

Alex,

The first time I saw you, you were just a tiny little thing in Mom's lap. She was still living in Boston back then and Dad let me come visit for a few weeks. I held you in my arms every day while I was there until Dad sent me off to boarding school. After that, I didn't see you again until Cambridge. It was only a few years, but you had grown so much. But you still had the same HUGE smile. You're always smiling. Every time I see you, you get bigger and smarter and happier, especially since you started transitioning. You've always been such a happy kid. I love that about you. You're always eager to explore or play new games or meet new friends. Every time I'm with you, I feel like a kid again. Please never lose that part of yourself.

I don't know what I'm trying to say with this letter. I've never been great with talking about my feelings, but I hope you know how much I love you and that I cherish the time we spend together. I know we don't get to see each other nearly often enough. I'm sorry for that. I can only imagine how tough it's been for you to go through all that moving from place to place, the separation, your transition, all during a war! Somehow you still stay so happy throughout it all. You're so strong. I hope you know that. I struggle to stay happy these days, but every time we hang out, you help me see some silver linings in my life again. I love that about you.

I guess what I'm really trying to say is sorry. Sorry I couldn't be around more. Sorry I couldn't keep you safer than this. Sorry I couldn't be the brother you needed me to be. I feel like I failed at that. Dad raised me to be a soldier, not a brother. It's too late for me to back out of that life now. Please don't make the same mistakes I did. Please don't try to find happiness in Dad's approval. Please don't try to find purpose in fighting. Those are not paths to happiness. I'm sorry I didn't realize that sooner.

You might not see me again for a while. Might be months or even years. I'm really not sure. When you're older, I hope you'll look back at this moment in history and understand why I had to leave for so long. I hope you'll remember the fun times we shared in spite of it all. I hope you'll remember all our hikes up the mountain and all those times we spent out on the boat (the stars are even brighter out at sea!) I hope you'll remember that I love you and I'm watching out for you no matter where I am.

I love this picture of us from last summer. It's from the day we helped Mom plant all the sunflowers in the garden. You painted the whole picture in your head then sent it to me on my birthday. We both look so happy in it. It's my favorite picture. I hope you like it too.

You're the best sister I could ever ask for. Stay strong and keep smiling until we meet again.

Big love,
Soren

P.S. I promise we'll go out on the boat again next time I'm back ;)