

The Diary of
Henry Kieler
1866-1867

December 21, 1866

Dear Virginia,

This is not so much a letter but a
diary entry as I find myself
unable to find a way to post this
small epistle to you. I know I
have been away from you a long
while. Know that I yearn for you
as each moment passes. When I
close my eyes I see your bright
smile and accepting eyes as if
you are standing before me. I
fall in love with you all over
again. While the trapping and
trading has been good and worth
my time and effort I find myself
drifting back to you. I only hope
my letters make it to you swiftly
to put your worries at ~~ease~~^{EASE}.

I knew you must have acquainted
yourself with Harrison in my absence.
He is a good boy. He has succeeded

②

"Much as you hope in loss and grief.

If he misbehaves, be merciful,
His hurt is great and deep like yours.

I do not know when I shall return
only that I hope to earn enough to
join you in the spring and we can
be together once again. I find you
in my dreams, tending the fire.

In one dream that recurs I am
a Chickasaw like my grandfather
dressed in leggings and traditional
wear. The soldiers are looking for
me to kill me. I am an Indian
outlaw. All Indians are outlaws it
seems. I try to crawl under the
rope bed to hide but the space is
too small and I am discovered. I can
see you standing behind the soldiers
and I am no more - run through with
a bayonet or bowie knife.

Knew this, Virginia. I have known no
greater love. All my love, Henry

Dear Virginia,

Dec. 27, 1866

③

Today's work included several deer.
We had to skin, dress and salt the
meat. We ate some of it for supper
with a few taters and turnips on the
camp fire. As the flames flicker in
the dimming day my thoughts turn
to you. The quieting and the quickening

I shall write to you even if
you are in the next room. Even if
you are tired and disageable
because of it. Your bright eyes
light me up with your fierce
desire at life. Your smile warms
me even if it is the corners of my
memory. I long to abide in your
embrace. I long to rest in your arms
near your heart.

Even though the horror of war
is over, the effects can be seen far
and wide. There is poverty among
every color of man. The most

④

aggregious among the Indian.
I know that my secret is safe with you for if anyone knew of my origins the banishment by white society would ~~be~~ throw me in most distressing poverty as well as a pariah among the acquaintance that I have. I check up my darker skin to being 'black dutch'. No one questions it! My father did the same even with his red hair.

The African now set free by law is also imprisoned by the most hideous poverty. I find they can be very industrious building their own communities and thriving by working ever so hard for themselves.

Liberation is the key to the inhabitants of this fine country especially for the Indian to live in peace in his/her own way. I trust you remain well.

I Love you so very much.
your Henry

Dec. 31, 1866

⑤

Dear Virginia,

I was asked to be a witness to a wedding between my colleague and his Cherokee woman. We were camped not far from the town of Haysville, North Carolina. I had to hurry and gather my nice Sunday clothes. I've repurposed some of my homespun clothing from the war to hunt and trap. I've gotten very very good with a needle and thread.

Maybe someday I will be good enough to make you a good dress - a proper dress. I could not find my frock coat and it made me exceedingly nervous. The court house filled with Veterans, farmers and family and as I stood there I could see you in your fine clothes with flowers in your fair hair. And I missed you so that it hurt. My body aches and my mind wept for you. I wondered if I could make it to Hart Mountain before dark just to dance with you. I always pray you

are well and happy despite this
arrangement. Do know that I would
do anything to remain by your side
as we love and labor on the farm.
Our farm. As I entered the
Court house I could feel the spirits
and ghosts. Some of my people
were forced to walk from Fort Hembree
only about thirty years prior. The
evil spirits pushed at me and
made heavy and weary of grief.

Knowing I could return to you
lightened my heart and banished
any and all ghosts. To dance with
you once again amongst the
lightning bugs is my greatest
wish. I love you with my
whole heart even when I am
no more & my love will linger
and hold you. Yours always,
Henry

Dear Virginia, January 2, 1867 ⑦

The cold full moon is upon us
and the chill is palpable. Lying
in the wilderness with only a camp
fire and lean-to is at times
unbearable. But nature offers me
respite and succor and for that
I am grateful. I long to be in
your arms near a fire and
covered in quilts and wool blankets.
My soul yearns for your health.
The nights are long and frigid
and I barely sleep as I cannot
get warm enough to relax.

Yesterday we were able to bring
in a large Elk. We were near
Turtletown, TN. It took over two
days to ~~the~~ skin the hide and dress
the meat. Almost half of it went
to my colleague's Cherokee woman.
She took it by Buckboard to her.

People still living in the old
Smoking Mountains. She chanted
over the animal and offered up
Tobacco and other things. She is
Very nice. Kind. While I am only
a Quarter Cherokee. I was not schooled
in some of the traditions and I was
thankful to be privy to the ceremony.

I hope the cold has not furred
you disagreeable. Sometimes the
absence of light can have an effect
on our very bodies. I hope Harrison
has proved to be a worthy son and
is helping with chores on the farm.

Please send him my love and tell
him I will not tarry in the woods
long. The sunset this evening would
take your breath away. I only wish
I had shared the vision with you.
Know that you have my whole heart
always. It beats out the letters of
your name. a sacred rhythm!

⑧ Yours always, Henry

Dearest Virginia, January 4, 1867 ⑨

It is so very cold here. I am
certain it is cold there on Brushy
Mount. I hope Harrison helped
Chop a cord of firewood to keep you
both warm. As I sit by my
Campfire I imagine your sweet
face as the flames cast a beautiful
glow upon you. I was visited
by two Red tailed hawks today
as we packed the Elk meat for the
Cherokee Village. My friend Kenneth's
woman is Cherokee and driving the
mules to her Village. I took the
hawks as a Swine sign that we
will soon be united and protected
until that meeting and onward.
They were truly majestic and ~~most~~ most
definitely took my breath away. It
was as if your soul was hovering
just above me. I miss you

Voice and your Visage. I miss our
Conversations. I miss your ideas
and thoughts, opinions and solutions
to various quandaries. I long to know
your thoughts. While nature is life
and invigorating and calming
and a way for me to support us,
it can be a bit isolating and
harsh especially in this long
wintering. I hope you are well. I
hope Harrison provides agreeable
company. There are days when I
do not speak as there is no one or
nothing to hear me - see me.

While nature holds us in her agile
hands we, as humans, require
tending like a good crop. Touch
and the exchange of ideas - a voice.
I bid you a good night until we meet
again. I love you with everything
I am. Yours, Harry

Dear Virginia, January 7, 1867

It has been a long day. (11)
I assisted Kenneth in packing
the Elk meat for his woman's
Village. She asked that someone,
a man, accompany her on the road
as a lone Cherokee woman might
face grave violence and infringement.
I guess I was or am 'man enough'
to be an escort. Sam is her white
name. Sam drove the mules and
I rode in the back on the buckboard.
I had my Carbine and pistols at
the ready. We passed a few other
Wagons and travellers on the road
and they all passed by us peacefully
and even quite neighborly. We
arrived in Tutletown in the afternoon
and passed out the meat to heads
of each clan. The leaders were women.
That is so and in keeping with my
own ancient intuition that to see it was

inspiring and astonishing. I so
long to speak with you on this. The
ideas and traditions feel ever so fresh
in today's hardships. Sam invited me
to stay the night in her cabin. It
was too late in the day to go back to
Camp and the mules needed tending.

Sam prepared a tasty stew from
the Elk and we sat by the fire and
talked a long while. She had tobacco
and we smoked clay pipes. Sam is
very shrewd and wise. Suddenly a
forceful knock on her door rattled the
house. A fellow Cherokee had gone into
labor and there were complications.

I rushed to another homestead with
Sam and offered my assistance since
I had some field training during the
war. She looked me squarely in the
eye for some time summing me up.
Since when do soldiers assist life
rather than extinguish it? How
would a scuffy soldier know anything

(12)

about birthing young... unless I was
possibly female. I did not defend
my secret as the complications required
immediate attention. I watched
and studied Sam as she navigated
the treacherous territory of the female
form in pain and uncertainty!

I learned a great deal more about
assisting the emotions than biology.
Mother and child are fine. I learned
methods of hygiene among the
Indians not practiced by men or
white folks.

Seeing the young woman, lithe
and full of potential and expectation
brought me back to you. To hold
you in a long passionate embrace.
To kiss you with an abiding soul.
To caress your beautiful form
and to exchange breathless
moments is the one thing ~~that~~ that
fuels my ambition and to find my
way back to you. Yams always,
Henry

(13)

(14)

Dear Virginia, January 11, 1867
 I write this more to preserve
 my memory than as a letter
 or form of communication except
 with myself. I found Harrison
 on the road leading to the cabin.
 He had finished the chores for the
 animals and had gone to fetch a
 surplus of eggs from Jesse.

It seems you reviewed my last
 missive with the dates of my
 arrival. I must say the grass -
 winter grass was fresh with dew
 that made it icy cold to the touch.
 I made Harrison promise not to
 alert you to my arrival. I halted
 on my mount in the front yard and
 watched you through our window
 for some time. You moved through
 time and space as a magical creature

certainly a siren from the sea but
 with no evil intention. All I could
 see was your heart... in the
 firelight. I saw the lantern light as
 you moved fluidly from one room
 to another. I dismounted and
 I found myself emotional and
 unable to contain myself at the very
 sight of you. I truly fell in love
 with you all over again. I almost
 felt that my presence would
 disturb your reverie - your
 meditation so I walked to the
 barn and Harrison helped me
 unsaddle and groom Copper. The
 boy fed him as well. As I left
 the barn each step I took towards
 our cabin was another step closer
 to you. Closer and more intimate
 in every way. I am home, dear one.
 I am home at last.

All My Love, Henry

(15)

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Dear Virginia, January 13, 1867

It was a trying day today.
I walked into town as I needed
the movement to help my mind.

Once I found the merchant and began
to talk of commerce/trade with
the proprietor, whom I have known
for several years now, an argument
erupted and escalated quickly.

No violence or even foul language
was involved but my character
and integrity was questioned as
well as my manners. I am no
bunte or hoodlum. I kept my

temper and proceeded in a respectful
and dignified manner. I was called
'Low Class' and the strike hit my wounds.
I realized that the proprietor was
truly speaking of himself but spewing
it out towards me. I shall never
do business with him again. There are
other folks with whom I can build

successful relationships with. He is a
Barbarian and it was only a matter
of time before I was next in line
for his abuse. A pox on him!

