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A Letter to E

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A LETTER TO E

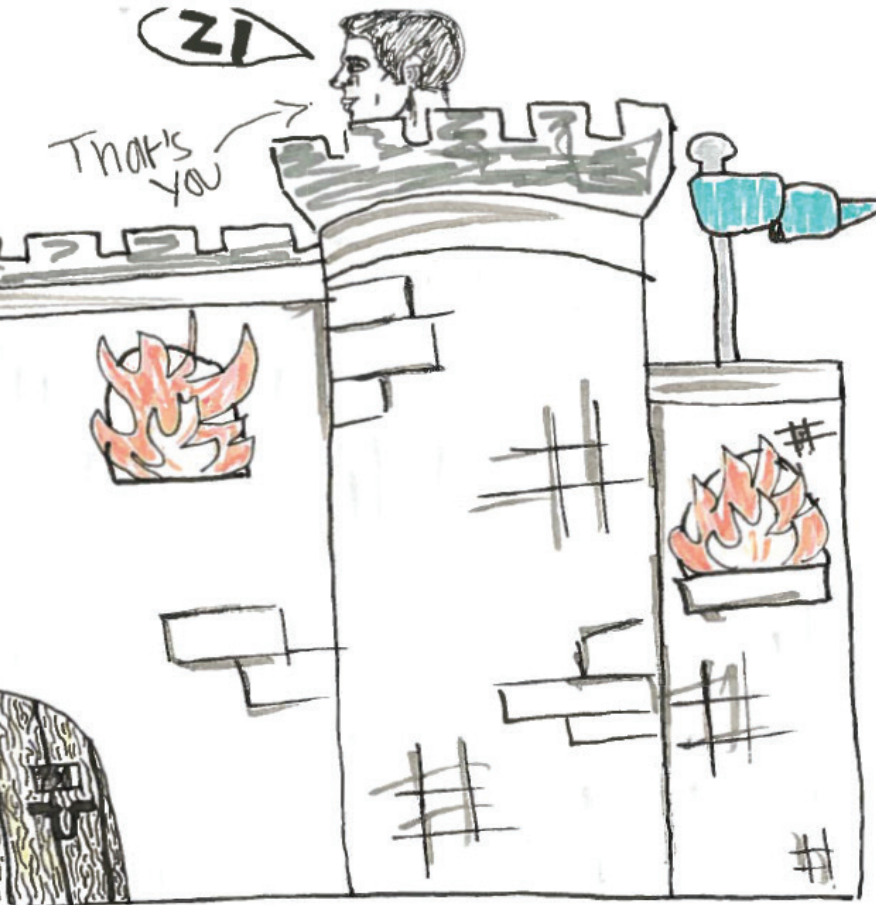
ZOEY LEIGH WOLDMAN



Dear E,

After a five-hour Trailways bus ride from Syracuse to Port Authority, an hour long cab ride from Port Authority to JFK, six hours staring at Gate 35 and an eight-hour flight sitting next to Trevor from Arkansas, I was

finally in the same building as you for the first time in over three months. Trevor and I talked while we waited for our bags to come around on the carousel. Of course mine was the last one out, as if the anticipation wasn't already releasing enough wild butterflies in



my stomach. I wasn't sure if I had butterflies because we fought the week before my arrival and I was nervous to see you, or if they were flying freely because I was actually excited. As soon as I wrestled my monstrous suitcase off the belt, I texted you to let

you know that I was one step closer. Trevor waited for me. He had never been to Madrid either and was just as confused by the outrageously high-tech, futuristic airport as I was. We approached the exit doors and as they slid open, I searched for your face. Instead, I

found the top of your head. I walked straight up to you and stared at your curls, waiting for you to look up. You didn't even notice me until I poked you and said "Hey." You looked up, hid your phone away in your pocket, and unrolled the poster-sized paper in your hand. *Welcome to Madrid, Zoey!* I giggled as I looked at the hand-sketched unicorn and kissed you before the moment had the chance to get any more awkward.

Settled in our taxi, you placed your hand on my thigh so I could feel the outline of your hand on my skin. I forgot what it felt like to be touched. Your fingers felt heavy through my pants. I didn't know why I felt uncomfortable. You had been my boyfriend for over a year. If anyone should have the right to touch me, it is you, but for some reason it left me uneasy. It felt like you were a stranger to my body, a mind that I did not know. I thought that maybe you would look

different or that your voice would sound different. You posted tons of Snapchat stories revealing your newfound love for churros and chocolate and sent me endless snaps of potato salad and various meats in rice.

