

CHAPTER XXV DECORATING

Colonel Hathaway and Mary Louise were walking down the street one day when they noticed that the front of Jake Kasker's Clothing Emporium was fairly covered with American flags. Even the signs were hidden by a fluttering display of the Stars and Stripes.

"I wonder what this means?" said the colonel.

"Let's go in and inquire," proposed Mary Louise. "I don't suppose the man has forgiven me yet for suspecting his loyalty, but you've always defended him, Gran'pa Jim, so he will probably tell you why he is celebrating."

They entered the store and Kasker came forward to meet them.

"What's the meaning of all the flags, Jake?" asked the colonel.

"Didn't you hear?" said Kasker. "My boy's been shot--my little Jakie!" Tears came to his eyes.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mary Louise, with ready sympathy; "I hope he--he isn't dead?"

"No," said Kasker, wiping his eyes, "not that, thank God. A shell splinter took out a piece of his leg--my little Jakie's leg!--and he's in a hospital at Soissons. His letter says in a few weeks he can go back to his company. I got a letter from his captain, too. The captain says Jakie is a good soldier and fights like wild-cats. That's what he says of Jakie!"

"Still," said Colonel Hathaway, with a puzzled look, "I do not quite understand why you should decorate so profusely on account of so sad an event."

"Sad!" exclaimed the clothing man, "not a bit. That's glory, the way I look at it, Colonel. If my Jakie's blood is spilled for his country, and he can go back and spill it again, it makes great honor for the name of Kasker. Say, once they called me pro-German, 'cause I said I hated the war. Don't my Jakie's blood put my name on America's honor roll? I'm pretty proud of Jakie," he wiped his eyes again; "I'll give him an interest in the business, if he comes back. And if he don't--if those cursed Germans put an end to him--then folks will say, 'See Jake Kasker over there? Well, he gave his son for his country--his only son.' Seems to me, Colonel, that evens the score. America gives us Germans protection and

prosperity, and we give our blood to defend America's honor. I'm sorry I couldn't find a place for any more flags."

The colonel and Mary Louise were both a little awed, but as Kasker accompanied them to the door, they strove to express their sympathy and approval. As they parted, however, the man leaned over and whispered: "Just the same, I hate the war. But, if it has to be, let's stand together to fight and win it!" * * * * *

"Gran'pa Jim," said Mary Louise, when they were on the street again, "I'm ashamed. I once told you I loved you better than my country, but Jake Kasker loves his country better than his son."