As I was walking back feeling
dejected, a young woman, very plain,
came to me and said, "I am your
neighbor. Here are some flowers from
my garden." She gave me a dozen
roses from her garden. I was so
elated as I felt as though the
heavens opened through her to tell
me "you are loved." And I felt
myself walking through the hollows
and woods as if in the very bosom
or even womb of the universe. The
Love and kindness is a balm to my
soul. As I looked at the deep blood
red color of the roses, I felt an
immense otherworldly Love for you -
a love as if God himself inhabited
me. A love that was communicated
from your soul to mine and vice
versa. You are my North Star,
Henry

①7

(18)

Dear Virginia, January 15th, 1867

I'm not sure how many letters I can write that I must tell you that I love you. The words seem simple but the depth of intent and emotion are deep and ineffable. I have watered and fed the animals and I love them with all my heart. They are my angels on earth. Their ceaseless adoration is proof of the miracle of the universe.

The sorrow suffered at their demise and the space - empty space left once they enter heaven is a heavy burden to carry.

The animals are our brothers and sisters that cannot speak the language of our tongues

but the language of our hearts and their absence leaves a gulf of sorrow. Each one has its own unique personality no matter a cow or a cat and so the cruel thought and action of killing feels like an ultimate sin.

This is something I had to discuss with Harrison in the barn. While his duties of caring for horse, cow, goat, dog & cat are admirable, his sportsmanship of killing birds, possums, raccoons and other small creatures caused alarm in me as it would in you, I believe. Killing for food in desperate circumstances is acceptable. But killing for sport and amusement is cruel and unforgivable. He got the look forgive me. My passion and empathy speak. I am always yours.

(19)

(20)

Dear Virginia, January 16th 1867

It was a quiet day wouldn't you say?
All the chores got done. We both
helped to school Harrison in his studies.
while the teacher has been away.

We built a nice cozy fire and you
prepared a delicious stew from
Elk, deer, corn, potatoes and cabbage.
It was delightful and tasty.

I basked in the firelight and
the vision of you working tirelessly
to fill our bellies and to give
to us the love you so freely exhale.

The orange of the fire set your
ginger hair alight. A bronze
copper glow. Your voice calm,
caring and filled with mountain
wisdom. We sat and read a while
in silence by the fire - Each in
our own reverie. You were engrossed

in the book and I could see the story
play out across your lovely face.
I simply read the local paper only
to catch up on local goings on and
possible business and work opportunities.

We retired early when we heard
Harrison snore in the loft bed.

We closed the door to our room and
the magic of our worlds merged
emotionally and with a gentleness
not commonly experienced. The soft
touch of your hand spoke a thousand
words. The curve of your figure
and how you found the curve of
mine. An exploration and maybe
even a hunger to be seen - to be
understood - to be heard and to be
guided by grace and passion and the
sacred. I do not take this moment
lightly. It is profound and reverberates
through my entire existence.

I am yours entirely Henry (21)

(22)

Dear Virginia, January 18th 1867

The day felt like a day out of days. Timeless. Nebulous. There were problems to solve, choices to complete, conversations to be had and yet I felt as if I were walking in a fog. The croupe is going around and I know a few folks on the mountain laid up with it. As you and I know mustard plasters and onions work well to alleviate the harsh symptoms. It is unforgiving to the elderly, though. Many find it a corridor to climb the steps to glory leaving behind a bereaved family. When one is called, one must go - go to the glory and be made whole again. It is a hefty burden and a solid

subject for discussion. I do not want to seem bleak only realistic about the realms of heaven and earth. We are truly only here for a blink of an eye and yet the gaze of one's beloved might last an eternity & truly a place of bliss frozen in time. Not only romantic notions but the loaded emotions of familial connection. The cord that ties Mother and child or sister and brother or Grandfather and progeny. The echo of that love and bond permeates the ages. While Harrison is not your blood relative and can never replace your son in heaven I can see that you mean the world to him and he means the world to you. It can never be broken. And you are my everything life after life. Yours always, Henry (23)

(24)

Dear Virginia, January 19th, 1867

It has been an uneventful day as far as work and the homestead. Harrison got up early to help me with the animals. The cow was in pain but once she was milked she seemed relieved. The yield was extraordinary. Early today I saw some Crows picking a fight with a red-tailed Hawk. It felt a bit prophetic as pertains to us and the world we live in.

It seems dark forces are attracted to the messengers trying in earnest to delay or delete the message altogether. But the hawk carried on. It was a minor nuisance - those big black birds and their squawking. No doubt they are clever! And shrewd. I fully admire them. They are majestic

and in the deepest black of their feathers is a rainbow. All the colors of the universe are hidden in the dark abyss of the crow and his feathers. There is always light in the deepest darkness. And so when I saw you holding the linen shirt of your boy... your son I could feel the ground shake with your sorrow. I wanted so much to take away that pain and those tears and replace them with laughter and long embraces and a kind of love that feels like a child hood blanket.

It rained today later in the day and you were ~~so~~ very quiet. I did not want to interrupt your solitude and meditations so I remained outside on the property until sundown. I am always yours,

Henry

(25)

(26)

Dear Virginia, January 25th 1867

How I love you so! I had no idea to write that except that it flowed from my heart thru the pen/quill. These winter months can be tedious. The light short yet growing in January. It certainly feels like the dark birth canal of the new year. The light does not fully engage until March or even April.

In any case I am content with the long embraces for warmth and love in the heart of winter.

It does try our souls that we want for action and engagement but dictates rest, silence, restoration and meditation - the natural rhythm of season. The month of January in the Roman calendar

meant "Gateway". I read that in a newspaper in Latin book recently.

I had to attend a colleague's relatives funeral today and that was my reason for absence from the fair. There was an amazing crowd of mourners there under a bleak, grey sky. But the celebration of their life was exuberant. I wish that I had known as I would have taken you and young Harrison to witness such an amazing, heartfelt celebration of life. There was singing of the triumphant kind and spoken words of love, joy and faith in the workings of the Universe. It gave me hope that you and I could one day be celebrated for our love and union and how the flow of that effort, a community and the world at large.

I love you so!
yours, Henry

(27)

Dear Virginia,

January 21st, 1867

Sometimes I do not know what it is I shall write until I sit down and put pen to paper. The day was bright and sunny for a winter day and truly not as cold as expected. I went thru the chores and it seemed that each moment of meditation you crept in with you wide grin and bright eyes. Even when I know you are just inside the house - truly yards away my mind drifts to the river you bring simply by your existence. These times in the heart of winter feel like time out of time as if there is no time, just us

and nature and our thoughts and our duties to self sufficiency and our love. Even if your love is not as ardent as mine I am in paradise no less.

I am fighting the chills and also a cold that I hope will pass as I try and take good care. I am grateful for your tender assistance and your concern. I feel I am quite healthy and robust at my age as are you. Yet we are not invincible. Just yesterday a man in his prime, younger than I, succumbed to a cold that went into pneumonia. It seems that when one is called home, one must go. I am sorry this misadventure is of a heavy and burdensome subject. Know that I shall love you unto eternity
Yours always, Henry (29)

Dear Virginia, January 22nd, 1867

While I was out in the woods checking the traps for small game, I came across some tracks. I knew they might be human - most definitely human and I wondered for a moment who was traversing our property. I came upon you yet you did not know. That is the skill of a hunter and trapper. You were foraging and had collected a nice array of wild mushrooms. I identified Turkey tail, Fawn's mane and chicken of the woods. You were very concentrated in your endeavor and even though I wanted very much to reveal myself, I did

not want to interrupt your reverie and concentration. By the time I had arrived at the house later in the evening I found that you were tending to Harmon who was a bit feverish. The cold of winter is brutal. So many of our countrymen exhaust their last bit of life until the bleak parts of winter when they are thanklessly and unceremoniously extinguished from this realm. The fragility of life is just that. It is fragile no matter when or where or what reason. No matter wealth or pauper or statesman or artist the end will come. But the hereafter gives us much consolation and so as I march through the snow, I know that I shall see you even after death. This is my oath.

Yours, Henry

(27)

Dear Virginia, January 24th 1867

The day began incredibly stormy. Even before dawn the thunder rolled and the rain came down in torrents. My sleep was fitful as was yours. I know you got up sometime in the night to check on Harrison then I watched as you stoked the fire and prepared a paltie and a brew with mushrooms to restore his health. Watching you work in silence in the dark with just the look fire and a candle to bring willness and equilibrium makes me burst with love for you. I would be your apprentice if you needed one. I know that expediency was the issue and so I did not interrupt.

As much as we mountain folk pride ourselves on health and folk medicine sometimes old man winter can bite us. Having been very healthy for the last 8-10 years I have found I have been felled by the same affliction as our young Harrison. Nature has its way of culling herds. I am not about to be culled so making my way through the illness along with Harrison. I hope makes us strong and resilient for the next wave of pathogens. We are hearty folk. Of strong stock. Of earnest and resilient constitution. And we count on this new country to flourish in our own industriousness and invention, innovation and the bond of family ties and community.
I am always yours,
Henry

(33)

Dear Virginia, January 26th 1867

It was cold but sunny today. As I came in for a midday meal I found you red and feverish over the cook fire. While Harrison has taken to bed with the croup I found you succumbing to it. I put you to bed as soon as I could. I found something to satisfy my hunger and then I headed out into the hollows to find some medicinals to aid in both you and Harrison's restoration. I climbed above a fog bank and collected the plants I could identify still growing in the winter. There is lichen and various mushrooms than help as long as the climate remains above freezing. I felt

as though I was walking on clouds and I prayed fervently to the spirits and ancestors to restore your health. Along with Harrison's. I could not bear the thought of the world and living in it without you. I feel as if we inhale and exhale the same breath. I went to the root cellar and found other herbs with which to make curatives. By the time I returned your fever was high. I tried to cool you with water from the creek. I did my best from recollection what my mother to use. You were fitful for some time then I cooled your brow and lay next to you and you were calm. The fever subsided for a bit. you reached for me. It brought tears and I wept. All the loss of a life lived rained upon me. You live. You are alive. Huzzah! I shall keep you alive! years always, Henry (35)

(36)

Dear Virginia, January 29th, 1867

It was a warm winter day - well warm for winter. I spent the night and most of the day laying next to you. You shivered and slept and quaked and slept. I only got up and dressed to check on Harrison. He seemed to be recovering from the affliction. He slept soundly.

