

January 1

Zoe,

Happy New Year! New Year's Eve is a pretty big affair at our house - Dad throws a huge bash for all his employees and many of his clients. I stayed upstairs mostly, only going downstairs to get a drink around midnight so I could follow your instructions. Anyway, it's still too noisy downstairs to sleep, so why not write you a letter? It's the very first thing I'm doing this year!

Poured over, stuck in, whatever. The end result is exactly the same. And it's dangerous no matter how you choose to do it!

~~You're planning on being~~ ~~What do you mean first~~ ~~How many is m~~

I did like my gift, yes. Thank you again.

I find it interesting how your cousins chose to introduce themselves. I didn't give them anything besides "introduce yourself," and they took it in vastly different directions. I'm not going to write to them directly, since by the time you get this you'll probably be well enough to write yourself. Instead, some brief messages you can pass along if you so choose:

Allie: I'm sure you will be a wonderful counselor someday.

Cate: I wouldn't call my opinion proof of anything, but you do come across more mature. Yes, you may use that quote if you like. Get Zoe to get Gabe to make it up into a cute poster or something, and you'll be the envy of all your friends. And no,

I haven't read any of Zoe's mother's books, because she hadn't told me who she was yet. I will be sure to go find them and read them soon.

Gina: I'm not going to apologize for calling it like I see it. In my experience the young teenagers are usually the ones most obsessed with romance and all the things that go with it. I based my opinion on the things you chose to talk about in your sections of the letter. You have to admit asking a complete stranger (or at least I'm assuming a stranger, since Zoe won't tell me how she described me to you, or to Gabe) about their love life is awfully forward. I say this, not in an effort to make you mad, but because it sounds like you were genuinely upset. This is a case where you can do something about the thing that made you upset, so I offer my assessment only in hopes of helping you.

(Also, please do find that photo. I haven't actually seen Zoe yet, so I have no idea what she looks like, other than tall and blonde with stripes - I like the idea that my first image of her will be that one.) And Zoe, I know you're choosing what to share here, but you have to share that bit. No editing to fit your own purposes. And just so it's fair, I'll ask Will and John to come up with some dirt on me in the morning.

I have no idea what you're talking about. Gabe and I were just having a conversation, man to man. Maybe he tracked me down as soon as you started writing me because he was worried about you, and I've been writing him letters behind your back - how would you know?

I don't have New Year's resolutions - they come with the stigma of always being broken. However I do plan to continue trying to be less paranoid and cynical.

Otherwise, I don't know what I would resolve, anyway. I don't need to lose weight, I don't need to quit any nasty habits. How about you? Are you the type to make resolutions? More importantly, do you keep them?

I don't think there is a solution to this, Zoe. If Lissa doesn't want to talk about her mom, you can't force her. Short of becoming her stalker (please don't by the way), there isn't any way you can find out what's going on. Can I ask what gives you the impression that her happiness is a front? As we've discovered, intentions and tone of voice are difficult to convey when writing a letter. Maybe that's just the way she is.

Anyway, don't feel bad if you can't "get her" to talk to you. Not everyone will be as convinced by your charming self as I was.

Okay, so the hard stuff (for me. I'm sure your stuff is hard too.) I will call my mom. Even before I read your letter, I was planning on calling her. But between Elisabeth and the party (which, okay, can I say this? My dad is a total douche-weasel, if I may borrow your word, for not canceling with a new baby in the house! "Can't let down the company" he says. You know what? I think, maybe, if you explained it to them they would be okay with it!)

Sorry, avoidance tactics, I know. But I do plan on calling her. It's going to be weird and awkward, but she deserves to know why I've been ignoring her, if John hasn't told her already. I owe her that much. I just don't know what to say. And, don't take this the wrong way, but I might not share what does end up getting said. I mean, I almost didn't share any of it, and I'm feeling a little shared out, you know? You've been great, it's not that, it's just... I've never shared

this part of my life with, well, anyone. Emma never asked, and everybody else is just acquaintances, you know? Even the people I knew back when she left have drifted away, and I didn't talk about it much then.

Right now, you're my best friend. Is that weird?

Anyway, this one is kind of short, but it's now about 4 am, and the noise has finally died down, so I'm going to try to sleep.

Your friend,
Alex