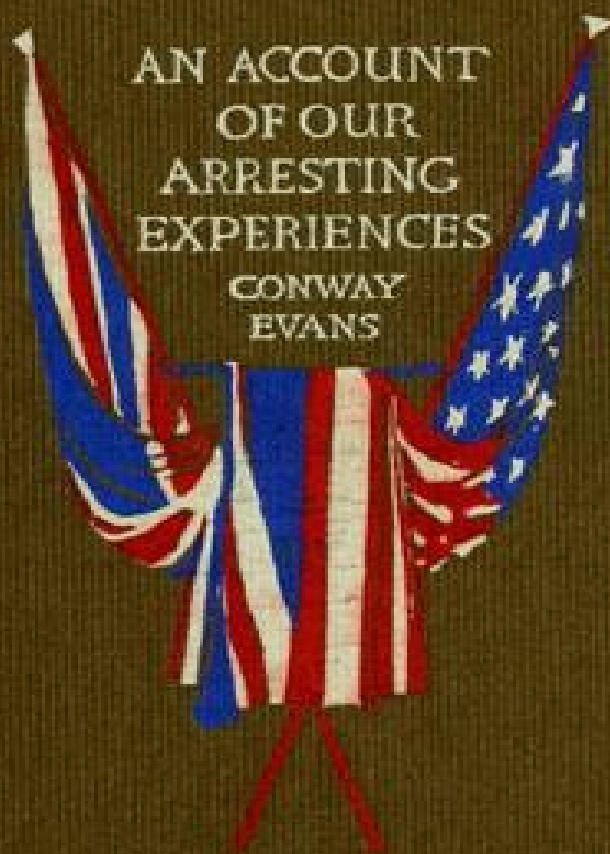


AN ACCOUNT
OF OUR
ARRESTING
EXPERIENCES

CONWAY
EVANS



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AN ACCOUNT OF OUR ARRESTING EXPERIENCES

**BY
CONWAY EVANS**

Publisher's Mark

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1914**



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D. B. Updike, The Merrymount Press, Boston

**TO MY TWO PLUCKY LITTLE
FELLOW PRISONERS**

**AN ACCOUNT OF
OUR ARRESTING EXPERIENCES**

We had been travelling for many weeks,—Lyra Nickerson, Katherine Schermerhorn, and I,—and after a beautiful tour through Germany, we arrived at Berlin on the evening of July 29, 1914. We had planned to spend a few days there preparatory to embarking at Hamburg in the *Viktoria Luise* for a northern cruise, and were looking forward to a short stay in the splendid capital. When we had secured our rooms at the Hotel Adlon, we found to our dismay that Kitty's box had not come through from Dresden, our last stopping-place. I went downstairs and interviewed the porter. He explained that, owing to the talk of war, many people were leaving their summer quarters, so that traffic was

considerably congested. In this wise did the little cloud appear upon our horizon.

The following morning (Thursday) we went sightseeing, and in the afternoon—as Lyra was not feeling well—Kitty and I each went our own way. At five o'clock we met in the hall of the Adlon, where we had tea with her cousin, Mr. Gear, and his friend, Mr. Cluett. Later she and I went to a superb concert at the Frederichshain and heard Thornberg, the violinist.

On Friday morning a little German friend whom I had not seen for many years came to visit me. I asked her if war were likely. She replied: "Certainly not. All danger is now over." This was encouraging, for I thought she knew what she was talking about.

In the afternoon we hired an automobile, and motored out to Potsdam. Then when we were outside the old Palace we heard that the Kaiser's "strong-for-peace" policy had been of no avail, that the Czar had insulted his messenger, and that now war was inevitable. We ourselves, chameleon-like, assumed the German colour. We believed what we were told, and felt sorry for the man who was called upon unwillingly to shed his nation's blood. On our way back to the hotel Kitty and I went to see Mr. Schermerhorn's cousin, Miss Barber, and then we realized the immediate gravity of the situation. She told us that now war *must* come, and she also told us that the Viktoria Luise would not sail. With quickened pulses we drove back to the Adlon, where the lounge was crowded with buzzing, excited people. Then we dressed, and went to the "Admiral's Palast" to see the exquisite Ice Ballet. While we were admiring the skating, and sympathizing with the fascinating Pierrot whose heart was broken by the cruelty of the dainty jointed Doll, we were able to forget grim reality—to forget that the bonds that had held captive the great Fiend were being cut, and that he was yawning after his long sleep, and stretching his cramped limbs.

