

[Letter from Carl Mathews to his aunt; he expresses his love for her and other family members who he seems to be estranged from. He recounts issues with his first wife and current wife and mentions a relationship with another woman which he calls a "friendship". He references his time in France during WWI and that he is shellshocked and is not the same person as he once was.]

Armistice Day '25
Nov. 11th

Dear Auntie,

Not anyone in America will ever know just what this day meant to me seven years ago when I dragged my tired and weary body back from the battlefield of France. How happy and thankful to some unseen power that had helped me to escape the dangers of war. My body lived to come home once more, but a vital part of something that once was me, died over there. No word of mine can bring the realization to them that know me; for they already know. For this no one should condemn me. I offered to my country all I had. It has taken away from me what it needed to assure victory. No one knows what I suffered during sixteen months in France. They never heard my story. It is too late now. A grateful country has forgotten. I came home and had my own domestic battles to fight. Against every hardship, I won. Even all this had its effect on my wrecked constitution. It lowered the vital spark on which I had founded my hopes of the Future. The years come and go and I found myself fighting the greatest enemy of all, ill health. Not speaking of a broken spirit. *[Page break – possible missing lines]* I had wads of it. Otherwise, I should not have survived. Of this day seven years ago I wanted to tell you of one great happy thrill I had then. I want to tell you of one not long ago that left me both happy and sad. Over to the grange while eating supper you came along and kissed me. It touched me more than anything else has ever done. I never know what it was like to have a real mother, only you. But, it seemed that in that kiss was cemented the love of my spirit mother and the only earthly mother I'd ever known. Some day I had hoped to have told you so that you could know and understand. A few months ago I was confronted by a great question, although easily enough answered. I did not have long to search to find my answer. Every five years a party of judges are called into conference in New York City to select certain names to be placed in the Hall of Fame. Just as important is my heart as it's Hall of Fame and my selection was made years ago and always kept and never crowded out. And as that question was put to me "What three persons do you love most or has meant more to your life than any other" I'm not ashamed to answer if it were the last act of my life. To you Auntie, because you've been a mother to me when I knew no other. One day I told you that I loved you more than any woman that ever lived. That stands until the end of my

life. Even your own son can never love or appreciate you more, because he has always had you to guide and protect him while I've battled every temptation and sin the world has to offer. I admire the sweet, patient way you have met the hardships that always have come to you. My idea of Christians are not them that come from the Church each Sunday with a bible beneath their arm and forget God on Monday. But, to you who has done life's duty as best they could, will find a little home across the border-land. And I live with that ambition that I can live just next door where the bars of misunderstanding will be let down and we can enter back and forth with Peace and happiness such as the world cannot know. Next comes Ora. It is seldom that a sister has ever meant anything vital to a brother. Even she does not know just how deeply grateful I am to her for my many things. Some day I mean to tell her just how I've benefitted by some kindly acts and thoughtful advice that at the time (brother-like) I took as interference in affairs that concerned no one but myself. Next one in that circle that has surrounded my life with that bond of hope and love that endures through the days of doubt is Lorraine Balcom Greuling. For fifteen years I've hidden my love under the disguise of friendship, many claim this Friendship that exists is wrong. But, anyone knowing the heart and soul of Lorraine as I do can never doubt that she could ever be disloyal to her own family by offering to me that which means my only existence. To know her, has been my education, when I've drifted away from the right, it was when circumstances kept us apart and I had need of her I feel her end is near now. It fills me with unutterable sadness such as is beyond my power to explain. It has changed my whole life. It mattered not who I married. I did my duty as best I could. Just this I'll explain that had I married Lorraine the Carl you would have know would have been far different than the Carl you know to-day. I've told the secret of my heart as I'd tell a mother. But, what her friendship has meant to me would fill a book. Just before she went away I saw her gazing off at the hills she has loved since girlhood and she was crying. I went and asked what was the matter. She thought for a moment and said "Laddie, I feel that I'm looking at the mountains that I've always loved and has been so much a part of my life, for the last time". Well, Auntie, my heart could never come nearer breaking than at that moment. I bowed my head and the tears fell like rain. I felt the passing of a sweet and wonderful soul. So I wanted you know when you heard Lorraine's name and mine linked to-gether, they have trespassed on a sacred friendship unbroken by the years. Before she went she left with me one request. She said "Laddie, you have tried to do everything I have asked of you in the years I have known you. Try and grant me this last request, that you will overlook the misunderstandings that exist between you and the Pottles. If they do not care to meet you half way you have traveled so much that you should be broad enough to go the whole distance to straighten it out". In the past two years it wasn't because I wasn't broad enough to go the limit. But, because of a certain stubbornness that came to me from birth as a sort of a misfortune inheritance either from

