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Slabs

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Slabs

KEITH J. MIDGEN

As red and yellow Hop-Ons shuttle fresh tourists to faded sites, Berlin revels in the first dry day of late spring. Teenagers pose on sandbags at Checkpoint Charlie where three ersatz soldiers lounge against a grungy clapboard guardhouse watching neon graffiti escape the sooty remains of The Wall.

Slender women wearing black head-scarves steer their children's hollow hands toward the faces descending to the Kochstrasse U-Bahn platform. The orange train, packed with vacant strap-hangers glued to cell phones, empties precisely at 3:14 p.m. at the Brandenburg Tor.

Near the statue of Victoria in her thousand-year pose sits a park of concrete monoliths standing in gray files. Not one the same size, all separated by cambered alleys of dark chimney brick — looking cowed and bent like faded families wilting in line near an empty cattle car.

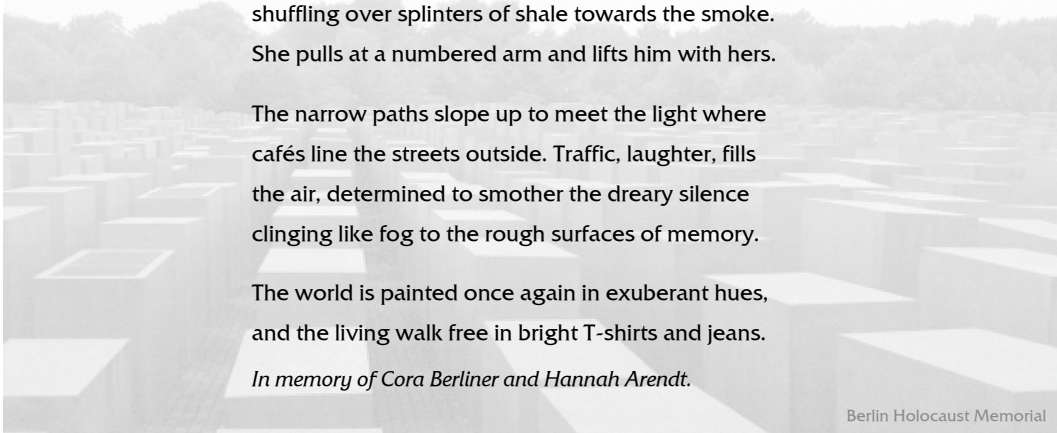
The sun dares to intrude among these somber slabs whose sides are speckled with glistening droplets, far too late for the looted souls with famished eyes. Deep into the array, the blocks crush the thin light tighter than a scrawled note in a crumpled envelope.

No echoes resound here along the muted lanes: Yet an old man slumps against a pillar, cupping his ears against the rhythmic scrape of synchronized shoes shuffling over splinters of shale towards the smoke. She pulls at a numbered arm and lifts him with hers.

The narrow paths slope up to meet the light where cafés line the streets outside. Traffic, laughter, fills the air, determined to smother the dreary silence clinging like fog to the rough surfaces of memory.

The world is painted once again in exuberant hues, and the living walk free in bright T-shirts and jeans.

In memory of Cora Berliner and Hannah Arendt.



Berlin Holocaust Memorial