

High School Story

Hand in Hand

By Rey Landoll

January 19, 1945

*Dear Love,*

*Is it hard to believe it's been a year since I last held your hand? I think the war has made everything muddled for me. Still, I miss you more than ever. It's been weeks since I last heard from you, but I've heard from the other women that the mail has been delayed again. It's difficult to decide what to tell you about my time here. I've written countless letters, ~~most I'll never send,~~ and still, I can't seem to find the right words to tell you how much I miss you. When I clutch the paper in my hand, the words feel dull without your light beside me.*

*How is your sister? You mentioned in your last letter that she was expecting. I'm sure James is overjoyed. You must keep me informed on how she's doing. How about your mother? Did she recover well? I very much wish I could be there, with ~~you~~ everyone. It's not the same hearing about it in letters that are only delivered once a month.*

*The other women here have been kind. Do you remember when I told you about Sarah? I've been joining her and her ~~lover~~-friend, Betty, for meals and to talk while we work. It is very different from home. There isn't the same ~~hate~~-judgment that there is back home. Is it wrong to feel envy towards Sarah and Betty, able to walk around, hand-in-hand, without fear of judgment or reproach? Perhaps that's part of the reason why I wish so badly you were here. I know we could never have that back at home, but is it wrong to dream? ~~I know this letter will be searched before they send it to you, dear, but how I wish I could clutch your hand and drag you to the highest mountain, singing you praises for all to hear how I love you so.~~*

*The men sometimes look at us strangely. It's clear they don't think we should be here. Everyone tells you to simply turn your head and bear it, or that we're exaggerating, but they're not the ones who have to hear the whispers every time a man sees them. Some of the women say that it's at least progress, but ~~I hate that this is what progress looks like~~ I'm still hesitant. Most of us, myself included, are worried that as soon as we're not needed, they'll send us home and things will go back to normal, all of our effort wasted.*

*~~Sometimes I worry I won't come back, it's so unlikely, yet it's a fear we all share.~~*

*I do hope to hear from you soon, whenever the mail comes through. I miss you more than ever, but when I hear from you in letters, it's easier to pretend that I'm beside you, clutching your hand. If there's anything I regret most about enlisting, it's leaving you behind. Everything I do reminds me of you. In every person I meet, I look for the things that they share with you. You're the sun I circle, even miles away.*

*Love,*

*Your Darling*

March 5, 1945

Dear Darling,

Your letters have been delayed, so I'm certain mine have been as well. Still, I wait for the mailman each day to bring me good news from you. I just recently got your letter about Sarah and Betty. I wish I could say things are better at home, but nothing has changed. They're still the same judgmental people they were before you left.

My mother has been fine, but it seems she's obsessed with finding me a husband once again. Every time I think I've convinced her to let it go, there's some new man she's certain I'll

find interesting. It's even worse now that some of the men from the Army are returning from across the seas. I've been avoiding her, but it's as if she knows where I am at all times.

The most recent victim of her rampage is this nice young man named John. He's surprisingly pleasant, doesn't complain, is always polite, and is overly sweet, all things that make my mother even more certain that he's the man of my dreams.

But he's boring. He's boring and plain, and nothing like you, which only makes me hate him more. I miss the way you used to always be by my side, always there to hold my hand. John's hand is far too rough to even compare to yours, a difference even more striking than you can realize. Mother wants me to settle down. I know she suspects us; this is likely the reason she's become firmer in her efforts to find me a husband as soon as possible.

Most of the men aren't like John. They aren't polite, they aren't kind, and they don't care about me. I'm sure they just want the money I'm to inherit from my mother. There are many words I could use to describe them, most not appropriate to speak in front of God, but I'll restrain myself for your sake.

She won't listen to me, though; she never does. As much as I complain or beg, it's as if she can't hear me. My pleas land on deaf ears, and she ignores me all the same. Often, I'm the one who must break it off with the men. Normally, it's easy; I have little care for the men who treat me with so little respect, but it's harder to come home to my mother's disappointment every time.

I'm sure my woes are nothing compared to yours. It must be dreadful out there in the war, but I'm here complaining about silly men and tiny problems. I do not doubt that it's any better for you; men treat us the same no matter where we are, but you have it worse, surrounded by them at all times.

You must tell me more about what it is that you do. I know it's important, anything you do is, but I want specifics. It's hard to imagine you as a nurse or cooking, but that's all they talk about the women doing in the war back here. I don't trust anyone's word but yours.

I could write for years about how much I miss you, but I fear the paper needed wouldn't fit in the envelope. Write to me again soon, I'll continue to wait for any news from you.

Stay safe,

Your Love

May 28, 1945

*Dear Love,*

*I fear my letters will only get shorter from now; they say I may be coming home soon. There's been whispered talk of the war ending. Only rumors, of course, but I can only dream of finally being home to see you.*

*The sirens, once ringing and flaring with danger every few minutes, now sit silently for days on end. To me, they signal our freedom, finally safe from the dangers that were once so common. It's easy to laugh now, everything feels lighter with the reminder that I'll be seeing you soon. I dream of you, of how you've changed, how much I've missed. Surely your hair is longer, your clothes different. It's impossible not change in such a long time.*

*I'm certain I've changed as well. I like to think I'm still the woman ~~you love~~ you know, but I know I've grown past that. It's different here, which makes it almost impossible to not change. I've grown used to the way things are here, it may take some time to remember what it's like to live normally, but at least you'll be by my side.*

*I read your last letter with Sarah, and we both laughed. It's hard to imagine you with a man parading you around. You've always been so stubborn and independent ~~it's what I love~~*

~~most about you.~~ When I come home, I'll tell your mother, right to her face, that your heart's already taken and that there's no room for any men. If she doesn't listen, then we'll run away together, just you and me. We'll find a nice house, far away from everyone else, and we'll forget about everything else.

‡ When I make it home, meet me at the train station where we first met. I want you to be the first thing I see when I step off.

Love,

Your Darling

June 8, 1945

Dear Darling,

Your most recent letter filled me with hope I haven't had in years. Even back here, the rumors of it coming to an end have started. I surely wish they're true, but I've been trying not to get my hopes up. I can almost imagine my Mother's face; shocked, no doubt. I've missed you for too long to care anymore.

A nice house sounds lovely, maybe even a cabin in the woods. We'd get a cabin right on the edge of a big lake, swim around in the shallows when it's warm enough. I can imagine it already, the sun shining down on us, our feet lapping against the surface of the water, and you, safe in my arms.

Even if we can't escape, perhaps when this is all over, things will be different. I wish for nothing more than to tell all my family and friends that you are mine and that you have returned to me. My mother continues to talk about possible men, but I ignore her. My mind is only on you.

I'll meet you at the train station, and I'll never let you leave again. No more wars, no more caring about others' judgment. Just us, together, for the rest of our lives.

Come home soon,

Your Love

*June 15, 1945*

*Dear Katherine Hall,*

*On behalf of the Women's Army Corps, I regret to inform you that your friend, Nancy Barbara, has been presumed dead. This presumption was made under the recent bombing of her home base on June 14, 1945. Her body is yet to be found. I extend my condolences and offer my sincere sympathy to you and your family during this difficult time. Please contact [REDACTED] if there's any way I can be of service to you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Colonel Robert Williams of the U.S. Army*