

ALEX: *(groggy, not quite awake)* Mmm... Yeah?

ZOE: *(startled)* Oh! Um, I didn't think you'd answer. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up.

ALEX: Who... *(immediately alert)* Madre de Dios, Zoe? What's wrong?

ZOE: *(trying for nonchalance)* Nothing. I'm sorry, I – I was just gonna leave you a voicemail. I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have called.

ALEX: You don't call someone at 3:00 in the morning for nothing, Zoe, and I'm up now. What is it?

ZOE: *(after a long pause, hesitant and quiet, the first statement coming out like a question)* Michelle passed away. About 20 minutes ago.

ALEX: *(after a pause)* I— I'm sorry to hear that. Were you there?

ZOE: *(In a rambling rush, the first statement sounding like a question)* No. No, I was at home, Betsy called, I'm on my way to Lissa's now. She doesn't know yet, and I just — *(deep breath)* This was a stupid impulse. I'm sorry.

ALEX: Zoe, don't be sorry. It's fine. *(slight pause)* So . . . are you okay?

ZOE: *(after a too-long hesitation; not quite a lie, the last statement coming out like a question)* Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay, I just -- I have to tell her. Lissa, I told Betsy I would tell her, because someone should do it in person, not over the phone, but it's a bit of a drive, and I thought I'd just get your voicemail and ramble to you, to keep from having to focus on -- everything else.

ALEX: Okay, so ramble. Pretend I didn't pick up. I'm just a . . . very sentient answering machine.

ZOE: *(a little laugh)* Well, now I'm on the spot. And I don't have any idea what to say.

ALEX: Okay . . . mmm . . . *(searching for a topic)* What did you do today?

ZOE: *(quiet, hesitant)* Did you get my letter?

ALEX: I . . . yes. And I replied, so we don't have to talk about that, if you don't want.

ZOE: I -- yeah, I don't. But — that's what I did today. Wrote that. Freaked out some more. I'm getting tired of all these emotional freak-outs. And now this, and I don't — how do you tell someone that their mother is dead?

ALEX: Zoe, I have a feeling you won't have to tell her. Why else would you be at her house at three in the morning? She may be young, but she's not innocent, not anymore.

ZOE: *(A quiet sob)* God. I'm crying. Like it's *my* mother. *(angry with herself, embarrassed)* I'm sorry, you don't need this crap right now.

ALEX: Zoe, it's fine. Please stop apologizing.

ZOE: *(long silence, then, almost inaudibly)* Okay. Will you just...

ALEX: *(after a beat when she doesn't continue)* What?

ZOE: (*deep breath*) Will you just . . . talk to me? About anything, I don't care. I just . . . need something else to focus on, and my life is merrily falling apart everywhere, so.

ALEX: (*long exhale*) Yeah, of course. Um . . . Oh! Andi said something the other day that I meant to ask you about.

ZOE: Yeah?

ALEX: (*accusatory but teasing*) Have you seen *Hamilton* on Broadway and just not mentioned it?

ZOE: (*a bit of a laugh*) Oh! Um, yes.

ALEX: How have you not brought that up?

ZOE: (*still laughing*) I'm used to everybody knowing and getting mad when I talk about it.

ALEX: How did you get tickets?

ZOE: Mom and I saw it ages ago, way before it was a huge thing. It was the summer after freshman year, it was still in previews on Broadway. Mom had to go to New York for a book thing and her publicist got us tickets.

ALEX: Did you meet Lin?

ZOE: Super briefly. Just at the stage door with the rest of the cast.

ALEX: I'm so jealous.

ZOE: Yeah, that's the typical response.

ALEX: Was it incredible?

ZOE: I'm angry Pensieves don't exist because I don't actually have a way to relive it.

ALEX: Yeah, I'm angry about that now, too.

ZOE: It's okay, though. Now that I know my penpal is a secret rapper...

ALEX: I'm a what now?

ZOE: I've listened to *all* of that six-hour letter now, that I slept through half of, so your secret is officially out. Alex Carter can freestyle.

ALEX: I... did do that, didn't I?

ZOE: Oh, yes. And personally, I am very glad. It was delightful.

ALEX: Well, I *did* tell you I was a poet, are you really that surprised?

ZOE: There's a difference between being a poet and being able to freestyle. I can't exactly picture Emily Dickinson go -- doing a whole lot of rapping.

