I sort of lost the keys to the
bulldozer I'm working on. My dad's
always saying you're such a
mechanical genius--

PETER
You're not going to go joyriding,
are you?

LUKAS
No. No, sir.

They walk past a billboard with a smiling man in overalls wearing a toolbelt: "CONFIDENT IN OUR STRENGTH."

PETER
What's the make?

LUKAS
Liebherr. 71.

PETER
Russian. Always breaking. I've
fixed a lot of those.
(sketching a drawing)
The control panel is under the
right side. You'll find a bunch of
wires... tie the two yellow ones
together. Should start.

He rips the sketch out of his notebook. Lukas pockets it.

LUKAS
Thank you, Mr. Strelzyk. Oh, hey--

Lukas hands Peter a BOOTLEG MIXTAPE.

LUKAS
Give this to Frank. It's music.
Real music.

Peter smiles as Lukas runs off, startling an old lady.

LUKAS
Rock and roll, Mr. Strelzyk!

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

A drab, two story house on a suburban street.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

DORIS STRELZYK, 32, smart, her free spirit hidden under a reserved facade, eats Spam and potatoes for dinner with Peter their two boys, FRANK, 15, quiet and withdrawn. ANDREAS, 9, too young to be so intense, wearing a Young Pioneers Uniform with a yellow bandana.

ANDREAS

And I got this badge for shooting.

Andreas proudly points to a rifle badge on his scarf.

DORIS

Shooting? You're nine!

ANDREAS

Scout Leader said we have to prepare for when the Westies attack.

DORIS

West Germany isn't going to attack us, Andreas.

ANDREAS

Scout Leader says they hate us.

DORIS

We have friends in the West. Good friends. The things they're teaching you kids.

PETER

Andreas. When I was your age, my Scout Leader told me that the Americans had dropped potato bugs from airplanes to eat all of our crops. The Yankee Beetle.

INSERT - *A field of crops-- crawling with potato beetles. Young Peter and his friends pick potato beetles from the crops and put them in glass jars.*

PETER

They sent the children into the fields to collect all the beetles. I obeyed and I spent my whole summer collecting jars of beetles.

INSERT - *50 jars of writhing beetles in Young Peter's room.*

PETER

But do you know what? The Americans never dropped those bugs on us. The State was lying so the children would work for free. And they wanted to instill fear of the outside world in us from a very young age. That way we would never want to leave.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Take off that badge.

Andreas sadly takes off his rifle badge.

DORIS
 (trying to lighten the
 mood)
 How were try-outs, Frank?

Frank stares at his plate. Shrugs.

FRANK
 Good.

Good. Peter knows that blanket response too well. They eat the rest of their meal in silence.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Gunter is on his roof, aiming his TV antennae to the West...

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

PETRA WETZEL, 24, girl next door beauty, headstrong, is kneeling by the TV with their boys: SAM, 2, and ANDREW, 4.

GUNTER (O.S.)
 (over walkie)
 Anything yet?

Petra watches their 13 inch TV which is filled with static.

PETRA
 (into walkie)
 Nothing-- wait! There!

ON TV - Rippling images of a city skyline... the brassy opening soundtrack of "DALLAS" comes into view. It looks like a magical portal into another world-- dubbed in German. Petra is transfixed with the flashy gowns. The opulence.

PETRA
 (in awe)
 ... their hair...

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Gunter secures the antenna, starts to climb down. A chill wind blows behind him and he feels someone watching him.

HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET - A silhouette in a window. Gunter swallows, watching the shadow watch him. He waves.

GUNTER
Evening, Helga.

It's their neighbor, HELGA, 50. Eating a fork full of chocolate cake, eyes fixed on Gunter.

GUNTER
Fixing a shingle.

Helga gives a judgemental nod. Gunter's smile vanishes as soon as he descends the ladder.

INT. STRELZYK LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

After dinner, the Strelzyk family watches their small TV.

REPORTER
(on TV)
Border disputes on Damansky Island have tensions between China and the Soviet Union rising. Said the Russian Minister of Defense, "Military action is imminent."

Frank looks up with concern.

FRANK
Dad. When I have to join the army and Russia goes to war with China-- I'd have to fight the Chinese, wouldn't I?

Peter nods.

PETER
What do you think about that?

Frank shrugs. Peter snubs out his cigarette.

PETER
Do you want to fight in a war in outer Mongolia over some line on a Russian map?

FRANK
No...

PETER
But you'd have to. Because we're Russia's "Brothers In Arms." Russia says sit, we sit. Jump, we jump.

ANDREAS

But... they helped us get rid of the Nazis.

PETER

What else did they tell you?

ANDREAS

The West. They were Nazis. Not us.

PETER

Everyone wants to blame the other side for the war. But there was no us and them back then. Truth is, one of the biggest concentration camps was just an hour away from here. Did they teach you that?

Andreas shakes his head.

PETER

The war is a disgrace both sides will never escape. Nor should it. Terrible things were done before we were born.

DORIS

Awful things.

PETER

Why? Because men blindly followed orders. They listened without questioning.

Peter leans close.

PETER

Don't let your minds become a prison. Dream free dreams. As big as you can, as far as you can. No matter what *they* tell you. Because in the end, all you have is this--
(taps his chest)
And the longer you wait to listen to it, the less likely you are to hear it at all.

The boys absorb this. Andreas walks over to Frank. Hugs him.

ANDREAS

I don't want you going to war, Frank.

PETER

Neither of you are going. We'll be long gone by then.

Doris accidentally knocks over her tea.

DORIS

Andreas? Change the channel. Frank, clean that up. Peter? Can you help me in the kitchen?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Doris whispers to Peter.

DORIS

It's okay for you and I to talk about leaving-- hell, I stood in line for two hours just to buy Spam and potatoes. But they're just children, Peter.

PETER

Frank's almost a man--

DORIS

Well, you're scaring him. And me.

Peter realizes he's wringing a dish towel in his hands.

DORIS

You're filled with so much anger and fire. Don't let it burn you up.

PETER

So what do I do? Give up?

DORIS

Never.

PETER

It'd be easier, wouldn't it?

She gently comes to him.

DORIS

Just be their father. Let them in.

She kisses him, soothing his anger-- if just for a moment.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Peter walks up to Frank. Hands him the bootleg mixtape.

PETER
This is from Lukas.

Frank's eyes light up.

PETER
Play it only in your room.

Excited, Frank runs upstairs.

PETER
And don't tell anyone about it!

INT. FRANK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Frank puts in the tape. Pulls on large, chunky headphones. "Anarchy in the UK" erupts. Imagine, if you can, the first time your mind was blown away by a song. This is not music. This is a revolution. The punk anthem plays over--

INT. KELLER HOUSE - NIGHT

Lukas Keller zips up his leather jacket in front of the mirror. Turns to his father and mother-- JOSEF and MAGDA KELLER. Both the picture of domestic normalcy.

LUKAS
I'm going out.

He kisses his mother on both cheeks.

MAGDA
Don't be too long.

Lukas shakes his father's hand.

LUKAS
Goodbye, father. Goodbye, mother.

EXT. MOUNTAINS OF POSSNECK - DAY

Lukas rides his bike toward a cold, rising light.

EXT. DEATH ZONE - NIGHT

Wind shrieks through the razor wire. A songbird is caught in the mesh fencing.

NEARBY CONSTRUCTION SITE - Lukas parks his bicycle beside a BULLDOZER. Climbs in. He follows Peter's sketch.

LUKAS
Tie the yellows together and...

The bulldozer rumbles to life.

EXT. DEATH ZONE BORDER - NIGHT

A guard dog perks up. BARKS.

IN A WATCH TOWER - OFFICER HORST, 31, Head Border Guard, trim hair, piercing eyes, peers through his binoculars.

HORST

Lights.

Spotlights sweep the forest. Illuminating the bulldozer rumbling directly toward the fence.

BULLDOZER - Lukas squints, driving FORWARD.

Horst speaks into an announcement system. His voice echoes.

HORST

Halt. Identify yourself.

Lukas shifts the bulldozer's giant metal shovel up, blocking himself from the guard's view.

HORST

Fire!

Border Guards fire Kalashinkovs. Lukas is protected by the bulldozer's giant shovel as hot shrapnel shatters around him.

The bulldozer tears through the barbed wire, ripping down a search light-- HAIL OF SPARKS. Guards jump away as the bulldozer rolls into a concrete trench, crashes wheels up.

LUKAS

Shit!

Lukas runs. Bullets chasing. A land-mine behind him explodes. DIRT FOUNTAINS. Lukas is thrown forward. Miraculously, he's still alive. He RUNS FOR HIS LIFE.

HORST. Raising his rifle. LUKAS. Almost at the last fence.

IN HORST'S CROSS HAIRS - Lukas climbs the fence-- bang.

Horst sniffs, slings his rifle, climbs down his tower to the up-ended bulldozer. He snaps the yellow wires and walks over to Lukas who is gasping on the ground.

HORST

You're barely even a man.

Horst pats down Lukas's leather jacket.

HORST

Who taught you to do that, hm? Your father? Your friend?

Horst finds Peter's hot-wire sketch. Narrows his eyes.

HORST

Who gave this to you? Speak.

Lukas glares. Blood pooling beneath him.

HORST

I will find out. Where you are from. Who your family is. They will all be punished for this.

(pockets the sketch)

But if you tell me who helped you, I will drive you to the hospital and maybe you'll live long enough to see mommy and daddy before you die.

Tears spill down Lukas's face. Horst sees blood is touching his boot. Disgusted, he wipes his boot with a handkerchief.

HORST

I'll wait.

Horst stands back, checks his watch, almost bored.

EXT. DEATH ZONE BORDER - DAY

The blue sky and drifting clouds are reflected in Lukas's open eye which is staring up. Horst watches the body from his tower. Sips hot coffee. Guards move to drag Lukas's body off.

HORST

Leave him.

GUARD

He's dead, sir.

HORST

Leave him. And get me some tea. This coffee is disgusting.

EXT. BERLIN - DAY

The flag of East Germany flies alongside the RUSSIAN FLAG over the great, grey city of Berlin.

EXT. BERLIN STATE SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

The headquarters of the Secret Police.

INT. STATE SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

A framed picture of ERIC HONECKER, East German Leader, on the wall. Horst stands at attention before five STASI OFFICERS.

OFFICER VERLAG

You had no problem shooting an unarmed man?

HORST

Apart from murder there is no worse crime than fleeing the Republic.

(sensing their hesitation)

I was under the impression our leader commends those who use firearms against these criminals--

OFFICER VERLAG

Yes, but the boy's body was left in the open for *three days*?

HORST

An example needed to be made.

OFFICER VERLAG

A rather disgusting example.

VOICE

He's right.

CAPTAIN EDMUND ZENTAL, 55, a brilliant, relentless force of nature in an ordinary brown suit and tie. He is studying Peter's blood-soaked sketch on how to hot-wire the bulldozer.

ZENTAL

People need to see the consequences of fleeing. Well done, comrade.

Horst puffs up at Zental's compliment.

HORST

Thank you, Captain. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

ZENTAL

Dismissed.

Horst walks out, feeling quite good about himself.

OFFICER VERLAG

I'll run a story in the papers: failed escape attempt--

ZENTAL

That only makes the people
sympathize with these people more.
Gives them ideas. No. Not a word of
this.

Zental holds Peter's drawing up to the light, studies it...

EXT. KELLER HOUSE - DAY

Heavy rain. MAGDA KELLER peers out from her front window.
CAPTAIN ZENTAL is knocking on her door.

ZENTAL

Magda Keller?

JOSEF

Who is it, Magda?

Zental shows them his badge. Icy dread creeps in...

ON THE STREET - Peter and Gunter are driving past. Seeing
Zental place Josef and Magda in the back of the sedan beside
two SHADOWY FIGURES, Peter slows.

GUNTER

What's going on..?

Peter sees the sedan's clunky RADIO ANTENNAE.

PETER

Stasi. You can tell by the radio
antennae. Russian make.

GUNTER

Jesus, Pete. Don't stop.

Zental senses Peter and Gunter watching-- he locks eyes with
Peter as memorizing his face. Peter drives off. Can't shake
the feeling this has something to do with him.

INT. MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY - DAY

Eerie silence as Josef and Magda are led down separate halls.

INT. MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY - BASEMENT

Lukas's body lies upon a metal table. Magda drops to her
knees. Zental hands her a Kleenex, oddly comforting her.

INTERROGATION ROOM A - Magda is at a loss, utterly gutted.

ZENTAL

Your son is a traitor. Was a
traitor.

INSERT - A tape recorder slowly records the conversation.

ZENTAL

He knew the consequences-- perhaps
he was suicidal, hm?

MAGDA

YOU MONSTER! YOU KILLED MY SON!

A guard holds Magda by the shoulder, forcing her to stay
seated. Zental coldly regards her.

INTERROGATION ROOM B - Josef trembles on a wooden stool.

ZENTAL

I'm a father as well. Two boys. We
go hunting, hiking. I love them.
This is why I need your help to
prevent this pain from ever
happening to another parent again.

Zental slides Peter's sketch across the table.

ZENTAL

Did you draw this for your son?

Josef stares at the drawing, his son's dried blood.

JOSEF

No.

ZENTAL

If you didn't, who did?

As Josef's mind reels, PULL BACK through a two way mirror--

INT. RECORDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

A hive-like room where Stasi Agents are recording
interrogations happening in different rooms where--

-A 12 year old girl clutches a doll while Stasi Agents
cajoles her to talk about her parents.

-A man kneels, wrists chained to the floor, as water is being
steadily poured over his head.

We catch a glimpse of the entire spying operation...

