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DEDICATION

Für Gummibär
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ABSTRACT

BUCH FÜR DIE U-BAHN

By

Laura G. Dunlap

Master of Arts in English

This collection titled, “Buch für die U-Bahn,” (Book for the U-Bahn) is comprised of three short stories that are structured to explore themes of identity, migration, and loss in the context of post-Wall Germany. The three stories, “Berlin Circuitry,” “Mind the Gap,” and “Vergiss Uns Nicht,” (Don’t Forget Us) are representative of each of these themes and serve as placement, displacement, and replacement. In “Berlin Circuitry,” the female narrator living in modern-day Berlin has placed herself within the city and is building a machine that seems to be crucial to the construction of her identity. Jürgen Fetter in “Mind the Gap,” has migrated to London, but he feels displaced and finds that London has become dangerously similar to his experiences growing up in East Berlin before the fall of the Wall. Lastly, “Vergiss Uns Nicht” is about a man named Paulo Rios who moves to Berlin where he laments the divorce of his wife and cannot seem to remember the name of his German friend he had met so long ago, but the budding of a new friendship seeks to replace those feelings of loss. The characters in all these stories not only have common thematic elements, but they are connected to one another through their experiences that have shaped their identities, their migrations, and their loss.
Berliner Circuitry

Being on the brink of dreaming made me think I was working on my machine. As my partner slipped his naked arms around me and I had begun to wake, I still thought that the sheets of the bed and our legs all twisted together had become the tangled mess of my machine’s multi-colored wires. Our legs—our wires—were bare on the ends, ready to be connected to something conductive and transfer signals and power to their counterparts. Electromagnetic compressors, continuity channels and multi-use control panels blended together to form the structure of something I did not yet fully understand. But our limbs were not these things.

He kissed the back of my neck and I knew he was preparing to get out of bed and get ready for his evening out. The cat also knew he would be leaving soon and jumped up to take his place, just as she always did, and curled up to sleep in the warmth he had left behind.

After he stretched beside the bed completely naked, he massaged his calves, scratched under the cat’s chin—by then she was curled up next to me—and then went into the bathroom to shower. By the time the water shut off and he strode through the bedroom to get dressed, even though he was still dripping wet, I was already up, dressed, and standing at my workbench. Before he left, he kissed me again and whispered something about dinner the next day, or at least that’s what I told myself because I had already returned to the threads of thought I had caught on the precipice of dreaming.

The machine’s calling had drowned out the rest of the world.

At my workspace, I clicked on my favorite lamp even though it gave very little light anywhere I put it. The lamp was too small, too slight even to have its own shadow.
It was hardly a foot tall, had a wide base and no pointed edges. Connecting between its base and shade was a skinny pole. The lamp was sleek, no doubt, but its sleekness did not make up for its inability to keep my eyes from tiring when I sat and stared at the schematics of my project.

I blinked a few times after I realized I had been staring at my notes since my partner left. My eyes strained against the dark and I tried to focus on the shadows dancing across the room. The light outside was failing. Evening was coming as it always did and the cat was surely asleep on the bed by now. It was her routine—our routine.

She was curled up on the covers with her little black nose tucked into her paws, her tail following tight around her small body. For hours she slept like that, purring every now and then, twitching as she dreamt whatever cats’ dream, if they dream at all, for that matter. I was of the belief that she dreamed. Of what, I could not be certain, but I often watched her sleep. Crouching down beside the bed I watched her whiskers shiver and twitch until I was overcome with the delight of seeing her sleep so peacefully. I used to curl up next to her and take in the smells on the bed, sometimes falling asleep, sometimes for too long, forgetting that there was work to be done. But those moments had been lost. They had been transformed. I had lost myself to the making of the machine.

I abandoned my desk and picked up my hobby-store soldering iron to connect some of the new conductors to the time-keep circuitry. As the months had gone by, the machine grew from a metal box no bigger than a computer housing case. A year later it stood at half the size of my apartment living room and had moving parts, buttons, levers, lights that would eventually blink, and the big switch to turn it all on. But I had not yet switched it on.
After a few minutes the conductors were in place and I did a power check with a multimeter to be sure that the time-keeper would not fry itself if I eventually turned it on. I knew that one of the problems with machines that had been calibrated with an internal clock was that they eventually burned out. Slowly, the electronic clocks would tick down and lose pace with the Greenwich Mean Time. I knew that if I set the time according to the bells of the Berliner Dom, the time would be accurate enough. Did the clock have to be accurate? I didn’t know how to answer the question I asked myself because I didn’t know what the machine did. The machine had no apparent purpose—other than the fact that I had just turned it into a glorified clock—but then again, I had wondered if anything we did had real purpose. All things simply moved forward through time and space, expanding with energy that had no actual intention; the energy was just left over as the residual from the creation of the universe. The universe: a perpetual machine that exploded, collapsed, and exploded again, each time creating different life that proceeded to create its own cycle of collapsing and exploding, imploding and assimilating. Life destroys itself until the energy stretches too far, falling into retrograde, travelling backwards to condense—once again—and compress itself until all our energies could not resist the gravitational pressure and blasted matter out into existence to try all over again.

Did it matter if I knew what the machine did? I could not even answer that question without the desire to want it to matter. There had to be a purpose somewhere; I could not accept that things existed without reason. Things didn’t just happen for the sake of an event taking place. Did they?

Before I began to build the machine I had written many books in numbered volumes about space and theoretical alien encounters. My works included notes on string
theory and everything I had read about inter-dimensional travel. The love for the subject began when I was a child and spent most of my time with my father who was a physicist and travelled many times to Berlin to give lectures at Humboldt-Universität. Instead of being a stargazer, my father perpetually had chalk on his hands and books for me to read on the flights back home where my father taught at Cal Tech. Father and I had travelled all over the world, and though we both favored Berlin, we didn’t stay in one place for long. The year that he died was the year I decided to stay.

Staring into the machine’s motherboard, I reorganized the chips of memory and exchange the old processor for a faster one I had purchased a few days earlier. I was always updating different parts on the machine as technologies expired and newer versions took their place. After making the changes, I felt bothered and impatient as if I were waiting for company to arrive or the mailman to bring an important letter. I shut the panel to the compartment I was working in and made notes in my work journal, changing the information in the parts catalog. By the low light of my small lamp, I scribbled a few notes on a diagram I had drawn months previous. As I wrote, I noticed something odd. The light from the lamp was brighter than usual. The bright light was on my hands and the paper, making them glow, reflecting strangely back into my eyes almost as if the light emanated from the paper itself.

The heat wasn’t on; the furnace in the building had been working on and off for months. As I worked, the living room was starting to get cold from the snow outside. The cold crept in through the apartment windows; I looked out to see what was left of the dying light of the afternoon. The Dom would soon strike five and the sun would set
almost a half-hour after. Light struggled in through the clouded sky and suddenly I felt compelled to turn my head to look behind me on the floor.

My shadow was gone.

I couldn’t feel the cold of the snow when I made a dash down the stairs and out the door of the complex. My socks were soaked with icy slush by the time I stopped and as I stood in the middle of the street looking down, I faced away from the setting sun. Through the dying light, my shadow had, in fact, completely vanished. I searched the trees and the streetlamp poles around me only to find that it was I who was out of place. My shadow had simply disappeared.

Back inside the apartment, still wearing my wet socks, I stood in front of the machine. The cat, having just woken from her nap on the bed—probably from all the commotion I had made running in and out of the apartment—brushed her hindquarters against my leg. Automatically, I knelt to pet her and she accepted the gesture of affection from my fingers without noticing what I was missing. Could cats tell if you had a shadow or not?

Suddenly, I was saddened and filled with a dreadful sense of loss. Sadness and loss quickly turned to panic and I began to ask myself, How long had I been without it? I wanted to scream. I wanted to scream and cry out, Wait! Let me go back! I can fix this! But my body was frozen and I could only stare down at the cat with her pretty orange eyes looking back at me. Her black fur acted as camouflage in the dark room and all that could be seen were those great orange eyes. She smiled a little kitty smile, but only because she wanted me to continue petting her.
After trying to calm myself down, I walked back over to the window and watched the rest of the light die as the *Dom* chimed five from its deep place within the city. Shadows grew larger across the streets until they enveloped the whole of *Kurfürstendamm Straße* and eventually the whole of Berlin. For a brief moment, I entertained the idea that this was a sign from the universe. Energy was eventually going to collapse and cause an opposite effect over all things. However, when I turned my head, the silly thought died away and I saw that the lamp on my desk was dim, just as it always had been.

I turned on the lights of the apartment and the cat mewed and pranced into the kitchen with her tail high in the air. I fed her, ate some leftovers, and tried to pour myself a glass of wine, but as I took the thin stem in my fingers, it slipped from my hands. The cat dashed into the bedroom when the glass shattered on the floor and shards of the wine glass skittered across the tile. I froze with the bottle in my hand and my heart beat hard in my chest. The whole apartment was still and I couldn’t even hear the traffic from the street below. Once my bearings were returned, I set the bottle down and then tiptoed around the kitchen to fetch the dustpan.

My phone rang as I swept up the glass. My partner was calling same time as always. He had probably just gotten home from his evening with his friends and was enjoying an unbroken glass of wine on his couch.

“I broke a glass,” I said, holding the phone between my ear and my shoulder.

“Are you okay? You seemed unwell earlier.”

*Could he tell there was something wrong?*

“No, it’s fine. Just a little tired, that’s all,” I lied.
A few moments of silence passed as I finished sweeping the glass into the dustpan and threw it in the garbage.

“You’re spending too much time on your machine,” he said.

I didn’t want to hear him say it, but I knew deep down that it was true. Almost every waking moment I was in front of it with my hands plunging into its innards fixing wires and soldering circuits.

Before the machine was half the size that it was I had asked him to move in with me. We had been cooking dinner together when I asked, or at least, he had been cooking while I tinkered at my workbench with my soldering iron. After I asked, he had come into the living room with a glass of white wine. He had set the glass down next to my tools and kissed my forehead. By then, I knew the gesture to mean no and that he would take the question into consideration. The question never came up again because the machine had taken up too much room.

“A break is what you need. Get out of the apartment and go to the museum or something,” he continued as I re-corked the wine.

Through the phone, I imagined that he was moving in to hand me a glass of wine and kiss my forehead.

“I’ll go out tomorrow,” I said with a sigh.

“That’s my girl.”

“Gute nacht.”

“Nacht.”

I hung up, but didn’t go straight to bed. There was still the issue of my shadow to grapple with. I thought that perhaps it had been my imagination, even a hallucination, but
in the kitchen as I swept up the glass I saw the shadow of the broom on the floor; I saw each of the tiny shadows of glass shards as I scooped them up into the dust pan. When I realized that I had not been hallucinating, I knew that I had to contact the one person who could possibly help me. *Why hadn’t I thought of him in the first place?*

Returning to my desk, I scribbled a few lines on a piece of paper. Later, only wearing my housecoat over my pajamas, I ran barefoot out into the snow and stuck the note in the mailbox. The note had no addressee. It was just a folded piece of paper disappearing into the dark just as he had said to do before he disappeared. The *he* was a friend, or at least, *was* a friend and he was the only person…or being that could help.

I returned into the apartment and for several minutes I watched the snow start to fall over the lights of the city. Before bed, I thought that the blinking lights all looked like stars.

The next morning I woke and did my morning routine. My shadow was still missing, but my coffee had the same taste and the cat begged for food like always. There had been a light snow in the early morning and the sky was overcast. *No shadows today,* I thought, and donned my heavy coat, placing my small black notebook in the inner pocket before leaving my apartment.

When I was little, I thought the Berlin U-Bahn was like a series of wormholes. They got me lost; they sucked me down and dragged me from one point clear across Tiergarten to Pankow, or from somewhere in Kreuzberg and just over to Mitte. As an adult, I still thought they were and I took these routes. In Mitte I could see the Reichstag from the art museum and walk along the Spree. I sometimes walked all the way to the
Dom and further; back the other way returned me to Tiergarten and back home where the machine was always waiting.

