

Hd. Qrs. Morris Island  
Aug 28<sup>th</sup> 1863

My dear Nellie.

It is a long time since my last letter to you but the strange & sudden changes in all my plans will be a sufficient excuse. I wrote to Jim on the 15<sup>th</sup> and since that as far as I have been able to learn there has been no mail sent North.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> the guns of our batteries opened on Fort Sumter and the same afternoon our Brigade was ordered from Folly Island to Morris Island & we have been here ever since to morrow however we are going back. You can judge of my eagerness to get a near glimpse of the famous fortress that has become so historic in this war. On the second day of the bombardment I got as close up as the great battery where our 300 pounder is and through a telescope took a long and earnest look at it. Even then it was much battered and bruised with great holes where our shells had worked their way altogether a sad looking sight.

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MMN #25214

Date: Aug. 28, 1863  
Description: John Marshall Brown letter from Morris Island, South Carolina

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Looking through a glass you would never suspect that it was anything but a tumbled down pile of bricks. so shapeless & deserted it appears. We have conquered it, almost destroyed it, but alas the rebel flag still flies & I do not think we are any nearer the end than when we began. The navy hasn't rendered us a particle of assistance and with only the help of the army it will be very long before Charleston is ours.

You will be surprised to hear how tired I am of this "Siege of Sumter". At first I was all curiosity and enthusiasm & kept my field glass at my eyes half the time watching each shot from our batteries, but by and by I got used to the incessant firing & lost all active interest in it. For three days I positively did not have curiosity enough to climb a little hill in rear of our tents and look at the famous place. I saw it today however and do not believe that we can do it much more harm than we have already done. It is little more than a great ruin & were it not for the little flag which floats

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from a small staff in one corner, you would never believe that any body could find a resting place there. We have had a pretty hard time here, with work in the trenches & exposure to the weather gradually reducing us to a handful of men. I will give you the experience of one night as an instance. I found the other day a college friend of mine who is Capt. in the 9<sup>th</sup> Me. I called on him & borrowed Bulwers "What will he do with it" & went back to my tent hugging my trophy in my arms & promising myself a very pleasant evening. I had scarcely opened the book when the news came that our advanced guard had made a slight advance from our outer trenches and captured 78 prisoners. I was musing on the affair which in the army of the Potomac we should hardly allude to but which is called here a brilliant achievement when suddenly and unexpectedly came an order for our Brigade to move to the front. We thought there was an assault to be made and in a marvellously short time our whole brigade had moved up the beach

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to our first line of trenches. It began to rain, we had no shelter, and all that night we remained shivering and wet, hungry & sleepless. The General pitched Hd. Qrs. in an old frame house which some light house keeper formerly occupied & soon went to sleep on a board in a corner but the rest of us & a few field officers who joined the party could not get asleep at all. It was a strange spectral place a grim skeleton of a house boards gone & rafters all exposed suggested a lonely gibbet on a haunted moor. The rain drenched us through & through the wind howled & whistled about us and close by the surf was dashing up the beach with a dismal monotonous anger. Now & then the lightning, most vivid, would reveal the batteries in front of us & now & then a flash & screaming bursting shell would remind us that man could still quarrel though the night was so horrible & nature so enraged. It was altogether a sight I can never forget, the deserted house the desolate fireside, the discordant elements the undying

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hate of men. I began almost unconsciously to repeat "Here groups of merry children played &c" you remember it. Another officer caught it up & soon we were repeating poetry than we sang "Home Sweet home" then I found out that one of the party was an "Alpha Delta" (Jim will explain) and thereupon we shouted & sang every college song that either of us knew. Do not doubt that a soldier's life has a bit of romance even at its gloomiest hours. Think of that evening, the songs & glee, the sad thought of home & then the grand passion of Nature & Man's feeble imitation of it in the cannon & bursting shell. At daylight we were relieved & I got to bed just at 5 & slept till 1. The Genl. & ever so many others are sick in consequence but I am still, Thank God for his Goodness, quite well.

But with all its novelties I confess that I wish we were back in the Army of the Potomac. A sea beach is hardly the best location for a house & home nor is sand so good as pepper in ones soup. But, pshaw, why do I complain I should not expect anything but this, this is what my

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whole year experience has amounted to this far. Change & privation and more than all & worth all suffering & disappointment — honor — Do you think I would change if I could the record & write in my diary such words as "Ease" "Rest" "Play" "Comfort" in the place of such words as "Antitam" "Fredericksburg" "Chancellorsville" "Gettysburg".

I wish you could walk with me on the beach of an evening just as the sun is going down. You would say that you never saw a more charming sight. Imagine a wide long beach of the purest sand looking more like a fashionable promenade & great Boulevard. It is crowded now with men, not a woman in sight. Here is a regiment at parade, here a fatigue party of colored soldiers chatting & showing their teeth & apparently proud that they are soldiers not servants. Here is a pompous Captain of Marines drilling his men & strutting about as if the beach were a ball room & his sabre which he brandishes now and then a charming partner in

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the dancer, here are some sappers  
in white trousers coming from  
the trenches, here are a knot of sailors  
always picturesque, always idle;  
they are paddling their feet in  
the advancing tide & looking  
seaward where the fleet is, stately  
frigate & modest Monitor side by side.  
But look there, with muffled drum  
& slow step, it is a funeral, a few  
men with muskets reversed like  
the torches on tombs, then a deal  
coffin borne by the dead mans  
comrades & then the few others who  
know his name, yonder too is  
another an artilleryman this  
time killed in the batteries, his  
coffin is borne on a Caisson &  
covered with a flag, whose bright  
colors shed a glow on my picture  
just as the sad ceremony it honors  
sheds a melancholy gleam.  
But I am getting prolix  
my pen runs on so that haven't  
time even to punctuate what I  
write  
Just think of it. I haven't  
heard from home since Mothers letter  
of the 3<sup>d</sup> of this month. 26 days. I am

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nearly homesick from conjecturing  
what you are all about. Why I don't  
know certainly that you have found  
out yet where I am.

How I should like to see  
you and all the rest. Give my love  
to all in and about Bramhall.

When you see or write to  
Clara Wells tell her I wrote to her on  
the 21<sup>st</sup> of July and am despondent  
because she has forgotten me.

Write to me my dear girl  
& tell me all the news, there will  
be enough, I know, to fill a dozen  
sheets of paper.

Good bye & God bless  
you all & me & bring about the  
day when we shall sit down again  
around the fireside & talk of the  
war as a cruel history that is written  
and past.

Ever your loving brother  
Jack

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