POSTAL SURVEILLANCE ROOM - A waterfall of envelopes. Hundreds of buckets of personal mail dumped on a table. Secretaries steam open love letters, bills.

Xerox copies are made of suspicious letters and then placed into green file folders...

DIVISION OF GARBAGE ANALYSIS - Agents wearing doctor's masks and gloves dump garbage onto a table and inspect it for any suspicious materials.

CLERICAL ROOM - Typewriters banging. A Secretary types up a new file: MAGDA KELLER, JOSEF KELLER. The file is stamped and passed to a clerk who takes it to--

FILE ROOM - A hauntingly vast room of file cabinets. The Keller file is placed in a file cabinet. As the cabinet is slammed shut--

INT. POSSNECK CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Lukas's casket is closed.

The church is packed. The Strelzyks and the Wetzels sit together. A framed picture of Lukas in his Army uniform.

CLICK! Peter sees an ODD MAN hiding behind floral arrangements, taking pictures of the mourners. Peter subtly turns his face away from the Odd Man's long camera lens.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Dirt on the grave. Doris and Peter console Magda and Josef.

DORIS

If you need anything, anything at all...

Magda nods absently. CLICK! The ODD MAN stands behind a tree, taking pictures. Josef grabs Peter in a tight hug, whispers.

JOSEF

Was it you, Peter? Did you draw that for Lukas?

Peter is immobile. As the world crumbles from under his feet--

STILL CAMERA POV - Peter is in the cross hairs. CLICK!

INT. FRANK AND ANDREAS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Doris kisses Andreas and Frank goodnight.

FRANK
Mom. I'm not a kid.

DORIS
You're never too old to get a kiss
from your mother.

She turns out the light. Looks back at them.

DORIS
Goodnight, my boys. I love you.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter smokes, knee bobbing. Tears in her eyes, Doris searches for something in drawers and cabinets.

DORIS
What was the name of that woman we
met from the organization in the
West?

PETER
Doris--

DORIS
They can't just shoot an innocent
young man and get away with it. We
need to file a complaint, tell
people-- do something-- no! I don't
want a hug. I want to spit in their
faces and say you killed a
beautiful young man with his whole
life in front of him!

(beat)
The State didn't even let them
publish an *obituary* in the
newspaper, Peter. Do you know how
offensive that is?

She angrily wipes her eyes.

DORIS
They can deny his death-- but not
his soul. Not his spirit.

She finds a business card. Grabs the phone. Peter stops her.

DORIS
Peter. Move.

PETER
Doris. They could be listening.

DORIS
Why would they--

PETER
Lukas came to me that night. Said
he needed to start a bulldozer
without a key.
(emotional)
It's my fault.

Doris puts the phone back in its cradle.

DORIS
Oh, God, Peter. Did you know?

PETER
No! I would've never told him!
(however:)
I made a sketch for him. How to hot-
wire the engine... they must have
found it because Josef asked me if
I drew it.

DORIS
Jesus. What did you say?

PETER
Nothing. I could barely speak.

Doris's knees give out. She sits beside her husband.

DORIS
Would Josef turn you in if he knew?

PETER
Josef and I have been friends for
twenty years.
(sadly, the way things
are)
Of course he would.

Doris's heart is pounding.

DORIS
You could get ten years in prison--

PETER
I know--

DORIS
A prison you could die in. They'd
deport me and the kids to the
Soviet Union just to make an
example of us.

PETER

Doris. Listen to me--

DORIS

They've done it before. We'll be exiled. Frank would be sent to the front lines. He'd be killed.

Peter grabs her hands.

PETER

Doris. I promise you, I swear on my life, that is not going to happen.

DORIS

How?! How can you tell me it won't happen?!

He locks eyes with her. With all his soul, he means this:

PETER

Because I'm going to get us out of here.

Knock-knock-knock. Doris and Peter tense.

VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR

Open up!

Peter peers out of the window-- GUNTER. Swaying, drunk.

GUNTER

Well, this has been the most goddam depressing day of my life. Beer?

Gunter holds up a half-empty bottle of VODKA.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter and Gunter are both drunk, sitting on the front steps.

GUNTER

Lukas was nice a kid. Listened to bad music, but he was a good kid.

PETER

Do you remember what we talked about at the tavern, Gunter?

(pause)

It's time.

Gunter takes a big gulp of vodka.

GUNTER
I dunno, Pete...

PETER
What if Lukas was your son? What
would you do?

That hits Gunter hard.

GUNTER
What the hell. I'm drunk and I'm
angry.

Gunter shakes Peter's hand. Gunter holds it.

GUNTER
But Peter-- it's not just you and
me. It's Doris, Frank, Andreas.
Petra, the boys.
(beat)
How are we going to get eight
people across the Death Zone?

EXT. SPREE RIVER - NIGHT

The Spree River is a natural divider between East and West.
It violently churns in the moonlight as the Strelzyks and
Wetzels stand on the muddy bank.

Peter holds two suitcases wrapped in plastic.

PETER
It's just a short swim to the West.

They wade into the raging river.

GUNTER
It's freezing!

An icy wave overwhelms Doris, dragging her down.

ANDREAS
MOMMY!!!

POLICE BOATS WITH SEARCHLIGHTS speed across the river,
illuminating everyone's terrified faces as they bob
helplessly in the water. Gun shots kick up the water.
Screams. Blood in the thrashing waves.

PETER
DORIS!

INT. PETER & DORIS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Peter snaps out of his terrible dream. Looks at Doris in bed beside him. He holds her tight, kisses her.

INT. GUNTER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

A hobby workshop of tools, toys, remote controlled planes, and half-built gadgets. Peter and Gunter study a large map of Germany. Smoke hangs in the air.

PETER

Escape by water is out.

GUNTER

So is land. These surface routes are impenetrable... Checkpoints every half mile.

PETER

What about air..?

Peter looks at Gunter's remote control airplane, transfixed.

PETER

In '63 I was in the airforce. Wanted to be a pilot. Fly the world. State didn't need pilots. State needed mechanics. So...

Gunter picks up a Western newspaper, idly flips through it.

GUNTER

You want to build an airplane? Sounds complicated.

Peter sets down the airplane. Rubs his face.

PETER

Yeah. It was a stupid idea.
(re: newspaper)
How'd you get that?

GUNTER

Petra's sister lives in the West. If she's allowed to visit she smuggles in little things. Real coffee. Real news.

Gunter stops. He stares at the newspaper.

GUNTER

Peter... Peter.

Gunter holds up the newspaper-- there is an article about the **Albuquerque, New Mexico Hot Air Balloon Festival** with a vibrant, color photograph of hot air balloons in the sky.

GUNTER
A hot air balloon...

PETER
It's quiet. Can hold eight people. Guards would never expect something like this to go sailing over their heads.

GUNTER
Slight problem: there are no hot air balloons in the Eastern Bloc.

PETER
We'll build one.

Peter grabs his keys, rushes out. Gunter follows.

GUNTER
Pete, I've never even seen a hot hair balloon in real life let alone built one!

PETER
Hot air rises. Heats the balloon. Balloon lifts-- the thing--

GUNTER
You don't even know what it's called!

PETER
Who cares what it's called! It's easier than building an airplane.

GUNTER
Everything is easier than building an airplane!

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Peter starts his orange Moskvitch. Gunter piles in.

PETER
We'll got to the library and find everything we can on wind circulation, aerodynamics--

GUNTER

They've banned so many books we'll
be lucky to find a dictionary.

INT. POSSNECK LIBRARY - DAY

Dusty, quiet. The LIBRARIAN'S eyes watch Gunter select "Around The World In 80 Days." The gold-leafed cover shows a magnificent picture of a hot air balloon. Peter finds a dusty Encyclopedia entry about a hot air balloon.

PETER

"In 1783 Joseph-Michael and Jacques-
Ètienne Montgolfier demonstrated
their invention, the hot-air
balloon, before a crowd of
dignitaries in Annonay, France. It
rose six thousand feet, stayed
aloft for 10 minutes, and traveled
more than a mile..."

(beat)

That was two hundred years ago. If
they can do it so can we.

GUNTER

It also says the first passengers
were a duck, a rooster and a goat.

PETER

We'll start tonight.

EXT. POSSNECK LIBRARY - DAY

Peter and Gunter exit with only two books. Peter can see Gunter's hesitation, his worry...

PETER

This is our chance, Gunter. Other
than fear, give me one good reason.

GUNTER

Michael Gartenschlager.

The name stops Peter.

GUNTER

He led six defectors across the
border, dismantled a live SM-70
from its mount, gave it to the West
for inspection and became a hero.
He crossed the border *two more*
times until they ambushed him and
shot him.

(beat)

(MORE)

GUNTER (CONT'D)

He was a pro, Peter. If he couldn't make it, what chance do we have?

EXT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

With a simmering anxiety, Peter smokes beside a tree. He stamps out his cigarette and we see hundreds of cigarette butts ringing the tree. Headlights. Gunter arrives.

PETER

I thought you weren't coming.

GUNTER

I wasn't. Then I found this.

Gunter hands him a translucent sheet of plastic wrapped junk.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Peter unfolds the plastic junk to see it's a balloon attached to a spring-box. Peter smiles, remembering...

PETER

Freedom balloons.

INSERT - *Hundreds of balloons float through the sky. An incredible, dream-like vision, a sky full of balloons.*

GUNTER

After the wall was built, the West released them... they had timers on them that dropped pamphlets in the air...

INSERT - *The balloon packages click open-- an enchanted Young Gunter stands in the rain of colorful pamphlets.*

GUNTER

Of course it was just Western propaganda, but what amazed me was the timer release thing. And that someone cared enough to send them...

PETER

You kept it all these years?

GUNTER

Lucky for you I found it in my attic last night.

Peter smiles. He pins the colorful newspaper picture of the hot air balloons in New Mexico on a blank corkboard.

PETER

(writing in his notebook)
Four adults-- Frank, three little ones, the gondola-- gas containers, the burner, the bag-- will weigh... one thousand six hundred and forty nine pounds.

GUNTER

Almost a ton.

PETER

We're going to need a lot of lift.

Gunter cracks open a dusty book on thermodynamics.

GUNTER

So. We'll need a balloon with a volume of--

Gunter punches numbers into his bulky calculator.

GUNTER

-- seventy thousand, six hundred and twenty nine cubic feet. Which means we'll need--

PETER

Eight thousand six hundred and eleven square feet of material.

GUNTER

That's bigger than a house!

Gunter is filled with worry.

GUNTER

This is a small town, Pete. People talk. We go into stores, asking for two thousand of anything and they're going to start asking questions.

PETER

We'll shop in different towns. Little here, little there. Piece by piece.

GUNTER

And then what? We sew it together?

PETER

You have a sewing machine, right?

GUNTER

This isn't like hemming pants! I don't know-- this is already sounding-- it's not something we can just hide.

They realize what this means.

PETER

We're going to have to talk to the wives.

GUNTER

We're going to have to talk to the wives.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Curtains closed. Doors locked. Cherry Schnapps is poured. Petra and Doris sit on the couch. Peter and Gunter show them their blueprint designs for the hot air balloon.

DORIS

A balloon? Are you serious?

PETER

We've calculated everything. Gunter will sew it. I'll construct the burner--

GUNTER

I'll be our Navigator.

PETRA

Just because you were a truck driver doesn't make you a navigator.

GUNTER

I'm learning wind patterns. Heat patterns. All the patterns.

PETRA

So how exactly do you navigate a balloon, Gunter?

GUNTER

Well, balloons fly by climbing into air currents, those currents then carry the balloon--

PETRA

I understand the way a balloon works. I'm asking what happens if the wind changes while we're up there? We end up living in Poland?

GUNTER

We only sail if the weather's right. Otherwise if it's too cold the balloon could freeze and we'd all drop from the sky and...

PETRA

And die.

GUNTER

Depends on how high up we are.

Peter looks at Gunter. *Stop talking.*

GUNTER

More Schnapps, honey?

DORIS

How high up does it go?

PETER

It can reach altitudes of two miles.

Doris pales. Two miles?

PETER

It's like standing on top of a very tall mountain.

DORIS

And how long will we be flying on top of this very tall mountain?

PETER

Navigator?

GUNTER

Estimated flight time: twenty minutes. Weather permitting.

DORIS

You want me to take our children two miles off the ground in something you're going to build in the garage?

Peter nods. Petra crosses her arms.

PETRA

When I was a kid the police threw a man in jail for a year just for putting a sign in his window that said "Shut Down the System.

(MORE)

PETRA (CONT'D)
Revolution Now."
(beat)
Think of what they would do if they
found out about this.

PETER
That's why this stays with us four.
If no one else knows, they can't
get in trouble. We won't even tell
the children. Total secrecy.

PETRA
And what-- the West will just
welcome us with open arms?

PETER
Doris and I have looked into this.
They'll give us asylum like they
give all refugees from the East.

She shakes her head.

PETRA
Now we're refugees...

GUNTER
This is what we've dreamt about,
Petra! If we do this we could
travel anywhere we want, never eat
Spam again, never live in fear
again. A better life for the boys.

PETRA
But we're comfortable here.

Petra looks at Doris.

PETRA
You're being awful quiet.

Doris stares at the ground.

DORIS
I just want our children to grow up
freethinkers, free men.
(beat)
But if we stay here-- I worry
they'll lose that spark. That magic
children have. How will I look at
myself, knowing I did nothing to
help them? What will I say?
(beat)
I was scared? I was comfortable?

PETRA

But this?

DORIS

This is the most insane thing I've ever heard.

(points at Peter)

And he doesn't come up with insane things. Peter's practical and smart and quite frankly a little boring. So for him to say this is the best plan of escape... it is.