Instead of taking these routes, I took U2 towards Potsdamer Platz and surfaced to trek across the vast landscape of skyscrapers and new architecture that overwhelmed the small space with hard angles and triangular shapes intersected with domes. During hot summers the domes absorbed the light from the sun and spread a radiating heat over all the walkers, commuters, and tourists passing through the streets.

I had always wanted to see the Potsdamer square from above. When I first began to sketch in my notebooks, I had drawn the streets of the Platz and imagined how the shapes had looked from the sky. My drawing was comprised of triangles and strange curves that followed the layout of the streets. The drawing had been close to the layout of area as seen on a map, but I had never actually seen it from above, even in an airplane.

I turned right down Stresemannstrasse towards Tiergarten. My eyes were not pointed upward like they usually were to take in the skyline. Snow still spiraled down in a soft, sparse powder and my eyes were at my feet. I saw the feet of others walking to work, or to their shopping, hurrying in the cold. My eyes watched their soft shadows. Their shadows were all firmly attached to their bodies, following them like loyal dogs to their masters. My feet followed a line in the pavement like my fingers followed wires of the machine to ensure they were connected properly.

Every time I lost myself to the geography the city, I lost myself to the machine. I had built the circuitry to be shaped like the streets and sometimes I would stop walking to sketch out new information pathways in my journal. The wide, dark line below my feet gave me a new idea for an extra processing junction. Many of the people passing me paid
no attention; the weather was too cold to give a damn. There were a few who did pass by, who narrowed their eyes as if they weren’t sure how to feel about me, but continued on their way. The children in the city were still on holiday from school and there were a few out, kicking snow as they walked and their mothers snapping at them as they did. Soon, the children would return to school which meant school supply shopping. The markets would be fully stocked with notebooks and writing utensils of all sorts.

Remembering this, I wrote in my notebook: _get more pencils and a new eraser_. I would forget this otherwise because I didn’t think of the things I needed to complete the machine, the little things like scotch tape for putting diagrams up on the wall, notebooks to add chapters to the parts catalog, and pencils, pens, loose paper—I never remembered much unless I had written down. Before the machine, remembering was easy. Multiple strings of thought held everything together and information was easily accessible. The lists I made in my head were always there after long evenings of coffee strolls when my partner and I would walk to the Ostbahnhof.

Our routine after a date was taking the _S-Bahn_ from _Alexanderplatz_ and walking down the East Side Gallery with our hands linked together. He and I always walked in silence, stopping once in a while to look at the art painted on the long concrete Wall. Each time we walked the Wall there the art was new whether it was simple tagging from local gangs—which had been far more colorful than any other gang tagging I had seen—or projects that were commissioned by the city. Restoration of the art was a constant undertaking and in the summers, artists would be assigned to a section of the Wall to paint over the spray painted scribbles of names, and random words like _spät_.

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My favorite section on our walk was one of the only art pieces that seemed to stay up. The piece was on a black background with three different colored planets that were supposed to resemble points on a map. On either side of the large red planet I always imagined was Mars, were the labels, NEW YORK and TOKYO. Below the planet was the word, BERLIN, but the I looked like a great big Y surrounding and swallowing Mars with barbed wire. Every time I stopped to view the sky map, my partner would walk away from me. Our hands would unlink and he walked further down the road, focused on something else entirely. After we left, he wouldn’t say anything until we got back to my apartment and sat on the couch—back when I had a real living room—and he asked me about the painting.

“Why do you like it so much?”

“Don’t know,” I would say, “I want Berlin to swallow me up, I guess.”

“I don’t,” he would say. “I don’t want to be swallowed up by anything.”

Eventually I stopped my admiration of the work and when we went out, I walked past the section I liked; eventually our dates stopped altogether.

I stopped across the street from the Potsdamer Bahnhof and put my hand against the cold section of concrete that jutted out of the squares of pavement. The section was one of the last parts of the Wall and colors of yellow, red, and blue were splattered across the surface. On the lower right, underneath a series of five numbers was an arrow that pointed to a splotch of yellow. Below the arrow was written: You are HERE. After taking my glove off, I touched the spot with my palm and felt nothing but the cold. In my mind I heard my partner’s words, I feel it too much.
The spot made me think about buttons and I pushed it with the tip of my finger, half-expecting something else to happen like when I pressed my palm to it, but nothing happened. Instead of standing there any longer I walked away from the slab and jotted down another note, adding to the poor sketch of the new junction diagram. The junction needed buttons; all machines needed buttons in which to function. I added four to my sketch and then decided it was time to walk to Tiergarten because the sun was starting to peek through a portion of the clouds and I didn’t want passersby to notice that my shadow was bizarrely missing.

By the time the light snow stopped and I reached the edge of the park, I knew it was time to see him. On the corner of Lennestrasse and Ebert, there was a coffee shop by a big hotel that we used to frequent back before I moved to Berlin permanently. We had come together as colleagues and spent most of our time interviewing physicists and mathematicians for writing material. I wrote books and he published weekly and monthly articles, both in English and German for various science journals and papers. Together, we attended conferences and he reviewed all of my work. He had even been the one to introduce me to my partner, who at the time was a part of his drinking crowd that watched soccer at the biergarten on the weekends.

I walked into the warm building, remembering that he refused to call it anything else but a café and that the last time we met, just before I began the machine, he moaned the entire time about the coffee being too wet—whatever that meant—and unlike what he had in Paris in 1793.

My old colleague had lost his shadow, too, but he had lost it long before I had lost mine, back before my father had died. At the time, I couldn’t wrap my head around the
idea. Of course I panicked, but he did not. He said that it suited his personality and that it was enjoyable. He told me that he could travel into different dimensions in time, and that he could slip through them as he wanted, changing nothing, but experiencing everything thought impossible.

As soon as I sat down and ordered a large coffee, he appeared, walking in with the odd slink he had acquired, dressed in slacks, white shirt, and a black jacket with a thin black tie. No one noticed how he was underdressed for the weather and he sat down across from me in the booth. At first he said nothing, just looking the same as he did the last time we saw each other as if he had been untouched by time.

Without asking, a girl brought him a coffee in a ceramic cup with a saucer underneath and he slapped her ass as she walked away, but the girl appeared unmoved. He lit a cigarette and no one noticed, not the baristas, nor the other patrons. I could see highlights of red underneath his black hair.

“You look old,” he said, having a sip.

“It’s only been a few years.”

He took a long drag from his cigarette and blew it out in a large plume. “Not for me,” he said. “Feels like a day, a week, just a trip to 1896 and back. Have you ever been to Russia?”

“No,” I lied, sipping my own coffee anxiously. I had realized in that moment that I didn’t want to stay with him long and that anything to get him off track would only keep me there longer. If I had told him the truth, he might have asked too many questions that I didn’t feel like answering and there was something scary about him, or perhaps it was
about me. I felt as if something lurked beneath the surface waiting to snatch me away from the world I knew.

“You should. I think you would like it more than Berlin.”

I didn’t ask him why because I didn’t want to hear the same speech he gave me the last time. The last time we had met he had told me that living in the space where he experienced no relative time was far superior to any other experience I would have. As he sat there, laughing, I doubted that there was any truth in what he had said.

He drank more of his coffee while the steam from mine swirled up and around like his cigarette smoke did around his head.

“Do you know where it went?” I asked after a very long pause.

“Where what went?”

I kept silent again as he finished his cigarette and put it out in the cup’s saucer leaving a black mark on the white porcelain.

“Same place mine did, I guess.”

We had worked together on the last book I ever published and spent a large portion of time just before it was finished, interviewing the man who had built the first machine that was—theoretically—designed to carry a spaceship into a black hole and stabilize the interior wormhole for passage through. To where, we were not sure. The mathematical calculations predicted that in an uncontrolled state, the wormhole would send the spaceship through a space between dimensions, bending through the universe and appearing somewhere else through a fluctuation in the dimensional rift. The distance of the destination, however, was almost impossible to calculate. Fluctuations in the dimensional rift were chaotic in nature and any leap into one of the wormholes would not
be as simple as getting off on the right metro station. The destination could be as far as a few thousand light-years, or a few thousand feet.

Not a soul in the world could predict, or even develop the correct permutations for destination prediction, let alone a ship that could travel far enough to reach the closest black hole to attempt such an experiment. No one even knew for sure if the theoretical wormhole was present in a black hole; the community of physicists studying the subject just always assumed there was one.

“Are you almost finished with your machine?”

I stretched in the booth, still apprehensive about drinking any more of my coffee because it tasted different now that he was here, almost unpleasant.

“Not really.”

When we interviewed the wormhole scientist for the last time, my colleague had come to the conclusion, blurting out in the middle of the interview that the man’s concept wouldn’t take us through the dimensional rift to travel elsewhere in the universe, but that it would take us to a different dimension entirely. The wormhole scientist had thrown us out of his office and said that we could use the material from our other interviews, but that he wanted nothing about actually travelling to other dimensions to be associated to his life-long work. I agreed, but my colleague insisted to pursue the idea.

At the same place we currently sat, he argued with me for over an hour about how it all made sense. Everything we had read and written over our whole careers came to this point in which the impossible was suddenly at our fingertips. I told him I would think about it and left to go home and finish writing up my notes. The next day I tried to discuss it with him, but he had vanished. There had been no answer at his apartment and
his phone was disconnected for months. No one else seemed to notice he had been missing after a few weeks.

“Good, I don’t think you should ever finish it,” he said, lighting another cigarette.

I shrugged, trying not to seem moved by his comment, but in the back of my mind not finishing the machine was a terrifying possibility.

After he had been missing for two months, he reappeared, wearing a black suit, talking about how he sat on a balcony in Paris to watch Louis XVI put his head into a guillotine, and with much enthusiasm he described how outstanding the coffee was that year. He had an entire lack of empathy as he carefully described what the mob of French citizens looked like with their fists raised, screaming for the king’s head. Afterwards, he said, he drew closer to watch as they lined up to dab their embroidered handkerchiefs in the blood that dripped from the stump of the ex-monarch’s neck—and then it was that point in his story that he decided to stop talking and try swallowing his still burning cigarette instead.

That day he returned and told me the story about being in Paris during the French Revolution, I thought I had lost my mind. But it wasn’t even as simple as that because I remembered that he couldn’t stop talking about the inter-dimensional travel and I had to come to the conclusion that he had successfully completed the experiment, or the machine, was he also building a machine at the time? I couldn’t answer the question because the memories from that far back had already started to slip away.

“The coffee here is still too wet,” he said, pushing it aside.

“How long was it before you—you know?”

His eyes remained on me for several moments before he answered.
“It was almost immediate. My shadow was gone and I was falling. That’s how I ended up in France.”

I held my breath and thought: *it could happen to me at any time.*

“Can I get it back before it happens?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he flicked ash into his coffee.

“If you figure that out, I’d like to know.”

His words were almost sad.

“I thought you liked it. The time-travelling stuff. It’s...well...interesting.”

“It’s not time-travel,” he corrected. “I was right. The machine would never work for interstellar travel. Dimensions. There are so many of them and they’re all different. The whole idea is a little complex, historical dimensional splitting something or other, but you’ll get it eventually. You know, if you don’t get your shadow back.”

When he said, *the machine would never work*, panic began to creep up my spine and into my heart. I felt that my heart had skipped several needed beats and it was hard to breathe.

“Why shouldn’t I finish the machine?”

Again, he took several moments to answer. In the space of the pause, I noticed that the snow had finally stopped and the sun was breaking through the clouds and shining across the center of the Platz.

“Why didn’t you finish the book?”

Both of my hands went flat against the table.

“You published it, but it wasn’t finished,” he said.

