

[Gabe:] Alex,

I have already apologized to Zoe for my dickish behavior, but you deserve one from me, too, so here goes. And no, before you ask, Zoe did not ask me to do this. She doesn't even know I am.

I was out of line. But you got to understand, it's been just me and Zo for forever. She's friendly, you know that, so she's got a lot of friends and always has, but I'm the one she's always come to for the big stuff. And now - I don't know you, man. Don't get me wrong; Zo's told me a bit about you, and I get that you and she are friends, but I didn't know how close you had gotten, and something this big? I hated the thought that she had struggled through it alone rather than "bother" me, because I guess I egotistically thought if she didn't come to me, she wouldn't go to anyone, you know?

Look, I've got nothing against you. I'm glad you could be there for Zoe when she needed someone and I wasn't around. I shouldn't have lashed out against you (Zoe told me she told you, so I won't rehash it). I felt guilty, that I hadn't been there for her. So I am glad that you could help. I hope you keep doing it. Zoe has a tendency to martyr herself, you know, self-sacrifice for needs she thinks are greater than hers. I worry about her sometimes, and I should have been happier that she has someone else to go to now, not just me. It's gonna take me some time to get over being a little jealous, but that's on me, not you. Keep being there for her, okay? And the obligatory, you hurt her, I hurt you. Yeah?

But thanks. And really, man. I'm sorry. I was a dick. Won't happen again.

Gabe Maxwell

[Zoe:]
Alex,

December 23

Gabe wrote you a note. I trust by now you've read it, since it was the first page I stuck in? That was an unsolicited inclusion – he took the trouble to bring it over to my house on his way to the airport to fly to Germany for his Christmas break (his dad is military and is stationed over there), so naturally, I'm insanely curious about what is in this note. He wouldn't tell me anything beyond that it was an apology he felt he owed you, and I haven't pried, much as I may want to. But I'm trusting I don't have to go into the ridiculousness of you wanting to back out of our friendship if it's causing a rift between me and Gabe. Such silliness.

Moving on.

YOU HAVE A BABY SISTER!!!!!!!

It's okay if you aren't excited about this – I am excited enough for twelve of us. Congratulations!!!

Now. Onto what is possibly the most important point of a letter full of very important things.

You say we sometimes talk at cross-purposes, that our meanings get dropped and lost and confused. And yes, I can see this. We've had a couple miscommunications, and occasionally the tone set in a letter's opening has, for the reader, defined the whole letter's tone differently than the writer intended.

But here's something I've noticed about this issue. I think you think I'm missing the humor in your letters a lot more often than I am.

So, for instance, you will write something in Letter A, and I respond to it in Letter B, and then when I get Letter C from you, you stress that what you wrote in Letter A was a joke, because you think that I misinterpreted it, not getting that in Letter B, I was joking, too. So maybe it's my sense of humor that isn't always coming through.

I get that you're wry and sardonic and sarcastic. I like that, because it gives me the chance to be the same in return! Remember my response to our fight? If I feel you're out of line or I find something you say offensive, I'm not shy about pointing it out. So that's something I think we can focus on: I'll work on making my joking tone a little more prominent if you'll work on trusting that I know when you're teasing or poking fun. Really, there should be a way to imbue the letter with vocal cues, so that as we read what the other writes, we hear the tone or laughter that accompanies things. I guess I'll have to settle for peppering my letters with even more smiley faces than usual! :)

Okay. Starting from the top.

Ugh, does high school have to be defined by drama? Because I don't like it!

And yes, Gabe was being a jealous jerk, and I called him out on that, and he's apologized for it, so I think we have dispensed with the drama.

Yeah, on second thought, I think I will keep Allie and Gina and Cate far, far away from you. It's not about you, understand, but, well. They know too much. :) No, they may get a note or two snuck in over the next week. We'll see.

You don't have to be happy about the assignment I gave you, but I'm glad you did it – and I do count it completed, and I will not disregard number two just because your list was five items long rather than ten. You are dependable – you undertook this task even though you didn't want to, right? This is a fantastic start to your list, and I hope that gradually, you will add to it. Not for me, but for you. Yes, the list is subjective, but this is part of that whole not selling yourself short thing. I have my list of ten, but I'm not going to include it in its entirety in this letter, because of reasons that will become clear in two days. I will give you the short version, though, because I think it's important for you to have:

1. You're honest.
2. You're loyal.
3. You're a defender.
4. You're protective.
5. You listen very well.
6. You're perceptive.
7. You're communicative.
8. You're fun.
9. You're kind and compassionate.
10. (Doesn't work on a short list because it requires an explanation; you will get it soon, I promise).

I'm not withholding to tantalize you, Alex, but because after reading your letter, this list has become more important for me to take my time with, to work to get the words to say what I want to say. Thank you for completing this challenge. I know it was a hard one.

Please do not teleport away to the future. I would be very sad, and very concerned, if you simply disappeared one day without warning.

I like what you would do with your God-day, though I do think you're looking at God-dom through the limited focus of human understanding. Like, no, I can't imagine being able to see the consequences of tiny actions played out through all of time, but God can. Even little things can change the course of a person's life forever, after all. For example, last year, Speech and Debate was full by the time I registered. So I let the guidance counselor put me in Sociology instead.

If you like Imagine Dragons, you should listen to FUN, or OneRepublic. They have similar sounds. You should also listen to the Hamilton soundtrack if you haven't, but that's less because of anything I know about your music tastes and more because everyone should listen to the Hamilton soundtrack because it's amazing.

I like your additions to my time capsule, but I'm not going to toss out my personal day manuscripts. Pictures are all well and good, but they don't tell you how people lived. Personal stories are important. They're what make history interesting. I hated history classes when I was younger because it was boring. And then I found the Dear America Diaries, and it all came alive! A day-to-day record of girls just like me, who happened to live in a different time. Making history personal is the way to make it interesting. I want to shake some of my peers sometimes, for falling asleep or zoning out, like, how can you not want to pay attention to this??

Sorry. Got off topic.

Now about your mom. Your mom said hi. I can understand why you're freaked, but can I ask you a question? And you don't have to write the answer, but I want you to think about it. If you had your mom in front of you right now, what would you say to her?

I may be as much a sucker for the reunion/redemption story as anyone, but you're not a character in a novel, and this is your life. I think you need to pinpoint exactly how you feel toward your mom right now. Are you angry? Sad? Disappointed? Do you feel betrayed? Do you miss her? And there's no reason why the answer to all of those questions can't be "Yes," but I think you need to figure out which is strongest. Do you want to see your mother again? Do you want to talk to her? If those answers are no, then I imagine you can ignore John's comment and everything will go on as it has. But if the answers are yes, then I think you need to talk to your brother. You don't have to set up a meeting or anything like that, but find out where she is and how she's doing. That's my advice.

Okay, Mom is yelling at me to get my butt downstairs and help clean the living room, so I need to go do that.

Let me know how your holiday goes!

Your Friend,

Zoe