Mary Louise and the Liberty Girls

By

L. Frank Baum

MARY LOUISE AND THE LIBERTY GIRLS

CHAPTER I
THE MASS-MEETING

One might reasonably think that "all Dorfield" had turned out to attend the much advertised meeting. The masses completely filled the big public square. The flaring torches, placed at set intervals, lighted fitfully the faces of the people—faces sober, earnest, thoughtful—all turned in the direction of the speakers' platform.

Mr. Peter Conant, the Chairman, a prominent attorney of Dorfield, was introducing the orator of the evening, Colonel James Hathaway, whose slender, erect form and handsome features crowned with snow-white hair, arrested the attention of all.

"You have been told," began the old colonel in a clear, ringing voice, "of our Nation's imperative needs. Money must be provided to conduct the great war on which we have embarked—money for our new army, money for ship-building, money for our allies. And the people of America are permitted to show their loyalty and patriotism by subscribing for bonds—bonds of the rich and powerful United States—that all may participate in our noble struggle for the salvation of democracy and the peace of the world. These bonds, which you are asked to buy, bear interest; you will be investing in the Corporation of

Right, Justice and Freedom, with the security of the Nation as your shield. As a stockholder in this noblest of corporations you risk nothing, but you gain the distinction of personally assisting to defeat Civilization's defiant and ruthless enemy."

Loud applause interrupted the speaker. On one of the rows of seats at the back of the stand sat Mary Louise Burrows, the granddaughter of Colonel Hathaway, with several of her girl friends, and her heart leaped with pride to witness the ovation accorded her dear "Gran'pa Jim."

With well chosen words the old gentleman continued his discourse, stating succinctly the necessity of the Liberty Bond issue and impressing upon his hearers the righteousness of the cause for which this money was required.

"The allotment of Dorfield," he added, "is one million dollars, seemingly a huge sum for our little city to raise and invest, but really insignificant when apportioned among those who can afford to subscribe. There is not a man among you who cannot without hardship purchase at least one fifty-dollar bond. Many of you can invest thousands. Yet we are approaching our time limit and, so far, less than two hundred thousand dollars' worth of these magnificent Liberty Bonds have been purchased in our community! But five days remain to us to subscribe the remaining eight hundred thousand dollars, and thereby preserve the honor of our fair city. That eight hundred thousand dollars will be subscribed! We *must* subscribe it; else will the finger of scorn justly be pointed at us forever after."

Another round of applause. Mr. Conant, and Mr. Jaswell, the banker, and other prominent members of the Liberty Loan Committee began to look encouraged and to take heart.

"Of course they'll subscribe it!" whispered Mary Louise to her friend Alora Jones. "The thing has looked like a failure, lately, but I knew if Gran'pa Jim talked to the slackers, they'd see their plain duty. Gran'pa Jim knows how to stir them to action."

Gradually the applause subsided. The faces of the multitude that thronged about the stand seemed to Mary Louise stern and resolved, determined to prove their loyalty and devotion to their country.

And now Mr. Jaswell advanced and seated himself at a table, while Mr. Conant requested those present to come forward and enter their subscriptions for the bonds. He urged them to subscribe generously, in proportion to their means, and asked them not to crowd but to pass in line across the platform as swiftly as possible.

"Let us raise that entire eight hundred thousand to-night!" shouted the Colonel, in clarion tones. Then the band struck up a popular war tune, and the banker dipped a pen in ink and held it ready for the onslaught of signers.

But no one came forward. Each man looked curiously at his neighbor but stood fast in his place. The city, even to its furthermost suburbs, had already been systematically canvassed by the Committee and their efforts had resulted in a bare two hundred thousand dollars. Of this sum, Colonel Hathaway had himself subscribed twenty-five thousand. Noting the hesitation of his townsmen, the old gentleman again arose and faced them. The band had stopped playing and there was an ominous silence.

"Let me encourage you," said Colonel Hathaway, "by taking another twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of these wonderful bonds. Put me down for that amount, Mr. Jaswell. Now, then, who are the patriots eager to follow my lead!"

There was applause—somewhat more mild in character—but none came forward. Alora's father, Jason Jones, who had already signed for fifty thousand dollars, rose and added another twenty-five thousand to that sum. This act elicited another ripple of applause; more questioning looks were exchanged between those assembled, but there were no further offers to subscribe.

The hearts of the committeemen fell. Was this meeting, on which they had so greatly depended, destined to prove a failure, after all?

Jake Kasker, the owner of "Kasker's Clothing Emporium," finally made his way to the platform and mounting the steps faced his townspeople. There was a little murmur of surprise and a sudden tension. The man had been distrusted in Dorfield, of late.

"You all know what I think about this war," said Kasker in a loud voice and with a slight German accent. "I don't approve of it, whatever anyone says, and I think we were wrong to get into it, anyhow."

A storm of hisses and cries of "Shame!" saluted him, but he waited stolidly for the demonstration to subside. Then he continued:

"But, whatever I think about the war, I want to tell you that this flag that now waves over my head is as much *my* flag as it is *yours*, for I'm an American citizen. Where that flag goes, Jake Kasker will follow, no matter what fools carry the standard. If they don't think I'm too old to go to France, I'll pack up and go to-morrow. That's Jake Kasker—with a Dutch name but a Yankee heart. Some of you down there got Yankee names an' hearts that make the Kaiser laugh. I wouldn't trade with you! Now, hear this: I ain't rich; you know

that; but I'll take two thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds."

Some one laughed, jeeringly. Another shouted:

"Make it three thousand, Jake!"

"I will," said Kasker; "and, if there ain't enough of you war-crazy, yellow-hearted patriots in Dorfield to take what we got to take, then I'll make it five thousand. But if I have to do that—an' I can't afford it, but I'll do it!—it's me, Jake Kasker, that'll cry 'Shame!' and hiss like a goose whenever you slackers pass my door."

There was more laughter, a few angry shouts, and a movement toward the platform. The German signed the paper Mr. Jaswell placed before him and withdrew. Soon there was a line extending from the banker's table to the crowd below, and the signatures for bonds were slowly but steadily secured.

Colonel Hathaway faced the German clothier, who stood a few paces back, a cynical grin upon his features.

"Thank you, Kasker," said the old gentleman, in a cold voice. "You have really helped us, although you should have omitted those traitorous words. They poisoned a deed you might have been proud of."

"We don't agree, Colonel," replied Kasker, with a shrug. "When I talk, I'm honest; I say what I think." He turned and walked away and Colonel Hathaway looked after him with an expression of dislike.

"I wonder why he did it?" whispered Mary Louise, who had overheard the exchange of words and marked Kasker's dogged opposition.

"He bought the bonds as a matter of business," replied Laura Hilton. "It's a safe investment, and Kasker knows it. Besides that, he may have an idea it would disarm suspicion."

"Also," added Alora Jones, "he took advantage of the opportunity to slam the war. That was worth something to a man like Kasker."

CHAPTER II

MARY LOUISE TAKES COMMAND

When Mary Louise entered the library the next morning she found her

grandfather seated at the table, his head resting on his extended arms in an attitude of great depression. The young girl was startled.

"What is it, Gran'pa Jim?" she asked, going to his side and laying a hand lovingly on his shoulder.

The old gentleman looked up with a face drawn and gray.

"I'm nervous and restless, my dear," he said; "that's all. Go to breakfast, Mary Louise; I—I'll join you presently."

She sat down on the arm of his chair.

"Haven't you slept well, Gran'pa?" she asked anxiously, and then her eyes wandered through the open door to the next room and rested on the undisturbed bed. "Why, you haven't slept at all, dear!" she cried in distress. "What is wrong? Are you ill?"

"No, no, Mary Louise; don't worry. I—I shall be all right presently. But—I was terribly disappointed in last night's meeting, and—"

"I see. They didn't subscribe what they ought to. But you can't help that, Gran'pa Jim! You did all that was possible, and you mustn't take it so much to heart."

"It is so important, child; more important, I fear, than many of them guess. This will be a desperate war, and without the money to fight—"

"Oh, the money'll come, Gran'pa; I'm sure of that. If Dorfield doesn't do it's duty, the rest of the country will, so you mustn't feel badly about our failure. In fact, we haven't failed, as yet. How much did they subscribe last night?"

"In all, a hundred and thirty thousand. We have now secured barely a third of our allotment, and only five days more to get the balance!"

Mary Louise reflected, eyeing him seriously.

"Gran'pa," said she, "you've worn yourself out with work and worry. They ought not to have put you on this Liberty Bond Committee; you're too old, and you're not well or strong enough to endure all the anxiety and hard work."

"For the honor of—"

"Yes, I know, dear. Our country needs you, so you mustn't break down. Now come and drink a cup of coffee and I'll talk to you. I've a secret to tell you."

He smiled, rather wanly and hopelessly, but he permitted the girl to assist him

to rise and to lead him to the breakfast room. There Mary Louise poured his coffee and attacked her own breakfast, although with indifferent appetite.

Gran'pa Jim was the only relative she had in all the world and she loved him devotedly. Their life in the pretty little town had been peaceful and happy until recently—until the war. But the old Colonel, loyal veteran that he was, promptly made it *his* war and was roused as Mary Louise had never seen him roused before. In his mind was no question of the justice of our country's participation in the world struggle; he was proud to be an American and gloried in America's sacrifice to the cause of humanity. Too old to fight on the battlefield, he felt honored at his appointment to the membership of the Liberty Bond Committee and threw all his energies into the task assigned him. So it is easy to understand that the coldness and reluctance to subscribe for bonds on the part of his fellow townsmen had well nigh broken his heart.

This the girl, his closest companion, fully appreciated.

"Gran'pa," she said, regarding him across the table after their old black mammy, Aunt Sally, had left them together, "I love my country, as you know; but I love *you* better."

"Oh, Mary Louise!"

"It's true; and it's right that I should. If I had to choose between letting the Germans capture the United States, or losing you, I'd let the Germans come! That's honest, and it's the way I feel. Love for one's country is a fine sentiment, but my love for you is deeper. I wouldn't whisper this to anyone else, for no one else could understand it, but you will understand it, Gran'pa Jim, and you know my love for you doesn't prevent my still being as good an American as the average. However," continued the young girl, in a lighter tone, "I've no desire to lose you or allow the Germans to whip us, if I can help it, so I've got two battles to fight. The truth is, Gran'pa, that you're used up with the hard work of the last few weeks, and another five days of begging for subscriptions would wreck you entirely. So you're to stop short—this very minute—and rest up and take it easy and not worry."

"But—my dear!"

"See here, Gran'pa Jim," with assumed sternness, "you've worked hard to secure Dorfield's quota, and you've failed. Why, the biggest subscribers for bonds in the whole city are you and Jason Jones! There's plenty of wealth in Dorfield, and over at the mills and factories are thousands of workmen who can buy bonds; but you and your Committee don't know how to interest the people in your proposition. The people are loyal enough, but they don't understand, and you don't understand how to make them understand."

"No," he said, shaking his head dolefully, "they're a dense lot, and we can't *make* them understand."

"Well, *I* can," said Mary Louise, cheerfully.

"You, child?"

"Yes. You mustn't imagine I've tackled the problem this very morning; I've been considering it for some time, and I've talked and consulted with Alora and Irene and Laura and the other girls about the best way to redeem the situation. We knew the situation was desperate long before last night's meeting. So all our plans are made, and we believe we can sell all the bonds required. It was our policy to keep silent until we knew what the big mass-meeting last night would accomplish, but we suspected it would turn out just the way it did—a fizzle. So the job's up to us, and if you'll sit quiet, Gran'pa Jim, and let us girls do the work, we'll put Dorfield in the honor column by Saturday night."

"This is nonsense!" exclaimed the Colonel, but there was an accent of hope in his voice, nevertheless.

"We girls are thoroughly organized," said Mary Louise, "and we'll sell the bonds."

"Girls!"

"Why, just think of it, Gran'pa. Who would refuse a group of young girls—earnest and enthusiastic girls? The trouble with you men is that you accept all sorts of excuses. They tell you they're hard up and can't spare the money; there's a mortgage to pay, or taxes or notes to meet, and they can't afford it, anyway. But that kind of talk won't do when we girls get after them."

"What arguments can you use that we have disregarded?"

"First, we'll coax; then we'll appeal to their patriotism; then we'll threaten them with scorn and opprobrium, which they'll richly deserve if they hang on till it comes to that. If the threats don't make 'em buy, we'll cry—and every tear will sell a bond!"

The Colonel stirred his coffee thoughtfully.

"You might try it," he suggested. "I've read that in some cities the Boy Scouts have been successful in placing the bonds. It's an honorable undertaking, in any event, but—I hope you will meet with no insults."

"If that rank pro-German, Jake Kasker, will buy bonds, there isn't a man in

Dorfield who can give a logical excuse for not doing likewise," declared Mary Louise. "I'm going to use Kasker to shame the rest of them. But, before I undertake this job, I shall make a condition, Gran'pa. You must stay quietly at home while we girls do the work."

"Oh, I could not do that, Mary Louise."

"You're not fit to leave the house. Will you try my plan for one day—just for to-day."

"I'll think it over, dear," he said, rising.

She assisted him to the library and then ran down the street to the doctor's office.

"Dr. McGruer," she said, "go over at once and see my grandfather. He's completely exhausted with the work of selling Liberty Bonds. Be sure you order him to keep at home and remain quiet—at least for to-day."

CHAPTER III

THE LIBERTY GIRLS

An hour later six girls met at the home of Alora Jones, who lived with her father in a fine mansion across the street from Colonel Hathaway's residence. These girls were prepared to work, and work diligently, under the leadership of Mary Louise, for they had been planning and discussing this event for several days, patiently awaiting the word to start their campaign.

"Some girls," said Mary Louise, "are knitting, and that's a good thing to do, in a way. Others are making pajamas and pillows for the Red Cross, and that's also an admirable thing to do. But our duty lies on a higher plane, for we're going to get money to enable Uncle Sam to take care of our soldier boys."

"Do—do you think we can make people buy bonds?" asked little Laura Hilton, with a trace of doubt in her voice.

Mary Louise gave her a severe look.

"We not only can, but we *shall* make people buy," she replied. "We shall ask them very prettily, and they cannot refuse us. We've all been loaded to the brim with arguments, if arguments are necessary, but we haven't time to gossip

with folks. A whole lot of money must be raised, and there's a short time to do it in."

"Seems to me," remarked Edna Barlow, earnestly, "we're wasting time just now. Let's get busy."

"Well, get on your costumes, girls," suggested Alora Jones. "They are all here, in this big box, and the banners are standing in the hall. It's after nine, now, and by ten o'clock we must all be at work."

They proceeded to dress themselves in the striking costumes they had secretly prepared; a blue silk waist with white stars scattered over it, a red-and-white striped skirt, the stripes running from waistband to hem, a "Godess of Liberty" cap and white canvas shoes. Attired in this fashion, the "Liberty Girls," as they had dubbed themselves, presented a most attractive and patriotic appearance, and as they filed out through the hall each seized a handsome silken banner, gold fringed, which bore the words: "Buy Bonds of Dorfield's Liberty Girls."

"Now, then," said Mary Louise, "we have each been allotted a certain district in the business part of the city, for which we are individually responsible. Each one knows what she is expected to do. Let no one escape. If any man claims to have already bought bonds, make him buy more. And remember, we're all to meet at my house at one o'clock for luncheon, and to report progress."

A block away they secured seats in a streetcar and a few minutes thereafter reached the "Four Corners," the intersection of the two principal streets of Dorfield. But on the way they had sold old Jonathan Dodd, who happened to be in the car and was overawed by the display of red-white-and-blue, two hundred dollars' worth of bonds. As for old man Dodd, he realized he was trapped and bought his limit with a sigh of resignation.

As they separated at the Four Corners, each to follow her appointed route, many surprised, if not startled, citizens regarded the Liberty Girls with approving eyes. They were pretty girls, all of them, and their silken costumes were really becoming. The patriots gazed admiringly; the more selfish citizens gave a little shiver of dismay and scurried off to escape meeting these aggressive ones, whose gorgeous banners frankly proclaimed their errand.

Mary Louise entered the bank on the corner and made inquiry for Mr. Jaswell, the president.

"We're off at last, sir," she said, smiling at his bewildered looks, "and we girls are determined to make the Dorfield people do their full duty. May we depend upon your bank to fulfill your promises, and carry those bond buyers who wish to make time payments?"

"To be sure, my dear," replied the banker. "I'd no idea you young ladies were to wear uniforms. But you certainly look fascinating, if you're a fair sample of the others, and I don't see how anyone can refuse to back up our girls in their patriotic 'drive.' God bless you, Mary Louise, and help you to achieve your noble object."

There were many offices in the building, above the bank, and the girl visited every one of them. Her appearance, garbed in the national colors and bearing her banner, was a sign of conquest, for it seemed to these busy men as if Uncle Sam himself was backing this crusade and all their latent patriotism was stirred to the depths. So they surrendered at discretion and signed for the bonds.

Mary Louise was modest and sweet in demeanor; her pleas were as pleasant as they were persuasive; there was nothing virulent or dominant in her attitude. But when she said: "Really, Mr. So-and-so, you ought to take more bonds than that; you can afford it and our country needs the money," the argument was generally effective, and when she had smilingly pinned the bond button on a man's coat and passed on to interview others, she left him wondering why he had bought more bonds than he ever had intended to, or even provoked with himself that he had subscribed at all. These were the people who had generally resisted all former pleadings of the regular committee and had resolved to ignore the bond sale altogether. But perhaps their chagrin was equalled by their satisfaction in having been won over by a pretty girl, whose manner and appearance were alike irresistible.

The men of Dorfield are a fair sample of men everywhere. At this period the full meaning of the responsibilities we had assumed in this tremendous struggle was by no means fully realized. The war was too far away, and life at home was still running in its accustomed grooves. They could not take the European war to themselves, nor realize that it might sweep away their prosperity, their liberties—even their homes. Fear had not yet been aroused; pity for our suffering and hard-pressed allies was still lightly considered; the war had not struck home to the hearts of the people as it has since. I doubt if even Mary Louise fully realized the vital importance of the work she had undertaken.

When the Liberty Girls met at Colonel Hathaway's for a light luncheon, their eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm and their cheeks rosy from successful effort. Their individual sales varied, of course, for some were more tactful and winning than others, but all had substantial results to report. "We've taken Dorfield by storm!" was their exultant cry.

"Altogether," said Mary Louise, figuring up the amounts, "we've sold thirty-

two thousand dollars' worth of bonds this morning. That's encouraging for three hours' work, but it's not enough to satisfy us. We must put in a busy afternoon and try to get a total of at least one hundred thousand by to-night. To-morrow we must do better than that. Work as late as you can, girls, and at eight o'clock we will meet again at Alora's house and compare results."

The girls needed no urging to resume their work, for already they had gained confidence in their ability and were inspired to renewed effort.

Mary Louise had optimistic plans for that afternoon's work. She first visited the big flour mill, where she secured an interview with Mr. Chisholme, the president and general manager.

"We can't buy bonds," he said peevishly. "Our business is being ruined by the high price of wheat and the absurd activities of Hoover. We stand to operate at a loss or else shut down altogether. The government ought to pay us compensation, instead of asking us to contribute to the war."

"However, if we fail to win the war," Mary Louise quietly replied, "your enormous investment here will become worthless. Isn't it better to lose a little now, for the sake of future winnings, than to sacrifice the past and future and be reduced to poverty? We are asking you to save yourself from threatened danger—the national calamity that would follow our defeat in this war."

He sat back in his chair and looked at the girl in amazement. She was rather young to have conceived such ideas.

"Well, there's time enough to consider all that," he said, less gruffly. "You'll have to excuse me now, Miss Burrows. I'm busy."

But Mary Louise kept her seat and redoubled her arguments, which were logical and straight to the point. Mr. Chisholme's attitude might have embarrassed her had she been pleading a personal favor, but she felt she was the mouthpiece of the President, of the Nation, of worldwide democracy, and would not allow herself to feel annoyed. She devoted three-quarters of an hour to Mr. Chisholme, who gradually thawed in her genial sunshine. She finally sold him fifty thousand dollars worth of Liberty Bonds and went on her way elated. The regular Bond Committee had labored for weeks with this stubborn man, who managed one of the largest enterprises in Dorfield, yet they had signally failed to convince him or to induce him to subscribe a dollar. The girl had succeeded in less than an hour, and sold him exactly the amount he should have bought.

The mill subscription was a powerful leverage with which to pry money from other reluctant ones. Stacks, Sellem & Stacks, the big department store

heretofore resisting all appeals, bought from Mary Louise bonds to the amount of twenty-five thousand; the Denis Hardware Company took ten thousand. Then Mary Louise met her first serious rebuff. She went into Silas Herring's wholesale grocery establishment and told Mr. Herring she wanted to sell him bonds.

"This is outrageous!" cried Herring indignantly. "When the men can't rob us, or force us to back England in her selfish schemes, they set girls on us to wheedle us out of money we have honestly earned. This hold-up game won't work, I assure you, and I advise you to get into more respectable business. My money is mine; it doesn't belong to the Allies, and they won't get a cent of it." He was getting more angry as he proceeded in his harangue. "Moreover," he continued, "our weak administration can't use me to help it out of the hole it has foolishly stumbled into, or make America the cat's-paw to pull British chestnuts out of the fire. You ought to be ashamed, Miss Burrows, to lend yourself to such unpatriotic methods of bulldozing honest citizens!"

Mary Louise was distressed, but undaunted. The man was monstrously wrong, and she knew it. Sitting in Mr. Herring's private office at the time were Professor John Dyer, the superintendent of Dorfield's schools, and the Hon. Andrew Duncan, a leading politician, a former representative and now one of the county supervisors. The girl looked at Professor Dyer, whom she knew slightly, and said pleadingly:

"Won't you defend our administration and our country, Mr. Dyer?"

He smiled deprecatingly but did not speak. He was a tall, lean man, quite round-shouldered and of studious appearance. He wore double eyeglasses, underneath which his eyes were somewhat watery. The smile upon his thin features was a stationary one, not as if assumed, but molded with the features and lacking geniality.

It was the Hon. Andrew Duncan who answered the Liberty Girl.

"The difference between Mr. Herring and eighty percent of the American people," said he in stilted, pompous tones, "is that our friend Herring unwisely voices his protest, while the others merely think—and consider it the part of wisdom to say nothing."

"I don't believe that!" cried Mary Louise indignantly. "The American people are loyal to their President. There may be a few traitors; we're gradually discovering them; but—"

"I am busy," Herring interrupted her, scowling, and he swung his chair so that his back was toward her.

"You won't be busy long, if you keep talking that way," predicted the girl.

"Tut-tut!" said the Hon. Andrew, warningly. "Your threats, young lady, are as unwise as Mr. Herring's speech."

"But they carry more weight," she asserted stoutly. "Do you think any grocery man in Dorfield would buy goods of Mr. Herring if he knew him to be disloyal in this, our country's greatest crisis? And they're going to know it, if I have to visit each one and tell him myself what Mr. Herring has said."

A tense, if momentary silence, followed, broken by the Professor, who now said in his smooth, unctuous way:

"Mr. Herring's blunt expression of his sentiments was not intended for other ears than ours, I am sure. In confidence, one may say many things to friends which he would prefer to withhold from an indiscriminating public. We are well assured, indeed, that Mr. Herring is a loyal American, with America's best interests at heart, but he does not regard our present national activities as leniently as we do. I have been endeavoring, in my humble way, to change his attitude of mind," here Herring swung around and looked at the speaker stolidly, "and though I admit he is a bit obstinate, I venture to assure you, Miss Burrows, that Silas Herring will stand by the Stars and Stripes as long as there is a shred of our banner to wave in the breeze of freedom, justice and democracy."

A cynical smile gradually settled on the grocer's stern face. The Hon. Andrew was smiling with undisguised cheerfulness.

"We are all loyal—thoroughly loyal," said the latter. "I've bought some Liberty Bonds already, my girl, but you can put me down for a hundred dollars more. We must support our country in every possible way, with effort, with money, with our flesh and blood. I have no children, but my two nephews and a second cousin are now in France!"

"For my part," added Professor Dyer, "I have hesitated as to how much of my meagre salary I can afford to spend. But I think I can handle five hundred dollars' worth."

"Thank you," said Mary Louise, somewhat puzzled by these offers. "It isn't like risking the money; it's a solid investment in the best securities in the world."

"I know," returned the Professor, nodding gravely, "But I'm not thinking of that. I'm a poor man, as you probably know, but what I have is at my country's disposal, since it is evident that my country needs it."

"Doesn't that shame you, sir?" asked Mary Louise brightly, as she turned to Silas Herring. "You're a business man, and they say—although I confess I doubt it—that you're a loyal American. You can convince me of the fact by purchasing a liberal share of bonds. Then I can forget your dreadful words. Then I can carry to everyone the news that you've made a splendid investment in Liberty Bonds. Even if you honestly think the administration has been at fault, it won't do any good to grumble. We are in this war, sir, and we've got to win it, that you and every other American may enjoy prosperity and freedom. How much shall I say that you have subscribed, Mr. Herring?"

He studied her face, his expression never changing. Mary Louise wondered if he could read her suspicion and dislike of him, despite her efforts to smother those feelings in the cause of Liberty. Then Herring looked at Professor Dyer, who stood meekly, with downcast eyes. Next the grocer gazed at the supervisor, who smiled in a shrewd way and gave a brief nod.

Mr. Herring frowned. He drummed nervously with his fingers on his mahogany desk. Then he reached for his check-book and with grim deliberation wrote a check and handed it to Mary Louise.

"You've won, young lady," he admitted. "I'm too good an American to approve what has been done down at Washington, but I'll help keep our flag waving, as the Professor suggests. When we've won our war—and of course we shall win—there will be a day of reckoning for every official who is judged by our citizens to have been disloyal, however high his station. Good afternoon!"

