Camp of 100th P.V.
Newport News, VA
March 18. 1863

My dear Jane

Instead of penning this in the midst of a drenching rain and cutting March wind as from the date you might suspect, I have the pleasure of recording a mild springlike day, such as one as makes the grass deepen in color and the buds open up. St. Patrick is a gentleman or at least behaves as such down here in Virginia. The most fastidious invalid could not take exception to this administration of the weather here. The improvement in the weather has also made an improvement in the men, and the sick list has become very small this morning. Everything was going nicely till about dark last night, when we suddenly received orders to cook two days rations and hold ourselves in readiness to march at a moments notice. These orders produced a great commotion in camp, and conjecture was busy investigating the cause. From the activity of the gunboats and the number of times we heard them blowing off steam it was supposed that the rebel rams were about coming down the river and that we were to be moved back into the country out of harms way in case of a naval engagement. A rumor reached us that Longstreet had fell on our advance near Suffolk and driven in our pickets and reinforcement had been sent for. The supposition at the Surgeon's quarters was that in the morning we would leave by boat for Norfolk and from there to Suffolk, so I went to bed early so as to be ready for our journey, but here we are yet. The orders respecting the preparation of rations etc were countermanded during the night, and we are now in the same footing exactly that we were the day before, except that this liability to move so suddenly will be apt to check the spirit of improvement that has been prevailing to such an extent. One effect of the order was to increase the sick list this morning and amazingly. As Uncle Sam does not expect sick men to fight, it is very convenient for a man who doesn't want to fight, to get sick, and consequently all such men got sick for the occasion, but as it turned out it was not necessary this time, and I had the trouble of putting up a good many doses this morning that will not be taken.

In place of a march they have substituted an inspection. These inspections are not at all relished. It is to us what housecleaning is to a housekeeper, except that we have not the buckets, brooms & scrubbing brushes. We get brush and leaves and tie them to a stick for a broom and other things in proportion. I have had no trouble this time. The hospital nurse has cleaned up our quarters and put everything in first rate order. He is a nephew of Old Mr. Magee's. Magee has been down to see me, he has the diarrhea, and doesn't feel like going home for a few days.
We had a new major appointed yesterday. It was Capt. Cline. Quite a number of other changes will consequently take place, of the nature of which I will inform you in a few days. Among others quite a change will be from what I led you to think in No. 27. but nothing important. There is heavy firing going on as I write: from the sound I suppose it to be five or six miles up the river. Yesterday and last night we heard heavy guns, but it appeared to be in the opposite direction. We don't know the cause, but have to wait till the newspapers come to find out what is going on. Even what happens so near as Fortress Monroe is, we have to find out what goes on there from the New York or Philadelphia papers, not that we didn't hear a good deal, but what we do never turns out to be true, and we refuse to believe any thing unless it is in print:

The marching orders caused a great commotion amongst another class of people that are becoming more numerous here every day. I mean the women and children. There has been an arrival of about five or six women here every day for some time past, and several of them brought their smallest children along. How these could accompany us in case of a movement could not be discovered, and they had to make preparations to return home. There is only one woman in our regiment: Mrs. Leasure, Mr. White and Capt. Hamilton expect their wives to day. Mr. Brown paid us a visit of two weeks, but has gone home. The New York regts, have their wives and children in great force here, and I suspect even more than their wives. For my part I shall not be sorry if we do move soon. It looks like doing something and to my taste is preferable to sitting still in a camp no matter how nicely it is situated: and then the incidents and excitement of a march is inspiring, whereas here from day to day the same routine becomes very tiresome. I suppose it is but natural for humanity to desire a change and I am just like the rest, wishing to go on when we remain still, and to stop and rest when we go on. There is perhaps no business in which there is more uncertainty than in this. There is also something about it that I like, and I am of the opinion that had I not been married and settled in life before coming here I would have chosen it for a profession and remained in the army the rest of my days. It will unfit many a one for the steady plodding life they used to lead, just as the Mexican war spoiled so many young men for active daily business pursuits afterwards.

Since I commenced writing to day the weather has undergone a considerable change, and there is a slight rain falling now. We will probably have a very respectable Equinoctial storm after all. I might have known it would not be a fair day if I had heeded your mothers sign at sunrise. It was a very "watery sun." But our Mercer Co. signs do not appear to hold good here in Virginia, as many of our boys have found out. Their predictions have generally
failed as far as the moon is concerned, and many of them will go home somewhat cured of their faith in such nonsense.

If I had your garden here I could give you a little help in it once in a while now. I have nothing to do in the afternoons and might be of some use in fixing your hot bed. The folks in Pennsylvania will never realize what a blessing they enjoy in not having this Secession question settled on their soil. A look at Virginia their neighboring state with the same soil and a milder climate, and now almost a wilderness is the result, whereas it might have been that the contest was to take place in Pennsylvania with the same result. This generation will never see Virginia in the same condition she was before. Dearly has she paid for her political sin, and the end is not yet.

There was no mail today - something unusual now, but I expected no letters, and have not been disappointed.

I hope you are all well, yourself particularly. The folks don't appear to give you much chance to be lonely. You would have been more lonely if I had been at home, for then they would not have come so much, and I was not much company when I got away to the office, and someone to play chess with.

With my respects to all acquaintances and neighbors and much love for yourself I remain

Your affectionate husband
William