

**Alex:** Zoe's letter, February 20<sup>th</sup>.

Do you know how hard it is to do a puzzle for you, when I can't actually write? Do you, Zoe? For now you're gonna have to just pick up these CD's at Cuppa Joe's. I'm gonna try and keep to our schedule, but I can't drive myself right now, so I've been relying on Emma to pick up and drop off letters for me.

I have already had Emma program your number into my phone, so I won't lose it this time, I promise. But here's hoping that I won't need it for something like this again, okay?

**[Pause]**

I— have never had anyone compliment my voice before. Thank you, I think. I'm glad you don't mind it, because you're probably going to get your fill over the next two months while I'm recovering. I'll do my best to hide my... to not let... t-to not be upset though, because we can't have you more distressed. You don't need that.

**[Pause]**

Zoe, you're so... cute when you can't figure out what to say. **[He realizes what he said and hurries to cover his tracks]** I - I mean, no, I don't mean cute, it's just, uh. . . it's fun to - wait no, that makes it sound like I'm enjoying your struggle, which I'm *not* I just... ugh, whatever. You know what I mean.

**[He takes a deep breath and starts again sounding tired and resigned.]**

It's okay, I deserved those things. I should have, I don't know, tried harder to get a message to you. Now that I'm thinking straight, I could have contacted Jonah and told him to tell you I was okay. Or, I don't know, I could have taken out a billboard somewhere?

**[Pause]**

The point is I should have tried harder, because I knew you would be worried, especially with the... horrible timing of it, coming right after you had just skipped a week, but I didn't, so... I'll take all of the abuse you want to send my way, because I deserve it.

**[Pause]**

You can't hear me smiling, Zoe, but I am. I'm so glad that you're looking out for yourself, and I'm sorry it's my fault that you had to. I hate that this happened, not just because I feel so helpless and it's incredibly frustrating, but because you don't need this right now. You have enough invalids to deal with in your life without adding one more. And—

I can't spend this whole letter apologizing, and I can't change what happened. Let's just move on, okay? It's easier to keep going like none of this ever happened.

**[Pause.]**

I've told Emma that there's nothing— that being friends with you doesn't mean I can't be friends with her too. She's denying being j-- that, that she feels that way, so I don't think that's getting through to her. I don't know, it's weird. I've never seen her this insecure before. She was always so confident, so sure of her uniqueness. It's part of what I liked I about her. I don't understand what it is about you that puts her so on edge. I mean, you and I... we've never met, and you're— I mean, it's not like you're... you're a-a threat to her in any way... right?

**[Pause]**

If giving me second-hand advice from Nurse Joe makes you feel helpful, then by all means, pass it along. I mean, you could come and 'babysit' me if you like, but between Rachel and Emma, I've pretty much got a 24-hour nurse detail at my disposal. Besides, you're too busy for that, and you don't ever want to meet me anyway, right?

Oh Zoe, if I had assigned you banana peppers, you wouldn't have been able to taste your syrupy sweetness! Until you get used to them, all you're going to taste is burning and pickles. You would have hated it... **[laughter]**

Ahem. Right. Sorry. Just the picture of your face when you try them— promise me, if you ever do try banana peppers, that I can be there to watch.

On a more serious note, I'll respect your wishes about Kevin, but... well, let me know if I need to send Gabe to beat him up, okay? **[He realizes how this sounds, and tries to lighten the mood, but there's still a darkness to his tone.]** I'd offer to do it myself but at this point punching

him would probably hurt me more than him. I suppose I could have Gabe hold him while I kick him! You just say the word, and I'll do it, Zoe. Especially if he hurt you. I don't want— You don't have to talk about him, but just... are you okay? Please, tell me you are okay, and that he didn't hurt you.

**[Pause]**

I knew you could find something you liked better than being a teacher! You never sounded very enthusiastic about it, and I was worried that you would get yourself stuck, that you would spend the rest of your life doing something you didn't like because you never tried to find something else even when you knew it wasn't for you! You deserve better than that. And aren't there plenty of theaters in the area for whom you can do that kind of work? I've been waiting for you to show that kind of passion for something, because that's how you know what you should do. Anyway, I am so happy that you're happy... at least about something. You sound so - so, um, lost a-and... alone for the rest of this letter that I... I want to do something about it, but I can't really, and that is so frustrating. So it's eas-- nice to read about something you're happy about.

**[Pause]**

Okay, you're right, I guess. Meeting might change something, but I don't know— Like, I try to think how it would change things, and I just can't imagine how it could go so horribly wrong that I wouldn't want to write to you anymore. That just doesn't make sense to me. And I hope I- I hope it feels the same to you.

I understand your example, of people moving away and losing touch, I mean, and I'm sure it's true for some people, but the thing is, these things aren't pre-determined. It doesn't have to be that way. It's hard, but if you try, then you don't have to lose people. And frankly, I find it hard to believe that anyone ever loses *everyone*. If you're really friends, if you're... I can't think of the word, I honestly can't. I guess, if you're best friends, then you're both going to try, and if you both try, then you can hardly fail, right? So, I'm going to try. How about you?

**[Long pause]**

You're right, Zoe, you don't sound okay. And I can't help but notice that you didn't tell me very much about what happened in your life while I was... gone. Are you okay? Can you tell me what happened, or is that too much to ask? I've got nothing to do over here but sit around and worry, so if it means a long letter, then please, write one. Emma has been great at coming up with distractions for me, but there's only so much television you can watch in a day, and only so many times you can lose at cards before you get kind of fed up. I'm going to school, but without writing notes to keep me focussed, I tend to zone out, get bored, and imagine all the things that could possibly have put you in such a terrible mood... well... aside from me being a terrible— being a jackass. **[He pauses. He takes a deep breath before continuing.]**

And of *course* we're okay. You have nothing to worry about— I'm the one with people-leaving-me anxiety issues, remember? Usually we have this conversation the other way around, so I'm not very good at it, but just, everything you've said to me, applies to you. I'm not going anywhere, and don't you forget it.

## [Pause]

Okay, we need some cheering up. You know what usually does it? Silly questions. So I'm going to ask you silly questions, and if that doesn't make you laugh, then I don't know what will.

- 1) What is the best joke you've ever been told?
- 2) What historical era interests you the most?
- 3) What is the best compliment you have ever received?
- 4) What is your favorite smell?
- 5) Where do you feel safest?"

All right, I hope you're feeling better. Emma has promised me she'll drive me over to the park so I can finally get out of the house for something other than school. She's been surprisingly... okay with doing the things I want to do, now that I'm an invalid. I guess I never asked before, but I always assumed she wouldn't be okay with the outdoors thing. She's very... oh, I don't know, obsessed with how she looks, and isn't much into getting dirty anymore. Now I think about it... the games we've played since she, well, hit puberty have all been of the cleaner kind - she beat me at basketball right soon after we first met. Anyway, I'm rambling. So yeah.

How do I even end these things? It's not like a letter where you can just sign it. I guess just, bye?