

Berlin

by Ingrid Anders

Under the city of Berlin,
in a humid cellar
with walls crumbling at the corners,
in a space that was either a bank vault
or a bunker before,
I dance.

The beat thumps my eardrums and
excites my adrenal glands.

Taking a break in a lean
against a support beam,
lungs heaving,
I inhale a bouquet of sweat
and pine-scented puffs
from the smoke machine.

White flashes of strobe light reveal
a hand,
an eye,
chipped paint,
a hole,
speakers,
and cables,
climbing
the walls
of the low space
like ivy.

Shadowy faces floating in the room
are like mine but not.
My eyes zero in on the silhouette of a man,
svelte and styled;
he looks old enough to have been old enough
when the big barrier broke
to have been involved.

Who was he then?
A dissident,
filling up journals with thoughts
of freedom and philosophy,
dreaming of demonstrations that he couldn't organize,
signaling those on the other side

of the great Berlin divide,
who would smuggle him music
and news
and chocolate,
while he whispered escape plans
to confidants on his side,
who would then keep silent
when the security patrol came asking were he went?

Or was he the security patrol,
tracking enemies east of the partition,
fanning suspicion,
keeping records of the deeds and misdeeds
of suspects,
paying the loved ones and relatives of wreckers
to betray the crucial details that
would crush the revolution
before it could get out of hand?

Or was his the hand on the trigger,
of an armed guard
at the border, perhaps,
in a gray, wool, army tunic
and a dark brimmed helmet,
casting a shadow over his narrowing eyes,
peering at the refugee
through the sight
of his assault rifle?

Would he have shot,
as he was commanded to do?
Would he have decisively missed,
as he was forbidden to do?
Or would he have sent a bullet
slicing through her
like a rabbit,
as he was trained to do?

But maybe, of course, he was just a guy, living
in the minutiae of history ...
going every day to a boring job and back,
dating,
drinking,
dancing to music his parents hated?

He spies me catching this look at him

and reaches out his hand,
luring me onto the dance floor.
His sharp eyes
lock with mine.
I loosen my limbs and let them prance around my body,
with the movement of the techno pulse.

It is too loud for words in here,
and I am glad.
The language barrier moot,
at this moment,
the two of us close,
bodies and minds carried away in the electronic current,
I stretch my arms out in all directions
and feel no walls.