the Mathews or Stetsons. It matters not. I got it and it has been a difficult master to my personal happiness. I've always tried to do what was right. But, it is impossible to live beyond reproach in this town. People do not understand me. I've been away too long. During what time I have been here, I've been too busy to mingle with the people and cultivate a friendship. Some will say it isn't the people or town that make the difference, it is you. But, indeed, it does Auntie, make a world of difference. We might say this town is typical of other small New England villages. But, it isn't. I've been in small towns where there was harmony and the neighbors helped one another. Other than for a gossip or two who did no harm to no one but themselves the town was was a happy place to live. Yet I must say there is no other place that has ever appealed to me like Lincolnville. The mts, lake and woods have called me back from the far off places and the longing to be nearer to them I love. Now, I do not want to dig up old bones that lie buried. But, I must touch in some way, without seemingly to have bitter memories recalled. I want you to know that long ago I had forgiven in my heart any wrong intended or thoughtlessly intended toward me. In the beginning I must tell you why I came to Maine. I had to make some change on account of health. I did not plan to live here. But, came down to sell Clair the farm as he said if I could offer a clear title free from E. he might buy. I had pinned my hopes on that so as to buy a small place near S. and get out of the city. When that fell through I had no other choice but to build as I had two girls to make a home for. But, for them marriage was far beyond my dreams as I never intended to get tied down again. But, Elizabeth turned the girls on me just at the wrong time. Now, I owned a lodging house in the City of Springfield and had Grace to run it for me while I worked on the nursery farm at Agawam. She had charge of the girls for two years. And at that time it seemed to me she was well fitted to care for them. You understand Auntie I'm getting down to the root of the trouble without putting all the blame on any single one. As soon as I started for Maine E. came and took both girls to Boston. That left me bewildered to know just what to do. After I left your place four years ago this winter I came over here and sat down on the old cellar wall and had the thing out. The reason I can't sell to anyone, no place to live. There shall be a place. The next day I was cutting the frame, then in the midst of things when money meant everything to me I was called to Boston to fight the legal aids society to retain ownership of the girls. Costing \$150 outside my fare E. skipped to Maine and put them back onto me. I had the house, I had the girls. Next, I needed a woman to care for them. Grace expected that job. The only honorable way to do was to marry her. She did not consider the hard task ahead. The separation from all she loved, to go to a lonely country farm, among total strangers. It was hard. I told her it would be. But, she loved me. She wanted a home for herself and boy. For years she had been a sort of an outcast from her father's heart on account of marrying young without his consent. Just before she came to Maine I made a visit to S. and to her home for the first and only time I'd been there. Her

father made me an offer to stay there and run his farm. It was the chance I'd always waited for. But, stubbornness again proved my master. She came to Maine to live with me. I did not let her come blindfolded. In my letters to her I had opened up broad vistas for her. I told her of the people. How she must never say ill of one neighbor to another as she would soon meet with disfavor among them. And if she ever heard ill of me it would be better not to tell me for my delicate condition could never stand the worry of what she would bring to me. I told her I had been shellshocked on the battlefields and what a strain it was on my nerves. That I must be kept quiet and not be made excited or argue a question with me while I was tired. I told her of the lonely country, and of the long, cold, dreary winters when we must den up like a woodchuck. In the after days I saw I had only wasted so much energy in writing all this for she did just the things I told her not to do. She changed toward the girls from what she had been in S. Jealous of every move they made. A child craves affection. I could not give it to them without a scene that would upset me for a week or more. In between, each night when I [*writing cut off*] the whole evening would be taken up with tales brought home from the neighbors. We had to argue the matter until far into the night, and I would arise to go back to work more weary than when I came home. My own sister was not exempt from talk. I had to have it out with her. The results, she knock Grace all over the kitchen for telling me. It was better thus for it came to an end. On the start of our difficulty I wanted to come over and explain to you and Hazel (Uncle Ed I didn't mind for I knew his way) the condition I was in and to ask if you would kindly refrain from saying anything to Grace, as she comes home and tells me all you say. It had to come to an end somehow or in a few months I'd have been in Augusta or in a fit of frenzy I'd have done harm to someone. But, I'm beyond that now, thank God. I made every sacrifice that man could make to right the feeling in my home. I asked E. to take Evelyn. I didn't like the way she took her, but it was by my request she went. Later, I made arrangements for Ella to go so peace might once more be mine. I have lost them both. Can a man do more? For two years I kept silent while she ran to the neighbors with every difficulty. Either over there or to Bessie's, Edna's or to the Ctr. People had me painted as a savage, still they did not know the inside story of my home. They knew the loose story of an angry jealous woman who couldn't realize or appreciate what I had done for her. The climax had to come sometime. She must learn a severe lesson or again my Future was ruined. It came. She decided to go home. I was unrelentless, and happy in her decision. In all that difficulty there was one bright gleam for me. Her boy knew and appreciated what I had done for his mother and she was angry with him to have him side with me. She took him with her, that is true, to the neighbors to verify her stories. But, he could not do otherwise. She went away a year ago. I gave her one chance. It was this. If she thought she could ever come back changed to me I'd welcome her back. If not, I'll send your stuff to you and you stay. I never dared to ask what brought about the

