

THE
HAPPY FOREIGNER

BY

ENID BAGNOLD



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1920
moulin digital editions



2020

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

PART I THE BLACK HUT AT BAR

I THE TRAVELER

PART II LORRAINE

II METZ

III JULIEN

IV VERDUN

V VERDUN

VI THE LOVER IN THE LAMP

VII THE THREE "CLIENTS"

VIII GERMANY

IX THE CRINOLINE

X FANNY ROBBED AND RESCUED

XI THE LAST NIGHT IN METZ: THE JOURNEY

PART III THE FORESTS OF CHANTILLY

XII PRÉCY-SUR-OISE

XIII THE INN

XIV THE RIVER

XV ALLIES

XVI THE ARDENNES

PART IV SPRING IN CHARLEVILLE

XVII THE STUFFED OWL

XVIII PHILIPPE'S HOUSE

XIX PHILIPPE'S MOTHER

XX THE LAST DAY

PROLOGUE

THE EVE

BETWEEN the gray walls of its bath—so like its cradle and its coffin—lay one of those small and lonely creatures which inhabit the surface of the earth for seventy years.

As on every other evening the sun was sinking and the moon, unseen, was rising.

The round head of flesh and bone floated upon the deep water of the bath.

“Why should I move?” rolled its thoughts, bewitched by solitude. “The earth itself is moving.

“Summer and winter and winter and summer I have traveled in my head, saying—‘All secrets, all wonders, lie within the breast!’ But now that is at an end, and to-morrow I go upon a journey.

“I have been accustomed to finding something in nothing—how do I know if I am equipped for a larger horizon! . . .”

And suddenly the little creature chanted aloud:—

“The strange things of travel,
The East and the West,
The hill beyond the hill,—
They lie within the breast!”

PART I THE BLACK HUT AT BAR

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

CHAPTER I

THE TRAVELER .

THE war had stopped.

The King of England was in Paris, and the president of the United States was hourly expected.

Humbler guests poured each night from the termini into the overflowing city, and sought anxiously for some bed, lounge-chair, or pillowed corner, in which to rest until the morning. Stretched upon the table in a branch of the Y. W. C. A. lay a young woman from England whose clothes were of brand-new khaki, and whose name was Fanny.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

"Don't move," said Foss.

Feet pattered past her; motors swept by; bicycle bells rang.

"Foss," she said.

The soldier leant towards her and listened.

"Choose your own time, but you must let me sit up a moment. I am in pain."

"Then, now, mademoiselle!"

She sat up, flinging the rug back, dazzled by the splendor of the forest, the climbing sun, the heavy-burdened trees. Behind her was a cart coming up slowly; far ahead a cyclist swayed in the ruts of the road. As they approached her she pleaded: "They can't know me! Let me sit up—"

But Foss knew only one master, his sergeant.

"Better go down, mademoiselle."

She went down again under the black rug, close against the wind that lifted the floor-boards, wrapping her coat more tightly round her, folding her arms about her knees.

"It must be nearly eight. I have an hour more before they come in to breakfast. Ah, and when they do, will one of them go into my bedroom with my letters?"

She tried to pick out in her mind that one most friendly to her, that one who was to destroy her. She heard in spirit her cry: "Fanny *isn't there!*"

She thought of Stewart who would have woken early, planning anxiously to save her. The faces of the guardians of the honor of the Section began to visit her one by one, and horror spread in her. Then, pushing them from her, attempting to escape: "They are not all the world—" But they *were* all the world—if in a strange land they were all to frown together. The thought was horrible. Time to get there yet! Alas, that the car was not facing *towards* Chantilly—so early in the morning!

"Foss, Foss, don't you see him coming?"

"The road is full of people."

A car rushed beside them, yet never seemed to pass. The engine slowed down and a voice called: "What's up? Anything you want?"

It was the voice of Roland Vauclin. Ah, she knew him—that fat, childish man, who loved gossip as he loved his food! To Fanny it seemed but a question of seconds before he would lift the rug, say gravely, "Good morning, mademoiselle," before he would rush back to his village spreading the news like a fall of fresh snow over the roofs. She lay still from sheer inertia. Had Foss answered? She could not hear.

Then she heard him clear his throat and speak.

"The Captain asked me to get a bit of wood for his fire, sir. I have a man in there gathering branches, while I do a bit of 'business' with the car.

"Oh, right! . . . Go on!" said Vauclin to his own chauffeur. Again

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

they were left alone. Talk between them was almost impossible; Fanny was so muffled, Foss so anxiously watched for Alfred. The reedy singing between the boards where the wind attacked her occupied all her attention. The very core of a warmth seemed extinguished in her body, never to be lit again. She remembered their last *fourier*, or special body-servant, who had gone on leave upon an open truck, and who had grown colder and colder—"and he never got warm again and he died, madame," the letter from his wife had told them.

"I think he is coming! There is no one else on the road, made-moiselle. Will you look? I don't see very well—"

She tried to throw off the rug and sit up, but her frozen elbow slipped and she fell again on the floor of the car. Pulling herself up she stared with him through the glass. Far up the white road a little figure toiled towards them, carrying something, wavering as though the ice-ruts were deep, picking its way from side to side. Neither of them was sure whether it was Alfred; they watched in silence. Before she knew it was upon her a car went by; she dived beneath the rug, striking her forehead on the corner of the folding seat.

"Did they see? Was any one inside?"

"It was an empty car. Please be careful."

Foss was cold with rebuke. After that she lay still, isolated even from Foss. Ten minutes went by and suddenly Foss spoke—"Did you have to go far?"

And Alfred's hard voice answered "Yes."

Then she heard the two men working, tools clattering, murmured voices, and in ten minutes Foss said: "Try the starting handle."

She heard the efforts, the labor of Alfred at the handle.

"He will kill himself—he will break a blood vessel," she thought as she listened to him. Every few minutes some one seized the handle and wound and wound—as she had never wound in her life—on and on, past the very limit of endurance. And under her ear, in the cold bones of the Panhard, not a sign of life! Not a sign of life, and, as though she could hear them, all the clocks in the world struck nine.

The Guardians of the Honor would be in at breakfast now; they would be sitting, sitting—discussing her absence. Stewart, upstairs, would be looking out of the window, watching the river, perhaps answering questions indifferently with her cool look, "Oh, in the garage—or walking in the forest. I don't know." Cough! She jumped as the bones in the bottom of the car moved under her, and the engine breathed. The noise died out, Foss leapt to the handle and wound and wound, fiercely, like a man who meant to make her breathe again or die. Again she struggled to life, lived for a few minutes, choked and was silent.

"How is the handle?"

"Pretty stiff," said Foss, "but getting better. Give me the oil squirt."

Alfred took his place at the handle. Suddenly the car sprang to life again on a full deep note. Fanny lifted her head a little. Foss was

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

leaning over the carburetor with his thin anxious look: Alfred stood in the snow, dark red in the face, and covered with oil. Soon they were moving along the road, slowly at first, and with difficulty; then faster and more freely. A little thin warmth began to creep up through the boards and play about her legs.

She was carried along under her dark rug for another twenty minutes, then fell against the seat as the car turned sharply into the forsaken road that led to the broken bridge. In five minutes more the car had stopped and Alfred was at the door saying: "At last, *mademoiselle!*" She stammered her thanks as she tried to step from the car to the ground—but fell on her knees on the dashboard.

"Have you hurt your foot?" said Alfred, who was hot.

"I am only cold," she said humbly, unwilling to intrude her puny endurances on their gigantic labors.

She sat on the step of the car rubbing her ankles, and stared at the meadows of thawing snow, at the open porches of stone which led the road straight into the river, at the church and the sunlit houses on the other side.

Bidding them good-by she reached the bank, and climbed down it, stumbling in the frozen mud and pits of ice till she reached the stiff reeds at the bank.

The river had floes of ice upon it, green ice which swung and caught among the reeds at the edge. "It is thin," she thought, pushing her shoe through it, "it can't prevent the boat from crossing the river." Yet she was anxious.

There on the other side was the little hut, the steps, the boat tied to the stone and held rigid in the ice. A shaggy dog ran by her feet to the river's edge and barked. Feet came clambering down the bank and a workman followed the dog, with a bag of tools and a basket. He walked up to the river, and putting his hands in a trumpet to his mouth called in a huge voice: "*Un passant, Margot! Margot!*" Fanny remembered her whistle and blew that too.

There was no sign of life, and the little hut looked as before, like a brown dog asleep in the sun. Fanny turned to the man, ready to share her anxiety with him, but he had sat down on the bank and was retying a bootlace that had come undone.

Margot never showed herself at the hut window, at the hut door. When Fanny turned back to whistle again she saw her standing up in the boat, which, freed, was drifting out towards them—saw her scatter the ice with her oar—and the boat, pushed upstream, came drifting down towards them in a curve to hit the bank at their feet. The girl stepped out, smiling, happy, pretty, undimmed by the habit of trade. The man got in and sat down, the dog beside him.

"I would stand," said Margot to Fanny, "it's so wet."

