

The Dear John Letter

By Marilyn Reeves

Alice awoke with a start. She rolled over and looked at the clock. 5:15 a.m. She felt dizzy and had a pounding headache and something was digging into her neck. It was the necklace she had put on last night as she was getting dressed for the party. Then she realized that she was still wearing her dress, now all mashed and twisted around her. Even worse, she remembered the letter. The midnight Dear John letter she had written to her boyfriend and took out to the mailbox before she passed out on the bed. "Oh, no! What have I done?"

She got up and used the bathroom, splashing cold water on her face. She took off her necklace and removed her poor rumpled party dress and tossed it into the closet. Then she put on her favorite frumpy old sweats and went into the kitchen to fix herself a cup of coffee.

It was all starting to come back to her. Her friends from work had talked her into going out for a night on the town. She hadn't been out for nearly two years since John had left for Afghanistan, so she said yes. With the sleek lines of her midnight blue dress skimming her curves, the strand of silver beads, and her chestnut hair falling in waves to her shoulders, she knew she looked stunning.

They had gone to the Lamplighter, ordered a few drinks, and started dancing with the fellows there. Most of them were strangers, a few were good looking. Did she give her phone number to one of them?

Feeling high as a kite when she got home, she remembered sitting down and dashing off that letter. What had she written? That it was over? That she was tired of sitting around waiting for him to come home, that she wanted to have fun?

What was she thinking, running out to the mailbox in the middle of the night to mail that letter? What sort of madness could have possessed her that she would throw away her happiness on a sudden impulse?

She started to cry. Spent the entire morning on the couch, sobbing and weeping, clumps of soggy tissue landing wherever she tossed them. "What have I done?" she wailed. "Poor John is over there in the suffocating heat, dodging bullets, being subjected to unimaginable horrors, and he gets a letter from me saying I don't want to wait for him anymore because I want to have fun?"

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw someone pass by on the walkway outside her window. It was Pete, the mailman.

Without a thought given to her appearance, her disheveled hair, her puffy eyes streaked with mascara, she ran out barefoot, hollering, "Pete! Pete! Please stop! It's me, Alice Green."

"Well, good morning, Miss Green. You're not looking too well this morning. Is everything all right?"

"Oh, Pete, please! Can you give me back the letter I stuck in the mailbox? The one to John McAvoy in Afghanistan? I don't want to send it after all. Please, Pete – it's a matter of life and death!"

"Well, I'm not supposed to do that, but let me see if I can find it."

He dug down in his bag and pulled out the letter and handed it to her. "There you go, Miss Green. Now I think you'd better go back in and get yourself some sleep."

“Oh, I will, Pete,” she said, giving him a hug, “but first I’ve got to write another letter. And this one I won’t want to take back.”

It had been such a close call, but after posting the second letter to John – the one that said she would wait for him forever – Alice went back to bed and slept.