change when she came home. At first I thought it could not last, but a year has gone now and only two misunderstandings. Both times I was at fault. No longer does she bring me home tales of the town that strike home into my heart. She never argues when I'm tired. She is trying hard to understand me. She has broader ideas and it has taken away her jealousy. She never by word or act while Lorraine was here ever let on she knew such a demon, nor had she cause to know him. Her companionship with Lorraine has helped me too. She learned to love her next to her mother. L. explained to her what her friendship meant to me and how it has helped me. Phillips, knew years ago and never objected. He knew only through a folly of mine that he got her to be an inspiration to his work and life. Grace, saw the beauty of her character. We are all in harmony now. It can never matter what the world can say or think. Under these happy conditions I've been fast regaining my former self. If L. can live and get well and I get no news to set me back I shall soon have won the purpose that carried me back to this lonely farm, away from an easier living than I can ever make here. I look eagerly forward to that happy day when we all will bide good-bye and go back to life that suits me better. I have told you this side of the story that perhaps you might glimpse the difficulty and feel just a little as I felt then. I feel you meant no harm when Grace came with her sad story of abuse, out of your great heart you found sympathy for her in the only way you knew. Not thinking perhaps that it might hurt me or affect the cause of my health. Auntie, believe me I did not give credit to all Grace told to me. I knew at the time she enlarged upon the details. But, some things I had to accept as the truth that it came from over there and in my heart I've forgiven and forgotten. As for Hazel, well, if I'd ever had the chance I wanted to talk with her so that she might know the deep esteem I have always had for her. I didn't want her to feel that I would force my friendship upon her. She has her circle of friends and I have mine. But, I had to admire even so the many qualities that she possesses and Clair was lucky to have won her. I would not say one word to hurt her either lie or truth. If I did I'd be sorry and humble enough to ask her forgiveness. But, what she told Grace about me was only second handed. For in all her life she never saw me do a wrong act or ever swear in her presence. She has never met a girl I've insulted or wronged or did she ever see me alone with L. during either marriage. But, I'm not going to recall the things that made me bitter at that time. I've overlooked and forgiven that part and I hope even though she never speaks to me on this side again that she has forgiven what I might have written during an angry mood. The part that hurt me most was I did not know she felt that way toward me. I had always liked her so well and when I recall my return from the war, I'll never forget that little thrill as I walked into the yard of my boyhood home, and Hazel was first to kiss and welcome me back. I had forgotten *[writing cut off]* I had forgotten the war. To be there among my friends. Oh Auntie, I wish you could feel just what I felt at that moment. The release and the relaxation after the strife. Then again when Hazel got after E. for leaving