She stands, studying the blueprints, the numbers. Nods.

DORIS

I want to see all of your calculations.

PETER

They're sound--

DORIS

My math is better than yours. I work at the bank.

PETER

Okay--

DORIS

And while you're building it, Petra and I will inspect everything.

PETER

Okay--

DORIS

If there is one thing I see that I don't like-- we call the whole thing off.

(beat)

We're going to be your quality control.

PETER

Okay.

The living room door suddenly opens. Everyone jolts. Peter covers the blueprints. It's Frank.

PETER

Frank, out!

DORIS
Just a second, sweetie.

Frank backs out of the room. They close the door. Everyone takes a relieved breath. Peter looks to Doris and Petra.

GUNTER
So. Do we have your blessing?

All eyes on Petra. Head in her hands.

PETRA
I see one thread, one bolt I do not like-- it's over.

GUNTER
Yes. A hundred percent.

PETRA
I can't believe I'm saying this...
(reluctantly raises her
glass)
To the balloon.

ALL
To the balloon.

EXT. TOWN OF GERA - DAY

Peter and Gunter drive into the city of Gera.

INT. GERA DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Peter and Gunter find large industrial rolls of cotton.

CLERK
How much do you need?

GUNTER
Five hundred feet.

PETER
(quickly)
For camping. We need to line the old tents.

GUNTER
(a little too excited)
We're Scout Leaders!

EXT. JUNKYARD - DAY

They sift through piles of junk. Hoses, metal pipes...

PETER
We need a petcock.

GUNTER
A *what*?

PETER
It's a valve.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

"**CAUTION: EXPLOSIVE**" on the side of a large propane tank.
Peter and Gunter buy four large cylinders of propane.

Officers Sturm and Drang drive by, watching Peter place the propane tanks in his car. Gunter waves at the police.

PETER
You're overcompensating.

GUNTER
I'm friendly. Try it some time.

Gunter continues waving. Sturm and Drang drive off.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Petra tries to block Peter and Gunter from lugging the equipment and junk inside her house.

PETRA
(whispers)
Why can't you build it in your own garage?

PETER
The ex-mayor and my factory supervisor live on my block.

PETRA
That's not my problem--

GUNTER
Petra, we agreed.

PETER
Someone's watching us.

ACROSS THE STREET - HELGA watches from her front window.

GUNTER
(through his smile)
That's Helga. She's still pissed we lost the war. Hi, Helga!

PETRA
Hi, Helga!
(whispers)
Inside. Now.

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT

Gunter's little boys, Sam and Andrew, run under the huge, billowing yellow cloth, their eyes big and full of wonder, giggling as Petra stretches it through the hall.

Gunter screws a DOORBELL on the attic doorway.

GUNTER
In case anyone comes in. You ring
it and alert me.

PETRA
It's going to look pretty weird
having a doorbell for our attic.

GUNTER
Not as weird as I'll look in
prison.

Petra pales.

GUNTER
Bad joke.

INT. WETZEL ATTIC - NIGHT

Gunter sits behind a 40 year old foot pedal-sewing machine, sewing the cloth together. Wind beats against the attic window. Petra looks out. She can see Helga's house.

PETRA
Helga can see in here.

Gunter nails a blanket across the window. *Not anymore.* Gunter sits down to sew the endless reams of cloth...

INT. WETZEL'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Peter connects the propane tanks into one main pipe. The fiery sparks cast a strobing glow across the basement.

Peter connects a stove pipe to the release valve. Cautiously turns on the propane tanks. Hoses hiss.

He flicks his lighter at the stove pipe. No flame. Peter checks the connections. Flicks his lighter again-- BOOM!

A FIREBALL throws Peter across the basement, smashing into shelves.

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The explosion shakes the house.

INT. HELGA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house across the street-- Helga sits up in bed.

HELGA
Hans, did you hear that?

HELGA'S HUSBAND
(groans)
Go back to bed.

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ears ringing, Peter sits at the kitchen table, eyebrows singed. He blinks, dazed. Gunter hands him a beer.

GUNTER
What happened?

PETER
(loudly)
Faulty petcock.

GUNTER
I have the same problem sometimes.

Gunter snickers. Peter laughs. All of their tension and worry coming out in nervous laughter. Petra glares, aghast.

PETRA
I want him out of here!

The two friends double over laughing.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter and Gunter carry the tarp-covered burner to the car.

GUNTER
Are you sure? The ex-mayor and your supervisor live on your street--

PETER
I'm more afraid of your wife than I am of them.

GUNTER
Makes two of us.

They load the equipment into a BOX TRAILER on wheels. Lock it with a padlock. They hitch the trailer to Peter's car.

GUNTER
Please be careful.

PETER
Please keep sewing.

Peter points to the sky. It's turning grey.

PETER
We have to beat the weather!

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter parks in his driveway. Gets out. Eyes darting from house to house as he walks to the wooden trailer.

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
Evening, comrade.

Peter's stomach drops. His SUPERVISOR is walking on the sidewalk. Peter crosses his arms, digging his fingernails into his bicep.

SUPERVISOR
(re: the trailer)
What have you got there?

PETER
For camping.

SUPERVISOR
Ah. Finally getting some fresh air?

Peter forces a laugh.

PETER
Yes, sir.

Supervisor walks off. Peter uncrosses his arms. Feels blood on his fingers. Where he was digging his fingernails into his arm, five half-moons are carved into his skin.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Peter vomits into the toilet.

DORIS
Peter--

PETER

I'm fine.

He kneads his fist into his stomach, trying to get rid of the searing pain in his gut. Doris could say something about the stress, the danger, his lack of sleep-- instead she just hands him a bottle of ulcer medicine.

PETER

Thank you.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter tapes a "DO NOT ENTER" sign on the door to the garage. He sees Frank watching him. Peter closes the door.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Peter re-builds the burner. Checks the connections. Turns on the propane tanks. Hesitantly, he lights his lighter--

A tiny flame appears at the top of the burner rig. Peter adjusts the valve and the flame grows higher.

PETER

YES!

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Frank hears the muffled, happy shouts from the garage.

FRANK

What's dad building in there?

DORIS

Oh. You know your father.

Frank shakes his head at his mother's deflection.

FRANK

No. I don't.

Doris doesn't know how to respond to that.

INT. POSSNECK HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Stealing glances at Sonja, Frank is engrossed in his writing as MR. WERMER lectures the class.

MR. WERMER

What are you writing, Strelzyk?

FRANK

Hm? Nothing--

Frank tries to hide his notebook. Wermer snatches it.

MR. WERMER
 (reads it aloud)
 "Your hair is like fire that warms
 my heart..."

The class laughs. Sonja's arched eyebrows rise.

MR. WERMER
 "Your eyes make me see world's
 beyond my own."

Mortified, Frank lowers his head onto his desk.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

The PRINCIPAL sets down Frank's poem.

PRINCIPAL
 What do you mean by "Your eyes make
 me see world's beyond my own?"

Frank shrugs. The Principal's eye bore into Frank.

PRINCIPAL
 What do you want to do with your
 life, Frank?

FRANK
 I dunno. Be a writer...?

PRINCIPAL
 Judging from this that's not going
 to happen.
 (snaps his fingers)
 Farming.

FRANK
 Farming?

PRINCIPAL
Farming.

FRANK
 But--

PRINCIPAL
 I'm going to recommend you be
 transferred to the vocational
 school for agriculture.
 (beat)
 We all need to do our part.

EXT. POSSNECK - DAY

Frank angrily drives home on his scooter.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Frank storms in, pushing open the door to the garage.

FRANK

Dad, I need to talk to you--

Gunter and Peter are lifting the burner into the metal frame.

PETER

Don't you see the sign?!

FRANK

What-- is that?

PETER

An agricultural seeding fan!!! Out!

Peter slams the door. Frank charges through the house.

DORIS

What's wrong?

Frank shoves past Doris into his bedroom. Slams the door.

Frank blasts his music, thrashing his arms through the air.

IN THE HALL - Doris stands alone, listening to her son's muffled, angry cries.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Peter and Gunter walk through the woods to a large grassy field. There is a 20 foot tall HUNTING BLIND and ladder nearby. They climb it and overlook the Death Zone far below.

PETER

It's the perfect launch site...

IN THE CLEARING - Peter is wearing a homemade FLAMETHROWER strapped to his back. Gunter stands far away, clutching a fire extinguisher.

GUNTER

You sure about this?

PETER

We need a way to get more heat into the balloon otherwise it'll never lift. Trust me.

Peter slaps a WELDER'S HELMET down over his face.

He sparks the end of the flamethrower--

Whoosh! A jet of fire arcs from the nozzle across the clearing, lighting up the night like a dragon's flame.

Peter shuts off the flamethrower. Lifts the helmet, smiles.

Gunter and Peter laugh like two kids. Happy to escape the confines of their drab lives for a moment.

A crackling sound. Smoke. A tree is on fire.

GUNTER

Shit!

Gunter rushes to extinguish the flaming tree.

INT. STRELZYK BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Peter sneaks inside, slips into bed. Doris rolls over on her pillow, eyes open. She's been waiting up for him.

DORIS

When's the last time you spoke with Frank?

Peter can't remember...

PETER

I'll talk to him.

DORIS

Do more than that. Otherwise-- what is all this for? If we save our family but lose our sons..?

Peter curses himself. Doris kisses him.

DORIS

I'm glad you're home. I don't sleep when you're not home.

She falls asleep. Peter is wide awake.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

Eyelids drooping, Peter yawns, drinking Kaffe Mix coffee. His stomach wrenches. He puts down his coffee, picks up ulcer medicine. Downs it.

Sees out of the window: birds flying. Soaring free.

INT. GUNTER'S BASEMENT - DAY

Gunter lights a torch under his home-built, one foot model of a hot air balloon.

GUNTER

We shoot the flamethrower into the balloon-- inflate the bag, light the burner and... lift off.

The little balloon model floats in the air in a magical, wondrous moment-- until it catches fire and drops to the ground in a fiery mess, filling the basement with smoke.

PETER

We need a better way to get the heat into the balloon.

Coughing, Gunter opens a window. He turns on a fan. Peter and Gunter stare at the turning fan... an idea forms...

INT. GUNTER'S GARAGE - DAY

Gunter puts the finishing touches on a homemade sheet steel fan with blades 4 feet long powered by a motorcycle engine.

The high-powered fan blasts papers around the room.

PETER

Brilliant, Gunter.

GUNTER

Hope so. That's my damn motorcycle engine.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

The rig is finished. Doris and Petra inspect the stitching and the iron frame. Steel posts in each of the four corners are tied with nylon clothesline. Doris points at the wicker basket in the picture.

DORIS

Peter, this is a gondola.
(re: the iron frame)
This is a piece of metal with clothesline tied around it.

PETER

We had to make some modifications for the weight.

DORIS

You saying I need to go on a diet?

PETER
No. You're perfect.

Peter leads Doris to stand on the iron frame.

PETER
You'll stand here. Frank and
Andreas will be here. Gunter and I
will be by the burner...

The four adults stand on the rig.

Doris stands at the very edge, holding onto the post. She
looks down over the frame, imagining what it will be like...

She hears rushing air, wind blows her hair aside.

Doris feels light, aloft, frightened. Vertigo coming on--

The rig rocks forward, tipping Doris slightly off balance.

Doris screams, grabs the ropes. Clinging to them.

PETER
You okay?

DORIS
Yes. Fine.

Doris nods quickly. Pretends to be checking the metal posts.

DORIS
Very secure.

Doris forces a smile. She is utterly terrified.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

1:30 AM. Night of the big test flight.

Frank peers out of his door as Peter and Doris creep past.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Headlights off, Peter parks out front. Looks at his watch.
Petra and Gunter sneak out.

EXT. POSSNECK - NIGHT

They drive through the quiet village.

PETER
See any police?

GUNTER
Nothing yet.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Headlights beam through the low, swirling fog.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

UP IN THE HUNTING BLIND - Peter looks at the road below...

IN THE CAR - Petra pours Schnapps into tiny glasses.

PETRA
To keep us warm.

DORIS
And sane.

They clink and drink.

PETER (O.S.)
Clear.

They all work together like an amateur, awkward pit crew.
Peter pulls on the clunky, homemade flamethrower.

PETRA
Is that thing safe?

PETER
Of course.

Everyone takes a big step away from Peter.

Gunter turns on the fan, the engine grinds loudly.

PETER
Muffle that thing!

Gunter throws blankets over the engine. They hold the balloon open. Peter aims the flame thrower into the open end.

SNAP! Something in the woods... they tense. A family of red deer are watching from the trees, eyes aglow in firelight.

However-- the balloon is not inflating. Peter sweats in the jet of fire. Determined to make this work. But the balloon withers sadly.

Doris touches the flattening cloth. Feels it...

DORIS

The fabric. The air's going right through it. It's too thin. Too porous. We need better cloth.

Petra feels the cloth, too.

PETRA

Yes. Definitely need thicker cloth.

GUNTER

Why didn't you say something before?!

PETRA

I didn't know! Don't blame me-- none of us here are experts--

PETER

(through clenched teeth)
What kind of cloth do you suggest?

Doris narrows her eyes.

DORIS

Taffeta?

PETRA

Oh, yes. Definitely taffeta.

GUNTER

What the hell is taffeta?

DORIS

It's good cloth. Thick.

GUNTER

(sighs)
I have to sew a whole new balloon?

PETRA

More Schnapps, honey?

INT. PETER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Gunter and Peter feed the balloon into the furnace. They watch the balloon curl into the flames.

GUNTER

All our hard work. For nothing.

