

A Slippery Slope

by lisa rosenblatt

The heat pounded onto Lorelei's bend in the Rhine as we climbed the slopes covered in grapevines. Every once in a while we'd pick and the red left a stain.

You came to Vienna, not expecting the cold. But you were freezing, so you put on Silvia's turquoise vest. That vest is gone; lost or abandoned in the moves since that first visit. The wisp of hair that falls in a soft curve on a temple. The crispness of your collar, a white, ironed shirt, blend of body and perfume. It was the way your fingers extended along a map as you explained a route, eyes more alive than I'd ever seen. You put on the turquoise vest and it was still you, more vulnerable, raw, but at home in your skin.

The flight from Frankfurt to Boston passes over Cologne. Düsseldorf comes onto the screen and Dortmund and Hennef, Bonn, Königswinter. I will try to follow a red line but Frechen leads me to the shoulder, to Alex and the hospital and everyone getting injured. With Alex it was her arm and you, your collarbone. That's the key bone in German and you had your principles about it all and the crash. The lines on your skin, black and blue and red and green, everyone could see that on the outside; but inside something had cracked. It made you angry, livid even, carelessness and competitiveness and callousness and coldness and greed had led to the crash, and you knew it, although it was just an accident that no one had intended.

Wuppertal, the party where they lit the alcohol, made it burn in blue flames before we drank it; people gather, enjoy each other's company, and everything makes sense, light-like, on the very edge of real.

Bonn flashes on the screen; where I dropped out. Although I could insist that it was because of the pump, because I didn't have a pump

for my flat tire because I had given it to you, I could even blame you because you took my pump, but that wasn't why I dropped out. There was a long road ahead and I was tired. So I left the course, just started walking down some suburban road in Bonn, pushing my bike, still wet from the swim, with just the one-piece suit and a flat tire until I found an open gate, umbrellas and tables, a tennis club where they welcomed me, gave me cake and coffee, pulled over a chair for me to sit down while the daughter of a former bike racer went home to bring back one of his inner tubes that would suit the rim of my bike better than the one I had packed in my emergency repair kit, which did not fit at all and was absolutely no help in an emergency. It is true, I was glad to leave somewhere in the middle without ever finishing.

Nettetal is on the screen now, and Krefeld, Hückelhoven, Willich, I don't remember where, but somewhere there, I actually finished. We took a ride to check out the course the day before but our ride had nothing to do with the course, and on the lower right is Dormagen where the water was steamy and we swam butterfly in rhythm and I could have stayed forever and we could still be swimming in that steamy pool ... but up by the Dutch border you took a wrong turn and cycled too far. When I crossed the finish line, I assumed you had already long finished and were talking to someone with that calm smile of yours, and perhaps a drop of sweat. A distinct hardness that translates into solidity, and a lightness that translates into beauty, and I thought I'd find you there, holding your rehydration like a cocktail, engaging in small talk. But you weren't there yet. I see Goch now and Kamp-Lintfort.

When the map turns big, there is just one orange line connecting Frankfurt and Boston. You flew to Iceland the first time you came to Boston. For me it was self-evident that you would come, and I didn't tell my family that you were my lover, my girlfriend, and my sister said, "Why doesn't she just take the bus up here," as I laid out my plan of leaving the lake and heading to Boston to pick you up, and I said, "because she is my girlfriend, and I want to go there and pick

her up” and my face turned bright red because I had never brought a partner home, but no one said anything and it all worked out and you arrived a bit late after a layover in Reykjavik but I knew back then that you'd be late cause you had sent a message, and the words you sent went straight to my heart and I've been pacing the streets ever since.

That must be the key, not the key bone, but the key. I said “fuck off” when you snapped at me, motioned me into the car as though that were the last thing you wanted, just waved your hand. You were tired. I am not following any red line anymore. The connection is gone. You never asked where I went when I left. It was dirty and dank and I slept on top of the sheets at some shitty hotel, leaving at the crack of dawn, wandering the streets, jumping on a westbound train.

We're leaving Holland now. As I ran to the Dutch streetcar I tripped and skinned my knee, ripped my pants, just a few drops of blood, just a few days before we left for the Himalayas and I was dizzy, nearly passed out but I didn't and back then there were no broken bones. It was surely a sign of what would come, of how I would come back to Holland when it was all falling apart. When I was; fading, fringing into a million fragments.