“I’m not really sure,” I told him.
After he disappeared I had stopped writing and took his name off the book. I had handed it over to my editor whom didn’t seem to care whether it was finished or not and regardless, it was published without much recognition. Instead, I had begun to compose the blueprints for a machine of my own. Once I had put pencil to paper, little else in my life could distract me from the task.

“It doesn’t matter now,” he sighed.

“No, I guess it doesn’t. What happens now?”

He shrugged his shoulders again. “Wait for the inevitable, I assume.”

My whole body tensed up. I drank my unpleasant coffee in frustration and I wanted a better answer from him. He had transformed into something new, something terrifying and I would resist becoming like him if I could help it.

“You lost everything, didn’t you?” There was a sense of finality coming to our conversation. The room was beginning to feel cramped and I was sure we were being noticed by now.

He nodded. “Gained something else in the process, but yes, everything you knew doesn’t seem to matter anymore.”

I gulped the rest of my coffee, my throat briefly contracting in pain as if I had swallowed something too large for my throat.

“Shadows are social creatures,” he said. He pulled a wad of Deutschmarks from his pocket and placed several on the table. “Wherever mine is, I am sure yours is, too.”

“They won’t take those,” I said, pointing at the crumpled currency.

“They won’t notice the difference.”
Then we left and he walked out ahead of me with a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth. My former colleague disappeared before I even reached the edge of the sidewalk.

For a few moments I stood there and I could see my breath swirling in front of my face. As I stared out into the street, I couldn’t recognize the city, it was something else, somewhere else, and I searched around almost in a panic, looking for something familiar.

The people passing me began to turn their faces and were looking at me with penetrating eyes. It was as if their eyes were prying away my layers to see what was at my center. I felt like they wanted to see the marks my shadow may have left behind.

I wandered away from the entrance of the coffee shop and down the street. I kept my eyes low and tried not to make contact with anyone else while I glanced up occasionally to see if anything around me looked familiar.

For a little over a mile I walked and was unable to tell whether the sun breaking in through the clouds was making it hard for me to see, or if the overcast glare was blending all the shades of grey into one blinding light. Eventually I was tired and didn’t want to walk any further. I made out the shape of a bench close by and I sat down on it; my feet were sore and my legs aching from the cold. When I looked up, my vision cleared. I was still in Berlin and I was facing the south side of the Spree, the slim river that snaked through the city.

I had designed the power conduit in my machine to look just like the Spree, ribbon cables sprung out from its center resembling the U8, the S7 and the U3 that connected to Dalhelm, a distant section of the city. That far out of the city’s center, bare pines were spread out on the shores of small lakes which had probably frozen over from
the winter. These areas on the outskirts were bare and unforgiving; they were empty and void of much life in the winter. I was afraid that if I didn’t find my shadow, I would become void and empty like the barren winter land on the fringes of Berlin.

As I sat on the bench looking at the deathly cold water of the Spree just near the Reichstag, I was relieved to know that I had not slipped into one of those other dimensions after all. Just then, my phone had vibrated a few times in my coat pocket. I had two missed calls and a text message from my partner: Wo bist du?

After a minute passed, I contemplated getting up and returning home immediately. I could take the S9 to the U9, but I was afraid that I would just return to building my machine. I did not want to face it. I did not want to see what it would do when it was finished, but also, I felt that if I never completed it, I might have felt that there was always something missing from me. What if finishing it meant that I would be reunited with my shadow?

In a return message I told my partner that I was out for a walk like he asked and I would be home later—that I had not forgotten he would be cooking dinner. He replied: Good girl. The cold Spree flowed in front of me and I stood still feeling paranoid about sitting for too long in the open.

Finding a pathway into Tiergarten, I searched for a space that was closer, more intimate than the wide open space framed with the modern architecture that was the new East Berlin. The park was quiet in the winter. Snow had blanketed the grounds and was untouched by footprints except for the occasional traces of a rabbit or a squirrel. As I walked, my tired feet were veering south, becoming numb from the cold that I had been
in for—I couldn’t be exact how many—hours and with no more than the small breakfast I had in the morning and the half-cup of coffee I drank at the café.

Walking became laborious and I wanted to stop every sixty paces just to sit down cross-legged in the thick snow. I didn’t want to move any further than I had to. Instead, I occasionally turned my head to see if my shadow was behind me and then moved on. When I reached the southern point of the Großer Stern, I stopped. Victoria stood on her pedestal. She was a bright golden bronze goddess who looked west, framed by two statues no more than a few yards in front of me. The statues were dusted with snow and punctuated with icicles.

On either side of Victoria, the statues were of violent hunting scenes; the men each had spears and were thrusting them into their own beast. On the left was a bison, its head down and surrounded by dogs with their teeth bared; the hunter’s face focused on his purchase and was wearing garb that was reminiscent of the old German tribes who roamed the land before the Prussian war. The statue on the right was similar to the bison, but instead, it was a man with his spear deep in the head of a boar.

However, the beast was unlike the bison. Instead of cowering under the man, with his head down, surrounded by mad dogs, it was snarling down at a hunting hound that was on its back in submission to the boar’s great fangs. This hunter was dressed in more of the traditional hunting garb, the look of the Waidmann in their Tyrolean hats and full-length Lederhosen. The Waidmänner ventured deep into the forests in packs with their Weimaraner dogs looking for a boar or a stag—something to come home with to declare man’s power over nature. Such violence always made my partner uneasy, but I enjoyed the snarling boar. I felt like the boar as I looked at its bronze eyes, like
something had trapped me and had tried to bring me down, but like the boar, I had to fight against the thing that was trying to put me out of existence.

Both bison and boar sat shadowed in the cluster of tall trees that were scarce of leaves. The trees only had snow sitting on their branches and Victoria was high behind them, glowing as she always did, even absent of the sun. I realized I had never been to the top of the Victory Column and I knew it was a steep climb. I also knew that I would be able to see the whole city from there and the streets would look like information pathways. At that height, cars and pedestrians would look like travelling bytes of information. No, I thought. If I went up there, I would be caught up in adding even more ideas and designs to the machine, I would fulfill my fear of never finishing it, never turning it on.

From the inner pocket of my coat, I pulled out my black notebook and dropped it in the snow. Against the white it looked like the cigarette burn on the porcelain from earlier—a black stain against something gleaming. I left it there and walked away. I missed my shadow and deeply regret that I built the machine in the first place, but I knew it had to be finished.

Heading northwest, I found my way up Altonaer Strasse and after taking one last look at Victoria I went into the tunnel underground.

My father used to sketch out equations in his graphed notebook while we rode together on the U-Bahn and I memorized the names of all the stations. Whenever we came to Berlin for his lectures or when the university needed him most, he would always stay somewhere like Wilmersdorf or Charlottenburg so that he could spend more time riding underneath the city. I spent a week riding every leg of the U-Bahn after he died.
and even though I had just started building the machine at the time, I did not sketch as he
did, but I recited the names of all the stations.

“The trains are always on time,” he told me. “I will always know exactly how
long I have to solve a problem.” At one point, he explained to me that he could think
most clearly on trains because while everyone appreciated them for their convenience, he
could admire the beauty of ingenuity in their design. The day the Hadron Collider was
turned on in Switzerland, he put down his newspaper and wept at the breakfast table.
Although he would never get to see it—even though he had taken part in the formulas of
its early designs—he wept because he told me it was the most beautiful technological
thing he could imagine. He died a few days later.

The train arrived at Kurfürstendamm and I hesitated when the doors opened. I
watched the few passengers sitting in my car get off. I thought that if I stayed on the
train, I might never leave. I would just sit and wait to fall into a hole in the universe, only
to pop out somewhere else. But I wanted to go home. I wanted to have dinner with my
partner and I wanted to scratch my cat behind her little black ears. There were so many
things that I wanted to do and I was afraid that all the things I loved would slip away.

I hurried after the other passengers and hardly made it through the doors before
they closed. The station was brightly lit and the light glared off the green tile on the
walls. It was a color that was popular in the early days of the underground, along with
pale yellow and an antique alabaster. My favorite stations were the ones that still had the
old signs from the 30s in the Germanic typeface, hand-painted, but many of them—
especially the ones in the eastern side of the city—had been covered up with more
modern signs and the station names, changed.
Snow was falling down into the stairway heavier than it had been coming down earlier. Carefully, I followed the stairs up back into the cold and tried not to slip on the icy steps. At the top of the stairs, my partner was standing, waiting for me with his hands in his pockets and the collar of his jacket pulled up to his nose. His blue eyes peered out from under the brim of his hat.

“Are you okay?”

I nodded, too tired and cold to give him an answer.

“Let’s go home,” he said, putting his arm around me.

We walked in silence back to the apartment; the snow was getting heavier and out of sleepy eyes I watched flakes fall on his lashes and melting on his soft lips. He hugged me tightly as we went up the stairs and I was very glad that he was there, always there, to keep me from falling down.

Inside the apartment it was warm and I was glad to be home. In the kitchen he reheated our dinner while I sat in the living room and put on my wool socks. The cat mewed at me and hopped up in my lap. She purred and appeared to see me, or at least I hoped she was. At first she was apprehensive of my fingers, sniffing them carefully before she allowed me to scratch underneath her chin.

After he brought our dinner to the couch, we ate side by side like we had when he first started dating. We ate in silence and after we finished we stayed on the couch and watched the cat on the floor as she cleaned between her toes with her tongue.

“There’s something wrong,” he said after he pulled me closer to his chest. My whole body ached and all I wanted to do was relax, to rest my head and listen to his heartbeat until I fell asleep. “I can tell,” he continued. “Something is different.”
“My shadow is gone,” I said with resignation. I didn’t want to tell him I had lost my shadow because I couldn’t tell him that I knew how to get it back.

“I noticed. When were you going to tell me?”

My eyes burned with the desire to sob. He had always been so perceptive and patient and I thought that maybe if I cried and held on to him as tightly as I could, my shadow would return. I wanted my shadow to know the desperation I felt in my heart. I wanted to hold onto everything I had built. Not the building of the machine, but the things I had built outside of it and before the machine existed at all. My machine’s design had been inspired by the city that had converted what was old and discontinued into something newer, more modern and forgot the things that were there in the past.

But I did not cry out and he kissed my forehead and took my hand.

“Do not worry,” he said; his voice was gentle. “I do not think it has truly left you.” He pointed to my unfinished machine.

“It might not come back if I finish,” I said, looking over at the machine at first, but then I looked past it. Pale lights were coming in through the window and beginning their evening twinkle. The snow was very heavy outside.

“I do not think that will happen.” He put his arms around me. “Sometimes the weight of our shadows is too heavy to bear,” he said. “Better to take them off for a while to think and they will be there when we are ready to put them back on.”

My partner let go of me and I got up from the couch. I stood in front of the machine and with my fingers resting on the tiny switch next to the time-keeper; I took a deep breath and held it.
There would be no turning back when I flipped the switch and I thought if I kept working on it, if I kept building the machine larger and found more excuses not to turn it on, I would never be done and I might slip off to another dimension, shadow-less and lost to the things that had mattered most to me. A surge of confidence coursed through my body and for a moment I was Victoria standing high above the city. I was the boar struggling against the hunter and his dog, snarling back at death instead of going to it easily. But I was none of those things; I was just a woman who had built a glorified clock.

In one gentle movement, I flicked the switch. Lights flashed on and off. The parts I made to move whirred to life and metal fingers clicked against the turning spokes of cogs. Red numbers appeared in the time-keeper reading: 19:03.

My partner stood beside me.

“Doesn’t work,” I said.

He took my hand and shushed me. “You’re not listening.”

All I could hear was the bell from the Dom chiming seven o’clock.

“Listen,” he said, squeezing my hand. I focused.

Faint whirring, clicks—so gentle, the beeps and noises played a mechanical symphony, but then I realized that the Dom was telling us that it was seven.

