Rosine sat in the back of the wagon with Michael and Gunther. It gave her a strange and rather morbid sense of security. She had always felt comfortable around the brothers, but she hadn’t expected being with their *dead bodies* to be the same. With a start, Rosine realized that she hadn’t opened the letter from Michael. In some ways, she didn’t want to, but she wanted to know what the last thing Michael was going to say to her was.

Rosine’s hand reached shakily toward the envelope lying on the ground beside her. She pulled the second letter out. *It’s rather long,* Rosine thought mildly. She looked down and began to read:

*“August 13th, 1914*

*“Dearest Rosine,*

*“You cannot even begin to know how thrilled I was to receive your last letter. I hope that you are doing well, since the last time you wrote me. Gunther, you will be glad to know, was assigned to tending the horses, and the two of us were driving one of the ambulance carts.*

*“You’re probably wondering why I say ‘were’. Well, I’ll start at the beginning. The British cavalry attacked us a few days ago, at dawn. They ambushed us, but we killed every one of them, or at least forced them to surrender. All the horses were killed except two, which Gunther wasn’t happy about, but what are you going to do?*

*“Well, we took the two horses. There’s a big black one and a smaller brown one. The black on isn’t that spectacular, but the brown one… there’s something special about him. I can’t exactly put my finger on it, but Gunther says that he must’ve been trained by an exceptional person.*

*“We had them pulling the ambulance cart that we’d been assigned to. It was fairly easy to do. Then one day, the Captain gave us orders that we were going to attack the British on foot. He assigned Gunther to stay at camp and take care of the horses, and me to go and fight. It would have been one of the few times I’ve been in the middle of the fight, and the only time without Gunther. I was ready. I was going to be brave and fight.*

*“But Gunther was too scared for me. He begged the Captain to let me stay behind with him, or to let him go instead. He even told the Captain that I’m good with the horses! Ha! But seriously, he thinks that I was too young to fight. I know, I know. That’s what you said. But I* wanted *to go. I* wanted *to prove that I was brave, that I was a man. But Gunther wouldn’t have it. He wouldn’t let me go.*

*“So the day we set out, he ignored his orders to remain behind, and chased after us. I had no idea he was coming. He brought the two horses. He rode the big black one, and had the brown one running alongside him. They caught up to us, and when he was beside me, he grabbed me by my backpack and swung me up onto the brown horse. I was terrified. I thought that an enemy soldier had caught me. I wasn’t until I saw Gunther’s face that I knew it was him.*

*“I didn’t really protest, because deep down inside, I was relieved that I didn’t have to fight. We rode for miles without speaking, and rested only when we got to the safety of a windmill. We hid the horses safely inside, and we’re now resting in the loft in some hay.*

*“Gunther said that we should sleep, but I’m more awake than ever now. He says that we’re heading for Italy, that we’ll be safe there. His biggest fear, I think, is that we’ll be found. He’s afraid that they’ll catch us, and punish us because we deserted. But we won’t be. I know it.”*

Rosine almost choked. “Oh, Michael,” she said, stroking his mud-coated hair. “How wrong you were.” She read on:

*“As soon as we get to a postal service, I’ll mail this, so it might be a while. Once we get to a stable place, I’ll write again. Don’t reply to this one; it won’t get to me. Besides, I don’t want us to get traced.*

*“I hope that the war doesn’t last too much longer. All I want to do is get home to you. Don’t forget- we’re going to have a big wedding and everyone is going to be there. I hope you’re working on picking out a dress, and planning it. I can’t wait to see how it turns out.*

*“I wish you and everyone at home the best, as does Gunther. (He says hello. He also says to tell you to ‘look after that horse.’ He says you know which one. I don’t know what he’s talking about, but I’m guessing you do. If not, please don’t kill me!*

*“See you very soon.*

*“Love,*

*“Michael”*

Rosine thought about what Michael had written. She had picked out her dress. She had it picked out from the time of Michael’s first letter. She and her friends Arabella and Sarah had been working on planning the wedding for ages, too. Rosine was hit by another wave of sadness when she realized that she’d have to tell them that the wedding was off.

Rosine sighed. She told herself sternly that she had to get a grip on herself before she returned home. She frowned, trying to figure out how to get the bodies home. Then she remembered that she had her horse. Remembering what Gunther had taught her about hooking up carriages, she put the harness on the horse and climbed into the driver’s seat. “Okay, boy,” she said. “Go!” The horse took off at a fast trot. Rosine scrambled to keep the reins steady and steer.

As the horse trotted easily up a hill, she waved to a couple of boys named Holden and Jürgen as she passed them. They stared at her as if she was crazy. And… she probably was. She was having a hard time processing what was going on, and she figure that when she got home she’d probably faint for exhaustion and not wake up for a week. When Rosine finally pulled up outside her house, she was barely able to climb out of the wagon. Her father Conrad and mother Lilli rushed outside, having heard the horse.

Lilli ran over to Rosine and grabbed her by the shoulders as she nearly staggered to the ground. “Rosine!” Lilli exclaimed. “Are you okay? What’s wrong? Why do you have this carriage?” Rosine tried to answer, but when she opened her mouth, all that came out was a strangled cry. Conrad came over and took Rosine by the shoulders, guiding her into the small cottage on the corner. Rosine’s arm scraped the moss-covered stone and a small pool of blood welled up. Conrad rushed her inside quickly.

Lilli walked toward the wagon hesitantly, looking concerned. She stood on her toes to peer inside. When she saw Michael and Gunther, her eyes widened, and she took a step back, her hand over her heart. She leaned with her back to the carriage and tried to calm her shaking shoulders. When she finally caught her breath, she looked at the sky and whispered, “Oh those poor boys. Why did they ever have to go to war?”