She made no allusion to the broken appointment for the night before. Fanny, noticing the dripping boards of the boat, stood up, her hand upon Margot's shoulder to steady herself. The thin, illusory ice

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

shivered and broke and sank as the oar dipped in sideways.

Cocks were crowing on the other side—the sun drew faint colors from the ice, the river clattered at the side of the boat, wind twisted and shook her skirt, and stirred her hair. All was forgotten in the glory of the passage of the river.

Margot, smiling up under her damp, brown hair, took her five sous, pressed her town boots against the wooden bar, and shot the boat up against the bank.

Fanny went up the bank, over the railway lines, and out into the road. Two hundred yards of road lay before her, leading straight up to the house. On the left was a high wall, on the right the common covered with snow—should some one come out of the house there was no chance of hiding.

She glanced down at her tell-tale silk stockings; yet she could not hurry on those stiff and painful feet. She was near the door in the wall.

She passed in—the dog did not bark; came to the foot of the steps—nobody looked out of the window; walked into the hall among their hanging coats and mackintoshes, touched them, moved them with her shoulder; heard voices behind the door of the breakfast room, was on the stairs, up out of sight past the first bend, up, up, into Stewart's room.

“Do they know . . . ?”

“No one knows!”

“Oh . . . oh All her high nerves came scudding and shuddering down into meadows of content. Eternal luck . . . She crept under Stewart's eiderdown and shivered.

“Here's the chocolate. I will boil it again on my cooker. Oh, you have a sort of ague”

Good friend . . . kind friend! She had pictured her like that, unquestioning and warm!

Later she went downstairs and opened the door of the breakfast room upon the Guardians of the Honor.

As she stood looking at them she felt that her clothes were the clothes of some one who had spent hours in the forest—that her eyes gave out a gay picture of all that was behind them—her adventures must shout aloud from her hands, her feet.

“Had your breakfast?” said some one.

“Upstairs,” said Fanny, contentedly, and marveled.

She had only to open and close her lips a dozen times, bid them form the words: “I have been out all night,” to turn those browsing herds of benevolence into an ambush of threatening horns, lowered at her. Almost . . . she would *like* to have said the sentence.

But basking in their want of knowledge she sat down and ate her third breakfast.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

CHAPTER XV

ALLIES

A THAW set in.

All night the snow hurried from the branches, slid down the tree trunks, sank into the ground. Sank into the moss, which suddenly uncovered, breathed water as a sponge breathes beneath the sea; sank into the Oise, which set up a roaring as the rising water sapped and tunneled under its banks.

With a noise of thunder the winter roof of the villa slipped down and fell into the garden—leaving the handiwork of man exposed to the dawn—streaming tiles, ornamental chimneys, unburied gargoyles, parapet, and towers of wood.

In a still earlier hour, while darkness yet concealed the change of aspect, Fanny left the garden with a lantern in her hand. She had a paper in her pocket, and on the paper was written the order of her mission; the order ran clearly: “To take one officer to the demobilization center at Amiens and proceed to Charleville”; but the familiar words “and return” were not upon it.

She cast no glance back, yet in her mind sent no glance forward. She could not think of what she left; she left nothing, since these romantic forests would be as empty as tunnels when Julien was not there; but closing the door of the garden gate softly behind her, she blew out the lantern and hung it to the topmost spike, that Stewart, who was leaving for England in the morning, might bequeath it to their landlady.

All night long the Renault had stood ready packed in the road by the villa—and now, starting the engine, which ran soundlessly beneath the bonnet—she drove from a village whose strangeness was hidden from her, followed the Oise, which rumbled on a new note, heard the bubbling of wild brooks through the trees, and was lost in the steamy moisture of a thawing forest.

There was a sad, a deadly charm still about the journey. There was a bitter and a sweet comfort yet just before her. There were two hours of farewell to be said at dawn. There was the sight of his face once more for her. That the man who slipped into the seat beside her at Chantilly was Julien dissolved her courage and set her heart beating. She glanced at him in that early light, and he at her. Two hours before them still.

She was to carry him with her only to lose him surely; he was to accompany her on her journey only to turn back.

All the way to Amiens he reassured himself and her: “In a week I will come to Charleville.”

And she replied: “Yes, this is nothing. I lose you here, but in a week you will come.”

(Why then this dread?)

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“In a week—in a week,” ran the refrain.

“How will you find me at Charleville? Will you come to the garage?”

“No, I shall write to the ‘silver Lion.’ You will find in the middle of the main street an old inn with moldering black wood upon the window sashes. How well I know it! I will write there.”

“We are so near the end,” she said suddenly, “that to have said ‘Good-by’ to you, to leave you at Amiens, is no worse than this.”

And faster she hurried towards Amiens to find relief. He did not contradict her, or bid her go slower, but as they neared Amiens, offered once more his promise that they would meet again in a week.

“It isn’t that,” she said. “I know we shall meet again. It isn’t that I fear never to see you again. It is the closing of a chapter.”

“I, too, know that.”

They drove into Amiens in the streaming daylight. .

The rain poured.

“I am sending you to my home,” he said. “Every inch of the country is mine. You go to a town that I know, villages that I know, roads that I have walked and ridden and driven upon. You go to my country. I like to think of that.”

“I shall go at once to see your house in Revins.”

“Yes—oh, you will see it easily—on the banks of the Meuse. I was born there. In a week, in a few days’ short time—I will come, too.”

She stopped the car in a side street of the town.

Lifting her hands she said: “They want to hold you back.” Then placed them back on the wheel. “They can’t,” she said, and shook her head.

He took his bag in his hand, and stood by the car, looking at her.

“You take the three o’clock train back to Paris when the papers are through,” she said hurriedly with sudden nervousness. And then: “Oh, we’ve said everything! Oh, let’s get it over—”

He held the side of the car with his hand, then stepped back sharply. She drove down the street without looking back.

There was a sort of relief in turning the next corner, in knowing that if she looked back she would see nothing. A heavy shadow lifted from her; it was a deliverance. “Good-by” was said—was over; that pain was done—now for the next, now for the first of the days without him. She had slipped over the portal of one sorrow to arrive at another; but she felt the change, and her misery lightened. This half-happiness lasted her all the morning.

She moved out of Amiens upon the St. Quentin road, and was almost beyond the town before she thought of buying food for the day. Unjustly, violently, she reflected: “What a hurry to leave me! He did not ask if I had food, or petrol, or a map—”

But she knew in her heart that it was because he was young and in trouble, and had left her quickly, blindly, as eager as she to loosen that violent pain.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

She bought a loaf of bread, a tin of potted meat, an orange and a small cheese, and drove on upon the road until she came to Warfusée. Wherever her thoughts fell, wherever her eye lay, his personality gnawed within her—and nowhere upon her horizon could she find anything that would do instead. Julien, who had moved off down the street in Amiens, went moving off down the street of her endless thought.

“I have only just left him! Can’t I go back?”

And this cry, carried out in the nerves of her foot, slowed the car up at the side of the road. She looked back—no smoke darkened the landscape. Amiens was gone behind her.

Again, on. In ten minutes the battlefields closed in beside the road.

Julien was gone. Stewart was gone. Comfort and ease and plenty were gone. “But *We* are here again!” groaned the great moors ahead, and on each hand. The dun grass waved to the very edge of the road cut through it. Deep and wild stretched the battlefields, and there, a few yards ahead, were those poor strangers, the Scavenging Chinamen.

Upon a large rough signpost the word “Foucaucourt” was painted in white letters. A village of spars and beams and broken bricks—yet here, as everywhere, returning civilians hunted like crows among the ruins, carrying beams and rusty stoves, and large umbrellas for the rain.

At the next corner a Scotch officer hailed her.

“Will you give me a lift?”

He sat down beside her.

“What do you do?” she asked.

“I look after Chinamen.”

“Ah, how lonely!”

“It is terrible,” he replied. “Look at it! Dead for miles; the army gone, and I live with these little yellow fellows, grabbing up the crumbs.”

She put him down at what he called “my corner”—a piece of ground indistinguishable from the rest.

“Is that where you live?”

“Yes.”

There was a black-boarded hut from whose funnel smoke exuded, and to this ran a track across the grass. She watched him walk along it, a friendless, sandy man, left over from the armies which had peopled the rabbit warren in the ground. The Renault loped on with its wolf-like action, and she felt a spring of relief that she lived upon moving ground; passing on down the rickety road she forgot the little man.

Ahead lay the terrible miles. She seemed to make no gain upon them, and could not alter the face of the horizon, however fast she

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

drove. Iron, brown grass—brown grass and iron, spars of wood, girders, torn railway lines and stones. Even the lorries traveling the road were few and far between. A deep loneliness was settled upon the desert where nothing grew. Yet, suddenly, from a ditch at the side of the road a child of five stared at her. It had its foot close by a stacked heap of hand grenades; a shawl was wrapped round it and the thin hands held the ends together. What child? Whose? How did it get here, when not a house stood erect for miles and miles—when not a coil of smoke touched the horizon! Yes, something oozed from the ground! Smoke, blue smoke! Was life stirring like a bulb under this winter ruin, this cemetery of village bones?