“That’s impossible,” I said. “The time-keeper is relative,” I told him. The time of the machine, I thought, should have reflected the time of the Dom, but it remained different as the bells in the distance continued to ring. There was absolutely no fault, I was at least sure of that.
Although the relative time of the city, the chiming of the Dom, had been three minutes behind, my machine’s design, inspired by the city’s geography, was three minutes ahead.

My partner’s blue eyes smiled and he kissed my forehead. He put his arm around me and when I glanced down, I could see that our shadows were intertwined. We stood there hugging one another as the snow fell outside and my new clock beeped its symphony of time.
Jürgen’s face was in his hands. He was sitting alone on a bench at the end of the Victoria station platform, except he was not alone. The rest of the station was empty except for a young woman who was several meters away on the opposite end, shifting her weight back and forth on her maroon canvas shoes. However, Jürgen did not see her, at least, not this second time. He couldn’t remember seeing her before because his sense of time had been temporarily skewed. Jürgen tried to grasp the missing moments of his day, but they were far, almost too far gone to recover.

Wie spät ist es? Jürgen thought to himself. His mobile was no longer in his pocket and the digital arrival signs hanging over the platform were blinking on and off: Errorinformation notfound. Although he did not know what time it was exactly, he knew it must have been late in the evening. What was still in the pocket of his dark blue London Underground-issued windbreaker was a rat, dead and starting to stink. As a train passed through on the outer tracks of Victoria station, he looked up towards it.

There was no mystery about the last thing he did remember: walking up the stairs of Shepherd’s Bush station was clear. He remembered having to shield his eyes from the sun that had started to peek from behind the clouds and that the half-burnt, dead rat weighing down his pocket, swaying with each step, was still warm from the accident. He remembered Henry Dowdell’s scrunched face of disgust after the rat had been electrocuted on the freshly laid tracks of Shephard’s Bush station during their test that day. The unfortunate rat had been in the wrong place, probably drawn to the exposed wires, searching for just the right piece to build his nest.
But when he could grasp this memory, he still did not see the young woman when he looked up to watch the Jubilee line train pass through the Victoria station. He did, however, notice the train bereft of its passengers and for a moment, the hushed sound the cars made as the train blew through it lifted him up to someplace else, somewhere safe.

London had been nothing like Lisbon. Almost ten years had passed since Jürgen had his first job as a Railway Specialist in Lisbon. He had gone there to assist the Lisboa Metro implement new Bombardier brand railcars before the turn of the new millennia. Previously, Jürgen had worked for Berlin’s Deutsche Bahn under the same title and his bosses thought it was a good idea to contract his specialties to other European metro companies. Jürgen would be the first to begin to assist these other companies in upgrading their technology and train their staff in how to manage rail systems as the Germans did. Deutsche Bahn prided themselves in their trains that always ran on time. Although the intention was based more in monetary gain rather than the goal of sharing useful knowledge, Jürgen bought into it all the same.

After the train passed through the Victoria station, Jürgen put his face back into his hands and waited for the train that would take him back to the place he slept. Still unseen by him, the woman on the opposite end of the platform continued to fidget and checked her watch several times. She stared at him for long periods and then looked away towards the tracks.

Jürgen’s mobile had fallen from his pocket and into the bottom of the Victoria line suicide pit. It was there with his work badge, both having slipped out when he and the young woman had tumbled down to the concrete earlier. Her elbow was badly scraped and bleeding a little, but she looked more frightened than she did wounded.
Although Jürgen had no recollection of seeing her not more than a few minutes before.
Nor did he remember lurching towards her as a train came screaming down the tunnel
with no reason to stop, and her, with her toes tipping over the edge of the platform, so
close to meeting an end. That brief time was gone.

All Jürgen could think about was how that morning he had been among the early
riders crammed together on the Lancaster Gate platform waiting for the Central line
towards Ealing Broadway. Like every morning, he blew his nose as part of his routine,
trying his best to keep quiet. This morning others followed suit, honking and sneezing,
some, unfortunately on unaware passengers in front of them. What they lacked, however,
was Jürgen's compulsion to look into his tissue and examine what he expelled. Schwarz.
Black soot mingled with snot clung to the wrinkled surface of the tissue. Disgusted, he
crumpled it up and crammed it into the left pocket of his khakis, the same pocket he
carried his mobile.

The platform continued to fill with a rush of people yammering away on their
phones or distracted with sending text messages; all of them were pushing into one
another like schools of fish wriggling together through a current. As they swelled in
numbers, the small tunnel grew louder with chatter that reverberated against the dirty,
decaying tiles lining the walls. A woman bumped into Jürgen with her brown leather
handbag as she flicked her auburn hair across her face and behind her shoulder. The
contact caused him to scrunch his shoulders up and replant his stance firmly, trying to
occupy a smaller space than he was before.

He closed his eyes and tried to picture that the platform was empty, but before he
could clear his mind, the heads of other Underground patrons perked up and all turned in
the same direction like meerkats listening for signs of danger. The crowd anxiously shifted with a collective worry that not everyone would fit into such a small space and that some riders would probably be left behind.

Finally, the familiar rush of hot air swept across Jürgen’s face, almost soothing him until the screech came from down the tunnel. He pulled his pen and pad from his jacket pocket, flipped to a clean page and marked the date and time in the upper right corner. Below, he wrote: *Lancaster Gate to Holland Park*. The ear-piercing screech made him cringe and filled him with the same disgusted feeling he had with his black snot in that morning’s tissue.

When the train stopped, Jürgen was the only one with his head still down, walking forward as the crowd swirled around and rushed towards the doors. He wrote down: *Going too fast, wearing on breaks*. The doors opened as a woman softly announced the Central line service to Ealing Broadway.

Jürgen tucked his pad and pen back into his jacket pocket and with the rest of the crowd, boarded the car in front of him. He took his place—as he always did—in the center of the car with his back to the doors on the opposing side. A man in a two-piece suit and a small leather briefcase tucked under his arm was facing him. As the doors closed and the train moved, the man shifted his eyes from Jürgen’s official metro jacket to his matching badge. The man looked uneasy and Jürgen tried to ignore his wandering eyes until the man cleared his throat.

Jürgen should have been used to the way people stared at him, but almost ten years in London only revived the same feelings of being watched in his childhood. Having grown up in East Berlin before the fall of the Wall, it was normal to be watched
by neighbors and by the police. Nearly everyone watched one another and some of them even reported what they saw to the *Stasi*. The thought of being back in his childhood made him feel sick.

He tried not to think about how long he had been from his home if Berlin, even more so, how long he had been away from his mother who was living in *Hesse*. Too long had he been riding around in the dark, he thought, but it had been what he always wanted and his work was not yet complete. Although, spending so much time travelling underneath London had taken its toll and made his face hard, aging him too soon. The hard look, he figured, was probably what caused so many people to stare, but for too long he had felt as if the stares were something more.

“You Transportation Police?”

Jürgen had been in London long enough to have an idea as to where in England someone was from. He considered the man a moment, and then identified his sloppy pronunciation of *Transportation* as being not from London and wondered why he would ask the question that he did when his badge clearly read: *Jürgen Fetter, Railway Specialist Engineer, London Underground*. Did he not understand what that meant?

He remembered his brief time in Lisbon perfectly. No one had ever given him one of those weary sideways glances that he deemed the London riders so famous for. Nor had he the kind of resistance to railway changes or suggestions that the other Underground employees had given him. Instead, he had worked with a man named Paulo Rios. The man who was in his early forties at the time, had been called, *Riberio*. Paulo told him the nickname was a play on his last name which meant, “little river.”
“They call me little river,” Paulo had said, and Jürgen thought the nickname was in bad taste because Paulo wasn’t a very tall man. In fact, Paulo had even been shorter than most of the women Jürgen saw there and thought it unfair to be called such a mocking name. He was even more aware of this because he had been called such awful things behind his back by his coworkers. Things like, Aryan prat, stuffy German twat, and even as far as Nazi. But Jürgen had been none of these things.

Of course he knew that over the time he had spent in London, he had been known to keep his distance from the people he worked with. Even his first day in London had been a terrible experience, very unlike Lisbon. In Lisbon, Paulo had welcomed him with cheeky banter about how Jürgen was called there only because the managers of the Lisboa Metro thought the footmen running the rails were incapable of transitioning the new cars. Paulo had such playful confidence about the situation, and additionally, he welcomed Jürgen with open arms, determined to learn from the peculiar German man even though he knew he could complete the work on his own. And Jürgen had felt that he taught Paulo something.

He remembered the day that they rode the Linha Azul together. It was the blue line that they first organized to put the new rolling stock into place, and when Jürgen had first pulled out his pad to write down what he could hear during the ride, Paulo was most intrigued. Jürgen told Paulo that he only had to listen to hear what the rails wanted to tell him.

Jürgen turned his attention back to the man who had asked him the question about being Transportation Police. “No,” he replied. “Not one of them.”
The man nodded. Distrustful, he gave Jürgen a sideways glance and shuffled away from him, grabbing a glossy red pole for support as the train rocked back and forth. The rails emitted sounds beneath their collective feet that continued to pierce Jürgen’s ears. The distrustful man had been one of many, but it was still a gesture that Jürgen could not get used to. He tried not to think about it and instead stood with his feet and shoulders evenly spread. He leaned in the opposite direction that the train took its sharp turn; the train picked up speed in the approach to Queensway which was announced again by the soft voice.

However, Jürgen no longer registered this in the part of his mind that was focused on what he was actually hearing: screeching, squealing, scraping, and the grinding of wheels on an ill-maintained track. Again, he wrote on his pad: *Rail tightening*.

Jürgen had almost immediately moved to London after he left his work in Lisbon. The Deutsche Bahn had been offered a great deal of money from the Underground for the new specialist services and Jürgen’s talents were required. Of course he never saw more than a small fraction of what the Deutsche Bahn was offered, but Jürgen wasn’t doing the work for the money, he was doing it for the love of the trains.

Paulo had also shared his passion for underground metros and Jürgen knew it was for that reason the two of them had become fast friends. Although he remembered Lisbon so fondly, it pained him to think that the lost friendship was so far behind. Jürgen had sent many letters to Paulo’s home after he left, but not one of them had ever been answered. He tried to email, but the address had been lost somewhere and even when he tried to contact Deutsche Bahn to retrieve it, there had been no response. Because of this disconnection, Jürgen sometimes felt that Lisbon hadn’t actually happened in the first
place, but he always reassured himself that they did. He had proof in his collection of notebooks.

But he couldn’t let his memories be a distraction. The new Bombardier stock was launching soon and the trains needed to be updated to meet the capacity needs. They were to look newer, sleeker, and run quieter than any other trains Jürgen had seen. Stations like Shepherd’s Bush were undergoing a complete overhaul that would transform them from the cavernous, eerie holes they were in order to receive such pristine rolling stock.

Although the Central line had been the least of his worries, he ached knowing that the Victoria line—the first to showcase the new trains—was just as, if not more unprepared. He had been arguing with his superiors for years about the state of the rails and the work needed to make the kind of improvements they wanted. Despite his best efforts and all the glad-handing and empty nods of agreement, Jürgen still wasn’t being heard.

As the train car continued to violently sway back and forth, the lights flickered on and off. In his notebook he began to jot things down: shocks need calibrating, wiring is bad. Faulty wiring in the car could become a potential fire hazard and then where would they be? Rats were typically the culprit. They liked to chew at the wires and everything else. Jürgen cringed, knowing that the black soot was more than dirty metal from the ground-down rails and lubricant from the gears. The soot was rat shit, too.

He pulled a fresh tissue from his pocket and removed his glasses to dab away the tears that had formed in the corners of his eyes. They watered when he strained to listen to the rails too hard and suddenly he imagined the rats underneath the cars, their little bodies crushed on the rails, tails cut short, or simply scurrying away for their lives. Rats
were a nuisance of course, but their predicament saddened him. Just when he thought he might vomit at the violent images of eviscerated and dying rats, Jürgen took a deep breath and consulted his reflection in the plastic window.