Peter's eyes glow in the flames. Not giving up.

PETER
Let's go get some taffeta.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Dinner. Peter's mind is a million miles away.

ANDREAS
Dad? Can we?

PETER
Can we what?

ANDREAS
Go camping this weekend?

PETER
No. I have to work.

Suspicious, Frank looks at his father.

FRANK
On the weekend?

PETER
Gunter and I are fixing up an old house.

FRANK
At one in the morning?

PETER
What is this?

FRANK
You tell me.

Frank locks eyes with his father. Not backing down.

PETER
I'm your father. I don't have to tell you anything. Eat.

FRANK
Why are you lying to us?

PETER
I'm not lying.

FRANK
You're worse than the Stasi.

Frank storms off.

PETER

You are not excused! Frank!

Peter slams his fist into the table, startling everyone. Andreas begins to cry. Doris scoops him up.

HALLWAY - Peter stalks after Frank--

FRANK

This isn't a family! It's a dictatorship.

Frank slams his bedroom door in Peter's face. There is a mocking "DO NOT ENTER" sign taped to it. Sound of MUSIC blasting from inside. Peter bangs on the door.

PETER

Turn that music off!

The music only gets LOUDER.

PETER

Frank, I will break down this door in three, two--

The music stops. Silence. Doris bobs Andreas in her arms.

DORIS

(soothing Andreas)
It's okay, honey.
(to Peter)
Calm down.

PETER

He has no respect for authority.

Doris looks at Peter-- she's not going to help him this time.

DORIS

I wonder where he gets it from.

She walks off, soothing Andreas. Peter is alone in the hallway. He winces. Ulcer tearing into his gut. Peter wrenches his fist into his gut, feeling like he and his family are being ripped apart.

EXT. BERLIN - DAY

THE BERLIN WALL - The fifteen foot high, brick and concrete wall eclipses the late sun with endless miles of barbed wire, watch towers, and an oppressive feeling of dread.

Peter and Gunter drive past, staring up at the monolithic, impenetrable wall that barricades the city.

EXT. BERLIN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Gunter puts on a white sailing CAPTAIN'S HAT as he and Peter enter the revolving doors of a large department store.

INT. BERLIN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

A lanky SALESMAN greets Gunter and Peter.

GUNTER

We need a thousand feet of taffeta
to make sails for our sailing club.

Gunter points to his sailor's hat. See? Sailors.

SALESMAN

I've never sold that much material.

GUNTER

We would like to be your first.

The Salesman studies them.

SALESMAN

Wait right here.

Salesman walks off, watching them.

GUNTER

(whispers)
We should go.

PETER

(whispers)
We need this material--

GUNTER

That salesman had Stasi eyes, Pete.
This is Berlin, they're everywhere.
Jesus, I knew I shouldn't have worn
the hat.

Peter sees a SALESWOMAN watching them. Now, more SALESPEOPLE are watching them. A cold feeling slinks down Peter's spine.

PETER

Let's get out of here.

Peter and Gunter head toward the revolving door.

SALESMAN

Sir? Sir!

Salesman stalks them. Snaps his fingers, points. A group of SALESPEOPLE follow Gunter and Peter. They're trapped.

SALESMAN

(to his co-workers)

You see? I told you! These are the sailors--

(whispers to Peter and Gunter)

Because of the large size of your purchase, I will be awarded Salesman of the Month! I cannot thank you enough.

Gunter and Peter look at each other, stunned.

GUNTER

You're... welcome.

EXT. BERLIN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

The Salesman happily carries the enormous rolls of taffeta into Peter's orange Moskvitch car.

SALESMAN

Please come again!

Peter drives off. Gunter realizes something.

GUNTER

Did you pay cash?

PETER

No, I wrote a check--

Soon as he says it, he realizes his grave mistake.

GUNTER

I'm sure it'll be fine.

But they both know it's not going to be fine.

INT. GUNTER'S ATTIC - NIGHT

Gunter customizes the old sewing machine with a small electric motor. It chugs to life, spinning wildly.

BZZT! BZZT! The attic doorbell rings. Gunter freezes.

DOWNSTAIRS - Petra is nervously pressing the doorbell as Helga knocks on the front door. Petra slowly opens the front door. Gunter rushes down from the attic. Helga enters with her dog.

HELGA

Ah, Gunter, I caught you! We hardly see you anymore.

GUNTER

Been busy.

HELGA

Not too busy for Helga's famous Black Forest chocolate cake, hm?

Helga holds up a chocolate cake. The little boys cheer. Petra and Gunter exchange worrisome looks.

KITCHEN - Helga devours her cake, feeds some to her dog.

HELGA

Here there is no joblessness, evictions are forbidden, there's very little crime--

Petra makes eyes to Gunter: *does she ever shut up?*

HELGA

And yet I see our neighbors pointing their TV antennae to the West to get Western television. Who needs to see that? Not me.

PETRA

Not me.

Helga's dog wiggles out of its collar. Scrambles off.

HELGA

Duchess!

The dog scrambles up the stairs, scratching the ATTIC DOOR.

HELGA

What do you smell up there, girl?

PETRA

That's where I keep my crock pots.

GUNTER

That's what you smell, isn't it?

Gunter reaches for the dog. It snaps at him.

HELGA

Duchess! Don't be rude.

GUNTER
Well, thanks for coming. The boys
have to be up early--

They usher Helga out. Close the door. Hearts pounding.

PETRA
This has to stop.

Gunter nods. He's had enough.

GUNTER
It will.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

The balloon, a patchwork of multi-colored material, inflates as the blower and flamethrower fill it with air. It rises majestically, glowing brightly.

PETER
It works... it works!

Peter and Gunter happily jump into the gondola. Peter turns on the propane burner rig. The little flame ignites.

GUNTER
Up, up, and away!

The platform barely lifts five inches off the ground. It hovers, then the gondola bumps down onto the grass.

GUNTER
Why aren't we flying?

PETER
Flame's too small.

The gas sizzles out. The fire dies.

GUNTER
And now the gas ran out.

PETER
We'll fix that--

GUNTER
What if it runs out mid-flight?

PETER
It won't. It can't.

The balloon deflates around them like a giant wet blanket.

PETER

(scribbling furiously)

If we add two more propane tanks we might be able to increase our lifting power--

GUNTER

This is impossible.

PETER

Two more tanks only adds five pounds--

GUNTER

The burner flame's too small to lift the whole thing, let alone eight people.

PETER

If we switch out the posts for aluminium that could reduce the weight--

GUNTER

Who are we kidding, Peter? This thing's never going to work.

PETER

It's trial and error--

GUNTER

It's been nothing but error for six months! I haven't slept more than three hours a night since we started. I don't see my kids because I'm sewing a giant, useless bag until my fingers bleed. Petra's pissed all the time. She's convinced we're being watched which means she won't sleep with me which means I haven't had sex since July which means I'm pissed all the time, too. And when I do sleep, I have nightmares about falling out of the sky in a fiery wreck-- and now, after six months of your bullshit I can jump higher than this goddam thing can fly!

And then, as if Gunter hasn't said a word:

PETER

We need to increase the gas pressure coming out of the tanks--

GUNTER

Peter.

PETER

--the flame will get higher and we'll have lift off.

GUNTER

It's over.

PETER

Look. We're tired. We'll get some rest. Things will look different in the morning.

GUNTER

You're not listening. I'm done.

PETER

Do you like being a prisoner in your own country, Gunter? Do you?

GUNTER

Is that what this is about? Defying your country?

PETER

I'm not defying it, I'm trying to save it! We can't give up. Not now. We're so close--

GUNTER

We're not close, you're just obsessed--

PETER

(breaking)

Yes! I am! This is our lives-- my family's life! Our lives! Nothing is more important than this. Nothing!

Gunter looks at Peter. Something's off here.

GUNTER

Are you in some kind of trouble?

Peter itches his neck. Lights a cigarette. Gunter eyes him.

GUNTER

We *could* stay. We don't *have* to leave. But you act like every minute's your last. Is there something you're not telling me?

PETER
You don't want to know.

GUNTER
Yes. Yes I do. Right now.

PETER
I don't want to implicate you.

Gunter steps back, stunned.

GUNTER
Don't want to implicate me... *what do you call this, asshole?!* You put me in harm's way! You risked my family's life just to save your own ass?!

PETER
I'm doing this for all of us! And if you're too much of a coward to stand up and take a chance for once in your life then you can stay here and rot but get the hell out of my way!

Gunter looks at Peter with venom.

GUNTER
Stay away from me. And stay away from my family.

They pack up in silence.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter drops Gunter off at his house. A chasm between them.

GUNTER
What are you going to do with it?

PETER
Throw it in the fire.

GUNTER
Another one in the fire.

PETER
It's probably a good idea we don't speak for a while.

GUNTER
Never's good for me.

Gunter walks to his house. Peter watches him go. Drives off.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - NIGHT

Snow falls. Thick white blankets of snow cover the forest.

SUPER: December, 1978

Alone in the woods, axe over his shoulder, Peter trudges through knee-high powder. He chops down an evergreen with angry swings, wood splitting, cracking, falling--

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - DAY

Peter sets up the tree in the living room. The family decorates it for Christmas.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Snow falls. Gunter lays bricks. Radio playing in the BG:

REPORTER (O.S.)

The Soviet Union sent thirty thousand troops into Afghanistan to quell the United States backed Mujahideen Rebellion--

EXT. POSSNECK - NIGHT

New Years Eve in the GDR. As the village counts down to Midnight... Gunter and Peter celebrate in their own homes with distant, defeated expressions.

INT. PETER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Peter drags the balloon down to the furnace. Opens the furnace door into the roaring, beckoning fire. But he can't bring himself to throw it inside even though he knows he should. As Peter slams the furnace door shut--

EXT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

Rain falls. Peter sees his CO-WORKER reading a newspaper:
FLEEING TRAITOR DIES ON BERLIN WALL.

CO-WORKER

They didn't print her picture because she was pretty. They thought people would get upset.

The hint of sadness in his Co-Worker's tone surprises Peter. Co-Worker runs off, using the paper as an umbrella.

Peter sees a ghostly figure with dead-eyes waiting for him.
JOSEF KELLER.

JOSEF
Hello, Peter.

INT. JOSEF'S CAR - DAY

Rain pounds the car roof. They sit inside Josef's parked car.
Both men are soaked from the rain. Windows foggy.

JOSEF
I couldn't stay here. Too many
memories.

PETER
How's Magda?

JOSEF
We divorced last month.

PETER
Jesus. Josef, I'm so sorry...

JOSEF
I want to leave, Peter. Escape. You
were always talking. So many ideas--

Peter sees that Josef keeps looking at the car's AC vent.

JOSEF
I thought, you of all people could
get me out...

PETER
(shivers)
Mind if I turn on the heat?

Peter reaches for the heater controls-- Josef stops him.

JOSEF
It's broken.
(a slight smile)
Least it's not as cold as the time
we took the boys skiing. Remember?

PETER
That cabin was freezing.

Peter sees the radio antenna on Josef's the car. Bulky,
familiar. A runny feeling slides down Peter's stomach.

JOSEF

Peter... I know it was you who helped Lukas. Why won't you admit it?

An undercurrent of accusation and contempt in Josef's voice. Peter looks at his friend, emotional.

PETER

Josef... I am so sorry...

Josef's eyes flick to a BREAD VAN parked nearby. *A bread van? In the factory parking lot?* Peter sees several large antennae jutting from the top of the bread van.

PETER

I can't help you.

Peter gets out of the car. Into the falling rain.

JOSEF

Peter--

PETER

I'm sorry, Josef!

Peter runs into the rain.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter is coughing, shaking. Doris hands him tea.

DORIS

(half-hopeful)

Maybe you're being paranoid?

PETER

His car antennae. Same kind the Stasi use. Must have rigged it to record our conversation.

(beat)

They got to him. And now--

Peter coughs as he tries to light a cigarette. Doris takes the cigarette away, puts a thermometer in his mouth.

PETER

-- they're after us.

(regretfully)

I turned my back on my own friend...

DORIS

You had no choice--

PETER

Is this what they want? To divide us? Tear us apart?

DORIS

Yes. That way we can't unite and kick the living shit out of them.

She feels his head. Checks the thermometer.

DORIS

You have a fever. Let's get you some rest. I'll call work--

PETER

No! I have to save my sick days.

He violently coughs. He looks up at his wife. Eyes pleading.

PETER

We have to finish it, Doris. But I can't do this without you. You're my heart. My soul. I need you.

DORIS

I'm here, Peter. Always.

He kisses her hands.

DORIS

But you're going to need more help than just me.

She brushes the hair from his eyes.

DORIS

We need someone we can trust.

INT. FRANK'S ROOM - DAY

Peter knocks on Frank's door. Frank opens the door.

PETER

Frank. We need to talk.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - DAY

Peter leads Frank to the garage door.

PETER

What I'm about to show you, you can't tell anyone. No one can know. Not even your brother.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 This is life or death for all of
 us. Do I have your word?

Suddenly scared, Frank nods. Peter unlocks the door.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - DAY

Frank looks at the burner rig. He takes in the pictures, the blueprints for the balloon. The fan. Propane tanks.

FRANK
 You want to fly a hot air
 balloon... over the Death Zone?
 (pause)
That's your secret?

PETER
 Yes.

Frank's jaw hangs open.

PETER
 I figured you and I fixed up that
 scooter of yours last summer--
 maybe we can fix this.

FRANK
 You want my help?

PETER
 If I'd asked you sooner, we'd be
 living in the West by now.
 (pause)
 We need to leave as soon as
 possible.

FRANK
 Are we in trouble?

Peter nods. Frank swallows. Fear in his eyes.

