

Camp Opposite Fredericksburg
Dec. 10, 1862

My dear Jane

Here we are yet, but likely it will not now be long. I did not intend writing to you again so soon, but to finish up all the letters I owe to others who have written to me. By dint of perseverance I got through them all except the one I owe the children, and that one I was afraid must stand a while. If it was not so cold I could write a good deal in the evening, but it can't be done. Last evening I heard there was a mail in, and went down to the Quartermasters to stay with Johnny till the letters were distributed, as they generally come there first. I waited there till 9 O'Clock and gave up all hopes of any coming that night. But while I was there our Brigade received orders to ready to march at a moments notice. The Quartermaster was ordered to issue three days rations to the men, and late as it was he commenced doing so immediately, so that the meat and potatoes would be cooked before morning. Orders also came to see that we all had 60 rounds of cartridges & the same as we had once before. I went round to my quarters and found that the mail had been distributed there while I was away. In my tent was your letter of the 4th, and the night caps, also the postage stamps. I am exceedingly obliged to you dear for thinking about these things. Also am obliged to Miss Kenah for knitting one of them. I wore them last night, but they came sometime during the night. I am wearing them during the day. It is fashionable here to do so, and a great many wear such caps in preference to the little skillets some have, except when on duty, and then we must wear the regulation caps. I cannot keep up times or regular dates this time and my journal will therefore be imperfect. They have kept us as busy as beavers since I wrote last. The camp has had rumor on rumor. One part of the day it is we are going into winter quarters, in an hour afterwards it is we must cross the river, and so on. However on Sabbath we were ordered out while at breakfast for inspection - must be ready in five minutes - I guess some burnt their mouths to save their coffee. We were inspected, but had no preaching. After dinner we were notified to be ready at 3 O'Clock to go on picket for 24 hours. This was the coldest day we had experienced yet, a regular Mercer Co. freezing day, and the prospect of going out in the country in sight of the enemys pickets, did not warm us up much. One of our regiment was sent; the left wing. We went out, a tramp of about two miles through the snow and came to the posts. We were dropped of in parties of 3, 4, 5, or 6 at short distances apart, for instance 3 men at Liberty 3 at our house 5 at Ire Kirks 3 at Pringles & 6 at Wadsworth, and so on, always one party being within sight and hearing of the other. No one was allowed to pass us either out or in the lines; any one attempting

it was to be taken prisoner. Now what appears to be hard about this duty becomes a benefit to us. We obtained permission to have fires, and we soon had great fires of fine dry rails in a blaze. We struck up arbors of fine boughs to keep off the wind, and actually have a warmer place than we would have had in camp. One had to walk constantly between the posts during the night. There were 5 on my post and our trip came only once an hour. During the day we only went if we chose. We saw no rebels all night. The next morning our Lieut. let me go out beyond our lines if I chose for the purpose of foraging. I loaded up my gun and went out about a mile and a half. I got a haversack of corn meal and came back. Some of the boys had milked some cows. We had a good dinner of mush. I made an engagement with Mrs. Green the woman of the house to go back at one o'clock and she would have some pone baked for me. The officer thought it a trap and said she might have some rebels there to overpower me. I did not care much for risking it, but did not like to give it up and be scared for nothing but a woman. I went, and got some fine corn bread. She was just finishing baking it. She also sold me 1/2 a peck of dried apples, and said if we staid here I might come and get more. I got back in good time, and saw many rebels. After my return our post was visited by a German artist and a sketch taken of our officer and our fine arrangement. We spent a pleasant Monday afternoon and were not a bit glad when another regiment came about sundown to relieve us. We slept pretty soundly that night in spite of the cold. Today we got extra ammunition and inspection orders again. This was inspection of arms, accoutrements, knapsacks and quarters. To get you to fully understand what this means I can tell you in one word. It is exactly the same things as "housecleaning" at home. Such a fussing by the thousands of men. Every one on the "rampage" at once. I keep my gun clean all the time & it don't take me more than 5 minutes a day to do it, so I don't much care when inspection comes. It is over now & I have time to write. The cannon are booming in the distance, and the practices in ear detects between times valleys of musketry. The officers say the left wing is crossing the river today & I see & know that the center is in motion. We are on the extreme right acting as the reserve & consequently our orders to be ready to march at a moments notice. We will follow when they cross or if they can't without help we will be thrown in to turn the scale. This is the post Col. Leasure likes & where our regt. has mostly been. We can't be ready at a moments notice, but can be off in 5 minutes. The weather looks more like winter, there is still some snow on the ground. I think we get used to it. We don't mind it now, and if gets no worse we will not care for getting into winter quarters. The wet is the only thing that makes us uncomfortable. We are all in excellent health. One of the regiment, in our

Brigade (the 36 Mass.) is going down. The dead march is a daily tune with them, and the last valley about sunset, announces the final discharge of some fever soldier for his long home. The Eastern & Northern troops can't stand it like the N.Y & Penn. ones. My appetite keeps up and I get plenty now to keep it on. Gen. Burnside has got us extra rations. Potatoes twice a week, condensed vegetables for soup, or curious kind of cake made of Potatoes, Peas, Beans, Carrots, Cabbage & Barley, pressed as hard as a stone, but by boiling melts into a very good soup. One ounce swells up and makes a ton of soup, good too. We have been paid off, and the sutlers have come. We can get almost any thing by paying three times what it is worth. They sell tobacco \$2.50 a pound. We bought nothing from them but a can of condensed milk. Have not used it yet, and can't tell how it goes. Johnny gets us what extra things we need at government prices. Good sugar .11. Extra good molasses .44 per gallon. Crackers .5 per oz. Rice .7 per oz. While this is the case we will not have any use for sutlers. Wm. Floyd sent me 1/2 a oz. of his good pepper & it is a good deal better than any I ever saw. He did not charge for it. I enclosed .5. I don't want to carry much money about & I don't want to use much by mail now when every one knows we have been paid. I will send some to George for things he has sent me, and to get postal notes for change. He can get them easier in Phil.. You can't get a \$5. changed here. We got paid to 15 of Nov. \$24.25. I am sorry I can't answer Bert & Willies letter now. They must do as they do at the table wait till the older ones are first served. Tell Bert that I notice a great improvement in his writing. If he keeps on he will be a good writer. In a short time he will beat Tommy. Thanks to H. Elliott. I won't write any more sorrowful letters to you dear, about separation. If you only saw me & the rest you would feel more like laughing than anything else. Dangers and care are unknown things in our camp, and I cannot be odd. Even with our present prospect of meeting the enemy every hour there is the same cheerfulness that usually pervades our regiment. I have scarcely left room to answer your questions or letter. Uriah Forrest has not come yet. Let the fireside critics who think Burnside can move an army of 100,000 men like a horse & buggy come here and show him how. I know he would be obliged if any one could tell him how to move faster. Those who talk so only show their ignorance to the soldier. I join Willie in thanks to Bessie for knitting the caps. We are all well.

it is now dark, I have been interrupted. Carried three loads of wood for our camp fire. We take turns at it. I don't chop, but make up in carrying. Rumors come in to night that we have driven the rebels off from here. Will know in the morning. If so I have missed a fight. I will send Willie a picture answer to his

picture letter. Kiss Siss for me & believe me.

Yours affectionately

William