

Scene 1

Frau Landgut hangs laundry. We hear children singing:

*Children: Just you wait, don't you fear,
The man in black will soon be here.
With his butcher knife so true
He'll make mincemeat out of you!*

A neighbour leans out her window above. She shouts at the children:

Neighbour: Hey! I told you kids to stop singing that.

Frau Landgut: Oh Hanna, they're only playing—

Neighbour: Isn't it bad enough that he's all over the papers?

Frau Landgut: Leave 'em alone. As long as we can hear them singing, at least we know they're still there...

Inspector Lohmann passes through the darkness below. He looks at his notebook and sighs with exhaustion. With defeat.

A line of parents face the audience. Impatient. Suspicious. A homeless person - Heinrich - enters, crosses. They don't pay him any attention.

The school bell rings. As one, the parents extend their hands, barking at their children to hurry. They exit. Frau Landgut looks after them, searching for her own.

Frau Landgut: Elsie?

One figure remains upstage, motionless.

*A child's ball slowly rolls into the light. The figure steps forward and picks it up.
It is Hans Beckert, the child killer.*

Beckert: Now, that's a pretty ball. What's your name?

Lights on Frau Landgut, above. She calls out:

Frau Landgut: Elsie!

Beckert: Lovely. Would you like to go for a walk with me?

They vanish into the darkness. Beckert begins to whistle "In the Hall of the Mountain King."

A mailman (Otto) passes letters up to Frau Landgut.

Otto: Frau Landgut.

Frau Landgut: Thanks. Wait, Otto—

Otto: Yes?

Frau Landgut: Have you seen Elsie?

Otto: Sorry, no. But I'm sure she won't be long.

Otto exits.

A Blind Beggar enters, selling balloons. He has a chalkboard sign describing his situation.

Beckert, still whistling, drops a coin into the cup.

Blind Beggar: Thank you.

Beckert: *(To Elsie)* Here you go, Elsie.

Beckert and the balloon slip back into the darkness.

Frau Landgut: Elsie?

Elsie's ball slowly rolls back onstage.

Frau Landgut: Elsie!

Beckert crosses the stage and exits alone.

Darkness. Silence. The balloon pops.

Scene 2

Chaos, paranoia, panic.

Calls of "Extra! Extra!"

The parents enter and bustle to and fro across the stage, barely lit, but we hear snippets of conversation, such as:

"Not again."

"Makes you afraid to send your kids to school!"

A large crowd of people are trying to read a bulletin.

Citizen 1: You in front, what's it say?

Citizen 2: 10 000 mark reward!

Citizen 3: We can't hear you in the back!

Citizen 2: "The terror in Berlin has found a new victim. Certain evidence leads us to believe that this is the same murderer who has already claimed the lives of eight of our city's children in as many months. Anxiety among the general public is heightened by the failure to apprehend a suspect. But the police are faced with the almost impossible

task of catching a criminal who leaves no clues behind. Who is the murderer? What does he look like? Where is he hiding?..."

A person reads the newspaper to his friend.

Citizen 4: "... No one knows him, yet he is among us. Anybody sitting next to you could be the murderer."

Citizen 5: Why do you look at me when you say that?

Citizen 4: I think you know.

Citizen 5: What's that supposed to mean?

Citizen 4: I saw you following that little girl from the fourth floor!

Citizen 5: You're crazy!

Citizen 4: Who's crazy? Me, or a man who chases little kids?

They begin to fight.

Citizen 4: Murderer! I'll have you locked up!

Beckert appears above, stooped over his windowsill high above the street, writing with red pencil crayon, and smoking a cigarette. He pauses intermittently to stare out the window.

Beckert: "Since the police withheld my first letter from public opinion, I am now writing directly to the press. Proceed with your investigations, but remember two things: no one is safe, and I'm not done yet."

Jäger's house.

Inspector Lohmann and Jäger enter.

Lohmann is wearied by the ongoing investigation.

Jäger is irate, and he follows on Lohmann's heels like a small dog.

