

February 18

Alex,

For future reference, Andi is in my Humanities class. If you ever need to get a message to me and you can't write it down, you can give it to her. It wouldn't have helped us this past week because she's in Merchant of Venice, so has been off work for rehearsals, but, you know. If necessary. I'm also giving you my phone number again, cell and house. Put them somewhere prominent this time, yeah? :)

Is it weird to say that it's good to hear your voice? Because it is. You have a very pleasant voice, and a very expressive one, and I am so glad you're okay.

~~I mean, there are parts of hearing you that aren't good~~ No, it is good to hear your voice, but it kind of makes things harder, too. Because, yeah, I can hear when you laugh and I can hear your tone, and that's fantastic, but I can also hear ~~when you're the way you~~ that I——

Alex, I don't think you're a jackass. I don't. I couldn't. ~~Not ever~~. I'm so sorry that I said those things, I shouldn't have, I really shouldn't have, and I can't stand the idea that I hurt you. I don't think that about you. ~~I don't. I just~~ There was this stupid little voice in the back of my head, and I hated it, and I never wanted to believe it, but it just kept saying that maybe I was wrong, and maybe you weren't who I thought you were, but I don't think that about you. I could hear in your voice that it hurt, me saying that. And I'm so sorry.

I promised that I would tell you if all of this got to be too much. So, this is me telling you. Mom asked on Thursday if I'd heard from you, or

if she needed to take Lissa, and I said that I had heard from you, but that I still hoped she could take Lissa because I needed the day. She took Lissa again today because I'm finding that I still do.

I planned for all the stress of Michelle and Lissa and Thom, and school, and work, but I forgot to leave room for unexpected stress from outside sources, and this past week, feeling guilty about my letter, and then not hearing from or knowing about you, and some other stuff, it just, it pushed me over. And since I am, after all, supposed to be doing better about looking out for me, Mom took Thursday and today with Lissa, and she's gonna take this week, too, and I've switched some shifts around at work (well, for other reasons that I'll get to, not just this). I'm just gonna try to get my feet back under me a bit. ~~I'm sorry that I ever thought, even for a second, that you~~

I'm sorry.

And I'm sorry you couldn't reach me. I could have sworn I wrote my phone number on a postscript, but it was a while ago. I probably jotted it on a scrap of paper, which then got lost. And with Andi gone all week, Cuppa Joe's has lost its most reliable communicator.

It's so weird writing a letter this way, having to go through and listen to you over and over again to know what to respond to, rather than reading through pages. But I guess I have to get used to it, because it sounds like this will be our format for a while. I don't have any problem with that — do what's easiest and least painful for you, okay? (Hasn't anyone ever told you that wrists and sidewalks don't mix? :))

Okay. Back to the beginning, so I can respond bit by bit.

I don't get why people can't seem to acknowledge that platonic relationships between boys and girls are a real thing. Maybe Derek wasn't such a good guy, if that's what he believes without evidence. I was rooting for you, Derek. We were all rooting for you, and now I'm just pissed off at you for giving into stereotypes and trying to solve problems through physical intimidation. Douchebag.

~~Emma, you don't have anything to be nervous about.~~

Tell Emma that she doesn't have anything to worry about, okay? That you and I are just like you and her. I'm not trying to steal you away. If anything, I'm really glad she's there for you. That is, after all, the mark of a good friend.

Nurse Joe winces in sympathy for you. I know you probably have a ton of advice and directions already, so you don't need more from a random nurse you've never met, but he says the best advice he has is don't get impatient, and don't ignore the sprain to favor the break. He says sprains can actually take longer than breaks to heal, so even though it seems less severe, it's important to care for it just the same as you would without a broken wrist.

Sorry, I know you've probably been told all that already. But let me feel like I'm doing something to help, okay?

