

Skipped the Censor

1-3-45 9:19pm

Izzy!

I'm in Japan. I'm really in Japan! Shall I tell you about my adventures?

Well. The boat was boring. As you can imagine. It was very grandiose, my hateful father being a diplomat and all, but still...

Our ship docked this morning, and we went straight to our house, which is *tiny*, and has extremely narrow stairs up to the second story. I've already fallen up them once, and I'm not *at all* looking forward to falling down them, which I guarantee you I will. My bedroom is no bigger than the cabins on the ship, and those weren't particularly big, let me tell you. There's no bed, I have to sleep on a mattress on the floor, but it's actually quite comfortable (that's where I am now).

I've got a box of postcards that my father had leftover from somewhere, and for some reason they got put in with our luggage. So I'll use them to write to you, since they're rationing paper for the war.

I've run out of space.

Miss you heaps,
Alice

26-3-45 12:42pm

Dear Izzy,

You're going to be getting quite a few postcards from me. I always have so much to tell you, and I keep seeing things that remind me of you, or things that make me think, "I must tell Izzy that". But then I remember that I can't. And this makes me sad.

I'm in Japan, Izzy, and to be honest, I don't even know why, apart from the fact that it's something to do with my father's job. It's starting to sink in. But I'm coming back soon (I hope).

It hurts me to know that you're in pain because of me. But I don't want this to be a clean break. Because even if a clean break does heal faster, we don't need to heal. As soon as I'm home, everything will be better. But if it's a clean break, it will hurt when I come home too. Yes, it hurts a lot, but we can get through this. I believe so anyway.

And of course I will remember you! You're impossible to forget, so don't worry about that. God though, I miss you so much. So much more than anything else.

Lots of love,
Alice

19-4-45 5:04pm

Izzy,

I'm going to *die*.

I went into a shop by myself today, and *everyone* was speaking Japanese and I couldn't understand *anything*.

I get such strange looks everywhere I go, because there are *no* white faces here. Since there's a war on, they're *very* suspicious of us. We have to carry ID cards everywhere, in case they try to arrest us. It would be worse if we were in the capital though, but we're living in the port, really close to a city called Hiroshima, so the people here are more used to strange-looking foreigners wandering around. There's also been a lot of bombing in the capital, so I'm quite glad we don't live there.

My father has to take the streetcars into the centre of the city each day to sit in his office and send important telegrams. I don't understand why he couldn't do that from New Zealand. I asked him, and he said, "It's none of your bloody business".

I hate my father. He forces us to the other side of the world and won't even tell us why. I can't believe he's putting us through this. Actually, I can, because he doesn't give a damn about either me or my mum.

Oh hell. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say all that. I'd better stop writing now.

Love from
Alice

31-4-45 10:35am

Dear Izzy,

In reply to your question, no, I don't go to school. My father wanted me to, but my mum said, "Don't be absurd, she isn't going to understand anything". Once I've learned more

of the language I might, but for the moment Mum is trying to tutor me, which isn't working too well. I mean, I love my mum, but she didn't do very well at school herself ... and she's not completely with it all the time, which worries me. They had another one of their damned fights over it, yelling and cursing at each other, and completely forgetting I exist. I hate it. The annoying thing is, though, I can't go outside the house. But I suppose it's better that way, because I feel so foreign every time I do. And, I've probably already told you this, but my house is tiny. There are two bedrooms upstairs (mine and my parents') and a lounge and kitchen downstairs. There's also a traditional Japanese room that my father has filled up with boxes of our things, because he doesn't know what to do with it.

Anyway, thanks very much for your letter, it arrived yesterday. The post was sitting on the table when I came down to breakfast, and when I saw your letter there I got *so* excited, because letters from Izzy are amazing and they make me 'smile inside', to use one of your phrases.

Got to go now, Mum's calling me.
Alice

17-5-45 11:18pm

Izzy-chan eh, (it's Japanese for 'to Izzy' – I'm learning, see!)

Guess what?! I made a new friend yesterday! She lives three houses down from me, and her father is a fisherman, and her mother a seamstress. Her name is Aika, and she is sixteen, like us. She speaks almost no English, and you already know that my Japanese is awful. So we were talking in a kind of mess of broken Japanese, broken English, and mostly wild hand gestures! I can only see her on Sundays, because she has to go to school every other day. She also has to work in a factory – Japan is really short of workers, because of the war. She has to get up at some ridiculous hour of the morning, like my father, to catch a streetcar to her school. From what I could tell, she was really lucky to be able to go to such a good school, as her parents are really poor.

