

## Preface

There are certain things that you find out about yourself as a result of the events you are faced with in your life. Then, there are the other traits that you don't seem to question, but rather, understand and accept as part of who you are. In no way do you choose this disposition, it is just simply, how you have always been. These facets are as much a part of you, as your DNA makeup. Most of these self-discoveries surface in adolescence, but a few are awakened on an unassuming weekday, the kind of day easily taken for granted, until the events of that day rewrite an entire chapter of your story, and change who you are – forever.

In my case, there are sadly, more than a handful of priceless qualities, (perhaps minor annoyances depending on whom you speak to), that those who love me must adopt. These established links of my personality have no explanation or malleability; they have just always been, and will always be-- Lena. The short little blonde girl who thinks much too deeply about most everything.

We are all set off on this pre-measured journey, given one mind and one soul completely unique to ourselves. This period of time has no guarantee, no foretold outcome or earthly guide to show us the way. Still,

for most of the free world, in this life, it is easy to believe that our future lies completely in our hands, not giving a second thought or consideration to circumstance. We find false comfort in the belief that our personalities, likes and dislikes are seemingly ours to decide. Going on that premise, we conclude that certainly our next week, month and year is easily ours to decide as well.

For me, my story unfolded in a way I could have never imagined this summer, revealing the answers to secrets I had never shared with a soul. The pieces that make up who I am, instead of a string of random intricacies that I could never weave together clearly, but resolved to accept nonetheless, finally tied in place to create a vivid patchwork of understanding.

## Chapter 1

The plane touched down with an emphatic thump, nicely capturing the essence of the trip to Germany with my mother up to this point.

I looked over at my mother and met her eyes, gave a weak smile, and slowly released the grip of her hand, now that we had landed safely on the ground. I broke our stare to watch the wing flaps thrash roughly against the air, challenging their hinges, and making the wind whistle loudly outside of my window. I felt the power of the brakes and reflected on the physics behind this thrilling feeling. Understanding the science behind slightly frightening events always brought me comfort.

I was surprised that this tradition still continued, that of reaching for my mother's hand upon take-off and landing. Something about the sheer speed it takes to launch the 200 ton barrel of steel into the air instills a sense of excitement, finality and fear into my heart. My love affair with planes and flight, any of the sciences really, started at an early age. If you

were to need blackmail worthy proof, the school photograph taken on Halloween of me surrounded by my kindergarten classmates, is quite enough embarrassing evidence. Yes, as the other girls in my class modeled costumes of colorful ballerina tutus and princess dresses, I stood proudly among them in my navy blue pantsuit complete with the bronze plastic Delta “junior pilot” wings securely fastened to my lapel.

Unfortunately for me, and possibly fortunate for the rest of the travelling world, my eyesight was doomed from day one and my math skills were much weaker than my understanding of science.

As the plane taxied up the runway, I started to make out the familiar silhouette of the Munich airport. A sense of relief rushed over me as I realized I was once again back in the country that I have always had an undeniable connection to. My sentimental moment was quickly interrupted as Mother managed to irritate the passenger across the aisle by rushing to get her bags from the overhead compartment before the seatbelt light had been turned off. I certainly wasn't embarrassed or appalled, after years of acknowledging that it was merely in her nature to express herself unfiltered and to accomplish her agenda regardless of anyone else's. Up to this point, she had successfully insulted several passengers and flight attendants, insisted on a handful of ridiculous accommodations and reminded me why I had made the wrong decision for all of the major milestones in my life. She guilted me into calling the neighbor watching her cats on three separate occasions to ensure that she knew how to care for them upon her absence. This all occurred in the span of the 15 hours of travelling prior to touching down in our destination country. I could hear the irritation in the neighbor's voice during the first call. She didn't pick up the phone on my third, and I don't blame her.

I agreed, or was strongly coerced, to go on this last minute, whirlwind of a trip. I heard the desperation in my Mom's voice when she called me two weeks ago after receiving a phone call from my *Tante*, (the German word for Aunt) Marille. She was the only living relative left in my *Oma's*, (Grandmother), estate, and she was ready to clean house and discard everything left over since her passing. Realizing that my mother, as calloused as she could be on most occasions, was truly devastated at the possibility of losing a part of her family history, I couldn't help but to join her on this venture. Old family documents, photographs, and heirlooms were all fair game to dispose of according to my mother's recount of Tante Marille's threat.