Jäger: Destroying an honest man's reputation!

Lohmann: Herr Jäger—

Jäger: How is this even legal? Searching a person's house based on an anonymous letter— without a warrant! I'm gonna sue your entire department!

Lohmann: Calm down. We're just doing our job.

Jäger: As if it weren't enough that we're already scared for our kids—

Lohmann: That's why we've got to follow up every lead. It could be anybody.

They vanish into the darkness.

A gentleman enters elsewhere. He talks to a child beside him.

Gentleman: What's that, dear?

Two citizens appear in the shadows behind him. They watch this exchange with suspicion.

Gentleman: It's nearly five o'clock. Now you must hurry home. Where do you live?

Citizen 6: *(Coming forward)* What's it to you where the kid lives?

Gentleman: Excuse me?

Citizen 5: *(Seizing the Gentleman)* What do you want with that kid?

Gentleman: Let me go! This is an outrage!

Citizen 5: Get her alone, eh?

Citizen 6: And kill her like the others?

Citizen 5: Call the police!

Citizen 6: The police never come.

Citizen 5: Even better.

The gentleman is surrounded and Wm beaten.

Scene 3.

Police headquarters.

Lohmann enters. Inspector Gernhardt is reading a newspaper.

Gernhardt: "Murderer writes to the press." How's that for a headline, Lohmann?

Lohmann: We can't stop him from writing letters.

Gernhardt: Can't stop him from doing much, if what the papers are saying is true.

A tense silence. Gernhardt continues to read:

Gernhardt: "Since the police withheld my first letter from public opinion, I am now contacting the press directly."

Lohmann: If you're here, who's directing traffic?

Gernhardt: It's quite the scandal.

Lohmann: We'll find something.

Gernhardt: What've you got?

Lohmann: His postcard. The lab's going over it now.

Gernhardt: But fingerprints—

Lohmann: I'll have you know, Gernhardt, that we've had good results with this approach. I know it sounds—

Gernhardt: No, Lohmann. My point is— Between him, your team, and everyone at the post office, god knows how many hands it'll have passed through—

Lohmann: But that's just it, there's more.

Gernhardt: To the postcard?

Lohmann: Yes. I've noticed some peculiarities in the handwriting.

Gernhardt: Handwriting! You trying to figure out whether he killed them with his left hand or with his right?

Lohmann takes a facsimile from a folder and hands it to Gernhardt.

The writing, done in red pencil, is childlike and upsetting.

Lohmann: Just look.

Beckert stands in a shaft of light, as if in a trance, staring into the mirror.

Lohmann: See these swelling sweeps, like here in the word 'remember'—

Gernhardt: "Swelling sweeps"?

Lohmann: They suggest a pathological sexuality of this offender.

Gernhardt: They certainly do. And the red pencil?

Lohmann: Well, that - not to mention the uneven style from his last letter - is in itself a form of acting.

Gernhardt: The marvels of modern science.

Sarcastic clap. Beckert fades. Lohmann starts to go.

Gernhardt: It's none of my business, and I'm sure you're doing the best you can, but people are stopping *me* in the street, Lohmann. They don't care that I'm not in homicide. They're scared. And if you don't find something more substantial, there—

Lohmann: My team hasn't had more than twelve hours sleep in an entire week. They report for duty more exhausted than they were when I dismissed them, and 80 - if not 90 - per cent of our leads are false. But we're constantly on call anyway, as even the smallest lead might be the one that solves the case.

Gernhardt rolls his eyes.

Lohmann: Take the last victim, Elsie Landgut. One of the officers located a candy wrapper in the bushes not far from where we found her. We tried to track this wrapper by contacting every shop and market within a radius of a kilometre and a half, but it was no use. So we expanded the area searched, but by then no one remembered anything that might serve as a lead—

Gernhardt: Yes, but—

Lohmann: Yet despite these setbacks, we're still expected to press on.