The first impulse of Mary Louise was to crumple up the check and throw it in the man's face, to show her resentment of his base insinuations. But as she glanced at the check she saw it was for ten thousand dollars, and that meant sinews of war—help for our soldiers and our allies. She couldn't thank the man, but she bowed coldly and left the private office. Professor Dyer accompanied her and at the outer door he said to the girl:

"Silas Herring's heart is in the right place, as you see by his generous check. Of course, he might have bought more bonds than that, as he is very wealthy, but he is an obstinate man and it is a triumph for our sacred cause that he was induced to buy at all. You are doing a noble work, my child, and I admire you for having undertaken the task. If I can be of service to you, pray command me."

"Urge everyone you meet to buy bonds," suggested Mary Louise. She did not care to discuss Silas Herring.

"I'll do that, indeed," promised the school superintendent. But as he watched her depart, there was a queer expression on his lean face that it was well Mary

Louise did not see.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAITOR

When the Liberty Girls met that evening at the home of Alora Jones, it was found that Mary Louise had sold more bonds than any of the others, although Laura Hilton had secured one subscription of fifty thousand dollars from the Dorfield National Steel Works, the manager of which industry, Mr. Colton, was a relative of the girl. Altogether, the day's work had netted them two hundred and fourteen thousand dollars, and as soon as she could escape Mary Louise rushed home to report their success to her grandfather.

"In one day, Gran'pa Jim!" she cried exultantly, and the old colonel's eyes sparkled as he replied:

"That makes our great mass-meeting look pretty small; doesn't it, my dear? I consider it wonderful! With four more such days our quota would be over-subscribed."

"That's what we shall try for," she declared, and then told him who the biggest bond buyers had been—mostly those who had refused to listen to the regular Committee or had not been influenced by their carefully prepared arguments.

"It's just because we are girls, and they are ashamed to refuse us," she acknowledged. "It seems like taking an unfair advantage of them, I know, but those who need urging and shaming, to induce them to respond loyally to the nation's needs, deserve no consideration. We're not robbing them, either," she added, "but just inducing them to make a safe investment. Isn't that true, Gran'pa Jim?"

"What surprises me most," he responded, "is how you ever managed to load your little head with so much mature wisdom. I'd no idea, Mary Louise, you were so interested in the war and our national propaganda for waging it successfully."

"Why, I read the newspapers, you know, and I've listened to you spout patriotism, and ever since we joined the Allies against Germany, my girl chums and I have been secretly organized as a band of Liberty Girls, determined to do our bit in winning the war. This is the first chance, though,

that we've ever had to show what we can do, and we are very proud and happy to-night to realize that we're backing Uncle Sam to some purpose."

"This war," remarked the old soldier, thoughtfully, "is bringing the women of all nations into marked prominence, for it is undeniable that their fervid patriotism outranks that of the men. But you are mere girls, and I marvel at your sagacity and devotion, heretofore unsuspected. If you can follow to-day's success until Saturday, and secure our quota of subscriptions to the bonds, not only Dorfield but all the nation will be proud of your achievement."

"We shall do our best," replied the girl, simply, although her cheeks glowed pink under such praise. "There are enough slackers still to be interviewed to bring the quota up to the required amount and with to-day's success to hearten us, I am sure we shall end the week triumphantly."

Next morning the Liberty Girls sallied forth early, all six aglow with enthusiasm. Mary Louise consulted her carefully prepared list and found that her first calf was to be at McGill's drug store. She found Mr. McGill looking over his morning's mail, but moments were precious, so she at once stated her errand.

The old druggist glanced up at the girl under his spectacles, noted her patriotic attire and the eager look on her pretty face, and slowly shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Miss Burrows, but I can't afford it," he said evasively.

"Oh, Mr. McGill! I'm sure you are mistaken," she replied. "You can afford insurance, you know, to protect your stock, and this money for Uncle Sam is an insurance that your home and business will be protected from the ravages of a ruthless foe."

He stared at her thoughtfully a moment. Then he selected a paper from his mail and handed it to her.

"Read that," he said briefly.

Mary Louise read it. It was a circular, printed in small, open-faced, capital type on plain white paper, and unsigned. It said:

"Why, this is treason!" cried Mary Louise, gasping from sheer amazement and indignation. "It's a—a—treacherous, vile, disloyal insinuation. Some German spy wrote that, and he ought to be hanged for it!"

The druggist nodded. He picked up the envelope that had contained the circular and scrutinized it closely.

"Really, it looks like foreign handwriting; doesn't it?" he agreed, handing her the envelope. "It is postmarked 'Dorfield' and was posted last evening. The whole town is buzzing about the wonderful work of the Liberty Girls yesterday. Perhaps your success is responsible for this—this—opposition."

Mary Louise's cheeks were burning. Her eyes flashed.

"May I keep this—*thing?"* she asked, with a shudder of disgust as she thrust the circular into its envelope.

"Certainly, if you wish."

"And will you let an enemy attack like that influence you, Mr. McGill?"

He smiled, rather grimly.

"Yes. I'll invest five hundred in the bonds. I had already decided to put in a hundred dollars, but for a moment this veiled accusation bewildered me. You're right; it's treasonable. It will be hard for me to raise five hundred, just now, but I'll do it. I want that to be my answer to the German."

Mary Louise thanked him and hurried away. Next door was Lacey's Shoe Store, and Mr. Lacey was reading a duplicate of that identical circular when the Liberty Girl approached him.

The man bowed low to Mary Louise, a deference she felt rendered to her red-white-and-blue uniform.

"Good morning!" he said pleasantly, recognizing the girl as one of his good customers. "Glad to see you, Mary Louise, for if I give you a good fat check it may take a nasty taste out of my mouth, acquired by reading a bit of German propaganda."

"I know, Mr. Lacey," she replied earnestly. "I've seen that circular before. Do you mind my having it—and the envelope?"

"I wouldn't touch the filth, if I were you," he protested.

"I'm going to run the traitor down," she said. "No man has the right to live in Dorfield—or in America—who could be guilty of such disloyalty."

He gave her the circular and his check for Liberty Bonds, and she passed on to the next store. During the morning Mary Louise discovered several more of the traitorous circulars. Some merchants would not admit having received the warning; others, through their arguments, convinced the girl they had not only read the screed but had been influenced by it. Perhaps it did not seriously affect her sales of bonds, but she felt that it did and her indignation grew

steadily. By noon she was tingling with resentment and when she joined the other Liberty Girls at luncheon, she found them all excited over the circular and demanding vengeance on the offender—whoever he might happen to be.

"Isn't it dreadful!" exclaimed Lucile Neal, "and what could the person hope to gain by it?"

"Why, he wanted to kill the Liberty Bond sale," explained Alora Jones.

"A suspicion that this money is to be misapplied, or that officials will steal part of it, is likely to prevent a lot of foolish people from investing in the bonds. All this morning I could see that men were influenced by this circular, which has been pretty generally distributed."

"Yes; one or two repeated the very words of the circular to me," said Laura Hilton; "but I just asked them if they considered the United States able to pay its bonds and they were forced to admit it was a safe investment, however the money might be used."

"I'd like to know who sent that circular," exclaimed Edna Barlow.

"I'm going to find out!" asserted Mary Louise.

"How, my dear?"

"There must be ways of tracing such a bunch of circulars as were mailed last evening. I'm going to see the Chief of Police and put him on the trail."

"Do you know," said Edna, a thoughtful and rather quiet girl, "I already have a suspicion who the traitor is."

"Who?" an eager chorus.

"I'm not sure I ought to speak his name, for it's only a suspicion and I may be wrong. It would be an awful thing to accuse one unjustly of such a dastardly act, wouldn't it? But—think, girls!—who is known to be against the war, and pro-German? Who did we consider an enemy to the cause of liberty until—until he happened to buy some bonds the other night and indulge in some peanut patriotism to disarm a criticism he knew was becoming dangerous?"

They looked at one another, half frightened at the suggestion, for all knew whom she meant.

"Perhaps," said Alora, slowly, "Jake Kasker really believes in the bonds. He certainly set the example to others and led them to buy a lot of bonds. It doesn't seem reasonable, after that, to credit him with trying to prevent their sale."

"Those pro-Germans," remarked little Jane Donovan, "are clever and sly. They work in the dark. Kasker said he hated the war but loved the flag."

"I'm afraid of those people who think devotion to our flag can cover disloyalty to our President," said Mary Louise earnestly.

"But the flag represents the President, and Kasker said he'd stand by the flag to the last."

"All buncombe, my dear," said Edna decidedly. "That flag talk didn't take the curse off the statement that the war is all wrong."

"He had to say something patriotic, or he'd have been mobbed," was Lucile's serious comment. "I hadn't thought of Jake Kasker, before, but he may be the culprit."

"Isn't he the only German in town who has denounced our going into the European war?" demanded Edna.

"No," said Mary Louise; "Gran'pa has told me of several others; but none has spoken so frankly as Kasker. Anyhow, there's no harm in suspecting him, for if he is really innocent he can blame his own disloyal speeches for the suspicion. But now let us check up the morning's work and get busy again as soon as possible. We mustn't lose a single minute."

"And, as we go around," suggested Alora, "let us keep our eyes and ears open for traces of the traitor. There may be more than one pro-German in the conspiracy, for the circular was printed by somebody, and there are several kinds of handwriting on the addressed envelopes we have gathered. We've no time to do detective work, just now, but we can watch out, just the same."

Mary Louise did not mention the circular to Colonel Hathaway that evening, for he was still ill and she did not wish to annoy him.

The next day she found another circular had been put in the mails, printed from the same queer open-faced type as the first. Not so many had been sent out of these, but they were even more malicious in their suggestions. The girls were able to collect several of them for evidence and were 'more angry and resentful than ever, but they did not allow such outrageous antagonism to discourage them in their work.

Of course the Liberty Girls were not the only ones in Dorfield trying to sell bonds. Mr. Jaswell and other bankers promoted the bond sale vigorously and the regular Committee did not flag in its endeavors to secure subscriptions. On account of Colonel Hathaway's illness, Professor Dyer was selected to fill his place on the Committee and proved himself exceedingly industrious. The only

trouble with the Professor was his reluctance to argue. He seemed to work early and late, visiting the wealthier and more prosperous citizens, but he accepted too easily their refusals to buy. On several occasions the Liberty Girls succeeded in making important sales where Professor Dyer had signally failed. He seemed astonished at this and told Mary Louise, with a deprecating shrug, that he feared his talents did not lie in the direction of salesmanship.

Despite the natural proportion of failures—for not all will buy bonds in any community—on the fourth day following the mass-meeting Dorfield's quota of one million was fully subscribed, and on Saturday another hundred and fifty thousand was added, creating jubilation among the loyal citizens and reflecting great credit on the Liberty Girls, the Committee, and all who had labored so well for the cause.

"Really," said Professor Dyer, his voice sounding regretful when he congratulated the girls, "our success is due principally to your patriotic organization. The figures show that you secured subscriptions for over half a million. Dear me, what a remarkable fact!"

"More than that," added Jason Jones, Alora's father, who was a wealthy artist and himself a member of the Committee, "our girls encouraged the faltering ones to do their duty. Many a man who coldly turned our Committee down smiled at the pretty faces and dainty costumes of our Liberty Girls and wrote their checks without a murmur."

"All the credit is due Mary Louise," declared Alora. "It was she who proposed the idea, and who organized us and trained us and designed our Liberty costumes. Also, Mary Louise made the most sales."

"Nonsense!" cried Mary Louise, blushing red. "I couldn't have done anything at all without the help of you girls. No one of us is entitled to more credit than the others, but all six of us may well feel proud of our success. We've done our bit to help Uncle Sam win the war."

CHAPTER V

UNCONVINCING TESTIMONY

On Sunday "Gran'pa Jim," relieved of all worry, felt "quite himself again," as he expressed it, and the old gentleman strutted somewhat proudly as he marched to church with his lovely granddaughter beside him, although her

uniform was to-day discarded for a neat tailor-suit. Mary Louise had always been a favorite in Dorfield, but the past week had made her a heroine in the eyes of all patriotic citizens. Many were the looks of admiration and approval cast at the young girl this morning as she passed along the streets beside the old colonel.

In the afternoon, as they sat in the cosy study at home, the girl for the first time showed her grandfather the disloyal circulars, relating how indignant the Liberty Girls had been at encountering such dastardly opposition.

Colonel Hathaway studied the circulars carefully. He compared the handwritings on the different envelopes, and when Mary Louise said positively: "That man must be discovered and arrested!" her grandfather nodded his head and replied:

"He is a dangerous man. Not especially on account of these mischievous utterances, which are too foolish to be considered seriously, but because such a person is sure to attempt other venomous deeds which might prove more important. German propaganda must be dealt with sternly and all opposition to the administration thoroughly crushed. It will never do to allow a man like this to go unrebuked and unpunished."

"What, then, would you suggest?" asked the girl.

"The police should be notified. Chief Farnum is a clever officer and intensely patriotic, from all I have heard. I think he will have no difficulty in discovering who is responsible for these circulars."

"I shall go to him to-morrow," decided Mary Louise. "I had the same idea, Gran'pa Jim; it's a matter for the police to handle."

But when she had obtained an interview with Chief of Police Farnum the next morning and had silently laid one of the circulars on his desk before him, an announcement of her errand, Farnum merely glanced at it, smiled and then flashed a shrewd look into the girl's face.

"Well!" said the Chief, in an interrogative tone.

"Those treasonable circulars have been mailed to a lot of our citizens," said she.

"I know."

"They are pro-German, of course. The traitor who is responsible for them ought to be arrested immediately."

"To be sure," replied Farnum, calmly.

"Well, then do it!" she exclaimed, annoyed by his bland smile.

"I'd like to, Miss Burrows," he rejoined, the smile changing to a sudden frown, "and only two things prevent my obeying your request. One is that the writer is unknown to me."

"I suppose you could find him, sir. That's what the police are for. Criminals don't usually come here and give themselves up, I imagine, or even send you their address. But the city isn't so big that any man, however clever, could escape your dragnet."

"Thank you for the compliment," said the Chief, again smiling. "I believe we could locate the fellow, were such a task not obviated by the second objection."

"And that?"

"If you'll read this circular—there are two others, by the way, mailed at different times—you will discover that our objectionable friend has skillfully evaded breaking our present laws. He doesn't assert anything treasonable at all; he merely questions, or suggests."

"He is disloyal, however," insisted Mary Louise.

"In reality, yes; legally, no. We allow a certain amount of free speech in this country, altogether too much under present conditions. The writer of this circular makes certain statements that are true and would be harmless in themselves were they not followed by a series of questions which insinuate that our trusted officials are manipulating our funds for selfish purposes. A simple denial of these insinuations draws the fangs from every question. We know very well the intent was to rouse suspicion and resentment against the government, but if we had the author of these circulars in court we could not prove that he had infringed any of the existing statutes."

"And you will allow such a traitor as that to escape!" cried Mary Louise, amazed and shocked.

For a moment he did not reply, but regarded the girl thoughtfully. Then he said:

"The police of a city, Miss Burrows, is a local organization with limited powers. I don't mind telling you, however, that there are now in Dorfield certain government agents who are tracing this circular and will not be so particular as we must be to abide by established law in making arrests. Their

authority is more elastic, in other words. Moreover, these circulars were mailed, and the postoffice department has special detectives to attend to those who use the mails for disloyal purposes."

"Are any of these agents or detectives working on this case?" asked the girl, more hopefully.

"Let us suppose so," he answered. "They do not confide their activities to the police, although if they call upon us, we must assist them. I personally saw that copies of these circulars were placed in the hands of a government agent, but have heard nothing more of the affair."

"And you fear they will let the matter drop?" she questioned, trying to catch the drift of his cautiously expressed words.

He did not answer that question at all. Instead, he quietly arranged some papers on his desk and after a pause that grew embarrassing, again turned to Mary Louise.

"Whoever issued these circulars," he remarked, "is doubtless clever. He is also bitterly opposed to the administration, and we may logically suppose he will not stop in his attempts to block the government's conduct of the war. At every opportunity he will seek to poison the minds of our people and, sooner or later, he will do something that is decidedly actionable. Then we will arrest him and put an end to his career."

"You think that, sir?"

"I'm pretty sure of it, from long experience with criminals."

"I suppose the Kaiser is paying him," said the girl, bitterly.

"We've no grounds for that belief."

"He is helping the Kaiser; he is pro-German!"

"He is helping the Kaiser, but is not necessarily pro-German. We know he is against the government, but on the other hand he may detest the Germans. That his propaganda directly aids our enemies there is no doubt, yet his enmity may have been aroused by personal prejudice or intense opposition to the administration or to other similar cause. Such a person is an out-and-out traitor when his sentiments lead to actions which obstruct his country's interests. The traitors are not all pro-German. Let us say they are anti-American."

Mary Louise was sorely disappointed.

"I think I know who this traitor is, in spite of what you say," she remarked,

"and I think you ought to watch him, Mr. Farnum, and try to prevent his doing more harm."

The Chief studied her face. He seemed to have a theory that one may glean as much from facial expression as from words.

"One ought to be absolutely certain," said he, "before accusing anyone of disloyalty. A false accusation is unwarranted. It is a crime, in fact. You have no idea, Miss Burrows, how many people come to us to slyly accuse a neighbor, whom they hate, of disloyalty. In not a single instance have they furnished proof, and we do not encourage mere telltales. I don't want you to tell me whom you suspect, but when you can lay before me a positive accusation, backed by facts that can be proven, I'll take up the case and see that the lawbreaker is vigorously prosecuted."

The girl went away greatly annoyed by the Chief's reluctance to act in the matter, but when she had related the interview to Gran'pa, the old colonel said:

"I like Farnum's attitude, which I believe to be as just as it is conservative. Suspicion, based on personal dislike, should not be tolerated. Why, Mary Louise, anyone might accuse you, or me, of disloyalty and cause us untold misery and humiliation in defending ourselves and proving our innocence—and even then the stigma on our good name would be difficult to remove entirely. Thousands of people have lost their lives in the countries of Europe through false accusations. But America is an enlightened nation, and let us hope no personal animosities will influence us or no passionate adherence to our country's cause deprive us of our sense of justice."

"Our sense of justice," asserted Mary Louise, "should lead us to unmask traitors, and I know very well that somewhere in Dorfield lurks an enemy to my country."

"We will admit that, my dear. But your country is watching out for those 'enemies within,' who are more to be feared than those without; and, if I were you, Mary Louise, I'd allow the proper officials to unmask the traitor, as they are sure to do in time. This war has placed other opportunities in your path to prove your usefulness to your country, as you have already demonstrated. Is it not so?"

Mary Louise sighed.

"You are always right, Gran'pa Jim," she said, kissing him fondly. "Drat that traitor, though! How I hate a snake in the grass."

CHAPTER VI.

TO HELP WIN THE WAR

The activities of the Liberty Girls of Dorfield did not cease with their successful Liberty Bond "drive." Indeed, this success and the approbation of their fellow townspeople spurred the young girls on to further patriotic endeavor, in which they felt sure of enthusiastic encouragement.

"As long as Uncle Sam needs his soldiers," said Peter Conant, the lawyer, "he'll need his Liberty Girls, for they can help win the war."

When Mary Louise first conceived the idea of banding her closest companions to support the government in all possible ways, she was a bit doubtful if their efforts would prove of substantial value, although she realized that all her friends were earnestly determined to "do their bit," whatever the bit might chance to be. The local Red Cross chapter had already usurped many fields of feminine usefulness and with a thorough organization, which included many of the older women, was accomplishing a 'vast deal of good. Of course the Liberty Girls could not hope to rival the Red Cross.

Mary Louise was only seventeen and the ages of the other Liberty Girls ranged from fourteen to eighteen, so they had been somewhat ignored by those who were older and more competent, through experience, to undertake important measures of war relief. The sensational bond sale, however, had made the youngsters heroines—for the moment, at least—and greatly stimulated their confidence in themselves and their ambition to accomplish more.

Mary Louise Burrows was an orphan; her only relative, indeed, was Colonel James Hathaway, her mother's father, whose love for his granddaughter was thoroughly returned by the young girl. They were good comrades, these two, and held many interests in common despite the discrepancy in their ages. The old colonel was "well-to-do," and although he could scarcely be called wealthy in these days of huge fortunes, his resources were ample beyond their needs. The Hathaway home was one of the most attractive in Dorfield, and Mary Louise and her grandfather were popular and highly respected. Their servants consisted of an aged pair of negroes named "Aunt Sally" and "Uncle Eben," who considered themselves family possessions and were devoted to "de ole mar'se an' young missy."

Alora Jones, who lived in the handsomest and most imposing house in the

little city, was an heiress and considered the richest girl in Dorfield, having been left several millions by her mother. Her father, Jason Jones, although he handled Alora's fortune and surrounded his motherless daughter with every luxury, was by profession an artist—a kindly man who encouraged the girl to be generous and charitable to a degree. They did not advertise their good deeds and only the poor knew how much they owed to the practical sympathy of Alora Jones and her father. Alora, however, was rather reserved and inclined to make few friends, her worst fault being a suspicion of all strangers, due to some unfortunate experiences she had formerly encountered. The little band of Liberty Girls included all of Alora's accepted chums, for they were the chums of Mary Louise, whom Alora adored. Their companionship had done much to soften the girl's distrustful nature.

The other Liberty Girls were Laura Hilton, petite and pretty and bubbling with energy, whose father was a prominent real estate broker; Lucile Neal, whose father and three brothers owned and operated the Neal Automobile Factory, and whose intelligent zeal and knowledge of war conditions had been of great service to Mary Louise; Edna Barlow, a widowed dressmaker's only child, whose sweet disposition had made her a favorite with her girl friends, and Jane Donovan, the daughter of the Mayor of Dorfield and the youngest of the group here described.

These were the six girls who had entered the bond campaign and assisted to complete Dorfield's quota of subscriptions, but there was one other Liberty Girl who had been unable to join them in this active work. This was Irene Macfarlane, the niece of Peter Conant. She had been a cripple since childhood and was confined to the limits of a wheeled chair. Far from being gloomy or depressed, however, Irene had the sunniest nature imaginable, and was always more bright and cheerful than the average girl of her age. "From my knees down," she would say confidentially, "I'm no good; but from my knees up I'm as good as anybody." She was an excellent musician and sang very sweetly; she was especially deft with her needle; she managed her chair so admirably that little assistance was ever required. Mrs. Conant called her "the light of the house," and to hear her merry laughter and sparkling conversation, you would speedily be tempted to forget that fate had been unkind to her and decreed that for life she must be wedded to a wheeled chair.

If Irene resented this decree, she never allowed anyone to suspect it, and her glad disposition warded off the words of sympathy that might have pained her.

While unable to sally forth in the Liberty Bond drive, Irene was none the less an important member of the band of Liberty Girls. "She's our inspiration," said Mary Louise with simple conviction. Teeming with patriotism and never doubting her ability to do something helpful in defeating her country's foes,

Irene had many valuable suggestions to make to her companions and one of these she broached a few days after the bond sale ended so triumphantly. On this occasion the Liberty Girls had met with Irene at Peter Conant's cosy home, next door to the residence of Colonel Hathaway, for consultation as to their future endeavors.

"Everyone is knitting for the soldiers and sailors," said Irene, "and while that is a noble work, I believe that we ought to do something different from the others. Such an important organization ought to render unusual and individual service on behalf of our beloved country. Is it not so?"

"It's all very well, Irene, to back our beloved country," remarked Laura, "but the whole nation is doing that and I really hanker to help our soldier boys."

"So do I," spoke up Lucile. "The government is equal to the country's needs, I'm sure, but the government has never taken any too good care of its soldiers and they'll lack a lot of things besides knitted goods when they get to the front."

"Exactly," agreed Mary Louise. "Seems to me it's the girls' chief duty to look after the boys, and a lot of the drafted ones are marching away from Dorfield each day, looking pretty glum, even if loyally submitting to the inevitable. I tell you, girls, these young and green soldiers need encouraging, so they'll become enthusiastic and make the best sort of fighters, and we ought to bend our efforts to cheering them up."

Irene laughed merrily.

"Good!" she cried; "you're like a flock of sheep: all you need is a hint to trail away in the very direction I wanted to lead you. There are a lot of things we can do to add to our soldiers' comfort. They need chocolate—sweets are good for them—and 'comfort-kits' of the real sort, not those useless, dowdy ones so many well-intentioned women are wasting time and money to send them; and they'll be grateful for lots and lots of cigarettes, and—"

"Oh, Irene! Do you think that would be right?" from Edna Barlow.

"Of course it would. The government approves cigarettes and the French girls are supplying our boys across the pond with them even now. Surely we can do as much for our own brave laddies who are still learning the art of war. Not all smoke, of course, and some prefer pipes and tobacco, which we can also send them. Another thing, nearly every soldier needs a good pocket knife, and a razor, and they need games of all sorts, such as dominoes and checkers and cribbage-boards; and good honest trench mirrors, and—"

"Goodness me, Irene," interrupted Jane Donovan, "how do you think we could supply all those things? To equip a regiment with the articles you mention would cost a mint of money, and where's the money coming from, and how are we to get it?"

"There you go again, helping me out!" smiled Irene. "In your question, my dear, lies the crux of my suggestion. We Liberty Girls must raise the money."

"How, Irene?"

"I object to begging."

"The people are tired of subscribing to all sorts of schemes."

"We certainly are not female Croesuses!"

"Perhaps you expect us to turn bandits and sandbag the good citizens on dark nights."

Irene's smile did not fade; she simply glowed with glee at these characteristic protestations.

"I can't blame you, girls, for you haven't thought the thing out, and I have," she stated. "My scheme isn't entirely original, for I read the other day of a similar plan being tried in another city, with good success. A plan similar, in some ways, but quite different in others. Yet it gave me the idea."

"Shoot us the idea, then," said Jane, who was inclined to favor slang.