She stopped the car. The child turned and ran quickly across a heap of dust and iron and down into the ground behind a pillar. “It must have a father or mother below—” The breath of the invisible hearth coiled up into the air; the child was gone.

A man appeared behind the pillar and came towards the car. Fanny held out her cigarette-case and offered it to him.

“Have you been here long?” she asked.

“A month, mademoiselle.”

“Are there many of you in this—village?” (Not a spar, not a pile of bricks stood higher than two feet above the ground.)

“There are ten persons now. A family came in yesterday.”

“But how are you fed?”

“A lorry passes once a week for all the people in this district—within fifty miles. There are ten souls in one village, twenty in another, two in another. They have promised to send us huts, but the huts don’t come. We have sunk a well now and it is drinkable, but before that we got water by lorry once a week, and we often begged a little from the radiators of other lorries.”

“What have you got down there?”

“It is the cellar of my house, mademoiselle. There are two rooms still, and one is watertight. The trouble is the lack of tools. I can’t build anything. We have a spade, and a pick and a hammer, which we keep between the ten of us.”

“Take my hammer,” said Fanny. “I can get another in the garage.”

He took it, pleased and grateful, and she left this pioneer of re-colonization, this obstinate Crusoe and his family, standing by his banner of blue smoke.

Another hour and a large signpost arrested her attention.

“This *was* Villers Carbonel,” it told her, and beneath it three roads ran in different directions. There was no sign at all of the village—not a brick lay where the signpost stood.

Stopping the car she drew out her map and considered—and suddenly, out of nowhere, with a rattle and a bang, and a high blast on a mad little horn, a Ford arrived at her side upon the crossroads.

“Got no gas?” enquired an American. She looked up into his pink face. His hood was broken and hung down over one side of the car.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

One of his springs was broken and he appeared to be holding the car upright by the tilt of his body. His tires were in rags, great pieces of rubber hung out beyond the mudguards.

"Dandy car you've got!" he said with envy. "French?"

Soon he was gone upon the road to Chaulnes. His retreating back, with the spindly axle, the wild hood, the torn fragments of tire flying round in streamers, and the painful list of the body set her laughing, as she stood by the signpost in the desert.

Then she took the road to Peronne.

"I won't have my lunch yet—" looking at the pale sun. Her only watch had stopped long since, resenting the vibrations of the wheel. She passed Peronne—uprooted railways and houses falling headforemost into the river, and beyond it, side roads led her to a small deserted village, oddly untouched by shell or fire. Here the doors swung and banged, unlatched by any human fingers, the windows still draped with curtains were shut, and no face looked out. Here she ate her lunch.

The rain had ceased and a little pale sunshine cheered the cottages, the henless, dogless, empty road. A valiant bird sang on a hedge beside her.

With her wire-cutters she opened a tine of potted meat, and with their handle spread it on the bread.

"Lord, how lonely it is—surely some door might open, some face look out—" At that a little gust of wind got up, and she jumped in her seat, for the front door slammed and blew back again.

"I couldn't stay here the night—" with a shiver—and the bird on the branch sang louder than ever. "It's all very well," she addressed him. "You're with your own civilization. I'm right *out* of mine!"

The day wore on. The white sun, having finished climbing one side of the sky, came down upon the other.

Here and there a man hailed her, and she gave him a lift to his village, talked a little to him, and set him down.

A young Belgian, who had learned his English at Eton, was her companion for half an hour.

"And you are with the French?" he asked. "How do you like the fellows?"

"I like them very much. I like them enormously." (Strange question, when all France meant Julien!)

"Don't you find they think there is no one else in the world?" he grumbled. "It is a delicious theory for them, and it must be amusing to be French!"

"Little Belgium—jealous young sister, resentful of the charm of the elder woman of the world!"

A French lieutenant climbed to the seat beside her.

"You are English, mademoiselle?" he said, she thought with a touch of severity. He was silent for a while. Then: "Ah, none but the English could do this—"

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“What?”

“Drive as you do, alone, mademoiselle, amid such perils.”

She did not ask to what perils he alluded, and she knew that his words were a condemnation, not a compliment. Ah, she knew that story, that theory, that implication of coldness! She did not trouble to reply, nor would she have known how had she wished it.

They passed an inhabited village. From a door flew a man in a green bonnet and staggered in the street. After him a huge peasant woman came, and standing in the doorway shook her fist at him. “I’ll teach you to meddle with my daughter,” she cried.

“Those are the cursed Italians!” said the French lieutenant, leaning from the car to watch.

A mile further on they came to a quarry, in which men prowled in rags.

“Those are the Russians!” he said. And these were kept behind barbed wire, fenced round with armed sentries.

She remembered an incident in Paris, when she had hailed a taxi.

“Are you an American?” asked the driver. “For you know I don’t much like driving Americans.”

“But I am English.”

“Well, that’s better. I was on the English Front once, driving for the French Mission,” the driver said.

“Why don’t you like Americans?”

“Among other things they give me two francs when three is marked!”

“But once they gave you ten where three was marked!”

“That’s all changed!” laughed the taxi-man. “And it’s a long story. I don’t like them.”

* * *

“Go away!” said France restlessly, pushing at the new nations in her bosom. “It’s all done. Go back again!”

“Are you an Ally?” said the Allies to each other balefully, their eyes no longer lit by battle, but irritable with disillusion—and each told his women tales of the others’ shortcomings.

Along the sides of the roads, in the gutters, picking the dust-heap of the battlefields, there were representatives of other nations who did not join in the intercriticism of the lords of the earth. Chinese, Arabs and Annamites made signs and gibbered, but none cared whether they were in amity or enmity.

Only up in Germany was there any peace from acrimony. *There* the Allies walked contentedly about, fed well, looked kindly at each other. *There* there were no epithets to fling—they had all been flung long ago.

And the German people, looking curiously back, begged buttons

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

as souvenirs from the uniforms of the men who spoke so many different languages.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ARDENNES

THE day wore on—

The sun came lower and nearer, till the half-light ran with her half-thought, dropping, sinking, dying. “Guise,” said the signpost, and a battlement stared down and threw its shadow across her face. “Is that where the dukes lived?” She was a speck in the landscape, moving on wheels that were none of her invention, covering distances of hundreds of miles without amazement, upon a magic mount unknown to her forefathers. Dark and light moved across the face of the falling day. Sometimes when she lifted her eyes great clouds full of rain were crossing the sky; and now, when she looked again the wind had torn them to shreds and hunted them away. The shadows lengthened—those of the few trees falling in bars across the road. A turn of the road brought the setting sun in her face, and blinded with light, she drove into it. When it had gone it left rays enough behind to color everything, gilding the road itself, the air, the mists that hung in the ditches,

Before the light was gone she saw the Ardennes forests begin upon her left.

When it was gone, wood and road, air and earth, were alike stone-colored. Then the definite night, creeping forward on all sides, painted out all but the road and the margin of the road—and with the side lights on all vision narrowed down to the gray snout of the bonnet, the two hooped mudguards stretched like divers’ arms, and the blanched dead leaves which floated above from the unseen branches of the trees.

Four crazy Fords were drawn up in one village street, and as her lights flashed on a door she caught sight of the word “Café” written on it. Placing the Renault beside the Fords she opened the door. Within five Frenchmen were drinking at one table, and four Americans at another. The Americans sprang up and claimed her, first as their own kin, and then at least as a blood sister. They gave her coffee, and would not let her pay; but she sat uneasily with them.

“For which nation do you work? There are no English here,” they said.

“I am in the French Army.”

“Gee, what a rotten job!” they murmured sympathetically.

“Where have you come from?”

“We’ve just come back from Germany, and you bet it’s good up there!”

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“Good?”

“Every darn thing you want. Good beds, good food, and, thank God, one can speak the lingo.”

“You don’t speak French then?”

“You bet not.”

“Why don’t you learn? Mightn’t it be useful to you?”

“Useful?”

“Oh, when you get back home. In business perhaps—”

“Ma’am,” said the biggest American, leaning earnestly towards her, “let me tell you one thing. If any man comes up to me back in the States and starts on me with that darn language—I’ll drop him one.”

“And German is easier?”

“Oh, well, German we learn in the schools, you see. How far do you make it to St. Quentin?”

“Are you going there on those Fords?”

“We hope to, ma’am. But we started a convoy of twenty this morning, and these here four cars are all we’ve seen since lunch.”

“I hardly think you’ll get as far as St. Quentin to-night. And there’s little enough to sleep in on the way. I should stay here.” She rose. “I wish you luck. Good-by.”

She thanked them for their coffee, nodded to the quiet French table and went out.

One American followed her.

“Can you buzz her round?” he asked kindly, and taking the handle, buzzed her round.

“I bet you don’t get any one to do that for you in *your* army, do you?” he asked, as he straightened himself from the starting handle. She put her gear in with a little bang of anger.

“You’re kind,” she said, “and they are kind. That you can’t see it is all a question of language. Every village is full of bored Americans with nothing to do, and never one of them buys a dictionary!”