ALEX: (*laughing*) *Chica*, if you *ever* thought of me as Emily Dickinson I would be very surprised.

ZOE: (*laughing*) What, not fond of messing with your neighbors by refusing to go out in public and only wearing long white dresses?

ALEX: You know, if I thought Rachel would let me get away with it...

ZOE: (*laughing*) I can just see it. I'm glad I called -- I'm learning so much!

ALEX: Yes, well, our little secret, okay, *chica*? If I hear about this from Andi or Eddie, or find out that you've told all of Tumblr...

ZOE: Andi and Eddie do seem like they'd be awfully interested to know this about you. Of course, they seem awfully interested in a lot of things. I'm having trouble figuring out what would lead Andi to Hamilton-drop in the first place.

ALEX: I dunno, I asked her about her plans for... summer after high school or something.

ZOE: Ah, okay, that would lead there, I guess. She and Jimmy have been trying to finagle tickets for their New York trip.

ALEX: Yeah, but I mean... do they ask you questions about it? Our letters, I mean? Cause Eddie can be a little... weird sometimes.

ZOE: Well, Eddie has been weirdly interested in my project from the beginning. This is just an extension of that, I think.

ALEX: Oh, right. That makes sense, I guess. (*a moment of silence*) Did you know that humans can see more shades of green than any other color?

ZOE: Wow, really? I didn't, but that makes sense. Did you know that there's a town in California that was built on a fault line? I mean, the whole state is built on a fault line, we're going to fall into the ocean some day after an earthquake, so that's a fun future to look forward to. Also, I can hear you laughing, and yeah, hi, I'm Zoe Ballard, and I ramble as much in real life as I do on paper, nice to meet you. *Anyway*, there's this town and this fault line runs through it, and at one point, there's a curb that hits the line in such a way that over the last forty years, it's been really cleanly separated and pulled apart, and geologists were actually using it to study the shifting of tectonic plates until 2016.

ALEX: What happened in 2016?

ZOE: The city, not knowing what was going on, fixed the curb.

ALEX: *(a laugh)* Of course they did.

ZOE: Okay, your turn. Astound me with your useless knowledge.

ALEX: Um... giraffes have as many vertebrae in their spines as humans do.

ZOE: Really?

ALEX: Really.

ZOE: I did not know that. This phone call continues to be highly educational.

ALEX: Your turn.

ZOE: Facetiously is the longest word in the English language with all six vowels in alphabetical order.

ALEX: (*laughing*) Why do you know that?

ZOE: (*also laughing*) Why do you know about giraffe spines? Verisimilitude is the longest word with vowels and consonants alternated throughout.

ALEX: Okay, what are the shortest?

ZOE: Oh, no, you can't do that.

ALEX: Can't do what?

ZOE: Ask me to expand on my useless factoids. I'm drawing from a very shallow well of knowledge here. I *can* tell you that the plastic tip on your shoelace is called an aglet.

ALEX: And the divot under your nose is called a philtrum.

ZOE: And the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold is called (*stumbling over the word*) kintu-- kintsugi.

ALEX: Really? They do that?

ZOE: (*reflective and more subdued*) Yeah. It has to do with the belief that flaws don't need to be hidden and sometimes things are more beautiful for having been broken and put back together.

ALEX: I like that idea.

ZOE: Me too. (*a pause*) I'm here.

ALEX: Okay.

ZOE: Okay. (*A pause*) Alex?

ALEX: Yeah?

ZOE: (*earnestly*) Thank you.

ALEX: Any time, *chica*.

ZOE: Talk to you soon?

ALEX: (*a little laugh*) Yeah, *chica*. Talk to you soon. (*She should hang up. Or he should. But neither of them do.*) Good luck.

ZOE: Thanks. And breaking the apology rule one more time, I'm sorry for waking you up at three in the morning.

ALEX: Only fair, since I kept you up till three a few days ago.

ZOE: Oh! And—

(*A pause. She doesn't continue*)

ALEX: Yes?

ZOE: (*hesitantly*) I don't know how much I'm going to be able to do --- writing I'm going to be able to do in the next few days.

ALEX: That's fine, *chica*, do what you can, okay? (*A pause*) I— I'll miss you, though.

(*a VERY tense silence*)

ZOE: (*abrupt and rushed*) Gotta go. Talk to you soon.

ALEX: (*relieved she didn't seem to catch the slip, trying not to let that show*) Okay. Talk to you soon.

Phone call ends