"In order to raise money," said Irene, slowly and more seriously than she had before spoken, "it is necessary for us to go into business. The other day, when I was riding with Alora, I noticed that the store between the post-office and the Citizens' Bank is vacant, and a sign in the window said 'Apply to Peter Conant, Agent.' Peter Conant being my uncle, I applied to him that evening after dinner, on behalf of the Liberty Girls. It's one of the best locations in town and right in the heart of the business district. The store has commanded a big rental, but in these times it is not in demand and it has been vacant for the last six months, with no prospect of its being rented. Girls, Peter Conant will allow us to use this store room without charge until someone is willing to pay the proper rent for it, and so the first big problem is solved. Three cheers for Uncle Peter!"

They stared at her rather suspiciously, not yet understanding her idea.

"So far, so good, my dear," said Mary Louise. "We can trust dear old Peter Conant to be generous and patriotic. But what good is a store without stock,

and how are we going to get a stock to sell—and sell it at a profit that will allow us to do all the things we long to do for the soldiers?"

"Explain that, and I'm with you," announced Alora.

"Explain that, and we're all with you!" declared Lucile Neal.

"All I need is the opportunity," protested Irene. "You're such chatterboxes that you won't let me talk! Now—listen. I'm not much of an executioner, girls, but I can plan and you can execute, and in that way I get my finger in the pie. Now, I believe I've a practical idea that will work out beautifully. Dorfield is an ancient city and has been inhabited for generations. Almost every house contains a lot of articles that are not in use—are put aside and forgotten—or are not in any way necessary to the comfort and happiness of the owners, yet would be highly prized by some other family which does not possess such articles. For instance, a baby-carriage or crib, stored away in some attic, could be sold at a bargain to some young woman needing such an article; or some old brass candlesticks, considered valueless by their owner, would be eagerly bought by someone who did not possess such things and had a love for antiques.

"My proposition is simply this: that you visit all the substantial homes in Dorfield and ask to be given whatever the folks care to dispense with, such items to be sold at 'The Liberty Girls' Shop' and the money applied to our War Fund to help the soldier boys. Lucile's brother, Joe Neal, will furnish us a truck to cart all the things from the houses to our store, and I'm sure we can get a whole lot of goods that will sell readily. The people will be glad to give all that they don't want to so good a cause, and what one doesn't want, another is sure to want. Whatever money we take in will be all to the good, and with it we can supply the boys with many genuine comforts. Now, then, how does my idea strike you?"

Approval—even the dawn of enthusiasm—was written on every countenance. They canvassed all the pros and cons of the proposition at length, and the more they considered it the more practical it seemed.

"The only doubtful thing," said Mary Louise, finally, "is whether the people will donate the goods they don't need or care for, but that can be easily determined by asking them. We ought to pair off, and each couple take a residence street and make a careful canvass, taking time to explain our plan. One day will show us whether we're to be successful or not, and the whole idea hinges on the success of our appeal."

"Not entirely," objected Alora. "We may secure the goods, but be unable to sell them."

"Nonsense," said little Laura Hilton; "nothing in the world sells so readily as second-hand truck. Just think how the people flock to auctions and the like. And we girls should prove good 'salesladies,' too, for we can do a lot of coaxing and get better prices than an auctioneer. All we need do is appeal to the patriotism of the prospective buyers."

"Anyhow," asserted Edna, "it seems worth a trial, and we must admit the idea is attractive and unique—at least a novelty in Dorfield."

So they planned their method of canvassing and agreed to put in the next day soliciting articles to sell at the Liberty Girls' Shop.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIBERTY SHOP

Mary Louise said to her grandfather that night, after explaining Irene's novel scheme to raise money: "We haven't been housekeeping many years in Dorfield and I'm not sure I can find among our household possessions anything to give the Liberty Shop. But I've some jewelry and knickknacks that I never wear and, if you don't mind, Gran'pa Jim, I'll donate that to our shop."

The Colonel was really enthusiastic over the plan and not only approved his granddaughter's proposition to give her surplus jewelry but went over the house with her and selected quite an imposing lot of odds and ends which were not in use and could readily be spared. Eager to assist the girls, the old colonel next morning went to town and ordered a big sign painted, to be placed over the store entrance, and he also induced the editors of the two newspapers to give the Liberty Girls' latest venture publicity in their columns, inviting the coöperation of the public.

Peter Conant turned over the keys of the big store to the girls and the first load of goods to be delivered was that from the Hathaway residence.

The Liberty Girls were astonished at the success of their solicitations. From almost every house they visited they secured donations of more or less value. It may have seemed "rubbish" to some of the donors, but the variety of goods that soon accumulated in the store room presented an interesting collection and the girls arranged their wares enticingly and polished up the brass and copper ornaments and utensils until they seemed of considerable value.

They did not open their doors to the public for ten days, and Joe Neal began to grumble because one of his trucks was kept constantly running from house to house, gathering up the articles contributed to the Liberty Girls' Shop. But the girls induced other trucks to help Joe and the enthusiasm kept growing. Curiosity was spurred by the big sign over the closed doors, and every woman who donated was anxious to know what others had given to the shop. It was evident there would be a crowd at the formal "opening," for much was expected from the unique enterprise.

Meantime, the girls were busily occupied. Each day one group solicited donations while another stayed at the store to arrange the goods. Many articles of furniture, more or less decrepit, were received, and a man was hired to varnish and patch and put the chairs, stands, tables, desks and whatnots into the best condition possible. Alora Jones thought the stock needed "brightening," so she induced her father to make purchases of several new articles, which she presented the girls as her share of the donations. And Peter Conant, finding many small pieces of jewelry, silverware and bric-a-brac among the accumulation, rented a big showcase for the girls, in which such wares were properly displayed.

During these ten days of unflagging zeal the Liberty Girls were annoyed to discover that another traitorous circular had been issued. A large contingent of the selective draft boys had just been ordered away to the cantonment and the day before they left all their parents received a circular saying that the draft was unconstitutional and that their sons were being sacrificed by autocratic methods to further the political schemes of the administration. "Mr. Wilson," it ended, "is trying to make for himself a place in history, at the expense of the flesh and blood of his countrymen."

This vile and despicable screed was printed from the same queer type as the former circulars denouncing the Liberty Bond sale and evidently emanated from the same source. Mary Louise was the first to secure one of the papers and its envelope, mailed through the local post-office, and her indignation was only equalled by her desire to punish the offender. She realized, however, her limitations, and that she had neither the time nor the talent to unmask the traitor. She could only hope that the proper authorities would investigate the matter.

That afternoon, with the circular still in her handbag, she visited the clothing store of Jacob Kasker and asked the proprietor if he had any goods he would contribute to the Liberty Girls' Shop.

Kasker was a stolid, florid-faced man, born in America of naturalized German parents, and therefore his citizenship could not be assailed. He had been quite

successful as a merchant and was reputed to be the wealthiest clothing dealer in Dorfield.

"No," said Kasker, shortly, in answer to the request. Mary Louise was annoyed by the tone.

"You mean that you *won't* help us, I suppose?" she said impatiently.

He turned from his desk and regarded her with a slight frown. Usually his expression was stupidly genial.

"Why should I give something for nothing?" he asked. "It isn't my war; I didn't make it, and I don't like it. Say, I got a boy—one son. Do you know they've drafted him—took him from his work without his consent, or mine, and marched him off to a war that there's no good excuse for?"

"Well," returned Mary Louise, "your boy is one of those we're trying to help."

"You won't help make him a free American again; you'll just help give him knickknacks so he won't rebel against his slavery."

The girl's eyes flashed.

"Mr. Kasker," she said sternly, "I consider that speech disloyal and traitorous. Men are being jailed every day for less!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe that is true, and it proves what a free country this is—does it not? Mr. Wilson's democracy is the kind that won't allow people to express their opinions, unless they agree with him. If I say I will stand by the American constitution, they will put me in jail."

Mary Louise fairly gasped. She devoutly wished she had never approached this dreadful man. She felt ashamed to breathe the same air with him. But she hated to retreat without a definite display of her disgust at his perfidious utterances. Drawing the circular from her bag she spread it before him on his desk and said:

"Read that!"

He just glanced at it, proving he knew well its wording. Mary Louise was watching him closely.

"Well, what about it?" he asked brusquely.

"It expresses your sentiments, I believe."

He turned upon her suspiciously.

"You think I wrote it?" he demanded.

"My thoughts are my own," retorted Mary Louise.

Kasker's frown deepened.

"Your thoughts may get you into trouble, my girl," he said slowly. "Let me tell you this: However much I hate this war, I'm not fighting it publicly. To you I have spoken in private—just a private conversation. The trouble with me is, I talk too much; I don't know enough to keep my mouth shut. I guess I'll never learn that. I ain't a hypocrite, and I ain't a pacifist. I say the United States must win this war because it has started the job, and right or wrong, must finish it. I guess we could beat the whole world, if we had to. But I ain't fool enough to say that all they do down at Washington is right, 'cause I know it ain't. But I'm standing by the flag. My boy is standing by the flag, and he'll fight as well as any in the whole army to keep the flag flying over this great republic. By and by we'll get better congressmen; the ones we got now are accidents. But in spite of all accidents—and they're mostly our own fault—I'm for America first, last and all the time. That's Jake Kasker. I don't like the Germans and I don't like the English, for Jake Kasker is a George Washington American. What are you doing, girl?" he suddenly asked with a change of tone.

"I'm putting down that speech in shorthand in my notebook," said Mary Louise, "and I think I've got every word of it." She slipped the book in her bag and picked up the circular. "Good afternoon, Mr. Kasker!"

The German seemed bewildered; he ran his fingers through his bushy hair as if trying to remember what he had said.

"Wait!" he cried, as she turned away. "I've changed my mind about those goods; I'll send some over to your shop to be sold."

"Don't do it," she replied, "for we won't accept them. Only those whose patriotism rings true are allowed to help us."

Then she marched out of the big store, the proprietor at the desk staring at her fixedly until she had disappeared.

"That's it, Jake," he said to himself, turning to his papers; "you talk too much. If a man prints a thing, and nobody knows who printed it, he's safe."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DETECTIVE'S DAUGHTER

"I'm pretty sure, Gran'pa Jim," said Mary Louise that evening, "that I've trailed the traitor to his lair, and he's none other than—Jake Kasker!"

This was the first time she had mentioned her suspicion of Kasker to him, and her statement was received by the colonel with moderate surprise, followed by a doubtful smile.

"I know Jake," he remarked, "and while he is uneducated and his mind is unformed concerning most things outside the clothing business, I should hesitate to accuse him of downright disloyalty."

"He's a German, and sympathizes with the Kaiser," asserted Mary Louise.

"Did he say that?"

"Well, not in so many words."

"A German-American is not usually pro-German," the colonel declared, "for Germans who come to America come to escape the militarism and paternalism of the Junkers, which is proof in itself that they disapprove of what we term kaiserism. I know that Kasker talks foolishly against the war and resents the drafting of his son, but I think he is a good American at heart. He has bought Liberty Bonds more liberally than some who proclaim their patriotism from the housetops. I don't fear these outspoken objectors, my dear, as much as those who work slyly in the dark—such as the writers of those disgraceful circulars."

"I practically accused Kasker of sending out those circulars," said Mary Louise, "and his defense was very lame and unconvincing. Listen, Grand'pa, to what he said. I took the speech down in shorthand, and that worried him, I'm sure."

The colonel listened and shook his head gravely.

"Yes, Jake Kasker talks too much," he confessed, "and much that he says is disloyal to our government and calculated to do much harm, especially if widely circulated. This is no time to criticise the men who are working hard to win the war; we should render them faithful support. The task before us is difficult and it will require a united country to defeat our enemies. I must talk to Jake Kasker."

"Won't it be better to let the authorities deal with him?" suggested the girl. "They're certain to get him, in time, if he goes on this way. I believe I frightened him a bit this afternoon, but he's too dull to take warning. Anyhow, I shall relate the whole interview to Chief Farnum to-morrow morning."

This she did, but the Chief gave her little satisfaction.

"No one pays any attention to Kasker," he said.

"He's a German, and a traitor!" she insisted. "A woman's intuition is seldom at fault, and I'm convinced he's responsible for this latest and most dreadful circular," and she laid it before him.

"A girl's intuition is not as mature as a woman's intuition," the Chief answered in an impatient tone. "You force me to say, my dear young lady, that you are dabbling in affairs that do not concern you. I've plenty of those circulars on file and I'm attending to my duty and keeping an eye open for the rascal who wrote them. But there is no proof that Kasker is the man. The federal officers are also investigating the case, and I imagine they will not require your assistance."

Mary Louise flushed but stood her ground.

"Isn't it the duty of every patriotic person to denounce a traitor?" she inquired.

"Yes, if there is proof. I think you are wrong about Kasker, but if you are able to bring me proof, I'll arrest him and turn him over to the federal agents for prosecution. But, for heaven's sake, don't bother me with mere suspicions."

Mary Louise did not accept this rebuke graciously. She went away with the feeling that Chief Farnum was, for some reason, condoning a crime, and she was firmly resolved to obtain the required proof if it could be secured without subjecting herself to the annoyance of such rebuffs as the one she had just endured.

"We ought not to permit such a snake in the grass to exist in dear old Dorfield," she told her girl associates. "Let us all try to discover absolute proof of Kasker's treachery."

The other Liberty Girls were as indignant as Mary Louise, but were too intent on their present duties to pay much attention to Jake Kasker. For the Liberty Girls' Shop was now open to the public, and men, women and children crowded in to see what the girls had to offer. Sales were so brisk during the first week that the stock became depleted and once more they made a house to house canvass to obtain a new supply of material.

This kept all six of the girls busily occupied. Irene each morning rode down to the shop in the Hathaway automobile—wheel-chair and all—and acted as cashier, so as to relieve the others of this duty. She could accomplish this work very nicely and became the Liberty Girls' treasurer and financial adviser. Each day she deposited in the bank the money received, and the amounts were so liberal that enthusiasm was easily maintained.

"The soldier boys have reason to rejoice," said Irene complacently, "for we shall soon be able to provide them with numerous comforts and luxuries—all of which they are surely entitled to."

So the new enterprise was progressing finely when, one evening, on reaching home from a busy day at the shop, Mary Louise found a letter that greatly pleased her. It was from an old and valued girl friend in Washington and after rambling along pleasantly on a variety of subjects the writer concluded as follows:"

Now, this girl was in many ways so entirely unlike Mary Louise that one might wonder what link of sympathy drew them together, unless it was "the law of opposites." However, there was one quality in both their natures that might warrant the warm friendship existing between the two girls. Mary Louise was sweet and winning, with a charming, well-bred manner and a ready sympathy for all who were in trouble. She was attractive in person, particular as to dress, generous and considerate to a fault. The girl had been carefully reared and had well repaid the training of the gallant old colonel, her grandfather, who had surrounded her with competent instructors. Yet Mary Louise had a passion for mysteries and was never quite so happy as when engaged in studying a baffling personality or striving to explain a seeming enigma. Gran'pa Jim, who was usually her confidant when she "scented a mystery," often accused her of allowing her imagination to influence her judgment, but on several occasions the girl had triumphantly proven her intuitions to be correct. You must not think, from this statement, that Mary Louise was prone to suspect everyone she met; it was only on rare occasions she instinctively felt there was more beneath the surface of an occurrence than appeared to the casual observer, and then, if a wrong might be righted or a misunderstanding removed—but only in such event—she eagerly essayed to discover the truth. It was in this manner that she had once been of great service to her friend Alora Jones, and to others as well. It was this natural quality, combined with sincere loyalty, which made her long to discover and bring to justice the author of the pro-German circulars.

Josie O'Gorman was small and "pudgy"—her own expression—red-haired and freckled-faced and snub-nosed. Her eyes redeemed much of this personal handicap, for they were big and blue as turquoises and as merry and innocent

in expression as the eyes of a child. Also, the good humor which usually pervaded her sunny features led people to ignore their plainness. In dress, Josie was somewhat eccentric in her selections and careless in methods of wearing her clothes, but this might be excused by her engrossing interest in people, rather than in apparel.

The girl was the daughter—the only child, indeed—of John O'Gorman, an old and trusted lieutenant of the government's secret-service. From Josie's childhood, the clever detective had trained her in all the subtle art of his craft, and allowing for her youth, which meant a limited experience of human nature and the intricacies of crime, Josie O'Gorman was now considered by her father to be more expert than the average professional detective. While the astute secret-service agent was more than proud of his daughter's talent, he would not allow her to undertake the investigation of crime as a profession until she was older and more mature. Sometimes, however, he permitted and even encouraged her to "practise" on minor or unimportant cases of a private nature, in which the United States government was not interested.

Josie's talent drew Mary Louise to her magnetically. The detective's daughter was likewise a delightful companion. She was so well versed in all matters of national import, as well as in the foibles and peculiarities of the human race, that even conservative, old Colonel Hathaway admired the girl and enjoyed her society. Josie had visited Mary Louise more than once and was assured a warm welcome whenever she came to Dorfield. Most of the Liberty Girls knew Josie O'Gorman, and when they heard she was coming they straightway insisted she be made a member of their band.

"She'll just *have* to be one of us," said Mary Louise, "for I'm so busy with our wonderful Shop that I can't entertain Josie properly unless she takes a hand in our game, which I believe she will be glad to do."

And Josie *was* glad, and proclaimed herself a Liberty Girl the first hour of her arrival, the moment she learned what the patriotic band had already accomplished and was determined to accomplish further.

"It's just play, you know, and play of the right sort—loyal and helpful to those who deserve the best we can give them, our brave soldiers and sailors. Count me in, girls, and you'll find me at the Liberty Shop early and late, where I promise to sell anything from an old hoopskirt to a decayed piano at the highest market price. We've had some 'rummage sales' in Washington, you know, but nothing to compare with this thorough and businesslike undertaking of yours. But I won't wear your uniform; I can't afford to allow the glorious red-white-and-blue to look dowdy, as it would on my unseemly form."

CHAPTER IX

GATHERING UP THE THREADS

Josie O'Gorman had been in Dorfield several days before Mary Louise showed her the traitorous circulars that had been issued by some unknown obstructionist. At first she had been a little ashamed to acknowledge to her friend that a citizen of her own town could be so disloyal, but the matter had weighed heavily on her mind and so she decided to unload it upon Josie's shrewder intelligence.

"I feel, dear, that the best service you can render us while here—the best you can render the nation, too—will be to try to discover this secret enemy," she said earnestly. "I'm sure he has done a lot of harm, already, and he may do much more if he is left undisturbed. Some folks are not too patriotic, even now, when we are facing the most terrible ordeal in our history, and some are often so weak as to be influenced by what I am sure is pro-German propaganda."

Josie studied the various circulars. She studied the handwriting on the envelopes and the dates of the postmarks. Her attitude was tense, as that of a pointer dog who suddenly senses a trail. Finally she asked:

"Do the police know?"

Mary Louise related her two interviews with Chief Farnum.

"How about the agents of the department of justice?"

"I don't know of any," confessed Mary Louise.

Josie put the circulars in her pocket.

"Now, then, tell me whom you suspect, and why," she said.

Until now Mary Louise had not mentioned the clothing merchant to Josie, but she related Jake Kasker's frank opposition to the war at the Liberty Bond mass-meeting and her interview with him in his store, in which he plainly showed his antagonism to the draft and to the administration generally. She read to Josie the shorthand notes she had taken and supplemented all by declaring that such a man could be guilty of any offense.

"You see," she concluded, "all evidence points to Kasker as the traitor; but Chief Farnum is stubborn and independent, and we must obtain positive proof

that Kasker issued those circulars. Then we can put an end to his mischief-making. I don't know how to undertake such a job, Josie, but you do; I'm busy at the Liberty Shop, and we can spare you from there better than any one else; so, if you want to 'practise,' here's an opportunity to do some splendid work."

Josie was a good listener. She did not interrupt Mary Louise, but let her say all she had to say concerning this interesting matter. When her friend paused for lack of words, Josie remarked:

"Every American's watchword should be: 'Swat the traitor!' War seems to breed traitors, somehow. During the Civil War they were called 'copperheads,' as the most venomous term that could be applied to the breed. We haven't yet coined an equally effective word in this war, but it will come in time. Meanwhile, every person—man or woman—who is not whole-heartedly with President Wilson and intent on helping win the war, is doing his country a vital injury. That's the flat truth, and I'd like to shake your Jake Kasker out of his suit of hand-me-down clothing. If he isn't a traitor, he's a fool, and sometimes fools are more dangerous than traitors. There! All this has got me riled, and an investigator has no business to get riled. They must be calm and collected." She slapped her forehead, settled herself in her chair and continued in a more moderate tone: "Now, tell me what other people in Dorfield have led you to suspect they are not in accord with the administration, or resent our entry into the Great War."

Mary Louise gave her a puzzled look.

"Oughtn't we to finish with Kasker, first?" she asked, hesitatingly, for she respected Josie's judgment.

The girl detective laughed.

"I've an impression we've already finished with him—unless I really give him that shaking," she replied. "I'll admit that such a person is mischievous and ought to be shut up, either by jailing him or putting a plaster over his mouth, but I can't believe Jake Kasker guilty of those circulars."

"Why not?" in an aggrieved tone.

"Well, in spite of his disloyal mutterings, his deeds are loyal. He's disgruntled over the loss of his son, and doesn't care who knows it, but he'll stand pat and spank the kid if he doesn't fight like a tartar. He hates the war—perhaps we all hate it, in a way—but he'll buy Liberty Bonds and help win a victory. I know that sort; they're not dangerous; just at war with themselves, with folly and honesty struggling for the mastery. Let him alone and in a few months you'll find Kasker making patriotic speeches."

"Oh, Josie!"

"Think of someone else."

Mary Louise shook her head.

"What, only one string to your bow of distrust? Fie, Mary Louise! When you were selling Liberty Bonds, did you meet with no objectors?"

"Well—yes; there's a wholesale grocer here, who is named Silas Herring, a very rich man, but sour and disagreeable."

"Did he kick on the bonds?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me all about him."

"When I first entered his office, Mr. Herring made insulting remarks about the bonds and accused our government of being dominated by the English. He was very bitter in his remarks, but in his office were two other men who remonstrated with him and—"

"What were the two men doing there?"

"Why, they were talking about something, when I entered; I didn't hear what, for when they saw me they became silent."

"Were they clerks, or grocers—customers?"

"No; one was our supervisor, Andrew Duncan—"

"And the other man?" asked Josie.

"Our superintendent of schools, Professor Dyer."

"Oh; then they were talking politics."

"I suppose likely. I was obliged to argue with Mr. Herring and became so incensed that I threatened him with the loss of his trade. But Mr. Duncan at once subscribed for Liberty Bonds, and so did Professor Dyer, and that shamed Silas Herring into buying a big bunch of them also."

"H-m-m," murmured Josie contentedly. "Then neither of the three had purchased any bonds until then?"

"I think not. Gran'pa Jim had himself tried to sell Mr. Herring and had been refused."

"I see. How much did the supervisor invest in bonds?"

"One hundred dollars."

"Too little. And the Professor?"

"Five hundred."

"Too much. He couldn't afford it, could he?"

"He said it was more than his salary warranted, but he wanted to be patriotic."

"Oh, well; the rich grocer took them off his hands, perhaps. No disloyal words from the Professor or the supervisor?"

"No, indeed; they rebuked Mr. Herring and made him stop talking."

Josie nodded, thoughtfully.

"Well, who else did you find disloyal?"

"No one, so far as I can recollect. Everyone I know seems genuinely patriotic —except," as an afterthought, "little Annie Boyle, and she doesn't count."

"Who is little Annie Boyle?"

"No one much. Her father keeps the Mansion House, one of the hotels here, but not one of the best. It's patronized by cheap traveling men and the better class of clerks, I'm told, and Mr. Boyle is said to do a good business. Annie knows some of our girls, and they say she hates the war and denounces Mr. Wilson and everybody concerned in the war. But Annie's a silly little thing, anyhow, and of course she couldn't get out those circulars."

Josie wrote Annie Boyle's name on her tablets—little ivory affairs which she always carried and made notes on.

"Do you know anyone else at the Mansion House?" she inquired.

"Not a soul."

"How old is Annie?"

"Fourteen or fifteen."

"She didn't conceive her unpatriotic ideas; she has heard someone else talk, and like a parrot repeats what she has heard."

"Perhaps so; but—"

"All right. I'm not going to the Liberty Girls' Shop to-morrow, Mary Louise. At your invitation I'll make myself scarce, and nose around. To be quite frank, I consider this matter serious; more serious than you perhaps suspect. And, since you've put this case in my hands, I'm sure you and the dear colonel won't mind if I'm a bit eccentric in my movements while I'm doing detective work. I know the town pretty well, from my former visits, so I won't get lost. I may not accomplish anything, but you'd like me to try, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, indeed. That's why I've told you all this. I feel something ought to be done, and I can't do it myself."

Josie slipped the tablets into her pocket.

"Mary Louise, the United States is honeycombed with German spies," she gravely announced. "They're keeping Daddy and all the Department of Justice pretty busy, so I've an inkling as to their activities. German spies are encouraged by German propagandists, who are not always German but may be Americans, or even British by birth, but are none the less deadly on that account. The paid spy has no nationality; he is true to no one but the devil, and he and his abettors fatten on treachery. His abettors are those who repeat sneering and slurring remarks about our conduct of the war. You may set it down that whoever is not pro-American is pro-German; whoever does not favor the Allies—all of them, mind you—favors the Kaiser; whoever is not loyal in this hour of our country's greatest need is a traitor."

"You're right, Josie!"

"Now," continued Josie, reflectively, "you and I must both understand that we're undertaking a case that is none of our business. It's the business of Mr. Bielaski, of the department of justice, first of all; then it's the business of Mr. Flynn, of the secret service; then it's the business of the local police. Together, they have a thousand eyes, but enemy propagandists are more numerous and scattered throughout the nation. Your chief of police doesn't want to interfere with the federal agents here, and the federal agents are instructed not to pay attention to what is called 'spy hysteria,' and so they're letting things slide. But you believe, and I believe, that there's more treachery underlying these circulars than appears on the surface, and if we can secure evidence that is important, and present it to the proper officials, we shall be doing our country a service. So I'll start out on my own responsibility."

"Doesn't your secret service badge give you authority?" asked Mary Louise.

