

Berlin

The rain bangs against the roof of our car. "How long 'til we get there?" I ask my parents for about the tenth time in one minute.

"I just told you, about twenty more minutes," my dad replies.

"Johannes, fahre ich jetzt rechts oder links?" my Mom asks him.

"I miss Joris," I say. Joris is my older brother, and for as long as I remember, our trips as a family have always involved all four of us.

"Yes Lena, we all do," my mom tells me. She has told me that ever since he left for college. At least he's not that far away from our house in Ann Arbor, MI, because he went to college at the U of M. So he has a dorm room just a couple of blocks away. This year, though, he can't come on our trip to Germany, because we are staying in Berlin for half a year, just like we have every five years. I've gone three times already. Every time, my brother has been with me.

I love my brother. He's five years older than me, and he's a brown-haired boy, tall, because it runs in the family. All of my friends hate their siblings, but Joris and I are fine. We don't tell our parents each other's secrets, and we don't really get into each other's business. Now, after thirteen years together, he has left.

"Home again, home again, toodleydoo." My mom's voice interrupts my thoughts.

"YAY!" I shout. The building at Niedstraße 28 faces us—its big white walls towering as high as I can see.

As I am unpacking my suitcase in my room, I think about everything that I did last time we came here. There was a boy named Anton living next door to us, and we used to hang out together a lot. We usually played soccer in the park, but when it snowed in winter, we made forts, and tried to get icicles down from the lampposts. I think about all of my friends from school and aftercare. I wonder how they have changed. Five years is a long time, and anything could have happened. I start putting my clothes in my closet. As I am hanging up the new dress that I got from Amelia and Alisha as a goodbye present, I notice that it has a letter stuck to it. I take the dress out and set it carefully on my bed. I'll open it later, I think to myself.

I finish unpacking right as the doorbell rings. I run to the speaker and answer. "Hallo?" I ask.

"Hallo Lena!!! Hier sind Laura, Lea, und Paula H.!!!

"HALLO!!!!!!!! Kommt rein, kommt rein!" I click the buzzer and open the door for my friends. I can already hear them coming up the six flights of stairs to get to our apartment. I run into my room and hide the dress under my bed. I hear them at the door. They come into my room. Lea! Laura! Paula! We hug and hug, talk and talk, and I learn that I had guessed right: many things do change in five years. Lea has a boyfriend, Laura's birthday is coming up, and she's having a dance party at a beach house that her parents are renting. Guess what? I'm invited!!!!

I have a great time with my friends, but I definitely miss people from Ann Arbor. I especially won't forget Alisha and Amelia, my two best friends.

We've been friends since kindergarten and our friendship has been especially tight ever since we all went to Vermont together. We saved up for the tickets for a year and finally, over Easter break in 2013, we got to go. That's what I'm thinking about when I head out the door with my Berlin friends for ice cream at my favorite gelateria around the corner.

When I get home, my mom and dad are still busy getting the house ready, but my grandma is also there. When she sees me, I am immediately embraced with hugs and kisses. She gives me the regular present; a bar of chocolate and a book. She says she has to go get us some food and asks whether I would like to come. I say ok, and we head off to the closest grocery store.

I come home carrying about twenty bags full of groceries, my grandma close behind with just as many. "Wow! That's quite the load you bought there!" My mom comes and takes some of the bags from each of us. "Are you sure that we will have room for all of this in our fridge?" We stuff everything that will fit in and my grandma volunteers to take the rest home to her apartment.

I help to prepare dinner with my dad and grandma. While we make Königsberger Klopse (one of my favorite German meals), my mom finishes unpacking. We all sit down at the long table in the dining room and dig in. Dinner is delicious, the potatoes are perfect, and the meat is just right. It might just taste so great because I was eating airplane food before this, but I think it is an amazing welcome feast.

After dinner, I help put the dishes away, but I am eager to get to my room and open the letter. I stack the last dish and run down the hallway. I pull the dress out from under the bed and tear open the envelope. The note reads:

Dear Lena,

By the time you get this letter, you will probably already have had many adventures with your friends and had a lot of fun. We hope that you don't have too much fun without us, though that problem will be resolved soon, seeing as:

WE ARE COMING TO BERLIN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

We have planned this trip ever since you first told us that you would be going for another half year. Our parents have agreed, and your parents were very kind and let us stay with you in your apartment. We have been saving up our money and now have enough to get a plane ticket there and back. We are SO excited to finally meet all of your friends and to spend time with you in a whole different COUNTRY!!!!!! As you can probably tell, WE CAN'T WAIT!!!!!!!!!! ← That was Amelia ☺

So, for the details:

- *We will arrive at the airport around 2:00pm on Sunday and you and your parents will come pick us up at the gate*
- *We will then go to your house and spend a month with you and your family/friends*
- *We have to leave a month from that Sunday to attend school in Ann Arbor*
- *We will have TONS of fun together!!!!*

Well, We have to go finish packing now! See you SSSOOOOOONNN!!!!!!

Amelia and Alisha

The smile on my face gets bigger each sentence I read. I just can't believe it. Amelia and Alisha coming to Berlin. For a WHOLE MONTH! Without their parents. On the plane. To me. Oh. My. Gosh.