West Berlin, 9 November, 1989
'Tor auf! Tor auf!'
They are as young as she is, those who now scramble up the wall—an activity which just the other day would have seen them shot. Ahead, a crane raises its steel arm and comes crashing down on a section of concrete.

The Brandenburg Gate appears ghostlike through the rain beyond the wall, on the east side. The statue of Victoria, the goddess of victory in her chariot atop the monument, sits in low cloud. She is supposed to be ushering peace into the city. A gust of wind threatens the umbrellas of those who hope to hold back the weeping November sky. People coalesce, thousands of raincoats glimmering in the floodlit night.

Berlin, divided, as she's learnt, down the middle since 1961, sits uncomfortably inside the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. She tries to imagine growing up on one side of a wall which cuts off all of those in East Berlin from those in the West—mothers separated from daughters, husbands from wives, brothers from sisters.

A man bumps her from behind. A metre away, Heinemeyer struggles to make his way back to her. A growing number of people come between them, and she has a moment of panic—what if she loses him?
Everyone in the city, East and West, wants to be here, at *die Mauer*, at this moment.

A young man with a pickaxe hacks at the concrete, chipping away. '*Passt auf*!' Watch out!

'Susanna!' Heinemeyer calls.

People stack against each other like cards with no air between. She has never been in such a crowd. Her life in Australia has been defined by space and air and light. But now it's almost too hard to breathe. People crush her from behind, from in front. She tries to suck in air and her ribs don't expand. The hood of her heavy wool coat falls back, and she can't reach around to put it on again because there is no room to move. Her hair is soaked. It sticks to her scalp. Rain runs down her eyelashes into her mouth.
'*Lass mich durch*!' a woman screams. '*Ich ersticke*!'

Let me through! I'm suffocating!

Maybe it is as dangerous as it feels. Maybe she, too, is suffocating. Will she die here in front of the Berlin Wall, a twenty-year-old Jewish Australian violin student, trampled to death by a stampeding crowd? It would make some kind of sense. Her grandmother, Oma Mirla Heller, died in the Holocaust—in the Buchenwald—this month forty-five years ago. Her crime: wearing a small blue and white *Magen Dovid* pin that said *Halt Hitle*r.
Imagine dying for two words.

'Susanna, I can't see you anymore!' Heinemeyer shouts to her in English.

Luckily, he is tall. Even in this land of tall people, he stands out, his head above the rest.

She sees the relief on his face as he pushes a man out of the way. *Entschuldigen Sie, bitte.*

Another man jostles her from behind, and then Heinemeyer is beside her, his blond hair slick and wet, his coat collar crumpled against his neck, raindrops catching light like small jewels on his chin stubble, his glasses foggy as the surge of people slams him against her. She stumbles. He catches her before she loses her balance. Not everyone is going in the same direction.

At the twelve checkpoints along the wall, gates swing or creak or break open.
The arm of the crane crashes again. People roar.

Her shoes are wet inside. Her lips must be going blue.

'Take my hand.' Heinemeyer's fingers wrap around hers.
The warmth of his touch is electric. If she ends up crushed to death at twenty, holding the hand of her beloved violin teacher while the Berlin Wall comes down, then so be it.
'Don't let go,' he says.

'I won't.'

The crowd has become as dense as a fish farm. There is nowhere to go—no escape from this seething mass of people pushing and pulling in opposite directions.

She and Heinemeyer are propelled, eventually, right to the wall. All along the top, as far as the eye can see through the drizzle, youngsters stand side by side, tight as soldiers, except for a gap where the crane works, its metal fingers grasping and breaking until the destruction of this section is complete. The machine scrapes back rubble.

Susanna gets her first glimpse of a world through the look-ing glass. The gap to the other side yawns open in front of them—a tear in the fabric of history—laying bare East Berlin as a gash of pale light.
Faces grey and ghostlike through the rain. Clothes washed of colour. Bodies without delineation. The East Berliners look like they've fallen out of a 1940s black and white movie.

Expressions are hard to read. She detects a communal look of disbelief.

'I never thought I'd live to see this,' Heinemeyer says, bend-ing his head close to hers so she can hear him.

There was no warning.