"No," replied Josie; "that badge is merely honorary. Daddy got it for me so that if ever I got into trouble it would help me out, but it doesn't make me a member of the secret service or give me a bit of authority. But that doesn't

matter; when I get evidence, I know what authority to give it to, and that's all that is necessary."

"Anyhow," said Mary Louise, with a relieved sigh, "I'm glad you are going to investigate the author of those awful circulars. It has worried me a good deal to think that Dorfield is harboring a German spy, and I have confidence that if anyone can discover the traitor, you can."

"That's good of you," returned Josie, with a grimace, "but I lack a similar confidence in myself. Don't you remember how many times I've foozled?"

"But sometimes, Josie, you've won, and I hope you'll win now."

"Thank you," said Josie; "I hope so, myself."

CHAPTER X

THE EXPLOSION

Day was just beginning to break when a terrible detonation shook all Dorfield. Houses rocked, windows rattled, a sudden wind swept over the town and then a glare that was not a presage of the coming sun lit the sky.

A brief silence succeeded the shock, but immediately thereafter whistles shrieked, fire-bells clanged, a murmur of agitated voices crying aloud was heard on every side, and the people began pouring from the houses into the streets demanding the cause of the alarm.

Colonel Hathaway, still weak and nervous, stood trembling in his bathrobe when Mary Louise came to him.

"It's the airplane factory, Gran'pa Jim," she said. "I can see it from my windows. Something must have exploded and the buildings are on fire."

The airplane works of Dorfield had been one of the city's most unique institutions, but until we entered the World War it was not deemed of prime importance. The government's vast airplane appropriations, however, had resulted in the Dorfield works securing contracts for the manufacture of war machines that straightway raised the enterprise to an important position. The original plant had been duplicated a dozen times, until now, on the big field south of the city, the cluster of buildings required for the construction of aircraft was one of the most imposing manufacturing plants in that part of the

State. Skilled government aviators had been sent to Dorfield to inspect every machine turned out. Although backed by local capital, it was, in effect, a government institution because it was now devoted exclusively to government contracts; therefore the explosion and fire filled every loyal heart with a sinister suspicion that an enemy had caused the calamity.

Splendid work on the part of the fire department subdued the flames after but two of the huge shed-like buildings had been destroyed. By noon the fire was controlled; a cordon of special police surrounded the entire plant and in one of the yards a hundred and fifty workmen were corralled under arrest until the federal officers had made an investigation and decided where to place the blame.

Reassuring reports had somewhat quieted Colonel Hathaway and Mary Louise, but although they returned to their rooms, they could not sleep. Aunt Sally, realizing the situation, had an early breakfast prepared, but when she called Josie O'Gorman the girl was not in her room or in the house. She appeared just as the others were finishing their meal and sat down with a sigh of content.

"My, but the coffee smells good!" she exclaimed. "I'm worn out with the excitement."

"Did you go to the fire, Josie?" asked Mary Louise.

"Yes, and got there in time to help drag some of the poor fellows out. Three men in the building where the explosion occurred were killed outright, and two others seriously injured. Fortunately the night shift had just quit work or the casualties would have been much greater."

"It's dreadful, as it is," said Mary Louise with a shudder.

"What was the cause of the explosion!" inquired the colonel.

"Dynamite," replied Josie calmly.

"Then it was not an accident?"

"They don't use dynamite in making airplanes. Twenty-two machines, all complete and packed ready for shipment, were blown to smithereens. A good many others, in course of construction, were ruined. It's a pretty bad mess, I can tell you, but the machines can be replaced, and the lives can't."

"I wonder who did it," said Mary Louise, staring at her friend with frightened eyes.

"The Kaiser," declared Josie. "He must be in fine fettle this morning, since his propaganda of murder and arson has been so successful."

"I—I don't quite understand you," faltered Mary Louise.

"Josie means that this is the work of a direct emissary of the Kaiser," explained the colonel. "We know that among us are objectors and pacifists and those who from political motives are opposing the activities of our President, but these are not dynamiters, nor do they display their disloyalty except through foolish and futile protests. One who resorts to murder and arson in an attempt to block the government's plans, and so retard our victory, is doubtless a hired assassin and in close touch with the German master-spies who are known to be lurking in this country."

"That's the idea, sir," approved Josie, nodding her tousled red head, "and better expressed than any answer of mine could have been."

"Well, then, can't this demon be arrested and punished?" asked Mary Louise.

"That remains to be seen," said Josie. "An investigation is already under way. All the outgoing night shift and some of the incoming day shift have been held under suspicion, until they can be examined and carefully questioned. I heard your Chief of Police—whom I know and knows me—assert that without doubt the bomb had been placed by one of the workmen. I wonder what makes him think that. Also the police are hunting for everyone seen loitering about the airplane plant during the past twenty-four hours. They'll spend days—perhaps weeks—in investigating, and then the affair will quiet down and be forgotten."

"You fear they will not be able to apprehend the criminal?" from the colonel.

"Not the way the police are going at it. They're virtually informing the criminal that they're hunting for him but don't know where to find him, and that if he isn't careful they'll get him. So he's going to be careful. It is possible, of course, that the fellow has left traces—clues that will lead to his discovery and arrest. Still, I'm not banking much on that. Such explosions have been occurring for months, in various parts of the country, and the offenders have frequently escaped. The government suspects that German spies are responsible, but an indefinite suspicion is often as far as it gets. Evidence is lacking."

"How about your boasted department of justice, and the secret service?" asked Mary Louise.

"They're as good as the German spy system, and sometimes a bit better. Don't think for a minute that our enemies are not clever," said Josie earnestly.

"Sometimes our agents make a grab; sometimes the German spy remains undiscovered. It's diamond cut diamond—fifty-fifty. But when we get every alien enemy sequestered in zones removed from all factories doing government work, we're going to have less trouble. A lot of these Germans and Austrians are liberty-loving Americans, loyal and true, but we must round up the innocent many, in order to squelch the guilty few."

The following week was one of tense excitement for Dorfield. Federal officers poured into the city to assist in the investigation; the victims were buried with honor and ceremony, wrapped in American flags to show that these "soldiers of industry" had been slain by their country's foe; the courtrooms were filled with eager mobs hoping that evidence would be secured against some one of the many suspects. Gradually, however, the interest decreased, as Josie had predicted it would. A half dozen suspects were held for further examination and the others released. New buildings were being erected at the airplane plant, and although somewhat crippled, the business of manufacturing these necessary engines of war was soon going on much as usual.

CHAPTER XI

A FONT OF TYPE

Mary Louise went into Josie O'Gorman's room and found the young girl bent over a table on which were spread the disloyal circulars.

"You've been studying those things for nearly two weeks, Josie," she said. "Have you made any discoveries?"

"I know a lot more about the circulars than I did," answered Josie. "For instance, there are nineteen printing offices in Dorfield, and only two of them have this kind of type."

"Oh, that's something, indeed!" cried Mary Louise. "One of the two offices must have printed the circulars."

"No; the curious fact is that neither printed them," returned Josie, regarding the circulars with a frown.

"How do you know?"

"It's an old style of type, not much in use at present," explained the youthful detective. "In one printing office the case that contains this type face hasn't

been used for months and months. I found all the compartments covered with dust a quarter of an inch thick. There wasn't a trace of the type having been disturbed. I proved this by picking out a piece of type, which scattered the dust and brought to light the shining bodies of the other type in that compartment. So the circulars could never have been printed from that case of type."

"But the other printing office?"

"Well, there they had a font of the same style of type, which is occasionally used in job printing; but it's a small font and has only twenty-four small a's. I rummaged the whole shop, and found none of the type standing, out of the case. Another thing, they had only three capital G's, and one of those was jammed and damaged. In the last circular issued, no less than seven capital G's appear. In the first one sent out I find fifty-eight small a's. All this convinces me the circulars were issued from no regular printing office."

"Then how did it get printed?" asked Mary Louise.

"That's what puzzles me," confessed Josie. "Three of the four big manufacturing concerns here have outfits and do their own printing—or part of it, anyhow—and I don't mind saying I expected to find my clue in one of those places, rather than in a regular printing office. But I've made an exhaustive search, aided by the managers, and there's no type resembling that used in the circulars in any of the private print shops. In fact, I'm up a stump!"

"But why do you attach so much importance to this matter?" queried Mary Louise.

"It's the most direct route to the traitor. Find who printed the circulars and you've got your hand on the man who wrote and mailed them. But the printing baffles me, and so I've started another line of investigation."

"What line is that, Josie?"

"The circular envelopes were addressed by hand, with pen and ink. The ink is a sort in common use. The envelopes are an ordinary commercial kind. The circulars are printed on half a sheet of letter-size typewriting paper, sold in several stationery store in large quantities. No clue there. But the handwriting is interesting. It's disguised, of course, and the addressing was done by two different people—that's plain."

"You are wonderful, Josie!"

"I'm stupid as a clam, Mary Louise. See here!" she went to a closet and brought out a large card-board box, which she placed upon the table. It was filled to the brim with envelopes, addressed to many business firms in

Dorfield, but all bearing the local postmark. "Now, I've been days collecting these envelopes," continued the girl, "and I've studied them night after night. I'm something of a handwriting expert, you know, for that is one of the things that Daddy has carefully taught me. These envelopes came from all sorts of people—folks making inquiries, paying bills, ordering goods, and the like. I've had an idea from the first that some prominent person—no ordinary man—is responsible for the circulars. They're well worded, grammatical, and the malicious insinuations are cleverly contrived to disconcert the loyal but weak brethren. However, these envelopes haven't helped me a bit. Neither of the two persons who addressed the envelopes of the circulars addressed any of these business envelopes. Of that I'm positive."

"Dear me," said Mary Louise, surprised, "I'd no idea you'd taken so much trouble, Josie."

"Well, I've undertaken a rather puzzling case, my dear, and it will mean more trouble than you can guess, before I've solved it. This pro-German scoundrel is clever; he suspected that he'd be investigated and has taken every precaution to prevent discovery. Nevertheless, the cleverest criminal always leaves some trace behind him, if one can manage to find it, so I'm not going to despair at this stage of the game."

"Do you know," said Mary Louise thoughtfully, "I've had an idea that there's some connection between the explosion at the airplane works and the sender of these circulars."

Josie gave her a queer look.

"What connection do you suspect?" she asked quickly.

"Why, the man who wrote those circulars would not stop at any crime to harass the government and interfere with the promotion of the war."

"Is that as far as you've gone?"

"Have you gone any farther, Josie?"

"A step, Mary Louise. It looks to me as if there is an organized band of traitors in Dorfield. No one person is responsible for it all. Didn't I say two different people addressed the circulars in disguised handwriting? Now, a bomb has to be constructed, and placed, and timed, and I don't credit any one person with handling such a job and at the same time being aware that the utmost damage to the War Department's plans would be accomplished by blowing up the airplane works. That argues intelligent knowledge of national and local affairs. There may be but two conspirators, and there may be more, but the more there

are, the easier it will be for me to discover them."

"Naturally," agreed Mary Louise. "But, really, Josie, I don't see how you're going to locate a clue that will guide you. Have you attended the trial of those suspected of the bomb outrage?"

"I've seen all the testimony. There isn't a culprit in the whole bunch. The real criminal is not even suspected, as yet," declared Josie. "The federal officers know this, and are just taking things easy and making the trials string out, to show they're wide awake. Also I've met two secret service men here—Norman Addison and old Jim Crissey. I know nearly all of the boys. But they haven't learned anything important, either."

"Are these men experienced detectives?"

"They've done some pretty good work, but nothing remarkable. In these times the government is forced to employ every man with any experience at all, and Crissey and Addison are just ordinary boys, honest and hard-working, but not especially talented. Daddy would have discovered something in twenty-four hours; but Daddy has been sent abroad, for some reason, and there are many cases of espionage and sabotage fully as important as this, in this spy-infested land. That's why poor Josie O'Gorman is trying to help the government, without assignment or authority. If I succeed, however, I'll feel that I have done my bit."

"Don't you get discouraged, dear, at times?"

"Never! Why, Mary Louise, discouragement would prove me a dub. I'm puzzled, though, just now, and feeling around blindly in the dark to grab a thread that may lead me to success. If I have luck, presently I'll find it."

She put away the envelopes, as she spoke, and resuming her seat drew out her tablets and examined the notes she had made thereon. Josie used strange characters in her memoranda, a sort of shorthand she had herself originated and which could be deciphered only by her father or by herself.

"Here's a list of suspects," she said. "Not that they're necessarily connected with our case, but are known to indulge in disloyal sentiments. Hal Grober, the butcher, insists on selling meat on meatless days and won't defer to the wishes of Mr. Hoover, whom he condemns as a born American but a naturalized Englishmen. He's another Jake Kasker, too noisy to be guilty of clever plotting."

"They're both un-American!" exclaimed Mary Louise. "There ought to be a law to silence such people, Josie."

"Don't worry, my dear; they'll soon be silenced," predicted her friend. "Either better judgment will come to their aid or the federal courts will get after them. We shouldn't allow anyone to throw stones at the government activities, just at this crisis. They may *think* what they please, but must keep their mouths shut."

"I'm sorry they can even think disloyalty," said Mary Louise.

"Well, even that will be remedied in time," was the cheerful response. "No war more just and righteous was ever waged than this upon which our country has embarked, and gradually that fact will take possession of those minds, which, through prejudice, obstinacy or ignorance, have not yet grasped it. I'm mighty proud of my country, Mary Louise, and I believe this war is going to give us Americans a distinction that will set us up in our own opinion and in the eyes of the world. But always there is a willful objection, on the part of some, toward any good and noble action, and we must deal charitably with these deluded ones and strive to win them to an appreciation of the truth."

"Isn't that carrying consideration too far?" asked Mary Louise.

"No. Our ministers are after the unregenerates, not after the godly. The noblest act of humanity is to uplift a fellow creature. Even in our prisons we try to reform criminals, to make honest men of them rather than condemn them to a future of crime. It would be dreadful to say: 'You're *all* yellow; go to thunder!'"

"Yes; I believe you're right," approved the other girl. "That is, your theory is correct, but the wicked sometimes refuse to reform."

"Usually the fault of the reformers, my dear. But suppose we redeem a few of them, isn't it worth while? Now, let me see. Here's a washwoman who says the Kaiser is a gentleman, and a street-car driver who says it's a rich man's war. No use bothering with such people in our present state of blind groping. And here's the list that you, yourself, gave to me: One Silas Herring, a wholesale grocer. I'm going to see him. He's a big, successful man, and being opposed to the administration is dangerous. Herring is worth investigating, and with him is associated Professor John Dyer, superintendent of schools."

"Oh, Professor Dyer is all right," said Mary Louise hastily. "It was he who helped bring Mr. Herring to time, and afterward he took Gran'pa Jim's place on the Bond Committee and solicited subscriptions."

"Did he get any?"

"Any what?"

"Subscriptions."

"—I believe so. Really, I don't know."

"Well, *I* know," said Josie, "for I've inspected the records. Your professor—who, by the way, is only a professor by courtesy and a politician by profession—worked four days on the bond sale and didn't turn in a single subscription. He had a lot of wealthy men on his list and approached them in such a manner that they all positively declined to buy bonds. Dyer's activities kept these men from investing in bonds when, had they been properly approached, they would doubtless have responded freely."

"Good gracious! Are you sure, Josie?"

"I'm positive. I've got a cross opposite the name of Professor John Dyer, and I'm going to know more about him—presently. His bosom chum is the Honorable Andrew Duncan, a man with an honest Scotch name but only a thirty-second or so of Scotch blood in his veins. His mother was a German and his grandmother Irish and his greatgrandmother a Spanish gipsy."

"How did you learn all that, Josie?"

"By making inquiries. Duncan was born in Dorfield and his father was born in the county. He's a typical American—a product of the great national melting-pot—but no patriot because he has no sympathy for any of the European nations at war, or even with the war aims of his native land. He's a selfish, scheming, unprincipled politician; an office-holder ever since he could vote; a man who would sacrifice all America to further his own personal ends."

"Then, you think Mr. Duncan may—might be—is—"

"No," said Josie, "I don't. The man might instigate a crime and encourage it, in a subtle and elusive way, but he's too shrewd to perpetrate a crime himself. I wouldn't be surprised if Duncan could name the man—or the band of traitors—we're looking for, if he chose to, but you may rest assured he has not involved his own personality in any scheme to balk the government."

"I can't understand that sort of person," said Mary. Louise, plaintively.

"It's because you haven't studied the professional politician. He has been given too much leeway heretofore, but his days, I firmly believe, are now numbered," Josie answered. "Now, here's my excuse for investigating Silas Herring and his two cronies, Dyer and Duncan. All three of them happen to be political bosses in this section. It is pretty generally known that they are not in sympathy with President Wilson and the administration. They are shrewd enough to know that the popularity of the war and the President's eloquent messages have carried the country by storm. So they cannot come right out

into the open with their feelings. At the same time, they can feel themselves losing control of the situation. In fact, the Herring gang is fearful that at the coming elections they will be swept aside and replaced with out-and-out loyal supporters of the President. So they're going to try to arouse sentiment against the administration and against the war, in order to head off the threatened landslide. Dyer hoped to block the sale of Liberty Bonds, blinding folks to his intent by subscribing for them himself; but you girls foiled that scheme by your enthusiastic 'drive.' What the other conspirators have done, I don't know, but I imagine their energies will not be squelched by one small defeat. I don't expect to land any of the three in jail, but I think they all ought to be behind the bars, and if I shadow them successfully, one or the other may lead me to their tools or confederates—the ones directly guilty of issuing the disloyal circulars and perhaps of placing the bomb that damaged the airplane works and murdered some of its employes."

Mary Louise was pale with horror when Josie finished her earnest and convincing statement. She regarded her friend's talent with profound admiration. Nevertheless, the whole matter was becoming so deep, so involved that she could only think of it with a shudder.

"I'm almost sorry," said the girl, regretfully, "that I ever mixed up in this dreadful thing."

"I'm not sorry," returned Josie. "Chasing traitors isn't the pleasantest thing in the world, even for a regular detective, but it's a duty I owe my country and I'm sufficiently interested to probe the affair to the extent of my ability. If I fail, nothing is lost, and if I win I'll have done something worth while. Here's another name on the list of suspects you gave me—Annie Boyle, the hotel-keeper's daughter."

"Don't bother about Annie, for goodness' sake," exclaimed Mary Louise. "She hasn't the brains or an opportunity to do any harm, so you'd better class her with Kasker and the butcher."

But Josie shook her head.

"There's a cross opposite her name," said she. "I don't intend to shuffle Annie Boyle into the discard until I know more about her."

CHAPTER XII

JOSIE BUYS A DESK

The "Liberty Girls' Shop" was proving a veritable mint. Expenses were practically nothing, so all the money received could be considered clear profit. It was amusing to observe the people who frequented the shop, critically examining the jumble of wares displayed, wondering who had donated this or that and meantime searching for something that could be secured at a "bargain." Most of the shrewd women had an idea that these young girls would be quite ignorant of values and might mark the articles at prices far below their worth, but the "values" of such goods could only be conjectural, and therefore the judgment of the older women was no more reliable than that of the girls. They might think they were getting bargains, and perhaps were, but that was problematic.

The one outstanding fact was that people were buying a lot of things they had no use for, merely because they felt they were getting them cheaply and that their money would be devoted to a good cause.

Mrs. Brown, who had given the Shop a lot of discarded articles, purchased several discarded articles donated by Mrs. Smith, her neighbor, while Mrs. Smith eagerly bought the cast-off wares of Mrs. Brown. Either would have sneered at the bare idea of taking "truck" which the other had abandoned, had the medium of exchange not been the popular Liberty Girls' Shop. For it was a popular shop; the "best families" patronized it; society women met there to chat and exchange gossip; it was considered a mark of distinction and highly patriotic to say: "Oh, yes; I've given the dear girls many really valuable things to sell. They're doing such noble work, you know."

Even the eminent Mrs. Charleworth, premier aristocrat of Dorfield, condescended to visit the Shop, not once but many times. She would sit in one of the chairs in the rear of the long room and hold open court, while her sycophants grouped around her, hanging on her words. For Mrs. Charleworth's status was that of social leader; she was a middle-aged widow, very handsome, wore wonderful creations in dress, was of charming personality, was exceedingly wealthy and much traveled. When she visited New York the metropolitan journals took care to relate the interesting fact. Mrs. Charleworth was quite at home in London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna; she was visiting friends in Dresden when the European war began, and by advice of Herr Zimmerman, of the German Foreign Office, who was in some way a relative, had come straight home to avoid embarrassment. This much was generally known.

It had been a matter of public information in the little town for a generation that Dick Charleworth had met the lady in Paris, when she was at the height of

her social glory, and had won the hand of the beautiful girl and brought her to Dorfield as his wife. But the wealthy young manufacturer did not long survive his marriage. On his death, his widow inherited his fortune and continued to reside in the handsome residence he had built, although, until the war disrupted European society, she passed much time abroad.

The slight taint of German blood in Mrs. Charleworth's veins was not regarded seriously in Dorfield. Her mother had been a Russian court beauty; she spoke several languages fluently; she was discreet in speech and negative in sympathy concerning the merits of the war. This lasted, however, only while the United States preserved neutrality. As soon as we cast our fortunes with the Allies, Mrs. Charleworth organized the "Daughters of Helpfulness," an organization designed to aid our national aims, but a society cult as well. Under its auspices two private theatrical entertainments had been given at the Opera House and the proceeds turned over to the Red Cross. A grand charity ball had been announced for a future date.

It may easily be understood that when Mrs. Charleworth became a patroness of the Liberty Girls' Shop, and was known to have made sundry purchases there, the high standing of that unique enterprise was assured. Some folks perhaps frequented the place to obtain a glimpse of the great Mrs. Charleworth herself, but of course these were without the pale of her aristocratic circle.

Their social triumph, however, was but one reason for the girls' success; the youngsters were enticing in themselves, and they proved to be clever in making sales. The first stock soon melted away and was replaced by new contributions, which the girls took turns in soliciting. The best residences in Dorfield were first canvassed, then those of people in moderate circumstances. The merchants were not overlooked and Mary Louise took the regular stores personally in charge.

"Anything you have that you can't sell, we will take," was her slogan, and most of the merchants found such articles and good-naturedly contributed them to the Shop.

"Sooner or later we shall come to the end of our resources," predicted Alora Jones. "We've ransacked about every house in town for contributions."

"Let's make a second canvas then," suggested Lucile. "And especially, let us make a second appeal to those who did not give us anything on our first round. Our scheme wasn't thoroughly understood at first, you know, but now folks regard it an honor to contribute to our stock."

"Yes," said Jane Donovan, "I had to laugh when Mrs. Charleworth asked Mrs. Dyer yesterday what she had given us, and Mrs. Dyer stammered and flushed

and said that when we called on her the Dyers were only renting the house and furniture, which belonged to the Dudley-Markhams, who are in South America; but, Mrs. Dyer added, they have now bought the place—old furniture and all—and perhaps she would yet find some items she can spare."

"Very good," said Edna Barlow; "the Dyers are in my district and I'll call upon them at once."

"Have the Dyers really bought the Dudley-Markham place?" asked Mary Louise.

"So it seems," replied Jane.

"But—'it must have cost a lot of money."

"Isn't the Professor rich?" inquired Josie O'Gorman, who was present and had listened quietly to the conversation.

"I-don't-know," answered Mary Louise, and the other girls forbore to answer more definitely.

That evening, however, Josie approached the subject when she and Mary Louise were sitting quietly at home and the conversation more confidential.

"The Dyers," explained her friend, "were not very prosperous until the Professor got the appointment as superintendent of schools. He was a teacher in a boys' school for years, on a small salary, and everyone was surprised when he secured the appointment."

"How did it happen?" asked Josie.

Mary Louise looked across at her grandfather.

"How did it happen, Gran'pa Jim?" she repeated.

The old colonel lowered his book.

"We haven't been residents of Dorfield many years," said he, "so I am not well acquainted with the town's former history. But I remember to have heard that the Herring political ring, which elected our Board of Education, proposed John Dyer for the position of school superintendent—and the Board promptly gave him the appointment."

"Was he properly qualified?" Josie asked.

"I think so. A superintendent is a sort of business manager. He doesn't teach, you know. But I understand the Professor received his education abroad—at

Heidelburg—and is well versed in modern educational methods. Our schools seem to be conducted very well."

Josie was thoughtful for a time, and after the colonel had resumed his book, she asked Mary Louise:

"Who was Mrs. Dyer, before her marriage?"

"That is ancient history, as far as I am concerned, but I heard the girls talking about her, just the other day. Her family, it seems, was respectable but unimportant; yet Mrs. Dyer is very well liked. She's not brilliant, but kindly. When we first came here, the Dyers lived in a little cottage on Juniper street, and it is only lately that they moved to the big house they've just bought. Mrs. Dyer is now trying hard for social recognition, but seems to meet with little encouragement. Mrs. Charleworth speaks to her, you know, but doesn't invite Mrs. Dyer to her affairs."

Next day Edna Barlow, after a morning's quest of contributions, returned to the Shop in triumph.

"There's almost a truck-load of stuff outside, to be unloaded," she announced, "and a good half of it is from Mrs. Dyer—a lot of the old Dudley-Markham rubbish, you know. It has class to it, girls, and when it has been freshened up, we're sure to get good prices for the lot."

"I'm surprised that Mrs. Dyer was so liberal," said Mary Louise.

"Well, at first she said the Professor had gone to Chicago on business, and so she couldn't do anything for us," replied Edna; "but I insisted that we needed goods right now, so she finally said we could go up in the attic, and rummage around, and take whatever we could find. My, what a lot of useless stuff there was! That attic has more smashed and battered and broken-legged furniture in it than would furnish six houses—provided it was in shape. The accumulation of ages. But a lot of it is antique, girls, and worth fixing up. I've made the best haul of our career, I verily believe."

Then Laura Hilton, who had accompanied Edna, added:

"When Mrs. Dyer saw our men carrying all that stuff down, she looked as if she regretted her act and would like to stop us. But she didn't—was ashamed to, probably—so we lugged it off. Never having been used to antique furniture, the poor woman couldn't realize the value of it."

