

A TRANSCRIPT OF TEXTS SENT FROM THE BEELITZ HEILSTÄTTEN

Rebecca Lindenberg

Just got off the train from
Berlin to Brandenburg.
Brandenburg is the Alabama
of Deutschland

—

A ruined hospital

—

It's very cold in thin forest

—

* this (fingers stiff) although
it is a forest of skinny trees

—

Because this place has a crazy
murderous history

—

[Photo: *Land Brandenburg*
map, typeset in old Blackletter]

—

[Photo: WHITE POWER
spray-painted on a brick wall, the O
in POWER: a smiley face.]

—

How am I already muddy

—

[Rolly-eye emoticon]

—

I use sour cream in mine
but Greek yogurt works

—

No, you can just fold it in

—

The clouds are really
zooming their shadows
are also zooming across
the ground. I'm sorry
the video I took doesn't
get the feel of it at all

—

[Video: The ground
with sounds of walking]

—

We don't make hospitals
like this in the US — these
buildings look like palaces like
the abandoned mansions
of a movie set for a David Lean
movie maybe Doctor Zhivago.

I can't quite get the feel of it

—

Well, fresh oregano is better
I think

—

[Photo: A porch wrapped
around three sides
of a rectangular building,
railing slats bowed out
and scalloped, like so many
ribcages, a rocking chair
broken, on its side, windows
open as if someone still
needs the fresh air]

—

Hitler, bloodied
at the Battle of Somme,
would have been brought
tea on that porch there
back when nobody
remembered his name.

—

Yes. Super-creepy.

—

Safe enough.
Hoschi says hi and
not to worry.

—

[Photo through hazy
windows: the sanitorium's
grand staircase, iced
with dashed stained glass]

—

This whole place looks
like a memory of something
you've come to regret.

—

[Photo: Hoschi, framed
by a dark doorway, wearing
black cap black coat black
backpack. Black jeans, sneakers.]

—

Yes. Exactly like a cat burglar

—

I like the term cat burglar

—

O shut up

—

I don't know I never
follow recipes. I get bored

—

Hm. Did you salt it yet?

—

Hang on we're in the basement
and I need the flashlight app.
There is utterly no light at all

—

This is, like, the most haunted
place in Germany.

—

[Photo: An ancient mattress
skewered by rebar, water-
rotted timber baring its nails]

—

I think it started as a TB
sanatorium for men (that's
the building I was just in) then
another for women

—

[Photo: A many-windowed
building, four stories tall,
steepled. Roof shingles and paint
coming away give the impression
of a decaying body, skeletal remains
here and there exposed. Knee-high
grasses sway in the doorways,
slender-armed trees reach
their leaves through window sockets
where ivies lash themselves
to what remains of the frames]

—

It was a field hospital
in both World Wars then
the Soviets came. When they
left, not one but two serial killers

—

I know one sec

—

I have a knife
I am only aware of
when we see other people.
They are like us, just
prospecting these ruins —
or they are not like us but
we assume like us

—

With a knife

—

[Photo: Painted in black
spray paint across
boarded-up window sockets
opaque as a blank stare: PSYCHE]

—

So. The Beast of Beelitz
was a local cop

—

A wolf

in grandmother's night-bonnet

—

Someone is playing music
somewhere

—

How should I know
I've never met
a German ghost

—

[Link to a Wikipedia article
that reads: *Bach, in his dedication
to the Brandenburg Concertos
writes: begging Your Highness
most humbly not to judge
their imperfection with the rigor
of that discriminating and
sensitive taste, which
everyone knows him to have]*

—

[Snippet recording of
distant music interrupted
when a plastic tarp
snaps, sighs back into its wall-hole]

—

Hoschi's all, *Don't be
such a Soft Egg or Warm-
Showerer or One Who Slows Down
at a Yellow Light* — German
has many words for wimp

—

I do not slow down
for yellow lights

—

[Photo: The sanatorium's cage
elevator, fogged with cobwebs]

—

Mmmhm.

—

Well. I just use zest in the marinade —
acid toughens the fish. When
are they coming over? It must be
pretty early where you are still

—

So jealous. It's damp and windy
today. Hinges keep wheezing
under the weight of their shutters —
an invisible kid on an invisible swing

—

Exactly. Repetitive stress

—

Hoschi can never remember
the word *joints* in English.
Ditto *abandoned*

—

Ha. I don't even
know that word in German
to forget it

—

[Cut-and-pasted from
results returned by Google
search on "Gothic":] *May relate
to or of the marauding Goths or
their extinct East Germanic
language, or in architecture,
pointed arches, flying
buttresses, rib vaults.*

—

[Cut-and-pasted from
results returned by Google
search on "Gothic novel":]
*In literature, the Gothic
marries horror
with romance.*

—

I'm just trying to get the feel of it

—

Oh, yeah. Sorry. First,
he killed Edeltraud Nixdorf
while she planted her tulips.
You can almost see them
from here

—

1989. A year

later her husband swallowed
enough pesticide

—

I know

—

I don't know. I'm not
really a philosopher I just
assemble the evidence

—

[Photo: The surgery's staircase
vibrantly graffitied
as an old subway car — magenta,
cyan, silver, black — love
expressed as mathematical
equation: $C + F, M + B$]

—

No one ever graffitiies
a breakup. J - S

—

O please that's what like
80 percent of poems are

—

Yes, maybe that's why

—

Maybe that's why I want
to write about a ruined hospital
complex and a serial killer

—

It sounds like a thing you have
a ruined hospital complex

—

Maybe I do I know I
practically have a collection

—

The chandelier
in the anatomy theater
looks like a badminton birdy
hung by its nose

—

I can't help it. After that,
the Beast of Beelitz
raped Christa Naujoks
then strangled her
with pink underwear
not hers

—

I've mostly been telling it to you
as Hoschi is telling it to me

—

Okay, you got me
that part's mine

—

It is because it does not
lend itself easily
to the enterprise
that it interests me

—

[Photo: Written in red
across an old steel door —
Die Nazi Scum.]