At nine o'clock, after Susanna's violin lesson was over and she sat discussing the concerto with Herr Heinemeyer in his apartment, the announcement was made on the German media: people were now free to travel from the east to the west. Just like that. There was confusion at first. Heinemeyer said that perhaps there was an error—they would have to see this to believe it.

Soon after, they joined the crowds of Berliners heading to the wall.

Susanna glances over her shoulder. The sea of umbrellas and raincoats of the Westerners, which seemed colourless, are in fact made up of a multitude of colours. People wear a thousand shades of blue. Their rainboots are specks of brilliance—yellow or red or pink—boots with Monet's water lilies, boots wrapped in the colours of a Mondrian painting. She turns again to look at the grey-washed Easterners drifting through the rain from the other side. With her hand wrapped in Heinemeyer's, the world can fall apart if it must. She wants to freeze this moment forever.

How has it happened that she is standing here holding the hand of a famous violinist seventeen years her senior, whose presence in a short time has come to be the meaning of her existence? On the one hand it could be fate. But it could also be a simple series of coincidences—a chain of events that was set off when she was so cold in the practice room at the academy on Nürnberger Straße that she could barely move her fingers, which led to him suggesting she might come to his apartment for her lesson as his private students did. And then there were the hours drinking tea after the lesson, listening to the *Rundfunk*, and the news of the imminent collapse of the wall.

When a woman tries to elbow her way between them—*lass mich durch!*—he lets go of Susanna's hand and puts his arm around her shoulders so that they are one creature, inseparable while the country tumbles towards reunification.

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In the U-Bahn Susanna stands drenched, swinging from left to right as she holds tight to the rubber loop that hangs from the roof. She and Heinemeyer are with the few thousand people heading home from Potsdamer Platz, Berlin's oldest station, in the middle of the night.

As the U-Bahn turns a corner, she's pushed against him. She looks at his lips, his Adam's apple, his unshaven jawline. She has noticed he shaves once a fortnight, so he sometimes looks more boyish and sometimes more manly than his thirty-seven years. For the past decade he has been building an exceptional international career. Growing up, Susanna had several of his solo albums which she listened to often, knowing and even emulating his style. When she discovered that the Stefan Heine-meyer was a lead faculty member of the International Academy of Music in Berlin, which offered the music scholarship, she was more determined than ever to win a place.

They get out at Nollendorfplatz and walk through the square. The façade of the Art Nouveau playhouse through the night drizzle makes Susanna think of how many layers of his-tory lie behind and ahead of her.

As they walk, Heinemeyer widens the gap between them, as if they have been too close, and Susanna feels this metre as though it were the distance from Pluto to Earth.

'I am so sorry, Susanna,' he says. 'I didn't realise how dangerous that was. People could've panicked and that never ends well.'

She has to double her walking speed to keep up with his long strides. ‘Not at all. Don’t be sorry. I loved every minute. And look, here we are and nothing bad happened.’ They laugh—the kind of laughter people share when they have just escaped an alternate and perhaps devastating destiny.

He looks at her. ‘I guess the world will never be the same again.’

She smiles at him, elated at how they connect—at the moment of shared drama. ‘Genau,’ she says. For sure. Mean-ing, her world will never be the same again.

‘*Pass’ auf! Ampelmann*,’ he says, grasping her shoulder as the pedestrian crossing man flashes red.

Ampelmann. The pedestrian crossing man has a name. A compound noun. She loves that German words can be squashed together and become more than the sum total of their parts.
Also, ‘Ampelmann’ is much more than its literal translation of ‘traffic light man’. An *Ampelmann* exists in his own right. A Berlin treasure, he needs no adjectives. German offers her a way to express some states of being that English doesn’t allow for. She, for example, has felt *Weltschmerz*, pain for and about the world’s woes, and *Fernweh*, distance longing, a singular longing to travel to foreign shores—which is why she is here.

‘So,’ Heinemeyer says, ‘I’ll walk you back to Familie Dietrich.’ ‘Um, Herr Heinemeyer …’ Suddenly, what she’s about to say seems terrifying. She hasn’t thought this through properly.

‘I think we should forget the formalities, after everything, yes? Call me Stefan.’

She feels her face flush and is thankful that it’s night. She can’t imagine any time when it would be easy to call him ‘Stefan’. When that might seem casual.