“If it’s villages you speak of, ma’am, it isn’t dictionaries is needed,” he answered, “’tis plumbing!”

She had not left them ten minutes before one of her tires punctured.

“Alas! I could have found a better use for them than arguing,” she thought ruefully, regretting the friendly Americans, as she changed the tire by the roadside under the beam from her own lamps.

When it was done she sat for a few minutes in the silent car. The moon came up and showed her the battlements of the Ardennes forest standing upon the crest of the mountains to her left. “That is to be my home—”

Julien was in Paris by now, divested of his uniform, sitting by a great fire, eating civilized food. A strange young man in dark clothes—she wondered what he would wear.

He seemed a great many difficult miles away. That he should be

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

in a heated room with lights, and flowers, and a spread table—and she under the shadow of the forest watching the moon rise, lengthened the miles between them; yet though she would have given much to have him with her, she would have given nothing to change places with him.

The road left the forest for a time and passed over bare grass hills beneath a windy sky. Then back into the forest again, hidden from the moon. And here her half-stayed hunger made her fanciful, and she started at the noise of a moving bough, blew her horn at nothing, and seemed to hear the overtaking hum of a car that never drew near her.

Suddenly, on the left, in a ditch, a dark form appeared, then another and another. Down there in a patch of grass below the road she caught sight of the upturned wheels of a lorry, and stopping, got down, walked to the ditch and looked over. There, in wild disorder, lay thirty or forty lorries and cars, burnt, twisted, wheelless, broken, ravaged, while on the wooden sides the German eagle, black on white, was marked.

“What—what—can have happened here!”

She climbed back into the car, but just beyond the limit of her lights came on a huge mine crater, and the road seemed to hang on its lip and die forever. Again she got down, and found a road of planks, shored up by branches of trees, leading round on the left edge of the crater to firm land on the other side. Some of the planks were missing, and moving carefully around the crater she heard others tip and groan beneath her.

“Could that have been a convoy caught by the mine? Or was it a dumping ground for the cars unable to follow in the retreat?”

The mine crater, which was big enough to hold a small villa, was overgrown now at the bottom with a little grass and moss.

On and on and on—till she fancied the moon, too, had turned as the sun had done, and started a downward course. It grew no colder, she grew no hungrier—but losing count of time, slipped on between the flying tree trunks, full of unwearied content. At last a light shone through the trees, and by a wooden bridge which led over another crater she came on a lonely house. “Café” was written on the door, but the shutters were tight shut, and only a line of light shone from a crack.

From within came sounds of laughter and men’s voices. She knocked, and there was an instant silence, but no one came to answer. At length the bolts were withdrawn and the head of an old woman appeared through the door, which was cautiously opened a little.

“An omelette? Coffee?”

“You don’t know what you speak of! We have no eggs.”

“Then coffee?”

“No, no, nothing at all. Go on to Charleville. We have nothing.”

“How far is Charleville?”

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

But the door shut again, the bolts were shot, and a man's voice growled in the hidden room behind.

"Dubious hole. Yet it looks as though a big town were near—" And down the next long slope she ran into Charleville. The town had been long abed, the street lamps were out, the cobbles wet and shining.

On the main boulevard one dark figure hurried along.

"Which is the Silver Lion?" she called, her voice echoing in the empty street.

Soon, between rugs on a bed in the Silver Lion, between a single sheet doubled in two, she slept—propping the lockless door with her suitcase.

The Renault slept or watched below in the courtyard, the moon sank, the small hours passed, the day broke, the first day in Charleville.

PART IV

SPRING IN CHARLEVILLE

CHAPTER XVII

THE STUFFED OWL

A STUFFED bird stood upon a windless branch—and through a window of blue and orange squares of glass a broken moon stared in.

A bedroom, formed from a sitting-room, a basin to wash in upon a red plush table—no glass, no jug, no lock upon the door. Instead—gilt mirrors, three bell ropes and a barometer. A bed with a mattress upon it and nothing more.

This was her kingdom.

Beyond, a town without lights, without a station, without a milkshop, without a meat shop, without sheets, without blankets, crockery, cooking pans, or locks upon the doors. A population half-fed and poor. A sky black as ink and liquid as a river.

Prisoners in the streets, moving in green-coated gangs; prisoners in the gutters, pushing long scoops to stay the everlasting tide of mud; thin, hungry, fierce and sad, green-coated prisoners like bedraggled parrots, outnumbered the population.

The candle of the world was snuffed out—and the wick smoked.

The light was gone—the blinding light of the Chantilly snows, the lights on the Pr cy river—moonlight, sunlight—the little boat crossing at moonrise, sunrise.

"Ah, that long journey! How I pressed on, how I fled from Amiens!"

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

"What, not Charleville yet?" she said. "Isn't it Charleville soon? What hurry was there then to get there?"

The stuffed bird eyed her from his unstirring branch, and that yellow eye seemed to answer: "None, none"

"This is his home; his country. He told me it was beautiful. But I cannot see beauty. I am empty of happiness. Where is the beauty?"

And the vile bird, winking in the candle's light, replied: "Nowhere."

But he lied.

Perhaps he had been sent, stuffed as he was, from Paris. Perhaps he had never flown behind the town, and seen the wild mountains that began at the last house on the other bank of the river. Of the river itself, greener than any other which flowed over black rocks, in cold gulleys—the jade-green Meuse flowing to Dinant, to Namur. Perhaps from his interminable boulevard he had never seen the lovely Spanish Square of red and yellow, its steep-roofed houses standing upon arches—or the proud Duc Charles de Gonzague who strutted forever upon his pedestal, his stone cape slipping from one shoulder, his gay Spaniard's hat upon his head—holding hack a smile from his handsome lips lest the town which he had come over the mountains to found should see him tolerant and sin beneath his gaze.

That bird knew the rain would stop—knew it in his dusty feathers, but he would not kindle hope. He knew there was a yellow spring at hand—but he left her to mourn for the white luster of Chantilly. Vile bird! . . . She blew out the candle that he might wink no more.

"To-morrow I will buy a padlock and a key. If among these gilt mirrors I can have no other charm, I will have solitude!" And having hung a thought, a plan, a hope before her in the future, she slept till day broke—the second day in Charleville.

* * *

She woke, a mixture of courage and philosophy. "I can stand anything, and beyond a certain limit misfortune makes me laugh. But there's no reason why I should stand this!" The key and padlock idea was rejected as a compromise with happiness.

"No, no, let us see if we can get something better to lock up than that bird." He looked uncommonly dead by daylight.

"I would rather lock up an empty room, and leave it pure when I must leave it!"

Dressing, she went quickly down the street to the Bureau de la Place. The clerks and secretaries nodded and smiled at each other, and bent their heads over their typewriters when she looked at them.

"Can I see the billeting lieutenant?"

"He is not here."

"I saw him enter."

"We will go and see"

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

She drummed upon the table with her fingers and the clerks and secretaries winked and nodded more meaningfully than ever.

“*Entrez, mademoiselle. He will see you.*”

The red-haired lieutenant with pince-nez was upon his feet looking at her curiously as she entered the adjoining room.

“Good morning, mademoiselle. There is something wrong with the billet that I found you yesterday?”

She looked at him. In his pale-blue eyes there was a beam; in his creased mouth there was an upward curve. The story of legitimate complaint that she had prepared drooped in her mind; she looked at him a little longer, hesitated, then, risking everything:

“Monsieur, there is a stuffed owl in the room.”

He did not wince. “Take it out, mademoiselle.”

“H’m, yes. I cannot see heaven except through orange glass.”

“Open the window.”

“It is fixed.”

Then he failed her; he was a busy, sensible man. “Mademoiselle, I find you a billet, I install you, and you come to me in the middle of the morning with this ridiculous story of an owl. It isn’t reasonable . . .”

The door opened and his superior officer walked in, a stern captain with no crease about his mouth, no beam in his olive eye.

Ah, now . . . Now the lieutenant had but to turn to his superior officer and she would indeed be rent, and reasonably so.

“What is the matter?” said the newcomer. “Is something fresh needed?”

The billeting lieutenant never hesitated a second.

“*Mon capitaine*, unfortunately the billet found yesterday for this lady is unsuitable. The owner of the house returns this week, and needs the room.”

“Have you some other lodging for her?”

“Yes, *mon capitaine*, in the Rue de Clèves.”

“Good. Then there is no difficulty?”

“None. Follow me, mademoiselle, the street is near. I will take you to the *concierge*.”

She followed him down the stairs, and caught him up upon the pavement.

“You may think, mademoiselle, that it is because I am young and susceptible.”

“Oh, no, no . . .”

“Indeed, I *am* young! But I slept in that room myself the first night I came to Charleville . . .”

“My room with the owl? Do you mean that? Is it possible?”

“Yes, I put him upon the landing. But even then I dared not break the window. Here is the street.”

“How you frightened me when your captain came in! How grateful I am, and how delighted. Is the house here?”

“Mademoiselle, I do not truly know what to do. *It is an empty*

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

house.”

“So much the better.”

“But you are not afraid?”

“Oh, no, no, not at all. Has it any furniture?”

