My dear Jane

I wrote you a hasty note yesterday informing you of our arrival here, which I hope you have received now, as there was a long interval in which I could not get an opportunity of writing. We were ordered off rather suddenly from Fredericksburg after all. The idea of sending us away from the front appeared to be to let the rebels see us go. On Tuesday the 10th at 11 o'clock I was engaged in writing a letter to Uncle Robert (and it is unfinished yet) when we were startled by the drum beating to pack up. We had to work, and in half an hour our Brigade was all in line and not a tent visible. It was a very clear day, rather more so than usual, and the rebels could not help seeing us leave. We marched down to the railroad depot, and towards evening were packed into some freight cars and moved off. It was well we had not far to go, as we made very poor speed. We got to Aquia Creek landing about dark. The troops that had started before us had to wait there a day or two before they got off, and I supposed we would too, and I proposed having time to write from there. But we appear to have had different luck. The boats were waiting for us. After getting the horses and baggage on board it was midnight. Our regiment was put on board a boat called the Sylvan Shore, except two companies and the Surgeons and quartermasters department who went with the 45th on the South America. Our boat was an old North River ferry boat, and entirely unfit for navigating such a bay. The weather was rather rough and we lay at anchor till the morning. There was hardly room on the decks for us all to lie down on. I slept in the fire room against the locker that night. We started Early in the morning and sailed till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when we met a boat that reported the bay as being very rough below, so we couldn't anchor and remained where we were all that night. We were just opposite the town of St. Marys. The next day was stormy and sometimes foggy. The South America ran aground in the fog. We kept on the weather becoming rougher, but as we were out of coal and water we determined to try to reach the Fortress that night if possible. Shortly after dark we came in sight of it, but it was too rough for us to round to, and we had to go on to Hampton Roads for an anchorage. This night it blew a perfect hurricane. I had been put on guard on the upper deck to keep the boat trimmed: the weight of three men to either side put her out of balance. I kept it straight till the men lay down. I reported to the pilot house and was relieved. I inquired of the pilot where the other anchor was and was informed that there was but the one, and that one not fit for a boat of that size, They kept up steam all night at the risk of burning all our coal, as that was our only chance in case
of the cable parting. We dragged anchor for a quarter of a mile, but fortunately the sea does not run high in the roads, and we rode it out till morning. I picked out a life preserver before I went to sleep, and would not have been the least surprised if I would have needed to use it before the morning. We got safely to the wharf in the morning at Fortress Monroe, not thanks to our War department for their care for our safety, but owing to a kind and overruling Providence that has once more preserved us for some other purpose. When we reported to Gen. Dix, he ordered us down to Newport News. It appeared we were not going to get off that boat. I had only Eaten dry crackers during the whole voyage. I took a canteen of water on board with me but never tasted it. There were only two barrels of water on board and they were guarded. The men could go and get a drink, but were allowed to carry none away. I was not thirsty and could have stood it a day longer. I gave two officers a drink the second day. Henderson got sick & I gave him the balance. He was feverish and soon drank it. He suffered terribly for want of water till we landed. He has not got over it yet. At last we landed and what a rush there was for the river bank where there are plenty of springs of good water. The water in the river is salt. Newport News is only the name of the point of land. All the buildings are sheds and barracks for soldiers and contrabands. I made a break up among the buildings and found a Sutler. I got in lot of cheese, a pound of butter and 15 cakes for $1. Our men had a frolic on it. Willie found a place where we got 10 apples for a quarter. There are usually plenty of oysters here too, but all were sold that day. We can get almost anything to buy here, only prices are a little higher than at home, but perhaps not higher than things are now getting Every where.

In the afternoon we were marched out along the river about a mile and a half to the very place the regiment was when Joe Moore left them last summer. Col. Welsh is in command of the Brigade since Col Leasure left and he made an Encamp farther back than before,, and nearer the woods. We got our tent pitched just at dark. It went hard to creep into our little tent again. The next morning all hands started for the woods for timber to build cabins like the ones we left. Willie and I chopped and carried all day. Henderson was not able. My shoulder is peeled with the pine logs. We have enough gathered to build a house and intended to commence tomorrow. Many got theirs up and are as snug as where they left. Most of the men are working like beavers to day notwithstanding it is Sabbath. Most of them will be finished to night. Since I commenced writing Col. Leasure has returned. He gave word that we would move our camp tomorrow to a better place, so we have lost nothing by waiting. I can’t tell you anything further about this movement. We know nothing about, but have a new rumor every hour.
Sometimes it looks probable, and sometimes not. At all events we are in a very pleasant place. We will have a daily mail, and many conveniences we had not and could not get at Fredericksburg. Your letter No. 5 of 9th came last night, only four days since it left home, which is quicker than we got them at Fredericksburg. I was glad to hear from you, and did not expect to so soon. I don't know how Col L. knew we were to go into winter quarters. He knows just about as much about the intention of our commander as we do ourselves. He gets the orders about an hour or so before he gives them to us. As to going home, Genl. Hooker allows one man from each company at a time to go for ten days. We left Hooker's command, and none of us men got home yet, but even then it would be a good while before many would get home at that rate. I wrote from here for George to send the keg on – perhaps I'll get it yet. I heard about the silver mine before – I saw a notice of it in a newspaper, and Uncle William mentioned it in his letter. You can rest assured there is no silver there unless it has been put there. Silver is never found near coal. It is a swindle you can depend. Even the terms of the shares show that. Say nothing but sell ours as quietly & quickly as you can, and don't be obliged to pay the balance of the $360 – which may be the case by some trickery. Take care that Dr. Coulter brings that book back. He is just the man to forget it and it is worth $7. if it is Beck's that he got.

I got the stamps in No. 3 – I think I said so in No. 15 but perhaps forgot.

Please excuse me for haste & brevity today; as I am in a great hurry to get this in the boat which leaves soon. If not on it it must wait till tomorrow – will write again as soon as possible.

Your affectionate

William