

January 16

Dear Alex,

You don't know this, because in all our various questions back and forth, you've never asked me how I get mad (clearly an oversight. Isn't that a terribly common question???) For the record, and future reference, I don't explode. I freeze. You never have to worry about shrapnel. Just frostbite.

And honestly, you don't have to worry about that. It takes a lot to get me there, much more than a few days of frustration and miscommunication.

In other words, I accept your profuse apologies. Accept mine?

That being said, I feel like I need to clear up a misconception. I do not have such a plentiful cornucopia of friends that I can afford to drop one as soon as we have a disagreement. Do you really think I'm constantly on the verge of walking away? Do you think we're just casual acquaintances, that I could just stop writing and move on, unaffected? Alex, you're one of my best friends. I have a wide range of people I get along with, and lots of people I don't mind hanging out with, but my close friends are few and far between, and you're one of them. So I'm not going anywhere, and I think your life is going to be a lot less stressful if you stop expecting me to leave at the drop of a hat. I couldn't do it. Friends fight. It happens. But you mean too much to me for me to kick you to the curb. Got it?

Also, the more worried you get about that, the higher the chances that you're apparently going to write me a letter entirely in Spanish, and I'm not gonna be able to read it.

It was never that I didn't want you to be worried about me, okay? I would never try to take that away from you. I would never want to take that away from you. I was just afraid that you were fixing an image in your head of me as this silly little girl who couldn't take care of herself, and I don't want to be that to you.

This whole situation sucks, Alex. It just sucks, for everyone. For the people who aren't going to live through it and the people who have to live through it and the people who have to support the people who have to live through it, and the people who have to support the people who have to support the people who have to live through it. And the hardest part is, I don't know how to tell you what to be for me because I don't know what I'm going to need. Like, at the moment, I honestly am fine. But I might not be tomorrow. So I don't know what to tell you. But I'll let you know as I figure it out, okay? And in the meantime, just keep writing. Keep offering me distractions and making me laugh and yes, making me blush.

Gabe's taking the news of your friendship break-up pretty hard, Alex. I mean, when I told him you were ending things, his response was "Well, I guess we all knew this day would come," so he's clearly inconsolable. Sure you won't reconsider? :)

~~I only blush too easily when you're involved!~~ Let me rephrase that. One, I was mostly kidding, or, not kidding exactly, but that's become my fall-back phrase when you say things I'm not expecting and I don't know how to respond. Like, you'd think I'd be used to your thorough candor by now, but, Alex, most guys don't go around talking about someone's personality blasting off a page or any of the other things you've said about me to which I've responded "you make me blush." Don't stop, I mean, as we've clearly discovered in the last few letters, I need a ton of

validation, and that's like a direct IV's worth, so . . . No, I blush because you don't hold back from saying nice things, and it's lovely to have nice things said about you. So thank you, for that.

My stripe is the green of the aurora borealis. That is the precise color, so a huge thanks to Kevin for helping me figure that one out!

It occurs to me that I haven't introduced Kevin to you yet, have I? Let me rectify that. Kevin's a guy about our age, who has been spending his time, like me, in the Hospice waiting room. And like, it was weird, but every time I looked up from my work this week, he was looking at me. Okay, that's an exaggeration, and it makes him sound creepy, but we made eye contact a lot for strangers.

So, then, Saturday, I grabbed your letter before I went to the HCC (Hospice Care Center, it's just too much to constantly write out, and I'm going to be talking about it a lot), but I refused to let myself read it until I had gotten through a majority of my homework. But I was having a hard time focusing, and every time I looked up, he seemed to be there again.

Anyway, when I read your letter, I got pretty ~~upset~~ flustered, and like I said, I started my reply four times, and each time, when I ended up crumpling the pages, it got more and more obvious, and the next thing I know, this guy was over at my table, saying he didn't want to intrude, but he wanted to know if everything was okay.

Well, I was pretty torn, you know, because on the one hand, I wanted to talk to somebody, but on the other, stranger. So I just said that it was nothing,

which he didn't buy. He said something like, "Is there anything I can do to help? Get you a coffee? Let you vent? Leave you the hell alone?" which made me laugh. But I told him that, much as I'd love an outside perspective, it would require revealing much more of my personal life than he was probably interested in.

He brushed off the concern and offered to listen anyway. Now, I was skeptical, which should make you happy. I did not pour out my life story to this guy. I pointed out that I didn't even know him, which is when he grinned and stuck out a hand. "Kevin Larson," he said. "My friends call me KevLar."

We bantered for a bit about the ridiculousness of his nickname, and good God was this guy a smooth talker. Like, he was flirting up a storm. And it was . . . actually really nice.

Anyway, at one point, since I still hadn't gotten around to telling him my name, he called me Aurora, and after I called him out on nicknaming me after the lamest Disney princess, he clarified that the name was referring to the aurora borealis, since that was the color of my hair stripe.

We chatted for a little longer, and then his aunt came out and he had to leave. But I have a feeling he'll be around again. I'm glad. He'll help give me something to look forward to. He was ridiculous, but he made me smile.

So, that is the color of my stripe. The green of the aurora borealis.

To answer my own questions:

1. I would go with teacher, I think. A history teacher. I've actually been thinking more and more about maybe going into that in college? I dunno. I've never been passionate about teaching, but then, I've never really thought about it. I am passionate about history, so that's where I think I'd fit best.

2. I think what I miss about childhood is the same as what you said. Life was so much simpler as a kid. It got complicated really fast, didn't it? I miss fleeting consequences and always having an adult around to help fix your mistakes. I mean, I suppose I still have that, but soon I won't, and that's terrifying, you know?

3. I love honey roasted almonds.

And now for yours:

4. Which Wich, Superior Sandwiches, of course!!! (No, it's Pita Pit, I'm a traitor to my sandwich employers.) Actually, there's a great place down by Fiesta Bay called Cafe Athena -- best Greek food ever.

5. I may or may not own the entire series of the Pony Pals books . . .

That's enough sharing for today! :) Answer your questions!

Zoe