The following morning Lyra realized the desirability of leaving Europe and of raising funds. She ordered the car, and we went to the office of the Holland American Line to try and secure the Imperial Suite, but without avail: no passages were to be had. Then we drove to five banks, and cashed a certain amount of her letter of credit at each one. At the Dresdener Bank she was informed that the Czar might capitulate even yet, and that in any case there would be three days of peace. Thereupon our spirits rose, and we began to make wild schemes. Even if Germany and Russia did go to war, why should we not tour in the Ardennes? Belgium would be a nice quiet neutral country to remain in, till we could secure passage to America.

In the afternoon we drove out to Schmockwitz and spent a placid time on the Miggelsee, but when we returned to Berlin we found the Unter der Linden seething with dense crowds of excited people and the whole atmosphere charged with electricity. At dinner Mr. Gear came up to our table. "You had better get out of this as soon as you can," he said. "There is going to be trouble at once."

Sunday morning Kitty was awakened very early by a stormy altercation in the room next to hers. She knocked on the wall, but no notice was taken of her remonstrance. After we had had breakfast, Lyra went downstairs and chartered an auto for 750 marks. The owner would not promise to take us farther than Hannover, owing to the difficulty of procuring petrol, and moreover both car and chauffeur were required in a couple of days for military duty. We consulted a large map, and decided to motor *via* Hannover to Osnabrück, and then go on to the frontier, wherever that might be.

When I had finished packing I rang for the porter to strap my trunk, but he did not come. I continued ringing with much vigour, and finally the nice little housemaid appeared on the scene and a flood of volubility broke over me. The porter was busy. He could not come. All Russians in the hotel were being arrested as criminals, for Russians had fired on a frontier town and war was declared. The hotel had been full of detectives for several days, and one "criminal" had had the room next to our suite. This piece of information explained the noise in No. 140. The occupant had evidently rebelled at being arrested so early in the morning! When I passed his room his captors were waiting for him, and he was calmly finishing off his toilette. The big lounge of the hotel was like a hive of swarming bees, and poor Mr. Louis Adlon looked simply worn out with worry; but he was so kind and courteous! I shall never forget all the trouble he took for us.

We got off at about 12.30 in a magnificent Benz, driven by one of the best-looking boys imaginable. The hand luggage was piled inside the car, so I sat outside. It was a lovely morning, and we all felt duly thrilled over our dramatic departure. The crowds were dense, and cars stacked with luggage like ours were shooting off in every direction. As on the previous day, the very air seemed charged with electricity, but when we were once in the country, all seemed peaceful and calm, and one asked one's self: "Why are we flying like this? What possible danger can there be?"

There were just a few indications of the times—a troop of Lancers clattered past us, and a body of Uhlans leading peasants' horses with their labels attached. At Wannsee a car with the crown prince and princess flashed past. On the bridge

over the Havel, overlooking Babelsburg, a tire burst, and we were delayed about half an hour. At Potsdam we made a halt at the telegraph office; but the news there was bad. No wires were being accepted for the "Ausland," and even local ones were not likely to get through.

The first town of importance we arrived at was Brandenburg, which stands on the Havel. Storks were flapping round in the meadows, and the old stone statue in the main street stared down on us as we flashed past, as if to ask: "Why this haste? From what are you flying?" But we had but scant attention to give either to him or that town, or to Plaue or Genthin. The blue sky clouded over, and by the time the spires of Magdeburg appeared on the horizon, the rain was coming down steadily. We had our first halt outside the city, for two officials did not seem at all inclined to let us into the town where formerly I had spent such merry days. However, our demon chauffeur was able to produce papers certifying that he was returning to Berlin, and we were allowed to proceed. We stopped awhile to buy some sailcloth, as our trunks were getting woefully wet on the top of the car. Then off we set once more, in pouring rain and a tearing wind, through flat and uninteresting country. As there was nothing special to look at, I could just sit still and enjoy the strange exhilaration of that wild drive—the steady pulsation of the magnificent car, which like some mythological monster ate up the long straight road, indifferent to the shrieking opposing wind and lashing rain. On, on, till gradually the furies grew weary, the gray gave place to gold, and the earth wore the "washed" look of a beautiful water-colour. The road was grand, and so open that there was no danger. The small towns took on a character all their own of Old World charm, and Baedeker recorded the fact that they were full of interest, but this had to be taken on trust. Brunswick made its own special appeal, though we saw little but old houses and the handsome façade of St. Catherine's. Onward we raced till away in the distance we saw Hannover, like a many-masted ship with its high chimneys and myriad lights. We kept up the pace, and at 9.15 pulled up in front of the Hotel Royal. I went in to know if the wire I had sent from Potsdam engaging rooms and a fresh automobile had arrived, but of course it had not. Then I returned to see about the dismounting of the luggage, and the girls stayed with me. A few people came to look on and became intensely interested. More joined, and we were soon the centre of a crowd. We imagined in time of war even a stray automobile must prove of account. We all laughed to find ourselves of such importance. Then up came a charming boy officer, who asked the chauffeur if he spoke German. "Ja wohl," was the laconic reply. "Are you German?" "Ja wohl."

