

The days prefacing the test's official commencement served to confirm that Dr. Gold had procured viable test specimens. Thirty men were subjected to daily pokes and proddings with throat swabs, thermometers, and stethoscopes to produce baseline measurements of health against which flu infection could be charted. The examination room in which this occurred was a brightly lit, windowless space whose white tiled walls reminded Lydia of the bathhouse at City Point, an association confounded by the sight of Assistant Surgeon Percival Cole heating a flask of amber liquid over a small flame and looking as content as Mrs. Kilkenny at the kitchen stove.

“That looks like soup,” Lydia offered once the two had exchanged good mornings. Because Cole was the only assistant surgeon who ate with Nurse Foley at the senior medical staff table, Lydia knew little about him beyond his name—but his manner had already distinguished him from the junior staff she dined with. The other assistant surgeons made her feel like a child brought before a table of adults at a dinner party: they tendered her exaggerated greetings and then treated

her as if she were invisible. In their brief interactions thus far, Cole had treated her no differently than anyone else.

“It *is* soup,” Cole affirmed, his eyes catching hers before returning to the task at hand. Everything about Cole eschewed wasted motion, from his precisely parted hair to the efficiency with which he wielded the tongs that held the flask above the flame. “I’m creating an agar culture medium for our throat samples. I wouldn’t personally recommend it, but bacteria quite enjoy it.”

Lydia drew closer. Cole was not the sort of person to invite notice, but notice—once paid—revealed a man whose mien matched his manner. He was proportionate rather than handsome, every aspect of his person optimized to meet its obligations. The hand preparing the broth had a square palm with fingers that seemed neither long nor short and which ended in clean, square fingertips. It seemed an ideal doctor’s hand, specially designed for the handling of medical instruments and the examination of wounds.

“Nurse Foley tells me you lack clinical experience,” he said in a way that did not make Lydia feel the need to apologize. “The preparatory examinations we’ll be conducting here should provide a good opportunity for observation and basic skill acquisition. You can start by bringing me that tray of petri dishes.” Wordlessly, she brought him the empty glass dishes and watched as he poured equal amounts of amber liquid into each one without spilling a drop.

“Making agar plates is wonderfully relaxing,” he said, his calm voice speaking in congress with the

methodical motion of his hands. Lydia realized she was witnessing the medical equivalent of knitting.

Any ambitions Cole might have instilled with his agar plates were tempered by the appearance of Nurse Foley, who informed Lydia that her examination room duties would be limited to recording temperatures and pulse rates in the medical log, an undemanding task that represented the upper bound of Nurse Foley's estimation of her. Lydia hoped through close observation to improve her standing, and in the meantime vowed to act as engaged as possible for a person performing a task just as easily accomplished by her youngest brother.

Awaiting the volunteers, Lydia felt the same reflexive excitement as she had anticipated the opening of Gilchrist's doors each morning. Though she was standing behind a ledger now and not a sales counter, the names recorded there might as easily have belonged to her regular customers, men from whom she had collected an entirely different set of vital statistics. Watching Nurse Foley arranging a set of throat swabs was not so different from watching the Men's Department manager put the finishing touches on a floor display. In this way, Lydia brought familiarity to Gallups.

The men arrived in groups of ten in the company of a blue uniformed escort who, having delivered his charges, leaned against the laboratory door lighting cigarettes and then picking his teeth and fingernails with each spent match. Nurse Foley read off each man's name as he entered and wished him a good morning, to which Lydia added her own greeting in quiet echo. The fellow who yesterday had called her

*According to William "Kewpie" Gray, escort was too nice a name. This was one of the same lunks who bullied him at Deer Island.*

part-angel was second in the alphabetized line, which—according to her ledger—meant she could start thinking of him as Frank Bentley and not as the man whose gray uniform pinched his shoulders.

“Hello again,” he said in lieu of tipping an invisible hat. He turned to the fellow behind him—a carefully groomed man whom her ledger informed her was Tony Cataldo. “She’s the one who got me into trouble yesterday.”

“I was there,” Cataldo reminded him. “And I recall it being Shaugnessy who got himself bawled out and not you. You don’t get in half the trouble you deserve.”

“Ignore him,” Bentley advised Lydia with a smile before filing past her into the room.

