

December 28

Zoe,

This time instead of directions to find the letter, you're getting directions for reading it. If I've calculated correctly, you should receive this letter on December 29. This is very important: Don't read it right away! Wait until 10 pm, and then go outside - somewhere you can see the stars. Find the third star in from the handle of the big dipper and make a wish. Then you can read the letter.

Very specific directions, I know. You said once that you like coincidences of history, displaced. I like coincidences of the present. At that exact same time, I will find the exact same star and also make a wish. I don't have a letter to read, but I'll sit outside with you, until you finish reading mine. Imagine that I'm reading it to you, even though we're all the way across the city from each other. It's kind of important with this one especially, so I hope this works.

Oh Zoe and cousins. At least you made me smile.

Since your cousins are obviously all very curious about me, I give you permission to share any part of this letter you want. If I don't want them to read something, I'll say so. If you happen to need to write this way again, though, can you do me a favor and have everyone write their name before they take over? It'll make it easier to tell who I need to address my response to :)

Zoe: Hands and boiling water do not mix. I am sure that you have figured this out now, but just in case stop putting your hands in it! At least you have a nurse right there to look at it.

I'm glad you liked the poem even though it was very silly and done quickly. But I figured you would see the value in it. Just to be clear, that was the Christmas present I was talking about earlier in the letter. I didn't have anything else ready, so I dashed off a silly one really quickly. The less silly ones take time to get right, unfortunately.

I'm on a 2 am coffee run now, if you want to join me :) Elisabeth woke me up with her crying, and I couldn't get back to sleep, so I drove over to Cuppa Joe's for a calming tea and someplace else to be. It's funny - even though Cuppa Joe's was always "Rachel's shop" to me, now it's kinda, well, our place. Even though we've never met. The point is, it feels like you're already keeping me company, even if you're miles away, asleep, and nursing a burned hand.

And, um, thanks. For the Christmas present. ~~It was~~ ~~No one has~~
~~ever~~ ~~I don't know what to~~ Thanks.

My message to Gabe was for Gabe. It doesn't concern you at all (other than you being the thing we have in common, so, of course, we're going to talk about you a little). And you may inform... whoever was writing at the time... Gina? You can inform Gina that I am very protective of my friends, no matter who they are.

Your cousins don't skimp on the ego, do they?

Allie: My holiday has been perfectly normal for my family, thank you for asking.

I honestly don't know what I want to do when I graduate. I could study poetry-writing, but that doesn't do much to pay the bills. I could probably still get away with it but, I would like to stand on my own two feet eventually, and that won't happen with a degree in writing poetry. I suppose I could take over running Rachel's coffee shops, but that doesn't sound too fun either.

I'm studying the typical high school subjects. English is my favorite, mostly when we're doing the poetry units, but in general too.

Side comment: I can tell what Gina thinks about. I'm going to do a thought experiment and guess at everyone's age based on the questions they asked me (feel free to share this if you think it won't offend anyone). I'd say Allie is over 20. Gina is definitely about 14, possibly 13. Cate is harder, because she didn't write as much, but I would put her around 16, maybe? She's certainly more mature than Gina.

Anyway, to answer Gina's questions, 1) No, I don't have a girlfriend, 2) I'm not opposed to the idea of one I guess, and 3 & 4) If

you're asking about long-distance for yourself, you don't even know me. For all you know I could be a serial killer! Tell Zoe to tell you about the first few letters of ours, and how long it took me to trust her, and that should give you an idea of your chances.

On to Cate:

1) As Zoe knows I haven't visited many places. I feel like my favorite place to visit is one that I haven't found yet.

2) I suppose you could say my dad - Zoe, explain to Cate who my dad is. Even if she's not from the SD area, she's bound to have seen a billboard somewhere.

3) I want to know how you would introduce yourselves, since Zoe did it for you. Also, your ages to see if I was right.

Aaaand back to Gina:

1) Not inappropriate, but no.

2) A perfect day is one where I get to go walking out in the park, I guess. It's not something I've really thought about.

3) What do you think Zoe isn't sharing? She is very forthcoming, and I think if she wants me to know something, I know it. But, since you're desperate to share, give me the dirt on Zoe, whatever you think that is.

Ok, the rest of this is for Zoe's eyes only, sorry guys.

There, this way you can hand them the other pages and they can fight over them. I find myself wondering yet again how you have described me and our friendship, ~~because your cousins seem to have the wrong idea.~~

The next bit is going to take a bit more explaining than I've ever done for you, so bear with me. See, I told you Mom left, and never even said goodbye. Those are the facts. But in a situation like that, the facts are never the whole story.

It was a few weeks after Christmas. I had been particularly obnoxious that year. I had refused to speak Spanish that fall, and I had some trouble getting used to school, always in time-out for talking back, or just flat out refusing to do what I was asked. The day before she left, I had gotten in a big fight at recess. I don't remember now what it was about. It was the third fight since the beginning of the school year. The school called Mom to come and get me, which meant she had to leave work in the middle of the day. She wasn't too happy about that, or the fact that I had a shiner - I always picked fights with kids at least twice my size, for some reason. She scolded me, and then sent me up to my room. When she wasn't there in the morning... I thought it was my fault. I was sure I had finally acted out enough that she was just fed up. I think the therapist probably suspected, but after just two sessions John threw a fit and Dad made therapy sessions optional. Will was the only one who attended regularly after that (probably explains a lot, huh?)

My instinct is to rip this up and throw it out before I send it to you, so I'm going to start a new page and stuff this in the envelope before I do that. Otherwise, the significance of my conversation with John will be completely lost on you.

It was getting late, and I had wandered out to the front porch to get away for a little while and read your letter. A few minutes later John joined me. I wanted him to go away, but I felt like if he wanted to escape too, I couldn't blame him. I just hunched over your letter, hoping he would take the hint and ignore me.

He didn't. He asked me a lot of questions about how I was doing and how school was going, but I barely answered him. It just kept getting weirder and weirder, and then he brought up Mom.

I still can't believe what he told me next. Like, I cannot wrap my head around it, that's how much it doesn't make sense.

He said that Mom has been sending me birthday and Christmas cards for years. That he even watched her put them in the mail this past year (oh yeah, and he sees her on a regular basis, because she lives near him in D.C., didn't see that one coming either). ~~He thinks that~~ ~~We couldn't figure out why~~ He thinks maybe Dad hid them from me. Maybe even threw them away.

John said a lot of other stuff too, about how I didn't know the whole story, because Dad didn't want me siding with Mom. ~~Apparently~~ No, this is important-- apparently the twins aren't actually my "step" brothers, they're half. They were two when Mom left. Yeah, I can do math too.

~~I just I don't What do I even~~ He gave me Mom's phone number. What do I do, Zoe?

What was that you said about high school and drama? Yeah, kinda wishing I had less of it right now.

Anyway, I hope your hand is feeling better, and that your break is much less drama filled than mine is.

Your friend,
Alex