

December 11

Alex,

I know by the time you get this letter, you'll already know what there is to know one way or another, but I'm pretty scared on your behalf, Alex. It sounds like someone drugged you. You said your soda tasted funny, and then you blacked out. I asked Joe and he says it sounds like GHB or Ketamine or Rohypnol. He says you (not you specifically; I didn't tell him who I was asking for, just reassured him it wasn't me. I want to respect your privacy, but I'm really worried) need to monitor yourself carefully in the next 24 hours and catalogue any additional symptoms you might develop. He also says if you think you've been drugged, you should go to the hospital to be checked, but I'm guessing it will be too late for that by the time you get this.

I've searched through local news reports since reading your letter, and I haven't heard anything to raise suspicion or alarm, so I'm going to hope that everything worked itself out, but I don't know. Maybe you should tell someone? Like, file a police report? And write down everything you can remember, even things you're not totally sure of. Like, where were you when you woke up? Were you home? Or still at the party? Are you missing anything? Do you think you were robbed or assaulted?

Sorry, I'm trying not to panic, but I'm worried. I know there's not much I can do, though, so I will try to answer the rest of your letter as normally as possible.

I took your advice on Lissa's letter, and struck out some of the "nice" from my reply. I told her she could write back to me, but that I wasn't comfortable with more than that right now.

I just – I don't know what she wants from me. And I know she's only thirteen, and I know she's probably not being goaded into this by her dad, but I still kinda feel like I'm being goaded into caring against my will. But, she asked for my help. How selfish would it be of me to not give it?

I told Mom about the letter. I asked if this is what he wanted to talk about so suddenly, and yeah, it was. Of course it was. Michelle (whose name I did not particularly want to know) has something called Wegener's, some kind of autoimmune disease. Joe says even if you catch it and treat it early, it almost always causes long-term complications, which is what's going on here. Mom's the one who told me Michelle is dying, not Lissa. That's how I knew. I don't know much beyond that, though, because I don't really want the details. I don't want to care. I don't want to feel sorry for this woman or her daughter, or get pulled into a situation that will inevitably force me to get closer to my biological father. But it's not this girl's fault. And I can't imagine being thirteen and trying to deal with this. So even though it's not fair, I feel like I have to be there for her, you know?

No, I guess you probably don't, actually. I can practically hear what you would say to that: No, you don't, Zoe. You're not obligated to be there for her or anyone else. You've got to take care of you first; you don't owe this girl anything.

It's not that you aren't right. It's just that I don't work like that. Believe me, I wish I could, but. Yeah.

I'd talk to Gabe about all this, but there's been a hiccup with our huge spring musical. We were doing West Side Story, but something happened with getting the rights? I don't know the details, but the

school announced last week that we're doing Into the Woods instead. Gabe was three quarters done with his costume designs, and now he has to start over from scratch, for a much more costume complicated show, and he's barely keeping his head above water with his own stress at the moment. I don't feel right adding mine. I'll fill him in over break, when he has a chance to breathe, but until then, I'm stuck trying to navigate this on my own. Well, with your help, of course.

I don't know, I feel weird just going through and answering all your points as if nothing's going on! So I think I won't. I think I'm gonna leave this here for now, at least until I hear from you. I want to get you this as soon as possible. And – yeah, I'm including my phone number for you. You don't have to use it, you don't have to give me yours in return, but if something like this happens again, I want you to be able to reach me. You've got my house number and my cell. I'll just rest easier, you know?

Please let me know as soon as you can if everything's all right.

Zoe