

Dearest Mae,

I'm still pushing strong. I say my prayers every night. You can tell that to Ma with good confidence, that's the truth. I'm still taking care of myself, to the best of my abilities. All the lads know of Clarissa by now, as I've been rather boisterous about her, unashamedly at that. They know how I want to see her. Every now and then they'll pick up a shift for me, or silently hand me some extra socks, or extra provisions when they're feeling really sorry for me.

How's my mother? It was so very hard, you know, leaving Ma as I had to. Of course she understood, you saw, you were there on our last day together. But I hated leaving her after the news of Dad came so suddenly. Mae, I know I don't have to ask, but please check in on Ma from time to time. Invite her for dinner so she can see Clarissa. Darling, everything is so abnormal over here. Here there isn't any rich and poor. We all do our part in taking care of each other. None of these boys get any more than I do, and if we starve, we're starving together. Don't think we haven't.

There aren't many animals out here, Mae. It's not like back with you, back where I could walk outside and feed deer by hand. I miss feeding our deer, Mae. Out here an animal is a rare thing to see. It's always a special when one poor sap comes trotting through the camps. Now I remember, I saw a rabbit one morning when I was waking from a dream.

I've come to enjoy waking up so much more profoundly. Waking up here isn't comparable to waking up at home on the bunk. Awakening here, it's something philosophical. Sometimes it's a dark shade of blue all around me, but not quite as black as you'd think for a battlefield. Other times I've woken up to the most delightful colours I've had the privilege to lay my own two eyes upon. On those mornings I sometimes forget for a few moments where I am, what I'm doing, and that you're not here with me. On those mornings I can feel you with me, and I see you in those lovely portraits the good Lord painted for me. But some mornings I'll wake up and it'll be raining like the devil. Sometimes I'll be awoken to an explosion, or a scream. Those mornings are harder to see the good in, but I always know it's out there somewhere.

I always end up finding the good when I think of you back home, readying our little girl up to meet her daddy. I see her in every single one of these mornings around here, Mae. It's unreal, truly, how easily I've come to love this girl and we have never even met. Mae, I think that will top all of these magnificent sunrises. I know they'll all be dull compared to when I finally see our Clarissa, hold her and look into her eyes. Whose eyes does she have, Mae? I sure do hope they're yours, for those ones must be the loveliest I've ever seen.

Mae, I know I said I was pushing strong, but I'm losing my wind. I don't admit this to the rest of the lads, and it's even hard to write. Darling, I've ended the lives of a score of people by now, and I don't pass a night without seeing the whole lot of them behind my eyes once I try and sleep. They always were saying how honourable a position that we had taken up, and even before, on the posters, they spoke of unimaginable glory, but I don't feel any of it. Not honour or glory or pride. If I'm perfectly honest, Mae, I haven't felt much of anything recently. To state it blandly, love, I feel emptier and emptier as the weeks drag on. It's as though I came into this fight a full glass of water, and I'm being drained bit by excruciating bit.

Mae, I don't feel like me anymore, but I promise that when I come back I'll be right again. Don't you worry, dear, I'll be as right as the rain that fell on me just this morning. I'll fix myself for you. For both of you.

Love to Ma, give her a kiss on the cheek from me. Hug Clarissa a little closer, a little tighter, so maybe she'll feel her strong old daddy's love from all the way over here. And of course, all my love to you, darling. The thought of you guides me through the nights and all the horrors I've faced out here.

Until the next write,

Christopher