

## 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:

"The Treasury Department is asking us to invest billions in what are termed Liberty Bonds. It has the 'liberty' to lend these billions to irresponsible or bankrupt nations of Europe, who are fighting an unprofitable war. Some of our dollars will equip an army of American boys to fight on Europe's battle-fields. This may be good business. Our excited politicians down at Washington may think they are acting for our best good. But what becomes of the money, finally? Will our millionaire government contractors become billionaires when the money--our money--is spent? Do you think the days of graft are past and gone? Have politicians become honest now that they are handling untold sums? Let us consider these questions when we are asked to subscribe for Liberty Bonds."

"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."