"This seems to me almost like robbery," remarked Lucile, doubtfully. "Do you think it right for us to take advantage of the woman's ignorance?"

"Remember the Cause for which we fight!" admonished Irene, from her chair. "If the things people are not using, and do not want, can provide comforts for our soldier boys, we ought to secure them—if we have to take them by force."

The attic of the old house had really turned out a number of interesting articles. There were tables, stands, settees, chairs, and a quaint old desk, set on a square pedestal with a base of carved lions' feet. This last interested Josie as soon as it was carried into the shop. The top part was somewhat dilapidated, the cover of the desk being broken off and some of the "pigeonhole" compartments smashed. But there was an odd lot of tiny drawers, located in every conceivable place, all pretty well preserved, and the square pedestal and the base were in excellent condition.

Josie open drawer after drawer and looked the old cabinet-desk over thoroughly, quite unobserved because the others in the shop were admiring a Chippendale chair or waiting upon their customers. Presently Josie approached Mary Louise and asked:

"What will you take for the pedestal-desk—just as it stands?"

"Why, I'll let Irene put a price on it," was the reply. "She knows values better than the rest of us."

"If it's fixed up, it will be worth twenty dollars," said Irene, after wheeling her chair to the desk for a critical examination of it.

"Well, what will it cost to fix it up?" demanded Josie.

"Perhaps five dollars."

"Then I'll give you fifteen for it, just as it stands," proposed Josie.

"You? What could you do with the clumsy thing?"

"Ship it home to Washington," was the prompt reply. "It would tickle Daddy immensely to own such an unusual article, so I want to make him a present of it on his birthday."

"Hand over the fifteen dollars, please," decided Irene.

Josie paid the money. She caught the drayman who had unloaded the furniture and hired him to take the desk at once to the Hathaway residence. She even rode with the man, on the truck, and saw the battered piece of furniture placed in her own room. Leaving it there, she locked her door and went back to the Shop.

The girls were much amused when they learned they had made so important a

sale to one of themselves.

"If we had asked Mrs. Dyer to give us fifteen dollars, cold cash," remarked Laura, "she would have snubbed us properly; but the first article from her attic which we sold has netted us that sum and I really believe we will get from fifty to seventy-five dollars more out of the rest of the stuff."

Mrs. Charleworth dropped in during the afternoon and immediately became interested in the Dudley-Markham furniture. The family to whom it had formerly belonged she knew had been one of the very oldest and most important in Dorfield. The Dudley-Markhams had large interests in Argentine and would make their future home there, but here were the possessions of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, rescued from their ancient dust, and Mrs. Charleworth was a person who loved antiques and knew their sentimental and intrinsic values.

"The Dyers were foolish to part with these things," she asserted. "Of course, Mary Dyer isn't supposed to know antiques, but the professor has lived abroad and is well educated."

"The professor wasn't at home," explained Edna. "Perhaps that was lucky for us. He is in Chicago, and we pleaded so hard that Mrs. Dyer let us go into the attic and help ourselves."

"Well, that proves she has a generous heart," said the grand lady, with a peculiar, sphinx-like smile. "I will buy these two chairs, at your price, when you are ready to sell them."

"We will hold them for you," replied Edna. "They're to be revarnished and properly 'restored,' you know, and we've a man in our employ who knows just how to do it."

When Mary Louise told Colonel Hathaway, jokingly, at dinner that evening, of Josie's extravagant purchase, her girl friend accepted the chaffing composedly and even with a twinkle in her baby-blue eyes. She made no comment and led Mary Louise to discourse on other subjects.

That night Josie sat up late, locked in her own room, with only the pedestal-desk for company. First she dropped to her knees, pushed up a panel in the square base, and disclosed the fact that in this inappropriate place were several cleverly constructed secret compartments, two of which were well filled with papers. The papers were not those of the Dudley-Markhams; they were not yellowed with age; they were quite fresh.

"There!" whispered the girl, triumphantly; "the traitor is in my toils. Is it just

luck, I wonder, or has fate taken a hand in the game? How the Kaiser would frown, if he knew what I am doing to-night; and how Daddy would laugh! But —let's see!—perhaps this is just a wedge, and I'll need a sledge-hammer to crack open the whole conspiracy."

The reason Josie stayed up so late was because she carefully examined every paper and copied most of those she had found. But toward morning she finished her self-imposed task, replaced the papers, slid the secret panel into place and then dragged the rather heavy piece of furniture into the far end of the deep closet that opened off her bedroom. Before the desk she hung several dresses, quite masking it from observation. Then she went to bed and was asleep in two minutes.

CHAPTER XIII

JOE LANGLEY, SOLDIER

Strange as it may seem, Mary Louise and her Liberty Girls were regarded with envy by many of the earnest women of Dorfield, who were themselves working along different lines to promote the interests of the government in the Great War. Every good woman was anxious to do her duty in this national emergency, but every good woman loves to have her efforts appreciated, and since the advent of the bevy of pretty young girls in the ranks of female patriotism, they easily became the favorites in public comment and appreciation. Young men and old cheerfully backed the Liberty Girls in every activity they undertook. The Dorfield Red Cross was a branch of the wonderful national organization; the "Hoover Conservation Club" was also national in its scope; the "Navy League Knitting Knot" sent its work to Washington headquarters; all were respectfully admired and financially assisted on occasion. But the "Liberty Girls of Dorfield" were distinctly local and a credit to the city. Their pretty uniforms were gloriously emblematic, their fresh young faces glowed with enthusiasm, their specialty of "helping our soldier boys" appealed directly to the hearts of the people. Many a man, cold and unemotional heretofore in his attitude toward the war, was won to a recognition of its menace, its necessities, and his personal duty to his country, by the arguments and example of the Liberty Girls. If there was a spark of manhood in him, he would not allow a young girl to out-do him in patriotism.

Mary Louise gradually added to her ranks, as girl after girl begged to be enrolled in the organization. After consulting the others, it was decided to

admit all desirable girls between the ages of 14 and 18, and six companies were formed during the following weeks, each company consisting of twenty girls. The captains were the original six—Alora, Laura, Edna, Lucile, Jane and Mary Louise. Irene Macfarlane was made adjutant and quartermaster, because she was unable to participate actively in the regimental drills.

Mary Louise wanted Josie to be their general, but Josie declined. She even resigned, temporarily, from membership, saying she had other duties to attend to that would require all her time. Then the girls wanted Mary Louise to be general of the Dorfield Liberty Girls, but she would not consent.

"We will just have the six companies and no general at all," she said. "Nor do we need a colonel, or any officers other than our captains. Each and every girl in our ranks is just as important and worthy of honor as every other girl, so the fewer officers the better."

About this time Joe Langley came back from France with one arm gone. He was Sergeant Joe Langley, now, and wore a decoration for bravery that excited boundless admiration and pride throughout all Dorfield. Joe had driven a milk wagon before he left home and went to Canada to join the first contingent sent abroad, but no one remembered his former humble occupation. A hero has no past beyond his heroism. The young man's empty sleeve and his decoration admitted him to intercourse with the "best society" of Dorfield, which promptly placed him on a pedestal.

"You know," said Joe, rather shamefacedly deprecating the desire to lionize him, "there wasn't much credit in what I did. I'm even sorry I did it, for my foolishness sent me to the hospital an' put me out o' the war. But there was Tom McChesney, lyin' out there in No Man's Land, with a bullet in his chest an' moanin' for water. Tom was a good chum o' mine, an' I was mad when I saw him fall—jest as the Boches was drivin' us back to our trenches. I know'd the poor cuss was in misery, an' I know'd what I'd expect a chum o' mine to do if I was in Tom's place. So out I goes, with my Cap'n yellin' at me to stop, an' I got to Tom an' give him a good, honest swig. The bullets pinged around us, although I saw a German officer—a decent young fellow—try to keep his men from shootin'. But he couldn't hold 'em in, so I hoisted Tom on my back an' started for our trenches. Got there, too, you know, jest as a machine-gun over to the right started spoutin'. It didn't matter my droppin' Tom in the trench an' tumblin' after him. The boys buried him decent while the sawbones was cuttin' what was left of my arm away, an' puttin' me to sleep with dope. It was a fool trick, after all, 'though God knows I'll never forget the look in Tom's eyes as he swallered that swig o' cool water. That's all, folks. I'm out o' the game, an' I s'pose the Gen'ral jus' pinned this thing on my coat so I wouldn't take my discharge too much to heart."

That was Joe Langley. Do you wonder they forgot he was once a milk-man, or that every resident of Dorfield swelled with pride at the very sight of him? Just one of "our soldier boys," just one of the boys the Liberty Girls were trying to assist.

"They're all alike," said Mary Louise. "I believe every American soldier would be a Joe Langley if he had the chance."

Joe took a mighty interest in the Liberty Girls. He volunteered to drill and make soldiers of them, and so well did he perform this task—perhaps because they admired him and were proud of their drill-master—that when the last big lot of selected draft men marched away, the entire six companies of Liberty Girls marched with them to the train—bands playing and banners flying—and it was conceded to be one of the greatest days Dorfield had ever known, because everyone cheered until hoarse.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROFESSOR IS ANNOYED

Josie O'Gorman, after resigning from the Liberty Girls, became—so she calmly stated—a "loafer." She wandered around the streets of Dorfield in a seemingly aimless manner, shopped at the stores without buying, visited the houses of all sorts of people, on all sorts of gossipy errands, interviewed lawyers, bankers and others in an inconsequential way that amused some and annoyed others, and conducted herself so singularly that even Mary Louise was puzzled by her actions.

But Josie said to Mary Louise: "My, what a lot I'm learning! There's nothing more interesting—or more startling—or, sometimes, more repulsive—than human nature."

"Have you learned anything about the German spy plot?" questioned Mary Louise eagerly.

"Not yet. My quest resembles a cart-wheel. I go all around the outer rim first, and mark the spokes when I come to them. Then I follow each spoke toward the center. They'll all converge to the hub, you know, and when I've reached the hub, with all my spokes of knowledge radiating from it, I'm in perfect control of the whole situation."

"Oh. How far are you from the hub, Josie?"

"I'm still marking the spokes, Mary Louise."

"Are there many of them?"

"More than I suspected."

"Well, I realize, dear, that you'll tell me nothing until you are ready to confide in me; but please remember, Josie, how impatient I am and how I long to bring the traitors to justice."

"I won't forget, Mary Louise. We're partners in this case and perhaps I shall ask your help, before long. Some of my spokes may be blinds and until I know something positive there's no use in worrying you with confidences which are merely surmises."

Soon after this conversation Mary Louise found herself, as head of the Liberty Girls, in an embarrassing position. Professor Dyer returned from Chicago on an evening train and early next morning was at the Shop even before its doors were opened, impatiently awaiting the arrival of Mary Louise.

"There has been a mistake," he said to her, hastily, as she smilingly greeted him; "in my absence Mrs. Dyer has thoughtlessly given you some old furniture, which I value highly. It was wife's blunder, of course, but I want back two of the articles and I'm willing to pay your Shop as much for them as you could get elsewhere."

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Professor," said the girl, really distressed, as she unlocked the Shop door. "Come in, please. Mrs. Dyer told our girls to go into the attic and help themselves to anything they wanted. We've done splendidly with the old furniture, and fenders, and brassware, but I hope the two articles you prize are still unsold. If so, you shall not pay us for them, but we will deliver them to your house immediately."

He did not reply, for already he was searching through the accumulation of odds and ends with which the store-room was stocked.

"Perhaps I can help you," suggested Mary Louise.

He turned to her, seeming to hesitate.

"One was a chair; a chair with spindle legs and a high back, richly carved. It is made of black oak, I believe."

"Oh, I remember that well," said the girl. "Mrs. Charleworth bought it from us."

"Mrs. Charleworth? Well, perhaps she will return it to me. I know the lady slightly and will explain that I did not wish to part with it." Still his eyes were roving around the room, and his interest in the chair seemed somewhat perfunctory. "The other piece of furniture was a sort of escritoire, set on a square pedestal that had a carved base of lions' feet." His voice had grown eager now, although he strove to render it calm, and there was a ring of anxiety in his words.

Mary Louise felt relieved as she said assuringly:

"That, at least, I can promise you will be returned. My friend, Josie O'Gorman, bought it and had it sent to our house, where she is visiting. As soon as some of the girls come here to relieve me, I'll take you home with me and have Uncle Eben carry the desk to your house in our motor car. It isn't so very big, and Uncle Eben can manage it easily."

The tense look on the man's face relaxed. It evident that Professor Dyer was greatly relieved.

"Thank you," he said; "I'd like to get it back as soon as possible."

But when, half an hour later, they arrived at the Hathaway residence, and met Josie just preparing to go out, the latter said with a bewildered look in her blue eyes: "The old desk? Why, I sent that home to Washington days ago!"

"You did?" Mary Louise was quite surprised. "Why, you said nothing to me about that, Josie."

"I didn't mention it because I'd no idea you were interested. Daddy loves old things, and I sent it home so he would have it on his return. By freight. You are away at the Shop all day, you know, so I asked Uncle Eben to get me a big box, which he brought to my room. The desk fitted it nicely. I nailed on the cover myself, and Uncle Eben took it to the freight office for me. See; here's the receipt, in my pocket-book."

She unfolded a paper and held it out to Professor Dyer, who read it with a queer look on his face. It was, indeed, a freight receipt for "one piece of furniture, boxed," to be shipped to John O'Gorman, Washington, D. C, The sender was described as "Miss J. O'Gorman, Dorfield." There was no questioning Josie's veracity, but she called the black servant to substantiate her story.

"Yes, Miss Josie," said Uncle Eben, "I done took de box to de freight office an' got de receipt, lak yo' tol' me. Tuesday, it were; las' Tuesday."

Professor Dyer was thoughtful.

"You say your father is away from home at present?" he asked.

"Yes; he's abroad."

"Do you suppose the freight office in Washington would deliver the box to me, on your order?"

"I'm afraid not," said Josie, "It's consigned to John O'Gorman, and only John O'Gorman can sign for its receipt."

Again the Professor reflected. He seemed considerably disturbed.

"What is the business of John O'Gorman, your father?" he presently inquired.

"He's a member of the government's secret service," Josie replied, watching his face.

The professor's eyes widened; he stood a moment as if turned to stone. Then he gave a little, forced laugh and said:

"I'm obliged to make a trip to Washington, on business, and I thought perhaps I'd pick up the—ah—-the box, there, and ship to Dorfield. The old desk isn't valuable, except—except that it's—ah—antique and—unusual. I'd like to get it back and I'll return to you the money you paid for it, and the freight charges. If you'll write a note to the railway company, saying the box was wrongly addressed and asking that it be delivered to my order, I think I can get it."

Josie agreed to this at once. She wrote the note and also gave Professor Dyer the freight receipt. But she refused to take his money.

"There might be some hitch," she explained. "If you get the box, and it reaches Dorfield safely, then I'll accept the return of my money; but railroads are unreliable affairs and have queer rules, so let's wait and see what happens."

The Professor assured her, however, that there was no doubt of his getting the box, but he Would wait to pay her, if she preferred to let the matter rest. When he had gone away—seeming far more cheerful than when he came—Mary Louise said to Josie:

"This is a very unfortunate and embarrassing affair, all around. I'm so sorry we took that furniture from Mrs. Dyer before her husband came home and gave his consent. It is very embarrassing."

"I'm glad, for my part," was the reply. Josie's blue eyes were shining innocently and her smile was very sweet. Mary Louise regarded her suspiciously.

"What is it, Josie!" she demanded. "What has that old desk to do with—with —"

"The German spy plot? Just wait and see, Mary Louise."

"You won't tell me?"

"Not now, dear."

"But why did you ship the thing to Washington, if it is likely to prove a valuable clue?"

"Why ask questions that I can't answer? See here, Mary Louise: it isn't wise, or even safe, for me to tell you anything just yet. What I know frightens me—even *me!* Can't you wait and—trust me?"

"Oh, of course," responded Mary Louise in a disappointed voice. "But I fail to understand what Professor Dyer's old desk can possibly have to do with our quest."

Josie laughed.

"It used to belong to the Dudley-Markhams."

"The Dudley-Markhams! Great heavens, But—see here—they left Dorfield long before this war started, and so—"

"I'm going out," was Josie's inconsequent remark. "Do you think those are rain clouds, Mary Louise? I hate to drag around an umbrella if it's not needed."

CHAPTER XV

SUSPENDERS FOR SALE

The two girls parted at the Liberty Shop. Mary Louise went in "to attend to business," while Josie O'Gorman strolled up the street and paused thoughtfully before the windows of Kasker's Clothing Emporium. At first she didn't notice that it was Kasker's; she looked in the windows at the array of men's wear just so she could think quietly, without attracting attention, for she was undecided as to her next move. But presently, realizing this was Kasker's place, she gave a little laugh and said to herself: "This is the fellow poor little Mary Louise suspected of being the arch traitor. I wonder if he knows anything at all, or if I could pump it out of him if he does? Guess I'll interview old Jake, if only to

satisfy myself that he's the harmless fool I take him to be."

With this in mind she walked into the store. A clerk met her; other clerks were attending to a few scattered customers.

"Is Mr. Kasker in?" she asked the young man.

"In his office, miss; to the right, half way down."

He left her to greet another who entered and Josie walked down the aisle, as directed. The office was raised a step above the main floor and was railed in, with a small swinging gate to allow entrance. This was not the main business office but the proprietor's special den and his desk was placed so he could overlook the entire establishment, with one glance. Just at present Kasker was engaged in writing, or figuring, for his bushy head was bent low.

Josie opened the gate, walked in and took a chair that stood beside the desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Kasker," she said sweetly.

He looked up, swept her with a glance and replied:

"What's the matter? Can't one of the clerks attend to you? I'm busy."

"I'll wait," was Josie's quiet reply. "I'd rather deal with you than a clerk."

He hesitated, laid down his pen and turned his chair toward her. She knew the man, by sight, but if he had ever seen the girl he did not recall the fact. His tone was now direct and businesslike.

"Very well, miss; tell me what I can do for you."

It had only taken her an instant to formulate her speech.

"I'm interested in the poor children of Dorfield," she began, "having been sent here as the agent of an organization devoted to clothing our needy little ones. I find, since I have been soliciting subscriptions in Dorfield and investigating the requirements of the poor, that there are a lot of boys, especially, in this city who are in rags, and I want to purchase for them as many outfits as my money will allow. But on account of the war, and its demands on people formerly charitably inclined, I realize my subscription money is altogether too little to do what I wish. That's too bad, but it's true. Everywhere they talk war—war —-war and its hardships. The war demands money for taxes, bonds, mess funds, the Red Cross and all sorts of things, and in consequence our poor are being sadly neglected."

He nodded, somewhat absently, but said nothing. Josie felt her clever bait had

not been taken, as she had expected, so she resolved to be more audacious in her remarks.

"It seems a shame," she said with assumed indignation, "that the poor of the country must starve and be in want, while the money is all devoted to raising an army for the Germans to shoot and mangle."

He saw the point and answered with a broad smile:

"Is that the alternative, young lady? Must one or the other happen? Well—yes; the soldiers must be killed, God help 'em! But *himmel!* We don't let our kiddies freeze for lack of clothes, do we? See here; they're taking everything away from us merchants—our profits, our goods, everything!—but the little we got left the kiddies can have. The war is a robber; it destroys; it puts its hand in an honest man's pocket without asking his consent; all wars do that. The men who make wars have no souls—no mercy. But they make wars. Wars are desperate things and require desperate methods. There is always the price to pay, and the people always pay it. The autocrats of war do not say 'Please!' to us; they say 'Hold up your hands!' and so—what is there to do but hold up our hands?"

Josie was delighted; she was exultant; Jake Kasker was falling into her trap very swiftly.

"But the little ones," he continued, suddenly checking himself in his tirade, "must not be made to suffer like the grown-up folks. They, at least, are innocent of it all. Young lady, I'd do more for the kids than I'd do for the war—and I'll do it willingly, of my own accord. Tell me, then, how much money you got and I'll give you the boys' suits at cost price. I'll do more; for every five suits you buy from me at cost, I'll throw an extra one in, free—Jake Kasker's own contribution."

This offer startled and somewhat dismayed Josie. She had not expected the interview to take such a turn, and Kasker's generosity seriously involved her, while, at the same time, it proved to her without a doubt that the man was a man. He was loud mouthed and foolish; that was all.

While she gathered her wits to escape from an unpleasant situation, a quick step sounded on the aisle and a man brusquely entered the office and exclaimed:

"Hello, Jake; I'm here again. How's the suspender stock?"

Kasker gave him a surly look.

"You come pretty often, Abe Kauffman," he muttered. "Suspenders? Bah! I

only buy 'em once a year, and you come around ev'ry month or so. I don't think it pays you to keep pesterin' merchants."

Abe Kauffman laughed—a big laugh—and sat down in a chair.

"One time you buy, Jake, and other times I come to Dorfield somebody else buys. How do I know you don't get a run on suspenders some time? And if I don't visit all my customers, whether they buy or not, they think I neglect 'em. Who's this, Jake? Your daughter?"

He turned his bland smile on Josie. He was a short, thickset man with a German cast of countenance. He spoke with a stronger German accent than did Kasker. Though his face persistently smiled, his eyes were half closed and shrewd. When he looked at her, Josie gave a little shudder and slightly drew back.

"Ah, that's a wrong guess," said Mr. Kauffman quickly. "I must beg your pardon, my girl. But I meant a compliment to you both. Accept my card, please," and he drew it from his pocket and handed it to her with a bow.

Josie glanced at it:

"KAUFFMAN SUSPENDER COMPANY,
Chicago.
Abe Kauffman, President."

"My business does not interest ladies," he went on in a light tone meant to be jovial. "But with the men—ah!—with the men it's a hold-up game. Ha, ha, hee! One of our trade jokes. It's an elastic business; Kauffman's suspenders keep their wearers in suspense. Ha, ha; pretty good, eh?"

"Do you ever sell any?" asked Josie curiously.

"Do I? Do I, Jake? Ha, ha! But not so many now; the war has ruined the suspender business, like everything else. Kasker can tell you that, miss."

"Kasker won't, though," asserted Jake in a surly tone. The girl, however, was now on another scent.

"Don't you like the war, then?" Josie asked the salesman.

"Like it?" the eyes half opened with a flash. "Who likes war, then? Does humanity, which bears the burden? For me—myself—I'll say war is a good thing, but I won't tell you why or how I profit by it; I'll only say war is a curse to humanity and if I had the power I'd stop it tomorrow—to-day—this very hour! And, at that, I'd lose by it."

His voice shook with a passion almost uncontrollable. He half rose from his chair, with clinched fists. But, suddenly remembering himself, or reading the expression on the girl's face, he sank back again, passed his hand over his face and forced another bland, unmirthful smile.

"I'd hate to be the man who commits his country to war," he said in mild, regretful tones.

But here, Kasker, who had been frowning darkly on the suspender man, broke in.

"See here, Abe; I don't allow that kind of talk in my store," he growled.

"You? You're like me; you hate the war, Jake."

"I did once, Abe, but I don't now. I ain't got time to hate it. It's here, and I can't help it. We're in the war and we're going ahead to win it, 'cause there ain't no hope in backing down. Stop it? Why, man, we *can't* stop it. It's like a man who is pushed off a high bank into a river; he's got to swim to a landing on the other side, or else—sink. We Americans ain't goin' to sink, Abe Kauffman; we'll swim over, and land safe. It's got to be; so it will be."

"All right. I said, didn't I, that it won't hurt my pocket? But it hurts my heart." (Josie was amazed that he claimed a heart.) "But it's funny to hear *you*talk for the war, Jake, when you always hated it."

"Well, I've quit kickin' till we're out of the woods. I'm an American, Abe, and the American flag is flying in France. If our boys can't hold it in the face of the enemy, Jake Kasker will go do it himself!"

Kauffman stood up, casting a glance of scorn on his customer.

"You talk like a fool, Jake; you talk like you was talking for the papers—not honest, but as if someone had scared you."

"Yes; it's the fellows like you that scare me," retorted the clothing merchant. "Ev'ry time you curse the war you're keeping us from winning the war as quick as we ought to; you're tripping the soldiers, the government, the President—the whole machine. I'll admit I don't *like* the war, but I'm *for* it, just the same. Can you figure that out, Abe Kauffman? Once I had more sense than you have, but now I got a better way of thinking. It ain't for me to say whether the war's right or not; my country's honor is at stake, so I'll back my country to the last ditch."

Kauffman turned away.

"I guess you don't need any suspenders," he said, and walked out of the store.

Kasker gave a sigh of relief and sat down again.

"Now, young lady," he began, "we'll talk about—"

"Excuse me," said Josie hastily. "I'm going, now; but I'll be back. I want to see you again, Mr. Kasker."

She ran down the aisle to the door, looked up and down the street and saw the thick-set form of the suspender salesman just disappearing around the corner to the south. Instantly she stepped out. Josie was an expert in the art of shadowing.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. CHARLEWORTH

When Mary Louise reached home that evening she was surprised to find a note from Josie which said:

"I've decided to change my boarding place for a week or so, although I shall miss Aunt Sally's cooking and a lot of other comforts. But this is business. If you meet me in the street, don't recognize me unless I'm quite alone. We've quarrelled, if anyone asks you. Pretty soon we'll make up again and be friends. Of course, you'll realize I'm working on our case, which grows interesting. So keep mum and behave."

"I wish I knew where she's gone," was Mary Louise's anxious comment, as she showed the note to Gran'pa Jim.

"Don't worry, my dear," advised the colonel. "Josie possesses the rare faculty of being able to take care of herself under all circumstances. Had she not been so peculiarly trained by her detective father I would feel it a duty to search for her, but she is not like other girls and wouldn't thank us for interfering, I'm sure."

"I can't see the necessity of her being so mysterious about it," declared the girl. "Josie ought to know I'm worthy of her confidence. And she said, just the other day, that we're partners."

