

SEPT 2

Leo,

It's about six hours since you left the island. The way things have been, I know you wouldn't have expected me to come to see you off, but I keep thinking about how you waved and waved from the dock five years ago, when I was leaving for Toronto.

While the ferry was carrying you to the mainland, I was on West Beach with Mackenzie and Rachel. Mackenzie had decided we should have one last summer swim before school starts tomorrow, but the breeze was so chilly, none of us ended up wanting to go in the water. So we just walked on the sand, talking and speculating about how junior year will go.

The summer vacationers have all left, so no one was on the beach except for us and a few families having a barbecue by the rocks. I could see the white shape of the ferry getting smaller as it crossed the strait, and the knot in my stomach got tighter and tighter.

Mackenzie started gushing about her "awesome" summer in L.A. and the hot nightspots she'd gotten into, and Rachel and I mostly just nodded in the right places, like usual. Not that I mind. At one point Mackenzie turned to me and said, "Because the big city clubs are the best, aren't they, Kaelyn?" and all I could say was "Um, I guess," because I never actually went clubbing in Toronto.

If she knew I spent most of my time there at the zoo or the vet clinic near our house, not shopping and partying, I'm pretty sure she wouldn't have glommed on to me the second I moved back last spring. But I haven't gone out of my way to correct her. It's nice having people to hang out with like this, even if it's sort of under false pretenses. I was so focused on getting by on my own in the city, I didn't realize how much I missed being with friends.

And it was only today I realized how much I've missed *you*.

By the time the ferry was out of view, the spray from the waves was making us shiver. We went up to the grassy stretch by the road, and Mackenzie almost stepped on a dead bird. She yelped and hopped around, shaking her foot like germs might have leapt up onto it. Rachel couldn't stop laughing.

The bird was a black-backed gull, and it looked healthy—other than being dead, of course. Its feathers were shiny and I couldn't see any injuries. Really weird, the way it was lying there, like it'd just dropped out of the sky. I wanted to get a stick and move the body around to take a closer look, except Mackenzie would have completely freaked out.

You wouldn't have minded, Leo. If I'd been walking on the beach with you, the way we used to, you'd have watched while I checked out the gull, and asked, "Can you tell why it died?" And you would really have wanted to know.

Standing there, looking at gull while Mackenzie wiggled her foot and Rachel laughed, it hit me harder than ever before. How stupid I've been to let one little argument screw things up so much. You were my best friend for as long as I can remember, and it's been almost two years since I last talked to you.

After a bit, Rachel stopped laughing and said she had to get

going. Her mom's been bugging her to be home more since her dad broke his leg working the trawlers last week. We agreed to meet in the caf tomorrow to compare schedules, and then we headed back into town.

I didn't go straight home. After Mackenzie and Rachel took off, I wandered past the fisheries and up the path that leads through the pine trees to the cliff where the cormorants nest. Standing by the rocky edge, looking at the ocean with the cool wind gusting over me and the gulls coasting overhead, I can imagine what it's like to fly.

At least, I usually can. Right then I felt as if I had a weight strapped around my waist, holding me down, made up of all the things I should have said to you before you left. When I still had the chance.

The most important thing is the hardest to admit. You were right. When we moved, I was overwhelmed the moment the taxi drove us away from the airport into the city. The second I walked up to that huge middle school, swarming with kids who'd spent their whole lives around skyscrapers and subways, I was sure I didn't fit in. So I went off and watched the chimps play in the zoo and fed the kittens in the vet clinic instead of trying to make friends. I probably could have if I'd put in the effort—Drew was at the same school, just a grade higher, and by the end of the first month he was so busy exploring the streets with his classmates we hardly saw him at home. But sticking to myself was easier. And by the time I got to the even bigger high school, the thought of doing anything else was scary.

You listened to me moan about the city and the kids at school so many times before you finally pointed out that half of the problem

was me. I shouldn't have gotten so angry. But at the time, I felt like you were turning on me. I couldn't see how right you were until we moved back here.

I figured I'd just fall in with the same people I'd known growing up, but everyone looked at me like I was a stranger. And I was still scared. I didn't know what to do or what to say, even to you. I'm so out of practice. It's ridiculous.

But that's going to change. Starting tomorrow, I'm going to be someone who talks to people in class even if they haven't talked to me first, and who hangs out in town instead of on cliff tops watching birds. I'm going to keep on being that person until I'm not scared anymore. And I'm going to practice saying everything I need to say to you in this journal, so the first time you come back to see your parents, for Thanksgiving or Christmas, I'll be able to apologize to your face and see if we can still be friends.

I promise.