I thought you would be fat; well, not fat. You could never be fat, but I thought you would be fatter. I know that's horrible that I would even think of you that way, but I did. Maybe it was a defense mechanism: that if you were fat, my lost feelings for you wouldn't be unjustified. God, I'm so shallow. You weren't fatter. You were perfect, just as I knew you before.

I knew that I hadn't actually lost any feelings for you, but I was scared. I was scared by the fact that I was completely okay while you were gone, that I wasn't crying every day and skipping meals from depression. I kept telling you that I felt the same, but I think I was just repeating it over and over again to try to



convince myself that it was true. My week in Madrid with you solidified the fact that no feelings were lost. Actually, I think they were stronger than ever.

• • •

FUCKING. So abrasive against your eyes, I thrust toward you in an attempt to convince you of my love. Ironic, like the initiation of a war seeking peace. I wanted to break down the walls and make you understand where I was coming from. Instead the bricks were laid and the mortar filled the cracks, making it impossible to reach you. I never use that word, at least not directed toward you. It was used in agony as I stub my pinky toe on the corner of my bed, or at the world for falling apart around me, but never at you. The anger built up inside of me, the result of a quiet darkness surrounding my heart like the amniotic fluid protecting the fetus in a womb.

Was this silence my body's way of protecting my heart, or was it the unwanted message relaying to my mind loud and clear? The message: you are not the one. *Do you still think you're going to marry him?* My mom probed the uncharted territory. *I DON'T KNOW...* *Fuck.* Tally, fuck: 3, other profanities: 2.

Yeah, come on, Zoey. Figure it out. Get it together. You didn't deserve that, any of it. I'm sorry for letting my anger boil to the brim, for succumbing to the power of the f-word. We were perfect before, only arguing about who's more badass, Drake or Rihanna. Rihanna, of course. Beautiful, strong, independent. I was confused about the fact that my heart didn't feel anything at all, the darkness keeping everything out, afraid to enter. Do I really miss you? Or, does this mean that I am independent? That I don't need you? I was afraid.





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The Alcázar, the Muslim-ruled fortress, was overthrown by the kings of Castile during the 16th century, and the Spanish Royal Court was moved to Madrid. In 1734 on Christmas Eve, the entire castle was burnt to the ground. The fire that came out of nowhere destroyed hundreds of paintings and treasures. The castle was not repaired until King Philip V built a palace—the palace that is standing today—in the same spot as the original Alcázar.

Together we visited the palace, Palacio Real de Madrid, and roamed its halls pretending to be the royal couple. I quizzed myself by reading the Spanish copies of the tour checkpoints. You corrected me when I was wrong, which wasn't very often. We snuck up behind a guided tour and pretended to be

part of the crowd, tucking our hands behind our backs and nodding astutely. We giggled at the ugly portraits of past royalty, imagining what it was like to be them, to have a “ceramic room” (the entire room, walls, and ceiling were covered in intricate ceramic tiles). *Imagine if a piece of ceramic fell off and hit us in the head. We would die.* The marble floors, tapestries, and polished rubies were astonishing. The most astonishing of all was that as soon as we soaked in all of the beauty, the memories of the crumbling walls beneath the fierce fires suddenly diminished.

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I couldn't believe how thoughtful you had been. Not only did you create a week-long itinerary for me, but you also planned an evening getaway, Airbnb and all. We even got to take one of those high speed

train rides that you so kindly let me sit in the window seat for. I wanted to soak in all of the views and see everything. Instead, I watched the inside of my eyelids. After only thirty minutes, we were in Segovia, the land of suckling pig. Looking in one direction, we gazed at snow-dusted mountains and in the other, an ancient aqueduct protecting its city. After we dropped our bags off at our house for the night, we made our way toward the aqueduct. The aqueduct, originally built by the Romans, helped transport water from the Rio Frio into Segovia. We followed its arches up stone stairs and began weaving through the city past churches and homes.

The entire day was spent along the cobblestone roads, noshing on traditional Spanish food and climbing 150 spiral stairs. We found ourselves on top of the tower in the Alcázar de Segovia. We bonded over the fact that we couldn't breathe and quickly regretted the extra three euros we paid for the hike. We had the roof to ourselves, so obviously we carved our initials into the stones. We peered out over the rolling hills and sighed over the fact that we had to walk twenty-five minutes back through the mist and cobblestone to get back to our Airbnb. We rewarded our labor by napping. *Can we please go to one nice dinner while I'm there, so I can get dressed up and look pretty?*

It was my only request for the entire week. It turns out Spain's idea of a nice, fancy restaurant is very, very different from the U.S. A "nice restaurant" means that it is old and serves traditional dishes, not that there is mood lighting and candles on every table. I wore a long, black lace dress that fell mid-shin where my fur boots met the hem, with my red lipstick breaking up the monochrome.

