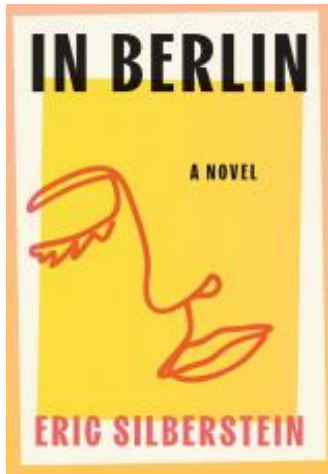


In Berlin

by Eric Silberstein



About the Book

"An utterly spellbinding journey...reflects a triumph of the human spirit in the face of unexpected catastrophe."

?Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States

His novel is for the universe, and all readers will find bits of themselves in places they might not have realized."

?Heather Krill, TRUE NORTH

Software engineer Anna Werner lives at a rapid clip, relishing her work and adopted city as much as her early morning runs. All comes undone on a sweaty August evening when, in the course of a 20-minute commute, Anna goes from worrying vaguely about a sore shoulder to staggering her way into an ambulance. She has suffered a spinal stroke. Over the coming months, her parents join the insurance man in telling her to get ready for life in a group home.

The only person who recognizes what Anna is still capable of is Batul al-Jaberi, a recent Syrian immigrant who meets Anna while doing her rounds as a janitor at the hospital. Batul is applying to medical school, where she hopes to regain control of a life hijacked by her family's flight from persecution in the early days of the Arab Spring.

At first the friendship is what Anna and Batul each need to regain mobility. But as their relationship deepens, Batul finds that she must choose between her family and Anna --- a choice that will force both women to rewrite their notions of loyalty.

IN BERLIN is a work of empathetic precision, exploring both the unpredictable nature by which geopolitics and scientific breakthroughs touch our lives, and the brave, bold and sometimes quiet ways in which people reassert agency in the face of loss. Most of all, it taps a throughline of emotion that binds characters and readers alike across geographies, cultures and ambitions.

Discussion Guide

1. The challenges Anna and Batul face in pursuing their dreams can feel extreme, but they are hardly alone in coping with political upheaval or medical emergencies. What personal or family stories do you have about lives interrupted through migration, illness or other sudden changes in circumstances?
2. Resilience is a revered quality these days, and Anna, Batul and Yaman all demonstrate an impressive ability to regain footing after setbacks big and small. But how might resilience sometimes underserve the characters, for example by letting them avoid problems that need addressing?
3. Eric Silberstein wrote this novel before the overthrow in 2024 of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, more than five decades into his regime's brutal rule. Many Syrian refugees are now returning to the homeland they once fled. Can you imagine Batul and Yaman moving back? Why or why not?
4. Often in literary criticism, a character's depth is measured by their dynamism --- how much a 'hero' is changed by his or her experience, for example. While Anna has tremendous change thrust upon her, one could argue that she changes very little in terms of how she views the world or operates within it. Do you think this is a weakness of the book?
5. 'One can think more lightly and freely in music than language' is Batul's translation of the line by Alfred Döblin, author of the seminal 1929 novel *BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ*. This is not Batul's experience. Instead, food is her language when speaking is too hard. How do Julia, Anna's father, or Anna herself communicate through mediums other than their native tongue?
6. Religious faith is clearly important to Batul, but other characters also orient themselves using (sometimes blind) belief. What do you think Anna's articles of faith might be? Yaman's? Anna's sister-in-law Christina's?
7. Berlin's role in the novel is often aspirational: a setting in which Anna can once again be independent, or where the al-Jaberis might rebuild a life. But the city's dark history during the Second World War, and its status as seat of the present-day German government, also enters the plot from time to time. How would the novel be different if set in London or New York?
8. In some ways, this is a workplace novel (even in Anna's apartment, Batul is on the job). Why do you think Silberstein spends as much time as he does on DDB's big project of upgrading its platform? And are Batul, Anna and even Yaman being naïve or narrow-minded for focusing so much on professional success?
9. How important to her recovery was Anna's logical way of thinking? Leo, the economist who broke his neck trying to save a drowning child, also prides himself on his ability to reason. But he comes to very different conclusions from Anna, even when drawing from similar evidence. Do you think the novel invites us to extrapolate from single cases or warns against it?

10. Spoiler warning: Batul tells Yaman that "it's not that simple" when he asks her if she's "programmed a certain way." She describes feeling relieved when it becomes clear that her parents want her to accept Yaman's proposal. Does this suggest she never planned a long-term romantic partnership with Anna?

11. Spoiler warning: By the end of the book, science and technology have solved many of the problems delivered to Anna on that sweaty August evening in 2014. Did Batul save Anna by turning her observations of axolotls into actionable scientific insights, or much earlier, back in Berlin, with the love that also saved Yaman? Or was Anna always going to save herself?

? Written by Rose Jacobs

Author Bio

Eric Silberstein is a software engineer, company founder and novelist. After receiving his bachelor's in computer science from Harvard, he founded Idiom Technologies, a pioneer in translation management software. He then went on to co-found and serve as CEO of TrialNetworks, a software platform to accelerate medical research. He is the author of the novels *THE INSECURE MIND OF SERGEI KRAEV* and *IN BERLIN*. Eric enjoys creating, learning, early morning swims, and writing at his local library.

Critical Praise

"An utterly spellbinding journey full of unexpected turns and nuanced characters, *IN BERLIN* reflects a triumph of the human spirit in the face of unexpected catastrophe. Silberstein has given us a gift: a deeply moving opportunity to look at tragedy with new eyes, and in doing so, to find hope and beauty in the most surprising of places."

In Berlin

by Eric Silberstein

Publication Date: August 5, 2025

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: Liu Book Group

ISBN-10: 1737351994

ISBN-13: 9781737351993