PETER
 I know it's scary-- but you're
 smart. You don't think I see you,
 Frank, but I do. I see how strong
 you are. Stronger than you think.

This means more to Frank than he realized. He so wants his father's approval.

PETER
 Will you help me, Frank?

A smile spreads across Frank's face. A lump in his throat.

FRANK
I'd love to, dad.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

Ice melts under the spring sun.

SUPER: April, 1979.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - DAY

Doris watches from the window as Peter and Frank carry propane tanks outside. She is pleased father and son are working together but conflicted as to the danger they're embarking on.

PETER
Empty that tank in the trash.

Frank fumbles the propane, opening the spigot. Gas shoots out in a powerful blast, knocking over the trash can.

FRANK
Sorry! It's coming out a little fast.

Frank tries to turn off the spigot but the propane is shooting out like a GEYSER. Peter stares. Wheels turning.

PETER
That's how we increase the gas pressure... Frank, you're a genius!

FRANK
I am? What'd I do?

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - DAY

Fiery sparks. Peter and Frank weld a rig that holds the propane tanks UPSIDE DOWN.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Frank and Peter drag the burner rig into the clearing. The propane tanks are now UPSIDE DOWN on the burner rig.

PETER
Stand back.

Peter lights the burner. The fire shoots FORTY FEET HIGH.

PETER & FRANK
Yes!!!

Their faces glow in the jet of firelight.

EXT. FOREST MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

Under a bold blue sky, Andreas runs with a kite.

Frank holds the string. The kite launches. Doris and the family watch the kite rise, cheering for it to fly.

IN THE TREES - Peter takes Doris through the pines...

DORIS
Where are we going?

He leads Doris to a mountain cliff. 2,000 feet drop.

DORIS
No-- no-- Peter!

PETER
We're far from the edge. You can do this.

Peter holds Doris, steadying her.

PETER
This is what it's going to be like.

DORIS
I don't like this--

PETER
You're doing it. Look.

Doris opens her eyes. She is standing at the edge of the mountaintop overlooking the vast valley below. Wind blows her hair back. She is amazed at the empowering, thrilling feeling inside of her. Doris screams in exhilaration and freedom.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Sitting in the HUNTING BLIND, Peter studies the distant Death Zone with binoculars. Frank is writing in his notebook.

PETER
What are you writing?

FRANK
Nothing.

PETER
Doesn't look like nothing.

FRANK

It's about some girl. But she's never gonna read it.

PETER

Why not?

FRANK

'Cause my principal's putting me in the agricultural program.

PETER

You didn't tell me this.

FRANK

You've been busy. And, let's be honest, I don't really have a chance of being a real writer.

PETER

Listen to me, Frank. The only person in this life who can tell you what to do is you. Not me, not your mother, not the State. This world is full of people who will tell you no, it's not possible. But you can make your own destiny. So when they say look down, you look up.

Peter and Frank look up into endless the stars.

PETER

Anything is possible.

Frank smiles thankfully. Peter picks up the binoculars, watches the spot-lights sweep the valley near the Death Zone.

PETER

Guards change posts at three fifteen. Write that down.

Frank writes that down.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

A strange wind blows. Atop City Hall, the brass dragon weather vane slowly spins.

SUPER: July 3, 1979

INT. FIRST BANK OF POSSNECK - DAY

The bank is so packed and busy, it's nerve-wracking.

RADIO DJ (O.S.)
 -- twenty mile an hour winds will
 be blowing from the North--

At her desk, among the noise, Doris adds up numbers on a calculator, copies them in an enormous bank book.

A small transistor radio plays quietly on her desk.

RADIO DJ
 -- heading into the West...

Her breath seizes. Utterly terrified. She has dreaded and hoped for this news.

INT. POSSNECK HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

In class, Frank stares out of the window. He can see the weather vane swing in the breeze, aiming to the West.

His eyes widen. It's happening.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Frank nervously walks up to Sonja.

FRANK
 I-- wrote this for you.

Frank quickly hands Sonja a poem, turns, briskly walks away.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter smiles. All excitement and energy.

PETER
 Start packing! One bag only. We
 need to keep the weight down.

INT. FRANK AND ANDREAS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Doris helps Andreas pack a small bag.

ANDREAS
 Where are we going?

DORIS
 It's a surprise. Bring only what
 you absolutely want.

Andreas grabs his SWISS ARMY KNIFE then... his teddy bear.

INT. PETER'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Peter quickly removes a stack of cash from a shoebox that Doris has been withdrawing from the bank. He zips the cash in his jacket.

INT. PETER & DORIS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alone, Doris opens a jewelry box. Her nervous fingers trace over family heirlooms... she packs them in a small bag.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

VALIUM. Doris takes two. She breaks a pill in half.

DORIS
Andreas-- honey?

Peter sees Doris give Andreas half a Valium.

DORIS
I don't want him getting fidgety in
the air and-- God forbid.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Peter peeks through the curtains, watching the lights in the neighbor's houses turn off... all is calm, quiet.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Frank helps Peter fold the balloon into the trailer.

PETER
Where's your mother? We have to go.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Doris opens a photograph album of the family. She lingers on pictures of the boys, Peter, and herself from years past playing outside of the house. Peter enters.

DORIS
I remember when we first walked
into this house. The wiring was all
wrong, lights wouldn't turn on-- we
fixed it.
(beat)
Frank took his first steps here...
Andreas spoke his first words
there... birthday parties. Dinners
with you. So many memories.

PETER

We'll make new ones. Enough to fill
a thousand houses.

He holds her hands.

PETER

There's no one else I'd rather make
them with.

She nods, wipes her eyes. They walk out of the bedroom. One
last look at their house... Doris shuts off the lights.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter attaches the trailer to the hitch as the family quietly
loads into the car, careful not to wake the neighbors.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - NIGHT

Doris and Frank glance back in their rearview mirror as
Possneck recedes from view. Peter's eyes are locked on the
road ahead. Andreas snores in the backseat.

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

Headlights throw eerie shadows through the trees.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

They unravel the balloon.... Peter hammers iron pegs into the
grass, roping down the gondola.

FRANK

Can I do the flamethrower?

PETER

You can start the fan.

IN THE HUNTING BLIND - Doris keeps watch with binoculars.

DORIS

Clear!

They inflate the balloon. It rises like a giant waking from a
nap. Doris's eyes widen as the great, homemade balloon
blossoms with a fiery glow.

DORIS

I never expected it to be this
beautiful...

Peter smiles at her in the fiery light.

DORIS

Andreas. Wake up. We're going on our trip.

Andreas wakes in the backseat. He rubs his eyes and sees the hovering hot air balloon.

ANDREAS

In that?

Frank holds out his hand to his younger brother.

FRANK

Just hold my hand.

Andreas takes his older brother's hand. Frank lifts him into the gondola, sitting him beside Doris.

DORIS

Hang onto me, baby. Whatever you do, don't look down.

ANDREAS

I won't.

PETER

Judging from the winds, we should be-- twenty-three minutes in the air.

Peter sets his watch. Looks across their scared faces.

PETER

Twenty-three minutes. Just a few moments of courage and we'll be free for the rest of our lives.

(pause)

We can do this. We're a family. Cut the lines!

Frank leans out of the gondola frame and severs the ropes.

PETER

Hold onto each other.

The balloon lifts off the ground with surprising speed. Frank leans out, watching the ground drop away.

DORIS

Frank, get away from there!

PETER

Sit down, Frank.

Tree branches rush past as the balloon rises higher.

THE NIGHT SKY

The balloon launches over the trees. Peter stands at the burner, checking the gas, checking his homemade altimeter.

Doris has her eyes closed, clutching the boys.

PETER

You're doing great, Doris.

DORIS

Just tell me when we land.

The balloon soars higher along the starry horizon. Above the ruins of a Medieval castle. Hair blowing aside, Peter looks at Frank and Andreas-- their faces filled with pure awe. They float through the air, dreamlike. Full of wonder.

ANDREAS

Mommy, look...

Doris cracks open an eye-- taking in the majestic sight of city lights passing below... it's breath-taking.

FRANK

How high up are we, dad?

Peter checks his homemade altimeter.

PETER

Six thousand feet.

FRANK

(whispers)

Is that too high?

Yes. But Peter doesn't say anything.

ANDREAS

Are we there yet?

Peter looks out-- stars VANISH. The air grows cold. Damp.

They are at the edge of an enormous, grey cloud. Something ominous about it. The mammoth fog swallows them.

IN THE CLOUDS - Haunting, misty fog. Tendrils of ethereal vapor swirl like ghosts.

Tink. Tink. Streams of water tinkle against the gondola.

ANDREAS
(excited)
We're in the rain!

Peter looks up-- rivulets of water stream down the edge of the balloon. WET PATCHES BLOSSOM ON THE CLOTH.

DORIS
What's wrong?

PETER
The condensation. It's weighing us down.

Peter fires up the burner, but the balloon DESCENDS.

DORIS
Is everything okay?

Peter doesn't answer. He opens up the valve, BLASTING THE BALLOON with fire. The gas SPUTTERS. Dies. The beautiful flame that was giving them light and warmth VANISHES.

The balloon plunges. Wind shrieks. The gondola shakes.

Doris clutches Andreas and Frank. Holding in her screams.

PETER'S POV - A silver fence glitters below.

The DEATH ZONE. The balloon is about to land on it.

PETER
Hold on!

He pulls a strap, opening a FLAP on top of the balloon. They plunge faster, veering backward.

EXT. SOUTH FOREST - NIGHT

TREE TOPS KNIFE UP. Snapping branches. The balloon tips.

The altimeter, knife, wrench, and compass slide off the gondola. Peter grabs for them but they spiral down--

WHAM! The gondola crashes into the ground, the corner plows through the earth, kicking up waves of dirt--

The balloon is DRAGGING them toward the razor wire.

PETER
We need to jump!

Peter throws their suitcases. Frank leaps off the gondola, rolling onto the ground. The balloon begins to rise. The gondola is now lifting BACK INTO THE AIR.

Doris hesitates-- LEAPS. Cradling Andreas, Peter jumps.

They collapse into a heap of pine and earth.

Twisting and flailing in a tangle, the balloon floats off, vanishing into the night.

ANDREAS

Our balloon..!

DORIS

Did we make it? Are we in the West?

Peter looks through the binoculars.

PETER

I can't tell which side we landed on...

Frank finds something on the ground. A piece of trash.

FRANK

We're still in the East.

He holds up a crushed box of Kaffe Mix.

PETER

No, no, no--

Everyone stares in horror and defeat.

PETER

We need to go. Now.

FRANK

But we're so close...

Peter fetches their luggage.

PETER

Pretty soon they're going to find that balloon and then they're going to find us-- we need to leave here, find the nearest road and follow it back to the car--

Peter walks off-- Doris grabs him.

DORIS

Peter-- !

Peter stops. His foot is inches away from a TRIP-WIRE.

Peter's breath trembles. He looks across the forest to a mounted SM-70 mine. Peter slowly steps away from the shimmering wire. Doris looks across the dark forest.

DORIS

It's so dark-- we can't see all the wires...

PETER

(thinking)

Okay. Okay. We'll stay here. Hide. Wait for daylight.

ANDREAS

You just said we have to leave!

Andreas starts to cry. Peter scoops him up.

PETER

It'll be like camping, see?

Doris finds a small hollow in the base of a tree. She sits Andreas there, holding him.

ANDREAS

This is nothing like camping.

FRANK

Sure it is, Andreas. We don't need a sleeping bag. We can just lie here and look up at the stars and be real quiet...

Frank nestles beside his little brother. The family huddles together, holding each other, looking up at the stars. Shivering like frightened animals, too afraid to speak.

EXT. SOUTH FOREST - MORNING

Early morning light rises through the trees. Peter hasn't slept, eyes wide, scanning the forest. He sees Frank is also awake. Sunlight shines across a nearby trip-wire.

PETER

Keep your eyes open. Walk very, very slowly.

DORIS

We'll play follow the leader.

Carefully they walk over the trip-wire...

ANDREAS

I see one! Over there!

PETER

Good, Andreas. Very good.

EXT. BACK ROAD - SUNRISE

The family walks along the foggy road, carrying their luggage, looking like lost tourists.

A large red deer with a crown of antlers emerges from the woods. It stops, looks at the family. They look back at it. A mystical moment. The deer trots off.

EXT. DEATH ZONE - DAY

Rifles out, guards are running--

GUARD

Over here!

COMMANDER HORST pulls up in a military jeep. He joins the guards as they stare up at-- hanging limply in the trees, the ragged balloon.

GUARD

(wonderstruck)

It's a balloon...

Horst shoots the guard a hard look. Guards cut down the balloon. It crashes to the ground.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dobermans lead a pack of guards through the woods. A dog lunges into the clearing, snarling at the ground. Peter's homemade altimeter is sticking out of the mud nearby his wrench, compass, and knife.

HORST

Keep searching. Whatever lunatic flew this thing is either dead or hiding.

EXT. BORDER TOWN- DAY

A GERMAN BEER HALL band plays a bouncy OOMPA-PA-PA tune. East Germans happily drink steins of frothy beer.

Peter, Doris, Frank, and Andreas walk through the bustling town of Lobenstein, feeling strange and alien. The band is hammering away, adding to the surrealness of their situation.

PETER
Just act naturally.

FRANK
Yeah, right.

They make their way through the revelry. Stomp. Stomp. Stomp.
20 GDR SOLDIERS march through the town. Peter pulls his
family into an alley... tanks, jeeps roll past.

People cheer for the soldiers. Soldiers wave to the crowds.

DORIS
It's a parade.

