



Lore

Directors: Cate Shortland
Country: Germany
Date: 2012

A review by Stephen Holden for *The New York Times*:

Cate Shortland's "Lore" is not a fairy tale, but it feels like one: a dark, mysterious fable of hungry, frightened children making their way through a perilous enchanted forest inhabited by demons. The film sustains an air of overarching mystery in which the viewer, like the title character, is in the position of a sheltered child plunked into an alien environment and required to fend for herself without a map or compass.

A remarkable young actress, Saskia Rosendahl, plays this chilly, largely unsympathetic protagonist, a blond 14-year-old German girl nicknamed Lore who herds her siblings through the Bavarian woods in the spring of 1945. Hitler is dead, and German resistance to the Allied forces has collapsed.

The stragglers include her younger sister, Liesel (Nele Trebs); her twin brothers, Jürgen (Mika Seidel) and Günter (André Frid); and her baby brother, Peter (Nick Leander Holaschke). Their destination, 500 miles to the north, is the farm of their grandmother Omi (Eva-Maria Hagen).



In the opening scene, Lore and her parents, Vati (Hans-Jochen Wagner), a Nazi S.S. officer, and Mutti (Ursina Lardi), destroy incriminating papers and shoot the family dog, then hastily pack their valuables and travel to their country home.

Their arrests imminent, Vati and Mutti must go their separate ways, never expecting to see each other or their children again. They give their cash, jewelry, silverware and trinkets to Lore to exchange for food, with instructions to go to their grandmother's. Then Vati returns to what remains of the army, and Mutti, suitcase in hand, marches stoically to an internment camp.

Most of the facts in the screenplay — by the Australian Ms. Shortland, the director of "Somersault," and Robin Mukherjee, adapted from a novel, "The Dark Room," by Rachel Seiffert — are slipped in rather than stated. Throughout the movie you are as starved for information as Lore and her siblings.

Until the children reach their destination, "Lore" seems to exist in a surreal, timeless limbo in which horror mingles with beauty. You are acutely aware of the contrast between the numb, shocked German citizenry they encounter and the magnificence and indifference of the natural world.

Until the railroads resume operation, the children proceed on foot. Adam Arkapaw's luminescent cinematography drinks in the landscape and pauses to study the wildlife, almost as if the movie were a nature walk amid a catastrophe.

Because the film is set in the countryside, there are shots of ruined buildings but none of bombed-out cities. There is no Nazi stereotype on whom to pin your loathing. All that is seen of the occupying forces are scattered army trucks and soldiers standing guard at checkpoints.

Wherever Lore and her siblings go, they come upon posted photos of concentration camp victims. But most of the people who cluster around them refuse to believe the evidence of their eyes and dismiss them as photographic fakery and staged propaganda. Lore, as she has been taught, is unashamedly, viciously anti-Semitic.



The movie's most important relationship is Lore's complicated connection to Thomas (Kai Malina), an enigmatic man several years older who carries papers identifying him as Jewish, although he does not match the documents' picture. When they first see each other in a village square, they make serious eye contact. He reappears later on a road they are traveling and attaches himself to Lore, posing as her brother while assuming responsibility for Peter.

He and Lore do a wary dance of curiosity, attraction and repulsion. In a moment that strains credulity, Lore impulsively seizes Thomas's hand and puts it up her dress. Yet Thomas remains poker-faced and inscrutable, even when Lore reflexively lashes out with an anti-Semitic barb. He offers no information about his past, and she doesn't press him.

It isn't until the very end of the film that Lore registers the impact of what she has been through. Having lost her faith, this once obedient Aryan princess vents her rage.

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