

Zasit,

Thank you for covering the postage on these letters. Only officers and other specialists can usually afford them, and without your help I'd be stuck. Also... Thanks again for the birthday present! Honestly, though, I'm seventeen now, and married. I think we're old enough that we don't need to worry about gifts.

I'm happy to report that you were completely wrong about the snow out here. It's a stalker's dream, honestly. I was worried about a lack of game, but we're at a cross-section of migration paths here, and there's plenty to shoot at. I don't know the names for most of the beasties, I won't lie to you. The only snatches of familiarity I've bagged is a single wolf and an owl. But the other catches look more or less like anything else. Four legs, guts, heart, etc.

The snow's good. It comes thick and fast, thanks to the blizzards. It's interesting; a sorta mixed blessing, it goes both ways. You know how coyotes would be all sneaky back home? It's the same deal, but backwards. Here, you can be a real ghost, sneaking around in the snow. When it whips up, you can't see much, but neither can they. And when it settles, the tracks are so easy to follow. I can track most game about as fast as I can run.

Earlier this year, some snatcher came through from the goblin forts, got caught. He got away, barely; some officer grabbed at him, missed him, but caught on his cloak. The wily bastard shrugged it right off and kept running... Hope he died of exposure on the way home, but that's probably wishful thinking. Either way, the officer just left the cloak sitting around, so I snagged it later. It's troll fur, I recognize the patterns. Kind of gross, but man, those goblins know their home turf; it suits the climate like a dream. I wrap up real warm in it and I can barely feel the windchill; if it's a hard day for game, I go out in the snow, then sit and wait until the fall picks up, let it surround me in my cloak. The beasts don't expect it, and I have all the time in the world to line up a shot.

Game's not all I'm shooting, though. I'm not technically part of the main force, but us stalkers see more goblins than anyone else, really. They keep sneaking in and out (they know to use the blizzards as well), ambushes, trying to get the jump on us. I killed my first one earlier this year, and then two more. You were right about that. I thought I was going to have some kind of come-to-Risen moment, shed tears. I didn't really feel anything, though. Except... Well. I felt kinda satisfied. I learned a lot from you. My shooting's good.

The ammo helps, though. I've still got the same crossbow you gave me when we were little: Bronze alloy with bismuth, chicken-bone in it from my first kill. But the ammo is something else. Our Captain makes a lot of it. She's nice, real easy to like. They call her "Cap'n Scrim", whatever that means, but she sure works bone something mean. Perfectly balanced bolts, they're a dream to shoot. I almost feel bad for these goblins. The reports are all doom n' gloom, but out there in the snow, we are untouchable. Me and the rest of the stalkers, they never see us until it's too late. It's a rush, honestly.

Anyway. Write back soon, yeah? I worry a little about the reports from home, it sounds pretty grim out there. But rest assured, me and the hubby n' kids are safe, and we all love you guys a ton.

Love,  
Cero1