Camp 17th U.S. Infantry
near Catlett Station Rd.
January 27th, 1863

Dear Sarah,

Feeling somewhat lonely this evening, I thought I might try to drive away all such gloomy thoughts by writing. Therefore seat myself for that purpose, with pen in hand.

First let me tell you what we are doing, which is little or no good. Guarding R.R. &c.

Yet it was necessary that it should be guarded, as we are entirely dependent upon it for subsistence, still it seems like doing the same thing over & over again.

Our details are very heavy, and the men are in bed only every other night, while the officers are off duty two thirds of the time. That is, they are never off duty, but their duty is very light except upon certain days.

I think we will remain here until the spring campaign begins, which will not be very long if this pleasant weather continues for any time.

We are having delightful weather, some
Like spring time in New Hampshire
I have been sitting in my tent nearly all day without fire. I had neither coat nor boots on, and yet I was full warm enough for comfort.

It is reported that the Guerrillas came and took a look at us, and the night of the 22nd but if it is true they did not come through our lines or in any way make themselves known.

The report originated from a darky woman, who says she heard them tell Birips the next day that they came out to our camp but found the sentinels were walking their beats, and seeing lights in several tents, concluded they would not be able to take us by surprise and therefore dangerous, consequently they abandoned their undertaking.

We have but a few men, yet, 'lover men never lived' and you can believe, if they are surrounded, some of these nights (which I very much doubt) they are not going to lay down their arms, until they have made at least one desperate struggle for to regain their freedom.

However we are pretty strongly guarded and I have no apprehensions of a surprise.
Gen. Byrus has just returned from a
Leave of Absence, and brought his wife,
This looks encouraging for the Winter
To be spent here. Yet I would much
Rather spend it elsewhere, but however
in Richmond, solely upon my own Terms
None of the Company I command
are stopping there for the present.
They were Captured on the 13th of October
by Guerrillas (the night we Camped Bell Run)
I received a letter from one of them
but a few days since. He did not give
any information regarding his treatment
Probably if he had, I never would have
received his letter
I will continue a hope that I may
be able to procure a Leave before Spring.
Although the Chances grow up every day,
Nevertheless you may rest assured my
Dear Sarah that if an Opportunity
is offered, I shall most heartily Accept.
When you see my folks please say to
them that I am well. But shall adopt the
same Rule towards them, that they do
Towards me, write once a month.
Remember me to all you write often
Yours ever

James