Still and standing alone, he was the spitting image of his father. Jürgen was impossibly thin and at least a head over everyone in the car. His blond hair was thinning early, it was neatly trimmed, and the rigid features of his long face were striking. His mother often reminded him how much he looked like his father. He lamented that he knew so little of the man and that which he did know, saddened him all the more.

After one last look into his reflection he quickly closed his eyes. The train slowed and the nerve-wracking noise was amplified by the suicide pit beneath the rails. Nothing bothered him more than those pits. Not only did he argue that they were highly unstable and unable to bear the weight of high railway traffic, but he couldn’t understand why someone would jump in front of a train and potentially ruin the punctuality of the timetable as well as the undercarriage of the cars. Although the human body was quite frail, splintered bones would lodge themselves underneath wheels causing derailment and pulpy flesh could gum up gears, sometimes catching fire if they touched the live currents that ran through the rails.

When he first found out about the suicide pits, Jürgen discovered that more than one hundred suicides occurred in the Underground each year. At the time, he didn’t believe it, but when he first saw the carnage of a suicide in Victoria station in the first month of his London arrival, he knew why his complaints fell on deaf ears.

The train stopped and the loudspeaker crackled. This time, a man’s voice, lazy and nasal made an announcement.
“Ladies and gentlemen, please keep all of your personal items with you at all times and please report any suspicious activity to the Transportation Police. This is a railway monitored by CCTV for your safety and security.”

The train took off again after an exchange of the morning crowd and Jürgen prepared to get off at the next stop. The voice continued: *This is a Central line service to Ealing Broadway.* Everything went quiet for a few minutes—the car on the tracks, the commuters—and Jürgen took a deep breath. The train glided over tracks that had been newly laid. No one ever understood his obsession with the calm atmosphere that followed a well-maintained track. Except Paulo, perhaps, and maybe even long ago, it might have been something his father understood, too.

When the new installments worked and everything ran smoothly, Jürgen was reminded of Berlin. Although home had drastically transformed since his childhood, what Berlin had become was a beautiful network of Metro design. The U-Bahn was a symphony of sorts, carrying commuters all over the city. *Einsteigen, aussteigen.* He longed to be there once again, and Lisbon, too.

Unlike Berlin, Lisbon’s underground network had been incredibly simplistic and although it looked run down, it had been brilliant. The Lisboa Metro only had four lines and it wasn’t hard to get almost anywhere you wanted to go. Jürgen thought that even now, Paulo must have taken the work they did even further. He thought he might return there soon, and if Paulo was nowhere to be found, he could find his long lost friend in the beauty of the rails.

Instead, the London Underground was a system of broken and muddled confusion; the Central line screeched like an ungodly creature from hell; the Victoria line
had a strange hum that radiated from some unknown location; other lines had issues that surpassed even the previous.

Jürgen’s stop was announced by the woman with the soft voice: *Holland Park* and he stepped up to the doors. When the train slowed, stopped, and the doors opened, she reminded him: *to please mind the gap*. Several people hurried past, casting him annoyed backwards glances. Jürgen did his best to ignore them, pulled out his pad, noted the time his ride had ended, and strode towards the exit. The walls of Holland Park station greeted him with advertisements for mobile phones and night shows in the West End.

Not even an effort to beautify the stations had been made, which was also something Lisbon had in its favor. Jürgen remembered the stop, *Marquês de Pombal* on the blue line. There had been a statue between the two rail lines of the station that was entirely made from wine corks. The *Pombal* had been some sort of famous political figure, that detail Jürgen could not remember, but he liked how it looked and thought it was very amusing and creative, something the Underground lacked. Even in the remodels, the bland décor of London’s yellowing tiles that they called the *classic* look remained, punctuated more often than not with their equally famous CCTV cameras.

The cameras were always watching. Even as he sat at the Victoria station with his face still in his hands, trying to remember all the events of his day, he could feel eyes watching him, following his outline and anticipating even the smallest shifts of his body. Feeling the watching eyes of others was something he knew well from his childhood.

Except, London had not been as secretive about their surveillance as East Berlin had tried to be. There was an abundance of cameras placed throughout the tunnels and even the ones in the city above were excessive, almost to the point of being ridiculous.
Jürgen was not sure if everyone was used to it, or just did not care to say anything. Was knowing that the eyes were on you better than not? *Nein*, Jürgen thought, *es war schlechter sein.* There was something more than electric eyes, though. Jürgen could feel it upon him, out in the open like they sometimes did when he was young.

The woman was still there staring at him and inching closer. Jürgen was too busy searching his mind for the time he had lost that he still didn’t see her, but he could feel her eyes. The fine hairs on his neck stood up and he twitched. He had felt the same way in his childhood after his father died. When the tenants of the building watched him from their cracked doorways and their dark corners, he could feel them stare when he passed. Jürgen could hear them whisper about how his father had been found, what he looked like, and what they thought of Jürgen, now the fatherless boy. Having that feeling again filled him with a great sense of dread.

When he was nine, his father was discovered hanging from a length of electric cord in the stairwell of their apartment complex. Jürgen had been at school that day and only heard what happened months later from tenants who had whispered the rumors in those dark corners. Throughout his adulthood, Jürgen imagined over and over what it had been like to see his father swinging in the stairwell. What *had* occurred was that one of the tenants on the fifth floor had found Jürgen’s father after investigating a strange smell. In Jürgen’s mind, he had imagined that his father looked peaceful, having finally escaped the pressure of the East Berlin eyes as Jürgen imagined they all would. But that was the untruth Jürgen had convinced himself of. Eventually, he could not picture the peace he had hoped for his father any longer. What did remain in his memory was the smell that lingered in the stairwell for weeks afterwards and the descriptions of his father’s bloated
face turned at an impossible angle. His father’s bowels had leaked out, too, pooling far beneath him on the floor where one of his shoes had fallen when he jumped. Each time Jürgen envisioned this, he felt sweaty and sick.

His father’s death was so sudden Jürgen felt that it almost negated his father’s existence entirely. The days were gone when they had their walks along the shipping tracks, steering immediately from the barbed wire that segregated edge of the city from the West to find something a little more pleasant like fruit-flavored hard candy or chewing gum. One day, they would have been able to walk beyond the barbed wire and through Potsdamer Platz to an art museum or to the Dom cathedral so they could climb to its top and look out over all of Berlin. After, they could have gone down to one of the markets to buy golden bags of Gummibärchen to eat them while dipping their feet in the Spree. His father would have encouraged him to stay in Berlin. Maybe his father would have held him back? But none of that happened because his father died before the Wall fell.

By late afternoon, Jürgen was dodging sidewalk traffic as he made his way towards the entrance to Shepherd’s Bush station. The entrance was guarded by the Transportation Police while it was closed for the renovation. He had spent part of the previous day setting crews up to pack down the track ballast. A meticulous job, but important to balance the ties and the rails just right. Good ballast kept the tracks balanced and unkempt ballast caused accidents, Jürgen thought.

All of the Transportation Policemen looked Jürgen’s way when he lifted his hand to wave, but they did not let him pass. One man, who had a sharp nose and broad shoulders, put his arm out and pushed Jürgen back.
“Where do you think you’re goin’?”

Two other sets of hands grabbed hold of Jürgen’s shoulders and held him firmly. Without panicking, Jürgen pointed towards his badge.

“Go on then,” the officer grunted as if he were greatly offended that he had to let Jürgen through. As Jürgen moved forward, straightened his jacket out and tucked his badge into his pocket, he heard the group of men bellow out hearty laughs from behind him. The echoes followed him down the staircase and above his head; six of the new CCTV cameras watched him, their red lights proudly blaring in the half-lit corridor.

Below him, the sound of a tile saw whirred and two men were having a conversation all in shouts. Once Jürgen came into view, the two men quieted and motioned for him to come over, their expressions attempting to hide unpleasant reactions to his presence.

Henry Dowdell, a rather rotund man with a wide red face, small eyes, and who always seemed very sweaty, tapped the guy running the tile saw on the shoulder. The man stopped, nodded, and wandered off to complete some other task that created less noise.

"How are you today, Fetter?" Waddling over with his clipboard in hand, Mr. Dowdell gave Jürgen a knock on the shoulder, although Jürgen felt it was unwelcome.

Even after working with him for a few years, Jürgen did not know what to think of the man. Dowdell had been nothing like Paulo. He was unkind, brutish, and Jürgen was sure that he was one of the men who had been calling him offensive names behind his back. Recently, Dowdell had been promoted to Railway Construction Supervisor, and though it was not a position unearned, Jürgen noticed it was a position Dowdell
frequently abused as he sought to control those below and above his own title. To further his authoritative conquest, Dowdell had many friends within the Underground network who heeded his every word.

For example, two of the Transportation Policemen at the top of the stairs knew Dowdell quite well. Although it was none of his business, Jürgen disliked it when these men, Dowdell and his cronies, conferred in the dark corners of stairwells or behind closed office doors. Dowdell had tried, to some extent demand that Jürgen's job fall to his authority, but to his disappointment, Jürgen was specialized enough to answer only to very few in London and those few were in positions that Dowdell was far too unqualified to obtain. Jürgen also knew that as soon as he turned his back on the man, Dowdell would lament: *Why am I not in charge of that German wank?*

Jürgen didn’t care much that he wasn’t well liked; all he really cared about was his work.

"Have they finished laying the track?" he asked, uninterested in opening any lengthy conversation.

Dowdell shrugged his heavy shoulders, "Finished yesterday after you left and we re-tapped the ballast, just as you asked."

Jürgen hopped down into the recess where the new tracks and fresh ballast gleamed. Chunky and a brilliant white, the gravel crunched beneath his feet as he took long strides between the new sets of rail. He could walk easily between them as the station stop came without a suicide pit. Jürgen stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. *Keine angst.* The air is clean down here, he thought.
Although it was a bit humid, he held the air in his lungs for an abnormal length of time and then let it out in one long exhale. This was the way the stations should feel, he thought, all that was missing was the warm hum of electricity through the tracks.

Jürgen was pleased with himself. The new station had come together because of his doing. It will all be perfect, he thought. Alles richtig, alles gut. Everyone would be pleased with its functionality, he imagined. They would marvel in its design and feel a part of something greater. When he opened his eyes, Jürgen climbed back up onto the platform and nodded towards the radio clipped to Dowdell's belt.

"Go ahead and call in. I believe we are ready for the electrical test."

Dowdell called in, “Clear for testing,” and a voice Jürgen knew well crackled through.

"Is anyone standing on die tracks?"

Dowdell handed the radio to Jürgen who, as if putting on a comfortable shoe, spoke clearly and effortlessly in his native tongue.

"Hallo hier ist Jürgen, wie geht's bei dir?"

"Alles geht mir gut. Sind die Gleise klar?"

Jürgen took one last look up and down the tracks. The man on the other end of the radio, somewhere with all the fuse boxes that switched on the main power to the segment of rails they were about to test, was the only other German Jürgen had met in London. Not that he actively sought out other Germans, but it just so happened that Kurt Lorenz was a twenty-something from Freiburg and had recently moved to London with his mother and father. Jürgen didn’t know much more than that about him, but he could not ignore that it sometimes felt good to hear familiar words on the other end of the radio.
"Ja, alles klar," Jürgen said.

"Daaanke sehr. Klar zum elektrischer Strom heir andrehen."

Before Jürgen answered to give the go, he looked at Dowdell who had his arms crossed and was shifting his eyes back and forth as if he were worried something was about to jump on him from behind.

"Drehen Sie dem Strom an."

