

## **Can Serrat: checkpoint**

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### **Project: short stories**

During my two months at Can Serrat I have primarily been writing short stories. The stories are all contemporary, literary fiction, and over the coming months I will be looking to place the stories in journals and magazines in both the UK and USA. I will update Can Serrat as and when the stories are published.

I have completed four stories, and researched and started many more. In total, I have written approximately 45,000 words, making this one of the most productive periods of writing in my life.

## Writing sample

Extract from a short story called 'German'

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It was a simple but brutal thing that made me think of Ally for the first time in a while. One floor up, my flat's big window looks straight out across Hertabrücke, a twin-arched iron bridge that crosses over the Ringbahn's two looping lines, and another four lines that carry freight trains and, occasionally, a refurbished stream train for which there's always a small crowd waiting to cheer and photograph. Just after passing under the bridge, the driver lets out a blast from the whistle and sends up a huge plume of thick grey smoke. One time I hadn't noticed the people waiting, only turned to see the blooming smoke, my first thought being: something's just been blown up.

The bridge changes through the seasons. Looks beautiful when its arches are covered in snow, in the setting sun of summer, spring dawns. All year round it's busy, every day except Sundays and holidays there's traffic, people. With the unending roadworks on Karl-Marx Straße and Grenzalle it's one of the main routes across the tracks; there's three schools nearby; the Feuerwehr station just over the other side sending out those too-loud sirens. I've seen teenage boys scrapping, drunk lovers getting inappropriate, pale figures ghosting back from the clubs Sunday and Monday mornings, fashion shoots with those glinting silver sun reflectors. One time I saw - I guess you'd call it assault. The cyclist back-stepped with his bike between his legs, yelled something at the driver, raised his forearm as if he was about to smash it into her face, her window down. I could hear her scream as watched through the window. I gave my story to the police, fetched her a mug of tea. She could barely stand, her legs just wouldn't.

But that wasn't it.

I get nervous seeing small kids going up to the railings that run along the walkways either side of it, peering through the gaps between each metal stanchion, heads poked through spaces that each local parent would have already worked out were too thin for even the scrawniest kid to fit through. It's a long way down though, nothing but gravel and broken bottles down there. And I'd see dogs sometimes, easily small enough to go through and off their leash, sniffing into the open air. Maybe I worry too much. Every ex- has told me that. You worry too much. You need to relax. You need to chill.

It was a Saturday morning when I saw the kid, a little girl, two or so years old, riding her tall dad's shoulders. Her little arms up and flopping left, right, left with each of his exaggerated strides, a one-man rollercoaster. Her mum there too, a few metres behind, with a small black dog safely on its leash, two older kids trailing behind who might or might not have been part of the group. All of them on the other side of the bridge, walking away from me, nearing the end of the second of the two arches. The dad keeping a few meters in front of them, stepping long and fast, his kid moving about enough that he must have been feeling it in his shoulders and legs, must have been about ready to put her down.

Then I saw the man. Who knows why we notice things before they happen, why we spot patterns in all this unfolding mess that mostly flattens out to nothing. Or if we even do, if it's not some after-the-fact sorting, selective sense-making from the mass of raw material that's funnelled into us. But there he was, this small guy coming the other way, having just turned onto the bridge from Siegfriedstraße. Wiry and fucked-up looking, too far away for me to know on what or how bad, I just knew he was off-kilter, barely even looking up at the group he was walking towards. I thought: he's going to shoulder into one of them...