As the rest of the group entered, Lydia allied some aspect of each fellow in line with the corresponding name on her list—a Gilchrist memory trick that had served her well in her counter girl days. After Tony Cataldo came George Denson, who had the broad back of an iceman and whom Lydia could imagine stoking the furnace in a ship’s belly, his face dark with soot. Theodore Evert was slender and compact, seemingly meant for a tall-masted navy of ships with crow’s nests perched above massive white sails. The two came in talking but fell silent at the sight of Lydia and Nurse Foley. They offered each a formal “Hello Ma’am,” before slipping back into conversation. Among these men, Lydia was no less a nurse than Cynthia Foley.

After recording a volunteer’s temperature, Lydia led him to Assistant Surgeon Cole to have his throat swabbed. Agar plates received the products of these swabbings in order to grow whatever bacteria had been

*George wouldn't have been caught dead belowdecks shoveling coal—that was Negro work.*

collected, results Cole promised to show Lydia as soon as there was anything to see. Men awaiting Foley's thermometer or those already swabbed by Cole were left to their own devices, a situation that unexpectedly re-allied the examination room with the City Point bathhouse. The voices reflecting off the white tiled walls could have belonged just as easily to Southie's off-duty drill-press operators and assembly-line workers making the most of a warm summer Sunday. Lydia did not know when her homesickness was greater: in this sound's presence or after the men were gone. In the silence of the empty, white tiled room, she picked up the spent matches littering the doorway, these remnants of the escort's boredom the only evidence that anyone had been there at all.

Homesickness and mourning were so inexorably linked that Lydia was never certain where one ended and the other began. Though she was never so susceptible to tears as her first day on Gallups, she never knew when or where grief for her brother would find her. In the weeks following Henry's death Lydia had seen him everywhere—striding past the D Street flat, boarding a streetcar, driving a hansom cab, or drinking a pint on the corner. The smallest resemblance between a stranger and her dead husband could spark the transformation. Here on Gallups, an easy way of walking, a head held at a particular angle, or a broad-shouldered silhouette would combine with her mourning to achieve a fleeting alchemy: for a moment Michael would be standing before her or walking just ahead. Then the moment would pass and the figure would revert to a man in a gray uniform, making the most of the freedom allowed him before the commencement of tests and quarantine.

*Henry is especially pleased with this last vision: he had aspired to one day stroll into a Southie pub as if he were a local.*

From over one hundred aspiring inmates, Dr. Gold had selected the thirty whose infractions were so minor they would have earned little more than a fine from a civilian court. Though several among the medical staff would have preferred more stringent restrictions on the volunteers, Lydia did not begrudge the men their short-lived freedom of movement. But more than once, observing a group from a distance or hearing their laughter caused her heart to beat so fiercely that her chest ached. If grief struck while Lydia was walking, she would stumble. If someone was speaking to her, their lips would continue to move but the sound of their voice would cease. The world would dim and Lydia would feel her brother's absence as keenly as if her chest had been opened.

Only in the margins of her letters home, in invisible ink, did she dare imagine writing: *Do you see him too? On the street, in the house, created from a stranger or from no one at all?* According to her mother, D Street was slowly regaining its balance. Tom was venturing outdoors each day and walking a little farther down the block, Malachy had returned to work, and Cora was helping to look after his girls in the daytime. Not wanting to sully her mother's reports of cautious recovery with the taint of her own ghosts, Lydia kept her visions of Michael to herself.

. . .

C'mere Lucky, you got some kinda bug sitting on your lip.

Leave it, that's my moustache!

Some moustache, Harris. Looks like a bug.

*Michael will never know if his whisperings sparked these episodes, but We derive solace from the thought that Our whisperings act as latent catalysts for countless private memorials.*

*Cora did not care to mention she was looking after Meagan and Patty because their grandmother was not up to the task. Jennie Feeney was never quite the same after Alice's death.*

be locked from the outside to prevent against accidental exposure. Throughout the period of quarantine, their temperatures would be monitored three times daily and regular blood and throat samples would be taken. Dr. Gold encouraged the men to relax and to enjoy themselves, and to remember that they were doing a great service for their country. Lydia did not understand how anyone could be expected to enjoy himself inside a locked room where he was waiting to fall ill, but if anyone else found the suggestion inappropriate, he did not show it.