No fever. It was as though we were a family of hibernating bears. Not even the warm sun could rouse us. During the moments when you shivered and the sweat on your brow beaded I held you close and I could hear your heart and it seemed for a time our hearts beat in exact rhythm. Synchronized. It was in those hushed moments that I could

sense other lives in other times. I could see in my mind's eye how our love has evolved throughout time. Fajing there praying to the universe and the divine not to take you from me just yet. There is so much life left for us to live. So much love to give and exchange. Skin upon skin under the quilts there seemed to be an alchemical marriage. As if the planets and stars aligned in a truly mystical and profoundly sacred point in time. When I slept, I dreamed of you... looking for me across a vast field. There were fallen soldiers there and you wore an expression of disbelief and horror. But I was not there... among the dead... But walking beside you whispering 'I love you'. yours,
Henry

(37)

Dear Virginia, January 30th 1867

Your fever broke today! Huzzah! My relief is unimaginable. I am grateful to the spirits and the angels that have granted more time on earth... with me! I rose early to cook fresh eggs from the hen house and to make a side of pork. Your cheeks were still red and your gait unsteady but you were up and moving and alive. Even Harrison was astonished at such a recovery. It seems you were very close to crossing over into the other realms. I hope my proclamations of love helped anchor your spirit to the now. Once we had our breakfast I left you and Harrison to rest and read. I went out into the town

to sell the eggs from the morning but found no buyers. It was too late in the morning. So I ventured to the woods - the infamous pass that leads to the Chickasaw Village. I was greeted by elders I have known since I was five. They remembered me from that time as a ferocious and precocious child. I still remember a bit of the tongue. As I have grown older and have assimilated to white society I have forgotten some of the language. I have not forgotten the love they have heaped upon me. While I could be called a half-breed, they know me as theirs. They have my love and respect. After visiting with them for hours and trading eggs for deer I found my way home to you. I embraced you as they embraced me but my fervor and passion exceeded. I am yours, Henry

Dear Virginia, February 2nd, 1867

The day has been warm for winter once again. You seemed content this morning before dawn. No fever. You were a sleeping vision. I did not want to disturb you so I ventured to the woods and the hollows. It was brisk out. I could see my breath as I wandered the primordial forest. I collected mushrooms that I could surely identify. And as the sun rose I saw a beautiful red-tailed hawk. It circled above me for some time. And I wondered what message you might have for me. Perhaps you will tell me in my dreams or even when I arrive home. Sometimes the time spent in nature does not register as time. It is fluid and flat of the man-made world and structures. At times I find myself adrift

in the ocean of timelessness. Don't think me crazy or absurd but it is where I think we live. Together, connected. Everything is simultaneous and our hearts know no time line or structures as such. The heat in synchronicity and most abundantly in close proximity. I came upon a stag in the woods. It was majestic! Regal and filled with power. The thought of killing it brought me to tears. But I know it shall be slaughtered. If not by me, then by the Chickasaw or other white settlers looking for food. It's spirit set me aloft on a journey through ancestry, history, mysticism and the preservation of life. I am a hunter at heart but my respect for the natural world is above that of delight. I am yours,
Henry (41)

Dear Virginia, February 5th 1867

It was a cold snowy day here in the mountains. The air so cold it would freeze your breath.

I brought the animals in the night before and hoped they would survive in the barn. At least they are out of the biting wind and elements. They can hie down with hay and each others warmth. You are still recovering but your color came back. You prepared a robust stew with pork, root vegetables and black eyed peas. It was hearty and warming. Harrison went to bed early and we could hear him snoring a bit in the left. I quickened the fire and we read for a bit. I read the paper,

looked up a few things in the almanac and you found a book of poetry and essays by Mary Wollstonecraft. The fire light flickered in your gorgeous blue eyes while the outside was being covered in a silencing blanket of snow. You got up and I thought for a moment you might retire. But you came around me and laid your hands upon my chest... My heart. Suddenly I felt both male and female equally and whole. Most times I feel male and the world sees me as such. You see me in my most intimate nature, my most fine existence. And I, in turn, see you as the divine being you are. You led me to our room and closed the door. We made no real sound as we loved each other.
yours always, Henry

(44)

Dear Virginia, February 7th, 1867

It was blisteringly cold today. Outside every hard surface was frozen. Even the creek and the pond. While the creek flowed a sheet of ice formed on the surface. As I walked through the hills and the woods the silence was magical. It is as if God or the Universe took a nap. Yet the sun shone brightly and birds foraged. The deer looked in vain for branches to nibble on. The foxes were out catching rabbit and mice. There is a whole world not connected to time as we know it - as we have constructed it - but based on cycles. There lies the true element of passage.

I came across a Creek woman and her boy. While they had furs against the weather they had been walking in

the elements. They were far from their territory and village. I do not speak Muskogee but offered them refuge at our place. We let them bed down near the cows and goats. You fed them the leftovers stew heated by the fire. They would not enter the house where we had a warm fire going. After a while I persuaded the boy to come inside for a little while and get warm by the hearth. Harrison noticed they seemed about the same age and he attempted to communicate. While the boy was open and eager they could not convey their thoughts to each other. Harrison wrapped the boy in a wool blanket as he headed for the barn and his mother. I lay beside you concerned for their lives in the chilling weather. You reassured me that Mother knows how to care for their young. I trust you and love you! Yours, Henry (45)

(46)

Dear Virginia, February 10th 1867

It seems I have not been spared the ague! The fever took me as I tended the animal in the barn. It was bitterly cold. I could feel it take me like an ice cold hand up my spine. I came inside and quickly stoked the fire to make a brew. You have still not recovered fully and Harrison was still a bit weak from the illness. I coughed and sneezed and trembled and it did frighten me when I could not catch my breath. But you calmed me. Just as you did when I first arrived on your doorstep many years ago as a soldier.

You took me in and as I hovered between worlds you bared your self and shared the warmth and the healing magic of your body. You compassion for me as a boy - a stranger even still confounds me. I am always and eternally grateful to you and for you. And so here I am again at the mercy of nature trembling from illness and you tend to me as if I am a garden. Methodical with love and tenderness and keen insight. I am pitiful and you calm me. I am frightened and you guide me. I am cold and you hold me. I am isolated in my sickness and you sing to me and the world's merge and I can see again. Yours, Henry (47)

(48)

Dear Virginia, February 12th, 1867

The fever has taken me. I am somehow on a journey. I hope not to tarry long in the Netherworld. I must find my purpose. If it is only to love you it will be my greatest triumph and goal. Night and day blend one to another. At times I hear the voices of those who have passed - My Father and Mother and Fine Brothers. At times I am in the heat of battle - in the midst of carnage and the memories pour down like a hot rain. Is it the mind of a man that wrecks havoc upon me. I am caught between genders. At once

understanding the depth of the union then at ruins confounded by the constructs and systems society has forced upon us. By us - I mean indigenous peoples - Indian peoples content to live within the cycles of nature. I am Cherokee, Shawnee and Chickasaw and I am a person not defined by my body or the white folks ideas and religions of what ought to be. There are terrible words that might be inflicted upon me. I am not a prisoner of those words. I am not a victim of the white man's world. I know how to survive and to thrive and while I may not bear heirs, I will bear the most exquisite love. Love heaped upon you and Garrison. The few things worth living for. I am yours, Henry (49)

(50)

Dear Virginia, February 15th, 1867

I slept the entire day, as the fever waxed then waned. It waxed again and broke. You prepared a mustard plaster to clear my chest. It burned. It turned my skin red and I could hear Garrison ask you what will happen with a tremble in his voice. It made me very emotional. I would not leave him or you without fighting to the last! In my delirium I was walking through a thick fog - through the mountains and hollows. I followed an Indian boy. I could hear him giggle as he played hide and seek along the mountain pass.

After a long while trying to locate him I saw something gleaming in the daylight just off the path. Even though it was foggy it caught the sun's light. I pulled it from the soil and brushed it off. It was a gold ring. At first I thought it might be a wedding ring - my ring! But it was not. It was engraved with an odd number 12:12 and the word Merkabah. Then I realized it folded out and became a key. I ran back through the woods and down the mountain to find you, my Virginia. I gave you the ring. It was yours and you knew what the key was and how to use it. I was glad I could give you back something that seemed lost... to time.

yours always, Henry (51)



(52) Dear Virginia, February 18th 1867

I think my fever has finally broken. Now it is just fatigue that burdens me. My sleep is constant and deep. My dreams are vivid and long. I feel when you wash my arms and chest. I feel when you place your palm between my shoulder blades. There is some potent Appalachian magic happening. I hear your voice as you call me from the other realms. I see the ancestors gathered about me. Cherokee, Creek, Shawnee, Chickasaw and Scots. I find myself running through the hollows of Sullivan, Tennessee or Chowan, North Carolina or the Highlands of Inverness. In each scenario I find myself running towards you in every lifetime.

At times I make the journey to your arms. At other times I fall short because of war or persecution or absolute fatigue and hunger. Sometimes you have already left this world and I was not aware until the discovery of my last breath. The mustard plasters sting but they help open me up. The ancestors around me sing and chant and I can hear their voices long gone over decades. But the clearest voice is yours as you whisper to me. You guide me through the ethers in dreams and alternate dimensions. For this I am so incredibly grateful. As I open my eyes to the vision of you lying beside me rubbing my back and softly murmuring me back into the world.
I am yours, Henry (53)

(54)

Dear Virginia, February 19th, 1867

I almost feel well and normal. Healed most certainly by your love and kindness. So many winter days lost that I must somehow make up for or we will go hungry. Even though I am still weak as a new born calf, I must forage in the mountains and hollows.