Although I am not much of a planner and don't mind spontaneity, I couldn't help but reflect as we walked along the impossibly long airport terminal, finally off of that plane, that the timing of this trip fell perfectly with the semester ending. I had just sent the last few recommendations for my "hidden potential" students to receive a science review during summer school and had nearly two months of summer vacation ahead of me.

Continuing to roll my carryon through the concourse, I smiled as I realized that this trip was yet another example that things seem to have a way of lining up in my life. Strange as it may sound, since I was old enough to self-reflect, I have always had the feeling that certain events have been already mapped out for me.

Along with a handful of other strange beliefs and theories I subscribe to, I have never believed in coincidence. This comes as a result of some peculiarities about myself that I don't share with most. One being the fact that I have never had a dream. Try telling that to a classmate you are hoping will become your new friend, without her balking and running the other way, and you'll understand why I keep these things under wraps.

I was quickly jolted out of my own meanderings as we slowed our pace, reaching the backed up lines of customs. I silently groaned to myself as I recalled my last experience with Mother going through customs with her “new” hip. I braced myself for another embarrassing display.

Forty five minutes later, we were on the platform ready to catch our train. Acknowledging that I wouldn't be privy to a strong shot of liquor or those coveted “nerve pills” that old 1920s films glamorized while in my mother's presence, I set my mind on a nice long nap when we reached our journey's end at Tante Marille's house, nearly three hours from this leg of the trip. Ahead of us was this two hour train ride to Passau and then half an hour in a matchbox car up the mountain, or “berg”, as the Germans call them, to Hauzenberg was left to conquer. I resolved to not give up my spirit.

## Chapter 2

I watched through the windows of the cramped taxi as the cityscape of the old buildings of Passau were replaced with tall looming pine trees barely allowing the sun to peer through and the smooth roads turned into bumpy cobblestone streets. Finally, the familiar crunch of the granite stones meeting the car tires greeted my ears as we pulled into the driveway at my Oma's house. As we stood at her front door, my fingers again traced the circled pattern of amber glass on the windowed door.

“Wow. I'm back,” I thought, barely believing it myself.

My Aunt let us in, speaking fast in her hard to understand dialect. Her voice echoed in the foyer, and it was hard to tell if she was fussing at us already, or glad to see us based on her usual high pitched shrill. As we stood in the hall, removing our shoes, I studied the stairwells that I bounded up and down as a kid and although I couldn't put my finger on it, I

felt different in this space. I concluded that it was because my Oma was no longer going to be waiting for us downstairs. There were still so many reminders of her though and it was hard not to feel her warmth in this place where I had spent so many summers of my childhood.

Tante Marille, decked in her familiar brown and white apron, insisted that we take a walk down to the market after only an hour of arriving at her house. I thought to myself, “Has this woman ever experienced jet lag?” only to remember, that no, she had never flown. Ever. She had never even explored the surrounding countries in her youth.

I felt a little bad about my internal sarcasm, but it quickly faded. Mom cornered me downstairs as we changed to put on our sneakers, hearing my quiet objections of not being able to take the cat nap I had set my mind on in the car ride here, from Passau.

“Let’s appease Tante Marille, we don’t want to start out our stay with her on a bad foot it being our very first day. Let’s at least wait until tomorrow to anger or offend her over something menial, okay Lena?”

“Fine”, I said trying to refrain transforming into that subordinate teenager I was so used to being in my mother’s presence.

Tante Marille, make that, the entire village of Hauzenberg literally walked everywhere they had to go. I am always amazed at how out of breath I am walking up the hill from downtown and how Tante Marille doesn’t seem the least bit winded, a hearty, solid woman well into her 60’s.

Now that I had accepted that I wasn’t getting a nap, another strong desire, window shopping, was suddenly awakened. I grabbed my purse stuffed with traveler’s checks and the Euros I had paid way too much to exchange in the airport, and looked forward to checking out the modern clothing store that my Mom’s friend owned.



We headed down the cobblestone street and instantly my sentimental side reminisced in all of the familiar landmarks that dotted our walk downtown, which hadn't changed a bit since I had visited three years earlier.

The rustic water spout was still trickling water and today featured a few "spatzen"; little sparrows enjoying a bath on this warm afternoon. I was excited to see that the tanning store and hair salon were still on the corner close to the market. I made a mental note, which I knew I would soon forget, to try to get in a few tans when I needed to get away. Marille and Mom chattered the whole way down the hill until she opened the conversation to me.