"You must be the silent partner, then," said her grandfather, smiling at her

vexed expression. "Josie is also worthy of confidence. She may blunder, but if so, she'll blunder cleverly. I advise you to be patient with her."

"Well, I'll try, Gran'pa. When we see her again she will probably know something important," said Mary Louise resignedly.

As for little, red-headed Josie O'Gorman, she walked into the office of the Mansion House that afternoon, lugging a battered suit-case borrowed from Aunt Sally, and asked the clerk at the desk for weekly rates for room and board. The clerk spoke to Mr. Boyle, the proprietor, who examined the girl critically.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"New York," answered Josie. "I'm a newspaper woman, but the war cost me my job, because the papers are all obliged to cut down their forces. So I came here to get work."

"The war affects Dorfield, too, and we've only two papers," said the man. "But your business isn't my business, in any event. I suppose you can pay in advance?"

"For a week, anyhow," she returned; "perhaps two weeks: If the papers can't use me, I'll try for some other work."

"Know anybody here?"

"I know Colonel Hathaway, but I'm not on good terms with his granddaughter, Mary Louise. We had a fight over the war. Give me a quiet room, not too high up. This place looks like a fire-trap."

As she spoke, she signed her name on the register and opened her purse.

Boyle looked over his keyboard.

"Give me 47, if you can," said Josie carelessly. She had swiftly run her eye over the hotel register. "Forty-seven is always my lucky number."

"It's taken," said the clerk.

"Well, 43 is the next best," asserted Josie. "I made forty-three dollars the last week I was in New York. Is 43 taken, also?"

"No," said Boyle, "but I can do better by you. Forty-three is a small room and has only one window."

"Just the thing!" declared Josie. "I hate big rooms."

He assigned her to room 43 and after she had paid a week in advance a bellboy showed her to the tiny apartment and carried her suitcase.

"Number 45'll be vacant in a day or two," remarked the boy, as he unlocked her door. "Kauffman has it now, but he won't stay long. He's a suspender drummer and comes about every month—sometimes oftener—and always has 45. When he goes, I'll let you know, so you can speak for it. Forty-five is one of our best rooms."

"Thank you," said Josie, and tipped him a quarter.

As she opened her suitcase and settled herself in the room, she reflected on the meeting in Kasker's store which had led her to make this queer move.

"A fool for luck, they say," she muttered. "I wonder what intuition induced me to interview Jake Kasker. The clothing merchant isn't a bad fellow," she continued to herself, looking over the notes she had made on her tablets. "He didn't make a single disloyal speech. Hates the war, and I can't blame him for that, but wants to fight it to a finish. Now, the other man—Kauffman—hates the war, too, but he did not make any remark that was especially objectionable; but that man's face betrayed more than his words, and some of his words puzzled me. Kauffman said, at two different times, that the war would make him money. There's only one way a man like him can make money out of the war, and that is—by serving the Kaiser. I suppose he thought we wouldn't catch that idea, or he'd been more careful what he said. All criminals are reckless in little ways; that's how they betray themselves and give us a chance to catch them. However, I haven't caught this fellow yet, and he's tricky enough to give me a long chase unless I act boldly and get my evidence before he suspects I'm on his trail. That must be my programme—to act quickly and lose no time."

Kauffman saw her when she entered the hotel dining room for dinner that evening, and he walked straight over to her table and sat down opposite her.

"Met again!" he said with his broad smile. "You selling something?"

"Brains," returned Josie composedly.

"Good! Did Jake Kasker buy any of you?"

"I've all my stock on hand, sir. I'm a newspaper woman—special writer or advertising expert. Quit New York last week and came on here."

"Wasn't New York good enough for you?" he asked, after ordering his dinner of the waitress.

"I'm too independent to suit the metropolitan journals. I couldn't endorse their gumshoe policies. For instance, they wanted me to eulogize President Wilson and his cabinet, rave over the beauties of the war and denounce any congressman or private individual who dares think for himself," explained Josie, eating her soup the while. "So—I'm looking for another job."

Kauffman maintained silence, studying the bill-of-fare. When he was served he busied himself eating, but between the slits of his half-closed eyes he regarded the girl furtively from, time to time. His talkative mood had curiously evaporated. He was thoughtful. Only when Josie was preparing to leave the table did he resume the conversation.

"What did you think of Jake Kasker's kind of patriotism?" he asked.

"Oh; the clothing man? I didn't pay much attention. Never met Kasker before, you know. Isn't he like most of the rabble, thinking what he's told to think and saying what he's told to say?"

She waited for a reply, but none was forthcoming. Even this clever lead did not get a rise out of Abe Kauffman. Indeed, he seemed to suspect a trap, for when she rose and walked out of the dining room she noticed that his smile had grown ironical.

On reaching her room through the dimly lighted passage, Josie refrained from turning on her own lights, but she threw open her one little window and leaned out. The window faced a narrow, unlighted alley at the rear of the hotel. One window of Room 45, next to her, opened on an iron fire-escape that reached to within a few feet of the ground. Josie smiled, withdrew her head and sat in the dark of her room for hours, with a patience possible only through long training.

At ten o'clock Kauffman entered his room. She could distinctly hear him moving about. A little later he went away, walking boldly down the corridor to the elevator.

Josie rose and slipped on her hat and coat.

Leaving the hotel, Kauffman made his way down the street to Broadway, Dorfield's main thoroughfare. He wore a soft hat and carried a cane. The few people he passed paid no attention to him. Steadily proceeding, he left the business district and after a while turned abruptly to the right.

This was one of the principal residence sections of the city. Kauffman turned the various corners with a confidence that denoted his perfect acquaintance with the route. But presently his pace slowed and he came to a halt opposite an

imposing mansion set far back in ample grounds, beautifully cared for and filled with rare shrubbery.

Only for a moment, however, did the man hesitate—just long enough to cast a glance up and down the deserted street, which was fairly well lighted. No one being in sight, he stepped from the sidewalk to the lawn, and keeping the grass under his feet, noiselessly made his way through the shrubbery to the south side of the residence. Here a conservatory formed a wing which jutted into the grounds.

The German softly approached, mounted the three steps leading to a glass door, and rapped upon the sash in a peculiar manner. Almost immediately the door was opened by a woman, who beckoned him in. The conservatory was unlighted save by a mellow drift that filtered through the plants from a doorway beyond, leading to the main house.

From behind the concealment of a thick bush Josie O'Gorman had noted the woman's form but was unable to see her face. The girl happened to know the house, however. It was the residence of Dorfield's social leader, Mrs. Charleworth.

Josie squatted behind that bush for nearly half an hour. Then the glass door opened and Kauffman stepped out.

"By the way," he said in a low voice, "it's just as well we didn't take Kasker in with us. He's a loud-mouthed fool. I've tested him and find he blats out everything he knows."

"We do not need him, since I've decided to finance the affair," returned the woman, and Josie recognized her voice. It was the great Mrs. Charleworth herself. Mrs. Charleworth, in secret conference with Abe Kauffman, the suspender salesman!

Then Josie experienced another surprise. A second man stepped through the shadowy doorway, joining Kauffman on the steps.

"It seems to me," said this last person, "that there is danger in numbers. Of course, that's your affair, Kauffman, and none of my business, but if I'm to help you pull it off, I'd rather there wouldn't be too many of us. It's a ticklish thing, at the best, and—"

"Shut up!" growled Kauffman, suspiciously peering around him into the darkness. "The less we talk in the open, the better."

"That is true. Good night," said the woman, and went in, closing the door behind her.

"I think I will light a cigar," said Kauffman.

"Wait until you are in the street," cautioned the other.

They walked on the grass, avoiding the paths and keeping in the darkest places. Finally they emerged upon the sidewalk, and finding the coast clear, traveled on side by side.

At times they conversed in low tones, so low that the little red-headed girl, dodging through the parkings in their wake, could not overhear the words they spoke. But as they approached the more frequented part of the town, they separated, Kauffman turning into Broadway and the other continuing along a side street.

Josie O'Gorman followed the latter person. He was tall and thin and stooped a trifle. She had been unable, so far, to see his face. He seemed, from the turnings he made, to be skirting the business section rather than pass directly through it. So the girl took a chance, darted down one street and around the corner of another, and then slipped into a dim doorway near which hung an electric street-light.

She listened eagerly and soon was rewarded by a sound of footsteps. The man she was shadowing leisurely approached, passed under the light and continued on his way, failing to note the motionless form of the girl in the doorway.

Josie gave a little laugh.

"You're a puzzling proposition, Professor," she whispered to herself, "and you came near fooling me very properly. For I imagined you were on your way to Washington, and here you've mixed up with another important job!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK SATCHEL

When Josie reached the hotel it was nearly midnight. Half the lights in the office had been extinguished and behind the desk, reading a novel, the night clerk sprawled in an easy chair.

She hadn't seen the night clerk before. He was a sallow-faced boy, scarcely twenty years old, attired in a very striking suit of clothes and wearing a gorgeous jewelled scarf-pin in his cravat. As he read, he smoked a cigarette.

"Hello," said this brilliant individual, as Josie leaned over the counter and regarded him with a faint smile. "You're No. 43, I guess, and it's lucky old Boyle ain't here to read you a lecture—or to turn you out. He won't stand for unmarried lady guests bein' out till this hour, an' you may as well know it first as last."

"He's quite right," was Josie's calm reply. "I'll not do it again. My key, please!"

He rose reluctantly and gave her the key.

"Do you sit up all night?" she asked sweetly.

"I'm s'posed to," he answered in a tone less gruff, "but towards mornin' I snooze a little. Only way to pass the time, with noth'n' to do an' nobody to talk to. It's a beastly job, at the best, an' I'm goin' to quit it."

"Why don't you start a hotel of your own?" she suggested.

"You think you're kiddin' me, don't you? But I might even do that, if I wanted to," he asserted, glaring at her as if he challenged contradiction. "It ain't money that stops me, but hotel keepin' is a dog's life. I've made a bid for a cigar-store down the street, an' if they take me up, somebody can have this job."

"I see you're ambitious," said Josie. "Well, I hope you get the cigar-store. Good night, Mr.—"

"My name's Tom Linnet. I won't tell the ol' boy you was out so late. So long."

The elevator had stopped running, so Josie climbed the stairs and went thoughtfully to her room. Kauffman had preceded her. She heard him drop his shoes heavily upon the floor as he undressed.

She turned on the light and made some notes on her tablets, using the same queer characters that she always employed. The last note read: "Tom Linnet, night clerk at the Mansion House. New clothes; new jewelry. Has money. Recently acquired, for no one with money would be a night clerk. Wants to quit his job and buy a cigar store. Query: Who staked Tom? And why?"

As she crawled into bed Josie reflected: "Mary Louise would be astonished if she knew what I have learned to-night. But then, I'm astonished myself. I feel like the boy who went fishing for sunfish and caught a whale."

Next morning she was up early, alert to continue her investigations. When she heard Mr. Kauffman go down to breakfast she took a bunch of pass-keys from her bag, went boldly through the hall to the door of 45, unlocked it with ease and walked in. A hurried glance showed her a large suitcase lying open upon a

table. She examined its contents. One side was filled with samples of suspenders, the other with miscellaneous articles of male apparel.

Josie was not satisfied. She peered under the bed, softly opened all the drawers in the dresser and finally entered the closet. Here, on the rear shelf, a newspaper was placed in such manner as to hide from observation anything behind it. To an ordinary person, glancing toward it, the newspaper meant nothing; to Josie's practised eye it was plainly a shield. Being short of stature, the girl had to drag in a chair in order to reach the high shelf. She removed the newspaper, took down a black hand-satchel—it was dreadfully heavy and she almost dropped it—and then replaced the paper as it had been before.

Josie was jubilant. She removed the chair, again closed the closet door, and leaving the room practically as she had found it stole back to her own apartment, the heavy satchel concealed in the folds of her frock. But no one saw her, the hall being vacant, and she breathed a sigh of relief as she locked her own door against possible intruders.

Then she placed the black satchel on a stand and bent over it. The lock was an unusual one. She tried all the slender keys upon her bunch without effect—they were either too large or did not fit the keyhole. Next she took a thin hairpin, bent and twisted it this way and that and tried to pry the lock open. Failure. However, she was beginning to understand the mechanism of the lock by this time. From that all-containing handbag which was her inseparable companion she drew out a file, and taking one of the master-keys, began to file it to fit the lock of the black satchel.

This operation consumed more time than she was aware, so interesting was the intricate work. She was presently startled by a sound in the corridor. Mr. Kauffman was coming back to his room, whistling an aria from "Die Walküre." Josie paused, motionless; her heart almost stopped beating.

The man unlocked his door and entered, still whistling. Sometimes the whistle was soft and low, again it was louder and more cheerful. Josie listened in suspense. As long as the whistling continued she realized that the theft of the black satchel remained undiscovered.

Kauffman remained in his room but a few moments. When he departed, carefully locking his door after him, he was still whistling. Josie ran to her own door and when he had passed it opened it just a crack, to enable her to gaze after him. Underneath his arm he carried a bundle of the sample suspenders.

"Good!" she whispered softly, retreating to bend over the satchel again. "Mr. Abe Kauffman will sell suspenders this morning as a blind to his more

important industries, so I needn't hurry."

Sooner than she expected the lock clicked and sprang open. Her eyes at first fell upon some crumpled, soiled shirts, but these she hurriedly removed. The remainder of the satchel contained something enclosed in a green flannel bag. It was heavy, as she found when she tried to lift it out, and a sudden suspicion led her to handle the thing very gingerly. She put it on the table beside the satchel and cautiously untied the drawstring at the mouth of the bag. A moment later she had uncovered a round ball of polished blue steel, to which was attached a tube covered with woven white cotton.

Josie fell back on a chair, fairly gasping, and stared with big eyes at the ball. In her desire to investigate the possessions of the suspender salesman she had scarcely expected to find anything like this. The most she had hoped to discover were incriminating papers.

"It's a bomb!" she stammered, regarding the thing fearfully; "a real, honest-for-true bomb. And it is meant to carry death and destruction to loyal supporters of our government. There's no doubt of that. But—" The thoughts that followed so amazing an assertion were too bewildering to be readily classified. They involved a long string of conjectures, implicating in their wide ramifications several persons of important standing in the community. The mere suggestion of what she had uncovered sufficed to fill Josie's heart and brain with terror.

"Here! I mustn't try to think it out just yet," she told herself, trying with a little shiver of repulsion for the thing to collect her wits. "One idea at a time, Josie, my girl, or you'll go nutty and spoil everything! Now, here's a bomb—a live, death-dealing bomb—and that's the first and only thing to be considered at present."

Controlling her aversion and fear, the girl turned the bomb over and over, giving it a thorough examination. She had never seen such a thing before, but they had often been explained to her and she had an inkling as to the general method of their construction. This one before her was of beautiful workmanship, its surface as carefully turned and polished as if it had been intended for public exhibition. Grooves had been cut in the outer surface and within these grooves lay the coils of the time fuse, which was marked with black ink into regular sections. The first section from the end of the fuse was marked "6;" the next section "5" and so on down to the section nearest the bomb, which was divided by the marks "1"—"1/2"—"1/4."

"I see," said Josie, nodding her head with intelligent perception. "Each section, when lighted, will burn for one hour, running along its groove but harmless

until the end of the fuse is reached. If the entire fuse is lighted, it will require just six hours to explode the bomb, while if it is cut off to the last mark and then lighted, the bomb will explode in fifteen minutes. The operator can set it to suit himself, as circumstances require."

The manner in which the fuse was attached to the bomb was simple. The hole made in the bomb was exactly the size of the fuse inserted into it. There were two little knobs, one on each side the hole. After pushing the fuse into the hole a fine wire was wound around it and attached to the tiny knobs, thus holding it firmly in place.

Josie took a pair of small pincers, unwound the wire and cautiously withdrew the fuse from the hole. Examining the end of the fuse she saw it was filled with a powdery substance which, when ignited, would explode the bomb. She had recourse to her hairpin again and carefully picked the powder out of the fuse for the distance of the entire first section. This proved difficult and painstaking work, but when completed not a grain of the powder remained in the woven cotton casing for the distance of six inches from the end.

Having accomplished that much, Josie sat looking at the thing in a speculative way. She could not have told you, at the moment, why her first act had been to render the bomb impotent in so queer a manner when she could have simply destroyed the entire fuse. But, of course, no one would try to use the fiendish contrivance unless it was supplied with a fuse.

After a period of thought the girl decided what to do next. She removed the bomb, fuse, green bag—even the satchel—to the big lower drawer of her bureau, and turned the lock.

"No one is likely to come in but the chambermaid, and she will be too busy to disturb anything," Josie decided; and then she locked her room door and went down stairs to breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HINT FEOM ANNIE BOYLE

Josie was late. In the breakfast room she found but one guest besides herself, an old lady with a putty face. But there was also a young girl seated at a near-by table who was grumbling and complaining to the maid who waited upon her.

"It ain't my fault, Miss Annie," protested the maid. "The cook says you ordered your breakfast half an hour ago, an' then went away. We tried to keep it hot for you, and if it's cold it's your own fault."

"I was talking with Mr. Kauffman," pouted the girl, who seemed a mere child. "I've a good notion to order another breakfast."

"If you do, cook will tell your father."

This threat seemed effective. The girl, with a sour face, began eating, and the maid came over to take Josie's order. The tables were near enough for conversation, so when the maid had gone to the kitchen Josie said sweetly:

"That Mr. Kauffman's a nice man, isn't he? I don't wonder you forgot your breakfast. Isn't this Miss Annie Boyle?"

"Yes," was the answer. "Do you know Abe Kauffman?"

"I've met him," said Josie.

"He an' Pa used to be good friends," said Annie Boyle, who did not seem at all shy in conversing with strangers, "but Pa's soured on him lately. I don't know why. P'raps because Abe is a German, an' everybody's tryin' to fling mud at the Germans. But Abe says the German-Americans are the back-bone of this country, and as good citizens as any."

"He don't seem to like the war, though," remarked Josie carelessly.

"Well, do you know why? Abe's had two brothers and five cousins in the German army, and all of 'em's been killed. That's why he's sore on the war. Says his brothers deserved what they got for not comin' to America an' bein' American citizens, like Abe is. But I know he's dreadful sorry 'bout their bein' killed just the same. German folks seem to think a good, deal of their families, an' so jest to mention the war makes Abe rave an' swear."

"That's foolish," said Josie. "He'll get himself into trouble."

"Abe's no fool; he knows how far he can go, an' when to stop talkin'. He'll cuss the war, but you never hear him cuss'n' the United States. He told me, just a while ago, that the war'll make him rich, 'cause he's smart enough to use it for his own good. But he said I mustn't talk about that," she added, with a sudden realization that Josie was regarding her curiously. "Abe an' me's chums, an' what he says is between us. P'raps he was only jokin', 'bout gettin' rich. Abe's a great joker, anyhow."

That this was a rather lame retraction was apparent even to Annie Boyle. She

gave Josie a suspicious look, but Josie's face was absolutely expressionless. The maid was placing her order before her and she calmly began her breakfast. A moment later, the old lady rose and tottered out of the room.

"Gee! I wish I had her money," remarked Annie Boyle, looking after her. "She's got a wad of stocks an' just has to cut coupons off 'em. Lives here easy an' don't worry. If I had her dough I'd—" She stopped suddenly.

"Money's a good thing to have," said Josie. "There's Tom Linnet, now; he's going to buy a cigar store."

"How'd you know?" asked Annie quickly.

"Why, he told me."

"Oh; are you an' Tom friends?"

"We're not enemies. Tom's in luck to have so much money."

"Wall," said Annie, "he's a fool to flash it all of a sudden. Pa took him for night clerk when he didn't have a cent—and it wasn't so long ago, either. He gets his board an' five dollars a week. Folks are goin' to wonder where he got all his fine clothes, an' them di'monds, an' how he can afford to buy Barker's cigar store. I asked Abe about it an' Abe says he guesses Tom got the money from an aunt that jus' died."

"Perhaps he did."

"Well, where'd he get the aunt? Tom's got two brothers that are peddlers an' a father who's a track-walker, an' he's got a mother what takes in washin'. If there's an aunt, she's some relation to the rest of the family, so why didn't she leave them some money, as well as Tom?"

"I don't know, but I'm glad Tom is so well fixed," answered Josie, rather absently, for her eye had fallen on the menu card beside her plate, and the menu card had somehow conveyed a new thought to her mind. She picked it up and examined it critically. Part of it was printed in a queer, open-faced type—all capitals—while the balance of the list of dishes had been written in with pen and ink. These printed bills would do for a good many breakfasts, for they mentioned only the staples, while the supplementary dishes were day by day added in writing.

"I wonder who prints your bills-of-fare?" she said to Annie Boyle.

"Why do you wonder that?" demanded Annie.

"I like the type, and I want to get some cards printed from it."

"We print our own bills," said the child. "There's a press an' type an' the fixings in a room in the basement, an' Tom Linnet used to print a new card every day for all the three meals. He did it at night, you know, between two an' six o'clock, when nobody's ever around the hotel. They was swell bills-of-fare, but Tom claimed he couldn't do so much printin', although that's part o' the night clerk's duty, an' Pa thought it used up too much good cardboard at war-time prices. So now we jus' get out a new bill once a week, an' write the extry dishes on it."

"That does very well," said Josie. "Does Tom still do the printing?"

"Yes. Pa hired him as night clerk 'cause he'd worked in a printin' office an' could do printin'. But since Tom got rich he don't like to work, an the bills ain't printed as good as they used to be."

"This looks pretty good to me," said Josie, eyeing it approvingly.

"I guess, if Tom wasn't goin' to leave, Pa would fire him," asserted Annie, rising from the table. "Good mornin', miss; I'll see you again, if you're stoppin' here."

After she had gone, Josie finished her breakfast thoughtfully. Three distinct facts she had gleaned from Annie Boyle's careless remarks. First, Tom Linnet had acquired sudden riches. Second, the type used on the hotel menu cards was identically the same that the disloyal circulars had been printed from. Third, between the hours of two and five in the mornings, the night clerk's duties permitted him to be absent from the hotel office.

Josie decided that Annie Boyle had not been admitted to the inner confidences of the conspirators, and that Tom Linnet was their tool and had been richly paid for whatever services he had performed. She was now gathering "clues" so fast that it made her head swim. "That chance meeting with Kauffman, at Kasker's," she told herself, "led me directly into the nest of traitors. I'm in luck. Not that I'm especially clever, but because they're so astonishingly reckless. That's usually the way with criminals; they close every loop-hole but the easiest one to peep through—and then imagine they're safe from discovery!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRINTING OFFICE

After breakfast Josie sallied out upon the street and found a hardware store. There, after some exploration, she purchased an asbestos table-mat. With this she returned to her room and locked herself in.

The chambermaid had "been and gone," but Josie's drawer was still locked and its precious contents intact. The girl scraped the surface of the table-mat with her pen-knife until she had secured enough loose fibre to serve her purpose and then she proceeded to restuff the fuse with the asbestos fibre the entire length of the section from which she had removed the powder. Then she pushed the end of the fuse into the hole in the bomb, wired it as before, and replaced the long fuse in its grooves.

"Now," said Josie, surveying her work with satisfaction, "if they light that fuse, and expect it to explode the bomb in an hour or more, they'll be badly fooled. Also, I shall have prevented another catastrophe like the explosion at the airplane factory."

She replaced the bomb in its bag, placed the bag in the black satchel, tucked in the soiled shirts to cover it and with her improvised key managed to relock the satchel. Watching for a time when the corridor was vacant, she went to 45, entered the room and replaced the satchel on its shelf, taking care to arrange the newspaper before it as a mask.

She had taken the chair from the closet and was about to leave the room when she heard footsteps coming down the hallway, accompanied by a whistle which she promptly recognized.

"Caught!" she exclaimed, and gave a hurried glance around her. To hide within the room was impossible, but the window was open and the iron fire-escape within easy reach. In an instant she had mounted it and seizing the rounds of the iron ladder climbed upward until she had nearly reached the next window directly above, on the third floor. Then she paused, clinging, to get her breath.

Kauffman was annoyed to find the door of his room unlocked. He paused a moment in the middle of the room and looked around him. "Confound that chambermaid!" Josie heard him mutter, and then he opened the closet door and looked in. Apparently reassured, he approached the open window, stuck out his head and looked *down* the fire-escape. Josie's heart gave a bound; but Kauffman didn't look upward. He drew in his head, resumed his whistling and busied himself repacking the sample suspenders in his suitcase.

Josie hoped he would soon go out again, but he seemed to have no intention of doing so. So she climbed her ladder until she could look into the window above, which was also open. The old lady she had seen at breakfast was lying upon the bed, her eyes closed. Josie wondered if she was asleep. The door

leading from the room to the hallway also stood open. The weather was warm, and the old lady evidently wanted plenty of air.

While Josie hesitated what to do a boy came up the alley, noticed her on the fire-escape and paused to look at her in astonishment. The girl couldn't blame him for being interested, for her attitude was certainly extraordinary. Others were likely to discover her, too, and might suspect her of burglary and raise a hue and cry. So she deliberately entered the room, tiptoed across to the hall and escaped without arousing the old lady. But it was a desperate chance and she breathed easier when she had found the stairs and descended to her own floor. Safe in her own room she gave a little laugh at her recent predicament and then sat down to note her latest discoveries on her tablets.

Josie O'Gorman was very particular in this regard. Details seemingly of trifling moment but which may prove important are likely to escape one's memory. Her habit was to note every point of progress in a case and often review every point from the beginning, fitting them into their proper places and giving each its due importance. A digest of such information enabled her to proceed to the next logical step in her investigation.

"These items all dovetail very nicely," she decided, with a satisfied nod at the quaint characters on the tablets—which all the world might read and be no wiser. "I must, however, satisfy myself that Tom Linnet actually printed those circulars. The evidence at hand indicates that he did, but I want positive proof. Also, I'd like to know which one of the gang employed him—and paid him so liberally. However, that suggestion opens up a new line of conjecture; I don't believe Tom Linnet got all his wealth merely for printing a few circulars, helping to address them, and keeping his mouth shut. But—what else has he been paid for?"

