

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 today 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."