"What are you eating these days, Lena, still the garbage Americans eat?" she said with the smile only she could give after delivering this touch of an insult.

"Not so much anymore, thanks, now that I am out of college, I have tried to eat healthier." I quipped back as respectful as I could.

I glared at my mother hoping she would feel the heat of my stare. She looked forward, as I knew she would, pretending not to acknowledge Tante's comment.

"I did ask Helmut from Aldi to help me up the hill with the Fanta's I bought for you, I remember from last time how you need to drink that sweet stuff," pausing for acknowledgement, and then continuing "Sprudel Wassa auch, *Sparkling Water too*" expecting my approval.

"Danke *Thank you*, Tante Marille." I followed with an exaggerated smile.

We reached the market and she handed me my own fabric bag and a few Euro Bills. My first instinct was to object, feeling bad that she had

handed me money, but I quickly stopped myself because I knew it would be a fight that would get me nowhere.

“You go, get what you like, I don’t know what you eat.” She lovingly pushed me towards the tables full of fruit and vegetables.

I took a long breath in to relish the smell of fresh food. You could smell the earthy ripeness of the tomatoes and sweetness of the raspberries. I picked a container of each, placed them in my bag handing the clerk a paper bill. I looked back and saw Mom and Marille were still stuck at the first table of the market entrance discussing European food, sure to end up in a debate. I decided to head toward the cheese and salami vendors. The salty, distinct aroma of the cheeses made my stomach growl.

“Would you like to try a sample?” a young woman asked from behind the stand.

“Ja, bitte *Yes please*,” taking a generous portion of the soft German cheese. It melted in my mouth and I asked for a few slices.

I saw that Mom and Marille hadn’t moved much so I took advantage of the opportunity to sneak off into the book store to try and find a few European fashion magazines to survive the silence, when Mom said it was time to “turn off the TV” before bed. No matter how old I get, she still expects adherence to some ridiculous rules.

I grabbed my phone and texted her to let her know where I was, and headed toward the store. I was greeted by the ringing of a row of bells as I opened the windowed door and then smelled the Jakob’s coffee brewing. I quickly found the colorful, thick magazines I loved pouring over. I purchased two magazines and a cup of coffee, and figured I had at least 10 minutes to sit down and sip the hot, rich brew.

I found a little table and chair next the bay window of the store. Pulling out my Sharpie Marker from my purse, I studied the radical outfits on the models and circled pieces I liked. Stopping to appreciate a black laced Grecian inspired dress on a tall blonde model, I studied the contrast of the black lace against the cream organza, the empire waist and the one shoulder drape design.

“Gorgeous,” I thought, “why can I never find things like this in America...Not that I had any occasion even remotely fancy enough to wear a dress like this to,” I rambled on to myself.

Sipping my coffee, I looked out of the window, which allowed me to see the last few tents of the market to spot my family when they emerged.

Instead of finding them in my field of vision, my eyes were suddenly drawn to a *shockingly* handsome man.

He was making his way across the courtyard, passing the fountain. He was wearing tan slacks and vest, over a crisp white shirt. He was carrying a briefcase and smiling, walking next to another tall man, who seemed to be saying something amusing.

I tried, but I could... not... break... my stare. You could say that my eyes were involuntarily fixated, enough that I had to blink to keep my contacts from sticking to my eyes.

He had the perfect build, thick golden brown hair and a grin that crept slightly up his cheek.

I found myself studying him and racking my brain trying to figure out why I had never seen him before but why he seemed so familiar.

I watched him buy an apple from the stand closest to the bookstore where I was sitting, walk it back to an older gentleman resting on the fountain steps and then he met back up with his friend.

“And he’s a humanitarian?” I mouthed, unbelievably entertained by my own private viewing of this scene unfolding before me.

My internal thought dialogue raced. ‘Who is this guy? It wasn’t a son of my mother’s friends, it wasn’t one of the neighborhood kids I grew up playing with over summer break, and I definitely would have remembered seeing him around town, as he looked so different than the boys I knew. The only clue I had to place him was his clothing, and the only businesses around the market to warrant such dress was the bank, the Raiffeisenbank.

He must be a banker from Raiffeisenbank, he was dressed the part, he was carrying a briefcase. Yes, definitely a young, oh my goodness, gorgeous banker.

