

October 7

Dear Zoe,

Can I call a stranger by her first name? I hope so, because I just did.

This is the strangest sociology experiment I have ever heard of. How do you know that I won't tell you a pack of lies? I could, very literally, be anyone. I could be a meth-head who is already so tripped out she thinks she's writing to her grandmother (in which case your Alice analogy may be rather apt). I could be a serial killer looking for his next victim. I could be particularly skilled at finding people with only a name and a P.O. Box address to go on (maybe I'm friends with the postmaster).

But sure, I'll play (obviously, since you're reading this). It's a good thing you included questions, because otherwise I'm not sure what I would say.

1. I'm not exactly comfortable giving a stranger identifying information. You can call me Alex.
2. I guess my quest is to live. Isn't that everybody's?
3. Since I'm not a fan of Monty Python, no. That said, even I know it should be the "airspeed velocity of a swallow."

4. She<sup>1</sup> kicks<sup>2</sup> my<sup>3</sup> butt<sup>4</sup> at<sup>5</sup> every<sup>6</sup> game<sup>7</sup> known<sup>8</sup> to<sup>9</sup> man.<sup>10</sup>

5. Horoscopes are for suckers.

6. Peanuts and dark chocolate syrup are the only way to eat ice cream - the regular Hershey's stuff is way too sweet!

7. I am an introvert, no question.

8. Social experiments aren't really my thing, so no, I haven't participated in any.

9. I found your letter at Cuppa Joe's. Where else did you stash them?

10. You didn't leave any instructions for your reply, and I don't have a handy P.O. Box lying around I can use. So, a challenge for you: find a way to get me a reply, and I promise to write you an answer. Just so it isn't impossible, I'll give you a few clues. Alex is the name I used for my order. My barista's name was Eddie. I ordered a cappuccino, an everything bagel with butter, and a glass of orange juice.

As things stand, you have all the control, and that makes me a little uncomfortable. Since you say you have a problem with making people uncomfortable, let's even things up a bit. First, I have a few conditions: No questions that could identify me unless I say I'm ready for them. No guessing who I am, either. I

have the right to refuse to answer anything you ask. You don't know if I'm a serial killer, but I don't know if you are either, and I'd rather be relatively anonymous for the time being.

Your reply should include answers to your own questions, as well as the following two to replace questions 1 and 9:

1. What is your standard order here at Cuppa Joe's? (I've already told you mine)

9. Who, in your opinion, is the greatest person of all time?

Should you choose to reply, I will answer my own question in return.

Alex