

Hey girl:

11 July 1944 3:30 PM

I'm continuing immediately after finishing the letter about the powers that be. I preferred to have that in a little letter by itself.

I haven't told you about the special duty that I was given in Rome, viz. checking on the military courtesy of the men in my division. Ordinarily this type of job is not given to a medical officer but when the colonel told me that he had to appoint someone to the job for the next day, I volunteered for it, since I wanted to hear Heifitz and also wanted to see Blithe Spirit, by Noel Coward. Of course, the taking of names of men who fail to salute is not a nice thing at best, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I gave the men every opportunity in the world to salute me, looking them directly in the eye as tho I was expecting them to salute, and making sure that they were fully aware that I looked at them before I would stop them for failing to salute. In almost every case they admitted sheepishly that they knew they were wrong, and would invariably salute me after I had finished taking their names etc. If I remember rightly it will cost them \$3 each for failing to salute an officer. The shame of it is that our division is really the only division on the streets of Rome that salutes at all. Members of the air corps never salute, and the same can be said for rear echelon troops of the infantry. The army earned a profit on me for the first day that I have been in it, altho I have often felt that I earned my keep.

Of course, despite the fact that I was on duty, I was privileged to do anything I wished. I first stopped at the vegetable market which is a tremendous thing at the edge of the city. I was curious about the variety of food which could be bought there. Apparently the place is chiefly a wholesale market altho many individual purchasers come there to buy. In fact the place is tremendously crowded. The Street is extremely wide at this point, at least twice as wide as Spring Grove Avenue at its widest, so that there is plenty of room, and yet there are so many people there that it looks like the sidewalk of Findlay St. Market on Saturday night. There seemed to be a tremendous amount of food, but after all Rome is a big city and I later learned that it is almost impossible to get food. In the way of vegetables, there were only a few potatoes, large quantities of some green vegetable which we don't have in the states, and many tomatoes, mostly of a small variety. Fruits were a bit more plentiful, with an abundance of apricots, less of plums, only a few pears and oranges. I learned that they haven't seen a banana in Rome for 4 years, and the same holds true for California oranges. People come to the market on those tremendously crowded street cars, bicycles, carts, and afoot. If you're a civilian in Rome these days you have to do plenty of walking.

Later on in the city, and I was in just about every spot in that city looking for soldiers to salute, I saw tremendous lines of people waiting at various little shops and outside vegetable stands trying to get their little share. You know how excitable the Italian people are. These lines would really show it. The rear half of the line was orderly, but instead of continuing as a single line, the line thickened with people as it neared the stand, until when the stand was reached it was surrounded by a mass of people all pawing the vegetables and all trying to be waited on at the same time. The proprietor would be screaming at his customers and they would scream right back at him, tearing the greens from each others hands. If it was not so tragic it would have been quite funny. The same is true for wine as it is for fruits and vegetables. I don't know what they do for milk and meat. Of course, there is the ever present black market, which I understand does a thriving business in Rome, but this is far beyond the means of the average citizen.

After driving around a bit I decided to stop over and see that youngster with whom I had fallen in love at the synagogue. They had given me quite specific directions for finding the place so that I had no difficulty at all. However, when I arrived there I learned that he was out walking with his dad, so we drove around looking for him on the street but were unable to find him. We returned a bit later and then waited around for him. He recognized me just as soon as he saw me and that beautiful dimpled smile spread all over his face. I went into the house with them, since I was especially interested in seeing what these large apartment houses of Rome looked like on the inside. This was an attractive 6 story apartment building with an elevator (which worked only when the electricity is on, which is not so often in Rome these days) and the usual tile or marble floors. The apartment itself was very nice and their furniture was quite attractive of extremely modern design. Since the father spoke English fairly well, we got along tremendously well. Little Michelle, who is 3 but no larger than Elaine, put on a sky act for me, but still was friendly. I stayed for about 3/4 of an hour talking with them. Altho the father had previously invited me to dinner, he apologized that it was now impossible since he had been unable to get any food for the meal. I had brought some K rations with me to eat for dinner and supper, but decided that I would give it to them and go without the meals if necessary. I had also brought in some of the candy that Irv had sent me and also the chocolates which you had included in my food package. Altho ~~you~~ they objected to taking it, you should have seen their eyes light up when I insisted that I had brought it for them. I opened up the K rations so that I could show them what was in it, &

each item which I brought out would bring its individual expression of surprise and pleasure. They were so appreciative it did my heart good. These were not the type of people who beg. Everything about them insisted that this was true, their expensively furnished home, their sincerity, their culture. It was quite a pleasure just to be with them. The husband was a doctor of commerce, whatever that may be. I tried to ascertain whether it was equivalent to being a CPA back in the states, but couldn't make myself sufficiently well understood to find out. However, at the present time there is absolutely no work in his field, and he is thinking seriously of going to the U.S. if he can later. I took out the pictures of the kids and showed them the similarities between Elaine and Michelle, which they, too could see. Their hair is alike, with the single big curl you used to make on her head when I last saw her; they both have intensely black, mischievous, bug eyes which are always darting hither and yon and which they both know how to use to best advantage. Their little snub noses are also alike, but there the similarity ends. I am enclosing one of his pictures which they gave me and from which I think you will have no trouble seeing why I fell in love with him. The picture doesn't do his dimples justice, but otherwise is an extremely good likeness. If you will cover up the face from the tip of the nose down, you will be able to see the resemblance to Elaine.