Just then, in the midst of the loud, yet silent bantering of my mind, he turned back and shot a look at the bookstore window, right where I was sitting.

I clumsily lifted up my magazine to shield my ogling face, not realizing how obvious that must have looked and quickly grabbed my caffetasse which almost landed in my lap. Only a drop spilled out of the side of the cup.

This was enough time for me to lose sight of him and snap back to reality that I needed to get back to Mom.

I thanked the store saleswoman for the coffee and waved as I left. As the bells jingled, I was met by Mom and Tante.

“Ready?” they asked in unison.

“Sure,” I said, distracted trying to look past them to see if I could still see the two men walking.

I started to rehearse in my mind how I would ask Marille who they were without sounding interested. I thought, I could ask if it was Martina’s brother, which I already knew it wasn’t, but information gathering was of most importance to me. Or I could ask her if the two were affiliated with the Raiffeisenbank, the bank that my whole family at one time worked for.

Unfortunately, I never spotted them again and strangely felt a substantial amount of disappointment.

Mom and Marille rattled off all of the fresh food and desserts that they had found as we headed up the hill back home.

Then Marille caught me off guard, and said with her sheepish grin, “I found something for you...” sticking her hand in her cloth shopping bag.

“Your favorite Riesling, I remember you said you liked it that last time you visited,” as she handed me the bottle.

I couldn’t stop the wide grin that spread across my cheeks.

“Yay, wine and fashion magazines, what a perfect end to the day,” I said with true happiness.

I hugged her neck, which she clearly wasn’t expecting, but then she softened her stance to hug back. We finally made it back into the house and I asked permission to head downstairs to retire for the night.

“And not eat dinner I am going to cook for you?” Tante said with obvious surprise. “Oh, sure, I will come back up, let me set my alarm, that is if you don’t need my help,” secretly hoping I was still considered a “kid” among the two, not graduating to prep cook as most women my age were expected to be.

“Okay,” she said with understanding in her voice.

I skipped down the stairs, which always sounded like a pack of Clydesdales stampeding because of the echo of the four story stairwell and wooden staircase against my shoes. Held fast in my hands were the magazines, bottle of wine and yummy finds from the market.

The afternoon sun was starting to turn the sky an orangish yellow hue and I saw the perfect spot on the balcony swing to prop up my feet and relax. I grabbed a few couch pillows, a little glass and bottle opener out of Oma’s neatly organized cabinet and set the glass and fabric bag on the table next to me. I cozied into the bench, opened my favorite bottle of wine and generously poured the Riesling into the gold rimmed glass. I pulled out the magazine I was looking at earlier.

Only, I couldn’t focus. All I could envision was the young man I had seen in the square and the moment he looked over at the storefront. ‘Had he seen me? I had to find out who he was. My mission these next two weeks was to see him again. Not stalk him in a creepy way, at least not on purpose.’ I laughed at my stupid thoughts as I took a long drink of my wine inhaling the fresh citrus notes and aimlessly flipped through the pages of the magazine wondering what I would say to him when we met. I took another sip of wine and set my glass down on the table. I laid my magazine down too, careful to keep the page tucked under, so I didn’t lose my spot. I stretched out pointing my toes towards the edge of the balcony, taking a mental picture of my pretty pink toenails against the lush green color of the forest in the background.

I finally felt like I was on vacation. As I let the heaviness of my eyelids close, I sensed that this vacation had something special in store for me. I must have fallen asleep outside because I jumped up when I heard the

heavy porch door open and my Mom call “Lena, are you going to come up and eat dinner?”.

I stretched my arms over my head and realized that dusk had fallen over the town and the crickets were singing their sweet song. I saw little trails of light from the fireflies and sat up to put up my belongings and trudge up the stairs.

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“We made coffee, Lena,” as Mom recognized my sleepy, grouchy shuffle up the stairs.

Marille had again, outdone herself, with enough food to feed a family of six. Nonetheless, I grabbed a few cookies to dip in my coffee and thanked them both for their hard work in the kitchen.

“Qwatch, *Nonsense*” Marille said as she waved off my compliment.

I loved this about her personality, as hard of a woman as she was, she was very humble. I made a conscious effort not to eat my weight in the spread that was set before us, which both Mom and Marille chided me for. We chatted about our plans for the trip and I was recruited to help Mom in the morning, potentially all day, to sort through the letters and paperwork that belonged to Oma.

