

THE STEELE LETTERS

Fort Yates, N. Dakota  
Sunday, Sept. 14, 1890

My Darling Mother:-

It hasn't been a week since I last wrote you but its Sunday so I must write again - I haven't done much today besides sit in the house and read - It was a bright morning & Stell & I concluded we would take a horseback ride after luncheon. To this end I ordered up the horses, but just as Bluth (?) my striker finished cinching up Stella's saddle it began to sprinkle so we sent the horses back to the stable & forth with it stopped raining & didn't begin again. The elements here are very contrary. They always do what you don't want done. The weather has been acting up at a great rate the past week simply because we have some visitors from the south in the post. If Dakota can just catch a good thick skin person from the south within her blizzard-bound limits, she turns loose all the weather she has in stock upon him.

Stell & I had a great day of it last Wednesday. We had our horses hitched to the "troop" spring wagon & set out for a hunt. We didn't take a man to hold the horses as Stell could manage them when I should get out to shoot or hunt. We went out eight or ten miles - didn't find much to shoot but had a pleasant day of it - as long as it lasted. But at about half past three we found ourselves on the other side of the Porcupine creek, about midway between the upper and lower crossings and about six miles from the nearest one. We were about five miles from the post. I didn't want to drive way around to the crossing so I searched along for a place to cross.

At last I found a pony trail crossing the creek. The bank was about six feet high on our side and straight down but being soft sand I found I could slope it down with my feet enough to drive down but taking great care.

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So I put the brake on fast & down we went & reached the bottom all safe. Here our troubles came. Had I driven straight across all would have been well; but the horses wanted to turn up stream & as the water was not deep I humored them by a yard or two. That yard or two was fatal. They struck a bed of quick sands & in a second both my horses and the wagon were fast. Poor Stell had to jump out in the water & wade out & of course I was out in a second unhooking the harness and struggling with my horses. I succeeded in helping the near one out before the sand packed round him but when I got to the other the sand had packed so tight around his legs & belly that he couldn't move a muscle. I hitched the other horse to him & whipped him up till he broke the thick leather tugs, while I, with the pole of the wagon, which I had taken out for the purpose, pried with all my might under the helpless horse. But it was all of no use - every second only made him more fast. Every one of his four legs within a few minutes were fixed as tight in the heavy sand as any fence post in the ground. Meantime the wagon has gone down to the hubs & its wheels were ~~fixed as tight in the heavy sand as any fence post~~ as fast as if they had been tapped with a mallet.

Stell helped all she could & we both worked with all our might trying to get the horse out, for the poor fellow was suffering so. He would groan and beat the water with his muzzle. But it was no use - we could not get him out by ourselves. At last, fairly exhausted, I said "Well Stell we have done all we can. I must send or go to the post for help." With that I loaded the guns for her and sat her down in the sand, while I mounted the horse we had out and started off at a canter to find an Indian if I could; if not to go on to the post.

Fortunately, within a mile I found an Indian herding some ponies & still more fortunate, I had a piece of paper & pencil. I gave him a note to Slocum (my 1st lt.) & the promise of a half dollar & away he went at a gallop for the post.

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Just an hour afterward Slocum with ten men following came galloping over the hill to us - the Indian on his little scrubby, panting pony leading the way. The men worked like beavers. They had to burrow down with their hands to the very hoofs of the horse & they had to work fast for the sand, of course, filled in as fast almost as it could be pulled out. At last we loosened the sand sufficiently to make it safe to pull him out & by means of lariats we dragged the poor prute out. He was fearfully strained though & is still lame in the left hind leg. I am in hopes this will be all right in a few days.

Imagine your arms & legs buried for two hours & held so fast that you can not move a muscle & the blood can scarcely circulate & you will have an idea how that poor horse must have felt. It was not that soft, oozy, miry, muddy quicksands that takes you in and stays soft - like some I got into in Indian Territory. It was pure sand, plenty hard and fine for a man to walk round on, but just soft enough to let a horse down. Of course every step we took round the horse packed him down that much faster. It was quite dark before we were back in the post.

Stell says she doesn't want to cross any more creeks or anything but bridges.

I have got to start Wednesday on a trip of about 100 miles down toward Grand River to make a reconnaissance & map of a road. I don't expect to be gone more than six or eight days.

I must now say goodnight.

Ever your devoted son,

Matt.

THE STALLER LETTERS

Fort Yates, North Dakota  
Sunday, Sept. 21, '90.

My Darling Mother:-

Stella has left me ~~with~~ her two cats to keep me company while I am writing and has gone over to the Woods - This has been one ~~of~~ of the ~~days~~ sort of days that I hate most. Indian summer I guess you call it - warm, bright and enervating. A regular Texas fall or winter day. Such weather knocks all the life and energy out of me. I would rather have it cold, damp, drizzly, sleety, cloudy, hot - anything. I can't stand what is known as "beautiful weather," - it makes me worthless & gives me the blues. -- I didn't go to Grand River last Tuesday as I expected to, but will start day after tomorrow, unless something prevents. The nights are getting pretty long and cold and I will have to take a good many blankets along to keep myself comfortable -- There are so few people at this post now and so little doing that every days seems like Sunday, and Sunday is just like every other day of the week. Old "Brother Carry" is here this evening but I don't go to hear the old fool any more - he is more of an ignoramus and imposition than I can stand. The thing that capped the climax, however, was that the old idiot had the assurance to call upon me to pass the hat round for him one evening. I haven't gone to hear him since - I think it must have been about six months since you last wrote me. Don't you think it about time you should be writing again? I haven't heard from any of you since Brother's letters telling me of George's trouble came. What has become of George? - I have so little to tell that it is hard work for me to write a letter from here <sup>nowadays</sup> ~~nowadays~~ - Our green Norwegian girl is turning out finely, & I think we shall be well pleased with her.

For want of more to say I guess I shall have to quit - Stella is back & joins me in love.

Ever your devoted son, Matt