

March 29

Alex,

Ugh, work is kicking my butt. My manager is absolutely infuriating. He said calling off and switching shifts while I dealt with the whole thing with Lissa wasn't a problem, but now, he's like, holding it over my head, and scheduling me for crazy ridiculous shifts, and I'm barely getting to my homework on work nights. I want to quit this stupid job so badly. But I like having spending money, and I don't have time to job hunt right now, so I am stuck in my sandwich chains for the time being, unless I can get them to fire me . . .

Okay. Venting done.

I'm still so freaking excited about that dress! Gabe still has it -- he's working on the tweaks in between Into the Woods projects. I told him that I was low priority, and that he probably shouldn't have taken the time to make it in the first place, if it's gonna put him behind for the show, but he just said he owed me, which was not what I was expecting, you know?

I tried to argue that it wasn't true, but he wouldn't let me. He said he owed me because he's been so busy this year that when I really needed someone, he wasn't able to be that person.

I had no idea he was still fixating on that. I thought we were done with that discussion months ago, and I said as much, but he said that I might have finished it, but he still felt guilty, so he wanted to take the time to do this for me. Some days, I don't know what I did to deserve either one of you. Seriously.

So, yeah, to reassure you, Gabe and I are fine. I didn't mention his new boyfriend because I wasn't aware that the dating life of Gabe was something you were terribly interested in.\* They've been together about a month, I think? ~~He's actually dating~~ I'm friends with his new guy (I actually kind of set them up), and the three of us hang out together quite a bit. I only sometimes feel like a total third wheel. So yeah, the only disappearing Gabe has done is disappearing into the spring musical, which happens every year, and the new boyfriend and I get together and commiserate about the absent/preoccupied and oblivious Gabe Maxwell.

I am trying to think seriously about what to do with the money, and I keep going round and round, but I'm trying to approach the whole situation logically and rationally, hard as that is for me with anything surrounding Thom. But I think I'm getting better?

The fact that I might one day find myself not hating him is what's so scary. Like, I get it, personal growth is important, but, I don't know. I'm still working through all this.

And, I'm glad that you're improving? Sorry, that sounds awful. I'm glad that you're having more days where it's easier to trust the people in your life. I'm really proud of you for that. I know it can't be easy, but, well, I can't help but compare you to that paranoid guy from our first few letters. I've been rereading our project in its entirety (well, as much as I have access to) for secret reasons. (No, no, don't ask. I can't tell you. It's a secret) and I like the Alex I'm writing to now much better. Not that I didn't like the Alex back then! Just . . . I like this one more. ~~And I've liked watching him grow out of~~

Okay. I'm gonna stop before I start sounding any more like a Hallmark greeting card.

Alex, it's not messed up — well, okay, maybe it kind of is, but it's not your fault. You said you don't want to talk about it, and I respect that, but I do want to say that needing me to need you doesn't make you a terrible friend. It makes you a regular person. We all have our issues, and this one is yours, and it could be worse. It could be a lot worse. You're not a terrible friend just because being able to help me on my bad days validates our friendship for you, okay?

Okay, answers to my questions.

1) Last summer, Gina showed up on my doorstep one day in July, out of the blue, and asked if I wanted to go on a road trip with her. I asked where we were going, and she said, "I have no idea. Wanna come?" And I did. We drove to Four Corners, where Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado meet, and we stood in four states at once. Then we went to Santa Fe to see the miraculous staircase of Loretto Chapel, because I'm not gonna get that close to New Mexico and not go see one of the greatest pieces of history the southwest has to offer (and if you don't know that story, Alex, please tell me, because I will absolutely share it. It's one of my favorites).

2) Okay, my favorite food is chocolate-covered blueberries, but that is significantly less important right now than the fact that your favorite food is pickled pineapple??? What the hell, Alex? That's a thing that exists? Why is that a thing that exists? Why would you do that to a perfectly good pineapple? And most importantly, when exactly in your past did you suffer the traumatic brain injury that damaged your sense of taste, and is there a fund I can donate to to help cure this horrible

affliction? I refuse to asterisk that. I'm entirely serious. Pickled pineapple . . . What is wrong with you? :P

3) I like the idea of you haunting the gazebo or Cuppa Joe's as just a friendly, otherworldly companion! Like Casper. :) I think I'd like to join you there. We can be like Statler and Waldorf observing and snarking about everyone who walks past, freaking them out with whispers of ghostly conversation. And, you know, helping the ones having bad days with our never ending supply of good advice.

I love Rose Tyler, so thank you for that incredibly flattering comparison. :) Now, Chris Eccleston is amazing, and I understand being wary (I'm so sad he only did one season!), but don't worry – David Tennant is great, too. Just FYI, though, the end of season two will break your heart. I sobbed. So sad. Amazing, but sad.

~~Can I say that I'm — actually kind of glad you didn't go swing with Emma? It's dumb, but I feel like the swings are our thing, so I'm kind of glad that's still just ours. —~~

Well, now I gotta cross picnic off my list of birthday ideas.

And speaking of birthday ideas, what do you want to do for your birthday? I know that birthdays are usually busy and full of obligations to family and friends, etc, so I don't want to plan to take up more of your day than you can afford to give. I guess my question is, are we doing just a quick, here's your gift, nice to meet you exchange? Or do you want to block off a little more time and hang out and do something for a little bit? It's totally up to you, whatever you want and can get away for, because your family and Emma have more claim on your time than I do.

So, yeah. Let me know.

Okay. Now for your really hard questions!

1) The best wish I've ever had come true? It wasn't really a wish, but more of a hope. When I was arranging this project, I hoped that I'd get to write with someone who would take the project seriously and that we'd build a friendship that would last beyond the semester.

2) I don't think we've done best memory from childhood. But it's definitely the first Christmas Eve that Joe lived with us, so when I was eight? He'd always been around the house, of course, but he officially moved in around Thanksgiving of that year. And on Christmas Eve, Joe made cookies, and the three of us sat on the couch and watched Miracle on 34th Street with all the lights off and a fire in the fireplace, and I just remember thinking, "So this is what it feels like to have a real dad."

3) The worst word I've heard used to describe me? Well, Gavin (you remember the friendzone douchebag from freshman year?) said some pretty insulting things, but I think the worst is when people use words that aren't bad words as if they're bad words when connected to you, you know what I mean? Like, Gavin liked to throw 'perfect' around like it was a shortcoming, but the one I really remember, I was ten or so, and at some big function of my mom's publishing house. I was one of the only kids there, and I was chattering on to some big, important, famous person, I'm sure, and this lady just looked down her nose at me when I stopped for breath and said, "Well! Aren't you chipper?" Chipper. I hate that word now. I much prefer what my third grade teacher wrote on my report card: "Zoe bubbles over with enthusiasm!"

I want to write more, but I'm scheduled 3:30 to close the next two nights at work, followed by an eight-hour Saturday shift, so I have to get started on all my homework. Talk to you soon?

Your Friend,

Zoe