“Ughh. Okay, but I do want to spend some time doing things that won’t bore me to tears.”

Marille let out her signature high pitched cackle, which clearly didn’t amuse my mother. Mom confirmed that she could take Marille’s car in the evening tomorrow to meet up with her old classmates for dinner and drinks, or vice versa, and she said that I will have earned a free evening to myself after helping her that day. I reluctantly agreed and Marille let out

another laugh. This time I felt mom's eye's cut through me, but I made an effort to ignore the glare.

I broke the ice by cleaning up our emptied dishes and started filling the sink with warm water.

“Raus, *Out*” Marille said shooining me away from doing any housework for her.

“Bitte? *Please*” I asked, hoping to show that I appreciated her hospitality.

“Nein,” she replied in a lowered tone, which signaled that I better not push the issue.

“Okay”, I responded as I wandered into the front room to watch the German news, one of the only channels available on her comically old television set. I nestled into the soft couch and struggled to understand the formal, quick paced language, glad that pictures helped fill in the blanks of the many words I didn't understand. I watched for about 15 minutes feeling the jet lag sink in, and wandered back into the kitchen to excuse myself for a shower and to crash into bed.

I could see that both Mom and Marille had rosy cheeks from the several beers that they were making their way through and I smiled as I kissed them both goodnight on the foreheads.

“Tschüsse *Bye*” they both said in unison lifting up their beer bottles. As they both realized they had mirrored one another, I saw them both shoot each other a look. I smiled and shook my head at them, thinking to myself, neither of them would ever admit it out loud, but they actually had a lot in common, and even more so, they wouldn't dare let on that there was an underlying friendship between them.



“Tschüsse” I said back, and climbed downstairs for the night.

### Chapter 3

We scoured through letter after letter, each provoking another story about the tragedy that marked my mother’s life, finding out the truth of how and why her father was killed on his way back home from the war. I

tried to be as supportive as possible but the emotions were exhausting. I finally begged her to release me from the project when I saw the clock change to 4pm. I knew she would want to start getting ready for her dinner with her old classmates.

“What are you going to do this evening, Lena?”

“I’m not sure, but I will probably end up going running, probably down to the Friedhoff *Cemetery*, like always, and maybe visit the bookstore if it is still open. Who knows? I may meet someone somewhat close to my age, maybe I’ll be lucky enough to find a 40 year old.”

Mother smirked, “Well I have a lot of catching up to do with the ladies, so I will leave the key under the mat, but you will probably beat me back. Just try not to be too noisy, if Marille wakes up, we won’t hear the end of it at breakfast tomorrow,” she said shaking her finger at me.

I maturely rolled my eyes at her.

“Remember the long distance phone call you made last time we visited, to whatever boyfriend you had at the time?”

“Mom, it was a two year relationship, and we thought we were going to get married, the phone call length was legitimate”.

Dismissing me with her hand, she continued, “Whatever it was, that was the first thing out of her mouth when we got in yesterday.”

Picking up the piles of papers that I had separated in order, a black and white photograph fell out and onto the soft area rug. “Got it. Well, have fun Mom.” I replied with the sticky sweet fakeness that I know gets under her skin.

Mom left the living room and I heard her footsteps echo on the wooden floors as she headed upstairs to Marille’s flight. I picked up the

picture that had fallen and put it on the top of the stack of papers as I walked them over to the living room table. I stopped mid step because the face in the picture caught my attention.

My stomach turned as I picked back up the picture and held it close to my face. I studied the photograph and recognized the person next to my grandfather in the picture. *'No, that can't be possible.'* I shook my head in disbelief as I focused on the gorgeous details of this stranger. Blaming my mind on making an obviously impossible connection to this person in the photograph and the banker that I spied yesterday in the courtyard, I felt like jetlag was surely the culprit of my ridiculousness. *'Lena, you are losing your mind'*, I scolded myself. I finished with my original task, laughing at my stupidity and placed the photograph and stack of papers neatly on the table.

I went to my room and changed into my black running capris, magenta Nike running tank and sneakers. Something about this particular outfit that has always awarded me with a good run. I pulled my hair into a high pony-tail, which always exposed my darker, natural hair color underneath, I made a mental note that I was way overdue in getting my blonde highlights done, did a quick mirror check, and darted up the stairs to grab some change and head outside, but the phone rang, so out of instinct I answered it, forgetting my limited skills in speaking German.