Gernhardt: Listen, I've been here a long time, a lot longer than you—

Lohmann: And how many kids have you had to pull out of the bushes? Or found behind factories? In ditches. How many times have you had to go back to the parents—

Gernhardt: That's what I'm trying to say— This is why I transferred out of homicide.

Lohmann: Well somebody has to do it.

A silence.

Gernhardt: Have you visited the homeless shelter? Maybe someone there has seen something—

Lohmann: Nothing. They never see anything. No one does. Tonight we're raiding the criminal district—

Gernhardt: Again?

Lohmann: Unless you've got a better idea.

Gernhardt: Oh, I think it's a fine tactic! Just tell Hertha and everyone at the Crocodile Club I say hello.

Lohmann exits back into the street. People bump as they pass by him, paying no attention. Among them, Herr Schränker. A moment - one unexpectedly interrupted by the appearance of an exhausted Frau Landgut. Schränker exits.

Frau Landgut: Inspector Lohmann.

Lohmann: Frau Landgut—

Frau Landgut: Why haven't you found her?

Lohmann: We're doing our best. But, please, you must understand, it's complicated. We need to wait.

Frau Landgut: Wait? For what?

Lohmann: More leads.

Frau Landgut: You mean, you need to find another little girl.

Lohmann: Please—

Frau Landgut: Good luck, Inspector.

She exits. Darkness.

Scene 4

The Crocodile Club.

Sirens. Crooks cross the stage in a panic. They are followed by police officers. Shouts from both sides are heard.

"The cops!"

"Get back!"

"Let me go!"

"Quiet!"

The proprietor, Hertha, enters.

Hertha: Not again!

Lohmann enters.

Hertha: This'll get you nowhere—

Lohmann: Not tonight, Hertha, or I'll run you in, too.

Hertha: Go after the murderer instead!

Lohmann: Get out of my way.

Hertha: You're ruining my business, these raids every other night.

Lohmann: You think I'm here just for the hell of it?

Hertha: You won't find him here! If you knew how steamed my customers are at the guy who's causing these raids— Especially the girls— Sure, they work, but believe me: in every one of them beats a mother's heart!

Lohmann: Listen—

Hertha: And I know a lot of big guys too who get all teary-eyed just watching the kids play. If they ever get their hands on whoever's doing this, they'll make toothpicks out of him!

Lohmann looks at her, shakes his head, and turns to go.

Lohmann: Sorry, Hertha. *(Shouting)* Get your papers ready, people!

Scene 5

The stage is split into two: Franz's apartment and the police office.

In Franz's apartment, the division leaders of the criminal network are meeting.

Meanwhile, Lohmann is sitting alone in a bar.

Franz watches out the window with binoculars. Hertha enters.

Franz: Hertha!

Hertha: I'm here. Those damn cops—

Franz: Saw the paddy wagons at the Club. Thought maybe—

Hertha: Don't worry about me. Where's Schränker?

Franz: Think they got him?

Hertha: You know, one time Scotland Yard laid a trap for him during a bank job he pulled in London. There he was, back to the wall, cops all around him. Seconds later, three men were dead on the ground... But he wasn't one of 'em.

Franz: But you put enough dogs on the fox's tail—

Hertha: Can it.

Gernhardt enters and approaches Lohmann, who's absorbed in a case file.

Gernhardt: Can I join you?

Lohmann: Oh— I'm not going to be here long--

Gernhardt: Let me buy you a drink. What're you having?

Franz: Dammit! I can't take this! He's never been late before.

Hertha: Well he said 3:00. What time is it?

Franz: I'll find out.

Franz pulls out a preposterous number of pocket-watches, comparing each one. Hertha picks up the phone and dials.

Hertha: *(Hanging up)* 2:58.

Gernhardt returns with two drinks.

Lohmann: Thanks.

Gernhardt: No problem.

Franz: The cops are crawling the streets like ants. They've gone nuts, got this murderer on the brain! My girlfriend's got a six-year-old, and every night I have to check under the bed to see if the killer's hiding there. You can't do business anymore without tripping over a cop. There's no privacy!