I had a glass of liquer with them and after talking for a while longer I left to continue on my tour of duty. I had not intended eating any dinner, but the liquer began to affect me and I decided that I had better get some food into my stomach, so I went to the officers' restaurant. There, who should I run into but Leip, and with a hag, no less. And believe me she was a hag. I had arranged with him to meet him at the Officers' Red Cross, but despite the fact that I had stopped there three times, I never found him around. It seems that he had been with her all the time. She was pretty much of a mess, but I guess she gives him what he is after. He should have a good time for the next four days because he is staying at the Hotel in Rome.

I stopped over at the opera house to get a ticket for Heifitz but they were all out of them so instead I was going to go to the show. However, I was accosted by a Lt. Col. Sanitary Corps in front of the red cross. He wanted to know if I had seen the catacombs, which I hadn't. He then got me interested in going (He was working for a lift, since he had been unable to get a taxi to take him there) so we went on out. It lies outside of Rome on the old Appian way. When I say "It" I mean the main one in Rome. It seems that in the days gone by no one could be buried in the city limits, and as a result they buried these dead in underground crypts which were dug out as needed to put in more dead. It is this gradual addition of new little underground rooms for the sarcophagi that resulted in the tremendous underground passages. There are numerous ones all around the outskirts of Rome, but the one which I visited is the most famous and largest of these. It is 150 feet deep consisting of five floors or levels. It was first started in the 1st century AD and burial continued in it until the 9th Century. For some reason or other it was lost to the world until the 19th century when it was rediscovered sometime in the 1840s. Altho 45 miles of the tunnels have been uncovered, they are still in the process of uncovering more of them, even at the present time. We were taken around by a priest who spoke English rather well, but who had the most disconcerting habit of clearing his throat after every sentence, so that before it was over we were listening for the latter rather than paying attention to what he was telling us. We were charged 6 liters (6¢) a piece for the tour. The grounds are a formal garden which is quite beautiful. There are several stairs which lead down into the catacombs, and into the walls on either side of the earthen stairs are cemented pieces of former tombs. Those of the 1st century were identified by the greek inscriptions on them, while Latin became the rule after that. Actually I guess that the simplest way to describe the catacombs is by saying that they are a series of passageways interlocking, with rooms off of these tunnels. The walls of the tunnels and of the rooms are composed of numerous crypts in which have been placed caskets (marble in almost every case). Many of the rooms contain small altars where services were held. A number of early popes were buried there at one time but most of the bodies of these have been removed and placed in churches. There are numerous primitive allegorical paintings and inscriptions in these chambers. It is interesting to note the improvement in quality of the paintings as the centuries passed. The development of art can definitely be noted here. There were about 10 in our party and as we entered the stairs we were each handed a small taper to light in the darkness below. We found that a number of the rooms had skylights in them so that daylight did eke its way down to certain portions of the catacombs. Our guide had a clever contraption consisting of a thin candlewrapped round and round the end of a cane, so that at the same time he was using the cane to point the candle would be lighting up the object to which he was calling our attention.

The trip was interesting but I'm afraid that I am about fed up on ruins, and from now on, except for objects with historic significance which is still alive in my memory, I'll let the dead take care of their own.

The Lt. Col. (Mial) who was with me was quite a big shot. He is the chief medical supply officer of the fifth army. He had just returned from the front lines from a tour of duty and had quite a bit to tell me.

On our return to town we were caught in a summer shower. I had a rain coat with me, as did Rabbit, my driver. He gave his to the colonel, and gosh did Rabbit get soaked.. However, the sun came out strong and he dried off in a short time.

I spent part of the afternoon in the show seeing Rhythm Parade, and then in the evening I went to see Blithe Spirit. Gosh, what a pleasure that was. It was held in a theater in which The Barber of Seville had it's initial showing in 1824, if I remember rightly. The cast was all English and really good. The audience also was almost all English, with only a smattering of Americans. Part of the reason for this is that our doughboys had to be on their way back before it was time for the show to leave out, but even so I think that the Englishman's taste runs more to this type of thing than does the average American. The play, by Noel Coward, is a dandy comedy in which a man, married to his second wife, has a seance held at his home, following which his first wife comes back in spectral form. Only he can see and hear her, so you can imagine the complications that can arise from such a situation. The show is filled with laughs and before it ends there are two ghosts, one visible and one invisible. Coward is plenty clever and gets in many cracks which are current.

Well, darling, I think 4 and a half pages at one sitting is plenty, or rather too much, and even so I still have many things which I had intended telling you but have decided to keep for later.

All my love dearest,
Walt.