As the doctors made their exits, Lydia turned her attention to the shattered dropper. When she heard the door to quarantine open and close, she sensed a change, as if the room had exhaled. She finished her task to find herself alone with the men, who were looking about the ward as if for the first time. John Kipling and Sammy Harris nodded at Lydia as they made their way toward the card table. Harry Able grinned. It was as if Sunday suits had been traded for more comfortable clothes.

She made a show of tidying her cart, trying to think of some small duty that might allow her to stay.

“You’re from Boston?” Frank Bentley asked her as though resuming an old conversation. He had moved to a table with Tony Cataldo, who was setting up a checkerboard.

“South Boston,” Lydia answered. “D Street,” she added when Frank Bentley smiled.

Tony Cataldo looked up from his game. “Did I call it, or what?” he boasted. “I got a cousin who runs a fruit store on Emerson. I figured you for a Southie girl.”

Frank grinned. "It's strange, ain't it? Being so close to home somewhere that feels so far away?"

Lydia was too surprised to do more than nod.

"It's like that for me," Frank continued. "I'm from Waltham. Never been to Boston before I enlisted, not to mention Southie, but now I guess I know the pier as well as anybody."

"You were at Commonwealth?" Lydia asked.

"Sure," Frank replied. "Most of us were, one time or another, before getting sent up to Deer Island. The only good thing about the brig was still being able to watch the gulls. Waltham's got a piece of the Charles running through it, but it's a shoelace compared to the Harbor."

"But you don't at all seem like you belong in prison!" Lydia exclaimed, blushing before the words had left her mouth.

"I'll take that as a compliment." Frank grinned. "Of course, we may seem harmless, but in reality—take Harry over there. Hey, Harry, what was it you were in for?"

"Aw, come on, Guvnor," Harry groaned. Frank scowled, but Lydia thought the nickname suited him. Frank Bentley struck her as the sort of fellow who would make it his business to know everyone and everything doing on his block.

"You don't gotta be nasty about it, Harry. I'm just trying to give our nurse here an idea of what she's up against."

Harry eyed Lydia. "Dereliction of duty," he mumbled. "I overslept. Overslept and was late to K. P. You happy now?" He glared at Frank and then glumly returned to his cards.

*Without meaning any disrespect to Nursie Lydia, Sammy Harris would like to point out that they called Frankie "Guvnor" on account of the statue he was found sleeping under when he didn't make it to his ship on time.*

"I'm sorry," Lydia offered.

Harry shrugged. "No point in being sorry for something you've nuthin' to do with. If I'm lucky the Navy'll take me back after all this."

"Harry here's a glutton for punishment," Sammy chimed in from behind his card hand.

"Best job I ever had," Harry grumbled. "Three square meals, a clean bed, and pocket money. I was planning to stick around."

"Then maybe you oughtta thought twice before signing up for flu duty," Sammy teased.

"Knock it off," Frank growled. "We're all gonna come out of this just fine."

"Hey, Frankie, we playin' checkers or what?" Tony complained.

"I should be going," Lydia said without moving toward the door.

"I suppose we'll be seeing you?" asked Frank.

"I'll be bringing your meals and anything else you might be wanting while you're in here," she confirmed. "I'll also be assisting Nurse Foley with the examinations, but she's made it clear that I—" She looked toward Harry Able. "I'm not really a nurse, you see. I'm hoping to learn enough while I'm here so that after all this—" She gestured at the room.

"What were you before?" Harry asked, pushing his cards aside. They were all looking at her now.

Lydia gave Harry an appraising glance. "Mr. Able, I have a pair of gabardine trousers in imported wool that would look absolutely stunning on you. They're the smart thing for the season and also a timeless addition to any wardrobe. Let's see. . . . If I'm not mistaken, you're a forty-four inch waist, thirty-two inch inseam."

Harry looked down at his legs and then back to her, his mouth agape.

“At one of the fancier places too, I bet,” Frank said.

Lydia nodded. “If someone had brought me a man dying of flu, I could have sized him up for a smart dinner jacket in no time at all.”