I walk at least five miles to a site where I spy wild boars. The temperature is above freezing so the ferns are still green things to eat if you look hard enough. And where there is green there are roots. The hoars dig destructively to get at roots and tubers. I have enough powder and mini balls to bag two or three even with near misses. The sound makes them scatter

so I must be judicious in my selection and aim. The only hardship is hauling the carcass over hill and dale and rocky terrain. But I shall do it if it will feed our family for many, many days. Once I get it in the barn Harrison helps me to string it up and Hog Dressing begins. I have a large sow and her meat is tender and will last until the Spring. Carving it up and putting pieces in the smoke house while boiling down the fat brings much needed sustenance. I am glad I can provide for you and young Harrison. The expression on your face as I pulled the carcass on a travois down the mountain was one of joy! It is forever embedded in my mind. We will eat and grow strong and resplendent. I love you to the ends of the earth!
Yours Henry (55)

(56)

Dear Virginia, February 20th, 1867

It seems as if an angel or spirit spurs me on to write to you. I am not sure why as I am not sure you will ever see these words. Perhaps, our descendents, if they are lucky and some saint or truly holy person sees the merit of these missives and decide they must be read and not thrown into the fire to heat someone momentarily. I love you.

God! I love you. I don't know any other way to express this than to shout it to the rafters.

Why? Why do I love you? I guess it is because you are a mirror. I see myself in you.

But also because you confront me when I may be too much

in my hitches. Perhaps it is that you, at times seem fragile. At times filled with rage at the unknown. And yet the unknown feels familiar to me. The constructs that hold power. The occupation, the colonialism, the slavery, the suffrage. So many white old men have established laws and structures that hem the like of us into places we are not welcome, that are not usinal in nature. We are nature. We are normal and the outside world is out of synchronicity regarding our Union. The world of man is out of bounds. The world of women moves in rhythm and is almost always in the circular movements of nature and knowing.

I am yours always, Henry (57)

Dear Virginia, February 22nd, 1867

The rains have come. Everything is saturated. A heavy fog covers the mountains and valley. Even though the air is warm for winter time, the climate is exceedingly humid.

It is good for foraging. I have collected Turkey tail and Chickens of the woods as well as Sassafras and other herbs for doctoring.

I am still recovering from the fever and cough. I find my stamina falls short. But each day I walk and climb a little more so that I might return to full strength. It seems you and Harrison have made a full recovery. As I pass by the ancient ferns and touch the clouds I am reminded the heaven is only three

feet above our heads. Our ancestors are there as well. They whisper wisdom to us through the trees and the silence. They guide us silently through our joys and trials. As I descend the mountain and glimpse the lamp light in the window, I can see you, my Virginia, at the hearth. I wonder what you are thinking and dreaming. What would be the thing that you most want to accomplish - what is your desire? I can see that you find contentment in simplicity.

It is a fine way or path to follow and yet I can only imagine what you might yearn for. My love encompasses your joy! I want your happiness and fulfillment as much as my own.

I Love you always, Henry (59)

⑥
Dear Virginia, February 23rd, 1867

I walked up into the mountains to trade with the Cherokee and they were preparing to honor the full wolf moon. The men dressed in skin cloths and wolf skins and danced by a bonfire. It seemed to be quite frightful if you were not a friend or knowledgeable of the tradition. We all howled and then the wolves answered back. We would howl again and they, our brothers would answer. and so nature goes. In the darkness I searched for your redeeming light. In the Forest I looked for you and I found you, dear

Virginia in the wild things. In the wild mushrooms that spring up for only a day or so then melt back into the earth. I found you in the wild fawn that disappears as the light changes. I found you as the wild fox plays and hunts and disappears silently into the surroundings. I found you in the two red-tailed hawks that circle and call from above then ascend into a cloud or dive for prey in the grassland. I find you in the moon half obscured by high clouds and fog. I find you in the brilliant blue of a blue birds wing as it takes flight. I find you deep in the subterranean areas of my heart insuring that it keeps pumping so that I can witness the miracle of you! Love ⑥
Henry

(62)

Dear Virginia, February 24th, 1867
It was a bit cooler today but
above freezing. Harrison was off
to the new school house and
new teacher. He was very excited.
I am certain winter boredom
and the short days have been
taxing for him. I am very
glad he takes a keen interest
in learning. Sustained
curiosity keeps one young
even in old age. He was eager
to meet the new teacher who had
come down from Virginia - Richmond
to be exact. She is twenty-five
and progressive from my understanding.
The day was cloudy and chores
needed to be completed and we
did them each in our own way

and time. I was in the barn
late afternoon feeding and brushing
down the animals when you
came inside. It had begun to
drizzle a bit and it was cool
enough to see our breaths.
You said you were going to the
root cellar to collect the
winter vegetables for dinner but
you turned long and smiled.
You teased me about the way I
walk. You playfully ribbed
me about my eccentricities but
what is a woman disguised as a
man supposed to do but embody
a masculine identity fairly complete.
You smiled. Your eyes sparkled with
mischief and, perhaps a secret.
Then you kissed me and reached for
me and we were no longer boys
but fully engaged in passionate
exchange! I Love you, Henry (63)

(64)

Dear Virginia, February 25th, 1867

I woke early and walked thru the foggy hollow into town. I passed a few Chickasaw on the dirt road.

They seemed hungry and out of luck.

I gave them a few coins and said a few words I could remember from my childhood and they beamed with wide smiles. They walked with me

back into town so that they could procure some provisions back at their homesteads. They were

exceedingly amiable and told stories as we walked. Once I

was in town the locals were friendly enough and I am not a stranger or out here. I observed

that the white locals and shop owners while pleasant for business purposes seemed to have an otherwise sour disposition compared to the

Indians. I contemplated this for a long while even as I walked back home - back to you.

They seem to fear that at any moment they will lose what ground they think they have gained. Their minds attach to the past and troubles from a bygone time or the uncertainty of the future.

The Indians seemed fully rooted in the present. They were happy and kind and generous of spirit.

They do not require the trappings of an industrial age. They are happy with what is needed not wanted. At times I wish I never learned the ways of white men.

I belong to two worlds: white and Indian as well as male and female.

Both of my genders love you in the various ways expressed.

I love you always, Henry

(65)

(66)

Dear Virginia, February 27th, 1867

It has been quite the day!

I was overcome with a feeling of extreme anxiety so I walked through town.

The town people seemed to stare at me. I heard folks whisper 'half breed'. And even the full bloods looked upon me with suspicion and disdain.

I am not sure what has caused this both external and internally. For a moment I was terrified my ~~secret~~ secret might be out amongst the town folk.

You are the only one who knows me intimately and so I put that theory away. I wondered if I had offended someone

unknowingly. I would most certainly apologize if I knew the nature of the slight. I am still guessing. I moved through town and attended my business there then quickly left for the mountains and the trail home. As I walked the many miles back I watched Grandmother moon rise and I said blessings along the path.

All day I missed you. My heart eager to return to you and to Harrison. As I took my last steps I could see you in the doorway right at twilight. You were straddling inside and outside. Nature and Heav'n - Above and below. You opened your arms and your heart to me and embraced me as you have every day of our knowing. For that I am blessed and grateful!

Yours, Henry

(67)

(68) Dear Virginia, February 28th 1867

I woke up this morning next to you feeling so amazingly grateful. I got up quietly so as not to disturb your peaceful slumber.

I could see the moon setting as the first hint of sunrise kissed the feathering clouds. I coughed a little. It was fall. I felt concerned. I have already healed from a Croup kind of cough and ~~the~~ fever and so have you and Harrison. For it to lodge in me again felt like cruelty from nature. I was flushed and warm. Perhaps a slight fever, and my throat began to feel like hair was growing in it. Alarmed and exceedingly annoyed I journeyed up the mountain

and through the fog to a place where I could find Turkey tail mushrooms, Sassafras roots and wild nettle as well as mullein. I wanted very much to make a brew that would stave off further symptoms and further contagion. While in the woods a lone wolf watched me. His eyes were rust or copper colored. Strange to find him alone. Perhaps he was old and waiting for me - for a weakness to present itself. Alas, my only weakness is you. I cannot get enough of your presence - your kindness, your generosity, your deep abiding love and devotion. For this I am captive. I am your captive! Yours always,
Henry (69)

Dear Virginia,

March 1st, 1867

I fear at times I talk too much. Sometimes I am compelled to let folks know where I have been and what experiences I have had to further continue a connection and point of conversation. As I look back I can see my earnest hope for acceptance.

I was taught by my people and ancestors that silence is strength that listening will always illuminate a persons intention and spirit. I only hope that my fault comes from a genuine place to relate to another and not from pride or some kind of caste system mentality. Being what white folks call a half breed

makes us straddle two worlds and we are not welcome in either. I am not Indian enough for the full bloods and I am truly not white enough for the settler folk. Alas, I can pass a black Dutch or black German but those terms are identifiers as well. If I could fully pass as either as well as I pass as male that would be something! Too many town folk know of my origins and thankfully some truly don't ~~care~~ care. They judge on my character and not my skin. Which leads me to your fair skin intertwined in mine. A darker - olive - as they say against the palest white moving in tandem to the rhythm of Creation! I am Yours! Henry

(72)

Dear Virginia,

March 2nd, 1867

It rained all day. It was a cold rain. We built a fire and stoked it all through the day. I watched as you made a stew and a brew at the hearth of herbs I had collected up in the mountains in the hollows. It seemed a lovely task with the care you gave to each ingredient. The care of tending the right flame. The care of stirring and tasting and stirring again then tasting to get the flavor of the ancestors. It was a hearty and laborious stew filled with salt pork, butter, beans, onions, ramps, fater, greens and turnips. It warmed the cockles of my heart and young Harrison licked his

bowl. There was love in those bowls. From your heart and mind to our bodies. We were nourished and the cold and damp banished from our threshold. Young Harrison tended to his studies with a full belly and we read various things by firelight and lantern light. The evening was quiet except for the steady rain of the roof and windows. I was keen to observe ~~to~~ when the boy extinguished his candle. I waited for a bit - nigh on half an hour then I took your hand and playfully led you to our room. We quietly ~~to~~ closed the door and undressed each other until we were new-born again. And then we loved on each other as mates are wont to do. I am yours! Henry (73)

(74) Dear Virginia, March 3rd, 1867

Today was sunny and warm. It was ever warmer on account of your touch. I walked upon the clouds and let the joy of the sun kiss my face as you did the night before. We expect the cold again as winter is still here so Harrison and I commenced to chopping wood for the fire and hearth. Then my friend and his Indian woman arrived on horseback. You were so very hospitable and sewed up Johnny cakes and a potato pancake for lunch. It seems I have been hired to hunt and track over in Tennessee again. Turtle town. I am to stay with the woman's family and help to bring in hides and meat and skins for sale and then also for the tribe. He said

a month would be sufficient and the pay is generous. While I am loathe to leave you and Harrison for that extended amount of time I know that you will be able to survive without me. Harrison may have to miss some schooling to get all the chores done. You can send word through the hollow and I will come. Turtle town is a 2-day ride away. I will ride all night if you are in need of me. Even though I am considered a half breed the Indians treat me well - like their own family. I enjoy their company and learn something new with each exchange. I know this news is a mixed bag of good and not so good but I also get to bring home the meat I catch for myself. I love you more than you know! Henry (75)

(76)

Dear Virginia, March 4th, 1867

I woke up very early and saddled the horse. The mule was upset that his friend would be leaving. I came in and you were not yet awake.

