

St. Romain,
28 September.

Dear Family:

The die is cast. I told Miss Ely to-day that I'd stick to this Division as long as she wanted. That means another three months anyway. I hated to do it, (and yet I love it here) - but the greatest trouble with work of this sort is with people's with personal preferences - plausible ones. So I kowtowed. It really was too inconvenient, to tell her at three o'clock I'd do anything she wanted and at six to call it off, because something I wanted turned up. Now I'm hoping that Paris will turn down Mr. Randall's request, so it won't be put up to me. I'm more calm and contented in my own mind now it's settled. I don't want the question to arise again, shall I be free to choose. So you can just go right on picturing me in this Division, perhaps in this very town, for the rest of 1918 anyway. By that time there may not be any Front. Oh, why couldn't Miss Ely have put off her tour of inspection just 10 more days!

I think I haven't told you much about St. Romain. It's a very picturesque little hill town, and the hill goes the other way - the main square, where our tent is pitched, is at the bottom between two long hills. There's only one real street running through the town. The others are just twisted alleys, with unexpected openings on old cow-sheds or wood-piles, or else quite casual little lanes about 100 feet long, leading to three or four houses tucked away out of sight. Everything is built of stone, mostly very old and crumbling, with mosses and weeds in the chinks and on the lovely old red-tiled roofs. There are no "stores," but there are a few queer old shops on the main street - places where you can get string bags and buttons and charcoal. A little river runs through the valley, cutting the town at right angles, and there is a public laundry built just under the bridge - not a laundry where you leave your clothes to be washed, but one where you do them yourself - if you happen to be a French woman - or an American soldier! It's just an open shed, with a stone floor, and a row of long tables to scrub on. The women wash the clothes around in the stream with long poles, then hoist them onto the tables and scrub the nap off with a big stiff brush. The soldiers wash there, too. It's certainly interesting to see the combination of American boys and French customs.

When I first came, I was billeted in a dear little cottage - two rooms and a loft. I had one room, the family had the other, and the loft was filled with our boys. That first night when I arrived, I was awfully tired and went to bed at half-past seven - not to sleep, though, for there was such a lot of talking and laughing outside that I couldn't. I didn't mind. I love to overhear the boys talk. At about 8 o'clock I heard some one say something about "an American woman." Then I heard, "What! An American woman here!" Then in awful French they asked the little Madam where I was. She said I'd gone to bed - very tired. That's the last I heard. Those great big rough boys tip-toed and whispered the rest of the evening, I believe, they were so afraid of disturbing me! I told them next day what I thought of them. They just grinned.

That was a nice billet: a big white-washed room with colored paper advertisements, baskets and brackets on the walls, a big red, lace-covered feather bed, and a turkey-red curtain to pull across the window in the door, which opened right on the little yard, 10 feet from the main road. I loved the room, and the landlady who gave me really good coffee in the morning, and her little four-year-old Rose, and especially the "hearted casement curtained red", but Oh my! the bed! It wasn't a bed; it was a hole with nobby sides. I folded up a couple of blankets and filled it up enough to make sleeping possible, but it wasn't comfy. Then, too, the place was so damp that the red tiles were always discolored in spots and the sheets felt moist and cold. Besides, it was over a five minutes' walk from the Tent, all the way up-hill. After four days I moved.

My new place is comfortable, but queer. It's a little pink stucco house, with light blue blinds and door, not a stone's throw from the Y, overlooking the river and the curve of the main street. The first story is just a cellar. You enter at the second, up a flight of stone steps. The height is good - not a bit damp. There's a funny little neglected garden in front, and grape-vines on all the walls. You enter a little room, which has probably been used for a kitchen. There's a big fire-place in it. Two rooms open from it, one rather small and the other a fair size with a big bed, a closed-up fire-place, dark brown paper, plush picture frames with faded photographs, a dirty green table cover, and shabby lace mantel and bed coverings. It has one nice window, looking almost due south, and the sun comes in all day - when there's any sun to come. That's my room. I've banished all the questionable drapery and ornaments, so that now it's rather bare, but clean. There's no one else in the house. I have it all to myself. A funny little old Belgian woman comes in to