What Jürgen expected to hear was a gradual hum. Instead, it was as if the ground had erupted. As soon as he let go of the button on the radio, a series of loud pops and cracks filled the air and a blast of wild electricity jumped across the tracks, searching for somewhere to go. Somewhere, something sizzled and Dowdell yelled, waving his arms wildly about. Jürgen calmly pushed the button on the radio, the smell of ozone reached his nose.

"Alles ab. Geht's nichts."

The current that had surged from the tracks below ceased. Dowdell wiped his large forehead, which was sweating more than usual, with the back of his hand.

"What the bloody hell was that?" He muttered breathlessly. "So much for your four rail system."

Jürgen did not acknowledge his jab, but instead jumped back into the tracks and clicked the radio again. The four rail system, which was designed to feed electricity more efficiently, was perfect.

"Danke Kurt," he said into the radio.

"Bitte Jürgen."
He squatted in the ballast and tried to get a look at what might have caused the problem. That was when a smell, other than the ozone of free electricity, hit his nose.

No, this was wrong, it had gone all wrong, Jürgen thought.

"One of the ceramics is cracked. Have it replaced and the ballast re-tapped," said Jürgen, trying to hide the anger he felt boiling up from his guts.

Dowdell scratched his head and looked very confused. He inched towards the edge of the platform and stared down where Jürgen squatted, trying to see what he was talking about.

"There is also a rat," Jürgen said, bending down.

Smoking slightly, jammed underneath and burnt into a ceramic bell that housed the wire connections, was the remnants of a rat. Touching the track was dangerous, but Jürgen felt compelled by the misfortune of the small creature to pull it out from where it met its end. He fished out one of the tissues in his pocket and picked the small thing up.

“Bloody rats,” Dowdell said, mopping his dripping brow again. “Can’t have anything nice down here without them scuttling around, spreading disease.”

The rat was not young, Jürgen noted. Little hands were curled up to its chest as if it were cuddling up to sleep; the tail was limp. He wrapped it up, still warm, and then he placed it carefully in his pocket, almost certain that it was not his rail system, but the incompetence of others that caused the rat’s death. With the dead rat in his pocket, he hopped back up onto the platform and dusted off his pants.

Dowdell cringed and moved away from him.
“Fix this,” Jürgen said. No further words were needed. Both men looked infuriated at one another and as Jürgen left, he could hear Dowdell cursing behind him, yelling for the two men who had been manning the tile saw.

Jürgen returned to the place he came in. As he began to surface, he removed his badge from the front of his jacket and placed it in his pocket, but then his eyes drifted too far up and made contact with one of the many CCTV cameras that hovered above his head. Eyes watched him from somewhere far away: For safety and security. He knew that feeling all too well. It was that feeling he had when he walked into the apartment complex after his father had died and it was the same feeling that came over him every time he went out into the crumbling streets of his neighborhood.

Before he reached the top of the steps, he had to pause and catch his breath. His stomach lurched forward and an acidic tang rose in the back of his throat. Jürgen tried to imagine that he was back in Lisbon and on his way to meet Paulo for an early dinner and some beers, or meet in Belém for some of their famous custard pastries. After having their fill of the Pasties de Belém they could walk to the monastery there and watch the tourists until the sun dipped down towards the sea. He tried to image the scenario, but he failed. Now the memory did not feel true.

Alles hat falsch geworden.

The smell of the burnt rat had returned to his nose, his mind reliving and engraving the smell into memory as one of those things that he would never forget. Now a new memory was squirreled away to the same place his father’s body swung back and forth. Even if his memory about his father hadn’t been something he truly experienced, it existed all the same.
After that, all the time was gone and he woke—now what felt for a second time—with his face in his hands at Victoria station.

Could he have pushed through the officers and out into the concrete and cobblestone? Perhaps the noise from the auto traffic had been too much, had given him a headache and he blinked out for a few hours. He tried to come up with possibilities, but Jürgen could only come to the conclusion that he had indeed lost time just as he did once before.

Jürgen had lived in the same apartment complex on the edge of Prenzlauer Berg for most of his young life, only moving after the Wall came down many years after his father had died. He moved with his mother back to her birthplace in Hesse after they had a considerable amount given to them in reparations. From there, he attended the University of Bonn, and began his work in railway engineering. Trains had been his passion since he was a small boy.

His life had been far from what his father imagined for him. At least that’s what Jürgen’s mother told him in regards to their financial struggles and when they finally moved away from Berlin. All Jürgen could remember about the man was how quiet, precise, and reserved he was. In Jürgen’s mind there was this stoic man, watching silently in the corner of the room, making notes and nodding when appropriate. The only other thing he could remember, other than his father’s peculiar demeanor, was watching the city trains come and go during their evening walks. But even so, his father had remained careful and quiet. Jürgen had become that man, a vision of his father, but not—according to his mother—what his father had wanted. According to her, his father just wanted Jürgen to be happy.
After Jürgen moved on from his education and began to work for the Deutsche Bahn, his mother sat him down and told him the truth of his father’s death. Much wasn’t explained when he was very young, and so he had put things together in his own mind:

*My father has been murdered. He tried to escape over the Wall. He tried to make our lives better. They wanted to make him look weak. He did not kill himself.* But that was not the case. To his own disappointment, his father had given in to weakness even before he died.

His mother confirmed that his father had killed himself, but that it was out of disgust for things he had done. For several years his father had exchanged information of individuals to the *Stasi* for extra money. His father was told that it was his duty. They said: *For safety and security.* The pay wasn’t much, his mother said, and they hardly paid on time—eventually refusing to pay at all. She said that in his father’s mind, the work he did had been for greater good of the family. Eventually, the responsibility had been too much and the information that his father passed along had resulted in a young man, who was hardly eighteen, getting seriously wounded. At least, Jürgen thought, his father had some small amount of dignity. When his mother finally told him, Jürgen lost time and had woken hours later deep in the woods by their new home, unsure of where he had been.

Remembering this at the Victoria station, he wanted to stand up from the bench, still cold underneath him, but he could not move. He was afraid.

Jürgen hated the idea of his father participating in the system he thought had murdered him. Though it wasn’t from the truth, it wasn’t the truth Jürgen wanted. His father continued to swing in his dreams, his smell lurked around every corner and his
cold, hard eyes looked back at him in the mirror. He tried to tell himself that his father did the noble thing—a life for a life—but there was nothing noble about spying on the community that supported you for a few extra Marks. His father was weak and it made Jürgen determined not to follow in those footsteps no matter how much he had become his ghost.

He did not rise from his seat, but instead he wiped his face and looked to the empty station. The woman, who had been standing there for so long, waiting for him, met his eyes. Her face was tight, lips pursed and posture frightened.

Time returned and he remembered seeing her before he sat down.

Jürgen had been standing on the Victoria platform waiting for the train. Fumbling, he had pulled his notepad from his front pocket and flipped through the pages. They were filled with numbers: *36 in Kensington; 40 durch Piccadilly Circus; zwanzig; 32; 17; 2 im WC.* Jürgen looked up. Four cameras watched him from each corner and six were positioned above the platform. There were twenty-seven down the longest escalator, he knew already. Jürgen had been riding the Tube for hours counting cameras and had arrived, very late, at Victoria station. He was alone except for the young woman standing with him there. He looked over to her: *Sie sieht uns jetzt.* He wanted to tell her not to move, just to pretend everything was okay while someone else watched them from a dark room full of monitors, watching their every move.

She had to be in her twenties, he figured. Her hair was long and dark brown, framing her slender and tan face. He thought she looked very plain, her clothes were dark colors: a purple shirt and straight-legged blue denim. But her shoes were red. Dark red
canvas shoes with rubber trim that was a dirty white. Jürgen noticed through holes that had worn through her shoes, that her socks were not matching colors.

When she glanced at him he looked away. He did not mean to be rude by staring at her shoes that he found to be quite peculiar. Instead, he stuffed his notepad back into his pocket and focused his eyes down into the pit of the tracks. They were filthy; the ballast was covered in the fine black powder that pervaded everywhere. Shepherd’s Bush was as close as he would get to a level of pristine work, but even then, it had still been soiled.

Dowdell had been incompetent, lazy, and so power hungry that it had blinded him to mistakes. Jürgen was sure that Dowdell had been rushing to complete the job instead of completing it correctly. Then Jürgen realized it could have been himself, not the rat that was killed on the tracks. Jürgen swallowed hard and carefully placed his palm on the bulge of the dead rat in his pocket as his fingers trembled at the thought of what could have happened instead.

His eyes drifted back to the platform and he realized he was standing quite close to its edge. The Victoria line would come soon, he knew, but not before the Jubilee line whipped through. Or maybe it had already? No, that was the Circle line, he thought. It was his morning ride passing back through headed towards Westminster. Jubilee would pass close to the platform and the rush of hot air would be stronger. The air would kick the black powder of rat shit, ground metal, and oil up, and then he and the woman would breathe it deep into their lungs.

Jürgen had looked over at the young woman and she was also standing very close. She was so close that the toes of her shoes were hanging off the edge. The woman was
staring down into the suicide pit below, but her focus seemed further off than that. The light of the train could be seen coming down the tunnel and he watched the woman close her eyes. She took a deep breath and held it. Jürgen knew he had to do something; there was no time to see if she was planning to jump.

He had lurched towards her just before the train passed, wrapped his arms around her shoulders and they both went down together. The Jubilee line screamed through at top speed and the rails shrieked, drowning out the woman’s scream. Jürgen’s jacket had twisted in his sudden movement and the rat in his pocket became pinned between their bodies. He had rolled to his left before they both hit the cement hard enough that it knocked his glasses off his face. His arm had cushioned her shoulder, but the force had certainly bruised their elbows if not broken them. For a second, he held her there on the ground and he could feel her whole body shaking.

Eventually he let her go and they both rolled over. A dark cloud of soot swept up over them as the train disappeared down the tunnel and Jürgen sucked in air despite his best efforts not to breathe it into his lungs.

Trembling, the young woman pulled herself to her knees, threw her hair back up out of her face and pierced him with her bright and wild green eyes. Lying on his back, he stared up at her both silent and breathless. Then she took off down the corridor and the rubber soles of her red shoes slapped across the concrete. He yelled after her.

“Nein! Warten!”

Jürgen did not know that his mobile had slid from his pocket and been crushed beneath the train; the pieces had already slipped through the ballast and one portion rested at the bottom of the suicide pit. His work badge was also there. He dusted off his
khakis and dragged himself to the nearest bench where he removed his glasses and began to cry.

I want to go home, he thought. Bitte.

The young woman’s red shoes had triggered the memory that only been lost briefly. During his struggle to recall the lost time, she had returned, watched him, and like a mouse apprehensively approaching a free crumb of food, drew nearer until he finally saw her. The woman sat down beside him and took his trembling hand.

“I’m sorry I ran,” she said. Jürgen tried to tell her that it was okay, but instead his throat just made hoarse cracking noises. “I had to come back to say, danke,” she told him, smiling as she did. Then the woman slowly let go of his hand, rose, and disappeared towards the station exit.

The entirety of his body felt as if it were about to collapse and he rested the back of his head against the wall. Not too long after the woman walked away, two Transportation Policemen appeared from the station entrance further down the platform. Jürgen recognized them at once as the two men from Shepherd’s Bush. Although his limbs protested, he rose to greet them, lifting his hand his pocket to find his badge, just as he always had before.

What Jürgen didn’t know was that his badge was gone and beyond saving. He turned away from the two men while simultaneously patting his pockets and searching the ground for where his badge might have gone off to. But by the time he realized that it might be elsewhere in the station, he felt a bright pain and a searing white light flashed across his eyes. Jürgen was on the ground again and he felt his head growing hot.
“Fucking foreigner scum,” he heard over a ping that began to grow in his ears; his breath was being knocked from him. A sharp pain rang through his body.

“Kraut prick.”

His groin muscles clenched as he was struck there; he smelled the rubber of a boot when he was struck again in the face.