I stoked the fire to warm the room.

I kissed you again and again. You held me as if I were off to war again.

Hunting can be like war in a way but I bless the animals before and after. By the time you were fully awake I made a pot of hot coffee.

We kissed one last time and I was off on the mountain trail towards town just as the sun cleared the horizon. Once in town I waved to a few folks. They took note of the Rifle holster and many seemed aware I'd be off hunting. About an hour's ride out of town the clouds moved in and the sky

got dark. The rains came and pelted me. I would have to make camp in the cold, wet rain. By sunset the rain was steady. I set up the lean-to and attempted a small fire. Everything was so damp and saturated. I had some dry tinder in my saddlebag and after three quarters of an hour was able to light a fire. I did not do much to drive the cold and damp away. But I was able to cook beans for supper. Turtle Town is another full day's ride so I will be up before the sun to pack and saddle up. It is times like these that I miss the warmth of your embrace. The warmth of your smile. The warmth of your body against mine for hours under Quilts and blankets.

I am Yours, Henry (77)

(78)

Dear Virginia,

March 5th, 1867

There was a fantastic and terrible storm last night with thunder & lightning and the rain came down in sheets. The fire I built was quickly extinguished from the wind and rain. I was was soaked even under my lean-to. To make things worse, Blue, our old man got loose and ran off during the storm.

So I must walk to Turtle town and that will add another half day.

Tudging along the trail in the steady down pour I came across a few Ex-Confederates worse off than I. They were bare foot in tattered clothes and still wearing kepis from a long lost endeavor. I had nothing to give them except a small bit of Tobacco and news from our

parts. We bid each other good luck and fudged along our respective paths. With every step I kept thinking that I have lost a days worth of work and our beloved horse.

My mind commenced to worry and how I might make up the lost time and wages. Then I realized that hunting in that climate is not productive so perhaps meditation on gratitude would best serve me.

My long ago ancestor who has been on the other side for some time now appeared. Her name is Sukiie Ocaneechi and she told me that my heart could move mountains when in synchronicity with nature. And so in the quiet patter of rain and foot steps my heart moved to you. How much you earnestly care for all things that matter, not just me and Harrison (79) for this I am humbled Yours, Henry

(80)

Dear Virginia,

March 6th, 1867

I arrived in Turtle Town about
Three in the afternoon. I was met
by my employees and friend:
Woman. She is called Sandy by
most that know her. Her people
call her by her Cherokee name.
Sandy greeted me and quickly
made a meal to help restore me
from the storm and long walk out
of the mountains. As we were
eating there was a small
commotion outside. Once on the
porch we were stunned to find
Blue in the yard pawing the ground
and making a fuss. She had followed
me somehow and she was hungry.
Sandy directed me to the barn and
I fed Blue oats and hay and she
calmed down straight away.

I ventured back to the house and
my friend showed me my quarters
My things were still damp and
Sandy took them to dry by the
fire. I wore a borrowed night
shirt and sipped some dandelion
root tea with a bit of sassafras.
It was most invigorating.

Tomorrow we set out before
dawn to hunt wild boar. The
night was very foggy in Turtle
Town and as I fell into sleep
and dreams I could feel myself
flying like a Red-tailed hawk
catching the wind and hovering
above the land. I wondered if
I could fly to you, my beloved.
Fly across the mountains and
above the clouds to see you again.
To watch over you and Harrison
like an angel. I am yours always
Henry

(81)

(82)

Dear Virginia, March 7th, 1867
I slept very soundly in the
Indian Village in Turtle town.
I dreamed about the ring that
turned into a key. A ring I
gave to you, perhaps in another
life. It seemed a strange
and foreign land. Then the
time came for an early break-
fast and out into the cold
pine barrens. The fog was
thick then hurried off once
day light grew. We came across
a group of bears and picked
off three. We spent the mid-
afternoon skinning and dressing
the kills. We obtained lots of
good cuts of meat. I got 25%

and my friend and employer got
25%. The other half goes to feed
the tribe. It is with their
permission that we are allowed
to hunt on these lands. The air
is cold. I can see my breath.
I am an excellent shot.
We haul everything in before
sunset and by supper time I
am so tired I can hardly keep
my eyes open. Sandy made us
a stew with venison and black
eyed peas, squash and taters.
It was warm and hearty.
Once back in my quarters I
looked through the window
to find the moon. A beautiful
crescent in the deep blue sky.
I wondered if I spoke to the
moon and you were looking at
it, too, if you could hear me.
I love you, H

(83)

(84)

Dear Virginia, March 8th, 1867

I awoke before dawn. Sandy prepared a hearty breakfast and we were out on the trails by sun up. The day was beautiful. A few high clouds and warmer than normal for winter. Fog banks dotted the mountains and as we climbed higher into the smokies you could see the blue/purple haze that defines this landscape. We were able to kill two deer, a doe and a buck. It took us the rest of the day to dress them and haul the carcass on horseback down the mountain. We get back into the village at dusk. Then we had to work by lantern light in the barn to finish dressing the animals

and preserving the hide, meat and bones. It was arduous but rewarding work. The big brown eyes of the doe looked up at me in her last moments and it pierced my heart. But her sacrifice will feed the better part of an Indian village especially the children. I had a very hearty supper cooked by Sandy's mother. Then I retired to quarters and recapped the day and my feelings. I wondered what happens to animals in their last moments. Do they feel things as we humans do? Do they understand what is happening to and they frightened, angry and sad? Or do they accept fate and move through the transition gracefully and innocently? I wish I knew the answers. Until then I will keep loving you and hey, eat! Yours, Henry (85)

86
Dear Virginia, March 9th, 1867

I awoke before dawn as usual, ate breakfast and was on the hunt by the time the sun rose.

I rode Blue and she seemed a bit persnickety in her disposition.

I could not figure out why she was stubborn or wouldn't budge at all. She acted like an ill-tempered mule. No amount of coaxing could get her going. I even dismounted and pulled on the reins and lead rope. To no avail. I even tried to tether her to a tree while I walked on but she would up and would have none of it.

So... I just left her on the trail in the mountains. I cannot let an animal cost me a days work. I was about a mile down the trail. It was dawn or maybe

a little after. The morning sun was beautiful on the winter landscape.

Suddenly I heard hooves at full gallop. I thought it a rider or messenger. To avoid being run over I moved off the trail and out of the way. That's when I saw Blue running at full speed.

In front of her was a bear running towards me! Blue got to the Bear before I could raise my rifle. There was an awful collision and confrontation.

While Blue stomped the hell out of the bear it ran a ways then came back in a rage. It attacked my beautiful Blue. Even as I shot the bear, my poor horse was quite wounded. I had to put her down. I cried bitter tears not only for Blue but for us. The wasted time, wasted meat, wasted skins. I am yours, Henry 87

March 10th, 1867

Dear Virginia,

I did not sleep well in Turtle town. I wept most of the night at the loss of Blue. She protected me and sacrificed for me, same as you have. It is something I shall never forget. I wake daily with a sense of gratitude that you chose me. That we came together in such turbulent times and that we loved and thrived in the face of danger.

The Cherokee and Chickasaw - even Shawnee see the Horse as a manifestation of personal power. The both of us have demonstrated that thus far in our lives. The Bear is about female introspection and protection of the offspring. I guess I am trying to remind

the death of our beloved mare and the interaction of the Bear. Both found themselves lifeless after the conflict. And I the Victor. But I was not involved in the fight. Perhaps the angels were at work to ensure my survival and that I would make my way back to you. That the Cosmos would find its balance. Blue... I will miss her. I will grieve a long while but it will not interfere with my work. I know you shall miss her, too. The next order of business is to make enough money in hides or meat to find a comparable horse as we will need the power of such on the farm. I do hope you and Harrison have had much better days than I recently. I miss you!
I Love you, Henry

(90)

Dear Virginia, March 11th, 1867

I arrived home early and a bit defeated. I could not complete the job without Blue and I did not have enough resources to purchase another horse. I walked home in true despair. I feel as if I have failed you and Harrison and mostly myself. Fate has been fickle of late and my turn of fortune elusive. After three days of walking from sun-up to sun-down and camping in the most raw and minimal way, I arrived home a bit weary and broken hearted over the animal and lost wages. My friend and his woman offered a bit of cash out of charity but I did not accept. I know that pride is a deadly sin. In hindsight

I should have accepted the hand-up. When I told you the news of Blue you were terribly upset. That made me upset all over again. It seems I could not ease your grief. And then you spoke ~~the~~ truths that stung but needed to be said. I know I am not the best partner. I know I hold my emotions close. I am aware that I miss cues that inform the weather of our relationship. There are times I wish I could go back and do better - communicate better instead of being silent and safe. You laid me bare. There are lessons for me to learn to be a better partner. To share more. To listen more. To reveal myself to you more. You continue to be the better of us in all respects. Despite the many set backs, I believe in you and I and Harrison. I am yours always, Henry

(91)

(92)

Dear Virginia, March 13th, 1867

It was a hard day. I woke up and I was ashamed of my short coming. I went to the barn before dawn and I sat in a corner of Blue's stall and I wept. I cried at the loss of such a magnificent animal and its knowing sacrifice on my behalf. I also cried as you and Blue have much in common. The sacrifices you have made of your own being to appease or make my life easy. The loss of Blue brought up the loss of so many and the sacrifice of so many. I cannot begin to understand the horror and grief you have endured at the hands of men in power. You present outwardly as a woman that further lessens your power in our culture at this critical time.