The certificates were produced, and the boy looked them over and handed

them back pleasantly. "Have you seen enough?" I inquired, laughing. "Yes," he replied. "Excuse me;" and with a beautiful salute he disappeared in the crowd. But another officer had joined the girls. "Please come inside," he whispered, and when they were in the hall, he asked them if they were enemies, to their great amusement.

I was so busy with the luggage that I did not notice their departure. The real truth had not yet dawned upon me. The trunks were hoisted off the car to the ground, and the gay decoration of the hotel labels attracted considerable attention. People thronged round, and deciphered the various names. I have never seen such curiosity. Finally the last suitcase was carried in. The landlord came forward, washing his hands with invisible soap. "Quite an experience for you. I apologize, but you see the crowd thought you were Russians." We all laughed. The mystery was solved. After all it was quite thrilling to be taken for Russians, and lent a flavour to the day.

We had dinner, and then for a few minutes we stayed in the hall discussing plans. A little man in uniform came in brandishing a bulletin. "We have taken a Russian harbour," he cried excitedly. "The place is in flames." An involuntary shudder went through me. The Russians were England's allies. Was this the first letter of the awful alphabet Europe was to be called on to spell? Was this the first of the mighty German conquests?

I looked up, remembering that I was in Germany. Two very blue eyes were fixed upon me. At the moment I wondered if any *arrière pensée* lay behind that intense look, but the little man seemed quite friendly, and then our party broke up and we were soon all sound asleep, forgetful of the fact that we were in a country at war with its neighbours.

The following morning (August 3) we got up early, as a car from the Adler Garage had been ordered at 9.30, but it did not come. The employees of the hotel were cool in their behaviour. The concierge, of whom one usually expects servility, proved surly, the waiter calmly insolent. The delay seemed interminable, so Kitty and I sat down and wrote letters, but we found it was of no use to post them, as none were going out of the country; so we put them in our handbags. Then Lyra and I went off in a taxi to the garage to inquire for the car, and found it just ready. As the luggage was being stacked on, two American girls came to ask us how we were going to get out of the country. Lyra offered to take them with us, but they refused because they had not packed up!

At last we were off once more—thankful to be moving, and for some time we

were able to enjoy the pretty pastoral scenery, and the charming little houses with black timbering set in their red brick. Our new car was a poor substitute for the Benz,—which had returned to Berlin for war duty,—and our handsome boy had given place to a stolid son of the soil with one green and one blue eye, a kindly soul, who radiated confidence. Outside Schloss Lippe he stopped to shift one of the trunks. Up sauntered an official and asked for his papers, which he produced. Then once more we headed in the direction of Minden.

"*Halt.*" A cordon of soldiers with bayonets across the road put an end to all appreciation of scenery. The "Halt" was very decisive, as well it might be on such an occasion, and we were surrounded by boys—fair-haired, smiling boys, with whom we laughed and talked as much as our limited vocabularies permitted. The chauffeur's pass was produced, and proved satisfactory. If all "Halts" were going to be such friendly affairs, we felt we were in for a merry day. We waived adieus to our youthful soldiers, but within a few hundred yards came another "Halt," and then another, and another. The fifth time we realized hand-waving and friendly salutations were not going to get us very far. Our trunks were to be examined. Our friendly chauffeur pleaded for us, but he was squashed. "This is war time. Examination must be made and no risks taken."

"Yes, but these are children. They only want to get out of the country."

