

January 21

Alex,

Do you know what I really miss about being a kid? The enthusiasm with which I was allowed to enjoy life. When I was little and it would rain, I would run out to the backyard and spin and twirl and jump in mud puddles and not even care that I was getting filthy and soaked to the bone. I miss that. As adults, or even high school students, we hunch into ourselves when it rains, and rush to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible. But today? You sent me out into the rain. I took no umbrella. I got soaked. And it was glorious (How did you make those arrows appear, by the way? Are you secretly a wizard, Alex? Are you holding out on me?)

So in the interest of reliving childhood, your letter is waiting for you at the Del Mar Arcade. Your prize costs five tickets. Ask for item AZ. This will be easiest to accomplish if you go after 5pm some night this week and ask for Jimmy. Otherwise the person working the prize counter probably won't have any idea what you're talking about.

Alex,

~~I don't mean to~~

Don't be embarrassed, Alex, okay? Seriously. It's . . . it's nice to hear how much you mean to someone, you know? Don't be embarrassed.

I'm back at the HCC, and . . .

I don't like how much Betsy and Thom are keeping Lissa in the dark about what's happening to Michelle, but I don't know how to have that conversation. They think, she's a kid, she's innocent, there's no need to share all the depressing details with her, but my thing is, she's asking. She wants to know the details, she wants to understand what's happening to her mother. She's not asking me yet, probably because she doesn't think I know that much, which is pretty accurate. Like, I know there's fluid build-up, and I know there's late stage renal failure, but I don't actually know what those things mean, you know?

I talked to Michelle about it earlier this week. She sleeps a lot, or tries to, but she was awake and coherent when we got there on Thursday, and she sent Betsy out with Lissa so that she and I could talk. She wanted to thank me for looking out for Lissa, and she wanted me to promise that I'll keep doing it, even after she (Michelle) dies. She's very frank and forthright. And she said she knows what happened with Thom and my mother, and she said she doesn't doubt him and doesn't doubt that he'll still be around for Lissa, but that she thinks Lissa is going to need all the support she can get. I decided to return frankness for frankness, and I asked if I could support her by telling her the truth. She said yes, if Lissa asks me, and I'm taking her

directive on this over Thom or Betsy's. Because it's her life, and her death. And her daughter.

And I said yes. I mean, I'm not gonna not be her sister when all this is over. It's just – I'm trying to stop being so cynical about Thom for Lissa's sake, but it makes me wonder what Michelle thinks might happen after she dies, that she made a point of asking this of me. Blech. Anyway.

No sign of Kevin today. I'm kinda disappointed. I was hoping to see him again. You know, like you said, because of him being able to help. Or offer advice or – he's just easy to talk to, okay?

We've actually been getting to know each other the past week or so. He made this whole elaborate guessing game out of trying to figure out why I come here, but spend all my time in the waiting room and not in with somebody. He came up with some pretty ridiculous (and hilarious) explanations! But I told him about Lissa and what I'm trying to do for her, and we talked about him a little, too. He's a senior at Sage Creek, and he comes to visit his grandpa every day. His grandpa's been in a coma for about nine weeks now. If it were up to Kevin, he'd pull the plug because he doesn't think his grandpa would want to live that way, but his aunt is the legal caretaker, so it's her call. Kev lives with her. I asked about his parents, but in his words, he has an origin story that would make Batman cry, and doesn't like to talk about it, which of course I totally get.

It just shows so much loyalty and love that he comes every day, you know? He says it's superstition, like he feels that the one day he doesn't come will be, you know, the day his grandpa passes. But still. That takes a lot of dedication.

Alex, I have the power to summon people just by writing about them!! Okay, fine, yes, just coincidence, but I had no sooner written the above then I felt a tap on my shoulder and an “Afternoon, Borealis.” He asked who I was writing so steadfastly to, and I told him it was just a friend, and then I told him a little about you -- not a lot, don’t worry. I mainly told him about the project that our correspondence grew out of. He was very interested, and said he wished he’d found one of my letters in the beginning, because he absolutely would have written to me.

It’s nice to have found someone to talk to here.

Now to your letter.

I think all this is gonna be a day at a time thing, you know? We just have to remember to talk to each other, and keep the lines of communication open, right?

Oh, and you never said – how did you like your birthday cake tea? Did I make you gag on sweetness again? :)

~~I’m sorry that Emma has disappeared from your life~~ I’m sorry you’ve kind of lost a friend in the wake of Emma’s new relationship. Unfortunately, you’re right. That is something that happens, and I suppose I shouldn’t be so quick to promise that I’ll never up and leave. Well, okay, no, I will never “up and leave.” I mean, I can’t promise that there won’t come a day when you and I will drift apart, because how do you make a promise like that? But what I can promise you is that you are one of my best friends, and I intend to keep that friendship alive and strong as long as I can, and as long as you’re willing to be part of

it. I mean, I've hung onto Gabe for what, eleven years now? So you're kinda stuck in this friendship until at least 2028. :)

Alex, I know you're not going to shed that mentality overnight, okay? But, that letter, the things you said, that wasn't you screwing up. You being honest with me will never be you "screwing up." Okay?

I think I got the gist of most the Spanish that I saw – Dios is God, right? It was just, not funny, I wasn't laughing at you at all, but all of a sudden, there was Spanish where there had never been Spanish before. And I don't mind, just be aware that you'll probably have to include a vocab list if you get too carried away.

Mmmm, nope. Sorry. I know I was the one pushing for a reconciliation, but I've changed my mind. Gabe is not allowed to meet you before I do. He's just not. You were right -- you only have one thing in common and it's me. Who wants to base a friendship on that? I think this is a wise move for you, knowing when to let these things go.

Although . . . well, more friends is always good, and I certainly shouldn't be trying to prevent you from having more friends. I suppose if you promise that you and Gabe won't meet in person before you and I meet in person, the friendship can continue. :)

I agree that we as a society should pay each other compliments more often. Which is why I will tell you that while your personality may not burst off the page like mine apparently does, it does permeate every inch of what you write, solid and steady. Your personality and voice in my head has become a comforting presence that I love spending time with (when you're not getting pissed at me\*). So thank you for that.

Sometimes I feel like becoming a teacher is kind of inevitable, because that's what you do if you do something silly like major in History. But – I don't know. There's just so much of the teaching profession that I have no interest in. I don't want to deal with problem students, and I don't want to just rehash the same bits of history over and over again, and I don't want to grade essays and projects and tests. I just want the history part of it.

Actually, what I think I want to do, this silly pipe dream that I've never really told anyone about because it's not a thing that's gonna happen – God, it's so far fetched and ridiculous that I don't even want to write it down. It's crazy, out of the realm of possibility crazy. But in a world where impossible dreams come true – I think I would enjoy being the curator of the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

God! I might as well wish to be Queen of England! I've looked into it, and it's an incredibly competitive field, you have to study for years and get published and — and the Smithsonian? Dream on, Zoe.

Yeah. Never gonna happen. But in a perfect world . . .

WAIT.

Hang on. You own TAP SHOES? WHY DID NONE OF YOUR SIBLINGS BRING THIS UP TO ME OVER CHRISTMAS???

I feel genuinely cheated.

Okay, these are my questions:

1. When did you try and learn to tap dance? You must tell me.  
Now.

2. If you had to spend the rest of your life as a bird or a fish, which would you choose?

3. I'm running out of material. This waiting room is a poor conductor for creativity. When was the last time you colored with crayons?

Okay, these questions are horrible. I'm going to quit while I'm ahead. :)

Your Friend,  
Zoe