This I can relate and it is why I perfect or practice being a man and passing as such daily so that we - as a UNION - may thrive in a white man's world. I wish we did not have to try so hard. And truly my sacrifice to this life feels so much less than yours. I do know that we shall endure as long as we are committed to one another. The paper makes it look and feel official but we know that it takes a daily commitment to stay together and prosper. The loss of Blue has brought up so much unspoken. So many moments when words could soothe but silence felt safe. That is my sin. I am responsible. But I shall try and make it right even to my last breath. I walk many paths and many lives but I love you above all else! Yours, H

(93)

(94)

Dear Virginia, March 14th, 1867

I have spent many nights since my return contemplating what it must be like to walk in your shoes. As a female born person I am well aware that our station in life is equal to Chattle and Cattle. I wish it were not so. I wish I could change the world for you ... and I!

Beyond that I am trying to see my reflection in you and your reflection in me to be a better partner. I want to so much to tell you things but the memory and the hurt are palpable and so silence once again feels safe. The other day you said something poignant that has stuck with me and

has kept my mind reeling. How do I really know you if you bury yourself in chores, work and outside? I write that I love you every night but I do not say it. You cannot hear the earnestness of my voice and the truth of my heart. Reading it is second hand and void of sensory perception except sight. I will do better! I will vow to be more vocal and physically demonstrative in a tasteful and respectful way. I can feel your heart again - not so much for me but for the world to be a better place for all sentient beings. Nature seems to be the balm that soothes. Nature is Truth in brutal and beautiful ways all at the same time. (95)
I will meet you there! x o, Henry

(96)

Dear Virginia, March 15th, 1867

The winter's day was a bit warmer than most. A brisk wind filled the air and a chill took root. I hastened to make Sassafras tea! I had dug up roots on my way to Turtle town. The tea was healing and restored me so that I may find more work aside from our subsistence farming. I went into town on foot, of course, to inquire about the purchase of a new ride. I came across some Chickasaws I am acquainted with. And while they are not known for their horsemanship and breeding, they gave good success as to whom horse traders could be trusted. We haven't

much in the way of resources but I found a pair of Scotsman, Brothers, who set a contest. The horses were half trained for rides HALF. That means they were not entirely broken as white folk term it. So whoever stayed on the back of the horse for more than a Quarter of an hour could have the beast for a dollar to be further trained by the winner. I am no horse trainer or breaker but I felt compelled to try my luck and followed my intuition. After a few seconds of violent lurching the horse settled into deep breathing and I sat there for more than 13 minutes on a calm animal. I won! Everyone was gobsmacked. We have a new member of our family - Calileo!
Yours, Henry (97)

Dear Virginia, March 16th ⁽⁹⁸⁾ 1867

It was cold this morning before dawn. I stayed in town.

Or rather, just outside. The Chickasaws let me bed down in their stable. It got right cold!

They lent me blankets and there was plenty of hay. I

brought my win-ear win-

Galileo, with me. I burrowed under the hay with the blankets to keep warm and Galileo kept nuzzling and moving the hay.

I was beginning to be upset and angry but just as I was about to fuss the animal lay down beside me. She nuzzled

me and the warmth of her body was sustaining. She stayed like that until the sun came up.

Then she gingerly got up trying not to disturb me and gazed at the rising sun. It was the deepest sleep I have ever experienced.

She was so warm and still and nurturing in a way I cannot explain. Her belly is speckled

like a bird's ~~egg~~ egg. Her disposition wholly changed since coming

to me. I am astounded by the exchange we have encountered with each other and how it will inform our lives going forward.

This incredible flash of time is reminiscent of ours and how

quickly you intuited that I am safe and loving. It is not lost

on me that these things or experiences are parallel rivers illuminating relationship in all its intense, intricate and intimate dimensions. I love you so

XOXO Henry

(99)

Dear Virginia, ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ March 17th, 1867
I awoke this morning and
brushed Gabeles. She was happy
for the care and attention.

I thought that I would put her
on a lead rope and walk her all
the way home. Once home I
would 'work' with her to 'fame'
her. But I remembered how she
came to be mine. I could not
help thinking loving thoughts
about her. How beautiful she is
and how much I admire her wild
spirit. I patted her forehead
and nose and she nuzzled me.
While in the stall of thought I'd
take a chance and ~~try~~ ^{mount} her.

She was calm and I was very
careful and sensitive to her
every move. I sat upon her

as if I always have. Just like
Blue. I gathered my things and
ate a brief breakfast with the
Chickasaws. I was able to communicate
very simply in their language that
I might 'ride' home instead of walk.
They shook their head as if it an unwise
decision. I bid them goodbye and
I climbed upon the animal bare
back. I checked and gently pressed
my leg in the direction to go.

She blinked - figured it out and
began walking. She is steady.
Right tan with black tail and
mane. She is very perceptive and
smart. I talk to her softly as
we walk the mountain trails
home to Brushy Mount. She is
good company. She responds even
to seemingly complicated conversation
by that I put mean human talk.
We have bonded and she will be a
longtime friend and helper. I cannot
wait for you to meet her! Yours,
Henry

Dear Virginia, March 18th, 1867 ⁽¹⁰²⁾

I arrived home about sunset. Harrison was in the yard splitting wood for the fire. When he saw me his eyes got as big as saucers. I heard him call, "Mama!" and you wandered to the porch.

You flashed your beautiful smile and were taken with the beauty of Galileo. I climbed down and you greeted her and she seemed amiable. It was a long ride yet better than walking on foot. Truthfully it was a lonely ride. A spiritual ride through the Smokey Mountains. You commenced to supper and I led Galileo to her new home. I gave her clean hay and some

food. I pushed her and talked to her to reassure that she would be safe. You wandered into the barn to say supper would be ready. You rubbed Galileo's nose and she responded kindly. Then you said something witty and I cannot remember the words but I felt that you were smitten again with me. Not that you were not, but the tact of daily life sometimes smother the magic. There seemed to be magic in the air. I kissed you suddenly and quickly and then I felt I may have upset you. You exited the barn quickly and disappeared for a bit. I came in for supper and you were smiling. Perhaps, blushing. It made my heart swell.

I am yours, Henry ⁽¹⁰³⁾

Dear Virginia, March 19th, 1867 ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

I was in the barn this morning with Caleb and Harrison came in. I introduced them and they seemed to get on very well. Then Harrison said, "Mama seems sad." and I figured it was because of the war and the recent loss of Blue. And he said, "No, sir. I think it is because of you." Then he left and went off to school. The morning was brisk and yet the sun burned off the chill and the fog. I walked inside to get breakfast and you were tending the cook fire. I lingered silently as you prepared eggs and bacon for us. I am sorry if what I did spontaneously the other night - I'm sorry if I somehow offended

or overstepped - "I began to ramble. Then you said, "I'm offended you don't do it more often." I could feel your sadness - the absence of fun and joy and romance and spontaneity. Then you got up and took my hands and led me to the table. Your face so very serious. "Why are you hiding from me?" you asked. I was confused as I was sitting in front of you. "Why are you hiding your heart from me - the one who loves you most." It made me break down into tears. I could not find words. Then I stammered, "I feel so much - so many things for you - so many emotions that I am overwhelmed by them. I don't know how to be close to you without being consumed by ~~them~~ ^{their} fiery passion I feel and so distance keeps me from feeling burned." You looked at me as if I were speaking nonsense and I felt deeper in love with you. Yours, Henry ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Dear Virginia, (106)
March 20th, 1867

I could not sleep at all last night. I suspect that maybe you did not either. It was a full moon and the moonlight cast shadows through the window - even with the light cotton curtains. I lay beside you and I may as well have been on the other side of the world. That space between us felt like a great chasm. Perhaps it is all in my mind, the closeness I feel for you. Perhaps you are a dream I have conjured to see myself. And yet I do not feel comfortable seeing my image. I feel ecstatic seeing yours. This is the crossroads where the devil beguiles and you sell yourself

or you stand fast in the light and banish the fears, the memories, the beliefs and the old wounds to find your self again a little more whole because of who and how you loved without location or judgment. And yet those minions that speak doubt about yourself invade the quiet spaces, warning you to protect yourself from the very people you love and adore most. What was the fighting for if not to return to love? What is the striving for if not to embrace the beloved? I understand those dark places that inch one towards self-annihilation. Then what? For what end except to possibly end the pain of emotional wounds. Overcoming is the goal, the prize. The path towards acceptance and the receptivity of the loved and loving. I will always love you.
yours, Henry (107)

Dear Virginia,

(108)
March 21st, 1867

I was awake early before sunrise. I did not want to disturb you so I completed chores early then walked in the woods for some time until the Sun kissed my face through the trees. I made my way home again to greet you upon your rise. When I came inside the house you were already up and about making breakfast for Harrison before he ventured off to school, and for me. We had an amiable first meal of the day and Harrison left for school as we cleaned the dishes and commenced work for the day. I mustered my courage and moved behind you. I wrapped my arms about you and kissed your neck. It felt so liberating to

and yet frightening to express myself so freely to you. I feel as though I am intuitive enough to know when the right time might be. Then I thought anytime love-time love is expressed in the right time and if it is not accepted it is not a reflection of my ardor or passion but rather other circumstances that dictate the romantic climate. It was the right time for us both. You peeled my shirt off and then my binding cloth. I was so exposed and you took all of me in with only a glance. I had not seen my breasts for a very long time and there I was naked mostly in my original form and not the form I present to everyone. It is fine intimacy. It is a true lesson in non-judgement, acceptance and the truth of spirit. No matter the gender I see you love me in your eyes. I am yours, Henry (109)

Dear Virginia, ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ March 22nd, 1867

I woke up with a start and remembered a dream. A garter snake had wrapped itself about my wrist. It was so innocent and friendly that I was not afraid in the least. I pondered that small earthy serpent for a long while. This thing we call gender is fascinating and wonderful and maddening. I believe the whites have made things complicated with their various belief systems. When I was little I would play with other children including boys and I did not wear a shirt or any covering of that sort. I thought I was a boy until people made fun of me and shamed me into covering my chest that was no different than a boy's.