“Very little. We will see.”

He pulled the bell at an iron railing, and the gate opened. A beautiful face looked out of the window, and a young woman called: “*Eh bien! More officers? I told you, mon lieutenant, we have not room for one more.*”

“Now come, come, Elise! Not so sharp. It is for the house opposite this time. Have you the key?”

“But the house opposite is empty.”

“It will not be when I have put mademoiselle into it.”

“Alone?”

“Of course.”

The young *concierge*, under the impression that he was certainly installing his mistress, left the window, and came through the gate with a look of impish reproof in her eyes.

Together they crossed the road and she fitted the key into a green iron door let into the face of a yellow wall. Within was a courtyard, leading to a garden, and from the courtyard, steps in an inner wall led up into the house.

“All this . . . all this mine?”

“All yours, mademoiselle.”

The garden, a deserted tangle of fruit trees and bushes, fallen statues, arbors, and grass lawn brown with fallen leaves, was walled in by a high wall which kept it from every eye but heaven's. The house was large, the staircase wide and low, the rooms square and high, filled with windows and painted in dusty shades of cream. In every room as they passed through them lay a drift of broken and soiled furniture as brown and moldering as the leaves upon the lawn.

“Who lived here?”

“Who lived here?” echoed the *concierge*, and a strange look passed over his face. “Many men were here. Austrians, Turks, Bulgarians, Germans, also.”

“Were you, then, in Charleville all the time?”

“All the time. I knew them all.”

In her eyes there fitted the image of enemies who had cried gaily to her from the street as she leant out of the open window of the house opposite. “Take anything,” she said, with a shrug, to Fanny. “See what you can make from it. If you can make one room habitable from this dust heap, you are welcome. See, there is at least a saucepan. Take that. So much has gone from the house in these last years it seems hardly worth while to retain a saucepan for the owner.”

“Who is the owner?”

“A rich lady who can afford it. The richest family in Charleville. She has turned *méchante*. She will abuse me when she comes here

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

to see this—as though *I* could have saved it. Her husband and her son were killed. Georges et Philippe Georges was killed the first day of the war, and Philippe . . . I don't know when, but somewhere near here."

"You think she will come back?"

"Sometimes I think it. She has such a sense of property. But her daughter writes that it would kill her to come. Philippe was the sun . . . was the good God to her."

"I must go back to my work," said the lieutenant. "Can you be happy here in this empty house? There will be rats"

"I can be very happy—and so grateful. I will move my things across to-day. My companions . . . that is to say six more of us arrive in convoy from Chantilly to-morrow."

"Six more! Had you told me that before . . . But what more simple! I can put them all in here. There is room for twenty."

"Oh" Her face fell, and she stood aghast. "And you gave me this house for myself! And I was so happy!"

"You are terrible. If my business was to lodge soldiers of your sex every day I should be gray haired. You cannot lodge with an owl, you cannot lodge with your compatriots"

"Yet you were joking when you said you would put us all here?"

"I was joking. Take the house—the rats and the rubbish included with it! No one will disturb you till the owner comes. I have another, a better, a cleaner house in my mind for your companions. Now, good-by, I must go back to my work. Will you ask me to tea one day?"

"I promise. The moment I have one sitting room ready."

He left her, and she explored the upper story with the *concierge*.

"I should have this for your bedroom and this adjoining for your sitting-room. The windows look in the street and you can see life." Fanny agreed. It pleased her better to look in the street than into the garden. The two rooms were large and square. Old blue curtains of brocade still hung from the windows; in the inner room was a vast oak bed and a turkey carpet of soft red and blue. The fireplaces were of open brick and suitable for logs. Both rooms were bare of any other furniture.

"I will find you the mattress to match that bed. I hid it; it is in the house opposite."

She went away to dust it and find a man to help her carry it across the road. Fanny fetched her luggage from her previous billet, borrowed six logs and some twigs from the *concierge*, promising to fetch her an ample store from the hills around.

All day she rummaged in the empty house—finding now a three-legged armchair which she propped up with a stone, now a single Venetian glass scrolled in gold for her tooth glass.

In a small room on the ground floor a beautiful piece of tapestry lay rolled in a dusty corner. Pale birds of tarnished silver flew across its blue ground and on the border were willows and rivers.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

It covered her oak bed exactly—and by removing the pillows it looked like a comfortable and venerable divan. The logs in the fire were soon burnt through, and she did not like to ask for more, but leaving her room and wandering up and down the empty house in the long, pale afternoon, she searched for fragments of wood that might serve her.

A narrow door, built on a curve of the staircase, led to an upper story of large attics and her first dazzled thought was of potential loot for her bedroom. A faint afternoon sun drained through the lattice over floors that were heaped with household goods. A feathered brush for cobwebs hung on a nail; she took it joyfully. Below it stood an iron lattice for holding a kettle on an open fire. That, too, she put aside.

But soon the attics opened too much for treasure. The boy's things were everywhere, the father's and the son's. Her eyes took in the host of relics till her spirit was living in the lost playgrounds of their youth, pressing among phantoms.

“Irons . . . For ironing! For my collars!”

But they were so small, too small. His again—the son's. “Yet why shouldn't I use them,” she thought, and slung the little pair upon one finger.

Crossing to the second attic she came on all the toys. It seemed as though nothing had ever been packed up—dolls' houses, rocking-horses, slates, weighing machines, marbles, picture books, little swords and guns, and strange boxes full of broken things.

Returning to the floor below with empty hands she brooded by the embers and shivered in her happy loneliness. Julien was no longer some one whom she had left behind, but some one whom she expected. He would be here . . . how soon? In four days, in five, in six. There would be a letter to-morrow at the “Silver Lion.” Since she had found this house, this perfect house in which to live alone and happy, the town outside had changed, was expectant with her, and full of his presence. But, ah . . . inhuman . . . was Julien alone responsible for this happiness? Was she not weaving already, from her blue curtains, from her soft embers, from the branches of mimosa which she had bought in the marketplace and placed in a thin glass upon the mantelpiece, from the gracious silence of the house, from her solitude?

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILIPPE'S HOUSE

WHAT a struggle to get wood for that fire! Coal wouldn't burn in the open hearth. She had begged a little wood from the cook in the garage, but it was wet and hissed and all her fire died down. Wood hadn't proved so abundant on the hills as she had hoped. Either it was cut

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

and had been taken by the Germans, or grew in solid and forbidding branches. All the small broken branches and twigs of winter had been collected by the shivering population of the town and drawn down from the mountains on trays slung on ropes.

Stooping over her two wet logs she drenched them with paraffin, then, when she had used the last drop in her tin, got down her petrol bottle. "I shall lose all my hair one day doing this . . ."

The white flame licked hungrily out towards her, but it too, died down, leaving the wet wood as angrily cold as ever.

Going downstairs she searched the courtyard and the hay-loft, but the Bulgarians and Turks of the past had burnt every bit, and any twigs in the garden were as wet as those which spluttered in the hearth. Then—up to the attics again.

"I *must* have wood," she exclaimed angrily, and picked up a piece of broken white wood from the floor.

It had "Philippe Seret" scrawled across it in pencil. "Why, it's your name!" she said wonderingly, and held the piece of wood in her hand. The place was all wood. There was wood here to last her weeks. Mouse cages—white mouse cages and dormouse cages, a wooden ruler with idle scratches all over it and "P. S." in the corner—boxes and boxes of things he wouldn't want, he'd say if he saw them now: "Throw it away"—boxes of glass tubes he had blown when he was fifteen, boxes of dried modeling clay . . .

"I must have wood," she said aloud, and picked up another useless fragment. It mocked her, it wouldn't listen to her need of wood; it had "P. S." in clumsy, inserted wires at the back. His homemade stamp.

Under it was a gray book called "Grammaire Allemande." "It wasn't any use your learning German, was it, Philippe?" she said, then stood still in frozen conjecture as to the use and goal of all that bright treasure in his mind—his glass-blowing, his modeling, the cast head of a man she had found stamped with his initial, the things he had written and read, on slates, in books. "It was as much use his learning German as anything else," she said slowly, and her mind reeled at the edge of difficult questions.

Coming down from the attics again she held one piece of polished chair-back in her hand.

"How can I live in their family life like this," she mused by the fire. "I am doing more. I am living in the dreadful background to which they can't or won't come back. I am counting the toys which they can't look at. Your mother will never come back to pack them up, Philippe!"

She made herself chocolate and drank it from a fine white cup with his mother's initials on it in gold.

* * *

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

Work was over for the day and she walked down the main street by the "Silver Lion," from whose windows she daily expected that Julien's voice would call to her.

"Mademoiselle has no correspondence to-day," said the girl, looking down at her from her high seat behind the mugs and glasses.

"He ought to be here to-day or to-morrow, as he hasn't written," and even at that moment thought she heard hurrying feet behind her and turned quickly, searching with her eyes. An old civilian ran past her and climbed into the back of a waiting lorry.

