

## **With Love, Flora Sandes**

October 21, 1914

Dear Hazel,

Unmarried and 25, I decided to finally act for those in battle. I have nothing to come home to, for my brothers and father have all gone to war, and I can see no further schooling in my future. I have trained as a medical nurse for months now. I am now a part of the Red Cross and will be serving wounded soldiers just behind the lines. I have seen what the Germans have done to the British and to the Allies. I must do my part as I was called to aid those suffering. Though it is a small contribution, without many small contributions to the war there would be no hope. And one life is just what I am willing to give if I can save that of others. I might not return from the unstable living conditions of war and the constant attack of which I will be facing. And because many die before they reach the hospital, I will be closer to the battle front. However, I am willing. I was given a choice that I may do my part well. I am ready to face the dangers of war, and soon I will be nose to nose with whatever may come from the army, so I will be behind them.

With love, Flora Sandes

P.S. I love you dear sister and friend. I hope all is well with you and your family. I pray that your brothers come home.

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September 2, 1915

Dear Hazel,

I have never known such hell as there is in war. I cannot imagine even that this letter would make it to the outside world—if there even is one. I have a tough time believing there is anything more than this everyday ache in my spine and blood on my dress. My fingers are swollen, bruised, and infected. My rosy nails are gray and chipped; my hair is dirty and ratty. Everything down to my feet is covered in dirt and filth. My feet ache as does every other part of me. There is hardly enough to eat, but at least because of this the food does not taste so bad. My face is bruised and wrinkled; I catch a glimpse of myself once in a while and wonder how I used to be pretty. It is truly the saddest most draining experience you could ever fathom to be a close witness to the scars of war. It shows no mercy on me and has engraved the hardship on my very face. It has done great destruction to the other

nurses as well. I am far better off than most. The tents in which I am stationed reek of rotting flesh and smoke. Nothing is clean. There is no place you can go to where it is pure and safe. There is no place I can go to where the dirt does not blow into my eyes and the ash does not stain my fingertips. Close fire is constant! We must leave behind brothers, fathers, and sons' bodies to be blown up in the tents. If you are unable to run, you are dead. Unfortunately, many soldiers have infected limbs that require amputation for the soldier to survive. If colors could describe smell, taste, feeling, temperature, and death I would describe the war as gray. Gray like feeling numb. I feel numb myself. Sometimes, I cannot help but wonder if this is all real. War cannot be real. Sometimes, the gray numbness of this environment I know is broken by a sharp pain, an agonizing scream, a murmur of prayers, or the sudden spill of warm red blood on my white apron. The worst pain I feel though is the quick moment when you are gripping their hand and one moment they are there and the next they have screamed their way into a deep sleep that I refuse to believe is death. But it is death. I am no longer helping; I am suffering as I watch the eyes of hundreds of soldiers go gray. Gray, the numbness I feel; gray like the ash and the dust and the filth; and the gray that means death. I watch the colors fade from their faces and shut their eyes. I cannot help but wonder who he was or who his wife or his mother was, but for a moment I feel the pain that they would feel as he dies. I am haunted by the empty beds. They remind me of all the soldiers I failed to save. Those once blood-stained sheets were washed white only to be filled by another man's blood. I miss you dearly and hope you receive this letter. I still pray that your brothers come home. I will continue to write. Please write back to me.

With love, Flora Sandes

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October 17, 1918

Dear Hazel,

Do you remember the necklace my father gave to me when I was a young girl? It was given to me with the intention that I would pass it on to my daughter and that she might then pass it on to hers. Because I will not be returning from the war, I am giving it to you so that you may pass it on as your own. Consider it a last gift that I may give to my best friend. I can't look at it anymore. It's a beautiful gold cross, and the colored stones bring me back. I noticed that I never did start a life of my own. I never expected it would go by so fast. I let myself grow old and older until it was too late for a husband. Don't do what I did. You can still marry and live your life. When I think of the days of my youth, they greet me like a cool brook running constant in the back of my thoughts. It calms me but fills me with sadness and remorse. It weaves through the memories of the war and nourishes them, slowing them down so that it might seem as if it is stopping the fire and

washing away the ash. It shows clear in my blue eyes. My eyes are the only part of me that have kept their color in this battle. Finally the battle is coming to an end. But so, my youth is coming to an end. I am practically gone. I am sick with a disease that has not yet been identified, leaving me almost unable to walk. I don't know if I can manage to live long enough for the end. However, the French are driving back the Germans. I am seeing fewer patients which gives me time to put the last of my strength into healing them. If I do return, give me back my necklace so that I can run my fingers over the stones and feel the brook in my mind come back to me. I will accept that life is what it is and spend no more time wasting it. It is a struggle to think that this next breath might be my last. I don't want to die here like so many. I want to come home and die in a field where we used to be young and colorful. I want to die content. I want to die knowing that my life was worth something. At least in the war I was able to save a few lives. That is why I must put my last strength into these young soldiers. Today I let one go. But his death was not bloody and agonizing. He was not screaming or begging me to stop the pain. He died simply by closing his eyes and holding my hands. It was death yet it was peaceful, and it left me with confusion, and anger, but also a bit of satisfaction that he did not go in such pain. I want to die that way. You will see me again.

With love, Flora Sandes