

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 swallowed 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.