"I am in no hurry," she said, sure that he would come, and walked on into the Spanish Square, to stare in the shops behind the arcaded pillars. Merchandise trickled back into the empty town in odd ways. By lorry, train, and touring car, merchants penetrated and filled the shops with provisions, amongst which there were distressing lacks.

The trains, which had now been extended from Rheims over many laborious wooden bridges, stopped short of Charleville by four miles, as the bridges over the Meuse had not yet been made strong enough to support a railroad. To the passenger train, which left Paris twice a week, one goods truck full of merchandise was attached—and it seemed as though the particular truck to arrive was singled out casually, without any regard to the needs of the town. As yet no dusters, sheets or kitchen pans could be bought, but to-day in the Spanish Square every shop was filled to overflowing with rolls of ladies' stays; even the chemist had put a pair in the corner of his window. Fanny enquired the cause. A truck had arrived filled with nothing but stays. It was very unfortunate, as they had expected condensed milk, but they had accepted the truck, as, no doubt, they would find means of selling them—for there were women in the country round who had not seen a pair for years.

A man appeared in the Square selling boots from Paris—the first to come to the town with leather soles instead of wooden ones. Instantly there was a crowd round him.

It was dark now and the electric street lamps were lit round the pedestal of the Spanish Duke. The organization of the town was jerky, and often the lights would come on when it was daylight and often disappear when it was dark. Where Germans had been there were always electric light and telephones. No matter how sparse the furniture in the houses, how ragged the roof, how patched the windows—what tin cans, paper and rubbish lay heaped upon the floors, the electric light unfailingly illumined all, the telephone hung upon the wall among the peeling paper.

A little rain began to fall lightly and she hurried to her rooms. There, once within, the padlock slipped through the rings and locked, the fire lighted, the lamps lit, the room glowed before her. The turkey carpet showed all its blues and reds—the mimosa drooped above the mantelpiece, the willow palm in the jar was turning yellow and shedding a faint down.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

"You must last till he comes to tea!" she rebuked it, but down it fluttered past the mirror on to the carpet.

"He will be here before they all fall," she thought, and propped her window open that she might hear his voice if he called her from the street below.

She boiled her kettle to make chocolate, hanging it upon a croquet hoop which she had found in the garden—Philippe's hoop. But Philippe was so powerless, he couldn't even stop his croquet hoop from being heated red-hot in the flames as a kettle holder One must be sensible. He would allow it. That was the sort of device he would have thought well of.

"He rushed about the town on a motor-bicycle," the *concierge* had said, when asked about him. But that was later. There had been other times when he had rocked a rocking-horse, broken a doll's head, sold meat from a wooden shop, fed a dormouse.

"Did Philippe," she wondered, "have adventures, too, in this street?" She felt him in the curtains, under the carpet like a little wind.

* * *

The days passed.

Each day her car was ordered and ran to Rheims and Chalons through the battlefields, or through the mountains to Givet, Dinant or Namur. Changes passed over the mountains as quickly as the shades of flying clouds. The spring growth, at every stage and age from valley to crest, shook like light before the eyes. There were signs of spring, too, in the battlefields. Cowslips grew in the ditches, and grass itself, as rare and bright as a flower, broke out upon the plains.

A furtive and elementary civilization began to creep back upon the borders of the national roads. Pioneers, with hand, dog, and donkey carts, with too little money, with too many children, with obstinate and tenacious courage, began to establish themselves in cellars and pill-boxes, in wooden shelters scraped together from the *débris* of their former villages. In those communities of six or seven families the re-birth and early struggles of civilization set in. One tilled a patch of soil the size of a sheet between two trenches—one made a fowl yard, fenced it in and placed a miserable hen within. Little notices would appear, nailed to poles emerging from the bowels of the earth. "Vin-Café" or "Small motor repairs done here."

All this was noticeable along the great national roads. But in the side roads, roads deep in yellow mud, uncleared, empty of lorries and cars, no one set up his habitation.

A certain lawlessness was abroad in the lonelier areas of the battlefields. Odds and ends of all the armies, deserters, well hidden during many months, lived under the earth in holes and cellars and used strange means to gain a living.

There had been rumors of lonely cars which had been stopped

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

and robbed—and among the settlers a couple of murders had taken place in a single district. The mail from Charleville to Montmédy was held up at last by men in masks armed with revolvers. “We will go out armed!” exclaimed the drivers in the garage, and polished up their rifles.

After that, when the Americans in the camps around, hungry upon the French ration, or drunk upon the mixture of methylated spirits and whiskey sold in subterranean *estaminets* of ruined villages, picked a quarrel, there were deaths instead of broken heads and black eyes. “They must . . . they **MUST** go home!” said the French, turning their easy wrath upon the homesick Americans.

Somewhere beyond Rheims the wreck of a cindery village sprawled along a side road. Not a chimney, not a pile of bricks, not a finger of wood or stone reached three feet high, but in the middle, a little wooden stake rose above the rubbish, a cross-bar pointing into the ground, and the words “Vin-Café” written in chalk upon it. Fanny, who was thirsty, drew up her car and climbed across the village to a hole down which the board pointed. Steps of pressed earth led down, and from the hole rose the quarreling, fierce voices of three men. She fled back to the car, determined to find a more genial *café* upon a national road.

The same day, upon another side road, she came on the remains of a village, where the road, instead of leading through it, paused at the brink of the river, over which hung the end spars of a broken bridge.

“I will make a meal here,” she thought, profiting by the check—and pulled out a packet of sandwiches, driving her car round the corner of a wall out of the wind. Here, across the road, a donkey cart was standing, and a donkey was tied to a brick in the gutter.

Upon the steps of a doorway which was but an aperture leading to nothing, for the house itself lay flat behind it and the courtyard was filled with trestles of barbed wire, a figure was seated writing earnestly upon its knees. She went nearer and saw an old man, who looked up as she approached.

“Sir . . .” she began, meaning to enquire about the road—and the wind through the doorway blew her skirt tight against her.

“I am identifying the houses,” he said, as though he expected to be asked his business. She saw by his face that he was very old—eighty perhaps. The book upon his knee contained quavering drawings, against each of which a name was written.

“This is mine,” he said, pointing through the doorway on whose step he sat. “And all these other houses belong to people whom I know. When they come back here to live they have only to come to me and I can show them which house to go to. Without me it might be difficult, but I was the oldest man here and I know all the streets, and all the houses. I carry the village in my head.”

“That is your donkey cart, then?”

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“It is my son’s. I drive here from Rheims on Saturdays, when he doesn’t want it.”

He showed his book, the cheap paper filled with already-fading maps, blurred names and vague sketches. The old man was in his dotage and would soon die and the book be lost.

“I carry the village in my head,” he repeated. It was the only life the village had.

So the days went on, day after day, and with each its work, and still no letter at the Silver Lion. Though vaguely ashamed at her mood, she could not be oppressed by this. Each cold, fine, blooming day in the mountains made him less necessary to her, and only the delicate memory of him remained to gild the town. When hopes wither other hopes spring up. When the touch of charm trembles no more upon the heart it can no longer be imagined.

CHAPTER XIX

PHILIPPE’S MOTHER

THE horn of a two days’ moon was driving across the window; then stars, darkness, dawn and sunrise painted the open square; till rustling, and turning towards the light, she awoke. At the top of the window a magpie wiped his beak on a branch, bent head, and tail bent to balance him—then dropped like a mottled pebble out of sight. She sat up, drew the table prepared overnight towards her, lit the lamp for the chocolate—thinking of the dim André who might pay his beautiful visit in turn with the moon and the sun.

She got up and dressed, and walked in the spring morning, first to the bread shop to buy a pound of bread from the woman who wouldn’t smile . . . (so serious and puzzling was this defect that Fanny had once asked her: “Would you rather I didn’t buy my bread here?” “No, I don’t mind.”)

Then to the market for a bunch of violets and an egg.

And at last through the Silver Lion—for luck, opening one door of black wood, passing through the hot, sunny room, ignoring the thrilled glances of soldiers drinking at the tables, looking towards the girl at the bar, who shook her head, saying: “No, no letter for you!” and out again to the street by the other black door (which was gold inside).

She passed the morning in the garage working on the Renault, cleaning her, oiling her—then eating her lunch in the garage room with the Section.

Among them there ran a rumor of England—of approaching demobilization, of military driving that must come to an end, to give place to the civilian drivers who, in Paris, were thronging the steps of the Ministry of the Liberated Regions.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“Already,” said one, “our khaki seems as old-fashioned as a crinoline. A man said to me yesterday: ‘It is time mademoiselle bought her dress for the summer!’”

(What dream was that of Julien, and of a summer spent in Charleville! The noise of England burst upon her ears. She heard the talk at parties—faces swam up so close to hers that she looked in their eyes and spoke to them.)

“And how the town is filling with men in new black coats, and women in shawls! Every day more and more arrive. And the civilians come first now! Down in the Co-operative I asked for a tin of milk, and I was told: ‘We are keeping the milk for the Civils.’ ‘For the Civils?’ I said, for we are all accustomed to the idea that the army feeds first.”

“Oh, that’s all gone! We are losing importance now. It is time to go home.”

