

I woke relatively early the next morning, about half past nine, and lay listlessly staring out the window next to my bed. The sky above Berlin was a uniform gray. Cheerless winter had suddenly returned to the city. The pleasant spring-like days of the past week, which brought forecasts of impending climatic disaster, were gone overnight. I peered down into the somber street. A fine, persistent drizzle was soaking the terrain. Up at the intersection, dark hulking silhouettes were making their way along the Gneisenaustrasse, bundled up in long winter coats, their heads and umbrellas bowed against the wind. Down at the other corner, the elderly Turkish men had pulled in their folding chairs from the sidewalk in front of the fruit stand. What would follow now would be months of short, depressing days; skies so heavy with gray that they seemed to press down on you. I ran my finger across the white aluminum window frame next to my bed. It was cold to the touch; chilled by the cold air outside. It was also covered with a fine, dark powder accumulated over the past few days when, for a couple of hours each afternoon, I had left the window open. The famed *Berliner Luft* was severely polluted from the burning of brown coal that warmed the homes of the surrounding GDR. That biting odor, which filled the dead cold and stung the eyes until they watered, would now settle upon us once again.

My attention turned to the row of buildings across the street. The Kreuzberg district where I lived had survived World War II largely intact; a bit of old Berlin in sharp contrast to the ugly modern buildings grouped around the Memorial Church in the city center. Starting at the far corner of my street, the turn of the century Beaux-Arts buildings stood massive and melodramatic, many complete with elaborate balconied facades. But in the middle of the block the architecture changed. Directly across the street from my apartment stood a flat concrete wall with windows punched through it. Some catastrophe had apparently occurred here during the

war, destroying the apartment house that once stood there. A single bomb that fell from the sky, perhaps intended for another target? Artillery fire a degree or two off the mark? And what of the inhabitants? Were they taken from this life while having their breakfast? Or in their sleep? Or while reading a book during a rare lull in the unimaginable chaos of the time? Had they dutifully gone off to work, performing a task already made senseless by war and the disorder it wrought, desperately clinging to that last strand of normality in their lives, only to come home and find all they had valued or loved in this world suddenly obliterated? At the opposite end of block, across the Gneisenaustasse, the large white neon cross of the Free Evangelical Congregation glowed in the gray mist. It seemed to float in the air like a silent memorial to the nameless, faceless victims of the human tragedy that took place here. Sometimes Berlin is full of ghosts.