Harry nodded, then Sammy. Lydia moved her gaze from man to man, meeting each pair of eyes as she went.

“Well, Nurse Wickett,” Frank said, resuming his game and capturing two of Tony’s checkers. “I’d say we’re in pretty good hands.”

She was out the door before she realized that she was expected to lock them in, a task that had not crossed her mind when provided the key. She wondered if the click of the bolt falling into place caused the men to shiver as she did or if their time on Deer Island had inured them to the sound. The door secured, she pushed her cart down the hallway, its squeaky wheel sounding like an alarm.

*Sammy never got used to the sound of a door being locked behind him. For years afterward he never locked anything he was inside of, not even the bathroom.*

. . .

How come it’s luck if I win and science if you do?

If you gotta ask I sure ain’t telling. You want in or not?

Go ahead and deal.

Hey Evert, howya feeling?

All right, I s’pose.

Stop asking him, wouldya Harry? You’re making it worse. Who wants checkers? How ’bout you, Joe?

Can’t you see I’m busy?

How many does that make, Cohen?

[revision 3]

WHOLE COUNTRY IN  
GRIP'S GRASP

*Epidemic Spreads to Middle West and on  
to the Pacific States*

Spanish influenza has now spread to practically every part of the country. Reports today to the public health service showed the disease is epidemic in many western and Pacific coast states as well as in almost all regions east of the Mississippi river.

Influenza now is epidemic at three places in Arizona, in Maryland, in many parts of Arkansas, in Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and many other states. The disease is reported from many parts of California. In the District of Columbia the malady is spreading rapidly. The disease is epidemic throughout New England, where it first made its appearance, and officials in that section are considering drastic steps to curb its spread, including the prevention of public gatherings.

. . .

My Dear Boy—

I used to say that any successful businessman was the equal of any headshrinker when it came to knowing how people tick, but now I am not so sure. Wasn't it one of them who talked about our dreams coming from someplace outside of ourselves? I am thinking there might be something to that theory.

It always goes the same way: A dead man lies on a table but his face is blocked by the doctors standing all around him. I do not know who this man is and I suppose I never will. All I know is that he is dead. I expect if I had fought in the war a dead man would not be such a shocking sight, but I did not fight in the war and so it hits me upside the head every time. Especially when a doctor cuts into the dead man's chest. He carves a Y that starts below the shoulders and ends below the belly button. Once the cutting is done, it looks less like a man's chest than a brisket butchered all wrong.

When the dream changes *I* become the one lying on the table—except that it is not me. It is Henry Wickett's widow. She is older than when I met her, but I still recognize her. And in the dream I *am* her, looking through *her* eyes as she lies on a bed. I am holding a baby to my chest, trying to feed him, but I am hungry myself. The hunger is boring into the pit of my stomach. The baby is crying and cannot suck, and I am crying too, for myself and for the babe in my arms. When I wake up, that jagged, hungry feeling follows me into waking and I scream just like you used to scream when you had your nightmares. It turns out that my scream and your scream sound exactly the same.

Your Loving Father

[revision 4]

Sure, but—

And don't it say in the Bible "dust to dust"?

Yeah, but—

Well, we're just helpin' that along, see?

But we can't just—

It's a unique situation. If we do it like Mr. K wants then everyone's happy: me, you, Mr. K, the families, everybody.

What about Jesus?

What's he gotta do with anything?

If it's a sin I gotta know so I can confess it.

Jesus wasn't even buried in a box. He was wrapped up in a sheet!

Gee, I never thought about that.

Well don't feel like you gotta start now.

But I think I ought to confess it anyway, just to be sure.

I don't care what you tell the priest so long as right now you give me a hand.

Aw, jeez—

Look, you're so bothered by it, turn your head. . . . Good. Now, wait—just—a minute. . . . All right, now help me put the dirt back in.

But—

Just shovel, all right? We got another one waiting.

. . .

My Beautiful Darling—

Our house is much smaller than it used to be and I do not recognize anything. Today I opened our front door and some rascal had switched our front lawn,

our driveway, and even our Packard for an ugly brown hallway lined with ugly brown doors. Where are you? I have looked everywhere. Are you at your mother's?

