

Letter No. 39

7th January 1919

Dear Family:

Once, months ago, a canteen worker, whose name I'll leave out, criticized my work. She said: "It doesn't pay to do your best, they'll stick you with something you don't want." I don't think any comment is necessary. I was so disgusted I sat up nights thinking up things I could do. But oh dear! There is as much truth in her conclusion as there was rotten mess in her morals. It looks now as though I were doomed to stay put right here in St. Romain until I go home. It's not that I don't like St. Romain - I've simply loved my work here as I guess you know, but I have no wanted to be a little more "in" things. A tiny little village in the S.O.S. doesn't seem like a part in the war at all. It was awfully hard to promise Miss Wily I'd not try to change until January - but I've always had January before me as a time limit. And it's been even harder to get letters from almost everyone I know over here - they are all in Germany now or up along the old front. They've welcomed and cared for the returning prisoners and gone forward with our boys and done all sorts of exciting things, while I have just sat in this little peanut and cooked down restless fits. Christmas was a milestone - the climax of all my efforts here. I've watched the bulletin boards break, the window cloth tear, the tent sag, and the flags fade with the comfortable feeling - of well, it's only for a few weeks - days - more, then it will all come down anyway. We have such crowds here now that nothing lasts. I'm surprised the heavy counter hasn't given way. Tables and benches break and even the tent itself tears. It's a continual question of beginning again, - always in everything, both physical, mental and spiritual. It gets a little wearing, but I've always seen January and the fresh inspiration of a reassignment ahead.

Yesterday I went to see Mr. Helms for his endorsement of my application. We'd talked about it before and I knew he didn't want me to go, but it's always been a more or less understood thing that I might. Well - he put it pretty strongly. He said I'd earned the right to go and that if I insisted upon it he would do his best for me, but that I would have to insist for it would be with his protest rather than his consent. He said of course that the work here was as important as anywhere (I suppose it is) and he added some very nice things about the value of my part in it. Perhaps it was the flattery of having him want me to stay that finished me - but the upshot of the matter was that I've agreed to stay put right here, unless, after I've had my week off and get rested, I find I really can't do it. Of course that won't happen, I can do anything; it's just that I don't want to.

You see, when you boil the matter down, it just comes to a conflict between my own personal wishes on one side and a whole lot of things on the other, so there really wasn't any other way out of it; but I was so disappointed I nearly cried right there in the office! I didn't though. Father would have known how near the edge I was, but I hope I bluffed Mr. Helms.

It's so unreasonable of me too. If I had come to the end of my time here, and the Chief had said: "Here's your pass, now clear out, the sooner the better" - I'd have nearly died of shame, and yet because he told me I'd made good and he wanted to keep me I felt pretty nearly as cut up - only differently.

There's one consolation though; since I've got to stay in this Division I'm thankful it's St. Romain and not St. Aignan. We know what mud is here, but after all we're so blanting we drain off pretty well. St. Aignan is flat, and oh my! And we're pretty homelike here in spots. It's just a great old madhouse there; I'd be in a real one if I had to live there. Every time, all Fall, the restlessness of wanting to go North has attacked me I've comforted myself with the thought of how much worse it would be if I had had to go to St. Aignan that time in August when I came so near it.

I'm trying to plan my vacation now. It's difficult to know just what to do all by yourself. I wouldn't take it at all if it weren't that I know I'll need it before I get through. Dorothy Young writes from Nice for me to join her and Mr. Helms says he'll give me a pass to Paris, but I'd rather see Paris than anything, if I could only find out where she is. And it's difficult to see just when to fit it in. I can't bear to leave before our own boys do, and yet when the new division moves in there will be