EXT. ROUTE 90 - DAY

Exhausted. Feet dragging. Peter picks up Andreas.

INT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Peering through the trees, Peter finds his car. The fan, the
flamethrower. Exactly where they left it. In the daylight,
the objects look useless and small.

PETER
Clear.

The others rush in. They throw everything in the car.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

They drive past the "Welcome to Possneck" sign.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - DAY

Peter cautiously opens the front door, worried the police
will be waiting for them. They enter the house they thought
they left for good. Doris shuts the curtains. Frank and
Andreas flop onto their beds and fall asleep.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Peter lights up the furnace. The fire RAGES. He shoves the
blueprints, sketches, and the newspaper photograph of the
colorful balloons into the fire.

Peter watches the whole thing burn. Doris enters.

Peter rips open his shirt. He tears at the money strapped to
his chest. She puts her hand on his shoulder.

PETER
I... I'm so sorry.

He grabs her hand, clutching it. He's in tears.

PETER

I failed... I failed you...

She holds him as he breaks, unable to hold it in any longer.

INT. MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY - FIRING RANGE - DAY

BANG! BANG! Zental shoots a target clean through its paper heart. An officer yells for him. Zental holsters his handgun.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Zental and twenty utterly confounded Stasi Agents are staring down at Peter's tools which are neatly laid out on a table.

ZENTAL

A balloon..?

Zental turns around and we see more officers are inspecting the entire sewn balloon, the burner rig...

HORST

I found it, sir.

HORST is standing at attention.

ZENTAL

This is the second escape attempt in your district, Horst.

HORST

With respect, sir, my men are doing everything to find these traitors--

ZENTAL

Well, it's not enough! Your district is a breeding ground for rebellion.

HORST

If I had more guards--

ZENTAL

You can't do the job with what you've got, why should we give you more?

Horst swallows, visibly shaken. The other Stasi like seeing Horst get torn to shreds.

OFFICER KAASE

Captain Zental. There are no hot
air balloon companies in East
Germany or Poland--

ZENTAL

See these welding points? This
stitching. The craftsmanship...
someone knew what they were doing.
A builder, an engineer, someone in
construction, that's who we're
looking for.

Zental feels the clothing.

ZENTAL

Is this cotton?

OFFICER VERLAG

One of the secretaries identified
it as taffeta.

ZENTAL

Where would one get this much
taffeta?

OFFICER VERLAG

Department store?

ZENTAL

Search them.

OFFICER VERLAG

Which ones?

ZENTAL

All of them.

OFFICER VERLAG

That will take some time--

ZENTAL

So take it. Surely someone made a
large purchase they'd remember.
(re: Horst)
And get this man more guards.

HORST

Thank you, Captain--

ZENTAL

Do not disappoint me.

Horst knows this is a threat. A photographer comes forward takes a picture of the table of tools. As the camera FLASHES--

EXT. NEWS STAND - DAY

The cover of the newspaper. A picture of the tools with the headline: **HELP US FIND THE TRAITORS.**

Gunter, walking past, stops.

GUNTER
(reading)
"...homemade... hot air balloon..?"

Gunter's gone white.

INT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

As Peter works, it feels like everyone is watching him. His Supervisor. His Managers. Do they know? Do they suspect him? *FLICK, FLICK.* His shaking hands try to light his cigarette.

INT. FIRST BANK OF POSSNECK - DAY

Doris can't concentrate either. She glances around the office, feeling the eyes of her co-workers.

RADIO DJ (O.S.)
Officials are looking for any
information about the traitors--

A cluster of CO-WORKERS gather around the radio.

CASHIER
They tried to escape in a hot air
balloon. Can you believe it?

Doris forces a laugh. It's louder than it should be.

CO-WORKER
It's incredible. Like a fairy tale.

Doris hides a slight smile at the people's inspiration.

CASHIER
The Stasi will catch them.

CO-WORKER
They always do.

Doris's smile fades.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Frank miserably sits back at his desk.

MR. WERMER

This week Skylab, the failure of the American Space Program that cost the American tax payers two billion dollars will come crashing down to Earth in a fiery wreck--

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Frank walks dejected down the hallway. Sonja stops him.

SONJA

You.

Frank tenses. *Does she know?* She holds up Frank's poem.

SONJA

Write me another one!

She kisses Frank on the cheek, runs off. As Frank brightens--

INT. STRELZYK LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Clock ticking. Peter looks out of the curtain.

DORIS

Please stop. You're making me nervous.

Peter paces. Lights a cigarette.

DORIS

Don't smoke inside. And please stop pacing.

PETER

So what do you want me to do?

DORIS

I want you to stop shouting.

Peter rubs his face. At the end of himself. Shattered.

PETER

I'm sorry I put you all through this... I made a promise I couldn't keep.

The fire is utterly gone from his voice.

PETER

And we almost died because of me
and my stupid dream. I was just
lying to myself...

They have never seen Peter like this and it scares them.

PETER

Now they will find us. And they
will take us all away. And that
will be the end of our family.

Ashamed, Peter walks into the garage. Hiding his tears.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Frank follows Peter inside.

FRANK

Dad...

PETER

Not now, Frank.

FRANK

Sounds like there's only one thing
we can do. Build another.

PETER

No, son.

FRANK

We have to--

PETER

You almost died. We almost died.

FRANK

We flew. In something we built.

Frank's eyes are filled with fire.

FRANK

You can't give up now. That's what
you always say, isn't it? No matter
what, don't give up-- keep hope?
Was all that lies?

Peter doesn't have an answer. Frank storms out. Peter looks
at the empty corkboard. Frank comes back in with his clunky
TAPE PLAYER.

FRANK

I've listened to you. Now you
listen to me.

(beat)

This is the tape Lukas gave me.

Frank presses play. The bootleg mixtape spins.

"Heroes" by David Bowie plays.

FRANK

Do you hear that? *Standing by the
Wall*. This guy's singing about us.

The song fills the garage. Frank speaks the lyrics:

FRANK

We can beat them. Forever and ever.
We can be heroes. Just for one day.

Peter stares, breathless. Doris and Andreas appear.

DORIS

Listen to your son, Peter.

PETER

You-- you want to try again?

She takes a breath. Nods.

PETER

But you were terrified!

DORIS

More than anything in the world.

She stands tall. Proud.

DORIS

But I did it.

ANDREAS

I did it, too.

Peter looks at the faces of his family. Their belief in him
and the mission wells up inside of him, re-lighting his fire.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Gunter is miserably laying bricks.

PETER

We need to talk.

Gunter startles.

GUNTER

Damn right we need to talk-- *what's my wrench doing on the front page of the newspaper?!*

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS walk past.

GUNTER

So you see the bricks here will be about ten feet high--

The construction workers to pass.

PETER

(whispers)
We flew, Gunter.

That stops Gunter. He has so many questions... doesn't dare ask them here.

PETER

Come by the house for dinner tonight. Doris would love to see you.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

With great urgency, the Wetzels and the Strelzyks meet again.

GUNTER

(reading the paper aloud)
The People's Police ask for your help finding the traitors?!

PETRA

It's everywhere! All over the news! Even on TV. Because of you, my family might go to prison!

DORIS

We're not going to solve anything by getting emotional!

(beat)

We're German for God's sake. Let's act like it.

PETER

I am sorry we are in this situation but we are in this situation. And if we're going to escape, we have to work together.

GUNTER
No. The damn thing doesn't even
work--

PETER
It does. We turned the propane
tanks upside down. The flame was
forty feet high!

Gunter thinks about this.

GUNTER
Of course. Why didn't I think of
that?

PETER
Frank thought of it!

GUNTER
Frank! Ha! Good lad!

PETER
We were six thousand feet in the
air! A mile and a half off the
ground!

DORIS
You should have seen it.

GUNTER
Wow.

Petra glares. Gunter straightens, pretends not to care.

PETRA
If it works then why are you still
here?

PETER
We were seconds away from crossing
the border. But there was a cloud--

GUNTER
I warned you about the clouds.

PETER
We needed our Navigator.

DORIS
Now they're coming for us. And if
they get to us, they'll get to you--

PETRA
Is that a threat?

DORIS
It's a fact.

PETER
We have to build another balloon.

GUNTER
Another?

PETER
And we need to build it fast. Two weeks at the most. But that only happens if we do this together.

Peter looks at Gunter.

PETER
I was wrong to drag you into this in the first place. I'm sorry.

Gunter is caught off guard by Peter's confession.

GUNTER
You didn't drag me into anything. I wanted to leave. Just needed someone crazier than me to talk me into it. And for the record, the balloon was *my* idea.

PETER
That's why you're the Navigator.

Gunter smiles.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

The bootleg mixtape blasts "Judy Is a Punk" as Peter, Gunter, and Frank weld a new gondola frame together.

INT. RUDOLSTADT DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Doris purchases a roll of yellow taffeta. Smiles to clerk.

DORIS
I'm making a ball gown.

INT. LEIPZIG STORE - DAY

Petra purchases a roll of green taffeta. Smiles to clerk.

PETRA
I'm making curtains.

INT. OBERLAN STORE - DAY

Gunter purchases a roll of polka dot taffeta.

GUNTER

I just really like polka dots.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Rolls and rolls of colorful fabrics. Doris and Petra cut up the piecemeal fabrics as Gunter sews the materials together. Peter enters, dumps another bolt of cloth on the floor.

EXT. BERLIN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Zental, Verlag, and Kaase enter the store.

INT. BERLIN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Standing before his EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH photograph, the lanky salesman smiles at Zental.

SALESMAN

I remember! Two men needed the material for their sailboats.

ZENTAL

You said you brought the material to their car. Do you remember what kind of car they were driving?

SALESMAN

I remember it was orange because I hate the color orange. It wasn't a Trabant. It was a Moskvitch!

ZENTAL

(to his officers)

Get the sales records and find that car.

INT. MOSKVITCH CAR - DRIVING

Peter drives the orange Moskvitch into--

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Peter parks. Speaks with the SALESMAN about the Moskvitch.

Peter trades in his orange Moskvitch car. He drives off in a smaller, clunky BLUE WARTBURG CAR.

INT. HELGA'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Forking cake into her mouth, Helga watches Doris and Petra enter the Wetzels' house with reams of fabric.

Helga looks to a newspaper article about the hot air balloon.

HELGA

Hans! Hans! The neighbors. They're the balloon people!

Her HUSBAND groans in bed, cuddled up next to their tiny dog.

HELGA'S HUSBAND

Go back to sleep, Helga.

HELGA

They're always carrying fabric into the house but I haven't seen the boys wearing new clothes--

HELGA'S HUSBAND

The only balloon I see is the size of your ass from all that cake.

Helga stands there, insulted-- she picks up her husband's shirt from the dresser and rips it.

HELGA'S HUSBAND

My shirt!

Helga marches out with the shirt. Her dog leaps out of bed and follows her to--

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Petra and Doris freeze in the middle of cutting fabric as Helga knocks on the front door. BZZT! BZZT! Petra rings the attic doorbell. Gunter stops sewing. Petra answers the door.

HELGA

I hate to bother you at this late hour but--

Helga holds up the ripped shirt.

HELGA

Hans ripped his good shirt. Could I borrow that sewing machine of yours?

PETRA

It's almost midnight--

HELGA

He needs it for work and his other shirts are in the laundry.

Helga shoves the door-- Petra stops it.

PETRA

No.

HELGA

But-- we're neighbors.

PETRA

That doesn't mean you just barge in here whenever you want.

HELGA

You're acting very strange.

Petra slams the door. Locks it.

PETRA

Goodnight, Helga!

INT. HELGA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Helga huffs. Marches back to her house. Dog following.

HELGA

Police? This is Helga Grum. I want to report mysterious activity.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

Sonja sits on the back of Frank's scooter. Wind in Frank's face, he is beaming at having Sonja with him.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The sky is mirrored on the lake's surface. Sonja lounges in the sun. Franks nervously holds a handwritten short story.

FRANK

Sonja... this is a short story I wrote. Would you read it?

She smiles, takes it. Frank beams.

SONJA

Now I have something to ask you.
(beat)
Will you join the Free German Youths?

FRANK

(laughs)

Those guys? They're like the
Communist successor to the Hitler
Youth--

SONJA

Frank Strelzyk, they are not! They
uphold good, East German values.
Security. Solidarity. Protection.

FRANK

I... didn't know you were so
involved...

SONJA

It's fun! East Germany's 30 year
celebration is coming up.

Sonja slowly begins kissing Frank's neck...

SONJA

We can go to the festival of
Political Songs together...

She nibbles Frank's ear, whispering hotly:

SONJA

Hand out pamphlets...

Her hand snakes into his pants--

INT. CIVIC CENTER - NIGHT

Frank recites a pledge under a "Free German Youths &
Acceptance to the Community of Socialist Workers" banner.

FRANK

I pledge myself to the progress of
the State, the Party, and the
working class.

In the audience, Sonja beams at Frank. Peter and Doris look
very concerned. This could ruin everything.

INT. WETZEL HOUSE - DAY

BANG! BANG! Petra peeks out of the window, utterly terrified
as OFFICERS STURM and DRANG bang on the front door.

OFFICER DRANG

Police. We need to search your
house.

PETRA

What for?

OFFICER STURM

Open the door.

Drang and Sturm shove inside. Petra's heart pounds. The cops search her living room, the bedrooms. They throw back the rug, slide the couch away.

Little SAM starts crying. Petra scoops him up.

Drang spots the doorbell screwed on the attic doorway. He smiles as if he's found a clue.

PETRA

Sometimes when I sew, it's hard to hear the children...