Darling, I have a confession to make—I never wrote to the widow. Perhaps you guessed as much. I wish there had been someone like you to give me advice at the very beginning, before I had a family to consider! Please believe me when I tell you that I did not act out of cruelty. I am a coward, not a villain. But I guess you already knew that as well.

What do you hate most, my cowardice or my weakness? I know I was a terrible old goat, but I have been faithful to you for so many years that when I see another woman the thought does not even cross my mind. It is true that I have been dreaming of the widow—You see? I tell you everything now!—but Darling, the dreams are so unpleasant—it is as if she is whispering the saddest parts of her life into my ear. I should have made a clean break of this business long, long ago, but perhaps she can still forgive me. Perhaps you can too.

Always,  
Your Loving Husband

the possession of a bedridden man. Percy always carried a notebook; it was as natural to him as a hand.

"I think you'll find this of interest. I started keeping it yesterday," he whispered, "when the aches started. In the event it wasn't just overwork."

Percival Cole's entries had begun at noon the day before, with hourly notations charting appetite, temperature, respiration, heart rate, and overall condition until he had been confined to bed, after which the observations became more erratic as he awoke and returned to sleep. Even when he was sick, Percy Cole's handwriting remained immaculate, the chart of his continuing illness a paragon of organization. It was of momentary comfort to Lydia to suppose the order Percy had imposed upon his symptoms would somehow make sense of his disease.

"It's beautiful," she said, returning it to his hand.

"Wickett?" Foley called from the other side of the curtain. Lydia turned to go.

"Not yet," Percy whispered. "Nurse Foley," he managed a little louder. The nurse pushed aside the curtain. "I would like Miss Wickett to attend my case."

No one, not even Dr. Gold, had ever advised the nurse on how to best employ her assistant.

"She is on her way to becoming an awfully good nurse," Cole continued. "I'd be pleased if my condition could help her toward that end."

Nurse Foley tilted her head—a feline gesture now familiar to Lydia as a bid for composure—then righted herself. "As long as you're not trying to get rid of me Percy," she teased.

"Never," he assured her.

"All right," Foley agreed. "The two of us should

*Wickett's nostrils,  
which were dainty  
and well formed,  
Cole considering  
himself a partic-  
ular connoisseur of  
female nostrility.  
This was addi-  
tionally the first  
and only time Miss  
Wickett touched  
him.*

have you back in the lab in no time.” She crossed to the other side of the curtain.

Once she had gone, Percy grinned. “That certainly took her by surprise,” he whispered.

“Not only her!” Lydia added.

“Nurse Foley undervalues you,” he said. Talking had tired him, and it was difficult to make out his words.

“You’re a kind man,” Lydia murmured. “Now get some rest.” But he was already asleep.

Lydia emerged from Cole’s bedside to find Nurse Foley staring fixedly at his closed curtain. She gazed a few moments more before turning toward Lydia. “You attended numerous flu cases at Carney?” she asked softly.

Lydia nodded.

“How does he look to you?” Foley asked. Her brief time on Gallups had traced worry lines on the smooth skin of her forehead.

“It always comes on frightfully quickly,” Lydia replied. “The next day or so will tell us the chances of him holding his own.”

“I hate this part of it,” Cynthia sighed. She looked toward Cole’s bed. “It’s maddening how much of medicine comes down to waiting. Most doctors don’t think of it that way; they make their diagnoses and move on. We’re the ones who decide from moment to moment if anything more can be done. We’re the ones who stay behind.”

They both observed the closed curtain, listening to Percy breathe. Then Nurse Foley moved toward a supply cabinet at the far end of the room.

“Of course, you mustn’t let caring for Percival interfere with your other duties,” she said, making a show of opening and closing the cabinet’s drawers. “I

need you to report to the west ward and prepare ten fresh beds.”

“But what happened to the ten who were already in the west ward quarantine?” Lydia asked. “I’ve got their breakfasts.” Too much was changing too quickly. Time seemed to have accelerated with no concern for her ability to keep pace.

“Save those for the new men,” Foley answered. “The others are back in the volunteer barracks. Now hurry. Dr. Gold will be needing your assistance.”

“Yes, ma’am,” she answered and returned to quarantine.

