

**Alex:** Zoe's Letter, March 11th.

Hey Zo. Seems like it's the week for tough conversations. I honestly don't know what you should say to any of it. I guess, for Lissa, you ask what her reasoning is, and if it's sound, then... that's what she wants. I wish I could be more help, but I've never had to go through anything like that. My grandparents have been out of the picture since before I was born - Dad's parents are both dead and Mom's are still in Mexico and we never talk. Rachel's parents are still fairly young and healthy, and...

How do you even deal with the fact that you know someone is going to die, and there is nothing you can do about it? Some people say it's better, because then you get to say goodbye, but it also gives you a lot longer to feel helpless and regret things you could have done. I guess if this is the choice that Lissa wants to make, then I think she should have the right to make that choice, whether I think it's a mistake or not.

**[Pause]**

Don't apologize for telling me about your life, Zoe. I will listen to anything you want to say, even if it's about death and dying and hospitals. I mean, yes, I don't want to hear it, but more because I wish you didn't have to deal with it than because it's uncomfortable to read about.

**[Pause, then laughs]**

Guess you randomly picked the wrong CD to listen to first. I did warn you on the second one, but I didn't have any way of marking them. I figured it didn't make too big of a difference, because if you got into the long one you

could always just stop when you got tired of listening, you know? How was I— I mean, I didn't know— oh, you know what I mean.

You have forbidden me from apologizing for the length, so I won't, but I *will* apologize for getting you in trouble and making you into a zombie. That was never my intention. Hell, I didn't intend to make a six-hour letter, I swear. I thought I'd just go through answering your letter and the CD and then that would be it. I don't even know where the rest of it came from... I barely remember most of it. You'd think, just talking into a microphone, it would be so difficult, but I wasn't just talking into a microphone, I was talking... to you.

Anyway, it won't happen again, I promise. Next time I decide to just talk, I'll set a timer.

**[Pause]**

Okay, we can't both be at fault here. I'm the one who let he-- who--who didn't pay you enough attention. Real friends don't let other friends get in the way of seeing them... That sentence got convoluted fast. I just mean that I could have.. that sh-[e]... oh, you know what I mean. If you're feeling neglected, that means I'm a shitty friend, so you're not allowed to take the blame on this one, okay? Promise me.

**[Pause]**

You better not forget about the trip, *chica*! If you do, I'll have to stow away in your backpack and then where will you be? Backpacking for a long time with no food or clothes or anything else, that's where!

**[Pause]**

I still haven't ruled out the long con— get me to trust you and then pull the rug out from under me. That's what all the serial killers do!

I knew it! I knew you must be an alien! Nobody could have been that happy all the time!..." **[He sobers up, his thoughts taking an unhappy turn.]**

Actually, that's... um.

Listen, Zoe. It's not that I didn't *like* your CD, it's just... they're all so - such *downer* songs. I mean, okay, The Beatles ones are mostly optimistic, and a few of the others are too, but... I don't know... **[his voice is filled with concern]** Are you *sure* you're okay? You've had a lot to deal with lately, and I get being sad, but... I don't know, Zoe. I... I always pictured you listening to happy, silly music, like, I don't know, there's this song called "Evil Genius" by Eleventyseven - it's all one word, look it up sometime if you get a chance. Maybe this is just me being overly worried, or having preconceived notions that were totally untrue, but... If you need a shoulder— if you need someone, I'm here for you, okay?

All that said, I'm not violently opposed to anything you put on there. Put what you want on the next one. I mean, if you want to make a next one. I won't complain.

**[slightly indignant]** Three? Count again, *chica*. Between two Beatles, a Neil Diamond, 'Lean On Me,' and 'My Way' I'm counting five, which is almost a *third* of your playlist.

**[Pause]**

**[Faux whining]** Aw, I was going to surprise you! I put a hold on the DVDs at the library, but Doctor Who must be a popular show because I'm still a little ways down the list. I thought, as soon as I got them, I could record while I was watching them so you could hear my commentary - I like to snark at the TV when I'm watching by myself. Now you've ruined the surprise.