Schränker appears. He takes a step onstage, and then retreats quickly. The others respond in simultaneous relief:

Hertha: Thank god!

Franz: Hello!

Schränker: *(Offstage)* Are you crazy? Close the blinds!

They do. Only when he is satisfied does Schränker enter and sit down.

Schränker: I hereby call this meeting to order.

Gernhardt: Want to talk through anything? It might help.

Lohmann: I don't know, I feel like I'm going crazy...

Schränker: I declare all division leaders of the Organization present. I assume you are
both authorized to make binding decisions for your departments?

(*The others nod.*) Good. We shall dispense with the preliminaries, as we all know why
we're here.

Gernhardt: Just start from the beginning. What have you got?

Schränker: An outsider is ruining our business and our reputation. Measures taken by
the police to catch this child-murderer are hampering *our* activities.

Lohmann: The perpetrator may well be an upstanding citizen—

Schränker: Things must return to normal or we'll go under. If we can't secure funds to
support the partners and children of our members who are currently enjoying room and
board at state expense, I don't know where we'll find the money to carry out our
business.

Lohmann: He could live a completely unremarkable existence right in the open. Probably
he plays marbles with the neighbourhood kid or cards with her father.

Schränker: But the greatest offence of all: the police seek the murderer in *our* fold. They
think he is one of us. We conduct our business in order to survive, but this monster has
no right to survive.

Franz: We've got to be able to go about our business again without cops in the way at
every turn!

Hertha: We gotta kill this guy. Without mercy.

Schränker: Order, please. We need to have—

Lohmann: (*Reading off a list of security measures*) ID checks, curfews, raids—

Franz: Informers. We gotta know the cops' plans before they do!

Gernhardt: Every resident must consent to searches of their property for even the slightest of clues.

Hertha: We have connections. What if we put an article in the papers that our Organization doesn't wish to be lumped together with this animal— That the cops oughta look for him somewhere else?

Franz: He's not even a real crook!

Gernhardt: The public must cooperate. It's the only way. Maybe if there was a telephone number they could call if they see anything—

Lohmann: What the hell has public cooperation gotten us so far? It's panic! They call us every time the milkman walks by.

Hertha: This is going nowhere.

Lohmann: And when it really matters, they can't remember anything!

Gernhardt: Maybe a larger reward, then?

Franz: So, what, we just wait for the police to catch him?

Lohmann: It won't help. Solving crimes like this is next to impossible, especially since the perpetrator and the victim are usually brought together by chance. The instincts of the moment drive the murderer's actions.

Hertha: The police have been after him for eight months. They'll only get him by accident now.

Franz: We can't wait for that. We'll go broke!

Lohmann: The children vanish without a trace and when they're found... Well, we all know the state we've found them in.

Hertha: He won't stop 'til there's no kids left.

Lohmann: Killers like this rarely leave a clue behind. That's what makes our work so hard, our successes so few.

Hertha: Why is it there's a word for kids who've lost their parents, but there's not a word for parents who've lost their kids?

A silence.

Gernhardt: So what do you propose?

Schränker: We catch him ourselves.

Lohmann: Information on the killer must already exist somewhere.

Franz: Us?

Schränker: It is the only choice we have.

Lohmann: He's pathological. I'm sure he's already had run-ins with the authorities. That's why the prisons, hospitals, and asylums must cooperate with us—

Gernhardt: They'll never agree.

Lohmann: I'll beg on my knees if I have to.

Hertha: And how do you suppose we do that?

Gernhardt: You'd need information on those who were released after being declared harmless to society, but who have a history of this sort of violence.

Lohmann: Or were the victims of violence themselves.

Schränker: We cover the city with a net of informers. Every square mile under constant surveillance.

Gernhardt: That's good, Lohmann.

Lohmann: But is it enough?

Hertha: And how exactly are we supposed to do that? The cops are already hauling us downtown every time we step outside.

Schränker: Not us.

Hertha: (*Gets it*) The Beggars Union—