She was making up the last of ten new beds when the door to the west ward opened. On seeing Frank standing with Dr. Gold in the doorway, the blood rushed from her head and she wavered on her feet. She wondered if a special ferry would be sent or if she would be kept on Gallups until the next mail delivery, if she would be permitted to eat with the medical staff until her departure or if she would be confined to her room. She looked over the ward she had just prepared. At least she could be satisfied with the last duty she had performed. She turned toward Dr. Gold, determined not to avert her gaze.

“I’m sorry,” she confessed. “I know I ought to have said something, but I just couldn’t.” She could feel her beating heart. “I couldn’t bring myself to do it.”

The moment stretched. She looked from Dr. Gold to Frank. She thought she saw him shake his head.

When she turned back toward the doctor, he offered her a puzzled smile. “No apologies necessary, Wickett. I’m sure you got these beds together as soon as you could. Is the room ready?”

Only now did she see nine other men standing

*Frank had thought of Lydia in her nightdress so often since the previous night that when he at first saw her in the ward, he did not recognize her.*

*Even on the day he got sent to the brig, Frank did not feel more cheated than when it looked like the doc might be onto him and Liddie.*

[revision 6]

For example—"Fifty-seven" would be "Fifty-buzz." "Fifty-six" would also be "buzz." "Seventy-seven" would also be "buzz-buzz." "Seventy-four" would be "buzz four."

A person who makes a mistake may either pay a forfeit or drop out of the game. The object is to stay in as long as possible.

. . .

January 7, 1925

Dear Mr. Driscoll,

This Christmas we took our boys to visit my youngest brother in South Boston and decided to visit you at the famous QD Soda Factory. We arrived in the morning but you were not in so we took the guided tour.

Mr. Driscoll, you are not telling the truth! The tour does not even mention Wickett's Remedy and then there is that whole business with the dream about the Indian! If you had bought the recipe from me I suppose you could do whatever you wanted, but Mr. Driscoll, you never did! And when I went back to your office your secretary said that you would not be in for the rest of the day!

Mr. Driscoll, I believe that you are an honest man at heart. Even honest men make mistakes sometimes. You do not need to feel embarrassed, but now the time has come to do what is only fair and right! It would mean a lot to me and my husband.

Sincerely,

Your Disregarded Business Partner

There was a knock on the quarantine door. “Is there a problem in there?” came the voice of an escort.

“Everything’s fine,” she tried to assure him.

“If those fellows are giving you a hard time—”

“No, no,” she insisted. “We were just having a conversation.”

“Don’t make me come in there,” the voice threatened before footsteps were heard walking away.

“How are you boys feeling today?” she asked. She wanted to apologize for everything: for the gaps in her knowledge, for the escort’s rough voice, for the locked door and the closed windows and the helplessness that inhabited quarantine with them. She wanted to give each man a pair of proper trousers and a decent shirt. She wanted to stand them all for a pint at O’Reilly’s. She wanted to dance with Frank again, somewhere no one would give them a second glance.

“We’re all right,” Frank answered, their eyes briefly meeting. “At least for now, anyway. Ain’t that right, fellas?”

As far as Lydia could tell, Frank’s assessment was correct. No one appeared feverish, which meant she needed only to serve breakfast to consider her responsibilities met. “You’re all really quite brave,” she said.

“We ain’t brave,” George said quietly. “Just desperate.”

She distributed ten trays and without another word left the room.

She treated the rest of the day as a contrivance in which she was a small cog. She filled her mind with the clicks of a cog; she moved with the steadiness of a cog, traveling her designated circuit in Dr. Gold’s machine. Percy only slept now, if sleeping was what she could

*After he left  
Gallups, Sergeant  
at Arms Calvin  
DiBrosio loved  
to describe his  
courageous acts  
of heroism that  
morning—which  
certainly would  
have transpired if  
only the nurse had  
let him inside the  
ward.*

call his closed-eyed struggle for breath. She was attending his bedside toward afternoon's end when his face contorted as if he was bearing a heavy weight and his eyes opened. When he saw that she was with him, his breathing accelerated, his chest sounding as if it was taking in some curdled version of air. She realized he was trying to speak.

"No, Percy," she murmured. "You mustn't exert yourself. Is there something I can get you? Water? A new compress?"

Percy shook his head and then gestured with his fingers.

