...Each black meter of water, rolling past ominously mute, had the momentum of over three hundred stacked-up fuel tankers, by someone’s calculations. Meadows, playgrounds, riparian woodlands, the paths and many streets, as well as bridges, lots, docks, a big shed at the foot of the railway embankment holding God knows what long-forgotten junk were submerged and sank for days and for weeks. Children asked whether the water would stay like this now, so high, so dark, and so, so bad. Yes, I said to a little girl with an eye patch, it looks like it’ll stay like this from now on. Ah well. The world is turning black.

And the neighbor, arm in arm with his wife, dog invisible, gazing at a bend in the Alster where the river used to come around the curve and fling its gold-brown glitter at the bank, eyed the nightmarish immensity of water and said hollowly that never in his life, since he sailed boats here as a schoolboy, had he experienced the like on the Alster, never had it happened before, not even in a dream, in which everything is possible, was it possible. Too quickly for the darting pupils to follow, the river rolled under the Fuhlsbütteler railway bridge southward to the Free and Hanseatic city. I saw three plastic canisters and pictured a raft you could build with them. High water, said the stunned neighbor. Floods. They’d always happened, summer or winter, in the fall or especially in the spring, as soon as the snowmelt descended on Stormarn. But this here, the black water masses, such a draggled park, never, really, no