“Get back to yer own fuckin’ country.”

Off down the tunnel of Victoria station, Jürgen watched the light of the Victoria line finally come and then go. The train was supposed to stop, but it didn’t, and still, the arriving announcements began and the overhead boards with green lights blinked back from their error message as if nothing happened. The renowned man’s voice of Victoria station announced: *Mind the gap, over and over.* But for Jürgen, it was far, far away.

He felt the blood running down from his nose to under the side of his head. When the pooling blood reached his ear it created a whooshing sound as if he had just held a large conch shell up close so he could hear the ocean. He wanted to speak: *Bitte nichts.* He wanted to ask why, but he didn’t want to know the answer. Everything had already gone too wrong. He wanted to go back to Lisbon and find Paulo so that they could continue being friends and he also wanted to go home.

As his vision went black and the pain took hold of his body, he thought again and again: *Please don’t let me die. Please, don’t let me die. Bitte, bitte.*
Vergiss Uns Nicht

Paulo Rios could not remember the name of his German friend. And when he entered the complex on Kurfürstendamm Straße in Berlin, he felt as if time was somehow different. Not that it was any faster or slower, but as he ascended on the stairs towards the third floor, with each of his large luggage cases in tow as well as a third bag slung over his shoulder, his years seemed to have caught up with him.

Ten years had passed since he had worked with an Underground Railway Specialist from Berlin’s Deutsche Bahn office. The man had been very young, in his mid-twenties, but his angular face and piercing blue eyes had the ragged look of experience. Paulo remembered their many conversations from long ago, but during his flight and his reminiscing of their time together in Portugal, he could not remember his name.

Lisbon was far behind him now. Christmastime and the New Year had already passed and Paulo knew spring would soon be around the corner. The taxi ride from the airport to his new apartment complex had taken him through the Berlin streets and many of the gutters, he saw, still had dirty melting snow in them. Spring would come soon, he hoped.

All time weighed down on his shoulders when he stood before the door of his new apartment and fished for a key in his jacket pocket. After he opened the door and crossed the threshold in a belabored manner—both luggage cases were too big to be rolled in together and his shoulder bag had finally become too heavy for him to bear any longer—the years remained. In the dark, he shed his suit coat first in an attempt to remove the sudden awareness of his age, followed by his sweater; the climb had left him out of
breath and sweaty despite the bitter Berlin winter outside. When he finally caught his breath from the short climb, he clicked on the light and shut the door.

Paulo was not actually that old. In his mind, however, he still felt that he was in his early forties and oblivious to the signs that certain life-altering events were about to take place. The event was six years ago when his wife, Lídia, told him she wanted a divorce. At the time he didn’t understand why. Paulo had loved her very much, he still did, but as the years slipped by unnoticed, he had begun to realize how their relationship had gone wrong.

One day, Lídia had sat across from him at their favorite café near their home in the Alfama district of Lisbon and with her long, slender fingers folded on top of the faded yellow table cloth, said to him, “Eu te amo mais.” He still remembered how beautiful the weather was and how good his coffee and milk tasted as he had watched his wife, perhaps she had been somewhat withdrawn that day, stir two sugar packets into her espresso. She never took her coffee with milk; she said it dulled the texture. Most of the time they were out and about together in the city, she had preferred they find one of the many places that made Turkish coffee. She had gone to Istanbul when she was in college and had enjoyed it there so much that she pursued a cup whenever she was able. She told her husband that she liked the texture and the way the grittiness remained on her tongue for some time after. Milk filled in the gaps between each of the small granules of coffee, she told him. But he had never expected her to tell him that she did not love him any longer.

After a few moments gazing around his new Berlin apartment, Paulo shivered and put his green sweater back on. The front door he had entered through sat between the
kitchen on the left, which had a breakfast bar partition separating it from the entrance way, and small dining area on the right. Most of the apartment was open space, the dining room opened up into the living room which was already furnished with a dark blue sofa facing a dark laminate stand meant for a television. Between sat a matching coffee table. The table was not large, nor was it very tall, but Paulo thought it was the right height to work at his computer if he decided to sit on the floor. Probably not, he thought, he was too old to be sitting on the floor.

The far wall of the living room was a large window that had the curtains drawn. Early afternoon light crept in at the edges and Paulo pulled the curtains aside to look out at his view. Just as he had seen it from the airplane before he landed at Berlin Tegel, the city sprawled before him. He remembered his German friend telling him that unlike Lisbon, his home of Berlin was flat. The forgotten man had told him, “When you get to its tallest point, you can see almost all the streets and parks. Everything feels so close there; I hope you see it one day.”

Although Paulo was not at the tallest point, he could see a great distance beyond the buildings surrounding Kurfürstendamm. Golden light reflected off a needle-like structure that looked as if it pierced a great silver globe. It was a building he recalled seeing in photographs, but he was not sure what it was called. Beside the needle structure was a wide cathedral with huge green dome roofs. The building did look close, he thought, and he imagined that he could walk there someday, but it might take him an hour or more. More than a few minutes passed as he looked out at his view of the city before he returned to his luggage and wheeled it into his new bedroom.
The bedroom was also furnished, but somewhat Spartan. There was a queen-size bed with blankets and sheets already provided in their packaging on the mattress. Beside the bed closest to the door of the bathroom sat a night table with a single lamp. Along the far wall was also a window, the same far wall of the living room. When he opened the curtains there too, the view was much of the same. Across from the foot of the bed was a tall chest of drawers that also matched the rest of the simple dark laminate furniture.

Lídia had taken most of the furniture they had when they split up. Paulo had never bothered to replace what was lost; he let it go to her willfully and hoped that her having something they had owned together might have reminded her of the fonder times they had early in their marriage.

They had met in a Fado club in the Alfama. Lídia had asked him to dance for a particularly slow song. She was much taller than he was and at the time he thought they must have looked very odd together. Lídia was a tall woman with a strong jaw, bony shoulders, and long, slender fingers. That night they danced and drank wine before she invited him to her apartment. Paulo had only been listening to the Fado that night because the girl who was singing was his friend’s sister and he wanted to go out for beers with their group of friends afterwards.

But instead of going up the hill by the club to drink beer out on the overlook near the church, he left with Lídia and they drank more wine at her apartment. She had a piano, he learned, and she could play very well. The morning hours had begun when he sat with his head resting against the wall next to the piano and listened to her play. He had watched her long fingers flutter across the pale keys and felt the vibrations go from the piano hammers hitting the treble strings, down into the floor, up the wall, through his
head, and reverberated throughout his entire body. She thought he was funny when he watched her, and he thought she was beautiful.

Not long after they met they were married, which Paulo should have thought was a mistake at the time. Neither of them knew it had been the wrong thing to do and it wasn’t because they had married too young, but only that they had been too in love with one another to see that they were an incorrect match.

The year following their divorce, Paulo had wondered how long his wife had not loved him and thought it might have been much longer than he wanted to admit. Looking back, Paulo thought it might have been that he was too preoccupied with the people who were coming and going from his life, rather than the one who stayed.

In his apartment he rolled his luggage to the side of his bed and began to unpack. He unzipped his cases and filled the drawers with his folded clothes, making sure that there were no creases in his work pants and shirts. Paulo was not supposed to report in to Deutsche Bahn until Monday and it was only Friday, so he had the weekend to do any laundry or ironing needed.

The new job that moved him to Berlin was similar to the job that the forgotten German had in Lisbon so long ago. Except, the Deutsche Bahn had offered him the position of Senior Railway Specialist Engineer and he would be given the opportunity to stay for as long as he wanted. The job itself was relatively easy, Paulo had been doing it with the same caliber as his German friend had in the Lisboa Metro. Since the man’s short stay, Paulo took what he learned and applied it to his daily routes on the four metro lines.
The man’s talent had been a bizarre one. When they first rode *Linha Verde*, the green line from *Baixa-Chiado* to *Alameda*, the man had scribbled some notes down in a small green notebook and showed Paulo. On the page were the words, *unbalanced and grease*. The man told Paulo that he could feel the tracks wobble underneath as they passed through the tunnel, and that the small screeching noises told him that they needed to be smoothed out with grease. “If you listen closely, the tracks will tell you,” the man had said. Paulo didn’t quite understand what it meant at the time, but after the two men had spent much time together riding throughout the city, Paulo eventually understood.

After the forgotten German’s sudden departure from Lisbon, Paulo began to listen to the tracks when he rode. It was when he finally heard the screeches, felt the unusual rocking of the railcars through the underground tunnels, that he realized how unique the gift had been. From then on, he worked closely with his other Rail Engineers to teach them how to listen. Paulo had only wished he could have done the same with Lídia.

When he finished unpacking his clothes and toiletries, he zipped up his large luggage cases and placed them in the small closet. Then, he situated his things in the bathroom by placing his toothbrush just beside the sink and his soaps in the shower that was encased with glass. There was a tub, too, and Paulo toyed with the idea of having a warm bath since the apartment was noticeably cold.

In the bedroom he thought he might instead curl up on the bed with the new fluffy grey blanket that was folded upon it. He was very tired from the flight and didn’t think he could stand for much longer. Instead he sat on the bed and took off his shoes, but then realized his shoulder bag was still in the front room with his laptop and he got up to fetch them from the floor.
Paulo had never been on an airplane before. In fact, he had never left Portugal in his life. The opportunity to come to Berlin only came from his expertise in the Lisboa Metro. He had trained many individuals from their offices since the departure of the forgotten German and it seemed logical to him when Deutsche Bahn presented their proposition. Of course he took the opportunity, the pay was going to be good, and they had promised to arrange the apartment as well as all of his moving expenses.

Although, Berlin was not his first choice when he imagined travel outside of his home country. He considered seeing highlights of Europe, like Naples or Paris, and maybe even going to Barcelona, the place where his grandparents claimed their ancestors were from. Paulo thought that someday he might trace his family back to some grand Spanish cemetery and he would see the family name, Rios, marked upon the headstones. It would be in that place that he would discover something about his life he had not known before, but he doubted such a place existed.

Lídia had always wanted them to travel abroad and Paulo thought that the fact they hadn’t gone out on a trip together—other than to the south to see her mother, or up to Porto for a holiday or anniversary—might have been the reason she drifted so far away from him. Nevertheless, Paulo had come to Berlin. His new employer had arranged for what belongings he could not pack in his two suitcases to come a few days later by freight. Paulo didn’t have much more than his clothing, a few favorite lamps, a nice leather chair, and some of the old knickknacks his mother and father had passed on to him. His ex-wife had never been the kind of person to collect many things; she really only took the furniture, the record player, the art, the ornate wine rack that she convinced him to purchase, and of course, her piano.
Paulo picked up his shoulder bag and padded over to the sofa. His feet felt good just in his socks after the long walk through both airports and the trek up the stairs. He was one step closer to making it his new home, he thought, and sat down on the sofa with his bag. But, before he could pull out his laptop so that he might check his email, there was a knock at the door. In the shuffle he did back across the room in his socks, he could feel that his toes were starting to get cold.

At the door was a young woman with medium-length dark brown hair that swooped across her face.

“Hello, how are you?”

Paulo cleared his throat to respond and he stuttered a moment because somewhere in the back of his mind he entertained the idea that the knock would be his forgotten German friend, and that the name Paulo had searched for would suddenly spring to his lips so he could speak it once again. He imagined they would spend the rest of the afternoon catching up and then, in turn, the man could show him around Berlin as Paulo once did for him in Lisbon.

“Who are you?” Paulo asked the young woman who stood in his doorway. She was wearing a short-sleeved grey shirt, dark pants, and simple flat shoes. The woman wasn’t much taller than he and she had a very slender frame. Both she and Paulo were quite petite, but she, however, had winter-like skin. The pale kind of look that told him she spent few hours outside, more than likely it was a result of the cold.

