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*Sickster*

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# Part One

## *Abitur*

The starting shot is to be taken literally: a deafening bang. And afterwards, a crack appears, finer than a hair's breadth.

It was the summer of 1994, and the parade of leavers from the Canisius School was moving through the silent city of Bonn, a city drifting towards meaninglessness. Geed up and at the same time slightly dulled from days of protracted celebrations, dulled too by the long exam period and then the sudden relief, to which they could attach no real meaning, the leavers just wanted to keep celebrating. They were brandishing their beer bottles, screeching triumphal cries from their cars into the moving air, holding their faces up to the sun, and getting as much noise as possible out of the finger-painted cars, engines revving, tyres squealing, leaning on the horns: cutting a swathe of noise through the silence that closed again immediately behind them.

The leavers' celebrations had something showy and make-believe about them. They *wanted* to celebrate, but weren't quite pulling it off. They had imagined this day and longed for it so often that it could hardly have lived up to their expectations. With clumsy, rude gestures and wholehearted shouts, the leavers did their best to make themselves feel like the kings of the day and, in an odd way, this made them fall into the stereotypes of the eighties childhoods they had now buried. For no real reason, Lara was imitating the East Frisian comedian Otto Waalkes, and kept forcing her vocal chords to produce a deep "Jaa! Jaa!". Eva tossed her corkscrew curls about, enjoying the wind, as if she had suddenly found herself in a hairspray commercial. Jakob was wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses, and screaming incomprehensible slogans through a megaphone left over from the Gulf War era. Achim and Anja were performing a strange mixture of