

March 4

Alex,

If you thought that joke was bad, I have another one for you:

What do a duck and a bicycle have in common?

Punchline in the PS – I promise this time, and after all. I've only ever lied to you about the wheels.

Shoot, now I have to line up a "Save the Whales" tote bag . . . Maybe for your birthday. If you're lucky. :)

Alex, when are you going to get it through your head that you don't make me mad? Has anything you've ever said or done honestly made me mad? The only things that have come close have been you jumping down my throat for a comment taken out of context way at the beginning, and then turning into a hovering mother hen with the whole Lissa thing, but even then, I wasn't ever mad.

I'm not gonna get mad at you for sharing your opinion, especially when I've asked for it. I want you to tell me what you think, haven't I said that enough? God knows I'm not perfect or unbiased, coming into this whole thing with Thom, and, well, you are not alone in your opinion. I talked about the argument with Mom, and she said some of the same things you did. And I still think everything he had to say is a load of shit, but, well, when two of you are urging me to think about what he had to say, I might be slightly more open to considering your points. Slightly. Maybe.

Am I more affected by the fact that he wasn't part of my life than I'm willing to admit to him? Yes. Of course I am. Have I imagined how my life might have been different if he'd never left, or if he'd come back?

Sure. Who wouldn't? But how can I be pissed that he left me without a dad, when he didn't? I had Joe. He was the only Dad I ever needed. Thom can't act like leaving me and leaving Mom are two separate things he has to make up for because one of those things doesn't exist. He left Mom. Period, end of story. He didn't leave me because you can't leave someone who doesn't exist yet! How can I be mad at Thom for not being there for me when I never wanted him there in the first place?

You know what I'm most pissed about at the moment? That these aren't rhetorical questions.

I'm so freaking muddled and confused about this whole damn thing. I don't want to care. I shouldn't care. So why is there a part of me that does?

This is why I didn't want him in my life. I was happier when I could just hate him without thinking about it.

Do you know what he's never done? He's never apologized. That's what pisses me off the most about this whole "being tested by God" crap he was spouting – in his mind, it clears him of having to do so simple and basic a thing as freaking say "Sorry"! It's always about him. It's never about us.

I just want this whole thing to be over, Alex, and now I sound like the awful one. But I can't help it. I want this to be over. I want to be at the point where I don't have to sit in this waiting room anymore, where I can just keep getting to know Lissa without the rest of this defining our interactions.

Sorry, I'm whining. I'll stop.

I like chica. Don't stop using it. Sometimes the most fitting nicknames are the ones that slip out naturally. :)

I don't want you sacrificing sleep for me, Alex, okay? I mean, if you had a TARDIS or a Time Turner, that would be one thing (if you do, by the way, and you're holding out on me, like you were about being a wizard . . .)

~~Actually, can I say something? And please, don't take this the wrong way, but —~~

~~—God, now I'm the one worrying about pissing you off.~~

~~Do you think there might be something in Emma keeping you so busy? I'm not accusing anybody of anything, and I'm not jealous of the time that you're spending with her, but — your letters keep getting shorter. Which, it's fine, you don't owe me hours of your time, I'm not asking for an audiobook. I just, these are just a few minutes, and there's a part of me that feels like I'm being (I'm trying to find a way to say this that doesn't sound awful, and there isn't one, and I'm sorry in advance) robbed, almost.~~

This is stupid, I'm sorry. I don't have a claim on you, I know that, and you said yourself that you need to get out of the house, and you have to have someone to take you, and I'm reading way too much into everything, and it's fine. It's nothing. It's fine.

There aren't as many differences in the situation with Emma as you think. I verbalize my apologies and guilt where she might not, but she's communicating it just as clearly, and I think the conversation is just as straightforward. Sit her down, force her to be still (metaphorically, understand), and set the boundaries that you need to set. You're an introvert. You told me that in your first letter. That means you need time

by yourself to recharge, and being constantly in company, even company that you enjoy, is exhausting for you. And it's not that you don't appreciate the help or the desire that drives it, but put your foot down. Be direct, and be clear about what it is that you really need from her. That's my advice, which you asked me for, so I hope that helps.

This girl says No to Charming. I think Rapunzel should have cut off her hair and climbed out her own tower. I think Cinderella should have stayed past her curfew, and said screw it, this is who I am, Princey boy, take it or leave it. I think Sleeping Beauty should have asked more questions and worn gloves all day on her 16th birthday. Spare me the rescue stories. :)

That's the end of your letter, which means I don't have that much more to say. I like "Talk to you soon, chica." I think it's perfect.

It's my turn to ask the questions, right? Okay.

- 1) You have one backpack's worth of space. What do you take to a deserted island?
- 2) What fictional character do you most want to be real?
- 3) Tell me the story behind the constellation made up by the random collection of dots I've panned in on the next page.



Zoe

PS - They both have handlebars. Except for the duck.

PPS - Oh, I almost forgot! I made you a CD. It's not me or anything, it's just some of my favorite songs at the moment. But you said you get bored, and so I thought I would try and give you something to fill some time. Don't look for an overarching theme or message – there isn't one. These are just songs I like. Some you've probably heard, some you probably haven't. But, yeah. Enjoy.

### Songs for Alex

- 1 - Here Comes the Sun - The Beatles
- 2 - Love Song - Sara Bareilles
- 3 - Viva la Vida - Coldplay
- 4 - My Way - Frank Sinatra
- 5 - If I Could Tell Her - from Dear Evan Hansen by Benj Pasek & Justin Paul
- 6 - Rainbow Connection - Kermit the Frog
- 7 - Nothing at All - HeyHiHello
- 8 - Sweet Caroline - Neil Diamond
- 9 - Out on the Town - FUN.
- 10 - Cabinet Battle #1 - from Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda
- 11 - Lean on Me - Bill Withers
- 12 - Fields of Gold - Sting
- 13 - Big Bad World One - Jonathan Coulton
- 14 - Flagmaker, 1775 - from Songs for a New World by Jason Robert Brown
- 15 - A Twist in My Story - Secondhand Serenade
- 16 - Let It Be - The Beatles
- 17 - I Lived - OneRepublic
- 18 - Let the Rain - Sara Bareilles