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Head Quarters 55th Regt. Mass. Infantry.
Palatka, Florida April 9th 1864.

My Dear Eaton,

The rain again! It comes down in floods when it comes at all. The days & weeks pass by with little variety and great dullness. Now and then a picket is gobbled up, or we take a Secesh prisoner or Ind, or their Cavly. [Cavalry] come around & we turn out & exchange salutations. My Regt. [Regiment] is still in three portions & only half of it with me – a great injury of course to its efficiency. The Companies here are in good condition and – in spite of little opportunity for drill in the last two months – they are said to march, handle their rifles and tin better than any here. But the great outrage of withholding their pay continues, and the distress of the men is getting almost too great for endurance. Here is a Regt. enlisted by the written promise of the Sect. [Secretary] of War to Gov. Andrew, that they should have the pay & rations & treatment of white troops, that promise being repeated to them by us all, & to this day not made good. I am sometimes almost in despair and am indignant and sometimes think evil of all mankind when I see and feel this gross injustice. The men are dying by disease & bullets. Their families are often refused admittance to the

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almshouses for their color, and in some cases that I have been informed of, their wives have proved unfaithful and have been reduced to infamy from destitution. Can flesh & blood stand these things? I do not know how my men have so patiently & nobly performed every task & duty assigned to them so far – but this they cannot continue long unless they are righted. And here are men who talk largely of their efforts for colored men, & go to work ostensibly to get the pay for them, but rally behind their own detestable axes. Friend, there is much that one sees in the army, to make him either a knave or as ugly and suspicious as a wild beast.

I do not know if I have ever written you of one difficulty I have had, from an unfortunate selection of a few of my officers, a misfortune that other cold. [colored] Regt. have had even more than mine. Col Hallowell who is as fine a man as ever lived, could be too easily persuaded or [unclear word] sometimes, & he accepted two or three utterly incompetent men & others who just accepted for missions here in order to get out of the ranks. The last of course were men devoid of honor or principle & I have had to hold a tight rein over them. Eventually I hope to be rid of them, but if there had not been true excellent officers to the Regt. to

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redeem these, I do not know how the Regt. could have been kept in order. I have recommended one of our Cold. [Colored] Sergeants for a Commission, – a fine gentlemanly efficient man he is. This will disgust two or three who will probably leave to my great relief. The Adjutant you know should be a most efficient & accomplished

officer & gentleman. Adj. Hallowell was such, but he was never strong enough to join to the army, & left us last Octbr. [October] not resigning however until very recently. This has obliged me to perform most of the labor that Comdg. [Commanding] officers usually have nothing to do with. I hope soon to have a first rate Adj. who can run that Dept. properly. Col. Hallowell's leaving left one injurious effect on the Regt. in causing some to think that they might be deserted by those who had promised them so & so, & to whom they naturally looked for address. They got a notion lately that I was going to resign & some of them said if I left they wd. [would] break their guns & never do a day's duty until they were paid – so I was told by one of the line officers. I assured them that I should not leave on my own accord until I had seen this thing through.

We get few letters or papers & those are far between, at this out of the world place.

Write as often and as fully as you can.

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I do not know if you are interested in my domestic matters as I write them, but the fact is that having scarcely any one to talk or write Confidentially with, I have to put these things in black & white sometimes. You must not infer that I am living a discontented life. I do not indeed like the life & wd. [would] gladly be out of it if I thought it were right to leave, but I usually pass the time well enough by keeping busy or by enjoying all that is pleasant & amusing around me. I wish you & Emily could see my boy Jo perform. Everybody is taken with him, he is so smart & droll. Just now he ran out to get his blanket, that he has forgotten in the rain. He brought it in well soaked “Jo, what does j-a-c-k-a-s-s spell?” Ans [answer]: “Jackass.” “It is somebody that dont know enough to go in when it rains.” “My blanket is a jackass, then,” says the young rascal. “A blanket is not somebody is it?” (Jo.) “A jackass aint anybody.” – I just called him in to say “Jo, what time is it?” “Don't know, Sir.” “Don't tell me you don't know.” He [word unclear] rushes in to the adjutant's office, & returns saying “Five minutes past two, Sir.”

The man who takes care of my horses is a fine manly fellow, who used to be with Col. McCollough in an Ill. Cavly. Regt., & who rode by master's side at Ft. Donelson, Shiloh & Corinth. He used to tend trotting horses out west – always used to have some fast horses at the Annual Fair at St. Louis. He is a treasure to me.

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Sat eve.

This afternoon Col Barton 48th NY Comdg [Commanding] gave a dinner to the Comdg officers of the Post. Mrs Col Barton & Mrs Dr Mulfourd, the former very bright & pleasing (si placet), the latter rather handsome but vulgar – at any rate, weak. Wine there. Col Montgomery & Capt Breese of the gun boat Ottawa & Mr Jos Hoxie of NY City – arrive presently. The Band of the 48th N.Y. gave us magnificent music in the garden after dinner, which with pleasant Company the orange blossoms & flowers, made quite an episode and life at Palatka. This eve has been passed by the underlined and a quick game of whist at Col McDonald's 47th N.Y.

The Maple Leaf was blown up by a rebel torpedo passing down the river from here last week. She was the boat in which we came to this Dept. last summer, & I had been on her with troops last year at N.C. A fair Secessionist across the river – married six & forty years – has just made me a fine palmetto hat. But no trimmings to be had for it. Love to Sister Samantha & to you all.

Yrs A S H [Alfred S. Hartwell]
To Lucien Eaton