The Chickasaw on my mother's side
Clan would never shame a child
based on gender or what is
appropriate for girls and a whole
other set of rules for boys. I lay
next to you for some time wanting
to touch or caress you. You were
sleeping and so I did not disturb
your repose. I drifted back into
a liminal place when I should
have done chores. I vaguely heard
Harrison leave for school and I
watched the high clouds thru the
window. Then you woke up and
turned to me. You put your hand
on my chest. We exchanged "good
mornings!" Then you giggled and
you took my face in your hands
and kissed me with such fervor
that I forgot myself completely.
I was in a kind of paradise or
heaven with you. I am yours, Henry
(111)

Dear Virginia, (112)
March 24th 1867

I was in the barn early to lunch
Calileo. I heard someone ride up
to the house. It was just as the sun
came up. I packed my navy pistol
and walked out to greet the man.
He asked if I was Henry Kieler and
I responded, "Who wants to know?"
Then he climbed down and said
he was sent by a fellow soldier
I knew during the war. I quitted.
I want to forget the war and all
associated with it. I left the war
for peace. He said a man named
Oliver has been asking for me and
is in a poorly way due to injuries.
Old wounds. Oliver Kilpatrick, I
knew him well. Still, I wanted to
make sure this was not a ruse or
con to get what little valuables we
have. He seemed earnest and produced

a letter and I recognized Oliver's hand.
He was just over in the next town of
Murphy. I left you a note before
I rode off on Calileo. I prayed
Calileo would take care of me and
not throw me and run off.

I arrived at Oliver's mother's home.
They ushered me to a back room
where he was laying, his eyes fixed
on the ceiling. "Henry, Henry, Henry."
"I'm here, Oliver. It's Henry." He
took my hand. He was skin & bones
and a yellow pallor took over. "I always
knew who you were." He said. Then he
smiled. I realized he had figured out
my secret. "I loved you best." He
said and I sat with him for some
time as his breathing became labored.
Then his hand went limp and the room
was silent. It happened so fast the
flight of the soul. And yet it was
profound and will never leave my
mind or heart. I love you always,
Henry

(114)

Dear Virginia, March 25th, 1867

I stayed the night in Murphy, North Carolina as Oliver passed away late in the evening. I went to bed in a very somber mood as to be expected. He died about 9:30 in the evening and there was all manner of grieving by his family. I sat by a bit helpless as to what I might do to ease their pain. Someone mentioned the minister and I saddled Calles and rode through Murphy asking everyone I knew who might know the Methodist Minister as Oliver has gone to the glory. I was sent or rather directed down a lonely lonely road to the minister's home. It was dark as they had retired.

I knocked on the door several times and the man answered in his night shirt. I told him the news and within minutes he was dressed. I was not sure what Calles would do with two riders - two, on her back but she complied and I let her guide her gate. I dropped the minister and tended to Calles then arrived as prayers were being said for the deceased and mostly for the mourners. I slept fitfully and wanted to come home to you in the night. As I awoke with the sun I gathered my things and rode all day to get home to you. When I saw you I froze for a moment - Caught in the wonder of life. Grateful for the time I have had and will have with you! All the magical moments. Witnessing the lightning bugs return to light up the fields as a mirror to our hearts. And light em light for each other. Love,
Henry

(115)

Dear Virginia, March 26th, 1867

The days are still cold but they are getting longer. Spring will be upon us soon and the toil of preparing fields and planting will consume our days. We have done this before and while it is hard work there is something about patting one's hands in the ground - filling the earth - smelling the freshness of fertile soil and possibly horse manure. Working and sweating by your side to nature our very own abundance with the help of the universe and the ancestors is in itself miraculous.

I made my way home from the funeral and wrote down the poignant moments so that I may not forget the impact and the words and the emotions displayed

for the honor of Oliver's life and service to Country, family and Community.

I found you in our bedroom after supper and after Harrison had retired and I asked you to recount the death of your boy - your son. You resisted not wanting to stir up those dormant feelings and I obliged. I did not want you to fully relive that pain. So, I let it go and undressed for bed.

Then I watched you as you undressed in the faint lamplight. I did not see you as a man who desires his wife but I saw you as a woman - an independent woman masking the pain of loss and navigating grief yet again. I was sorry to have brought the subject to light. I said so. You laid your head upon my chest and wept. I felt so very close to you. I love you. Henry

Dear Virginia, March 27th, 1867

The night held so many feelings and emotions. It was rife with passion and Compassion and Empathy and Trust.

I felt you as you touched me. It was intimate and at first I was afraid. I felt that if you knew every corner of me - every bit of my body and mind. Every mile of my personality that you would reject me. Laying there with you in the inky black of night I realized yet again that I am rejecting myself. It is not you that I am fearful of - it is all me. I am seeing myself and endlessly critical of every bit, nuance, move. If I truly believe that I am a result of the mastermind

of the universe, How could I reject that? How could I think and believe that you would reject me after all we have shared and experienced together? These are hard truths and lessons that come up for me again and again. I remember you once said to me, "Why can't you let me love you?" I did not have an answer. Today it might be that I find myself a stranger in my own body. In my mind's eye I am Henry every bit. However, as I mask my gender I feel like a pretender. A fraud. Something not real but presented as such! The struggle troubles me at times. I seek not to better my fortunes as a male. I seek to calm my mind and emotions to move in tandem with that state of being! I Love you always. Henry

Dear Virginia,

(120)
March 28th, 1867

The day began warm for March. There is usually snow in the Tennessee mountains in March. Our supply of food has dwindled and so I must hunt. There are only so many potatoes from the root cellar that one can eat. I put a saddle on Calico and knew that to fire my rifle, I would have to dismount. I am not sure of her reaction and sensitivities. I cannot risk injury. As I rode up into the smokies I could see green shoots sprouting and lots of Turkey Tail and Lion's mane and Chicken of the Woods growing in abundance. As the days grow longer I am taken in reverie at a kind of meditation that moves me to other realms.

I sometimes wonder if I am in a dream or the dream is in me. (121)
I came across some wild turkeys and fired on one. It will feed us for many days and what a healthy medicinal soup it will make with its entire body - bones and all!
My mind wanders to you and I find myself always wanting to be in your presence... In your arms. To hear your laugh and to see your smile brings me home again. I long for your touch. I yearn for your kiss, your embrace, your hand in the small of my back or on my shoulder or just hooked within my elbow. I long to lie with you even if it was only last night. I long to be between your legs and in your arms in the sweetness and stillness of evening. Yours, Henry

Dear Virginia, March 29th, 1867

It is a warm day for March and I was up early before dawn as my mind raved with ideas for income. I was out at the barn feeding the animals then making a small but hearty breakfast for Harrison and I. I sent him off to school and no sooner had he left than federal soldiers had arrived.

They said they were taking a census of the Indian folk.

It is 1867 and the census is not due to arrive until 1870. It was a ruse on their part. I pretended to be naive. They asked if I was Indian or 'Latin' and I said I was "black Dutch". There is no such thing, although I am sure there are Dutch folk who are not 'fair'. It was good enough for the soldiers

and they rode on. I will be written in history as being black Dutch and not Chickasaw. To be labeled Indian in any way invites violence, confiscation and humiliation. I could see you peering out through the kitchen window as the soldiers interviewed me. I felt you were more frightened that they would discover my gender more than my ancestry. I felt more frightened of the opposite.

I came inside and collapsed in your arms as the men rode away. My fears came easy from fright and relief. I am grateful that you can see me cry and be fully myself - naked before you. That is a true partner - to love, laugh and cry. I love you so!

I am yours always, Henry

(124)

Dear Virginia, March 30th, 1867

The soldiers are still in the mountains menacing folks. The harassment is unbearable. It is not only me and our family but others. Some half breed Indians like myself, free man and ex enslaved peoples, Veterans who may have fought for the other side and widows. It is distressing.

There are some in my tribe that are like me. They do not adhere to traditional roles within a family or society and they have been family mistreated. Some have gone missing. The tensions in the area are high. There have been killings. I try and keep my head down and focus on providing for

our family. But every day brings grave news of the States governance and the disappearance of people who do not adhere to the culture of power. That is white ruled. I am a light skinned Chickasaw and not reared within the tribe but one drop of Indian blood renders me 'Colored' in the eyes of the State and Country. I have worked hard all of my life and if I can pass as a white man to better my life as well as yours I will damn well do it and to Hell with the others. I love you so much, Virginia, that I cannot imagine a life without you in it - or Harrison. It would be the greatest tragedy of many lifetimes not just this one. My aim is to endure and out smart the dull witted fat cats that feel the need to control and centralize power among the few. I am yours always, Henry

(125)

(126)

Dear Virginia, April 3rd, 1867

The soldiers have come back. I don't think they ever really left. The first visit was a warning. I woke up early and we prepared breakfast for Harrison and ourselves. Harrison went off to school. You went into town to teach young students piano at the church and I traded eggs, stored mushrooms and venison with the Chickasaw. While I was there just outside of Turtle town the soldiers came and rounded everyone up. We did not know why. We had done nothing except trade. It was the usual activity on a Monday. They gathered on horseback. They moved around us - all of us.

