

she was actually talking about something completely different. When a huge basket of nectarines appeared a few days later, and I was told to eat them, I knew for certain that my lovely aunt had been concerned for my health.

...and then I went into the *Schlafzimmer*



HOW WAS IT FOR YOU, *SCHATZ?*

Life in Germany comes with lots of rules and regulations, as some of its citizens helpfully remind us. “Rechts stehen, links gehen!” they’ll bark at you because you’re standing on the wrong side of the escalator. You’ll hear a ringing sound when, without thinking, you step onto the cycle path. “Das geht nicht!” they’ll shout at you because the red man is lit up as you cross the road, even if there isn’t a car in sight. There aren’t just rules for pedestrians, though; there are also rules for drinking.

The first rule is that you should never, ever start drinking before everyone in your group has a drink, and when they do, someone who still knows what’s going on will give the signal. Then you must clink glasses with everyone in the group. You *must not* cross or hinder someone else’s path to clinking glasses. And you *must* keep eye contact while clinking and say, “Prost!” It’s a special sort of eye contact: eyes are wide open, chins forward, followed by a quick nod of acknowledgement that things have been done properly and drinking may begin. Heaven help you if you start before everyone is ready. “Nur ein Schwein trinkt allein!” someone once reminded me, as I got on with drinking as if there weren’t a moment to lose. All these rules came as a bit of a surprise to me. I come from a country where you