"You want to get something for me?" she asked. Percy nodded. She wondered how high his fever had climbed.

Percy pointed to her again, and then to himself. With his finger he traced a line from his left shoulder to his breastbone, repeated the gesture on his right side, and then drew a line from his breastbone to his stomach. Then he pointed at her again. When she did not respond, he reenacted the procedure. It looked as if he was tracing a giant Y.

"I'm sorry, Percy," she whispered, "but I don't know what you're asking for."

Percy shook his head, repeated the strange pattern once more, and then smiled.

Lydia smoothed his forehead. She wondered who he thought she was. "I'm afraid whatever it is will have to wait," she murmured. He closed his eyes. Every few minutes she refreshed his compress because his fever demanded it and because this slight comfort was all that remained to offer him. At her shift's end, when Nurse Foley stood outside the curtain and Lydia could

not stay with him any longer, she dipped her hand into the bowl of cool water and pressed her palm to his temple. "Good-bye Percy," she whispered. She rose and approached the bed curtain. She gazed at Percy one last time, then passed to the other side.

Lydia was eating dinner when Dr. Peterson entered the dining hall and did not take his seat. Every head in the room turned as though attached to a single string held in Peterson's hand. Everyone knew what he was there to say.

"I have some sad news," he began, and the room exhaled. The doctor gave details but Lydia did not listen. The details did not matter. She stared at her plate, shocked by the anger that had bloomed inside her. Their presence on Gallups was absurd. They ought never to have come. When she looked up from her plate, Dr. Peterson had finished speaking and was walking toward her table. Killington and Warner turned toward him, certain his approach was meant for them, but she knew, somehow, that he had come for her.

"Hello, Wickett," Dr. Peterson said.

"He went quickly," she replied.

"He was an incredibly promising young man. His death is a terrible blow." There was a pause, during which the doctor stared at her as though trying to peer under her skin. "Even in the depths of sickness," he resumed, "Percival's thoughts were of research and the advancement of knowledge." He paused again. "To that end," he finally continued, "he wished to invite you to his autopsy."

Lydia stared at Peterson. To her surprise she found him blushing.

*Bertram is outraged that after commandeering Percival Cole's care, Joe left it to him to inform the others of the young man's death.*

Is she very unwell?  
Come in, come in.  
Can I have that bread?

. . .

May 18, 1933

Dear Mr. Driscoll,

Mr. Driscoll, I tried to telephone you several times since my last letter, but then I gave up. I suppose it was silly to think that you would talk to me when you are not answering my letters. Frank got so angry about the whole thing that he wanted to go back to the soda factory himself but I convinced him that this was between you and me.

I went to a lawyer but lawyers cost money and we don't have any. I have looked for the contract you signed with Henry, but if I ever had it I do not have it anymore. I am telling you this so that you know the only way for you to do the right thing is to decide to do it. I cannot make you. Quentin, I would not be writing you again if times were not so hard. It is not too late for you to make up for the wrong you have done, and it would be a great help to my family. I am a Christian woman. I believe in repentance and in forgiving those who seek forgiveness.

Sincerely,  
Lydia

. . .

### My Beautiful Darling—

I am afraid our dear boy is really angry with me this time. I suppose I ought to have warned him about what I planned to do, but I wanted it to be a surprise. You always loved surprises. I will never forget the look on your face when I brought home the boat.

It was quite daunting stepping up to that podium knowing what I planned to do. Can you imagine the weight of a duty that has been deferred for seventy-five years? The first time I tried to stand, my legs gave out! It was a struggle, but I made it to the microphone. And then, my darling, I said aloud what I only ever said that once in a whisper to you. I could tell from the first that our dear boy did not take it well, but he tried to hide his disappointment for the sake of the party. I did not stay long after that—I was so very tired—but everyone was quite kind. Soon I was in a car heading home and the gnawing, hungry feeling that had been haunting me was finally, finally gone.

I wish our dear boy would talk to me. He used to visit every Sunday and sometimes on Wednesday as well, but now he does not visit at all. I have tried to telephone but he does not answer. I even called the police. I told them I thought our dear boy had been kidnapped or maybe even murdered, but when the police came to my door they did not do anything and then that girl took away my phone. Now I have to ask every time I want to make a call and most of the time she says no. I take consolation in the sleep that has finally returned to me. The widow has left my dreams, my Darling. She has forgiven me, but still you will not come. My nights are dreamless, and when I wake I am still alone.

