

June 12, 1944

Dearest Arlene and Earl Junior,

You've received this letter because I didn't make it. I am terribly sorry that this is the last thing you will have to remember me. I want nothing more than to come home. I miss you both. I miss teaching. I miss the smell of the chalk. I miss the headaches of life that really don't seem like headaches any more.

Arlene, my love. I want you to celebrate the rest of your life. Live it as much as you can. Find new friends. Work at a job that satisfies your dreams. Do anything and everything that you can to make your life happy. Learn to drive. Move somewhere that gets cold in the winters. Travel to places unaffected by this damn war. Coach Junior's baseball team. Go back to school and get a master's degree. Learn to cook an amazing new dish. Do whatever takes your mind off of me. Just live unaffected.

There is only one thing that I want you to do for the remainder of your life as a promise to me. It's a terribly difficult request but satisfying nonetheless. It will require that you stop at certain points in your life to think and then do. I hope it is not too much to ask. It is something that will make me smile down from heaven if you do this one thing for me for the rest of your life.

Are you ready?

I want your fullest attention.

This is not a promise to take lightly.

When you are done using a blanket, whether in the living room or bedroom, please fold it up and put it away.

Remember the headaches I mentioned at the start of this letter? Finding blankets left in piles all over the house used to drive me crazy. I mean seriously, how hard can it be to fold it up when done? Whatever it was about those blankets, it would drive me absolutely insane to find them.

We don't have that problem in the service. Everyone's bed and gear have to be meticulously organized and kept. Every morning, I was reminded of you when I had to make my bed. When I got to the blanket, I thought of you. It's little moments like these when home truly hurts in a soldier's mind. One makes his bed and then has to march for hours immediately after. What else can one think about when marching other than how his wife never folded the blanket.

What's funny, is that now that I think about it, I would give anything to find a blanket thrown onto the couch. There were times when I would pick one up to fold and I could still feel the warmth of your presence on it.

Dearest Arlene, I adore you and every minute that I had with you. While our time may be up now, I will wait for you outside the gates of heaven until it is your turn to join. I will keep watch over you. I'll be your guardian angel. Take your time. Enjoy your life. Always remember me.

Now to junior.

I've been able to do some really exciting things in the service. I've seen and touched several tanks. I tell the men that drive them that my son would be so excited to meet them. All of them are impressed to hear that you want to drive a tank someday. You can't be tall like your father if you want to drive one. I peeked inside one and there is no room inside.

You'd be amazed with what it feels like to hear a tank shoot its canon. It's loud. What is most interesting is that the blast shakes your insides. We had a live fire training with the tanks and targets all around us. Every time a tank fired its canon, my heart and lungs bounced around inside my chest!

I would be proud if you joined the service, but I would also be proud if you found something else to do with your life.

My boy. My wonderful boy. You have a lot of responsibility now that I am gone. When you are young, the best thing you can do is listen. Listen and do whatever your mother asks of you. Don't talk back. Don't whine. Be a soldier like your father and hop to it when she gives an order.

I'm sorry that I have to make you grow up quicker than you should. No eight year old boy should have to go through the pain and responsibility I have put you through. Just know that I joined the service to make sure that you would remain free. It's a difficult

thing to understand at eight, but just know that I did this for your future.

I told your mother that she should live her life and enjoy it. I want you to do the same. Enjoy your baseball games to the fullest. There are kids around the world who cannot play baseball, but you can! Play outside whenever it is nice out. Read a lot. Dig holes. Collect bugs. Get dirty! Do whatever you can to explore the world around you. The woods near the house has hundreds if not thousands of adventures you can pursue.

Have fun, but also focus on your schooling and try your best at all times. School may not be the most fun at times. There are teachers that you will love and those that you cannot stand to be around. Regardless of what you think of them, always listen. Every teacher has important wisdom to share. Often, the times you learn most from them are not during class or on a specific lesson. Before you know it, you'll be out of school and entering life as an adult. It is this wisdom you will take with the rest of your life.

I want you to make a promise to me. This is one that I am sure you can keep.

Always take care of your mother.

This will be easy when you are a child. Little boys cling to their mothers when they are young.

This promise will get harder when you get older. You will make friends and will want to spend time with them. Go out and have fun, but make sure you always come home and cherish your mother. She will always be there for you. You need to be there for her.

I truly miss you both. I'll keep watch over you from heaven. If you happen to find a feather or two through your life, it may be from my angel wings when I flew too close.

Take care of one another. Be happy.

Your loving husband and father,

Earl