

December 18

Alex,

I reject the premise of your challenge. You want me to make you a list of ten things I want just for me? Fine. I can do that, no problem. But you want me to make this list because you think I've lost sight of what I want in the midst of trying to do things for other people, and I reject that out of hand.

I'm not a doormat, Alex. I'm not lying down, inviting the world to walk all over me. You say my nature is to put everyone else before myself, but that's not true. I take each situation as it comes, and I assess whose need is greater, mine or the other person's, and I'm sorry, but a thirteen-year-old's need for someone who can help her deal with the fact that her mother is dying beats out my desire to avoid an uncomfortable situation.

You think that people suck, and that the first instinct of humans is to take advantage. And, okay, I guess that's a valid viewpoint, but I want to believe in an inherent goodness. I want to believe that by showing kindness, by offering help, by being who I am, I can make a difference. And yeah, there are people who will take advantage. I know that; it's happened. But I know where the line is. You get to take advantage of me once. I give people a fair chance, but that doesn't mean I don't stick up for myself. I stuck up for myself with Thom. I stuck up for myself with Gavin Monteson freshman year when he thought I owed him a relationship. Hell, I stuck up for myself with Gabe 20 minutes ago when he got filled in on the whole situation and decided to act like a dick about it. I told him that he didn't get to treat me like crap, and that when he decided to stop being a dick, we could continue our conversation.

I help people, Alex. I like helping people, I feel good when I help people. You want me to write you this list? Okay, I will, but I'm not leaving off the things that involve helping other people. Because they can be for me and someone else at the same time.

You don't have to worry about me, okay? I believe you wrote with the best of intentions, and I don't hate you. Your concern is valid and appreciated. But I'm not a doormat. Nobody walks all over me.

All that out of the way, here is your list.

1. I want to set foot in every country in Europe.
2. I want to backpack up the west coast.
3. I want to make a viable career out of studying history.
4. I WANT TO GET A BETTER JOB.
5. I want to see Sara Bareilles in concert.
6. I want to pass my French final at the end of the month.
7. I want to be a bridesmaid at my mother's wedding.
8. I want to be invited to the Tony Awards when Gabe wins for Best Costume Design.
9. I want you to come backpacking with me someday.
10. I want a never-ending supply of the pens I found at the store last week. They're amazing!

That's my list, and yeah, there are other people on it. And I'm not sorry for ignoring that part of your instructions. Because doing good things for other people doesn't detract from the good the acts do me.

On to other things.

Was rereading all my wonderful words really that much of a hardship, Alex? At least you knew where your answer was, unlike a certain separated-by-page letter I could mention...

Also, numbered lists equal organized, not angry.

Thank you for your answers to my questions for my presentation. They were very helpful, and thank you, Alex, for the very nice things you said about me. :) I used a couple of your direct quotes, actually, and my teacher is really interested in what you have to say. He's been kind of ridiculously fascinated with this whole project so far.

As for what I thought of you initially, I can actually tell you exactly what I thought, because I took extensive notes:

"Alex - Cuppa Joe's - Unknown gender/age: Alex is a skeptic, giving me a puzzle to solve if I want to continue writing back and forth. I can already tell that Alex is going to be fun, definitely my most interesting participant so far."

Zoe (you DARE tack that Y onto the end of my name?????) most definitely does not have a boyfriend. Where in my last letter are you pulling that notion from?

Now for some more interesting questions for you, since my last few were so boring. :P

1. How many of the states have you visited?
2. How adept are you at untangling knots?
3. How about removing stubborn jar lids?

Your Experimenter,
Zoe

PS - Okay, I have debated about whether or not to add this the whole time I've been writing this letter, but Alex, I think I need to return honesty for honesty. I hope the same caveat applies to this round of it - that you won't hate me at the end of it.

I think you are too easily blowing off what happened to you at that party. You can't remember eight to twelve hours of your life. Despite your nonchalance, that doesn't just happen. And don't brush me off as worrying needlessly - I'm not a mother convinced you're not eating enough or a grandma who wants you to have more light to read by. Blackouts are serious and they are cause for concern. ~~If there are people who know you can't remember that night and aren't concerned, that's a problem. Because it means they either~~ And I don't like that you seem to be ignoring the evidence right in front of you. You drank a drink that tasted funny, and you can't remember the next eight hours. If your power goes out in the middle of a thunderstorm, you don't assume that you forgot to pay the electricity bill.

If you want me to butt out, fine. I will, and I won't bring it up again unless I have good reason. But please don't just brush me off. Please think about what I'm saying. Deal?