

NUMBA

Me and Others at Karl-Marx-Allee

I'm walking toward the bakery I like,
when I see what seems to be a young man,
a large backpack resting on his shoulders,
long, thick hair,
almost a messy frame.

His style catches my attention,
something curious, something unique:
bags dangle from everywhere,
two on one shoulder,
two on the other,
a heavy backpack
and another bag in his hand,
as if he's carrying the weight of the world.

He's standing under one of the Stalin buildings
on Karl-Marx-Allee.
Our eyes meet for a few seconds,
a silent exchange of presences.
I step into my café. Kosan.
Moments later,
he steps in too.

There's something restless about him,
but I can't quite hear what he says.
He asks for something, handing over the small plastic bottle of water.
The attendant uses a piece of paper to shield his hands,
as if trying to hold back more than just hygiene.

The exchange about the bottle of water continues,
the young man still pointing.
He thanks with his body,
takes the piece of bread handed to him, and leaves.

A woman turns, surprised,
he holds the attention of those who see him.
Me, and others.

Maybe he lives on the street.
There are no signs of
illness.
drugs.

grime.
not more than thirty.

Another man enters. This one is about fifty.
He stops at the counter,
invisible at first.
Others are served before him.
When his turn comes,
he waits,
a long, quiet pause.
Why?

He gives up.
He walks toward me—oh no, please—
I don't speak German well enough.

Uff, but he wipes the bench beside me.
Looks outside,
wipes the table again.
He gathers the crumbs he's swept
from the table and the seat,
holding them in the hollow of his hand,
and walks out.

Ahh, now I see it.
The scraps,
offered to the dog waiting for him outside.
He lights a cigarette.
And that's that.