I had cables tied up down the dirt road. They shackled us and we were immediately a chain gang, with no reason! No charges. No offenses. We were marched down a road that became a dirt path and then to a remote clearing in the woods. I watched as the soldiers lynched the native folk picking them out for their darker skin. I imagined the sound of your piano playing and it comforted me. I wondered if today might be my last on this green Earth. I was interrogated over my heritage and I just repeated Dutch - German. I hope my ancestors can forgive me. I hope you can forgive me. I hope that I will live another minute, hour & day to see your face again. Yours, Henry

(127)

(128)

Dear Virginia, April 10th, 1867
I know I have gone missing.
I write this as a reminder of
what happened so that I do not
forget the details and the paper &
ink are a witness to the atrocities.
I have somehow arrived as a
captive in Jonesborough, TN.
I am still shackled to the other
surviving Chickasaw and Cherokee.
A few of my compatriots told the
soldiers I was Indian but my
skin is lighter than most.
We are in the jail and the make-
shift pens while they decide
what to do with us. They say
we should have walked. I was
not born until after 1838 as were
most of my fellow captives.
The soldiers talk about Andrew
Johnson's home up the road.
He is the current President and he

means to remove all Indians as well
as purchase the state of Tennessee as
it was in the 1840's and 50's.
Two soldiers unshackled me from
the rest. My hands are tied behind
me and a noose put around my
neck. But there is no tree. They
kick and slap their horses and
I am dragged through the dirt
street. I know this is my
moment to leave the earth. This
is my end. But I remember
laying on the battle field at Cold
Harbor thinking the same thought.
I said my last breath would whisper
your name. With a rope about
my neck I could not say your name.
I tried again and again and
again as the dust and dirt choked
me. Finally they let the rope fall
and slipped it off thinking I was dead.
The opossum is a sacred animal
I love you more each day, Henry
(129)

(130)

Dear Virginia, April 11th, 1867

In my unconsciousness, or rather hyper-consciousness, I found myself in ancient Scotland weeping ^{you} on the Moors. I, born male, and you truly female. It feels that our commitment and love is abiding and everlasting. If prior lives exist then this is very, very true. I know nothing more than this feeling. And seeing you and happy together in the Heather under a blue sky.

• Once I awoke every part of my body hurt. The soldiers dragged me and left me for dead. Like Lazarus I was given life again brought back for the desire of you!

The rope burns on my neck were raw and as I tried to make a sound I found myself mute. At first I crawled and then I was able to walk for short bits. I'd take respite along the trails in the woods. The roads were too dangerous. I do not know how many days had passed and I do know that you would be angry and then worried. I came across a peddler and his wagon but I had no voice. I tried to write in the dirt but the man was illiterate. Even my whisper was silent due to injury. Even when I wept under the moon there was no sound. I will keep moving. I will keep surviving. I will keep willing myself to heal and find my way home to you. I am yours, Always Henry

(131)

Dear Virginia, April 13th 1867 (132)

I can only imagine your anger and concern at this incident. I am not sure where I am but I read the moss on the trees and head in the direction I feel instinctively. East towards the rising sun. I have nothing with me as it was all taken by the soldiers. I find nuts and wild greens as well as mushrooms in the forest. I have no weapon so I cannot hunt. I suppose I could set snares but I am eager to get home as quickly as possible. I pass another woodsman on my trek and try to communicate. He is a minister by profession and is thankfully literate. I write down my questions and he points me in the right direction. He notices my rope burns about my neck and offers Comfrey to soothe and aid in healing.

I walk on for the whole day. It is brisk but the sun is warm and the days grow longer. As the sun moves towards the horizon and beams its light towards me everything shimmers in a golden light. It is as if looking into eternity. For that light I see it reflect in your beautiful eyes. That moment when the sun is on the horizon - that angle that hints at the ineffable. I see you there in that warm glow. I see you there as I have seen you for thousands of years. I want to join you in that transcendence. I want to embrace you and kiss you and for you to respond in the passionate way you reserve for me. The woods become familiar and I know that my path to you is certain. I must stay off the main roads. I shall dream of you. Yours, Always Henry (133)

Dear Virginia, April 15th, 1867

I meet Harrison on the road as he was making his way home from school. He runs and jumps into my arms with tears flowing and breathy whimpers. I set him down and he can see the burns on my neck and the bruises on my face. His look is earnest and he asks, "Did they hurt you?" and I am aware - we are both aware of what he is asking. Violation. Besides brutality of answer 'No' without any sound. I have no voice. We walk the rest of the way arm-in-arm and I see you in the yard hanging the laundry. Your blue silhouette against the sun-kissed sheets. When you catch sight of me your Semenov's changes and I am aware of your disappointment and simmering anger. I am aware

enough to know it is mis-directed at one Harrison even says "Mama! It's not Henry's fault." You move away coldly into the house without a word as if I had willfully abandoned you. Again I have no voice and rely on writing but if you take refuge in your solitude I cannot possibly communicate. The trauma of the incident is palpable in the both of us. Even though we are in the same room it feels as if you are a million miles away. I do not know how to reach you? I do not know if it is possible. I only hope time will reveal the cracks where the light shines in. In the meantime, I must find a real desire to live to continue in this hard way. - Without you I am a man without a country - an exile in a strange land. Love has many colors and some are briefly dark. I Love You, Henry (135)

(136)

Dear Virginia, April 16th, 1867

I wake and realize you have taken to your bed. At night it is 'aus' what that seems no longer a fit description. You will not rise even when I plead with you. It seems you are planted with no will to move - almost Catatonic. My pleading on the other hand has no sound. My voice gone. I only hope it will return and has not been utterly destroyed by 'men'. I can only write my feelings and concern for you and I can physically attempt communication that seems woefully inadequate. I do not know what to do for you. Harrison is afraid and has taken on most of your chores as have I. It feels as if the incident has incited a feeling of utter hopelessness. That you

might will yourself from this world into the next. There is crying and worrying and a sense of chaos. You, our dear Virginia, hold our world together. Without you there is no point to continue. We all hang in the balance as you sift and sort your thoughts and feelings and however it may manifest we are ready and able to assist and help. It might be melancholy as the war and its wounds have certainly created fertile ground for that. I only hope you can see and feel the help and the love and the joy around you. When the world seems to have come to some kind of end we wake up to a whole new existence through our faith in the universe and in each other. Wake up dear one - my beloved to the magic of our Union. Love
Henry
(137)

Dear Virginia, April 19th, 1867 138

I am so very worried for you. You lay in our bed, eyes fixed to the ceiling and no manner of talking or caressing can stir you from this odd and catatonic state. Harrison refuses to go to school now and takes on the chores. I have taken on your tasks - happily - to make you feel better. I realize you will not eat or drink water and I find you in grave danger. If you are willing yourself to go to the glory, I will assist begrudgingly. I whisper to you, "I want you! Here! With me!" You do not react or respond. I am yelling into the void. I come to realize, perhaps, you are needed more in other realms, other places. I cannot go to these places. I can

only hold you in my heart and pray that you will be done. If you must leave then I shall let you go. I will be grief stricken for a long while. I try and explain to Harrison that your soul may have fulfilled its purpose here and must move on to the next place. I hold your hand. It is as if you are not here. You are somewhere else and my heart hurts a mighty hurt to have your body here and your spirit on its own journey. I whisper your name over and over like a conjuring as if the sound will reanimate you and call you back to this world. Maybe you have gone to prepare the future. Maybe you are planting seeds of love and reunion many, many years from now. I choose to believe that notion as I fall asleep next to you. I Love you always, Henry 139

Dear Virginia, April 23rd, 1867

I am beside myself as you seem to slip away. I do not understand what is calling you to the other world. I send Harrison for the doctor. They arrive in the late afternoon. The sun beams in from the window. It is spring and the light is filled with hope. The doctor is not and leaves us with heavy hearts. I tell Harrison I will go and fetch the Chickasaw medicine man. I saddle Calico and ride for hours until I find the village. I tell my friend who's woman is Indian "I need the medicine man." Now she goes to find him as if talk with my

friend. After a while the medicine man arrives. He seems bewildered by me. I plead with him/them to follow me to my beloved. He/they are reluctant. I will pay, I say. We have a lantern and the Indian rides in back of me on Calico. We journey through the woods and the night arriving at our farmstead by dawn. I find Harrison in the yard tending to the chores. I tether Calico and bring the Chickasaw into the house - the room where you are still catatonic. He/they reach for your hand to get an idea of your condition. The Indian turns to me, his face is pale. "You are not here." He says. I am stunned. I do not understand. (141)
Nevertheless I love you, Henry

Dear Virginia, April 25th, 1867 (142)

I love you so. I want so much to bring back those times when we laughed and enjoyed each other's company. I do not know how to reach you in your current state. I hold your hand, I whisper in your ear the boundless love and admiration I have for you. You are still as a stone, eyes fixed to heaven. I have no way of cajoling you! ~~not~~ rousing you to wakefulness. I weep at the thought that our days are over. The Chickasaw Chants and whispers in their language trying to find a way to get you unstuck in the in-between place you currently occupy. I plead with the medicine man but they shoo me away. So I try and speak with Harrison but his gaze is fixed upon

you. He cries a bit hoping you will wake up. The medicine man asks Harrison what was the last thing you did before entering this debilitating state. Harrison is choked up. He can hardly get the words out. He is weeping hard now. He says that the Sheriff had come out to the farm wanting you, Virginia, to identify ~~over~~ a half-breed. You had to walk into town and to the building that housed the constables. Harrison was with you. You identified Henry. Me. Lying on a wooden farm table dragged to death by soldiers. The hands about my neck and my swollen face prompted you to faint. It was from this moment you had lost the will to remain on this earth. What you are looking at, I do not know. I do know my love is endless
Henry

Dear Virginia, April 28th, 1867 (144)
You told me before the incident
with the soldiers that I had
hidden my heart from you.
I am so sorry that I have
sequestered myself. I did not
know that I was not sharing
as fully as I should have.
I did not know the thickness
of the walls about my heart.
I do know that my love
for you has no end. And
I will tear down those walls,
the stoic, silent ways of
mountain people. I am standing
beside you as you repose in
our bed. Your eyes are still
fixed upon the ceiling. Harrison
is upset at the notion of being

an orphan. I bear my heart to
you. A thousand lifetimes play
out before me. Harrison does
not acknowledge my presence.
I hold your hand. I whisper
your name. I am lost without
you. Then suddenly you come
alive for a brief moment. You
inhale a deep breath. Then
you exhale and whisper
"Henry". All goes silent. There
is nothing more... Then... a
moment... and I feel you take
my hand. You smile at me while
standing beside me. I am at
peace. You are happy, and we
walk away into oblivion
leaving the world behind.
Our abiding and enduring
love has carried us through. (145)
yours forever, Henry