As they spoke there came a shrill whistle which sounded through Charleville.

“Ecoute!” said a man down in the street, and the Section, moving to the window, heard it again, nameless, and yet familiar.

Unseen Charleville lifted its head and said, “Ecoute.”

The first train had crawled over the new bridge, and stood whistling its triumph in the station.

As spring became more than a bright light over the mountains so the town in the hollow blossomed and functioned. The gate bells rang, the electric light ceased to glow in the daytime, great cranes came up on the trains and fished in the river for the wallowing bridges. Workmen arrived in the streets. In the early summer mornings tapping could be heard all about the town. Civilians in new black suits, civilians more or less damaged, limping or one-eyed, did things that made them happy with a hammer and a nail. They whistled as they tapped, nailed up shutters that had hung for four years by one hinge, climbed about the roofs and fixed a tile or two where a hundred were needed, brought little ladders on borrowed wheelbarrows and set them against the house-wall. In the house opposite, in the Rue de Clèves, a man was using his old blue putties to nail up his fruit trees.

All the men worked in new Sunday clothes; they had, as yet, nothing old to work in. Every day brought more of them to the town, lorries and horse carts set them down by the Silver Lion, and they walked along the street carrying black bags and rolls of carpet, boxes of tools, and sometimes a well-oiled carbine.

“Yes, we must go home,” said the Englishwomen. “It’s time to leave the town.”

The “Civils” seemed to drive them out. They knew they were birds of passage as they walked in the sun in their khaki coats.

The “Civils” were blind to them, never looked at them, hurried on, longing to grasp the symbolic hammer, to dust, sweep out the German rags and rubbish, nail talc over the gaping windows, set their

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

homes going, start their factories in the surrounding mountains, people the houses so long the mere shelter for passing troops, light the civilian life of the town, and set it burning after the ashes and the dust of war.

There were days when every owner, black-trousered and in his shirt sleeves, seemed to be burning the contents of his house in a bonfire in the gutter. Poor men burned things that seemed useful to the casual eye—mattresses, bolsters, all soiled, soiled again and polluted by four years of soldiery.

Idling over the fire in the evening, Fanny's eye was caught by a stain upon her armchair. It was sticky; it might well be champagne—the champagne which stuck even now to the bottoms of the glasses downstairs.

"I wonder if they will burn the chair—when *they* come back." Some one must come back, some day, even if Philippe's mother never came. She seemed to see the figure of the Turkish officer seated in her chair, just as the concierge had described him, stout, fezzed, resting his legs before her fire—or of the German, stretched back in the chair in the evening reading the copy of the *Westfälisches Volksblatt* she had found stuffed down in the corner of the seat.

How, how did that splash of wax come to be so high up on the face of the mirror? Had some one, some predecessor, thrown a candle in a temper? It puzzled her in the morning as she lay in bed.

On the polished wooden foot of the bed was burnt the outline of a face with a funny nose. A child's drawing. That was Philippe's. The nurse had cried at him in a rage, perhaps, and snatched the hot poker with which he drew—and that had made the long rushing burn that flew angrily across the wood from the base of the face's chin. "Oh, you've made it worse!" Philippe must have gibed.

("B"—who wrote "B" on the wall? The Bulgarian—)

She fell asleep.

The first bird, waking early, threw the image of the world across her lonely sleep. He squeaked alone, minute after minute, from his tree outside the window, thrusting forests, swamps, meadows, mountains in among her dreams. Then a fellow joined him, and soon all the birds were shouting from their trees. Slowly the room lightened till on the mantelpiece the buds of the apple blossom shone, till upon the wall the dark patch became an oil painting, till the painting showed its features—a castle, a river and a hill.

In the night the last yellow down had fallen from the palm upon the floor.

The common voice of the tin clock struck seven. And with it came women's voices—women's voices on the landing outside the door—the voice of the concierge and another's.

Some instinct, some strange warning, sent the sleeper on the bed flying from it, dazed as she was. Snatching at the intialed cup of gold veining she thrust it behind the curtain on the window sill. An act of

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

panic merely, for a second glance round the room convinced her that there was too much to be hidden, if hidden anything should be. With a leap she was back in bed, and drew the bedclothes up to her neck.

Then came the knock at the door.

"I am in bed," she called.

"Nevertheless, can I come in?" asked the concierge.

"You may come in."

The young woman came in and closed the door after her. She approached the bed and whispered—then glancing round the room with a shrug she picked up a dressing-gown and held it that Fanny might slip her arms into it.

"But what a time to come!"

"She has traveled all night. She is unfit to move."

"Must I see her now? I am hardly awake."

"I cannot keep her any longer. She was for coming straight here when the train came in at five. I have kept her at coffee in my house. *Tant pis!* You have a right to be here!"

The concierge drew the curtain a little wider and the cup was exposed. She thrust it back into the shadow; the door opened and Philippe's mother walked in. She was very tall, in black, and a deep veil hung before her face.

"*Bonjour*, madame," she said, and her veiled face dipped in a faint salute.

"Will you sit down?"

She took no notice of this, but leaning a little on a stick she carried, said, "I understand that it is right that I should find my house occupied. They told me it would be by an officer. Such occupation I believe ceases on the return of the owner."

"Yes, madame."

"I am the owner of this house."

"Yes."

"May I ask of what nationality you are?"

The concierge standing behind her, shrugged her shoulders impatiently, as if she would say, "I have explained, and explained again!"

"I am English, madame."

The lady seemed to sink into a stupor, and bending her head in silence stared at the floor. Fanny, sitting upright in bed, waited for her to speak. The concierge, her face still as an image, waited too.

Philippe's mother began to sway upon her stick.

"Do please sit down," said Fanny, breaking the silence at last.

"When will you go?" demanded the old lady, suddenly.

"Go?"

"Who gave you that lamp? That is mine." She pointed to a glass lamp which stood upon the table.

"It is all yours," said Fanny, humbly.

"Mademoiselle borrowed it," said the voice of the concierge. "I lent it to her."

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“Why are my things lent when I am absent? My armchair—dirty, soiled, torn! Paul’s picture—there is a hole in the corner. Who made that hole in the corner?”

“I didn’t,” said Fanny feebly, wishing that she were dressed and upon her feet.

“Madame, a Turkish officer made the hole. I spoke to him about it; he said it was the German colonel who was here before him. But I am sure it was the Turk.”

“A Turk!” said Philippe’s mother in bewilderment. “So you have allowed a Turk to come in here!”

“Madame does not understand.”

“Oh, I understand well enough that my house has been a den! The house where I was born—All my things, all my things—You must give that lamp back!”

“Dear madame, I will give everything back, I have hurt nothing—”

“Not ruined my carpet, my mother’s carpet! Not soiled my walls, written your name upon them, cracked my windows, filled my room downstairs with rubbish, broken my furniture—But I am told this is what I must expect!” Fanny looked at her, petrified. “But I—” she began.

“You don’t understand,” said the young concierge, fiercely. “Don’t you know who has lived here? In this room, in this bed, Turks, Bulgars, Germans. Four years of soldiers, coming in one week and gone the next. I could not stop it! When other houses were burnt I would say to myself, ‘Madame is lucky.’ When all your china was broken and your chairs used for firewood, could I help it? Can *she* help it? She is your last soldier, and she has taken nothing. So much has gone from this house it is not worth while to worry about what remains. When you wrote to me last month to send you the barometer, it made me smile. Your barometer!”

“Begone, Elise.”

“No, madame, no! Not till you come back with me. They should not have let you come alone. But you were always wilful. You cannot mean to live here?”

“I wish this woman gone to-day. I wish to sleep here to-night.”

“No, madame, no. Sleep in the house opposite to-night. Give her time to find a lodging—”

“A lodging! She will find a lodging soon enough. A town full of soldiers—” muttered the old woman.

“I think this is a question for the billeting lieutenant,” said Fanny. “He will explain to you that I am billeted here exactly as a soldier, that I have a right to be here until your arrival. It will be kind of you to give me a day in which to find another room.”

“Where are *his* things?” said the old woman, unheedingly. “I must go up to the attics.”

A vision of those broken toys came to Fanny, the dusty heap of horses, dolls and boxes—the poor disorder.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

"You mustn't, yet!" she cried with feeling. "Rest first. Sit here longer first. Or go another day!"

"Have you touched *them?*" cried Philippe's mother, rising from her chair. "I must go at once, at once—" but even as she tried to cross the room she leant heavily upon the table and put her hand to her heart. "Get me water, Elise," she said, and threw up her veil. Her ruined face was gray even at the lips; her eyes were caverns, worn by the dropping of water, her mouth was folded tightly that nothing kind or hopeful, or happy might come out of it again. Elise ran to the washing-stand. Unfortunately she seized the glass with the golden scrolling, and when she held it to the lips of her mistress those lips refused it.

"*That, too*, that glass of mine! Elise, I wish this woman gone. Why don't you get up? Where are your clothes? Why don't you dress and go—"

"Madame, hush, hush, you are ill."

"Ah!" dragging herself weakly to the door, "I must take an inventory. That is what I should have done before! If I don't make a list at once I shall lose something!"

