

November 20

Alex,

I should make you hunt for this in some horribly complicated fashion (three pages in three different locations? I found them out of order, Alex, and I almost had to give up on page two!) but Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and I leave in three days for Washington state to visit my cousins, and so I'm trying to get us through as many letters as possible in the interim.

Okay, I'm sorry, I didn't think about making you wait four days for a letter – I was making a gesture! (Also, I didn't have it finished. Tech week is crazy, even for pit. Does that offer some solace?)

Sometimes, I don't understand people either, and it can be dismaying to see how many entitled, offensive assholes there are in the world. But I am encouraged by the fact that, in my experience, there are many more open-minded individuals trying to be better.

Wow, you're not really on the internet at all? How on earth do you qualify as a modern teenager?* I am very much an internet person. I'm on Facebook and Tumblr and Twitter and Spotify and a few other places (I'm ZoewithanE just about everywhere). I'm on social media way more than I ought to be, but it's so fun! I use Tumblr the most -- I love being connected to people on the other side of the world, who I would never have had the chance to meet if we hadn't had the same minority opinions about webseries. Might I suggest getting at least a Twitter? It's very easy to be a casual Twitter-user, much easier than Facebook, where people have to agree to be your friends. On Twitter, you can follow anyone you want without having to post anything

yourself, and it's really easy to ignore your account if you decide it's not for you.

Nooooo! Not banana peppers, please! I'll be good, I swear!

What can't I do? Plenty, Alex. I swear I'm not as perfect as you think! I can't play any instruments other than the trumpet and trombone, and I can't sing at all. I also can't act, which is so frustrating, because I think being in plays would be a lot of fun. My French also sucks. Like, I learn the vocab I need to do well in the class, but when I try to speak it, I am halting and hesitant, and my accent is atrocious. I also have to work my ass off to get my As in math, which is why I'm in Statistics, not Calculus. Concrete, numbers-based math, I'm okay with. Abstract, conceptual math sounds distinctly like torture. I am not athletic – I told you I quit the volleyball team in 8th grade because everyone started taking it too seriously, which is true, but it was also because I sucked. I'm pretty bad at general coordination. I can't sew, much to Gabe's chagrin, and I can't cook. I burn pancakes, and pancakes are pretty simple.

And moving away from skills-based examples, I am cripplingly claustrophobic, impatient as hell, and too impulsive for my own good. Honestly, I'm a good writer, a good brass player, a good friend, and a good student, but that's really all I have to recommend me. And to be frank, that first one is more a result of upbringing than any real talent of my own – I was raised by a UCSD professor of English Lit, Composition, and Creative Writing; it's not my fault I write like a college student! Trust me, you would too if you'd had my mother looking over all your essays and written work your whole academic career!

Like, I have no problem accepting praise for my musicianship or my grades – I've worked hard to be good at those things. But I get so uncomfortable when people praise my writing because I feel like those skills don't have much to do with me, you know?

Now that I have catalogued my faults for you, I would like you to catalogue your virtues. What are you good at, Alex? How do you like to spend your time? What are you passionate about (besides puzzles; I think it's clear you have a great talent for those – I feel a little inadequate sometimes, trying to keep up!)

No further communication from Thom, as far as I'm aware. Mom says she's stopped talking with him about me, though she's still talking to him about other things that I can tell she wants me to ask about, which I refuse to do because I'm determined not to care.

Don't you dare add your banana peppers to my perfect California white pizza.

When is your birthday? You don't have to tell me month and date or anything, just when you say you got a gift for your birthday, I'd like to know how recently that was (and if it's coming up any time in the near-ish future, I need time to prepare).

I know Harris Burdick very well; I pored over those pictures when I was little. I always loved the one with the dove on the wallpaper coming to life. If you want this letter in a timely fashion, I can't write you a short story now, but I will work on it over break and get it to you next time. I'm much better with letters and essays than creative writing, despite my mother's influence (in addition to being a writing professor, she has

published several novels, under a pen name. If you are curious and you promise not to be intimidated, I will tell you who she is).

My favorite book changes all the time, but my favorite author consistently (apart from Mom) is Elizabeth Wein, who writes YA historical fiction centered around female pilots in WWII. I love Code Name Verity with all my heart, and you should read it if you never have.

The last play I saw, besides YAGMCB was our production of Noises Off, which I enjoyed! It's a play about a play, which is always fun.

And your day was fine? That's it? Just fine? I mean, I'm not asking for a novel or anything, but such a short answer makes me think maybe things aren't exactly "fine," just based on how much you said the last time I asked this question. Is everything okay, or is life just boring right now?

As for my day, it was packed. I did the church thing with Mom and Joe this morning, and had to leave early to make call for closing Charlie Brown. The final show went well, even though our Sally messed up "New Philosophy" something awful. We recovered, but it was tense in the pit for a few measures, trying to get her back on track. She was really upset with herself at intermission; I felt so bad! She was the only freshman in the show, and she felt like she let everyone down.

But we closed well, and I went straight to Del Mar after pit strike (much simpler than regular strike) to collect your letter, and now I'm rushing through this instead of doing my French! :) I really hate French.

In case I don't hear from you before I leave, have an excellent Thanksgiving!

Zoe