Now, when a woman has said good-by to the popular age of thirty-five, she thinks kindly of a man who includes her amongst the "children," so never shall I forget the chauffeur with bi-coloured eyes! The young man with normal vision would take no risks, and we soon all joined in the game. We pressed our keys upon the soldiers, and not only invited them to climb upon the top of the landaulette, but climbed up ourselves, and obeyed all behests. The first deadly thing to come to light in my trunk was a Canadian bark workbox. "Open it." The contents was critically examined. Then various perilous packets were found: Soap—Soap—and again, Soap!

The sun was hot, and so were we, but the investigation went on very thoroughly. At last it was over, but we were told that we had to go to the Kontrol office—whatever that might be. A chinless juvenile got into the car with us as escort, but he was so weighed down with the sense of his own importance that he was not very interesting. At the Kontrol office we were all marched into a little room. It had a bed, and on a washstand was a basin filled with clean water. We were so dirty after unstrapping and strapping trunks that we asked if we might wash our hands. Two kindly soldiers ministered to us and got us clean towels, and listened sympathetically to the story of our examination. Then in came the

adjutant, and no one could have been nicer or more courteous. We explained that we were trying to get to Holland, as we wished to sail to America, and that our one desire was to get out of Germany as quickly as we could. He smiled, and then he went away, and wrote out a little paper and signed it. It was to the effect that we had been examined, and that all was satisfactory. Never have three women been more grateful for a little piece of paper, and when we said good-by to our benefactor, our gratitude was very real.

We were soon spinning along again, but ugly indications of warfare began to be visible. Outside Minden we saw quantities of cannon being mounted, and then suddenly we came upon a motor in a ditch. Children were playing round it, and a man was keeping guard under a tree. Our chauffeur stopped to find out what had happened. The car had belonged to a Russian. He had tried to escape when told to "Halt," and had been shot. Truly the grim game had begun in this peaceful-looking land.

Time after time we were stopped by orders of soldiers, and we got almost used to the imperative "Halt." But we had nothing to fear with our magic *passe-partout*. A few words of parleying, and then came the usual concession: "You may go on further." No one would say exactly where "further" meant, but surely we should get to the frontier. We headed for Osnabrück, mistaking the road, however, at Lübeck, where the horses were being collected, and that delayed us for some time. The country now began to change in the magical way that countries do change when they begin to merge into neighbouring ones. We began to feel the Dutch element. Men, women, and children seemed to change, too, and to become more and more stolid. Boots gave way to sabots, and the little black and white cows began to wear the sacking jackets that they do in Holland.

Before getting into Osnabrück we passed the railway station. The gates were closed, and we stood still while a long, long train steamed slowly by us—a train decorated with huge boughs of greenery—a train packed with men—husbands, lovers—going to God knows what fate. They were shouting and waving and cheering. That is now a week ago.

It was about six o'clock when we pulled up outside the hotel at Osnabrück, so we had no time to waste over food. We had eaten nothing all day, but now we were able to buy some bread and cheese to eat *en route*. We were terribly dusty, and to save my own new coat, Kitty kindly lent me an old one of hers. It was bright rose-colour, and made me rather conspicuous as I took my turn on the little seat.

The first important place after Osnabrück was Rheine, and there, for the first time in the day, I began to wonder how things were going to turn out. Before we knew where we were, we were stopped by soldiers and mobbed by a dense, excited crowd. Even the wonderful paper did not have its usual effect. I was told I must proceed to headquarters before we could continue our journey, so I got out of the car, but when I saw the rabble which intended to accompany me, I told the two soldiers who were my escort that I should prefer walking arm-in-arm with them, and off we set, greatly to our own amusement and that of the mob which followed at our heels, yelling, "Russian! Russian criminal!"

When we reached the railway station I was taken before the superior arbiter of our fate. He was a serious individual, and read the precious document very carefully. Then came the usual fiat: "You may go further."

Great disappointment of the following crowd—a disappointment communicated to the unpleasant loafers who had continued to surge round the automobile in my absence. One of them had climbed on to the back and hit Lyra's hat twice, but she had been very calm, and kept her temper. When our innocence was made known the excitement died down, and we departed amidst cheers and waving handkerchiefs.

I shall never forget the next part of the drive. My appearance produced the same effect everywhere. "Russian! Russian!" was on every lip. One individual whispered to another, and small groups of people knotted together and watched us out of sight. At one place a man jumped on a bicycle and tore off—perhaps to give information. At first I did not mind, but after a while the situation got on my nerves. We swung past a man who was guarding a bridge. He wasn't a real soldier, but he had a gun, and I *know* he feels that he lost one of the chances of his life in letting me go, for his look of suspicion and hatred was unmistakable. Lyra kindly changed places with me, though she was very tired, and it was a relief to get out of the popular gaze.

