

18 Beacon Street
Sydney, N.S.
Wednesday
21-42

Dear Hewitt:

Sorry to get your wire that you couldn't come but I realize it is difficult to get out. I am really fine though so although it would be so good to see you still there is really no need for it. I shall be very glad to hear from Mrs. Stibbard. They tell me I am to have twenty-eight days leave as soon as I am able to travel. If so, I shall go home, I suppose, but I feel as if I were neglecting my duty. I wrote Mrs. Stibbard Monday, I think it was. I seem to have lost track of time. It will be a relief to see Daddy and Mother but I still dread that trip alone and especially if I have to stay over a day in Montreal. However, in a few days I will be feeling much stronger and it will bother me no longer, I'm sure. But I am glad Mrs. Stibbard had written to me. I hate to think of the girls working so hard while I lie around doing nothing. I hope they will write, I seem so far away from them all now. But so long as I get back to St. John's, eventually, I won't mind so much.

Since I won't be seeing you, I had better try to tell you what really happened. You know of course I met Agnes in Winnipeg. We had such fun on the trip and were both anxious to get back and yet at the same time enjoying our last few days leave to the full. We spent Sunday wandering around Montreal just seeing what we could see and not caring much what we did.

As soon as we got into North Sydney, we found out about our transportation then got on the bus for Sydney. We spent the day doing last minute bits of shopping. I got a pair of white slippers to replace Marg. Waterman's but of course they are gone. Penny's evening wrap is gone too and Murdie's travelling case and shirts. I am sorry to have lost them.

When we got on board ship, the first person we came across was S.B.A. Dewing. We had quite a time finding out from him what had happened since we left. Then we decided to go on deck but didn't want to carry our purses. So we took what money we had left, identification and so on, all out of our purses and put them in our burberry pockets. When we came down to go to bed we just left the things in our pockets. We were laughing and joking about the trip and for some reason I decided there should be life-belts somewhere. We looked all over laughing about it all the time, finally Agnes spotted them on the ceiling right over my berth. We went to bed then but just before I turned out the light, I glanced up at the belts and figured out how to put them on. Then I gave Agnes my flash-light so she would be able to see the time without having to get up and turn on the light and we both went right to sleep.

When the torpedo struck, I was thrown across the room right on top of Agnes. I knew what had happened but for a second couldn't do anything. She jumped up and grabbed the flash-light and climbed up for our life-belts. I would never have thought of them but I managed to grab our burberrys, then we headed for our life boat on the starboard side, struggling into our coats as we went. When we got on deck, the life boat was smashed. People were screaming and shouting. One sailor was trying to launch some rafts but outside of that it was just one terrified mob. The only thing we could do was put on our life-belts. Thank God, I had figured out how to put them on for Agnes didn't know. We just had to stand there and feel the ship going down under us. Neither of us knew enough to jump over board and get away from her, so when she went down, we were sucked under with her. How we got away from her, I don't know, but we clung together somehow all the time we were under and when we finally reached the surface, we managed to grab a piece of wreckage and cling to that. Part of a capsized life boat came by soon, so we got hold of that. I crawled part way up and a soldier

pulled me the rest of the way. Then we pulled Agnes up. There were about a dozen of us clinging to ropes at the beginning, but the waves kept washing right over us and the boat kept tipping. We knew that if it ever turned right side up, it would sink. We tried to watch for the waves and be ready for them but they came so fast and left us gasping from cold and from swallowing the salt water. We could hear people calling for help all around us but just had to cling there and listen. One by one they slipped off the boat with the waves. I never saw them go. One minute they were there, the next they were gone.