Will you ask our dear boy to forgive his old dad? If you ask him, I am sure he will. Once you and Ralph return we will all leave here together. Now that I am retired we can do anything, Darling, and I have all the time in the world to give to you and our son.

I am Yours Everlasting,  
Your Devoted Husband

. . .

Lawnview Senior Complex  
14 Telegraph Hill  
South Boston, MA

Mr. Ralph Finnister  
162 B Street  
Boston, MA 02127

September 27, 1993

Mr. Finnister:

We at Lawnview Senior Complex take great pride in our community, which provides independence and security to seniors and is based on communication and responsiveness to their evolving wellness. As sponsor of Mr. Quentin Driscoll's membership at Lawnview you are a crucial part of this community.

It is our goal at Lawnview Senior Complex to provide a restraint-free environment for seniors that maximizes their physical and emotional wellness levels. When a senior's lifestyle cannot be maintained or improved at one level of care, our Ongoing Wellness Program™ evolves to address their changing

reached toward the curtain and slowly, quietly, eased it aside.

He slept on his back, one arm at his side, the other thrown above his head, the bedsheet rising and falling with his untroubled breath. His color had returned. She knew his forehead would not feel warm if she touched it.

As she prepared to close the curtain she heard him whisper.

“Liddie?”

He opened his eyes.

“I knew it was you,” he said.

“You ought to go back to sleep,” she whispered.

“I’m wide awake,” he answered. “I slept all afternoon. If we whisper I’m sure we won’t wake anyone.”

“I should go.”

“Don’t,” he countered. “Not yet.”

“Are you truly feeling better?” she asked.

“Feel my forehead.”

“I don’t need to,” she answered. “I can tell you don’t have a fever.”

“So can I.”

“You don’t have the flu,” she whispered.

“I don’t have the flu,” he echoed.

“Frank,” she said.

One of the sailors shifted in his sleep. The room was filled with the interwoven rhythms of breath. She had missed that sound, the simple confirmation that she was not alone.

“Stay with me,” he urged. “Just for a little while.”

“Someone might hear us,” she whispered.

He smiled. “We’ll be very, very quiet.”

*Frank cherishes this memory of his wife. What woke him up at that moment was not the sound but the smell of her, a clean smell that made him think of sunlight on skin, which he took for perfume but which proved to be her own simple scent.*

She stepped toward him. She reached for the edge of the mattress and slowly, quietly, eased herself down. She knew his scent; it was an immutable part of her though she had only encountered it once before. She memorized the arc of his eyebrow, the curve of his lip. She skimmed her hand along the the plane of his cheek, alive to his skin against her palm.

. . .

Darling Sara—

To think that I will soon be able to hold you again! I have tried so hard to become the man you wanted me to be. The years have been lonely, but with you back again they will all have been worth it. Once you return I know that our dear boy will come back too. He could never stand to be away from his mama.

I will keep this letter short because I have a feeling we will be seeing each other very soon. In fact I think I hear your footsteps coming down the hall! Ha!

. . .

## OUR MAIL BAG

*Positive Outlook Is the Best Medicine*

To the Editor of the *Herald*:

I am writing to remind your readers not to give in to fear. Fear is more than just a feeling: it disorders the thoughts, heightens the pulse, and weakens judgment. In such a state it is no wonder influenza is getting the best of us, for a fearful body is an open door for disease. As long as

we cower inside our homes, wondering whom influenza will strike next, we will remain in sway to this terrible fiend. Fight back! Greet the morning with a song and a smile on your face! Do not tender influenza the honor of speaking its name, for in doing so you increase the fear inside your person. If the disease must be spoken of at all, give it some other name, preferably a playful term that weakens its power on the imagination. With my children I have begun to call influenza "that dirty dog" and I cannot tell you what a difference it has made! It is difficult not to smile when speaking such a funny name and, as we all know, a smile is the antidote to fear. I think it is precisely this attitude that has spared my family from serious illness.

MRS. HOWARD VEERS,  
38 Hereford Street