The day was beginning to close in, but a brilliant sun shining through heavy gray clouds lit up the world for a while like a watchful eye. We knew we could not be very far from the frontier, and this was confirmed by an official when we were stopped for the seventeenth time. He was very friendly, and gave the chauffeur much well-meant advice. "The actual frontier is at 'Kleine Brücke,'" he said, "but as no motors may pass and it is getting late, the ladies had better stay the night at Gronau and go on to Holland to-morrow." This sounded all right, but we felt we wanted to get out of the country at all costs, and that a cowshed in Holland was preferable to a grand hotel in Germany. The magic pass had stood

us in such good stead, there could be no hitch now we had so nearly achieved our aim.

We were so engrossed with the vicinity of safety that not one of us realized our chauffeur had forgotten to light up. All I remember is that we seemed suddenly to swoop down on a crowd, the peremptory "Halt!" rang out sharp and clear, and we came to a sudden standstill. The car was besieged by officials of every kind, and we all felt the genuine hostility in the air. A man in plain clothes was chief spokesman. I handed him the Minden pass, confident of its efficacy, and to our dismay, he put it in his pocket.

"We are only trying to get into Holland," I explained. "We have our tickets here for passage in the Rotterdam." "Show them." The tickets were produced and shared the same fate as the pass. "Get out of the auto. The luggage is to be examined." We meekly obeyed. There was no other course to pursue. Kitty clutched at her precious little vanity bag, which had afforded so much amusement during the tour. A ponderous policeman pounced upon it. "Please give me my little bag," wailed Kitty. "Let me open it and show you the contents."

The man did not understand her words, but he did understand her gesture as she stretched out her hands for the precious bag. He pushed her back roughly. Did this dangerous woman think he was going to allow her to throw a bomb in this her moment of despair? He rushed off into the crowd, gave the infernal machine to some one else to hold, and we saw it no more.

The luggage was all dismounted, and three wooden chairs were brought for us to sit on while the examination took place. That scene will always stand out in our minds with theatrical vividness. Flaring electric lights lit up the road. There was a dense crowd of officials and loafers, and beyond, blackness. One or two men came up and talked.

"We want to get into Holland. We want to get there to-night." "You cannot. The frontier is closed." "But when can we go?" "When the war is over." "That is incredible." "It is not incredible. You must stop here. It is a nice place. If you wanted a large town, why did you not stop in Berlin?" "Because we want to leave Germany. No one knows where we are. Can we communicate with any one?" "All communication is impossible."

This was cheerful news, but we had no time in which to think it over. Lyra's trunk had been opened, and the examination had begun. Several young women had arrived on the scene, who proved excellent English scholars and most

accomplished searchers. It was an education to watch their methods. Every garment was taken out, shaken, weighed in the hand, and held up to the light, then flung down carelessly. Pretty chiffons and fluffy dresses lay about on the dusty road; but no one cared. It was a sorry performance, and an unworthy one. Letters and papers were pounced on and read, and it was a revelation to realize how the most innocent wires and cables could be construed into having some subtle political significance. Finally the last garment was removed, and the trunk itself subjected to severe critical examination.

By this time it was very late, and the hearts of our captors melted a little. We were told we might proceed (under arrest, of course) to the hotel, and that the remainder of the luggage would be examined there privately.

Once more we took our seats in the car, but the drive can hardly be described as a triumphal progress. Soldiers walked in front, and soldiers walked at the side, till we arrived at the Hotel of the Angel—of all ironical names! Six women, including the searchers, joined us, and were very pleasant and kindly while our hand luggage was being examined sufficiently for us to get out some things for the night. They had a beautiful time, reading all the letters that lay scattered about in our belongings, and taking the keenest interest in all our possessions. Poor souls! They certainly needed a little diversion. One girl had said good-bye to her fiancé that morning, and another was a bride of twenty-four hours. She had married in haste to take the name of the man she loved before he went off to the frontier!

We were allowed to choose our bedrooms, and Kitty and I elected to share one big one. Then we were told that we must be undressed and searched, so one by one we were taken off by two damsels, who were soon able to declare that we were not concealing anything criminal about us.