It couldn't have been more than two or three hours before Agnes suddenly let go. I managed to catch her with one hand. She didn't answer when I called her and I couldn't get her hands around the ropes they were clenched so tight. One of the men and the poor little bride who lost her husband tried to help me but they had to hang on themselves. I tried to pull her up high enough so her head would be on my shoulder, but I wasn't strong enough. If only those horrible waves would have stopped for a little while, each one would pull her away from me and each time, I would pull her back. I did manage to hold her till day break but then a wave pulled her right away from me. I tried to reach her but couldn't and the men in front were too weak to pull her back. She didn't struggle because she was unconscious, and I knew she wasn't suffering but it was so terrible to have to cling there and watch her go. After that I just pushed my arms through between the ropes and life-boat and didn't bother any more. When the rescue ship came up and threw us ropes, I managed to get hold of one but that was all I could do about it and really didn't care. I don't know how they got me on board, nor what happened for a while. The Lieutenant looking after me said a sailor dived over for me. The first thing I can remember is that I was so terribly cold and someone was telling me to drink something hot and I couldn't because my teeth were clenched so tight. Finally they did get my mouth open but I couldn't get warm. So at last they swung a hammock just below the steam pipes, wrapped me in blankets and put me there. I shall bless that Engineer Lieutenant till my dying day for thinking that up, because at last the cold began to go. There isn't much more to tell but those men from cook to Captain were so kind. We were all terribly sick from swallowing so much salt water and they looked after us so well. They all kept coming to see how I was because they had found out from the papers in my burberry pocket that I belonged to the Navy.

As soon as the ship docked, I was taken to the Military Hospital. They gave me a hypo at once but even at that I'm afraid I wasn't a very quiet patient. I just couldn't forget about Agnes. Captain Seamen, the Army padre came and stayed with me all the rest of the day and at night they Navy padre came and the things I had to say were hardly printable, but they just listened and never told me I must stop. They gave me more dope of some kind so at last I got some sleep. Captain Seamen came first thing in the morning again and all day people came so that I was never alone. Navy, Army and Air Force, civilians, the little V.A.D.s looking after me and the Army Nursebag Sisters, even the American Navy all came and I was so glad because I couldn't face being left alone. They all wanted to know what they could do for me but all I wanted was to have them stay. Lt. Com. Rawlands and his wife have been constantly to see me and they have done almost as much as Captain Seamen to straighten out the mental state I was in. Jeanie Keenan's sister came too. It was good to get word from one of the girls. I'll try to write to her tomorrow.

Then Saturday, the Merchants got permission to bring me to their home. Really it is almost impossible to describe the care I have had. Nothing is too much trouble and every one in the family goes out of their way to do things for me.

Yesterday, Surgeon Lieut. Commander Oake let me get up for a while and today let me go out for a drive so I am really getting well fast. They told me Agnes had been found a few days ago. I had kept hoping somehow, somewhere, she might be found alive, but of course,

I really knew it couldn't be. It has been my only consolation that she didn't suffer and that she was never afraid, but if I could only have held her another half hour, she would be here too. I try not to think of that though.

S.B.A. Dewing has been twice to see me and phoned tonight to say he was leaving and to wish me luck. I was glad to know he had escaped.

Really I never knew that there could be so many grand men and women in the world. All day long there are phone calls and visitors and telegrams and letters. At night I am given something to make me sleep and the lights are always left on so that if I do wake up I can see right away where I am. They seem to think of every thing so that I never have to feel alone.

I must write Agnes' father and mother but I find it hard. She was so tiny it just doesn't seem possible I couldn't hold her. They will have her funeral in St. John's I suppose. I should like to be there but even so, I'm sure I couldn't stand it.

To-night, though, I'll be able to sleep without anything and without the light too, I think, because last night was not too bad and I hadn't taken any tablets.

As soon as I know what I am to do, I'll write home again. I've wired twice now and may wire again.

Give the girls my love. Tell Eric hello for me and the Doctors. I hope Murdie and Margie are all better again. I wired Murdie's father at Newcastle but he didn't get down to the train.

Do write soon, either here on to Winnipeg. I don't think I could go right through. If only Daddy and Mother would meet me there, it would help, or else come back that far with me. But it is really quite a bit to ask of them.

I do hope all is well and the hospital not terrible busy.

Much love

Margaret.