Your father said you weren't clever enough? Isabelle Johnson, that's nonsense and you know it. You're the most intelligent person I know, so don't you dare listen to him. You are clever and beautiful, and if your parents are too blind to see that then it's too bad for them. By the way, good luck with Matthew... I'm sure you'll be fine, try not to get too stressed, and be amazing... not hard, as you are already.

Lots of love from
Alice

18-6-45 3:51pm

Izzy,

That was the longest letter ever in the history of letters. In all seriousness.

Tomorrow I'm going on a trip to Miyajima, which is an island just off the coast, so I'm quite excited about that.

You wrote in your letter that it was easier for me; that I was experiencing new things and meeting new people. You can't be serious, can you? Every day is exactly the same. I get up at the same time, I eat breakfast at the same time, I see the same people every single day. It's just like your life, except I have no friends to lean on. You've got Matthew and the group at school, but all I have is me to keep me going. It's not easier for me.

I'm in a place where people give me the filthiest looks just for the sheer fact that I'm a gaijin – a foreigner. If I make a mistake, it's multiplied a million times because I'm not one of them. And it's worse because however hard I try to fit in with their culture, my father doesn't want anything to do with them. He hates them and curses and calls them horrible names, then my mum tells him to stop it and they fight, and I hate it.

Some days, I want to burst into tears and just cry for hours. But I can't. Not without you to make me feel better. How can you think that I don't miss you in New Zealand?

God, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. Everything seems to be coming out of me today.

I have to go now.
Alice

10-7-45 7:27pm

Dearest Izzy,

Calm. Breathe. Smile. It's going to be OK. Forgive and forget.

So, you said something that you didn't think about, something that wasn't too nice. But everyone does it. Everyone makes mistakes. And I know that you are too great a friend to throw away over a few silly comments. I know in my last postcard I was a bit... well, not angry, but you know what I mean. But I calmed down, and I smiled. And I realised that you're my best friend. So don't worry. Remember – Alice doesn't get angry for a long time. Alice forgives and doesn't hold grudges. OK?! First and foremost, you are my friend. You'd have to do something really bad for me to not be able to forgive you. You've helped me so much, Izzy, sent me so many words of reassurance. I don't know what I'd do without you. You are my rock.

I was talking to Aika last Sunday and I was telling her all about you. She thinks it's really odd that you have a garden! Japanese houses don't have gardens.

Oh, and I'm sure your mum will get better soon, don't worry. It's only a cold, yes? People get sick all the time. She'll be alright. I'll send her magic get-well thoughts.

Lots of love,
Alice

6-8-45 8:09am

To my dearest Izzy,

This is my message for you: stay strong. Because you *are* strong, in fact, you're the strongest person I know. You know you are. You can get through this, OK? All you need to know is that I care about you and I care if you're not alright. I'll always be here for you.

I know it's hard to lose someone, especially someone like your mum. But I bet she never stopped loving you, even when she grew wings and flew away. She'd be so proud of you for picking up and carrying on. And even though she's gone now, I'm sure – absolutely positive – that she watches you when the stars come out.

It's early morning, here, and it's nice. The air's clearer, not so polluted, and it's got that crisp morning feeling to it. Because when the sun comes up properly, it's *hot*. Pant-like-a-dog hot. Japanese summers are *a lot* hotter than summers back home, I can tell you. I think it's because –

1-10-45 I don't know what time it is, early afternoon, I think.

Izzy,

Jesus, what am I going to write?

We have poured our hearts out, onto paper, but today, all my words have deserted me. I've seen things in the past month that I never ever thought I'd see.

Nobody knows what happened. My mum says... She says they dropped a bomb.

But it was unlike anything the world's ever seen before.

There was no warning. Nothing. My father's gone. I ... I watched Aika slip away before my eyes.

I could describe to you what I've witnessed, but it would fill up a hundred of these postcards. But it's made me realise that I'm so, so, so lucky to be alive. So many people aren't. I'm not sure if the post is running yet, it might be from the port. If it is I'll send this, and the last postcard I wrote, today.

But with everything that's happened, I just want to say, Izzy...

I love you.

I was so scared I'd never get the chance to tell you that.

All my heart,
Alice

On the sixth of August 1945, at 8:15am, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

These are the postcards that skipped the censor.