—

I cannot tell if this means
Die as in go to hell or Die
as in the German plural *the*
I think it is the former but
that's not how I read it at first

—

[Photo: fading Cyrillic
on a battered sign
pointing nowhere now]
[Photo: Cyrillic stenciled
on the flank of a mud-mired
schoolbus carcass.]

—

Lol. What? I hear Chernobyl
schools are very high energy

—

On the upside, I bet Hell
has better cell service than this

—

Hell service?

—

#sorrynotsorry

—

Don't be absurd of course.
Even Utah airports have bars.

—

We're now at the drippy entry
to thirteen kilometers of
underground tunnel and
in an apocalypse movie,
zombies suddenly now

—

Hellmouth. Correct.

—

Hoschi says, *We should go
down there!* I think he's confused
as to what we should means
in American English

—

In German, if you want
to say someone's *not all there*,
you might say, His parents
built the swing too close to the wall.

—

Thump. Thump.

—

We can still hear
the surgery's sharded windows
walloping

—

Yes. Realreal creepy
but also kind of lovely
in an overtaken way

—

I hope I'm giving you
the feel of it

—

Come spring,
the reddest small strawberries
at the Wochenmarkt
will come from these woods

—

Remember how Yaya
used to say she wouldn't eat
strawberries unless they were
red all the way through?

—

I thought so too but
here they are

—

And the white asparagus —
as it peeks its nose out,
they bury it again, so
it never sun-toughens green.
Soft, fat, sweet, and white
as a blind cave salamander

—

[[Link to a recipe for
Spargel Creme Suppe](#)]

—

Still. Thoreau needs to
check his privilege cause
forests are scary. I'm glad
Hoschi is here.

—

The Beast of Beelitz
came upon a woman and baby
walking in these woods.
He bashed the infant's skull
against a tree, like
beating water out of laundry.
He raped the mother, choked her
with his own pink bra.

—

I know, I found myself
wishing the story were less
complicated even before
wishing it didn't exist, not
to give a bad name — you know

I blame the fundamentalists

—

[Photo: A filigree of roots
fringing the edge
of the Frauen Haus roof
where many delicate trees
have taken hold. Vines
have softly picked
all the windows open.]

—

[Short recording:
Gusts of birdsong.]

—

Don't worry about it —
language would be getting
in the way whether we were
texting or not

—

All experience is pure
whatever that means

—

Maybe because I know
this is the Women's House
it feels peaceful. Dim.
Cathedral-vaulted. An owl
is lowing in the rafters.

—

Well that's just how
I think it to myself
so sue me

—

The Beast came upon
two little girls in the wood.

—

No, they fought the Beast off.
He scratched one with his knife
but they left a trail of blood
and fiber, and a composite sketch
for the police to find a way back

—

[Video: A branch sways
under the weight of something
just gone from it.]

—

The Beast of Beelitz
found Talita's house
to hide in. He killed her, too,
forced himself upon her corpse

—

Kind of an old-fashioned
phrase: harrowing
the flesh

—

Another German word
for wimp: *Frauen-*
versteh. Woman-
understander

—

Ache is making me aware
of my feet

—

[Photo: Pale light diminishing
through nervy silhouettes of trees]

—

The Beast of Beelitz, jerk-
ing off under a tree
was caught with his ladies'
undergarments down
by a couple of passing joggers

—

I hope so, too

—

I wish we hadn't forgotten
our headlamps.

—

That will be delicious. I didn't
know you even had a blowtorch

—

Sancerre sounds good!
I like Sancerre
so mossy

—

O thank God a road

—

So now we're in this adorable
old corner pub, gingerbread
trim woodburning stove yellow beer

—

[Selfie: Me, smiling, lifting
a beer. Hoschi grinning,
his hand on my knee.]
[Selfie: My eyes closed, Hoschi
kissing my cheek looking
sideways at the camera.]

—

[Photo: A rust-crumbled
fire hydrant.]
[Photo: A daffodil
amid a roil of tiny white blossoms.]
[Photo: Blurry
evidence of ghosts.]
[Photo: A shoe.]

—

Hoschi wouldn't let me pay
with my credit card

—

True but actually
I think because
it has my last (he's all,
so *Jewish*) name on it

—

Yes, not many but still

—

Waiting for the train
I asked a young couple
smoking on the platform
if we're going the right way
and Hoschi was like, Don't
talk to the Nazis. Only
half joking

—

Okay, sissy. I hope
your dinner party is smashing
Wish I could be there
and here at the same time

—

[Kissy-wink emoticon]

—

[Blue heart emoticon]
[Purple heart emoticon]
[Pink heart emoticon]

—

The tang of snow
is in the air

—

[Photo: A cement angel
missing one wing]

[Photo: A cement
noseless angel]

—

I can't wait to get back
to Berlin there's a place right
at Hauptbahnhof still selling
winter Gluhwein

—

Mulled. But literally,
Glowing Wine

—

Haha. I wish.

—

Okay, just one more:

—

[Photo: Hoschi, eyes closed
doubled in the train window
and through his reflection, trees
and further trees]