She brooded on this for a while and then determined to take one thing at a time and follow it to a conclusion. So she once more quitted her room and descended by the elevator—openly, this time—to the office. It was now noon and the hotel office was filled with guests, and the clerks and bellboys were all busily occupied. Josie wandered carelessly around until she found the stairway leading to the basement. Watching her opportunity she slipped down the stairs.

The basement was not as barren as she expected to find it. There was an open central space, on one side of which were rooms for the barber shop, baths, and a pool room, all more or less occupied by guests and attendants. On the opposite side, at the rear, were baggage and storerooms. Just beside her she noted a boot-black's stand, where a colored boy listlessly waited for customers.

"Shine, miss?" he inquired.

"No," said Josie in a businesslike tone; "I'm looking for the printing office."

"Secon' door, miss," indicating it with a gesture; "but dey ain't nobody dere. De room's mos'ly kep' locked."

"I know," said Josie, and advancing to the door drew out her keys.

Her very boldness disarmed suspicion; the boy was not sufficiently interested to watch her, for a man came out of the barber-shop and seated himself in the boot-black's chair.

This sort of lock didn't phase Josie at all. At the second trial she opened the door, walked in and closed the door behind her.

It was a small room, dimly lighted and very disorderly. Scraps of paper were strewn around the floor. Dust had settled on the ink-rollers of the foot-press. A single case of type stood on a rack and the form of a bill-of-fare—partly "pied"—was on a marble slab which formed the top of a small table. On an upturned soap-box was a pile of unprinted menu cards. Josie noted a few cans of ink, a bottle of benzine, and a few printing tools lying carelessly about, but the room contained nothing more.

Having "sized up" Tom Linnet's printing room with one swift glance, the girl stooped down and began searching among the scraps that littered the floor. They were mostly torn bits of cardboard or crumpled papers on which trial impressions had been made.

Josie expected momentarily to be interrupted, so she conducted her search as rapidly as was consistent with thoroughness. She paid no attention to the card scraps but all papers she smoothed out, one by one. Finally, with a little cry of triumph, she thrust one of these into her handbag. She made this discovery just back of the press, and glancing up, she noted a hook that had formerly been hidden from her view, on which were impaled a number of papers—the chef's "copy" from which various bills had been printed. Running through these papers she suddenly paused, pulled one away from the hook and tucked it into her bag.

She was fairly satisfied, now, but still continued her search amongst the litter. It was not easy to decipher writing or printing in that dim light, but her eyes were good and the longer she remained in the room the more distinctly she saw. There was an electric globe suspended over the press, but she dared not turn on the light for fear of attracting attention. Several scraps on which writing appeared she secured without trying to read them, but presently she

decided she had made as thorough an examination of the place as was necessary.

She left the room, locked the door again and boldly mounted the stairs to the office, meeting and passing several men who scarcely noticed her. Then she took the elevator to her room and washed her grimy hands and prepared for luncheon.

At the table she slipped another of the printed bills into her bag, to use for comparison, and afterward ate her lunch as calmly as if she were not inwardly elated at the success of her morning's work. Josie felt, indeed, that she had secured the proof necessary to confound the traitors and bring them to the bar of justice. But there might be other interesting developments; her trap was still set. "There's no hurry," she told herself. "Let's see this thing through—to the end."

Indeed, on reflection, she realized that several threads of evidence had not yet been followed to their source. Some points of mystification still remained to be cleared up. Her facts were mingled with theories, and she had been taught that theories are mighty uncertain things.

On leaving the dining room, Josie got on her hat and jacket, went out to the street and caught an Oak Avenue car.

"Oh, Josie!" cried a well-known voice, and there sat Mary Louise, on her way home from the Shop.

Josie gave her a haughty look, walked straight to the far end of the car and sat down in a vacant seat. The car was half filled with passengers.

Mary Louise pushed forward and sat beside her friend. Josie stared straight ahead, stolidly.

"No one here knows you," whispered Mary Louise, "won't you speak to me, Josie?"

No reply.

"Where are you stopping? What are you doing? How are you getting along on the case?" pleaded Mary Louise, so softly that no one else could overhear.

Josie maintained silence. Her features were expressionless.

"I know you told me, in case we met, not to recognize you," continued Mary Louise, "but I'm so anxious for news, dear! Can't you come home, to-night, and have a good talk with me? You owe me that much consideration. Josie."

The car stopped at a street intersection. Josie stood up.

"Not to-night," she replied, and alighted from the car just as it started to move again.

"Bother Mary Louise!" she muttered, "she has made me walk three whole blocks."

Mary Louise was human and she was provoked. There was really no need for Josie O'Gorman to be so absurdly mysterious. Had she not known her so well, Mary Louise would have felt that Josie had deliberately insulted her. As it was, she blamed her friend for inexcusable affectation. "I'm not sure," she reflected, "that a girl can be a detective—a regular detective—without spoiling her disposition or losing to some an extent her maidenly modesty. Of course, Josie has been brought up in an atmosphere of mystery and can't be blamed for her peculiarities, but—-I'm glad *I'm* not a detective's daughter."

Josie, however, wasn't worrying over any resentment her friend might feel at the necessary snub. She was on a keen scent and already had forgotten her meeting with Mary Louise. Three blocks farther on she turned into the walk leading to an old but picturesque residence, at one time a "show place" of Dorfield and the pride of the Dudley-Markhams, but now overshadowed by modern and more imposing mansions.

Josie rang the door-bell and presently the door was opened by a young and rather untidy maid.

"I'd like to see Professor Dyer," said Josie.

"He's gone to Washington," was the reply.

"Indeed! Are you quite sure?"

"Yes," said the maid; and then Mrs. Dyer's head appeared in the opening and she gave Josie a curious if comprehensive examination. Then:

"If you're from one of the schools, I'm sorry to tell you that Professor Dyer went to Washington by the early train this morning. I don't know how soon he will be back. Professor Harrington of the High School is in charge. But perhaps it is something I can do?"

"No, thank you; I can wait," said Josie, and went away.

"So," she said to herself, as she made her way back to town in a street car, "if Dyer has really gone to Washington, he hopes to get possession of the old desk and its hidden papers. Pretty important to him, those papers are, and I wouldn't

blame him for chasing them up. But—has he really gone? Mrs. Dyer thinks so; but all evidence points to the fact that she's not in her husband's confidence. Now, if Dyer is on his way to Washington, what did last night's secret meeting mean? His absence will complicate matters, I fear. Anyhow, I must revise my conclusions a bit."

CHAPTER XX

ONE GIRL'S WITS

As she entered the hotel Josie encountered Joe Langley, the one-armed soldier back from the war. She had taken a great interest in this young fellow and admired his simple, manly nature, having had several interesting conversations with him at the Liberty Girls' Shop and at the drills. Josie felt she needed an ally at this juncture, and here was one who could be trusted.

"Joe," she said earnestly, drawing him aside, "are you going to be busy this evening?"

"Yes, Miss O'Gorman, I'm busy every evening now," he replied. "I've taken a job, you know, and my loafing days and social stunts are over. There wasn't any bread-an'-butter in telling the society dames about my war experiences, so I had to go to work. I'm night watchman at the steel works, and go on duty at seven o'clock."

Josie was disappointed. Looking at him musingly, she asked:

"Are they making munitions now, at the steel works?"

"Of course; it's practically under government control, they say, but is still operated by the old company. They make shells for the big guns, you know, and they've ten car-loads on hand, just now, ready to be shipped to-morrow."

Josie drew a long breath. This was real news and her active mind jumped to a quick conclusion.

"Are the shells loaded, Joe?" she inquired.

"All ready for war," replied the soldier. "You see, a night watchman in such a place has an important position. I guard those shells by night, and another man does nothing but guard them by day."

"Where are they stored?" was Josie's next question.

"In the room just back of Mr. Colton's office—the big main building."

"So Mr. Colton is still the head of the company?"

"He's Vice-President and General Manager, and he knows the steel and ammunition business from A to Z," asserted Joe Langley. "Mr. Colton represents the government as well as the steel works. The President is Mr. Jaswell, the banker, but he doesn't do anything but attend the Board meetings."

"Joe," said Josie impressively, "you know who I am, don't you?"

"Why, you're one of the Liberty Girls, I guess."

"I'm from Washington," she said. "My father, John O'Gorman, is one of the government's secret service officers; I'm working on a case here in the interests of our government, and I may want you to help me foil a German spy plot."

"Count on me!" said Sergeant Joe, emphatically. And then he added: "I'd like to make sure, though, that you're really what you claim to be."

Josie opened her hand bag and from a side pocket drew a silver badge engraved "U. S. Secret Service. No. L2O1." That was her father's number and a complimentary badge, but Joe was satisfied. He had to glance inside the handbag to see it, for the girl dared not exhibit it more openly.

"If you want to know more about me, ask Colonel Hathaway," continued Josie.

"No," said Joe; "I believe you're on the square. But I'd never have suspected it of you. Tell me what I'm to do."

"Nothing, at present. But should a crisis arrive, stand by me and obey my instructions."

"I'll do that," promised the man.

When the girl had regained her room in the hotel, she sat down with a businesslike air and wrote upon a sheet of paper, in her peculiar cypher, the story of her discoveries and the conclusions they justified up to the present hour. This was to fix all facts firmly in her mind and to enable her to judge their merits. The story was concise enough, and perhaps Josie was quite unaware how much she had drawn upon her imagination. It read this way:

"Disloyal circulars have been issued from time to time in Dorfield, designed to interfere with sales' of Liberty Bonds, to cause resentment at conscription and

to arouse antipathy for our stalwart allies, the English. These circulars were written by John Dyer, superintendent of schools, who poses as a patriot. The circulars were printed in the basement of the Mansion House by Tom Linnet, a night clerk, who was well paid for his work. Papers found secreted in an old desk from the attic of Dyer's house prove that Dyer is in the pay of German agents in this country and has received fabulous sums for his 'services,' said services not being specified in the documents. In addition to these payments, there were found in the desk notes of the Imperial German Government, for large amounts, such notes to be paid 'after the war.'

"Dyer is clearly the head of the German spy plot in Dorfield, but the person who acts as medium between Dyer and the Master Spy is an alleged suspender salesman calling himself Abe Kauffman. This Kauffman makes frequent trips to Dorfield, giving orders to Dyer, and on one occasion Kauffman, who stops at the Mansion House while in town, hired Tom Linnet to place a bomb in the Airplane Factory, causing an explosion which destroyed many government airplanes and killed several employees. The sum paid Linnet for this dastardly act has made him rich and he has bought or is about to buy a cigar store. Kauffman now has another bomb in his possession, doubtless brought here to be placed, when opportunity arrives, to do the most possible damage. Indications are that he may attempt to blow up the steel works, where a large amount of shells are now completed and ready for shipment to-morrow—meaning that the job must be done to-night, if at all. Perhaps Linnet will place the bomb; perhaps Kauffman will do it himself. Dyer has lost his incriminating papers and notes and is on his way to Washington in an endeavor to recover them.

"Associated with Dyer in his horrible activities is Mrs. Augusta Charleworth, occupying a high social position, but of German birth and therefore a German sympathizer. She is clever, and her brains supplement those of Dyer, who seems more shrewd than initiative, being content to execute the orders of others. Dyer was educated at Heidelburg, in Germany, which accounts, perhaps, for his being pro-German, although I suspect he is pro-anything that will pay him money. Dyer and the Hon. Andrew Duncan, while political pals, are not connected in this spy plot, but I suspect that Peter Boyle, the proprietor of the Mansion House may be one of the gang. I've no evidence yet that implicates Boyle, but he harbors Kauffman as a guest and ought to know that his night clerk is printing traitorous propaganda. So far, the evidence incriminates Kauffman, Mrs. Charleworth, Dyer and Tom Linnet. I believe Mrs. Dyer to be innocent of any knowledge of her husband's crimes; otherwise, she would never have parted with that important desk—the desk that will prove his ruin and ought to cost him his life.

"My plan is this," concluded the notation, "to catch Kauffman or Linnet in the act of placing the bomb to-night, make the arrest, round up the other guilty ones and jail them, and then turn the case over to the federal officers for prosecution. A telegram to Washington will secure Professor Dyer's arrest on his arrival there."

Josie read this through twice and nodded her red head with intense satisfaction.

"All clear as crystal," she asserted gleefully. "I have proof of every statement, and the finale can't go very wrong with such knowledge in my possession. To-night, unless all signs fail, will prove a warm night—warm enough to scorch these dreadful, murderous tools of the Kaiser!"

And now Josie skipped over to the police station and had a somewhat lengthy conference with Chief Farnum, who knew her father and treated the girl detective with professional consideration. After this she hunted up the two government agents—old Jim Crissey and young Norman Addison—who knew her well as "John O'Gorman's clever kid, the pride of her doting Daddy." They listened to her with interest and genuine respect for her talent and not only promised their assistance whenever it might be needed but congratulated her warmly on her good work.

This concluded Josie's afternoon labors, and it was with a sense of triumphant elation that she returned to her hotel to rest and prepare for the expected crisis.

CHAPTER XXI

SURPRISES

Josie went to dinner as soon as the dining room opened. When she came out she met Abe Kauffman going in. He stopped and spoke to her.

"Sell any brains yet?" in a jocular way.

"Not to-day," she replied, with her innocent, baby-like stare.

"Well, I didn't sell any suspenders, either. There are no spenders for *sus*penders. Ha, ha, ha!"

"That doesn't seem to worry you much," asserted Josie, pointedly.

He gave a shrug.

"Well, to-morrow morning I leave by the 5:30 train east, so if I don't see you any more, I hope the brains will find a market."

"Thank you."

She went on, glad to escape the man. "He told me about leaving on the 5:30, and is probably giving everyone else the same information, so he can't be connected with the explosion," she reflected. "Clever Mr. Kauffman! But not clever enough to realize he is near the end of his infamous career."

Josie's plans, perfected during that afternoon, primarily involved the shadowing of Abe Kauffman every moment, from now on. Abe Kauffman and his black satchel. For it grew dark early at this time of year, and already the brief twilight was fading. So the girl hastened to her room and exchanged her gray walking suit for a darker one that was inconspicuous and allowed free movement. Then she slipped her little pearl-mounted revolver—her father's gift—into her handbag and decided she was ready for any emergency.

Having extinguished the light in her room, she glanced from the window into the alley below, where the shadows were now gathering deeply.

"I think Kauffman will go down the fire-escape and drop into the alley," she mused; "but he must first come to his room for the black satchel, in any event, and from that instant I must never lose sight of him."

Suddenly she discovered a form pacing slowly up and down the otherwise deserted alley. Fearful that other detectives were on the watch, and might disrupt her plans, she strained her eyes to discover this person's identity. There was but one light to relieve the gloom, and that was far down the alley, a spot the prowler for some time avoided. Finally, however, he came to a point where the light touched his face and Josie instantly recognized Tom Linnet.

"He is waiting for someone," she decided, "and Kauffman is still at dinner—killing time because it's yet too early to undertake his nefarious task. Tom Linnet may be the tool he has selected, and I ought to get in touch with the boy, somehow, before he meets the arch conspirator. Kauffman is the one I prefer to land."

With this in mind, she hurried down, passed out at the front office doorway and turned into a narrow drive at the south of the hotel, which led to the rear alley. A great business block, now dark and deserted, loomed on the other side of the driveway, which was used by the baggage and supply wagons in the daytime.

When the girl reached the corner of the alley she found herself in very deep shadow; so she ventured to protrude her head far enough to look after Tom Linnet. To her surprise the party he had been waiting for had already joined him, for she discovered two dusky forms pacing the alley.

It could not be Kauffman. While she hesitated whether to steal closer or maintain her position, the two advanced almost to her corner and paused there —in the blackest spot they could find.

"I tell you I won't do it!" said Tom, in a hard, dogged tone that was tense with excitement. "I'm through, and that's all there is to it."

"That's a mistaken notion," was the quiet reply. "You're too deep in the plot to draw back, and the pay is well worth while."

"I don't want any more money," growled Tom.

"You'll get two thousand for this night's work. Cash. And there is no risk; you know that."

"Risk? God, man! Can't you guess how I dream of those poor devils I sent to their death in the airplane job? I hate the money I got! I—I—"

"See here," said the other voice impatiently, "that was a mistake, and you know it. We didn't intend murder, but the explosion was delayed. No one will get hurt to-night."

"Not through me," declared Tom.

"If you fail us, you'll come to grief."

"If I come to grief, so will you. Peach on me, and I'll blow the whole deal." There was a moment's silence.

"Would three thousand satisfy you?" demanded the tempter.

"No," asserted Tom stoutly; "I'm goin' to quit. What's done can't be undone, but I'm through with you. It—it's too blamed terrible, that's what it is! Leave me alone an' let me turn honest. Why don't you do the job yourself?"

"I think I will," said the other calmly. "If you intend to turn down a good thing, I'll do my own work and save the money. But remember, Linnet, silence is your only salvation. Don't talk at all; if you do, you're liable to say the wrong thing—and you can't afford to do that."

"I'm no fool," responded the night clerk, a shade of relief in his tone. "But don't come to me again, Professor. I'm done with you."

Professor! Josie felt a distinct shock. She had to flatten herself against the wall, too, and remain rigid, for the man abruptly turned the corner and marched down the driveway. Half way to the brilliantly lighted street he dodged behind the building opposite the hotel, threading his way through narrow back yards. Josie followed, swift and silent. Finally they reached a place where the man was forced to pass beneath the rays of a lamp and Josie was near enough to see his face. It was, in reality, Professor John Dyer.

That assurance was all the girl wanted, just now. She let him go his way and turned to regain the hotel. It was not quite eight o'clock, yet she felt it important to keep an eye on Kauffman and the bomb. The bomb, especially, for until Dyer took possession of the infernal contrivance he could do no mischief.

In the hotel lobby she entered a public telephone booth and called up Jim Crissey; then she went straight to her room. She could hear a low whistling in 45, which informed her that Kauffman had not yet gone out and that he was in a cheerful mood.

"I'm beginning to understand their method of work," Josie reflected. "Kauffman prepares the bombs, or brings them here under the guise of a suspender salesman; Dyer arranges for their being placed, having secured information as to where an explosion will do the most damage to the government, and Tom Linnet is used as the tool to do the actual work. Mrs. Charleworth probably assists Dyer in getting special information, and advises the gang, but doesn't take an active part in the perpetration of the crimes. Her brains and position would naturally place her at the head of the conspirators in Dorfield, although I'm pretty sure Kauffman, as the agent of the Master Spy, can dictate what they must do."

Kauffman slammed his door and locked it. He was going out. Josie opened her own door a crack to look after him. He was walking deliberately down the corridor, openly carrying in his left hand the black satchel.

To Josie this seemed the essence of effrontery. He had no intention of using the fire-escape, after all. He trusted in bravado, as so many careless criminals do. As she stealthily followed him, she observed the man stop in the office and exchange commonplaces with one or two guests whom he knew.

In reality, this was his safest plan. The black bag did not look suspicious. Presently the bomb would be turned over to Dyer and Kauffman's responsibility would then end. His very boldness was calculated to prevent suspicion.

Leaving the hotel, Kauffman walked leisurely up the lighted street. Only when

he turned a corner did Josie momentarily lose sight of him. There were many pedestrians at this hour and they masked the girl's form and for a while enabled her to keep near to the man she was shadowing. The only thing that puzzled Josie was the fact that Kauffman was proceeding in a direction exactly opposite that taken by Dyer a short time before. Dyer went south and Kauffman was going north.

When the business section of Dorfield was passed, the streets became more deserted. They were not well lighted either, which favored Josie the more.

Kauffman kept steadily on, and as the houses along the way thinned, Josie decided he was headed directly for the steel works. That upset her calculations a bit, for she knew he had not seen Dyer since the latter's interview with Tom Linnet, nor had he seen Linnet; therefore he could not know that any arrangements he had previously made with them had fallen through. The German's present actions, however, indicated that he had decided to place the bomb himself, without the assistance of his fellow conspirators. Had he been warned of Linnet's defection? Had he means of communicating with Dyer unknown to Josie? Dyer was a mystery; even his wife believed he was now on his way to Washington.

Surprises, in Josie's line of work were not uncommon, and this was no time to consider whys and wherefores. The one thing she was sure of was that the bomb was in the black satchel and the black satchel in Kauffman's hand. No matter where the other conspirators might be or how they were implicated in tonight's plot, as long as she kept her eye on the bomb, she would be able to control the situation.

CHAPTER XXII

A SLIGHT MISTAKE

From the edge of the town to the steel works the road led through a common, overgrown with brush and weeds. There was no moon and although the distance was not great it was a lonely, dark and "creepy" place. As soon as the girl saw Kauffman take the road to the works she decided to get there before he could do so. Knowing well she could not be seen, she branched off through the brush, and finding her way by instinct rather than sight, ran swiftly in a half circle over the fields and struck the road again considerably in advance of the more deliberate Kauffman.

She now set off at her swiftest run and on reaching the manager's office, in the front of the main building, perceived that it was lighted.

Josie rapped upon the door and it was opened by one-armed Joe Langley, the night watchman.

"Quick!" she said, "let me in and hide me somewhere, where I can't be seen."

Joe pulled her in, closed the outer door and locked it, and then faced her.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"There's a man coming here with a bomb in a black satchel," she panted. "He intends to blow up this building, in which all the shells axe stored. I want to catch him in the act, Joe, and you must hide me somewhere."

Joe glanced around with a puzzled look.

"Where?" he asked helplessly.

So Josie looked around her, too. This end of the long building was partitioned off for offices, as it fronted the town. The central section was a big space containing a table, benches, etc., while on either side were little glass rooms with partitions between them reaching about seven feet in height, the ceiling being some twelve feet from the floor. The first room to the left of the entrance was marked "Manager" on its glass door; the next office "Purchasing Agent," and the third "Chief Engineer." On the right hand side, the corresponding offices were marked "Secretary," "Examiner," and "Superintendent." All the office doors were locked except that of the Purchasing Agent, which stood ajar. Josie sprang into that office and cast a hurried glance around. The glass division between that and the manager's office was "frosted" with white paint, but so carelessly done that she found places where she could see through into the office of the manager. Also she could see into the main, or reception room, even with her door closed.

While she examined this place a knock came on the outer door—a loud, imperative knock.

"This will do," whispered Josie to Joe. "Go an let him in, but don't let him suspect I'm here."

Joe was not quick-witted, but on the battlefields of France he had learned prompt obedience to orders. Josie, as a government agent, was now his commander, so he merely nodded to her as he walked over to unlock the outer door.

Kauffman stepped in, satchel in hand.

"You're the watchman, I suppose," he said cheerfully. "Is Mr. Colton here?"

"No," answered Joe.

"I was to meet him here at this time," said Kauffman.

"He said he'd be back this evening," returned Joe, just recalling that fact, "but he isn't here yet."

"All right," said the man, "I'll wait."

He carefully placed the satchel on the table and sat down on a bench. Joe regarded him suspiciously, remembering the girl's warning, but said nothing more. Josie was watching Kauffman from her retreat, but as her little office was dark and the German sat under a bright light it was impossible for him to know that his every movement was under observation.

The minutes dragged. A big clock on the wall ticked with an ominous sound. Kauffman drew out his watch and compared it with the clock. He appeared to grow restless.

Josie's quick ears caught the distant sound of a motor car coming down the road. Perhaps Kauffman heard it also. He rose from his seat and going to the table unlocked the black satchel, pressed the top open and looked inside it. Still bending over the satchel he placed a cigarette in his mouth, lighted a match and applied the flame to his cigarette. His back was toward Josie but she comprehended instantly the action.

"He has lighted the fuse!" she murmured, triumphantly.

The motor car came to a sudden halt outside the door, which Joe had left unlocked; but while the German turned expectantly toward the door the maimed soldier, hearing Josie's whisper, approached her little room and slightly opened her door.

"He has lighted the fuse of the bomb," she said to him excitedly. "The bomb is in the satchel!"

Joe turned quickly to the table. He dived into the bag with his one good hand, drew out the heavy ball of steel and rushed with it to the door just as the manager, Mr. Colton, opened it and stepped in.

So swift were Joe's actions that Kauffman had no time to interfere. Both he and the manager stared in amazement as Joe Langley rushed outside and with all his might hurled the bomb far out upon the common.

"Confound you!" cried Kauffman. "What did you do that for?"

"What is it?" inquired the astonished manager.

"A bomb!" cried Josie, stepping from her retreat and confronting them. "A bomb with the fuse lighted, and timed to blow up this building after you had gone away, Mr. Colton. That man before you is a German spy, and I arrest him in the name of the law. Put up your hands, Abe Kauffman!"

The little revolver was in her hand, steadily covering him. Kauffman gave an amused laugh, but he slowly raised his arms, as commanded.

"I don't quite understand," said the puzzled manager, looking from one to the other.

"Well, I brought the new projectile, Colton, as I had agreed," answered the German, coolly, "but your quaint watchman has thrown it away. As for the girl," he added, with a broad grin, "she has fooled me. She said she had brains, and I find she was mistaken."

The manager turned to Josie.

"May I ask who you are, Miss, and how you came to be in my office?"

"I am Josie O'Gorman, an agent of the government secret service," she replied, not quite truthfully. "I've been shadowing this man for some time. I tell you, sir, he brought a bomb here, to destroy this building, and under pretense of lighting, a cigarette he has just lighted the time fuse. The bomb was in that satchel, but—" she added impressively, "as a matter of fact the thing was harmless, as I had already removed the powder from the fuse."

Kauffman gave a low whistle.

"How did you manage that?" he asked curiously.

"Never mind how," she retorted; "I did it."

Kauffman turned to the manager.

"Will you please order your man to get the projectile?" he asked. "It is lucky for us all that the thing isn't loaded, or there really would have been an explosion." He now turned to Josie, with his hands still in the air, and explained: "It is meant to explode through impact, and ordering it tossed out there was the most dangerous thing you could have done."

