

## 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 fozzled?"

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

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