

**Alex:** Zoe's letter, March 12th

Hey Zoe...

**[Long pause]**

Usually I do these in order, but I'm not . . . I'm not prepared for the first part. I have *no idea* what to say about any of that, so I'm going to leave it to last and hope to God that by then I'll have figured out something to say. I feel so . . . I started early because I know you need a response as soon as possible, but I just have nothing to say. Yet.

**[Pause]**

I— Zoe, your description of . . . how . . . friendships work is beautiful. I didn't get it at first, but . . . can I use this? The imagery would make beautiful poetry. And . . . of course you matter, Zoe. I wouldn't still be writing to you if you didn't. When we started this you asked about my best friend, in ten words. I think I'd have a different answer now. *That's* how much you matter.

**[Pause]**

**[hesitantly]** Zoe . . . has anybody told you it's *okay* to not be okay? Because it is. You're going through a lot right now, you are *allowed* to be sad. The thing that worries me is that you're not admitting it . . . not even to yourself. Maybe . . .

Do you remember that first time you had a bad day, after we started writing to each other? And you said part of what made it such a bad day was that nobody would just *let you* have a bad day. The thing is, *that's what you're doing right now*. Yes, you're doing it to yourself, and maybe you can't see it, but by not admitting you're *allowed* to be upset you're just . . . making the bad day worse."

**[Pause]**

**[Joking, almost trying too hard]** Hey now! I'm the one who can build a working commune from one backpack worth of stuff! And I was assuming a *school* sized backpack for that. If you're intending to bring a *real* backpacking pack, then there would be plenty of room for me, *and* the supplies to build my commune.

**[Pause]**

It's not that I don't want to tell you what I want, I just . . . I don't want . . . Oh whatever, you say you'll never be mad, so . . .

**[Takes a deep breath]** You can get me whatever you want for my birthday, Zoe, I just want . . . **[rushes through the next part, as if he won't say it unless he does it fast]** I'd like to know if you'd deliver it in person. I know, we said we wouldn't meet yet, but . . . way back at the beginning I said that I wanted it to be on my terms. I was paranoid, and I wanted to feel comfortable if we ever did meet, so I said it had to be my suggestion. So . . . I'm putting it out there. You don't have to, if you're not ready. I just . . . I'm ready when you are.

**[Door opens in background]**

**Emma:** What are you doing?

**Alex:** Emma! Sorry, Zoe was having a bad day, so I wanted to get her a reply as fast as I could.

**Emma:** Oh. But I thought you said you were doing them at night. That way we could spend time together before dinner.

**Alex:** I know, I'm sorry, usually I wait to do them, but I thought maybe if I got it done, we could go by before you left and drop it off for her. Just, you know, maybe cheer her up a little.

**Emma:** Oh.

**Alex: [clearing his throat]** Maybe, since I'll have it done, you can stay for dinner and we can hang out afterwards?

**Emma:** Okay.

**[Door slams shut]**

**Alex, calling after her in exasperation:** Emma!

Ugh. Apparently I can't do anything right lately. I'm so . . . so tired of being helpless. I mean, I can't help you, I can't even think of the right thing to say, and I've gotten through the rest of your letter, and I'm still just as stuck. **[getting more and more agitated]** Nevermind the fact that I have to have a babysitter day in and day out. I can't drive, I can't eat anything that requires two hands, or cutting, and I can barely eat anything else, because I am just *so clumsy* with my stupid right hand, and I just . . . I can't stand it anymore. And now Emma's mad at me, and I *still can't help you*, and I just--"

**[A loud crash; a scream of pain. The door opens]**

**Emma:** Are you okay?!

**Alex, his voice tight with pain:** Yeah, I'm fine, I just did something stupid . . . Turn it off.

**Emma:** What?

**Alex, yelling, barely concealing the pain:** Turn the damn recorder off!

**[Recording cuts off after a few seconds]**