me alone to go to Camden after I had been away so many months with no one to care for me, half enough to eat and the wet ground of the battlefield for my bed. To me those things denoted friendship of the purest type and you do not know how much I appreciated it. Then Grace told me, it struck me dumb. I've accepted my share of the world's disappointments alright. And surely its share of hardships have come to me. I feel through these experiences if I could aid or lighten another's burden I'd be glad to do it. Four times, Auntie, I've come back to this old place to make a start with only a suit case in my hand. It wasn't like stepping on to a farm all built up by someone else. I didn't have a shed full of tools to use. My first year here I found an old hoe on the wall and stuck a broom handle into it. I had to use it for I had no money to buy another. Two years I had no horse and packed all my wood on my back. I had not a neighbor that I could offer my services in return for theirs. You can never just realize what I've been through over here, I've owned the place thirteen years next month and I can count in my memory the visits you have paid to me. That hurt too. Because I'm only ten minutes walk away. But, times have changed since the old days. I've learned that in this town one must depend on themselves, and ask no favors. I can do that now. We have plenty to eat and wear. I've built a house and barn. Some money put away for a rainy day. And it all came by my labor. I've never been too busy to help others when they need me.

So Auntie, when you hear all these things about me, I want you to know from me that there is also another side you have not heard until now. I wanted you to know that I have no real partner such as some have to help me along. Every so often Grace is discontented and homesick and must take a vacation in the city that always proves costly to me, not to say leaving me in a hard place to care for everything as best I can. It is hard, no one knows, after a hard days work in the woods or elsewhere, to come back to a cold house and start at the very bottom of things to cook supper and get ready for another day. Hardly a woman in a hundred would leave a man in so hard a place. I've been here four years to try and get started without a vacation. Everything has been against every effort that I've made. I thought my only salvation was so I could stay at home was a flock of hens. We managed to get a hundred pullets together this year and they were nearly ready to lay when Geo. told me one night he carried out fifteen dead and more were sick. The next night there were twenty more. I sent one to Orono to be tested. There was poison found. So there was an enemy somewhere waiting for revenge. The day must come when we must surely meet. I dread the day. My temper is too violent to trust. One thing I've always been thankful for, I've always had plenty of confidence, without it I should have failed I every purpose. I never had a backer to talk to. I know if I failed to provide the money for all we needed, we would go hungry for food and cold for want of clothes. The first three years I let Grace handle the money as I thought it impossible for me to be bothered with such details as paying bills and buying the things we had to have. I'll say her efforts were

all failures and I took over the affairs and been slowly rising so that it is no effort for me to buy clothes and food, but have many luxuries we were forced to go without before on account of poor management. I'm not telling you these things in a boastful way, only to let you see that there is a side you failed to see before, all this I've need to explain so you would have a different feeling toward me. I wanted you to realize that no matter what part of the world I've been in, this much I've been a gentleman towards all and have done my duty as best I knew, whether in civilian life or domestic. On my war records will be found that I was the only man in my company to make seventy two trips to the front and return safely. The only one that made four trips in thirty six hours and return without sleep or rest. I worked as hard in France as in Lincolnville and no one would tell you here that they would not give me a job if I had worked for them once. Once in my life did I ever have a man say he did not need me longer and I've had so many jobs that with ordinary memory I cannot recall them all. This job I'm speaking of nearly cost me my life in the City of Portland, Maine. We were discharging freight from the Steamer Gov. Dingee. I had on my truck a load of sample silk and went to turn out on the gang plank for a coal cart and I was going fast and went through the railing right on overboard. I got a blue slip of my discharge for Carelessness. But it didn't matter only to mar my clean record for thus in my life I got an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army. But they were around for me to reenlist before I got it. With all this in view I wish that I could be exempt from any difficulty that could ever arise between them I love and me. I wish that above everything else that harmony could ever exist between you people and me while I am allowed to linger on this old place. It won't be long now for the time is drawing near when we must go. I have in that time brought about two purposes. My health has in a measure returned and again I've helped to place the old home at the Ctr. back on the cellar where it once stood. It would not be there but for my labor of every hour that I could spare to it and it has been free of charge outside of a supper or dinner eaten there at Ella's. She may never appreciate or remember it matter not. My former wife laid it in ashes and as far as labor goes I'll endeavor to put it back so Ella may have a home in the after days. So when you have read all this and thought it over, you must realize that after all there has been a spark of something that has prompted a kindly deed from me and a something that I have outgrown that you have not understood. We have drifted apart in the world of neglect and misunderstanding and if the tides of events never throw us together again on the wave of broad expanse of life I just want you to know I still love you as when a boy and in my heart you will ever land in that Hall of Fame. The day must surely come when we cast aside the weariness of worldly affairs and seek our greatest reward. But, always remember that though to you I have seemed a thing apart, I have been nearer to you then a human touch. Love entwines through the treasure of memory in that great storehouse of past events and they can never be marred by doubt or misunderstanding of the present. I've