"Take an inventory!" exclaimed the concierge mockingly, as she followed her. "The house won't change! After four years—it isn't now that it will change!" She paused at the door and looked back at Fanny. "Don't worry about the room, mademoiselle. She is like that—*elle a des crises*. She cannot possibly sleep here. Keep the room for a day or two till you find another."

"In a very few days I shall be going to England."

"Keep it a week if necessary. She will be persuaded when she is calmer. Why did they let her come when they wrote me that she was a dying woman! But no—*elle est comme toujours—méchante pour tout le monde*."

"You told me she thought only of Philippe."

"Ah, mademoiselle, she is like many of us! She has still her sense of property."

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST DAY

AROUND the Spanish Square the first sun-awnings had been put up in the night, awnings red and yellow, flapping in the mountain wind.

In the shops under the arches, in the market in the center of the Square, they were selling anemones.

"But have you any eggs?"

"No eggs this morning."

"Any butter?"

"None. There has been none these three days."

"A pot of condensed milk?"

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“Mademoiselle, the train did not bring any.”

“Must I eat anemones? Give me two bundles.” And round the Spanish Square the orange awnings protecting the empty shop-fronts shuddered and flapped, like a gay hat worn unsteadily when the stomach is empty.

What was there to do on a last day but look and note, and watch, and take one’s leave? The buds against the twig-laced sky were larger than ever. To-morrow—the day after to-morrow . . . it would be spring in England, too!

“*Tenez*, mademoiselle,” said the market woman, “there is a little ounce of butter here that you may have!”

The morning passed and on drifted the day, and all was finished, all was done, and love gone, too. And with love gone the less divine but wider world lay open.

In the “Silver Lion” the patient girl behind the counter shook her head.

“There is no letter for you.”

“And to-morrow I leave for England.”

“If a letter comes where shall I send it on?”

“Thank you, but there will come no letter now. Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

It was the afternoon. Now such a tea, a happy, lonely tea—the last, the best, in Charleville! Crossing the road from the “Silver Lion” Fanny bought a round, flat, sandwich cake, and carried it to the bouse which was her own for one more night, placed it in state upon the biggest of the gold and green porcelain plates, and the anemones in a sugar-bowl beside it. She lit the fire, made tea, and knelt upon the floor to toast her bread. There was a half-conscious hurry in her actions.

(“So long as nobody comes!” she whispered. “So long as I am left alone!”) She feared the good-bys of the concierge, the threatened inventory of Philippe’s mother, a call of state farewell from the billeting lieutenant.

When the toast was done and the tea made, some whim led her to change her tunic for a white jersey newly back from the wash, to put on the old dancing shoes of Metz—and not until her hair was carefully brushed to match this gaiety did she draw up the armchair with the broken leg, and prop it steadily beside the tea-table.

But—

Who was that knocking on the door in the street?

One of the Section come on a message? The brigadier to tell her that she had some last duty still?

“Shall I *go* to the window?” (creeping nearer to it). Then, with a glance back at the tea-table, “No, let them knock!”

But how they knocked! Persistent, gentle—could one sit peacefully at tea so called and so be sought! She went up to the blue curtains,

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

shooting hares. Soon I shall be back again. Brussels one week; then Paris; then here again. I'll see what builders can be spared from the Paris factories. They can walk out here from Charleville. Ten miles, that's nothing! Then we'll get the stone cut ready in the quarries. Do you know, during the war, I thought (when I thought of it), 'If the Revins factories are destroyed it won't be I who'll start them again. I won't take up that hard mountain life any more. If they're destroyed, it's too discouraging, so let them lie!' But now I don't feel discouraged at all. I've new ideas, bigger ones. I'm older I'm going to be richer. And then, since they're partly knocked down I'll rebuild them in a better way. And it's not only that—See!" He talked as though inspired by his resolves, shaken by excitement, and pulling out his note-book he tilted it this way and that under the starlight, but he could not read it, and all the stars in that sky were no use to him. He struck a match and held the feeble flame under that heavenly magnificence, and a puff of wind blew it out.

"But I don't need to see!" he exclaimed, and pointing into the night he continued to unfold his plans, to build in the unmeaning darkness, which, to his eyes, was mountain valleys where new factories arose, mountain slopes whose sides were to be quarried, for their stony ribs, rivers to move power-stations, railways to Paris and to Brussels. As she followed his finger her eyes lit upon the stars instead, and now he said, "There, there!" pointing to Orion, and now "Here, here!" lighting upon Aldebaran.

As she followed his finger her thoughts were on their own paths, thinking, "This is Julien as he will be, not as I have known him." The soldier had been a wanderer like herself, a half-fantastic being. But here beside her in the darkness stood the civilian, the Julien-to-come, the solid man, the builder, plotting to capture the future.

For him, too, she could no longer remain as she had been. Here, below her was the face, the mountain face, of her rival. Unless she became one with his plans and lived in the same blazing light with them, she would be a separate landscape, a strain upon his focus.

Then she saw him looking at her. Her face, silver-bright in the starlight, was as unreadable as his own note-book.

"Are you sure," he was saying, "that you won't be blamed about the car?"

"Sure, quite sure. The men have all gone home."

"But to-morrow morning? When they see it has been out?"

"Not—to-morrow morning. No, they won't say anything to-morrow morning. Oh, dear Julien—"

"Yes?"

"I think, I hope you are going to have a great success here. And don't forget—me—when you—"

"—when I come back in a week!"

"But your weeks—are so long."

"Yet you will be happy without me," he said suddenly.

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

“What makes you say that?”

“You’ve some solace, some treasure of your own.” He nodded. “In a way,” he said, “I’ve sometimes thought you’re half out of reach of pain.”

She caught her breath, and the starry sky whirled over her head.

“You’re a happy foreigner!” he finished. “Did you know? Dormans called you that after the first dance. He said to me: ‘I wonder if they are all so happy in England! I must go and see.’”

“You too, you too!” she said, eagerly, and she wanted him to admit it. “See how happy, how busy, how full of the affairs of life you soon will be! Difficulties of every sort, and hard work and triumph—”

“And you’ll see, you’ll see, I’ll do it,” he said, catching fire again. “I’ll grow rich on these bony mountains—it isn’t only the riches, mind you, but they are the proof—I’ll wring it out in triumph, not in water, but in gold—from the rock!”

He stood at the edge of the path, a little above her, blotting out the sky with his darker shape, then turning, kissed her.

“For a little time!” he said, and disappeared.

The noise of his footsteps descended in the night below. Ten minutes passed, and as each step trod innocently away from her forever she continued motionless and silent to listen from her rock. The noises all but faded, yet, loath to put an end to the soft rustle, she listened while it grew fainter and less human to her ear, till it mingled at last with the rustle of nature, with the whine of the wind and the pit-pat of a little creature close at hand.

She stirred at last, and turned; and found herself alone with that flock of enormous companions, the hog-hacked mountains, like cattle feeding about her. Above, uniting craggy horn to horn, was an architrave of stars.

“Good-by”—to the light in the valley, and starting the car she began the descent on Charleville. There are moments when the roll of the world is perceptible to the extravagant senses. There are moments when the glamour of man thins away into oblivion before the magic of night, when his face fades and his voice is silenced before that wind of excited perception that blows out of nowhere to shake the soul.

In such a mood, in such a giddy hour, seated in person upon her car, in spirit upon her imagination, Fanny rode down the mountain into the night.

She was invincible, inattentive to the voice of absent man, a hard, a hollow goddess, a flute for the piping of heaven—composing and chanting unmusical songs, her inner ear fastened upon another melody. And heaven, protecting a creature at that moment so estranged from earth, led her down the wild road, held back the threatening forest branches, brought her, all but standing up at the wheel like a lunatic, safely to the foot of the last hill.

Recalled to earth by the lights of Charleville she drove slowly up the main street, replaced the car in the garage, and returned to her

THE HAPPY FOREIGNER

house in the Rue de Clèves.

"It is true," she whispered, as she entered the room, "that I am half out of reach of pain—" and long, in plans for the future, she hung over the embers.

The gradual sinking of the light before her reminded her of the present. "The last night that the fire burns for me!" She heaped on all her logs.

"Little pannikin of chocolate, little companion!" Hunger, too, awoke, and she dropped two sticks of chocolate into the water. "The fire dies down tonight. To-morrow I shall be gone." A petal from the apple blossom on the mantelpiece fell against her hand.

"To-morrow I shall be gone. The apple blossom is spread to large wax flowers, and the flowers will fall and never breed apples. They will sweep this room, and Philippe's mother will come and sit in it and make it sad. So many things happen in the evening. So many unripe thoughts ripen before the fire. Turk, Bulgar, German—Me. Never to return. When she comes into the room the apple flowers will stare at her across the desert of *my* absence, and wonder who *she* is! I wonder if I can teach her anything. Will she keep the grill on the wood fire? And the blue birds flying on the bed? It is like going out of life—tenderly leaving one's little arrangements to the next corner—"

And drawing her chair up to the table, she lit the lamp, and sat down to write her letter.