Drang and Sturm climb up to the attic.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Drang and Sturm crash inside... the attic is empty except for the sewing machine. The balloon is gone.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - DAY

As Drang and Sturm drive off, Petra sees across the street, Helga watching. Petra scowls. Helga closes her curtain.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

The balloon has been tucked inside Peter's garage.

GUNTER

Good thing we moved it here.

Petra glares at Gunter. The two families are going through a practice run. Petra and Doris inspect every inch. Peter chews his finger, watching them go over the rig.

PETER

Well..?

Petra and Doris look at Peter.

DORIS

You passed.

Peter and Gunter shake hands, proud of their work.

GUNTER

Built in record time.

PETRA

Now what?

PETER

Now we pray for wind.

EXT. SKIES OVER POSSNECK - DAY

Not a breeze in the sky.

EXT. POSSNECK MARKET - DAY

A long line of SHOPPERS waits to enter the market. Doris waits at the end of the line, staring up at the sky...

A shadow crosses her face. A red banner is raised above main street. **"Celebrate 30 Years of the GDR."**

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

As Gunter walks up the steps, he sees banners and posters are being raised. **"30 years of Eternal Friendship With the Soviet Union, the Life Force of the GDR."**

Posters of GDR leader, Erich Honecker, are put up, looming watching. The celebration is like a dark spectre closing in.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Gunter lights a candle. He kneels down to pray. The candle flames flicker...

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

A breeze whispers through the trees... the weather vane spins. **"30 YEARS GDR"** flags flap like wind socks.

EXT. THE PEOPLE'S OWNED POLYMER FACTORY - DAY

Peter's hair is blown aside in the wind. His eyes sparkle.

WEATHER REPORT (O.S.)

A cold front from the South brings warm winds blowing West...

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - SUNSET

Listening to the radio, Peter smiles at his family.

WEATHER REPORT

-- expect a balmy summer breeze all through the weekend...

PETER
We go tomorrow night.

INT. PETER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Peter checks the burner, the tanks. Frank stands, unsure.

FRANK
What if... I didn't go?

PETER
What?

FRANK
It's just-- things are going really well with Sonja.

PETER
Okay. Stay.

Frank pauses. That was too easy.

FRANK
Okay?

PETER
You're almost a man, Frank. You know the consequences. Stay.

Frank, thankful, is now more confused about what to do...

FRANK
It's just-- I finally fit in here.

PETER
I understand.

FRANK
Where will I go to school in the West?

PETER
Where ever you want.

FRANK
What if... what if they don't like me over there?

Peter looks at his son, beaming with pride in him.

PETER
They'll like you.

FRANK
You're just saying that...

PETER
I would never lie to you. You have
a good heart and you're a good
person. And a good writer.

FRANK
(mortified)
You-- read my stuff?

PETER
Yeah. I don't pretend to know
anything about poetry or stories--
but it was... beautiful. Is that
the right word? You tell me.
(pause)
Mom liked it, too.

FRANK
Mom read it?

Frank doesn't know to be embarrassed or elated.

PETER
Starting over won't be easy, Frank.
It'll take a long time to tear down
the wall we've built in here.
(taps his temple)
But you're free to make up your own
mind. This isn't a dictatorship.
It's a family.

INT. FREE GERMAN YOUTH CENTER - THAT NIGHT

A lame East German disco song plays. Frank dances with Sonja
among Free German Youth TEENAGERS.

SONJA
We'll drive to Berlin, march in the
parade and then after... the hotel.

FRANK
Sonja, did you read my short story?
The one I gave you?

SONJA
Oh, that? No.

Her dismissive tone hurts worse than he thought it would.

FRANK

But it was important to me. I want to be a writer...

Sonja laughs. Frank stops dancing.

FRANK

What do you want to be, Sonja?

SONJA

Stop acting weird.

Sonja walks over to the punch. Frank follows her.

FRANK

Don't you want to-- I don't know, make your own destiny? Listen to real music?

SONJA

Life is more than just good music and stories.

FRANK

Not to me.

She downs her punch. Wipes her mouth.

SONJA

I did read your story, Frank.
(beat)
I hated it.

Frank looks utterly crushed.

SONJA

What were you thinking, saying those things? I burned it.

FRANK

You what-- ? That was my only copy! Why would you do that?

SONJA

Because I didn't want to have to report you.

Stunned, Frank steps back. Looks at her as if seeing her for the first time.

SONJA

Now stop being silly and come dance with me.

She holds out her hand. Heart breaking, Frank looks at her. He closes his eyes. Takes a breath. And walks away.

SONJA

Frank? Where are you going? FRANK!

Frank walks out of the door.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter opens the front door, welcoming his son home. Shaking, Frank embraces his dad. Peter holds his son for a long while.

EXT. DEATH ZONE - NIGHT

The gates open, welcoming a MILITARY CONVOY inside. 20 GUARDS step out. Young, fresh-faced GUARDS. Horst walks before them.

HORST

By law citizens have no right to cross this border. The proper method for stopping them is the following. First, identify. "Stop. Identify." Then if they do not answer, a warning shot.

Horst fires at a deer in the distance. It sprints away.

HORST

If they do not comply, fire again. This time, not a warning.

Horst trains his scope on the running deer. Fires. The deer twists, skids to the ground. The new guards are blank-faced.

HORST

Should you disobey these orders, should a fugitive get past you, disciplinary measures will be taken against you and you will face time in prison. Welcome to the Wall.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

A warm, humid night.

SUPER: September 15, 1979.

Carrying suitcases, Gunter and Petra quickly exit their house with their two little ones, Sam and Andrew.

SAM

Daddy, it's late.

GUNTER

Shhh-shhh.

As they drive off, a light flicks on in HELGA'S HOUSE.

HELGA

Police? This is Helga Grum.

INT. POSSNECK POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A tired OFFICER hangs up the phone.

OFFICER

Helga Grum's going on about her neighbors again.

Drang leans over, curious. He nods to Sturm.

DRANG

We'll check it out.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Doris zips up Andreas's jacket. Wraps a scarf around him.

ANDREAS

We're going in the sky again?

DORIS

Yes, my dear.

ANDREAS

I... I'm not scared.

DORIS

Such a big boy. Your father and I made you something...

They pin a homemade BADGE WITH A BALLOON on it to his jacket.

DORIS

For bravery in the face of danger.

Andreas beams. Peter gives Doris a lingering kiss.

PETER

For bravery in the face of danger.

DORIS

I love you.

PETER

I love you, too.

INT. MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY - BERLIN - NIGHT

Zental, surrounded by the balloon wreckage sifts through piles of useless evidence. Enraged at finding nothing, he kicks over the table. Verlag rushes in--

OFFICER VERLAG
They wrote a check!

Zental looks up-- Verlag waves a copy of a personal check.

OFFICER VERLAG
The salesman found it in their records.

OFFICER KAASE
They couldn't be that stupid.

ZENTAL
Desperate people make mistakes.
(reading the check)
Don't they... Peter Strelzyk?

INT. STRELZYK GARAGE - NIGHT

Peter and Gunter attach the trailer to the back of the small blue Wartburg.

GUNTER
(whispers)
I'm worried we built it too fast.

PETER
(whispers)
We built it well.

GUNTER
(whispers)
In a week in a half, Peter. We might have missed something--

Petra is dragging her luggage into the car.

PETER
No luggage. Too heavy. Trust me.

Petra grumbles, opens up her luggage takes out CHAMPAGNE.

PETRA
It's silly, but.. I read somewhere it's good luck to have a bottle of champagne on a balloon flight.

Everyone smiles at this...

PETER
 (looking at his watch)
 It's time.

They try to squeeze into the car but the two families won't fit in the tiny crappy East German Wartburg. Peter frowns.

DORIS
 We don't fit.

GUNTER
 I could drive my car.

PETER
 Police see two cars full of people driving at this hour they'll get suspicious.

Frank speaks up.

FRANK
 I could... drive someone on the back of my scooter?

DORIS
 What if the police stop him?

GUNTER
 I'll ride on the back. Say we had car trouble...

Doris takes a breath. She doesn't like it.

PETER
 Frank, you know the way there.

FRANK
 Yes, sir.

Peter looks at his friends, his family.

PETER
 You all know what to do. No matter what happens-- I'm proud to be with you tonight. Don't give up. No matter what.
 (beat)
 We can be heroes. Just for one day.

Frank smiles at this.

EXT. ROUTE 33 - NIGHT

Zental speeds in his sedan. Verlag reads a file and map.

OFFICER VERLAG
 He lives at fifteen Waldstrasse,
 Possneck. Two hours away.

Zental floors the gas.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - NIGHT

Peter drives the Wartburg with the trailer attached. It looks like the car is empty until we see--

INT. WARTBURG CAR - DRIVING

Doris, Petra, and the three little children are all lying down, keeping out of sight. Andreas sees little Sam and Andrew are scared, on edge.

ANDREAS
 It's going to be okay.

Smoking a cigarette, Peter glances in the rearview, keeping an eye on Frank and Gunter pattering far behind--

A CAR STREAKS PAST. PETER SLAMS THE BREAKS.

Doris, Petra, Andreas, Sam, and Andrew jolt forward.

It's the police. Sturm and Drang. Glaring at Peter from their car. It takes everything in Peter to remain cool, calm.

Doris, Petra and the boys press themselves into the floor and pull blankets over their heads. Andreas clamps his hand over Sam's mouth.

ANDREAS
 You must be quiet.

Little Sam and Andrew nod, terrified.

FAR BEHIND THEM - On the scooter, Frank squeezes the brakes, seeing the red and blue lights.

GUNTER
 Damn. Go left here.

FRANK
 But--

GUNTER
 Turn. Quick!

Frank, conflicted, turns left across a bridge over a thundering river.

WITH PETER - IN THE WARTBURG

Peter takes a long drag, waves at Sturm and Drang.

PETER
Evening officers.

DORIS
(whispers)
Don't overcompensate.

PETER
(whispers)
I'm being friendly.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Frank's scooter flies through the trees, winding-- Gunter hanging on tight.

GUNTER
Careful, careful!

The scooter skids across the edge of the launch site.

FRANK
Where are they?

GUNTER
They'll be here.

IN THE POLICE CAR - Drang and Sturm nod to Peter.

OFFICER DRANG
Be careful where you are driving!

PETER
Will do, officer.

The police speed off toward the Wetzel's house. Peter throws the car in drive and heads off into the forest.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

The Wartburg car roars into the clearing, trailer clinking.

Blankets are drawn back. Gasps from the children.

Andreas pats little Sam and Andrew.

ANDREAS
You did good. But it's going to get worse. I will protect you.

PETER

Quickly now. Frank, keep watch.

Frank climbs the HUNTING BLIND-- rise with him to see everyone unroll the giant balloon... its size and scope and color is incredible.

Gunter hammers four rope lines down into the ground as--

Peter lights the blow torch--

Doris starts the fan, bellowing heat into the mouth of the bag that Petra and Gunter and the boys are holding open.

Upside down propane tanks are opened.

THE CENTRAL BURNER is lit.

The little boys stare up at the rising balloon.

Their faces light up like it was Christmas morning.

Doris sees Petra is shaking.

DORIS

It's going to be okay.

PETRA

If one more person tells me it's going to be okay I might scream.

Petra grabs Doris. A big, desperate hug.

PETRA

Thank you. I wouldn't do this without you.

DORIS

Thank me when we get there.

EXT. WETZEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Sturm and Drang knock on Gunter's front door. Helga stands beside them, her hair in curlers.

HELGA

The whole family just left.

OFFICER STURM

Where did they go?

HELGA

That way. Probably to meet his friend.

OFFICER STURM

What friend?

HELGA

The one who smokes.

Sturm and Drang pause-- remembering, Peter in the car-- smoking. They suddenly get a bad feeling.

They quickly move into the patrol car and speed off.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

The balloon is full and bright, glowing like a rainbow moon. The adults help their children into the gondola.

PETRA

Boys, you hold here and here and you never ever, ever let go.

SAM

Mommy, you're squishing me.

PETRA

Good. We need to be squished.

Peter stands in the center with Gunter, keeping watch on the rippling, inflated bag.

PETER

Frank, cut the lines.

Frank is about to climb down from the HUNTING BLIND when--

Headlights of the police car appear on the road. Frank's eyes widen in horror.

FRANK

POLICE!!!

Frank jumps down-- frantically cuts three lines-- the balloon rises quickly-- pulling the last, tethered rope line TAUGHT-- setting the balloon at an awkward angle.

Frank accidentally drops the knife and has to tug at the last rope to pull it free-- TENSION PULLING THE LINE TAUGHT.

The rope frees, WHIPPING through the air. The iron peg on the end SLICES into Frank's face, CUTTING OPEN HIS CHEEK. Frank stumbles back into Andreas, smashing his nose-- BLOOD GUSHES from Andreas's nose.

ANDREAS

Aaaaaah!!!!

THE BALLOON RISES. IT'S POWERFUL but CLUMSY. Not the uplifting, wonder-filled they were hoping for.

GUNTER

Don't shake the gondola!

Peter grabs Frank, steadying him.

Doris wipes Andreas's nose, holding him.

200 FEET HIGH - The BURNER WOBBLER-- the 40 foot flame licks the side of the bag. *WHOOMPH*. FIRE SHOOTS up the balloon.

DORIS

Oh. My. God.

PETRA

We're on fire!

PETER

Stay calm--

PETRA

I want to get out!

GUNTER

No! We're too high!

As the balloon flies up, the FIRE BURNS A HOLE in the top side of the balloon. Everyone SCREAMS.

PETER

If we keep rising, the altitude-- the lack of oxygen-- it'll keep the fire from spreading-- just hold on.