At the manager's command Joe took an electric searchlight and went out to find the steel ball.

"If you please, miss," said Kauffman, "may I put down my arms? They are tired, and I assure you I will not try to escape."

Josie lowered the revolver. Her face was red. She was beginning to wonder if she had bungled the case. A second thought, however—a thought of the papers she had found in the old desk—reassured her. She might have been wrong in some respects, but surely she was right in the main.

"This man," said Mr. Colton, pointing to Kauffman, "is known to me as a munition expert. He bears the endorsement of the Secretary of War and is the inventor of the most effective shells we now manufacture. What you have mistaken for a bomb is his latest design of projectile for an eight-inch gun. He had arranged to bring it here and explain to me its mechanism to-night, and also to submit a proposition giving our company the control of its manufacture. If you are a government agent, you surely understand that these arrangements must be conducted with great secrecy. If we purchase the right to make this projectile, we must first induce the government to use it, by demonstrating its effectiveness, and then secure our contracts. So your interference, at this time, is—-ahem!—annoying."

Josie's face was a little more red than before. A second motor car drew up at the door and to her astonishment Mrs. Charleworth entered and greeted both the manager and Kauffman in her usual charming manner. Then she looked inquiringly at the girl.

"Pardon me, madam," said Mr. Colton. "There has been a singular misunderstanding, it seems, and our friend here has been accused of being a German spy by this young lady, who is a government detective—or—or claims to be such. The precious projectile, in which you are so deeply interested, has just been tossed out upon the common, but Joe Langley is searching for it."

Mrs. Charleworth's face wore an amused smile.

"We are so beset with spies, on every hand, that such an error is quite likely to occur," said she. "I recognize this young lady as a friend of the Hathaway family, and I have met her at the Liberty Girls' Shop, so she is doubtless sincere—if misled. Let us hope we can convince her—Miss O'Gorman, isn't it?—that we are wholly innocent of attempting to promote the Kaiser's interests."

Joe came in with the steel ball, which he deposited upon the table. Then, at a nod from the manager, the soldier took his searchlight and departed through the door leading to the big room in the rear. It was time to make his regular rounds of the works, and perhaps Mr. Colton preferred no listeners to the

conversation that might follow.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FLASHLIGHT

"Perhaps," said Josie, her voice trembling a little, "I have assumed too much, and accused this man," pointing to Kauffman, "unjustly. I was trying to serve my country. But I am somewhat confused, even yet, in regard to this affair. Will you please tell me, Mrs. Charleworth, what connection you have with Mr. Kauffman, or with his—projectile?"

"Very gladly," said the lady, graciously. "I am a stockholder in this steel company—a rather important stockholder, I believe—and while I am not a member of the board of directors, Mr. Colton represents my interests. Two years ago we bought the Kauffman shell, and paid liberally for it, but Mr. Kauffman unfortunately invested his money in a transatlantic merchant ship which was sunk, with its entire cargo, by a German submarine. Again penniless, he began the manufacture of suspenders, in a small way, with money I loaned him, but was not very successful. Then he conceived the idea of a new projectile, very effective and quite different from others. He asked our company to finance him while he was experimenting and perfecting the new projectile. The company couldn't undertake to do that, but I personally financed Mr. Kauffman, having confidence in his ability. He has been six months getting the invention made, tested and ready to submit to government experts, and up to the present it has cost a lot of money. However, it is now considered perfect and Mr. Kauffman has brought it here to-night to exhibit and explain it to Mr. Colton. If Mr. Colton approves it from a manufacturing standpoint, our company will secure an option for the sole right to manufacture it."

"Mr. Kauffman has been in Dorfield several days," said Josie. "Why did he not show you the projectile before?"

"I have been out of town," explained the manager. "I returned this afternoon, especially for this interview, and made the appointment for this evening. I am a busy man—these are war times, you know—and I must make my evenings count as well as my days."

Josie scented ignominous defeat, but she had one more shot to fire.

"Mrs. Charleworth," she stated, with a severe look, "John Dyer, the school superintendent, was at your house last night, in secret conference with Mr. Kauffman and yourself."

"Oh, so you are aware of that interview?"

"Clever!" said Kauffman, "I'd no idea I was being shadowed." Then the two exchanged glances and smiled. "It seems impossible," continued the man, "to keep any little matter of business dark, these days, although the war office insists on secrecy in regard to all munitions affairs and publicity would surely ruin our chances of getting the new projectile accepted for government use."

"I am awaiting an explanation of that meeting," declared Josie sternly. "Perhaps you do not realize how important it may be."

"Well," answered Mrs. Charleworth, a thoughtful expression crossing her pleasant face, "I see no objection to acquainting you with the object of that mysterious meeting, although it involves confiding to you a bit of necessary diplomacy. Mr. Colton will tell you that the Dorfield Steel Works will under no circumstances purchase the right to manufacture the Kauffman projectile—or any other article of munition—until it is approved and adopted by the War Department. That approval is not easily obtained, because the officials are crowded with business and a certain amount of red tape must be encountered. Experience has proved that the inventor is not the proper person to secure government endorsement; he labors under a natural disadvantage. Neither is Mr. Colton, as the prospective manufacturer, free from suspicion of selfish interest. Therefore it seemed best to have the matter taken up with the proper authorities and experts by someone not financially interested in the projectile.

"Now, Professor Dyer has a brother-in-law who is an important member of the munitions board, under General Crozier, and we have induced the professor, after much urging, to take our projectile to Washington, have it tested, and secure contracts for its manufacture. If he succeeds, we are to pay liberally for his services. That was how he came to be at our house last evening, when arrangements were finally made."

"Was such secrecy necessary?" asked Josie suspiciously.

It was Kauffman who answered this question, speaking with apparent good humor but with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice: "My dear young lady, your own disposition to secrecy—a quality quite necessary in a detective—should show you the absurdity of your question. Can we be too careful in these days of espionage? No emissary of the Kaiser must know the construction of this wonderful projectile; none should even know that it exists. Even should our government refuse to adopt it; we must not let the Central Powers know of it.

My own negotiations with Mr. Colton and Mrs. Charleworth have been camouflaged by my disguise as a suspender merchant. It was equally important that Mr. Dyer's connection with us be wholly unsuspected. When the projectile is adopted, and these works are manufacturing it in quantities to help win the war, still no information concerning it must be made public. You must realize that."

"That is all true," agreed Mr. Colton. "These frank statements, miss, have only been made to you because of your claim to being a government agent. If you fail to substantiate that claim, we shall place you under arrest and turn you over to the authorities, for our own protection."

"To be sure," said Josie; "that will be your duty. I am the daughter of John O'Gorman, one of the high officers of the United States Secret Service, who is now in Europe in the interests of the government. I came to Dorfield to visit my friend, Mary Louise Burrows, as Mrs. Charleworth is aware, and while here my suspicions were aroused of the existence of a German spy plot. Therefore I set to work to bring the criminals to justice."

"And, like the regulation detective, you have followed a false trail," commented Kauffman, with his provoking smile.

"Not altogether," retorted Josie. "I have already secured proof that will convict two persons, at least. And I am amazed that you have intrusted your secrets to that arch-traitor, Professor Dyer. Will you tell me, Mrs. Charleworth, what you know about that man?"

Mrs. Charleworth seemed astounded.

"Professor John Dyer is one of Dorfield's old residents, I believe," she answered slowly, as if carefully considering her words. "He is also the superintendent of schools, and in that capacity seems highly respected. I have never heard anything against the man, until now. His important public position should vouch for his integrity."

"Isn't his position a political appointment?" inquired Josie.

The lady looked at Mr. Colton. "Yes," said the manager. "It is true that John Dyer was active in politics long before he was made superintendent of schools. However, he was an educator, as well as a politician, so it seems his appointment was merited."

"How well do you know him personally, madam?" asked the girl.

"Not very well," she admitted. "We do not meet socially, so our acquaintance until very recently was casual. But I have looked upon him as a man of

importance in the community. On learning that he had a relative on the munitions board, I asked him to come, to my house, where I made him the proposition to take our projectile to Washington and secure its adoption. I offered liberal terms for such service, but at first the professor seemed not interested. I arranged a second meeting, last evening, at which Mr. Kauffman was present to explain technical details, and we soon persuaded Mr. Dyer to undertake the commission. We felt that we could trust him implicity."

"When did he intend to go to Washington?" was Josie's next question.

"On the 5:30, to-morrow morning. After exhibiting the projectile to Mr. Colton and securing the firm's option to manufacture it on a royalty basis, we are to take it to my house, where Mr. Dyer will receive it and obtain our final instructions."

"One question more, if you please," said Josie. "What connection with your enterprise has Tom Linnet?"

"Linnet? I do not know such a person," declared Mrs. Charleworth.

"Who is he?" asked the manager.

"I know him," said Kauffman. "He's the night clerk at the Mansion House where I stop. Sometimes I see him when I come in late. He's not of special account; he's weak, ignorant, and—"

A sharp report interrupted him and alarmed them all.

Josie swung around quickly, for the sound—she knew it was a revolver shot—came from the rear. As Colton and Kauffman sprang to their feet and Mrs. Charleworth shrank back in a fright, the girl ran to the back door, opened it and started to make her way through the huge, dark building beyond the partition. The manager followed in her wake and as he passed through the door he turned a switch which flooded the big store-room with light.

In the center of the building were long, broad tables, used for packing. A few shells still remained grouped here and there upon the boards. On either side the walls were lined with tiers of boxes bound with steel bands and ready for shipment. No person was visible in this room, but at the farther end an outer door stood ajar and just outside it a motionless form was outlined.

Josie and Mr. Colton, approaching this outer door nearly at the same time, controlled their haste and came to an abrupt halt. The upright figure was that of Sergeant Joe Langley and the light from the room just reached a human form huddled upon the ground a few feet distant. Joe had dropped his flashlight and in his one hand held a revolver.

Josie drew a long, shuddering breath. The manager took a step forward, hesitated, and returned to his former position, his face deathly white.

"What is it? What's the matter?" called Kauffman, coming upon the scene panting for he was too short and fat to run easily.

Joe turned and looked at them as if waking from a trance. His stolid face took on a shamed expression.

"Couldn't help it, sir," he said to the manager. "I caught him in the act. It was the flashlight that saved us. When it struck him he looked up and the bullet hit him fair."

"Who is it, and what was he doing?" asked Mr. Colton hoarsely.

"It's under him, sir, and he was a-lighting of it."

As he spoke, Sergeant Joe approached the form and with a shove of his foot pushed it over. It rolled slightly, unbent, and now lay at full length, facing them. Josie picked up the flashlight and turned it upon the face.

"Oh!" she cried aloud, and shivered anew, but was not surprised.

"I guess," said Joe slowly, "they'll have to get another school superintendent."

"But what's it all about? What did he do?" demanded Kauffman excitedly.

Joe took the light from Josie's hand and turned it upon a curious object that until now had been hidden by the dead man's body.

"It's a infernal machine, sir, an' I ain't sure, even yet, that it won't go off an' blow us all up. He was leanin' down an' bendin' over it, twisting that dial you see, when on a sudden I spotted him. I didn't stop to think. My Cap'n used to say 'Act first an' think afterwards,' an' that's what I did. I didn't know till now it was the school boss, but it wouldn't have made any difference. I done my duty as I saw it, an' I hope I did it right, Mr. Colton."

Kauffman was already stooping over the machine, examining it with a skilled mechanical eye.

"It's ticking!" he said, and began turning the dial backward to zero. The ticking stopped. Then the inventor stood, up and with his handkerchief wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Gott!" he exclaimed, "this is no joke. We've all been too near death to feel comfortable."

"This is horrible!" said Mr. Colton, "I can't yet believe that Dyer could be guilty of so fiendish an act."

"I can," asserted Josie grimly, "and it isn't the first time he has planned murder, either. Dyer was responsible for the explosion at the airplane factory."

Footsteps were heard. Out of the darkness between the group of buildings appeared two men, Crissey and Addison.

"Are we too late, Miss O'Gorman?" asked Crissey.

"Yes," she replied. "How did you lose track of Dyer?"

"He's a slippery fellow," said Addison, "and threw us off the scent. But finally we traced him here and—"

"And there he is," concluded Josie in a reproachful tone.

Crissey caught sight of the machine.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed, "who saved you?"

"I did," answered Joe, putting the revolver in his hip pocket, "but I wish you'd had the job, stranger."

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER THE CRISIS

Mrs. Charleworth drove Josie, who was sobbing nervously and quite bereft of her usual self-command, to Colonel Hathaway's residence. The woman was unnerved, too, and had little to say on the journey.

The old colonel had retired, but Mary Louise was still up, reading a book, and she was shocked when Josie came running in and threw herself into her friend's arms, crying and laughing by turns, hysterically.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked Mary Louise in an anxious voice.

"I've b-b-bungled that whole miserable G-Ger-man spy plot!" wailed Josie.

"Wasn't there any plot, then?"

"Of course; but I g-grabbed the wrong end of it. Oh, I'm so glad Daddy wasn't

here to see my humiliation! I'm a dub, Mary Louise—a miserable, ignorant, foozle-brained dub!"

"Never mind, dear," said Mary Louise consolingly. "No one can know everything, Josie, even at our age. Now sit down and wipe that wet off your face and tell me all about it."

Josie complied. She snivelled a little as she began her story, but soon became more calm. Indeed, in her relation she tried to place the facts in such order that she might herself find excuse for her erroneous theories, as well as prove to Mary Louise that her suspicions of Abe Kauffman and Mrs. Charleworth were well founded.

"No girl is supposed to know the difference between a bomb and a cannon-ball—or projectile—or whatever it is," was her friend's comment, when Josie had reached the scene in the manager's office, "and any man who is a German and acts queerly is surely open to suspicion. Go on, Josie; what happened next?"

Even Mary Louise was startled and horrified at the terrible retribution that had overtaken Professor Dyer, although Josie's story had aroused her indignation toward him and prepared her for the man's final infamous attempt to wreck the steel plant.

"And what about Tom Linnet?" she asked.

"Chief Farnum is to arrest him to-night," said Josie. "He will confess everything, of course, and then the whole plot will be made public."

"Poor Mrs. Dyer!" sighed Mary Louise.

But fate decreed a different ending to the night's tragedy. When the police tried to arrest Tom Linnet the young man was not to be found. He had not bought the cigar store, but with what funds remained to him, he had absconded to parts unknown.

Chief Farnum wired his description to all parts of the country. Meantime, on the morning after the affair at the steel works, an earnest conference was held between Mr. Colton, Colonel Hathaway, Josie O'Gorman, Mrs. Charleworth, the Chief of Police and the two secret service agents. At this conference it was deemed inadvisable to acquaint the public with the truth about John Dyer's villainy. The government would be fully informed, of course, but it seemed best not to tell the people of Dorfield that a supposedly respectable citizen had been in the pay of the Kaiser's agents. It would be likely to make them suspicious of one another and have a bad influence generally. The criminal had paid the penalty of his crimes. The murders he had committed and

attempted to commit were avenged.

So it was announced that the school superintendent had been killed by an accidental explosion at the munition works, and the newspapers stated that Mrs. Dyer did not desire a public funeral. Indeed, she was too overwhelmed by the tragedy to express any desire regarding the funeral but left it all to Colonel Hathaway and Mr. Colton, who volunteered to attend to the arrangements. The burial was very unostentatious and the widow received much sympathy and did not suffer in the esteem of the community. Mrs. Dyer, in fact, was never told of her husband's dishonor and so mourned him sincerely.

Immediately following the conference referred to, Josie brought the Chief of Police and the secret service men to her room and in their presence dragged the old pedestal-desk from her closet. Mary Louise, who had been admitted, exclaimed in surprise:

"Why, Josie! I thought you sent the desk to Washington."

"No," answered Josie, "I merely shipped an empty box. I knew very well that Dyer would try to get back the desk, hoping I had not discovered its secret, so I deceived him and gained time by proving that I had sent a box home by freight."

"That explains his decision to take the projectile to Washington," commented Detective Crissey, "he believed he could kill two birds with one stone—get back his papers and earn a big fee from Mrs. Charleworth."

"Also," added Josie, "he would be able to give the German Master Spy full information concerning the projectile, and so reap another reward. But all his diabolical schemes were frustrated by Joe Langley's bullet."

"Well, here's the desk," said Chief Farnum, "but where are those important papers, Miss O'Gorman?"

"And what do they prove?" added Crissey.

Josie slid back the panel in the square pedestal, disclosing the two compartments filled with papers. These she allowed the police and the detectives to read, arid they not only proved that John Dyer was in the pay of an organized band of German spies having agents in Washington, New York and Chicago, but Crissey was confident the notes, contracts and agreements would furnish clues leading to the discovery and apprehension of the entire band. So the papers were placed in his charge to take to Washington, and their importance was a further argument for secrecy concerning John Dyer's death.

"So far as I am concerned," Josie said afterward to Colonel Hathaway and Mary Louise, "the spy case is ended. When they arrest Tom Linnet they will be able to prove, from the scraps of paper I found in the printing room of the hotel, that Linnet printed the circulars from copy furnished by Dyer, and that Dyer and Linnet together directed the envelopes, probably in the still hours of the morning at the hotel desk, where they were not likely to be disturbed. The circulars may not be considered legally treasonable, but the fact that Linnet personally placed the bomb that destroyed the airplane works will surely send him to the scaffold."

"I suppose you will be called as a witness," suggested Mary Louise, "because you are the only one who overheard his verbal confession of the crime."

"It wont take much to make Linnet confess," predicted Josie. "He is yellow all through, or he wouldn't have undertaken such dastardly work for the sake of money. His refusal to undertake the second job was mere cowardice, not repentance. I understand that sort of criminal pretty well, and I assure you he will confess as soon as he is captured."

But, somewhat to the astonishment of the officers, Tom Linnet managed to evade capture. They found his trail once or twice, and lost it again. After a time they discovered he had escaped into Mexico; afterward they heard of a young man of his description in Argentine; finally he disappeared altogether.

The arms of the law are long and strong, far-reaching and mercilessly persistent. They may embrace Tom Linnet yet, but until now he has miraculously avoided them.

CHAPTER XXV
DECORATING

Colonel Hathaway and Mary Louise were walking down the street one day when they noticed that the front of Jake Kasker's Clothing Emporium was fairly covered with American flags. Even the signs were hidden by a fluttering display of the Stars and Stripes.

"I wonder what this means?" said the colonel.

"Let's go in and inquire," proposed Mary Louise. "I don't suppose the man has forgiven me yet for suspecting his loyalty, but you've always defended him, Gran'pa Jim, so he will probably tell you why he is celebrating."

They entered the store and Kasker came forward to meet them.

"What's the meaning of all the flags, Jake?" asked the colonel.

"Didn't you hear?" said Kasker. "My boy's been shot—my little Jakie!" Tears came to his eyes.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mary Louise, with ready sympathy; "I hope he—he isn't dead?"

"No," said Kasker, wiping his eyes, "not that, thank God. A shell splinter took out a piece of his leg—my little Jakie's leg!—and he's in a hospital at Soissons. His letter says in a few weeks he can go back to his company. I got a letter from his captain, too. The captain says Jakie is a good soldier and fights like wild-cats. That's what he says of Jakie!"

"Still," said Colonel Hathaway, with a puzzled look, "I do not quite understand why you should decorate so profusely on account of so sad an event."

"Sad!" exclaimed the clothing man, "not a bit. That's glory, the way *I* look at it, Colonel. If my Jakie's blood is spilled for his country, and he can go back and spill it again, it makes great honor for the name of Kasker. Say, once they called me pro-German, 'cause I said I hated the war. Don't my Jakie's blood put my name on America's honor roll? I'm pretty proud of Jakie," he wiped his eyes again; "I'll give him an interest in the business, if he comes back. And if he don't—if those cursed Germans put an end to him—then folks will say, 'See Jake Kasker over there? Well, he gave his son for his country—his only son.' Seems to me, Colonel, that evens the score. America gives us Germans protection and prosperity, and we give our blood to defend America's honor. I'm sorry I couldn't find a place for any more flags."

The colonel and Mary Louise were both a little awed, but as Kasker accompanied them to the door, they strove to express their sympathy and approval. As they parted, however, the man leaned over and whispered: "Just the same, I hate the war. But, if it *has* to be, let's stand together to fight and win it!"

"Gran'pa Jim," said Mary Louise, when they were on the street again, "I'm ashamed. I once told you I loved you better than my country, but Jake Kasker loves his country better than his son."

CHAPTER XXVI

KEEPING BUSY

The Liberty Girls were forced to abandon their Shop when a substantial offer was made by a business firm to rent the store they had occupied. However, they were then, near the end of their resources, with depleted stock, for they had begged about all the odds and ends people would consent to part with. What goods remained to them were of inferior worth and slow to dispose of, so they concluded their enterprise with a "grand auction," Peter Conant acting as auctioneer, and cleaned up the entire stock "in a blaze of glory," as Mary Louise enthusiastically described the event.

The venture had been remarkably successful and many a soldier had cause to bless the Liberty Girls' Shop for substantial comforts provided from its funds.

"But what can we do now," inquired Mary Louise anxiously as the six captains met with Irene one afternoon following the closing of the shop. "We must keep busy, of course. Can't someone think of something?"

One and all had been thinking on that subject, it seemed. Various proposals were advanced, none of which, however, seemed entirely practical until Irene said:

"We mustn't lose our reputation for originality, you know, nor must we interfere with those who are doing war relief work as well, if not much better, than we could. I've pondered the case some, during the past few days, and in reading of the progress of events I find that quite the most important thing on the government programme, at present, is the conservation of foods. 'Food will win the war' is the latest slogan, and anyone who can help Mr. Hoover will be doing the utmost for our final victory."

"That's all very well, Irene," said Alora, "but I'm sure we are all as careful as possible to conserve food."

"Don't ask us to eat any less," pleaded Edna, "for my appetite rebels as it is."

"I don't see how we Liberty Girls can possibly help Mr. Hoover more than everyone else is doing," remarked Laura.

"Well, I've an idea we can," replied Irene. "But this is just another case where I can only plan, and you girls must execute. Now, listen to my proposition. The most necessary thing to conserve, it seems, is wheat."

"So it seems, dear."

"People are eating large quantities of wheat flour simply because they don't

know what else to eat," Irene continued. "Now, corn, properly prepared, is far more delicious and equally as nourishing as wheat. The trouble is that people don't know how to use corn-meal and corn-flour to the best advantage."

"That is true; and they're not likely to learn in time to apply the knowledge usefully," commented Mary Louise.

"Not unless you girls get busy and teach them," admitted Irene, while a smile went round the circle. "Don't laugh, girls. You are all very fair cooks, and if properly trained in the methods of preparing corn for food, you could easily teach others, and soon all Dorfield would be eating corn and conserving wheat. That would be worth while, wouldn't it?"

"But who's to train us, and how could we manage to train others?" asked Mary Louise.

"The proposition sounds interesting, Irene, and if carried through would doubtless be valuable, but is it practical?"

"Let us see," was the reply. "Some time ago I read of the wonderful success of Mrs. Manton in preparing corn for food. She's one of the most famous professional cooks in America and her name is already a household word. We use her cook-book every day. Now, Mrs. Manton has been teaching classes in Cleveland, and I wrote her and asked what she would charge to come here and teach the Liberty Girls the practical methods of preparing her numerous corn recipes. Here's her answer, girls. She wants her expenses and one hundred dollars for two weeks' work, and she will come next week if we telegraph her at once."

They considered and discussed this proposition very seriously.

"At the Masonic Temple," said Mary Louise, "there is a large and fully equipped kitchen, adjoining the lodge room, and it is not in use except on special occasions. Gran'pa Jim is a high Mason, and so is Alora's father. Perhaps they could secure permission for us to use the lodge kitchen for our class in cookery."

The colonel and Jason Jones, being consulted, promised the use of the kitchen and highly approved the plan of the Liberty Girls. Mrs. Manton was telegraphed to come to Dorfield and the cookery class was soon formed. Alora confessed she had no talent whatever for cooking, but all the other five were ready to undertake the work and a selection was made from among the other Liberty Girls—of the rank and file—which brought the total number of culinary endeavorers up to fifteen—as large a class as Mrs. Manton was able to handle efficiently.

While these fifteen were being trained, by means of practical daily demonstration, in the many appetizing preparations for the table from corn-meal and corn-flour, Alora and one or two others daily visited the homes of Dorfield and left samples of bread, buns, cookies, cakes, desserts and other things that had come fresh from the ovens and range of the cooking-school. At the same time an offer was made to teach the family cook—whether mistress or servant—in this patriotic branch of culinary art, and such offers were usually accepted with eagerness, especially after tasting the delicious corn dainties.

When Mrs. Manton left Dorfield, after two weeks of successful work, she left fifteen Liberty Girls fully competent to teach others how to prepare every one of her famous corn recipes. And these fifteen, divided into "shifts" and with several large kitchens at their disposal, immediately found themselves besieged by applicants for instruction. Before winter set in, all Dorfield, as predicted by Irene, was eating corn, and liking it better than wheat, and in proof of their success, the Liberty Girls received a highly complimentary letter from Mr. Hoover, thanking them for their help in the time of the nation's greatest need. A fee, sufficient to cover the cost of the material used, had been exacted from all those willing and able to pay for instruction, so no expense was involved in this work aside from the charges of Mrs. Manton, which were cared for by voluntary subscription on the part of a few who were interested in the girls' patriotic project.

Another thing the Liberty Girls did was to start "Community Concerts" one evening each week, which were held in various churches and attended by throngs of men, women and children who joined lustily in the singing of patriotic and popular songs. This community singing became immensely popular and did much to promote patriotic fervor as well as to entertain those in attendance.

And so Mary Louise's Liberty Girls, at the time this story ends, are still active workers in the cause of liberty, justice and democracy, and will continue to support their country's welfare as long as they can be of use.

"We're a real part of the war," Mary Louise has often told her co-workers, "and I'm sure that in the final day of glorious victory our girls will be found to have played no unimportant part."

THE END