**[Pause]**

I *wasn't* worried about getting you in trouble, but you keep bringing it up, you see? Now I'm starting to wonder if you mean all that, or if you're really just hiding the fact that you're annoyed I made you stay up so late.

**[Pause]**

Well, how do you know I'm not a hobbit? Maybe I prefer to give gifts on my birthday rather than receive them. Anyway, no, I did mean I had an idea for something I wanted, but... I'm not sure, um-- I'm not sure I'm ready to tell you, okay?

**[Pause]**

Since they're Zoe's rules, I hardly think any suggestions I might have should be considered. They have to be yours, 100%. So, instead of suggestions for specific rules, how about you think about what advice you would want to give others, and then turn that into your rules.

**[Pause]**

I— Sorry, but for once you’ve written something that I completely don’t follow. Why would you try to... measure a... a friendship? It’s not about measuring, because that just invites comparisons, who is getting more time than who, who is more important to who... that doesn’t seem right to me.

I’m sorry, I just... I’m so confused by this metaphor. Is this about comparing yourself to Emma? Because you shouldn’t, believe me. There is no comparison, you’re completely different people, and I... I want you *both* in my life, okay?

**[Long pause]**

I’m sorry Zoe, but I don’t know what you want to say to Thom. I’m still kind of reeling from my own uncomfortable conversation... Tell you what, let me tell you about that, and then we’ll get back to your issue with Thom, because I don’t know what to say, but maybe by the time I’m done telling you this, I will.

So, yesterday, I had a doctor’s appointment to get another set of X-rays done and check on my progress. Emma was going to take me, but she had a prom committee meeting, and she’s missed too many of those already. Rachel had already planned long before I broke my wrist to go back to work March 1, so that left Dad.

My family isn’t exactly like yours... we don’t exactly talk to each other. This was the first time I was going to have to be alone with my dad since John told me about... everything.

We sat in really awkward silence for about ten minutes before I finally worked up the courage to actually say something.

In the end, I just dumped it on him. I told him I had been talking to Mom, and that I knew everything that had happened. I could see him start to shut down, and I could tell he didn't want to talk about it. But I needed to know why he hadn't told me, so I pressed him for details. Eventually he admitted he did it because... because he thought I loved her more than I loved him. And he kind of pointed out that, well, Mom wasn't particularly well off when she left. She didn't even know where she was going, or even if she would have a job.

He did have a point. I had always had a... I don't know 'special bond' - you'll have to imagine the air quotes - with Mom. And living like that would have been hard on me. It sucked, but... he had a point. So I let it slide.

I couldn't let the cards slide, though. I had to know what he had done with them, whether he had kept them or if they were gone forever. He was quiet for a long time before he admitted that yes, he did keep them, and they were sitting unopened in his desk in the library. He said I could have them as soon as we got home.

He was good on his word too. They're sitting on my desk, staring at me. I... haven't had the courage to open them yet, but... I will. Eventually.

**[Long pause]**

I do have good news, though! The doctor says that my left wrist is healing nicely, and that the sprain is healed enough that I can use my right hand

again! It's going to take me a while to learn how, since it's not my dominant hand, and I still probably won't be able to write for a while, but... I'm on the mend! Can you believe it has been over a month since I fell?

**[Long pause]**

I'm still coming up blank on Thom. I *don't* know what you want to say, because... because you don't yet. When I've been... too right about things before, it's always because I think, somewhere, deep down you already knew what you wanted to say, and it came through what you told me. But... that's not happening here. Maybe... maybe you should write him a letter again, but this time write it like you know you're not going to send it. Write whatever comes to mind, no matter how hurtful or cruel, because you know he'll never read it. And maybe what you really want to say will show up.

**[Pause]**

Alright, *chica*, it's getting late. I-I'll talk to you later.