It was a woman with a higher pitched voice than Marille, which I didn't realize was possible, speaking in a Bayrische *Bavarian-region of South Germany* dialect I could barely understand.

I kindly asked, "Eine momente, *One moment*" and before I could yell, "*Marille, telefone!*" she was standing behind me with her hand outstretched.

“Oh, here.” I said, handing her the receiver.

“Tschusse! *Bye!*” I called, bolting out the door.

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I needed to get away-to breathe...fill my lungs with this amazingly fresh, cool air. The sun was starting to slink down behind the hills, creating the loveliest silhouettes of the trees. The stark black trunks extended into limbs and leaves that looked like filigree. They contrasted against the vivid violet and orange sky. From where my Oma’s house was, on the top of the berg, my jog led me down the cobblestone streets, winding past the neatly manicured drives and front yards of the families I grew up knowing.

Herr Schlagger’s house, who had a daughter my age, was on the left with window boxes overflowing with coral orange geraniums. Gabi’s house, another friend, had a brown picket fence, hearts carved in her window shutters and a cherry tree right outside her bedroom window.

Curb appeal was certainly valued by this neighborhood and my eyes bounced from one artistic detail to the next.

I enjoyed the comfort of knowing I was one of the few souls exploring this evening as all the other families were tucked in their homes settling down for dinner.

I jogged past the little bakery that made unforgettable plum tortes and the modern clothing store that my mother’s friend owned. All were closed until morning.

Being here is like I am transported to a different time, a safer, slower, protected place in time. I jogged on looking forward to my usual ritual of plunking two Euros into the fountain at the center of the market square. I

could hear the bubbling water of the three separate spouts meeting the main pool of the fountain before I could even see it.

As I came around the corner, I slowed my jog to a walk, which to be honest, isn't much of a transition for me. I began to search my Capri pockets for the Euros I placed in them earlier.

“Wait,” I thought to myself “did I ever put them in my pocket?”

I saw them in my mind, in the little dish on the table by the door, “oh damn, the phone rang, and I forgot to grab them on my way out.”

Halfheartedly, I pulled out the fabric of my pockets just to make sure, but I knew with certainty that no coin was to be found. I couldn't help but sigh, “oh well”, out loud to myself, with typical disappointment in my failed memory.

I geared up for the next leg of my run to visit my family's memorial site at the cemetery, but something quickly caught my senses.

I felt the hairs on my arms stand up and I instantly became aware of my heart beat. Not trusting my eyes, for obvious reasons, I silently denied that I saw a figure standing behind the fountain, but then second guessed myself.

I froze for a moment in place. Panicked, I spun my head around and confirmed my internal checklist, yes, I was completely alone, all stores were closed, no witnesses, no one to run to.

Before I could decide which way to dart, I looked up, and there he was, now in front of the fountain.

The gorgeous banker that I had spied from the bookstore yesterday started walking towards me, his hands in his pocket and his lips in a subtle smile.

I felt a small sense of relief, but I was still apprehensive.

I realized that he was much taller than me, once he had reached just a few feet in front of me. I could now see the highlights of gold in his thick hair and his clothes were neatly pressed.

He then stretched his arm towards me, and I focused in on his hand and saw that he was holding out a coin.

“Suchen Sie etwas? Ein schönes Wunshe verlicht?” he said in a precise German accent. *Looking for something? A beautiful wish, perhaps?*

I must have just stared blankly, because he followed that, in a doubtful tone, with, “Sprechen Sie Deutsch?” *Do you speak German?*

I sputtered out “uh, yes”, and instantly felt embarrassed, feeling the blood flush my cheeks, as I realized I answered him in English.

I took the coin from his hand, smiled and said “Danke” *Thank You* making it a point to sound “very German” hoping I convinced him I could communicate with him, and then flicked the coin in the water, quickly closing my eyes tight and silently willing my wish to life.

He started, in the cleanest European dialect, “I speak English too, you know....”

“My name is Sebastian,” he said as he gestured his hand towards himself, as if he was trying desperately to communicate.

“Hi, I’m Lena,” and awkwardly held out my hand.

Without a beat, he took my hand in his and said, “Pleasure,” and shook it confidently as his perfect lips crept into a smile.