“I live in the apartment next to you,” she said. Her green eyes smiled at him. “Ich heiße Ella.” The woman held her hand out and they shook.
“I do not speak much German,” he said, “but my name is Paulo. I have just arrived today.”

The woman, Ella, nodded and said, Mmhmm. Then she ceremoniously tucked her swooping hair behind her ears.

“Then you will have noticed the heat is out,” she said.

Paulo shifted back and forth in his socks. His toes were colder now and his neck was stiff. He needed to lie down or at least sit somewhere he could get warm and relax his tired muscles.

“A bit chilly in here, yes. I was just about to see what I could do to get warm,” he said.

Ella nodded and then looked past him into his apartment, almost as if she hadn’t heard what he said. What Paulo had actually intended was to spend the next hour sitting on his sofa with his laptop where he would figure out how to connect to the internet in the apartment. In fact, he might not have noticed the heat was out at all if this woman from next door hadn’t told him even though the cold had already begun to invade his body. Paulo resigned that he would have given up and either gone out to search for a restaurant or a café to warm up in, or would have done as he pondered on earlier and wrapped himself up in the blanket on his bed.

Paulo almost told her to go away or was going to make some excuse so he could be left alone, but she looked at him again with her sharp green eyes and smiled. Something in her face told him that she only wanted someone to talk to.

“Would you like some tea?” She asked, and tilted her head slightly. Paulo nodded and before he could say yes, she was already headed for her door that was down the
hallway on his left. He left the door open for her, put his shoulder bag into the bedroom and retrieved his shoes.

When she came back into his apartment she had an armful of various tea-drinking tools and implements. There was a stainless steel kettle precariously balanced on top of the pile she cradled and she held it in place with the bottom of her chin. Ella carefully unpacked her armload in his kitchen as Paulo put his shoes back on; his feet were too cold in socks alone.

Small clinks of mugs and the metal creaking of the kettle on the stove told him the young woman knew her way around his kitchen and he guessed that their apartments were probably similar, if not altogether the same. After the kettle could be heard in a steady groan, Ella came out with three scones wrapped in plastic.

“They’re lemon,” she said, and put them down on the coffee table. She sat next to him on the sofa, leaned over the table and unwrapped one of the scones for herself.

“Thank you,” Paulo said. He felt completely unprepared to receive company, and usually he was accustomed to offering wine or coffee to his guests.

Lídia had never been one to do much entertainment in their home. Many times throughout their marriage Paulo had guests over: friends, coworkers, and estranged family members visiting Lisbon to see the sights. Almost every time, Lídia made herself scarce or feigned an illness. Even with her own family members visiting, with the exception of her mother, she had behaved in this way. Only when her mother came up from Faro or when they were alone Lídia had played her piano.

But, even her playing was a distant memory. Paulo found it difficult to picture the way she sat at the bench. Did she wear her hair down? What had she played so often?
There was a song floating around in his mind, it was something sad, he was sure of that. He did, however, remember the time she had some soft music playing while they ate dinner. The evening was in that same day his forgotten German left in such haste. Neither of the two men had wanted their friendship to end, but it seemed as if fate had been determined to take away their brief time together. Fate had even gone as far as to muddle Paulo’s memory of it all, but it was that same evening the man left that Paulo looked to his wife and said, “I do love how you can tell Mozart’s piano from all the rest. He was always sad, it seems.”

His wife had stopped eating the meal he had cooked—Paulo still could not remember what it was, maybe it was leftovers of some pork—and narrowed her eyes. “This is Schubert,” she said, and then she left the table. Paulo only responded with, “Oh, right,” and did not speak to her for the rest of the evening. He only remembered this because it was the day her piano playing—all music in their home—had come to an end.

The kettle whistled in the kitchen and Ella jumped up with her half eaten scone in her hand. Mugs clinked again and shortly after, she returned, her scone now gone. The mugs were dark blue, and Paulo thought they matched his couch well.

“Obrigado,” he said and took the steaming mug into his hands. Steam rose up and he held the mug close to his face. The warm smell of Earl Grey slipped up into his nostrils and he breathed in heavily.

“De nada,” she said in return.

Paulo smiled, “You speak Portuguese?”
Ella sipped at her hot tea cautiously and shook her head when she realized it was far too hot to drink. Paulo knew better and simply enjoyed the way the mug warmed his hands and how the steam hit his face.

“I lived there a long time ago. My father travelled a lot, he was a physicist. Our stay was very short, but I enjoyed Lisbon very much.”

“I am from Lisbon,” Paulo said. “A beautiful city, but sometimes difficult to live in.” He only said this because being so far from it, just being away for only a short time, he realized that even the city’s shape was difficult. All of the hills of the Alfama dug their way into the backs of your legs with their steep climbs. Paulo had told the German man that he would build strong legs walking there, and the man had not believed him until visiting his home for the first time. Paulo’s home had been at the top of a particularly steep hill, and he remembered how difficult it was for the movers to take up Lídia’s piano when they first moved in. The piano made it safely in the house, but he had spent an extra few Euros to make sure.

“I can only imagine,” Ella said. “Still, it was beautiful.”

Ella drank more of her tea even though it was so hot. Paulo took a very small sip, but it still scalded his tongue and he decided to blow on it instead.

“Your father was a physicist?”

She nodded and tucked her brown hair behind her ear again. Paulo noticed her fingers then. Her fingers were long, much like his wife’s had been, but they were not like his wife’s had been at all. Ella’s fingers looked hard and calloused on the tips. Grease was underneath her fingernails and her nails were short, as if they broke if they were to grow too long or she ritually gnawed at them.
She nodded at his question and took another scone. Only one scone was left.

“He wrote a lot. My father loved the idea of space exploration and spent his life studying ways to travel at the speed of light.”

Paulo shifted his eyes away from her fingers and drank from his tea. The liquid was still hot, but it felt good going down his throat and warmed him from within.

“Why did you come to Berlin?”

A few moments passed as he thought about her question. Paulo was not sure why he had come, exactly. Part of him had taken the job because it would be the only way to continue rising upward in his career. In Lisbon he had the highest job he could achieve other than working at the main Metro office. Paulo did not see himself stuck in an office for days on end. He thought he might put on too much weight and start eating unhealthily. Instead, Deutsche Bahn offered an opportunity to leave, to get out in the field and train others as he had learned from his forgotten German.

“I came to work,” he said. “Berlin is very different than Lisbon, not at all what I had expected.”

Actually, Paulo wasn’t sure what he had expected from Berlin.

“You will like it here,” Ella said. “My fiancée and I can show you around if you like. We can also cook dinner here this evening if you do not plan to go out.”

Paulo looked past Ella and out the window. He could not remember if he saw a ring on her hand, but he also did not want to be rude and look again. Instead he looked at the clouds outside that had gathered, darkening in the sky.

“It looks like rain,” he said, but Ella shook her head again.

“Snow,” she said. “I am sure it will snow tonight.”
They sat in silence for some time. When they both finished with their tea, Ella made more hot water and instead of Earl Grey, they had a fruity green tea that Paulo thought tasted like mango and peaches.

“Do you live with your fiancée?” Paulo asked, again trying not to be rude. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe the woman, but he did think there was something unusual about her. Although Lídia was really the only woman he had known well enough to compare to anyone else, he was sure that Ella was different from other women in a very peculiar way. He could not quite place what was missing or perhaps something had been missing, but was only just returned to her.

Paulo realized Ella looked very tired then. Faint bags could be seen beneath her eyes and she shifted in her seat as if she were sore from standing for too long. She couldn’t have been more than thirty and he felt a great sympathy for the distress she seemed to be in.

“His name is Max,” she said. “He lives nearby, but stays with me most nights. We want to move in together, but we would need more space and I don’t want to move just yet.”

“Is he German?” Paulo asked. Suddenly, he had felt very protective of Ella and wanted to know who her fiancée was. Although it was not so, he felt as if he were in a position to give approval of this man he had never met.

“Yes, he has lived in Berlin his whole life. He is from East Berlin and remembers the day the Wall fell.”

Paulo wasn’t sure why he liked this fact. Perhaps it had been because he had always wanted children with Lídia and he thought that Ella might have been the way his
own daughter would have turned out. Then again, the forgotten German had also told Paulo he was from East Berlin and had lived behind the Wall for most of his childhood. Perhaps, Paulo thought to himself, it might bring him closer to remembering the man’s name.

“You will meet him. Tonight maybe. He won’t be home for a few more hours,” she said. “Max teaches sciences at the Gymnasium—the high school nearby. He likes to cook on Fridays and I am sure he wouldn’t mind to cook for you.”

“I would like that very much,” Paulo said.

Ella’s eyes drifted away then from Paulo’s face, to her mug, and finally rested somewhere beyond the window. He did not know what she was looking out at, but he assumed it was something far beyond them both. Eventually she turned back to him and smiled.

“Would you like to go out for a walk? The snow will fall soon and I can show you a wonderful place we can buy you a few things. Whatever you need in the morning you can always borrow until you get settled in here.”

Paulo was still very tired, but he could not deny the young woman’s persistence. He saw so much of himself in her, and he, quiet and reserved, much like his German friend had been when they first met. For a moment the thought made him sad. Perhaps the man’s name had forever been lost to his memories, but his polite demeanor and gifts, he could carry on.

“That would be wonderful,” he said.

They both stood up. Ella took the mugs and put them into the sink. Then, she left to her apartment. Paulo went into his room and pulled out a heavier jacket from one of
the drawers in the dresser, took his new apartment keys out of his suit coat pocket, and
locked up. He walked down the hallway towards the staircase, thinking Ella would be
waiting for him there, but she wasn’t. He almost passed her apartment door; the door was
open and swells of hot air poured out.

At first, he thought it rude if he were to peek his head in, but the warm air felt so
good and even from the hallway he could see something very odd in her living room.
Instead of a place for a television like his apartment, there was a very large machine that
filled the entire wall. There were buttons, lights, and wires protruding from a large metal
framework. He could hear soft beeps and buzzes—melodic, even, almost as if the
machine were beeping out little notes of Mozart.

Ella returned and took Paulo by surprise. His mouth was agape with shock and he
said, “Oh, I didn’t mean to pry.”

She was bundled up in a grey wool coat and red scarf. Another scarf, this one pale
blue, was in her gloved hands. The expression she wore didn’t look upset, but slightly
embarrassed. Her apartment was very hot, he noticed, which was probably from the
machine.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I know it’s warmer in here than next door, but the
beeping tends to get on people’s nerves. My monstrosity is kind of hard to explain
anyway.”

“It’s not a monstrosity,” Paulo said. They were both silent for a few moments and
he could hear the beeps follow a melodic succession. “This is very beautiful.”

“Thank you,” Ella said, and then blushed.
She locked up her apartment after she petted her cat and told it goodbye. Paulo hadn’t even noticed the cat that had been curled up on the chair next to the door. Ella told him that her cat, Sonne, knew not to leave the apartment and that she preferred to nap most of the time anyway. They descended the staircase and Ella pulled out her mobile. She sent a text to her fiancée telling him where she would be if he was to arrive to her apartment early, and before they reached the bottom, he had already responded and asked her to pick up a baguette or two.

Outside, the air had become colder. The cold nipped at Paulo’s ears and neck. Ella handed him the powder blue scarf and he thanked her before wrapping it around his neck and tucking the ends into his jacket.

Just as Ella picked a direction, a light snow began to fall on their heads.

“Ah, see? It will be a beautiful walk,” she said.

Paulo had pulled the scarf up to his nose; it covered his mouth. Instead he said, *Mmmhmm* in agreement. Ella started off and each of her steps had a delightful spring.

It was in that moment Paulo followed Ella, seeing her stress melt from her face as the snow dusted her brown hair and flakes landed on his eyelashes that he knew he could not erase the years that had crept up on him so suddenly. But instead, he walked on with Ella and finally remembered his German friend’s name.