

Letters from War

“Mama! Mama!” I yelled across our one-room home. “He sent another letter! Papa sent another letter! I sprinted onto the bench with excitement. My mother walked in the house carrying two large buckets from the well. She set them on the ground with ease. She looked at me with awe and doubt. She took the letter from my hands and read it thoroughly.

“He’s okay, Baby. He’s okay for now,” she said to me, her eyes welled up with tears. She came and sat next to me, and put her arm around me, and then handed me the letter. I slowly read the letter.

Dear Abigail and Harriet,

I miss you two. I’m scared for you both, but I know you are safe. Things are tough here. I’m hoping that the officers are as good as they say they are, and that they won’t lead us into something that will get us all killed.

We don’t know when and what we’re going to eat. It’s always a surprise. One day we’ll be having bacon biscuits, and then we won’t have food for another two days. When we do have food, it will be nothing but a couple of crackers.

Shoes last as long as the battles out here. You can see my big toe poking out of both my shoes. If I get lost, my feet will be the first to freeze. Usually when I sit, I tuck them under me to keep them warm.

When I’m in battle, I’m worried that I’ll get shot, and nobody will find me and I’ll die all by myself on the cold battlefield. Even if someone found me, the Lord only knows if they’ll recognize me as they dump me in the shallow graves with all the other soldiers, who are unknown. -No funeral, no priest, just a big hole dug by my war buddies. No one would tell you I’m dead, and you’d be waiting for me to come home, but I never would.

If I get shot, or injured, I face a worse fate than ever. I don’t want to see the doctors. They scare me more than death. All they have to make the pain stop is morphine and chloroform, so most of the men supply their own whiskey and bourbon. If you’re cut and bleeding, they’ll take one of those burning hot pokers, like the ones

you use on horses and cows, and they'll set it right on your wound, till it's burned up. Most of us just use our tree sap teas to make us better, rather than go to the doctor. Most of the men out here are falling from sickness, not bullets. We've had 5 cases of measles, 3 cases of malaria, and a whole lot of other sick people in our regiment, alone.

We found a soldier in the woods. He said he was kidnapped and taken to a prison camp, but managed to free himself. He said that the whole place was filled with dirt and rats, and everyone there was sick. He was wearing two uniforms. One was his, and one was stolen from a dead man, just to keep warm. He said that the last thing he'd eaten was a cracker and a little bit of bacon and it was all covered with dirt. He told us that they found rocks and bones, and made jewelry out of it to trade for food. They also played baseball to keep themselves occupied. They ate rats to keep themselves nourished. I would hate to be there, and I also wouldn't be able to write to you two.

I really hope this war is over soon. I want to run up the lane and hold my two favorite girls. Stay safe, and you'll see me before you know it.

*Love always,
William*

I looked at the letter, but wasn't reading it. My mind was blank. The only thought was how scared I was for my papa. He was tough, but I wasn't sure he would be tough enough to handle that. I really do hope the war is over soon.