

Alex: Zoe's Letter, March 20th

[excited] Zoe! You know, as much as I appreciated you keeping me up to date via text, it is *really* nice to get a whole letter again. I'm gonna try to answer it in order, since it's pretty long. Besides, if I don't go in order I might forget to reply to something, and it's not like I can go back through and check.

[slightly subdued] I'd say the apologizing started when you... decided you didn't deserve to... to be friends with me. **[with a forced brightness]** Well, tough luck, *chica*. Deserve it or not, you're stuck with me now!

[sobering up] Seriously, though, why do you feel like you needed to apologize for... for just being you? You used to be so confident. What happened?

[Pause]

I know this week felt awkward to you, but you were a really great sister, you know that? I mean, I know Betsy was saying you were a big help, but everyone should have been saying it. So I'm saying it for them, okay?

[Pause]

Thank you for the playlist. It has kept me company all week while you were gone. I did a full commentary that I'll include on another disc, but just from looking at the written playlist, I'll give you a few highlights:

- *THERE'S* the Zoe we all know. Even if it's just a front, it's kind of like . . . fake it till you make it, or whatever quote you prefer in that vein.
- "The Future Soon" is indeed like "Evil Genius" and much closer to what I thought you would listen to.
- My favorite was definitely "The Last Great Waltz."

- Do you think I need to be made a man of? That I'm not . . . man enough for you? I'm hurt Zoe.
- I appreciate that you tried to put less old stuff on this one, but you have to admit, you *obviously* have a type. I mean, that Gotye song? Total Motown knock-off.
- My life would suck without you too, Zoe.

[Long pause]

Sorry, I'm skipping a lot, because we kind of went through it over text, and, well, I don't have a whole lot to say about any of it. Except what I've already said, probably too many times.

I said that my description of my best friend would be different now, not that I knew what it would say. Because how do you fit the most important people in your life into only ten words? I know, I know, I'm the poet, and that's supposedly what I do. Except usually we get more than ten words - unless you're doing, like, haiku, which, why would anyone put themselves through that much torture?

You say you're going prom shopping, that's exciting right? I'm told that girls like shopping for these fancy dress types. Anything in particular you have in mind, or are you going to get-- let Gabe force you into whatever he wants?

[Pause]

I suppose if we're meeting for my birthday, then by the time your birthday rolls around, I could be comfortable enough to climb into a backpack for you. But are you really sure that's what you want? It's not exactly a gift that keeps on giving . . .

[Pause]

I like your rules. I'm going to have Emma copy it and I'll hang it up on my wall. You should hang up a copy on your wall too. In

fact, I should get Gabe to do something fancy, like you threatened to have him do for my Christmas present! So . . . how do I get ahold of Gabe?

[Pause]

Yeah, I'm sorry you had to hear my . . . that . . . what happened. I— I honestly didn't expect it or I would have turned the recorder off at least until I calmed down and could try again. It's just... it's hard, you know? Because I want to help you, and I can't, and I want to be able to do things for myself, and I can't, and it's just . . . **[he's getting agitated again, sounds very frustrated]** lots of being . . . I don't even know how to say it, and it's making me mad again, so moving on.

[Pause]

Zoe? *Please* don't cry. I never intended to make you cry. Absolution, as you put it, is not something you earn, Zoe. People give it, or they don't, but you don't do anything to deserve or not deserve it. So . . . when you're ready to accept it, it's already there for you. Just please don't cry. You don't need that on top of everything else.

[Pause]

I'm opening Mom's cards one at a time, slowly. The early ones were really short, but the longer it goes, the more she says . . . about what's going on in her life, or things that John told her about me. And she always says she 'hopes I'll get this one' at the end. It's . . . it's heartbreaking to think that she knew he was keeping them from me and sent them anyway. Here I thought for years that she didn't love me, and . . . **[full of self-loathing]** and now I feel like even though she did, I don't deserve it, you know?

[Pause, then snorts softly]

Listen to me. I should be taking my own advice, right Zo? Why is it we can always see it for someone else, but never for ourselves? But . . . but I can tell that I'm on my way to being okay with it. I'm still talking to her when I can, and . . . and I don't want to strangle Dad anymore, which is . . . good, since that would be kind of hard in my current condition.

Okay, I think that-- No. Hang on, one more thing. I've already said no apologizing - and I'm at the point of adding it to your rules, by the way, Rule 8, you may not apologize for being yourself - but . . . **[he's embarrassed even bringing it up]** it's kind of embarrassing how much you thank me. Not that I don't appreciate it, but . . . I would have done all of it anyway, thanks or no. Any good friend would. So . . . you don't need to thank me, okay?

All right. Talk to you soon, *chica*.