

Chapter 24

The chapter opens with Theo and his companions traveling in a car driven recklessly by Rolf on a treacherous, moon-like road. The vehicle lurches violently, causing discomfort to the passengers, particularly Julian, who is pregnant. Miriam intervenes, urging Rolf to slow down, but her warning comes too late—the car swerves uncontrollably and suffers a punctured front tire. The group exits the car to assess the damage, standing in the shadow of a hedge while Rolf maneuvers the vehicle onto the grass verge. The tense atmosphere underscores the urgency of their journey and the fragility of their situation.

Realizing the need for secrecy, Rolf scouts ahead and finds a secluded track leading to a clump of trees, where the group can hide while repairing the tire. Theo agrees with the plan, prioritizing safety over speed to avoid detection by the SSP. The car is carefully driven along the rough track, flanked by the others on foot, until they reach a wooded area. A deep gully blocks their path, but Rolf locates a makeshift bridge, allowing them to cross into the shelter of the beech trees. The dense canopy provides cover, but the challenges are far from over.

Attempting to change the tire proves difficult as the wheel nuts are tightly secured, and the torchlight fails, leaving them in darkness. Miriam reveals there's no spare battery, forcing the group to abandon the repair until morning. Surprisingly, Rolf remains composed despite the setback, suggesting they eat and rest for the night. The scene highlights the group's resilience and adaptability in the face of unforeseen obstacles, as well as the underlying tension between urgency and caution.

The chapter captures a moment of vulnerability and camaraderie among the characters as they navigate physical dangers and the constant threat of discovery. The interplay of authority, trust, and practicality is evident in their interactions, particularly between Rolf and Miriam. The setting—a desolate, moonlit landscape—mirrors their

isolation and the precariousness of their mission. The unresolved tire repair leaves the reader anticipating the next steps in their perilous journey.

