

[Mérielcart] 29 August

My dear Bazel,

There was a remark in one of your previous letters that I nearly forgot to scold you for - about the school absorbing you and your not needing any other interests.

However I am sure it is not true and you didn't mean it. I believe you have an interest in me, for one, else you would never be so good to me. You see how hopeless it is pretending to scold you: I simply can't do it - you are such a dear, good girl and I love you quite frantically. Yet I haven't shown it in my letters lately, have I? But that is because since I have been a sergeant I have been rather intimate with

our company officers, and I simply hate writing letters for them to censor. But now I have hit on the idea of handing my letters to my platoon commander, and he kindly franko them in my presence, without reading them. So now I can write more freely, and if my letters are censored by some stranger down at the base, I don't care about that. I don't want to write about the old war, only my own private affairs, and especially you. You write to me very contritely that you have been guilty of being loved by another man, and you expect me to be very angry and jealous. I am sorry if I disappoint you, but I don't feel that way about ^{it} you at all. It seems to me the most natural thing

in the world that the poor boy should fall in love with you, and I have nothing but sympathy for him. Being young, he would probably not take it very badly, but I know what the same fate would mean to me. As for blaming you, I don't understand why I should. You don't. As far as I can gather, you were simply your natural self in the presence of a friend. You don't accuse yourself of giving him undue encouragement, but even if you did, what right have I to blame you? On the contrary, I want to make it clear to you that I have no right to criticize anything you may do. I have told you already my candid opinion that this is going to be a very long war yet, and you will be acting wisely if you do not

choose to tie yourself to wait till I come back. That of course must be exactly as your heart dictates, but you must not think yourself under any obligation to me. I believe I am scoring unfairly as it is, because you think of me as a hero and are afraid to hurt or disappoint me. My love would not be worthy of the name if I did not think of your happiness before my own, so I really want you to do just what you think best in such cases. All the same, I have no doubt there will be plenty more of them, and if they are really a source of trouble or annoyance to you, and you would prefer to be wearing an engagement ring, I need hardly say that I would be pleased and proud to send you one. I don't

think I have said all I meant to say, in the way I meant to say it, but perhaps you will understand.

[We are still in the same rather dirty, dull little village, undergoing solid training. There is some rather pretty country to one side of the village, but this locality was chosen not for its beauty but for its resemblance to the country where we are going, as regards hills, woods etc. I expect my next letter will be written on the way to the front. The same four of us that went to St Omer last week had a very enjoyable outing on Sunday. We hired a heavy old farm cart and drove about six miles to a small town. ^{Alberville?} It was a pretty place, with some interesting ruins and an old chateau and

church dating from the 12th century, but we spent most of the time arranging for dinner, buying eggs at one place, sausage at another, wine at another, getting the eggs cooked at another - for the alleged restaurant where we actually had the meal would not even boil eggs for us. It was good fun though, and we thoroughly enjoyed the dinner and the drive home in the evening.

We have just got word of Rumania's entry, also vague rumours of a naval victory. The first item opens up great possibilities, although I rather expect to see a long struggle before the Russians get an effective win - that is, come within striking distance of Constantinople.

However, it is certainly the best news we have had for many months, and if the news of the big naval victory is also true, it makes the end practically certain. If only these Huns could see it and give way!

I have had two letters from you, the latest dated July 4th, also a letter from your mother, together with the parcel you left for her to forward. The toffee was as acceptable as ever, and the cheese was a splendid idea. I am keeping it for hard times. Thank you very much for all your goodness, dear. With best wishes and much love from
Bea.

acv