You wore jeans. We sipped on a glass of wine and crunched through our suckling pig, a dish my dad told me about after watching an episode of Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations*. We made funny faces at each other from across the table and commented on our waiter's rude behavior. I shuffled around in my seat trying to rid the itch from my tights. We, or rather, you, paid the bill and we made our way back to the Airbnb for the night.

We have a tradition. It entails basically chugging cheap wine and being drunk together. That's it. Well, there's more, but you already know the rest. We hadn't had a wine night in months, and I was planning to make this one special. Underneath my lace dress was more lace. You started a fire and I tried to get ahead of you on the drinking. We cuddled and talked and cuddled some more. It was supposed to be a romantic night and it was, just not exactly according to plan. I drank too fast and filled my belly with poison. My stomach was full, so full that any movement could induce regurgitation. So much for our romantic night. We knocked out on the futon—not the bed, the futon—and I spent the dark hours wrestling your body to win over space and sheets. Maybe it wasn't exactly a romantic night, but it was a night to remember.

"You're my PIC. Do you know what that stands for?"

"Partner-in-Crime! Of course, I know what that stands for."

Fingertips interlocked and gripping tighter, I swept my gaze across the *uno número de personas necesarias para cambiar el mundo*. The white tiled walls settled on your mint chocolate chip eyes. You leaned in and planted your love onto my ChapStick varnished lips. *Only*

2% of the world's population has green eyes. Those words were engrained in my mind like the ABCs from the echoes of your voice, even though you always say that they aren't that great. Those mint green eyes, even though they are on your body, are mine. Not physically of course, because mine are shit brown, but they are my whole heart. My whole world. You are the one person who has changed my world. As cheesy as those words sounded slipping from my lips as I practiced my Spanish, mimicked the cliché message, dancing across my keyboard beneath my fingertips, I have you in mind.

I can't stop looking at you. No matter how hard I try, my eyes wander until they find you before them. Three and a half months went by and not once was I able to settle my eyes on you. I never thought being in a long distance relationship would be this hard. I thought that we would be okay, perfect as we always were. But I was not prepared, not even the slightest. *This whole thing sucks. This long distance thing. It is so hard, and I miss you.*

"Hey, you can't do that. You are the one who chose to leave. It was not my decision to be left behind."

"I know, but I had to."

"Obvi I support your dreams, and I always will... unless your dreams happen to be moving to Japan."

We stepped onto the escalator and pushed our bodies up against each other. There was no such thing as being too close. Something, somehow, changed from the moment we were in the taxi. You no longer felt like a stranger to my body. I had not touched you or been touched in three and a half months and I was taking advantage of every second. It was amazing how fast things had changed.

Just a couple days had gone by, several train rides and escalators under our feet.

We exited the metro station into the mist. You took my owl-covered umbrella from my hand and opened it above our heads. We strolled down the tree-lined street, Retiro Park to our right. On the first day of my trip, you took me here. We got lost in the maze of trees and bushes, explored a beautiful rose garden and paddle boated on the lake. The park, originally belonging to the Spanish Monarchy, was enlarged by King Phillip II, making it one of the largest parks in Madrid. The park was made public during the late 19th century and eerily resembles Central Park. We spent the whole summer together in Manhattan, two blocks away from Central Park, but never managed to go there. Somehow being in Retiro made up for that. It made up for all of the broken promises and the sights unseen.

I looped my arm under yours and leaned in close to be near you and to also avoid being spit on by the clouds. We continued to linger, making our way toward the Prado. The entire night before, I bugged you about making sure to take your student ID so we could get discounts on our museum tickets. As soon as we approached the ticket window, I opened my purse and my fingers fumbled around for my student ID. Of course it wasn't in there. I had been preaching to the choir. I felt horrible that I made such a big deal about it and then didn't even come prepared myself. The worst part was that you wouldn't let me pay for my own. In fact, you wouldn't let me pay for anything while I was there. It irked me, but I was grateful. If I did not already say it, thank you, E.

The Prado is home to the paintings and sculptures of artists like Goya, Velázquez,



I felt some kind of connection to the oils on canvas and to you. Maybe this week, this moment, this feeling of our fingers intertwined with my head on your shoulder was the rebirth of our relationship, a fresh start. The uneasiness from our fights and my arrival subsided to reveal you standing next to me. My boyfriend, my lover, my best friend, I just saw you. We were 3,618 miles apart, but I was home.

Love,
Z