

## The Other St. Moritz

There is a St. Moritz that rarely appears on postcards.  
A place of darkness, early light, and the sharp cold of a morning at 1,800 metres.  
Here, the day doesn't begin with champagne but with the clatter of a metal thermos, the hum of a space heater, and the smell of instant coffee in the staff room.  
Neon lights instead of candlelight, toast instead of croissants.  
Those who are awake at this hour are the ones who make it possible for others to sleep a little longer.  
When the sun rises over the lake, much is already done:  
beds made, paths salted, rubbish sorted, snow swept from rooftops.  
The village that will shine later in the day smells of work in the morning – of bread, diesel, and cold air.  
This other St. Moritz is not made of boutiques and Bellinis, but of the high-rise buildings in St. Moritz Bad, fifteen storeys above the valley.  
Here live the people who keep the village running: shop assistants, hairdressers, florists, teachers, postal workers, craftsmen, families who have always been here and those who have stayed, even though life would be far easier somewhere else.  
People who care more about finding a free parking space than the latest Louis Vuitton collection.  
Their view shows no panoramic terrace, but playgrounds, garages, and satellite dishes.  
And sometimes the air smells of fondue and laundry soap: of home.  
Behind the scenes of St. Moritz, in small rooms and basements, the other machinery is at work.  
An old table, the flicker of an ageing laptop screen, piles of paper, a chair the insurance inspectors would rather not see.  
Here, work schedules are written, lists printed, glasses polished – before the show begins outside once again.  
While the first windows slowly light up in the village, down in St. Moritz Bad the delivery vans are already on the move before six.  
They bring crates of fresh oranges, apples, heads of lettuce – all sorted for the hotels and restaurants about to wake up.  
At night, others take over: those driving snow groomers until midnight, and those spraying the natural ice rink at the Kulm, checking the paths on the frozen lake, or preparing the tracks for the horse races.  
And when, at five in the morning, the first lift workers from nearby Italy open their mountain stations, no one takes a selfie at minus twenty-two degrees, up there in the wind – yet without them, there would be no perfect snowtracks for the day.  
Then there are the quiet refuges: the bocce court in St. Moritz Bad, where retired men play during the slightly-less-cold season, so focused that every throw seems like a small act of resistance against the busyness of this place.  
While Dom Pérignon corks pop higher up, here the sand simply falls.  
And for a moment, St. Moritz is just a village.

Those who look closer find meeting places in no guidebook:  
the petrol station in St. Moritz Bad, with two standing tables out front,  
where construction workers drink a beer after their shift and discuss world affairs with  
the owner.  
Or the Portuguese shop at the edge of the village – a microcosm of sardines, bread, and  
pastéis de nata.  
Here it smells of Portugal and homesickness.  
Many who shop here would rather be back home in the warm south – but for now, life is  
here.  
A few streets away, a shop window reads:  
“All trousers – 30 francs.”  
A counterpoint to the boutiques where a single handbag costs twenty thousand.  
Next door, the kebab stand, where the lights stay on late and people from five different  
countries share the same sauce.  
Not far from it: the hairdresser’s salon, where no one asks where you are from,  
only whether it should be “the usual.”  
And if you really want to eat cheaply,  
you go to the Coop restaurant – where they serve spinach and ricotta cannelloni for 9.95  
francs.  
Between the luxury brands, you find the unsung heroes:  
the taxi driver waiting at the station at night, the cashier who greets the world with every  
“Grüezi,” the hotel employee who exhales for a moment in the staff room before smiling  
again outside.  
They are the ones who hold St. Moritz together.  
And so the Engadin bus continues,  
through a village with more faces than the brochures ever show.  
Past sparkling shop windows, construction sites, and back courtyards, past the bocce  
court, the petrol station, the kebab stand – the places no hashtag knows.  
Sometimes a high-rise reflects in the bus window, sometimes the lake.  
And one senses that perhaps this is the true beauty of the place: that it has two faces  
that know about each other – the polished one that tells the stories, and the other one  
that makes them possible.

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