

Berlin

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I remember drinking a cup of Darjeeling in a café on Boxhagener Strasse. At that hour Friedrichshain was almost deserted. But on my first visit to Berlin that happened to be my feeling all along, that everywhere there were streets that allowed for quiet ambling, getting lost, bypassing the hustle and bustle.

What a surprise! The Darjeeling tasted of spring! Outside, the trees were barren. Clumps of ice stuck to jagged stones and the Spree was frozen. I stood in the cold on the highpoint of the bridge on Rathaustasse, trying to imagine the flow of the river.

If I was to return in spring, what city would I find?

Every morning I would set out from my tiny apartment to walk all day, long into the night. I felt ten years younger. And with this burden of time accumulated like weight lifted from me, everything was a delight; the cobblestones, flags, façades and sides of buildings. Sometimes I skipped like a child over an ever changing ground, which when wet was full of tiny glinting. And all those patterns, fanned and herringbone, bedded in sand.

On my third day in Berlin, I walked myself into a huge appetite. I found a door with a sign over it and passed into a building which looked older than any one I have ever set foot in. Inside, to my delight, the timbers were heavy, black, and the floors unsealed. Two or three patrons sat at the bar. Most of the other tables were occupied by people engaged in noisy conversations. I found a table and after taking a seat could not help but notice a man at the bar, jabbing violently at his mobile. He was dressed in business attire, but his hair was greasy and he looked as if he'd slept in that suit for several nights. His eyes were borrowing into his skull, and every few seconds he opened his mouth and let out a yawn.

My order of Könisberger Klopse arrived. It was good. I chewed on a pork meatball smothered in white sauce with capers and looked up and saw the man had fallen asleep. Like a child in the throes of slumber who has loosened her grasp on a beloved toy, the man's hand lay gently open, empty, on the bar.

After the meal I drank a pilsner from a dimpled glass and watched the other people in the room. Afterwards, I walked home under the ghostly flicker of lights, allowing myself one last meandering journey that day.

In Mitte I ate an un-waxed apple. Two days later, in Kreuzberg, another one, just as tasty.

Every day the sun was not shining weakly the rain fell gently. The toes of my boots were stained over the course of my wandering. Far from minding, I've not polished the stains out of those boots, so that every now and then I might remember those streets I once walked.

I remember other things, the pale winter sun, soft rain, lumpy ground... passing endless porticoes into which I would peer... people riding tall bicycles... the sudden brightness of a door, the trims around windows... apartments nestled one into the other...small parks with smiling bundled up children...the grim-faced, khaki clad soldiers standing guard outside of buildings... winged and gilded statues... the vastness of an obsolete airfield filled with nighttime strollers... a sobering walk down a frozen aisle of The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe...

Above all else, I remember that daydreams flowed from me ceaselessly. Every sight cast a spell. Perhaps I needed to leave the familiar to *see*? Yet every little detail, every gram and grain of minutia belonged only to this city: even the shadows on walls, and the hover of crows crossing the dark sky between rooftops.