‘*Es ist mir peinlich*,’ she says. Saying she’s embarrassed in German is less embarrassing than saying it in English. Her German-speaking self can cope—whereas her other self can’t—with what she is about to ask.

‘Why?’

‘The Familie Dietrich isn’t expecting me home tonight so late. When I called them from your apartment to tell them I was going to see the wall, I … I said if it was after eleven I’d … stay over with a friend. And to go ahead and lock the door.’
‘*Ach, so*.’

Is he afraid? Exasperated? Worse, is he annoyed?

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to inconvenience you. Is this a problem?’ Has she come across as

presumptuous? It's obvious she has no other option as to where she might stay overnight. Has she put him in an awkward position?
He runs his hand over his jawline, considering. After a few seconds he says matter-of-factly, 'No problem. You can stay in my spare room.'

'Thank you,' she says, relieved.

The dull sky burns orange around the edges where the glow from the city spreads upwards. He strides towards his *Wohnung*—his apartment. She skips to keep up with him, her steps out of time with his all the way down Nollendorf-straße. His building, limewashed and solid and built in the early 1900s, he says, survived the war without being bombed. It reflects on the wet street divided in the middle by an island with leafless trees.

Rain falls sideways. She can see the individual drops in the halo around the streetlight outside his apartment.

It's nearly two in the morning.

They enter through a large wooden door with pillars on either side and because there is no lift, they take the stairs to the second floor.

His apartment is warm. It smells like pine and a musky aftershave. She inhales, observes with rekindled delight the vaulted ceilings and their wooden beams that soar over the stone benchtops. In his Miele kitchen, everything is immaculate. Even the white drying cloth hanging over the oven handle looks like it was ironed. It faces the right way out with a small black treble clef embroidered into the bottom left-hand corner. Like every note he plays, his home is careful.

The antique-looking porcelain teapot with its delicate designs representing an idealistic agricultural scene from China stands where they left it. The two matching teacups sit opposite one another like friends who stopped mid-conversation.
He takes off his coat. She has come to know his shoulders and how they move beneath the blue-grey pullover. For her his violin lessons have also been anatomy lessons—showing her how his facial muscles contract with both emotion and exertion when he is playing; how a whole body can become music—thigh muscles straining, arms encircling the sound, capturing it, setting it free, fingers teasing the notes until it sounds as though the strings may break or explode before his touch softens, and a resolving harmonic quivers on the E string.
'Would you like me to take your coat?' he asks.

'Sorry? Oh. Yes, thank you.'

She struggles against sleeves that are wet and clingy, finally wrestling herself free.

He takes the sodden jacket from her, hangs it over his arm, wipes his other arm across his forehead.

‘I’m going to put these downstairs in the boiler room and by the time we have to go to orchestra tomorrow, it will be dry as toast.’

We. She likes that he uses this word. It shows her that the bond created between them beside the Brandenburg Gate still exists.

Heinemeyer disappears through a doorway at the back of the kitchen.

He learned to speak English in England, so sometimes he sounds almost British, but there’s an earthiness, a slight accent that colours certain words—like when he says ‘was’ it sounds more like ‘wass’ rather than ‘waz’. Also, he pronounces ‘your-self’ like ‘you’re self’ which makes her feel closer to him, because though he may be a proficient violinist, his English has small imperfections—proof that he is human, flawed, like everyone.
Stefan Heinemeyer is her inspiration—Heinemeyer and Berlin and the smell of exhaust fumes in the rain and the way his fingers rest on his bow and cradle the neck of the violin.

Being with him tonight means more to her than anything else. She is in the apartment of a world-famous violinist, someone whose music she has listened to since she first began lessons as a nine-year-old.

In Stefan Heinemeyer’s kitchen, Susanna has a burning vision of who she might become as a person, as a musician. There is no comparison between the opportunities for a young violinist at the International Academy of Music in Berlin and the Queensland Conservatorium in Brisbane, even though at the time it was the challenge of her life to get into her performance degree. But she already faced and overcame a greater challenge: only one in two hundred were chosen for the academy. He heard her recordings and chose her. She feels warm at the thought. Though she will get full second-year credit, she wishes she could stay longer and complete her studies here in Berlin, especially now that a new era has begun.
At the very least she hopes that time will crawl so that June, which heralds her return to the harsh wintry light of Brisbane, Australia, remains a blur on the horizon.