

Text messages one through four: “Alex, I’m really sorry. Jolie explained everything. Please call me.”

Email number two: “Look, I understand if you don’t want to speak to me anymore. I deserve every bit of pain and wrath you want to hurl my way. I behaved like a child when all you asked of me was trust. I am a terrible person. I see that now. Please give me a chance to apologize. We never have to see each other again after that.”

Voicemail number three: “I wanted to tell you this in person, but since it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen, at least you can hear my voice. I’m sorry for giving up on you so easily, for jumping to the conclusion that you were just like everyone else who hurt me. I took my fear and pain out on you when it was Nick and Mia I should have been berating. You didn’t deserve any of it. I should have been there for you. I hope you meet someone who deserves your love, because I certainly I don’t. Tell Regina I’m sorry if you see her. Goodbye, Alex.”

Alex didn’t respond to a single message.

Two weeks passed and I was just starting to accept – if, by “accept” one means, “dwell on excessively” – the fact that I had ruined a perfectly good relationship. Without Mia to talk to, I was pretty much alone. Miles and I wallowed together occasionally, but he was more of the suffer-in-silence-then-move-on type and was already testing the waters of the dating scene again. I, on the other hand, preferred to stay locked in my apartment when I wasn’t working. I had my writing, and that was enough for now.

When my phone rang at lunchtime, the last person I expected to be on the other end was my mother. “Annabeth, what did you do? I heard from Mrs. Greenfield, who was told by Alyssa that Nick is moving to Los Angeles. What happened and why haven’t you told me?”

“Hello to you, too, mom.”

“I’m serious Annabeth. What is going on?”

I hadn’t told her what happened the day of dad’s funeral. I’d lied that Miles and I had to get back to Chicago for a work emergency. She was not going to like the truth, but she needed to hear it if she was ever going to let me live in peace. “Well, mom, if you must know, your precious Nick and my former friend, Mia, were colluding to break up Alex and me, which they succeeded in, by the way. Nick and I ended our friendship for good and now he is moving on, literally, with a little help from Miles. There. You’re all caught up. Are you happy now?”

My mom’s silence was heavy with shock. “I don’t understand. Perhaps if you’d tried a little harder…”

I started to ask her which of the transgressions I named she was so concerned about, but the words evaporated from my tongue when Angela knocked on the edge of my cube and handed me a small envelope.

“Look mom, I have to go. I’ll call you when I get home tonight.”

When I looked up Angela, she shrugged and said “It was just delivered for you.”

“By who?”

“A bike courier, you know, that cute young guy who sometimes flirts with Kendra.”

My shoulders sagged, hope leaching out of me like a pierced balloon. I slipped my nail under the glue and pulled out a single sheet of paper with a solitary line of typed text.

*There’s one last letter left in the box. Read it.*

“It can’t be,” I said to myself. I just put the box in the hall closet yesterday. It was empty. I’d opened the last envelope before we left for the airport the day my dad died. It had said,

“Open me when...your world is falling apart.” Along with a few pieces of chocolate, it contained a beautiful handkerchief with my initials monogrammed into it and a photo of me and Alex from our first date. I had clutched the small square of linen in my palm all the way through my dad’s funeral.

What if that wasn’t the box referenced in the note? What if my imagination was truly running away with me? But if it wasn’t from Alex, who was it from? And what did it mean? I closed my eyes and held my head in my hands, trying to decide if I was losing my mind.