

Luis Garza

Another World

April 17th, 1969

Dear Martha,

The months have gone, and I still hold my breath that it will end soon. The sky here is one of the things we must carry. The sky is not blue like in New Jersey—it is gloomy gray. Though the dirt becomes darker, like the nights, it still follows us wherever we march. The detonation of mines has been frequent, but the loudest thunder hasn't kept me from sleeping. Spending a lot of time in a foxhole can drive anyone elsewhere. I always kept your letters wrapped in plastic. Thinking of *home* there has kept me going. How I long to embrace the beauty of *home*!

I got your pebble and letter almost two weeks ago. It's here with me—something that you once held. It's been my good-luck pebble. You sent me the inspiration in which this milky white pebble is ordained to. It calms me down, especially during the marches. I safely hold it in my mouth—tasting the sea salt. It means a lot to me. This pebble almost always reminds me of you—and now it's a part of me. I'm thankful for that.

Last night one of my men was killed. *I* killed him. The vestiges of another world so far away led me to neglect him. I was instructed to be aware and protect the seventeen pairs of boots that follows behind me. Yet I have also been trained to treat my men as equal units. Tears painfully burned my cheeks, everyone noticed, but what did it matter? Ted is dead and there are certain things I will never have. I'm not their leader. What could I have done?

I decided to rid myself of anything that reminded me of home. So, I burned your pictures and letters. I'm so sorry. I've spent so much time *pretending* about... No more fantasies—I must keep my head in the war. I'm here—in hell. But I want to survive. And I want my men to survive. God, I want to go home.

Today's march greeted us with trenching rain. My helmet and poncho got heavier and heavier. But most of all, the mud under my boots came alive—It felt a strong attraction to my legs, the more I lifted my legs the more the mud held them. Now this may sound weird, but during the march—I thought I saw you there. From a distance through the pouring rain, you were there ahead of me just standing. I could never miss your gray eyes—they were steady and sad. Your look told me to keep going. And then you slowly disappeared into the rain. Wasn't that odd?

I guess I will end here—it's nighttime some of my men are waking up. I have yet to plan the upcoming march. Let me know if anything exciting happens at Mount Sebastian. I hope to see you soon.

Love Always,
Jimmy Cross

PS I now know what you mean by things coming together but also separating.

**Poem note: This piece was inspired by Tim O'Brien's *The Thing They Carried*. Jimmy Cross is one of the characters who fought in the Vietnam War.