

Zoe,

Remember the park where you found my last letter? Go back there. Sit on the swings for a few minutes with your back to the picnic pavilion. There's a running trail that goes along the playground. Get up and follow that trail, watching off to your left, until you find a gazebo that overlooks the creek. I don't know any specific stories about this place, but it has a lot of history to it. Almost every time I walk past there is a group there, watching the creek, or the people. I've even passed a few weddings there. Close your eyes and imagine the stories of all the people who have sat in this gazebo before you (including me, as I wrote this letter). Then, look up.

December 16

Zoe,

You made me go through every letter you have ever written me, just so you could do a fancy clue about your favorite book?! Do you know how long of letters you write? It took me hours. You have repaid your anger from a few letters ago and then some!

I know you probably don't mean it this way, but a numbered list kind of makes you seem like you're angry. But anyways, 1 & 2: no comment.

3: You would have found out my full identity eventually, and I've known yours for a while, so I guess it's fine. It's kind of like the gender thing - my "friends" know who I am, and I forget sometimes that you don't.

Can I be completely honest here? What I'm seeing in your problem with Lissa is that you're arguing with yourself on who comes first. You kind of took the words out of my mouth in your last letter on this, but your nature is to put everyone else before yourself. And the reason you hate Thom so much is because he couldn't do that. He put himself first, and hurt a lot of people in the process. Maybe that's why you're the way you are, I don't know, but you need to recognize that by putting yourself last 100% of the time, the only thing you get is to be last. Sure, some people might be grateful, some might recognize that you're doing them a huge favor, but people suck. Most of them are not like you, so they'll just take advantage of you, see that you like being taken advantage of, and keep on doing it. You have to decide where the line is, where you'll stop being a doormat. So, if you don't hate me

for saying this enough that you stop writing, next letter I want you to list me 10 things that you want for you. Not for your mother, not for Gabe, not to make the world a better place. For YOU.

I was less than half joking about backpacking. For all that Dad earns plenty to afford it, we don't travel too much, and when we do we go to a resort somewhere in the tropics where Rachel can lay out in the sun and Dad can golf, and everyone else can swim in the pool all day. Don't get me wrong, it's great, but it's not as fulfilling as your trip sounds. I'd really like to go, and since we have another year to work on me not being paranoid about going on vacation with a former stranger, I thought it wouldn't hurt to tentatively say yes.

I am imagining you playing keep away with a tall, large fashion designer, and it is making me laugh. Thanks for that. :)

You would be a miracle worker indeed if you managed to get us some snow, since the last time was 2014 and it hadn't happened since the 60s before that! Perhaps, during your backpacking trip, should I decide to go, we'll have to go far enough East to climb the Rocky Mountains? :)

I guess you could say I put up with Rachel but I wouldn't say it's because her excessive gift-giving worked. I don't resent her the way John does, but I wouldn't say I love her either. She's kind of annoying because she's always got this baby-talk voice when she's talking to me. And, since you asked, it's supposed to be another week until Elisabeth is born, and Rachel is being very demanding, so I make myself scarce as often as possible. It's as good an excuse as any to go for walks in the parks.

Zoe-y has a boy-friend (you'll have to imagine the sing-song tone I'm using here)

Sigh Here I compliment you on your question choices and you give me a bunch of boring school-related questions? I suppose I can answer them if I must.*

1) I guess I participated because it sounded interesting and I was curious.

2) I kind of thought your experiment was a little crazy. But I did it, so it must not have been too crazy.

2a) Can I ask you what you thought about me when I first wrote to you? Is that allowed?

3) I guess I did have some misgivings about participating, but, I mean, through the letters you've kind of seen how that played out, right? Cause I was super paranoid right at the beginning, remember?

4) I can't speak for other people's reasoning, but it is kind of weird to just find a letter asking you to do something. In this day and age nobody trusts anybody, so I expect people who didn't accept thought it was some kind of scam or hoax or serial killer or something.

5) I've learned that Zoe is a pretty awesome girl. I might say I've learned to be less paranoid, but this is kind of a special case, you know? It turned out well, so I might be more likely to try it again, but it also turned out so well because it was Zoe and not somebody else. Without her personality this would probably have not worked.

6) I'm glad that Zoe's social experiment means I met her.

Your lab rat,
Alex

P.S. I'm sure you're dying for more information about the party. I am too, but I don't think I'm going to get it. Brent said the party was a hit, but he thinks someone called the cops, cause they showed up about ten minutes after the party broke up. Emma doesn't remember too much (as I predicted) but said that I seemed like I was having fun, even though I eventually got sick. She ~~won't say~~ doesn't remember anything else. Anyway, since break starts end of this week, and by the time we get back everyone will be on to something else, there's not much chance of learning more. Basically, I think it's best to just put it behind me.