

**Alex:** Zoe's Letter, March 27th

It's great that Gabe took the time to make a dress for you. I'm sure you'll look fantastic in it. **[Pause]** So see? You have to go now!

**[Pause]**

Gabe has a new boyfriend? When did this happen? And how has it not come up yet? Did-- okay, I know this is coming from my experience with Emma, which is not necessarily typical, but did Gabe stop hanging out with you because of his new boy? Are you-- are you okay?

**[Pause]**

**[seriously]** I'm glad that you are trying to think seriously about what to do with the money. It's a big decision, and it *is* going to take some thought. But . . . I don't think . . . well, I won't say that I don't think you'll be different if you decide to take the money, or even if you end up -- getting along with Thom in the end, because of course you will be different. But . . . we're all different people, every day. I mean, I spent so much of my life thinking that everyone leaves, and that Mom was... that she hated me. And it's not like suddenly I flipped a switch and none of that was true anymore. I still have my days. Maybe I don't let you see them, and maybe there's fewer of them, but gradually I'm learning to be different. Maybe that's how it'll be for you. You're not going to stop hating him all at once, but maybe gradually you'll hate him less, until one day you suddenly notice you don't anymore. Not that I'm saying you'll ever *love* him or anything. Just that maybe someday you won't hate him."

What if I was imitating you, what of it? Do you not *like* how you sound?

**[Pause. He sounds tired.]**

I know, Zoe. I knew you wouldn't realize how your apologies could be taken, and . . . It's messed up that . . . that I need you to have bad days and to— to indirectly ask me for help to prove that you're not leaving, and it frustrated me that I couldn't provide the help because it felt like if I didn't, eventually you would realize I couldn't be what you needed and that . . . that would be it. It makes me a *terrible* friend. It's not that you were apologizing for . . . for . . . ugh, I - I don't even know. I knew that wasn't what you're apologizing for, I knew that you didn't . . . know that's what it meant, but it still . . .

Nevermind, I don't want to talk about it.

**[Pause]**

Zoe, The thank you thing . . . I don't . . .

I'll take your deal, Zoe, if only because I *like*-- what I mean to say is, these are just things that don't need -- I mean . . . I just . . . I *know* you. I know you would thank me, so you don't *have* to, does that make sense?

**[pause, he laughs softly]**

Didn't see that coming when I picked up your first letter, did I?

**[Pause]**

You have me at a disadvantage, Ballard, because when you do things like call me by my last name, I don't have the benefit of tone of voice to help me. Do we need to reinstate the asterisk?

**[pause]**

The questions are back, huh? Okay.

1) The most spontaneous thing I have ever done was pick up an envelope that said 'Read me' in a coffee shop, and follow the

directions inside. I may have to try being spontaneous more often, since that one worked out so well.

2) Hmm, well, since banana peppers are out . . . No, actually, I think I'll go for -- and you're going to think this is really weird -- pickled pineapple. And before you get all 'Ew, gross' on me, don't knock it till you try it, okay? It's *nothing* like the dill pickle you're imagining, I promise!

3) I don't know actually, because haunting usually goes with dissatisfaction, right? And . . . I mean, I'm not happy with everyone in my life - the things Dad did over the past 12 years being exhibit A - but I'm not distressed enough to haunt anything if I died tomorrow. But . . . well, it'd be fun to haunt the gazebo at the park. Not like, scary haunt, just . . . it would be a nice place to spend the rest of my . . . unlife. Or . . . or maybe— you're gonna think this is stupid, but I've become quite attached to Cuppa Joe's.

### [Pause]

Here I've promised you a long letter, and I'm running out of things to say. Life with a broken wrist is very, very boring, even with one mostly healed good wrist. So, I don't know, what do you want to hear about?

I, uh, OH, I finished season one of Doctor Who, and yeah, it's interesting. I'm . . . intrigued. I like Rose. She actually reminds me a tiny bit of you. Like, not a lot, but . . . she's kind to everyone, and keeps the Doctor in line. I'm not too sure about this new guy, though . . . what's his name? David Tennant? He's . . . different.

So, let's see, uh . . . how was my day. My day was fine. School was school, and then Emma was here all afternoon. She suggested a picnic dinner over at Carmel Creek. I was really surprised. Like I've said before, she's not usually into the outdoorsy stuff. But, yeah, she packed us some peanut butter

and jelly sandwiches, chips, and soda, and we sat over in the picnic shelters - she was gonna go with a blanket, too, but thought maybe I'd have too much trouble getting up and down. I don't think it would have been a problem, but . . .

Anyway. It was fun. Since it was all finger food, I could mostly feed myself, which was nice - no need to have her feeding me in public! Then we wandered around the park for the rest of the afternoon - it was such a beautiful day I couldn't bear to go back inside. If my wrist wasn't broken, I'd probably have found somewhere to sit and write— it was one of those days that can be so inspirational; the crystal clear blue sky that feels so fragile it could break, and the slight breeze tangy with salt that rustles through the leaves so the trees sound like they're whispering. But in some ways, it was nice to just . . . just enjoy it, you know? I noticed all those things, but I didn't have to figure out how to make them into something, and . . . it was peaceful.

**[Brief pause]**

Or at least it was peaceful until I suggested we go and sit on the swings for a bit. I thought it might be fun, but Emma . . . well, she didn't go for it. Too childish, she said. I was kind of disappointed, but, well, who was I to argue with the girl driving me home?

**[Pause]**

I'm sorry, I promised you a long letter, and I just don't . . . don't have anything to talk about.

**[Pause]**

All right, tell you what, I'll give you a few extra questions to answer besides your own, and that should help fill out the time some when the next one comes around, because I'll need to answer your new ones *and* mine. Let me pull up my fancy question finder . . .

## **[Pause]**

Ah, here's a good one: What's the best wish you've ever had come true?

What is your best memory from childhood? Wait, have we done that one? If we've done that, then skip.

Ooh, this one's good, though you may not like to answer it: What's the worst word anyone has used to describe you?

Okay *chica*, I guess that's it. Talk to you soon.