The big man whose pockets had swallowed up our pass and tickets again appeared upon the scene, and proved to be the burgomaster of the town. He interviewed Lyra in one room—questioning and cross-questioning—and then he came to me. His suspicions seemed to be allaying, and his attitude was almost paternal. Although we had no passports, we were able to prove our identification very successfully—the girls by papers and letters, and I luckily had in my possession my permit to visit all the Italian galleries, with my photo pasted on to it. This proved me to be Conway Evans, living in Florence; but while the examination was going on, I wondered how long it would be before the question of my nationality would crop up.

"Where is your husband?" "Florence, Italy." "Where do your father and mother live?" "Lausanne, Switzerland." "Where is your son?" "With my father and mother." "Where were you born?" "Georgetown, Demerara, South America."

I have always loved my colonial birthplace and suffered gladly the epithet of "Mudhead," but I don't suppose I ever experienced the same relief from it as when I realized that the worthy burgomaster's geography did not locate it amongst the British possessions, and that he was willing to swallow me whole as an American if I could deny my Russian nationality!

We were certainly very kindly treated. A supper of eggs and milk was prepared for us. While we were eating, the German girls sat with us and we got quite friendly. Bit by bit little things pieced themselves together like the pattern of a jig-saw puzzle. Our arrival at Gronau was no unforeseen event. We had been expected,—waited for,—and the fifteen men who had stood across the road to bar our progress had their fifteen guns ready to shoot if our stop had not been *instant*. Information had been sent from Hannover that we were suspects. Who sent it we are never likely to know—the obsequious hotel proprietor, the owner of the blue eyes, the smiling boy officer, or the insolent waiter. No matter, we were suspects, and the worst conclusions were drawn when we arrived in a car without lights, and when I emerged into the flaring ring of light in a rose-red coat—a Russian colour, pregnant with criminality!! Had we realized our true position when that sudden halt was made, how frightened we should have been! As it was, it never occurred to us that we were in actual danger.

At about one in the morning we went to bed, and dropped asleep from sheer fatigue. At about four Kitty and I woke up and discussed the situation dispassionately. We got out of our beds and looked out of the windows. Rain was falling in sheets, and the world seemed a cold, cheerless, uninviting place. The soldiers guarding us paced up and down, up and down, in the wet. Vitality is low at 4 a.m., and we were as dejected as any two mortals could be.

Stay at Gronau—remain in this God-forsaken place till the European conflagration burnt itself out, cut off from every soul we cared about and unable to communicate—impossible! Having arrived at this logical conclusion, we returned to our beds and went to sleep. At eight o'clock the examiners returned to the charge. We went into a long room with a raised dais. There were long tables ranged down it, covered with stained cardboard mounts for beer-glasses. Cigar ashes were in saucers, cigar ends on the floor. The smell of stale beer permeated the atmosphere. It was an engaging *mise en scène*.

Kitty and I were greeted by the head of police, two sergeants (one of them the bucolic hero of the vanity bag), and one of the girl searchers. The wearisome process began afresh. By the time the turn of my trunk came, the men were clearly bored. I had quantities of papers,—notes, MSS., sketches for lectures, extracts, charts,—papers which would have caused wild interest the evening before, but excitement was on the wane. By eleven o'clock everything had been seen thoroughly. The chief of police beamed upon us kindly. "It has to be done," he explained.

Later the burgomaster reappeared, more paternal than ever, and most kindly disposed. He was really sorry for all we had gone through, and promised he would do all in his power to get us over the border, and he certainly kept his word. Out of his pockets came all our confiscated belongings, and from some safe hiding-place was produced the fatal vanity bag!

At about one o'clock we went off again in the car, escorted by a now friendly policeman and one of the searchers. We were armed with a most reassuring pass, signed by the burgomaster himself, but when we arrived at the frontier and confidently handed it to the official there, he shook his head. "Impossible! Impossible!" he said. With a sudden rush our spirits sank to zero. This was the "most unkindest cut of all," but out of the darkness came light. We were at cross-purposes, and the man thought we wished to motor across the little bridge connecting Germany and Holland. We assured him we had no such desire, that I would take a trolley car to Eindhoven, charter a Dutch automobile to take us to Amsterdam, and return to the frontier to collect the girls and the luggage. Then came the hoped-for permission, and we all jumped out of the car. There was the little bridge—Kleine Brücke—and beyond Holland, the promised land. A few formalities, a few good-bys, a few planks traversed, and we were safe in a country that was neutral for the nonce: Holland, the stepping-stone to America.

S.S. Nieuw Amsterdam
A week later

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