loved Lincolnville as no other land I have ever seen. It has been a heaven to me. Its mountains and lakes an untold beauty that is impossible for anyone that has always lived here to see. Many have not been to the far off places and have been hungry to come back to see the beauty and feel the thrill to know they are yours to love. The same with people in those far away spots. They care not a hoot for you because you are a stranger in a strange land. But, back here someone cares. Someone loves. They cannot all hate or be disloyal. But out in that world I've known it has been my college, and experience has been my teacher. I've been a busy bee storing away what knowledge I could. It has helped me. Some day it may help others. I've met friends that I've been proud to call my friends. So with that in view I'm satisfied. But, again comes other facts that confront me with overwhelming force. I'm sensitive to every slight. A mere word sometimes sends me into a fit of blues that is impossible for me in a weeks time to overcome. It is said that one is guilty of a crime when they give way to morbid thoughts. But, in the breed of me it is said that it is natural. Some said my mother was easily hurt but she never by look or deed showed it. Why it was possible some say because of her gentle nature. While my father was easily hurt and vividly showed it by a stubborn, sulky nature that was unforgiving. So you must understand that I too have a mixture of both father and mother. Both, stubborn and gentle, sometimes relenting, oftentimes unrelentless, I may have never accomplished a single thing of which to be proud of, yet I am proud of the generations before me that brought about my existence. I may have become tired sometimes of that existence through circumstances that I have encountered. Still, I am a mortal being that lives and exists, that loves as every human being must, that hates sometimes and have conflicts with other human beings. But, in that silent hour of thought after the battle, I'm sorry. Sorry for the part I've been coward enough to take part in. It was said in my youth the only thing I've been afraid of was the dark. Perhaps it was right for I have known no other fear. Even when death stood just beside me saying no doubt "you will soon be mine" I didn't care, for I felt that death was only a transformation that sooner or later must take place, it may as well be now. I've done my duty to my country and to my family the best I knew how. Out of a town of nearly a thousand people. One other fellow bared his body for Uncle Sam's acceptance willingly, outside myself. That was Clayton McCobb. All this I've told you so that you could know the heart of me better. Not to boast, because I've said as I think back over the past, that I can think of nothing of which to feel proud of only the friends and people I know and the greatest country on earth of which I am part of. You have been patient to read all this to the end which is near now. In it all I just mean to convey to you whatever happens to you or me I want you to know that I've always loved you as a son could love a mother of his cherished dreams. One that he could place before a sweetheart. On the battlefield I've held a canteen to the dying life of a soldier. His final murmur was for his mother. So might it have been for me had you been my mother. So

Auntie, you must know it hurt to be a thing like me, apart from that great love I've always cherished second, in that Hall of Fame. I know I must soon give to a greater love than I can give. But I'm going to live with that one hope, that if she is over there she will guide me in a better trail, and give me more inspiration than the dividing miles that separate an earthly life. The third, I'm hoping that sometime in life that I can in some way be an aid to her success that through many years she has sort to crown her endeavor. To the ones that look to me for protection from want, hunger or cold would not miss me other from that. They have closer ties that call. You must realize what I mean, that neither you or Hazel if you loved your home and children the way I believe you do could ever think of going away from them, leaving them in neglect to care for themselves the best way they could. Sometimes the bodies of them half cared for or nourished with the proper food because of lack of time to prepare it for themselves. No, I could not think you or Hazel could do that. Then please do not wonder why I cannot love with the greatest that is in me. Now, Auntie, I've explained how I feel toward you and Hazel. I hope you will accept my part of it, as one of the sad tragedies of my life. Grace said that Hazel would never make a move to say she was sorry. That was a thing I never care to have her do. For it is beyond any ambition of mine to anyone so humble themselves to a wish of mine. But, you tell Hazel for me the greatest esteem I've always held for her, and know the great love I hold for you and the brotherly love I have for Clair and for Uncle Ed that has been kinder to me than an own father. With these thoughts dear Auntie, when you see me on the distant mountain top I care to have you know I'm looking longingly into that happy, peaceful valley I've always known. Love to you,

Carl K. Mathews