Alex, I don't, I don't think that you're vindictive or callous or any of it. Of course I think better of you than that, of course I do. I could kick past-Zoe in the face right now. I know what a good person you are, and I know what a good friend you are, and that you'd never do that to anyone. You'd never be cruel. ~~I can't believe I ever, even for a minute~~

I'd give anything to erase those awful words from everything I wrote the past two weeks. ~~I wish I'd never even thought them.~~ I can only ask you to forgive me, can only hope that you know ~~how I feel~~ what I truly think of you.

If you had punished me with banana peppers, I would have done it, I would have gagged the whole time, and had to wash my mouth out afterward with some thick, syrup-based sweetness, but I would have done it. I take my punishments very seriously. I looked like an idiot climbing that tree, but I did it for you.

If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not talk about Kevin anymore.

In the midst of all of the stress and angst-ridden drama of the past two weeks, there was something really amazing that happened to me. Well, is still happening.

You know I said that Ms. Willowwick asked me to do dramaturgy for her production of Merchant of Venice?

Wait – do you know what that means? Because I know it's not a common term; you have to be pretty involved with the theatre world to have heard it. I only knew it because I hang around Gabe and his mom so much at the Rep. A dramaturg is like a theatre historian. College or professional level productions will have this person who does all this research into the time and world of the play, and the time in which the play was written. And they work with the director and the cast and the production team to help fit the play into its space in history. Normally high schools don't really have one, but we're doing Shakespeare for the first time in forever, so Ms. Willowwick wanted someone to talk to her

cast about Shakespeare's life and times, and what was going on in the world that informed the writing and events of the play.

My Humanities teacher recommended me, so I've been working on this for weeks now, and — it's all I've wanted to do. Like, I had to force myself to pick up French and Stats and Chem, and even Humanities, because all I wanted to do was keep working on this project.

I presented it to the cast last Monday, and Ms. Willowwick asked me if I would put together a lobby display for the show next weekend, and I'm going to a bunch of the tech week rehearsals this coming week to see it all come together (hence calling off work), and I can't get enough of this, Alex. To research how these people lived their lives, and then to communicate that and see it incorporated into a performance — this is amazing. This is like, why I study history.

I think this might be what I want to do.

God, it's such a game-changer. Like, we've been talking about museums for forever, but this? I am so excited to see the show this weekend, and I want to know the next possible show I can do this for.

And I'm trying not to rush this, because I don't know if it's just that this has been a distraction from, you know, everything else, or if it's more than that, but I want to find out. I never felt that way about teaching. And I honestly never felt that way about curating — like, I dreaded doing any research on that at all, but I've already looked into dramaturgy and its requirements, and university programs and—

Sorry, I'm rambling. But I think I may be on to something, and it feels really good to have something figured out. So there's that.

Meeting wouldn't change the fact that we're friends, Alex, but it would change something. We talked about that. And it's not that I think you'd stop writing if I moved away, but, well, I had to acknowledge a few letters ago that I couldn't promise that I'd never leave. And you have to, too. You can't promise to never stop writing. Never say never and never say always, because those are promises you're bound to break.

High schoolers do that all the time – we promise that things are never going to change, that we're going to keep in touch and our friendships are going to be just as strong as ever, but it hardly ever actually works out that way. At first the lapses get longer, and then you keep meaning to catch up but never do, and then you stop noticing how much time has passed, and then you're seeing people every five years at reunions, and it's a room full of strangers that you fell out of step with forever ago.

God, I'm sorry. I don't mean to be so pessimistic. I should cross all that out. ~~It's just the ball of emotion talking, I promise. And I want to believe you, Alex. Really, I do. So I'm gonna put my energy toward trying to, and just move on for now.~~ Please ignore me.

This whole letter has been so depressing, and I don't want to leave it on that note, but I don't know what else to say. I wish I could be there with you somehow, wish I could talk to you in person about all of this, and have more of your voice and your words than just this CD.

Heal fast, Alex. And let me know if there's anything I can get you from this part of the city, yeah?

I'll be okay. I know I don't exactly sound like it in this letter, but I will be. I just need space and time to breathe a little before I dive back in.

I'm really glad you're okay. And, we're okay, too, right?

Yours,
Zoe