Gunter bows his head, praying like never before. Everyone huddles together, choosing to look up at the small flickering flame instead of looking down...

PETER

Navigator. Gunter! What's our altitude?

GUNTER

(checks altimeter)
A thousand feet and rising.

Peter clenches his jaw-- there's no going back now.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - NIGHT

Zental's sedan screams past the "Welcome to Possneck" sign.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Zental knocks. Waits as long as he can bear it then he kicks in the door. He and Verlag turn the house upside down.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

Sturm and Drang spot the blue Wartburg car. They shine their flashlights around the launch zone. It's a weird mystery until Sturm sees, up, in the sky--

Hovering two miles in the distance, the glorious, floating balloon, BLAZING FIRE trailing its side.

SKY NEAR THE DEATH ZONE

Shivering, Frank holds his hand to his face, blood pouring through his fingers.

PETER

Frank?!

FRANK

I got cut-- I'm-- I'm okay--

Doris and Peter want to help him, but they can't rock the gondola. Frank pulls his hand away from his face, presses his sleeve into his bloody cut. Sniffs.

Andreas nose has stopped bleeding, but Doris's hands are covered in dry blood.

POLICE PATROL CAR - DRIVING

Sturm and Drang speed down the forest road. The balloon's reflection in the windshield.

OFFICER DRANG

(screaming into his CB)

Yes! You heard me! A balloon! LOOK
IN THE SKY!!! IN THE SKY!!!

Sturm, staring up--

A FAMILY OF DEER are crossing the road. Sturm screams, pulls the wheel-- avoids the herd of deer, SMASHING into a tree.

The deer simply stare at the crashed car then leap back into the forest.

BALLOON - FLYING

2,000 FEET IN THE SKY. Everyone watches the fire on the side of the balloon. It fades away.

PETRA

It's out...

But now-- a charred hole is in the top of the balloon-- wind WHISTLING through it-- the burned lines vibrate.

PETRA

What if one of those ropes breaks?

PETER

They'll hold.

(beat)

German built.

GUNTER

(whispers)

The gas-- it's escaping.

PETER

We'll make it.

GUNTER

But--

PETER

We'll make it.

Everyone steals a look down at the shrinking villages passing below. Moonlit tree tops sweeping below. Rooftops drifting past. Highways, street lights, pass below them.

INT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

In the garage, Zental finds a can of burned blueprints, sketches. One scrap isn't fully burned... Zental studies it-- realizes, this is the same hand that drew the hot-wire sketch for Lukas Keller.

ZENTAL

It's him! Call the towers!

EXT. DEATH ZONE - NIGHT

A WATCH TOWER. Vaulting in the night sky. Horst smiles, proud of himself for having so many guards under his command...

A phone RINGS. *At this hour?* Horst sees a guard answer it then look to the sky...

Horst frowns. Sees another guard, peering up.

Stunned, a guard points to the sky...

Horst looks up--

The 20 Guards crane their necks to the sky... and for a stunned moment, you can hear a pin drop.

There, a speck of light... flickering like a shooting star.

Horst quickly picks up his binoculars.

HORST'S POV - The balloon. Aglow, sailing.

HORST
LIGHTS!!!

Guards frantically point the spotlights up, swinging the lines of light into the vast darkness--

THE BALLOON - FLYING

7,500 FEET ABOVE GROUND.

DORIS
Listen...

GUNTER
Sirens.

Spotlights dance up from below. Anxiety and fear rise.

FRANK
Can they see us?

PETRA
We're a ball of light in the sky,
of course they can!

PETER
Quiet! If we can hear them, they
can hear us...

Peter, mind reeling. *Think, think.*

EXT. DEATH ZONE - NIGHT

Guards running. Dogs barking madly. RIFLES AIMED UP.

Horst raises his rifle.

HORST'S POV - THROUGH THE CROSS-HAIRS - The BALLOON.

Horst's finger tightens on the trigger.

THE BALLOON - FLYING

Peter reaches up and SHUTS OFF THE GAS VALVE.

The 40 foot flame vanishes. PLUNGING THEM INTO DARKNESS.

Peter Strelzyk, the man who values control and precision-- closes his eyes and surrenders to the wind.

EXT. DEATH ZONE - WATCH TOWER - NIGHT

HORST'S POV - The glowing balloon-- FADES INTO DARKNESS.

As if by magic, the balloon blends into the night.

GONE.

Horst blinks. Peers through the scope. *Where is it?*

Spotlights fish the darkness.

THE BALLOON - FLYING

The families are silently hovering across the sky. Peter looks at Doris. Emotion in their eyes. Gunter and Petra clutch each other, their children. Praying silently.

Doris gently rocks Andreas, singing him a LULLABY...

Everything grows silent except for Doris's soulful, simple lullaby...

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - NIGHT

Doris's lullaby echoes over...

SONJA'S HOUSE - SONJA opens the window. Peers out, hair blown back. Gazing into the West where spotlights sweep the stars.

SUPERVISOR'S HOUSE - The old man curiously looks out...

HELGA'S HOUSE - Helga's dog BARKS. Helga wanders to the window. Listening to the distant sirens. Her jaw drops.

THE STRELZYK HOUSE - Zental and Verlag rush from the house. Hearing the distant sirens, they look to the sky...

EXT. DEATH ZONE - NIGHT

A young GUARD catches the balloon in his cross-hairs. He can see it... but then... ever so slightly, the young guard lowers his rifle and just watches in wonder as the balloon passes overhead...

SKIES OVER GERMANY

The balloon's silhouette arcs across a field of stars. The two families cling to each other. Flying triumphant.

EXT. DEATH ZONE

Horst jumps into a jeep. Yells to the DRIVER.

HORST
GO, GO, GO!

The jeep speeds down the Death Zone, Horst looking up--

HORST
There!!! FOLLOW IT!

The gates barely have time to open as the jeep flies out.

EXT. FOREST VALLEY - NIGHT

The jeep speeds South-West. Watching the sky above him-- Horst removes his sidearm-- BANG! BANG! Horst fires wildly.

BALLOON - NIGHT

Shots fly past. Everyone ducks, screams.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Horst screams into the sky-- suddenly jerked forward as the jeep slams to a stop. Horst shrieks at the driver.

HORST
DON'T STOP!

The Driver points up ahead... illuminated in the headlights:

"DANGER - LAND MINES"

Trip-wires for LAND MINES shimmer all around them.

Horst swallows. They have driven into the outer perimeter of the Death Zone and are caught in their own web.

Horst looks into the sky, fires, shooting up at shadows until the clip is empty and Horst is out of breath.

EXT. STRELZYK HOUSE - NIGHT

Zental looks into the sky. Infuriated. Amazed.

BALLOON - FLYING

Cold wind bites their faces.

FRANK
Dad. Did we make it?

Peter looks down-- sees nothing but darkness.

INT. NEARBY HOUSE - NIGHT

A FARMER sits up in bed. Looks out of his window-- his jaw drops. An enormous colorful orb glide past his window. Spellbound, the man rubs sleep from his eyes.

FARMER
Aliens...

THE BALLOON - FLYING

GUNTER
We're dropping. We need to light
the gas again.

Peter flicks his lighter over the valve. It doesn't light.

GUNTER
What's wrong?

PETER
No more gas.

SNAP! The burned line at the top of the balloon BREAKS. The gondola tips, spilling everyone at a forty-five degree angle.

Screams as they tumble into each other, grabbing ropes. Nightmarish chaos.

ANDREAS
DADDY-- !

Peter grabs Andreas before the boy goes over the edge. Andreas drops his teddy bear. The teddy bear plummets.

The charred hole in the top of the balloon RIPS.

FALLING. SHAKING. Tree branches crack, blur past.

PETER
HANG ON!!!

BANG! The gondola smashes into the Earth with shuddering force. They bounce violently. Gunter is thrown forward, his leg makes a sickening CRACK.

Everyone looks at the other... they're alive. They check the children, each other-- they're shaken, full of horror-- but the worst is over.

PETER

Andreas, look at me. We're okay. We landed. It's over.

ANDREAS

(shivering)
W-W-We're here?

Peter looks around. They're in the woods. A road just beyond.

PETER

Everyone stay here. Don't come out until Gunter and I say.

Frank swallows. They're not safe yet.

DORIS

Peter-- be careful.

EXT. FOREST - WALKING - NIGHT

An owl hoots. Away from the balloon, the two men hobble through the trees. Gunter stops, grabbing his leg.

GUNTER

I... I think it's broken.

PETER

Do you want to stop?

Gunter shakes his head no. He picks up a stick, uses it like a crutch. Peter helps support him as they wander through the misty woods, lost.

GUNTER

Peter. Where the hell are we?

Peter checks a map. Shakes his head. An old barn appears...

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Gunter and Peter peer around the old barn.

HEADLIGHTS. Peter and Gunter duck down, hiding. A flashlight beams nearby. Peter squints-- sees, it's a police car.

POLICE OFFICER

You there. Come out.

Peter and Gunter look at each other.

GUNTER
What do we do?

Peter shakes his head. This is it. Looks at the police car.

PETER
Is that-- an Audi?

GUNTER
That's a Western car.

Peter bravely steps forward. Calls out.

PETER
Are we in the West?

The Police exchange looks.

WESTERN POLICE OFFICER
Where else would you be?

Peter and Gunter's eyes light up.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Peter. Running through the trees. Shouting.

PETER
WE'RE HERE!!! WE'RE HERE!!!

He lights a signal flare. It burns RED AND BRIGHT.

Tears well up in Doris's eyes. Peter embraces his family.

GUNTER
PETRA! SAM! HUNTER! WE MADE IT!

The Western Police Officers help Gunter make his way back to the balloon which is miraculously still intact.

The police stop and stare, spellbound like children.

WESTERN POLICE OFFICER
Would you look at that...

EXT. TOWN OF NAILA - NIGHT

News of the balloon's arrival stirs the small village awake. One by one lights come on in houses as two police cars with the Strelzyks and Wetzels inside drive through the town. Huddled together, the families stare out.

INT. MAYOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A phone wakes the MAYOR OF NAILA. He groans awake. Answers.

MAYOR OF NAILA

A what..?
 (looks out his window)
Here?

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Phones ringing. NEIGHBORS are being awoken by the news.

No one can believe it.

EXT. NAILA POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The police cars park out front.

PETER

The police station? But--

WESTERN POLICE OFFICER

We just need you to answer a few questions at the station.

Andreas, still terrified, whispers:

ANDREAS

Are we in trouble?

Peter doesn't know how to answer. He holds his son tight.

INT. NAILA POLICE STATION - NIGHT

CAPTAIN HAMMAN, a chubby, large man, grabs Peter's hand, shaking it.

CAPTAIN HAMMAN

Welcome! Welcome!

The families are surprised as police officers rush up to them, shaking their hands, bringing them tea and blankets.

BANG! The doors to the police station swing open--

The Mayor of Naila and 20 PEOPLE, still in their robes, pajamas, come gushing in. They are carrying food, cookies, soups, breads, flowers, and sausage for the flyers.

The families are surrounded with smiles, hugs, congratulations. People anxious to meet them. It's a haphazard feast of welcome.

DORIS
(overwhelmed)
Who... are all these people?

ELDERLY WOMAN
We're your new neighbors.

The elderly woman says this with such empathy and love that it brings tears to Doris's eyes. Doris puts a shaking hand to her mouth. All the tension and fear melting away.

ANDREAS
Mommy, don't be sad.

Doris, sobbing, hugs Andreas.

DORIS
I'm not sad, honey.

A PRETTY YOUNG GIRL cleans the cut on Frank's face.

PRETTY GIRL
You're very brave.

FRANK
Yeah. Guess so.

Peter smiles at Frank.

A PARAMEDIC bandages Gunter's leg.

GUNTER
I thought we were dead. Are we?
Petra, do you still have the
champagne-- ?

Petra removes the bottle. She pops it. It fountains. Cheers.

Andreas looks up at his father.

ANDREAS
Does this mean we're free?

Overwhelmed, Peter nods. His little boy smiles.

SUPER: The Strelzyks and Wetzels relocated to the town of Naila, West Germany.

Their daring escape was reported around the world and they were celebrated as heroes.

EXT. VILLAGE OF POSSNECK - DAY

People point their TV antennae to the West just to watch the news. SONJA is stunned to see Frank being interviewed on TV.

SUPER: News of their daring flight overshadowed the East German 30th Anniversary Celebration, humiliating the Republic.

INT. MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY - DAY

ZENTAL angrily types up a file: PETER STRELZYK.

SUPER: Years after, the Stasi continued to spy on both families, jailing friends and family they thought helped with their escape.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1989. The Berlin Wall is torn down.

INT. WESTERN SUPER MARKET - DAY

Rows of food in colorful packaging under bright lights. The Strelzyks and Wetzels walk down the dreamlike aisles in AWE.

SUPER: After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Strelzyks moved back to their hometown of Possneck.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Nothing but wilderness where the fences and watch towers once stood. A rusty, overgrown "**STOP! BORDER - NO CROSSING**" sign is the only evidence of the Death Zone's existence.

SUPER: In 1993, the leader of East Germany, Erich Honecker, was indicted for "collective manslaughter" and put on trial for issuing shoot-to-kill orders to those trying to escape East Germany which resulted in the deaths of over 1,100 civilians.

Honecker was set free due to health reasons.

He died one year later, living in exile in Chile.

EXT. NIGHT SKY

The glowing, homemade balloon of rainbow colors flies over the evergreen trees. A symbol of imagination, dreams, hope, and freedom.

SUPER: Today the balloon is on display in the Berlin Wall Museum. At the time it was made, it held the record as the largest hot air balloon ever built in Europe.