

Mary Louise and the Liberty Girls

By

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JUST A WORD

The object of this little story is not especially to encourage loyalty and devotion to one's country, for these are sentiments firmly enshrined in the hearts of all true American girls. It is rather intended to show what important tasks girls may accomplish when spurred on by patriotism, and that none is too humble to substantially serve her country.

Organizations of Liberty Girls are possible in every city and hamlet in America, and are effective not only in times of war but in times of peace, for always their Country needs them--always there is work for their busy hands.

One other message the story hopes to carry--the message of charity towards all and malice towards none. When shadows are darkest, those who can lighten the gloom are indeed the blessed ones.

EDITH VANDYNE

Contents

CHAPTER I - THE MASS-MEETING	4
CHAPTER II MARY LOUISE TAKES COMMAND	8
CHAPTER III THE LIBERTY GIRLS	12
CHAPTER IV THE TRAITOR.....	19
CHAPTER V UNCONVINCING TESTIMONY.....	25
CHAPTER VI. TO HELP WIN THE WAR	29
CHAPTER VII THE LIBERTY SHOP	35
CHAPTER VIII THE DETECTIVE'S DAUGHTER	39
CHAPTER IX GATHERING UP THE THREADS	44
CHAPTER X THE EXPLOSION.....	50
CHAPTER XI A FONT OF TYPE	53
CHAPTER XII JOSIE BUYS A DESK	60
CHAPTER XIII JOE LANGLEY, SOLDIER	67
CHAPTER XIV THE PROFESSOR IS ANNOYED.....	69
CHAPTER XV SUSPENDERS FOR SALE.....	74
CHAPTER XVI MRS. CHARLEWORTH	79
CHAPTER XVII THE BLACK SACHEL	85
CHAPTER XVIII A HINT FEOM ANNIE BOYLE	89
CHAPTER XIX THE PRINTING OFFICE.....	92
CHAPTER XX ONE GIRL'S WITS	98
CHAPTER XXI SURPRISES.....	102
CHAPTER XXII A SLIGHT MISTAKE	106
CHAPTER XXIII THE FLASHLIGHT	111
CHAPTER XXIV AFTER THE CRISIS.....	117
CHAPTER XXV DECORATING	120
CHAPTER XXVI KEEPING BUSY.....	122

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 furthestmost 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 tomorrow. 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."