Knoxville, Tenn  
October 17, 1863

My dear Jane

It is almost two weeks since I wrote you last - what a long time - and a great deal longer since I heard from you. The conveyance of mails from here to the rear are very uncertain. Last night however I received your two letters 32 & 33 one from Pittsburg and one from home. I was very glad to hear from you once more. You give me all the news dear about everybody except yourself. Are you sick again? Do let me know how you are, I am more anxious to hear of your health than the other news. I did not intend writing you until tomorrow, as I didn't know when the mail would leave, and intended waiting for the quiet of the sabbath to be with you on paper, but from appearances this afternoon I fear we may be on the move before tomorrow afternoon.

Since I wrote you last we have had troublous times among us. We have been constantly on the move, and in this kind of country and the bad weather we have it is a very uncomfortable thing. The weather is rather cool and evenings and nights very cold. It has rained a good deal too. I had no overcoat and although Lt. Justice lent me one of his coats I suffered from the cold a good deal, and have a cough left on hand yet. Johnny got me a new overcoat last night and I am now equipped for our next tramp. I pitied some of our men who had neither overcoat or blanket. After shifting our positions around Knoxville a few days our brigades were sent one after another up the rail road to Ball's Gap. This was as far as we could then go as the rebels had driven the 23d Corp back to that place and had their Headquarters at Greenville. After we got up there with our whole force we took up our line of march early this day week. Lt. Justice remained at Knoxville to forward provisions as I advised him of our need of them. The infantry had passed on till about 11 a.m when I was ordered to take my supply train off the road. We took down a fence and drove into a field. I noticed all trains had to leave the road. This was to let Wilcox's men pass on. When we stopped we cooked dinner. Capt. Curtin came back from the front and told us to keep our teams harnessed and ready to move forward or backward as our men were formed in line of battle. If there was to be a fight there could be no business to do about rations so, leaving the train in charge of Dickson I started forward to the place Capt. Curtin told me the troops were, but they had moved. I went on through the woods about a mile and found Wilcox's men in line of battle, but none of them could tell where the Pennsylvanians were unless in the front. This was likely as that is generally where they are put. I went on a mile farther and found our whole division spread out like a long blue fence across hill and valley, but just came in time to hear the bugle
call for an advance. I waited in the road till they filed off as far as our regiment and then I marched on with it - on through Blue Springs and over the hills and woods beyond. At last we came to a thick wood to the right of the road and the division moved into it. We thought that as the day was far spent we were going into camp, and some of the cooks commenced building fires. I was talking pleasantly with our men when we heard Col. Morrison's broad Scotch voice ordering out the 45th as "skeemishers". I left at once and climbed a very high hill in front of the woods that overlooked the country for miles around. On this hill was Roemer's battery already. Burnside, Potter [Robert Brown Potter] and other generals were here too glass in hand. Without a glass I could see the rebel batteries on the opposite side. Here was to be the scene of conflict - here more blood was to be shed to cement that Union which had already cost so much. The skirmishers slowly advance up a rising cornfield treading down here and there a stalk of standing corn. The dark heavy battle line of our division forms behind them and emerges from the woods and halts. Yet all is silent - not a gun is fired - the view is sublime - the setting sun sends down a shower of golden light on the yellow cornfield and purples the tops of the "Smoky Mountains" beyond (the boundary between Tennessee & No. Carolina). The birds even are singing in the trees. All quiet still. The sun begins to throw long shadows of the trees aslant the cornfield, symbolic of the shadows shortly to fall upon the hearthstones of loved ones at home. Directly a shell comes whistling over the woods and strikes the hill we are on. Then another. Our skirmishers have discovered the enemy at last - he means to fight this time - They fire. Then comes Col. Leasure's sharp voice ringing up from the valley and our line is in motion. I wish you could have seen them. On they go as on dress parade - out of the shadow into the sunlight their arms glittering and all in order. The rebels come too - they shout and rush on - soon they must meet - some one must give way, but we have no fears of who that will be for it is the 9th Corps fighting under Burnside's eye. Both parties now are at the highest part of the field, their guns are levelled, one volley and the bayonet for the rest. Our men sprang to the charge like tigers on their prey - nothing could withstand it and Mudwall Jackson's [William Lowther "Mudwall' Jackson] men were in retreat without waiting a taste of our steel. Our men ran after them into the woods and on till dark, but nary rebel could they see any more. We shelled the woods and searched the woods but none were found. It was now dark and I came down the hill to see the result. I helped to get some of our wounded off. One man was killed. We took 41 to the hospital two of these were rebels - they died there that night. Four of our wounded will die -perhaps more. None of the 100th were killed or wounded. The 45th Penn, 36th Mass & 79th N.Y. lost most. Strange
we escaped for we were in between these regiments. This was the battle of Blue Springs. The next morning we started in pursuit and followed till night, but never overtook them. We came across their wagons left on the road, and their wounded left in houses on the way. Wilcox's men followed after us. They buried 70 of the rebel dead on the field - we saw a new made grave now and then on the way. Genl Burnside sent some cavalry around by a by road to intercept their flight but they were not able to stop them. The citizens say they went by on a run. They never stopped till they came to Carters where they had fortifications. Genl Shackelford with all the cavalry and mounted infantry were sent on after them and we returned, marching back part of the way and taking the cars part. Here we are back at Knoxville again, but I think we will not remain long. We are about starting south to open the rail road to Chattanooga. This must be done so that our supplies can be brought from Nashville, for it is impossible to haul supplies from Crab Orchard all winter.

I am not able now to answer your letters dear., but will have time tomorrow or during the week if we don't move. I have all our old business finished, and made out the papers for one month of the new in one forenoon, so you see my work will not be very heavy hereafter.

The idleness may not agree with me as well as I expect, but I am promising myself plenty of time to write to you ofterener dear, and I shall do so whether the mail runs or not. I like to do it, and you may get them sometime.

Johnny and Willie are very well and in good spirits. They are both kept very busy, but it appears to agree with them.

Give my kind remembrances to your father, mother and all my friends, and with much love and many kisses I subscribe myself once more

Your affectionate husband

William