

Remembrance

Despite everything, it's still you.

Several times a day, I find my eyes tracing over the tattoo on my wrist. It's a reminder. Even though my scenery has changed from the Pennsylvanian suburbs to the rush of Berlin, I find myself tumbling back into my same ruts.

It's so easy to fall back into depression once you've been inside its cloying touch. Every weekend, I stay locked inside my room, too anxious to really explore—because I am too anxious to ask to go on the adventures my acquaintances go on. Too anxious to make friends. It feels like I'm back at school in the US. Alone most days, with only passing conversations to break the silence. On some days, I feel like I'm losing myself once more to anxiety, and the reminder on my skin does little to quell the rising fear.

At times, Berlin feels so much like home that it hurts.

I've found myself picking out little details around the city that stand out. Ones that ground myself in this place—that tie me to Berlin so I don't float away in the endless thoughts of *it all being the same, why did you come here, it's a waste of money...*

Graffiti is the one that makes me feel *here*. There's so much of it compared to home. There's almost none in Gettysburg, and only a little more in Easton. But Berlin is covered in little instances of people staking a claim, clamoring to be remembered. The graffiti is a stark reminder that I'm not the only one who is struggling to be seen. To be remembered if only by a few. The graffiti drags me back to a time when everything seemed like it wasn't fragmenting slowly.

The only time I've done anything that can be considered graffiti was when I was eleven. My father had purchased some spray paint to paint this metal statue he found at a rummage sale, and he let me play with it in the backyard. I stared at the can for a long time, unsure of what to do with it. My hands were almost too weak to press the nozzle. I inched my way up to the door to the basement and wrote my name on it in black paint. I no longer visit my father there, but my name remains.

A part of me that won't be forgotten.

I've only ever lived in towns with history. With so much history, it can be difficult to find a reason to be remembered. Few I've known in either of those towns will remember me.

Berlin is much older than those towns, and yet it welcomes memories. It lets people leave their marks in ways that feel forbidden in Gettysburg and Easton. Maybe it's the hurt that exists here, so much more recent than my other two homes. Hurt invites hurt. It heals by opening itself to others and sharing that pain.

It remembers.

Walking around Kreuzberg, I see so many little instances of remembrance—of *wanting* to be remembered. Graffiti covers almost every available surface. Some are meaningless vulgarity—others are names. Are they the names of the person who left it there? Or someone they loved, someone they lost? I can only read a little bit of German—the words are puzzle pieces, ones that I can't make sense of. The ones I can read, I stop at. I read them. I take them in. That's what we want when we leave a bit of ourselves on these walls. We want others to see us. To understand. To climb inside of our hurt and pain—to bear a bit of it for a short while.

Sometimes I wish I was brave enough to leave a bit of my pain. I want to mark the walls with it, to lessen the burden I feel. It passes quickly as my anxiety reigns me in. But the desire to leave a reminder of myself remains.

I want to be brave like the artist that left the grand mural I saw walking back from the Jewish Museum. It was a large rose flanked on both sides by paint brushes. The rose was chained, the shackles stating, "Rise above." Above the rose was a rather famous saying: "Make art. Not war." I stopped and stared at the piece for quite a while. I took pictures. I simply watched as others either looked or kept on walking.

What was happening in the artist's life? What had they seen that prompted them to create a statement so beautiful, yet so accusatory? As I slowly walk towards the U-Bahn, I trace my fingers over my tattoo. I think about my name on that basement door.

They left their mark.

I'm continuing to leave mine.