

LIBERTY GIRL

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PROLOGUE
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“Eleanor? It’s time to wake up, sweetie. We’re almost there.”

For a moment Eleanor Blizzard thought about pretending that she couldn’t hear her father’s voice. She was still tired from her family’s long journey, and she was comfortably nestled in her bunk. She had never slept on a ship before, and the motion of the waves was surprisingly soothing. Besides, even with her eyes closed, she could tell that it was barely light outside. What did her father want at such an early hour?

That’s when Eleanor finally woke up enough to remember. She didn’t want to be asleep after that. She snapped her eyes open and looked out at her father’s face through the straw-colored locks of her hair.

“You’re sure?” she asked. “We haven’t missed it?”

“I looked out the porthole just before I woke you,” her father assured her. “The sun’s just coming up, and we’re right where the steward said we’d be.”

Eleanor threw her covers aside and hopped out of the bunk. The trip had already been full of new sights and experiences, but

this one would be particularly special. On the train ride from Indianapolis to Newport News, Virginia, she had seen coal mines, mountains, and many new towns before getting her first look at the Atlantic Ocean. From Newport News, they had embarked on her first journey aboard a ship as they steamed up the Chesapeake Bay. But even after all she had seen and done, the most exciting part was still to come. This was the day they reached their journey's end, and by a stroke of good luck, the route their ship was taking would set just the right mood for the occasion.

Eleanor's mother was already at the porthole. Faint glimmers of orange light were just beginning to shine on her face. She smiled as Eleanor scampered across the stateroom and joined her. "You're just in time," her mother said. "Look!"

Her parents had already placed a chair beneath the porthole for her to stand on. Eleanor climbed up and peered out at the early morning. The sky was still dark, but orange light was glinting off the water as the sun rose behind them on the other side of the ship. Eleanor wasn't looking at the bay, though. Her gaze went past the water and up to the shoreline, where she saw a series of long, low walls stretching across the landscape, with the tops of a few buildings poking up above them. What dominated the view, however, was an enormous flagpole that was almost exactly in the center of the structure and standing taller than anything else around. A huge American flag was flying from it.

Eleanor could hear the words of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in her head as the first rays of the sun shone on the red, white, and blue. "*Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light....*"

It was a different flag now, of course, with forty-eight stars on it instead of fifteen, but it was flying above the same Fort McHenry that Francis Scott Key had seen more than a hundred years earlier. Eleanor was filled with a sense of awe. A spirit of patriotic zeal had been in the air for more than a year—ever since the United States had joined the World War—but to Eleanor it seemed stronger than ever now that she was in sight of such a landmark.

It wasn't until the fort was almost past the porthole that Eleanor realized she hadn't let her parents have a good look. Her father had made this trip before, but it was as new an experience for her mother as it was for her. She quickly pulled away from the porthole and looked over to where her mother was still standing.

“Did you want to look some more, Mama?” she asked.

“I'm fine, dear,” her mother replied. “I'm sure we'll have plenty of other chances.”

Reassured, Eleanor turned back to see what might come into view next. They were well beyond the fort now, but the sights were almost as exhilarating. Fishing boats, tugboats, steamships, oceanliners, and other craft that Eleanor couldn't identify were either churning their way through the water or docked at the many piers. At last the ship arrived in Baltimore Harbor. Their journey was almost over.

The view was even more impressive once the Blizzard family went up to the deck. Their ship was pulling up to its berth next to a much larger vessel. Eleanor instantly recognized the flag flying from the other ship's mast. It belonged to France, where most of the fighting in the war was going on. Foreign flags were flying

on many of the other ships in the harbor as well. Eleanor felt as though the entire world—or at least the part that supported the Allies—was trying to pay the city a visit.

“Are any of your ships here, Daddy?” Eleanor asked.

“I’m not sure,” her father replied. “Most of them are still in the shipyard, getting ready for the big launching on the Fourth of July, but there could be one or two in the harbor. We don’t hear much in the Accounting Department about where the ships go after they’re launched.”

Eleanor nodded with understanding, but as they disembarked she kept looking around the harbor just the same. She had missed her father terribly during the months since he had gone to Baltimore, but she had always been proud of him and the work he had gone to do. Just the name of the place where he worked, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, made her feel as though he was playing an important part in winning the war.

They made their way through the crowd gathered at the dock. Eleanor’s father hailed a taxi, and soon they were riding through the city. Eleanor was mesmerized by the sights they drove past. Baltimore was completely unlike Indianapolis, and even the most common things looked new and different. The streets were much narrower, and many in the older parts of town were made of cobblestones. A wide sidewalk was all that separated the houses from the street. There was no sign of the large grassy lawns that Eleanor was used to playing on with her friends. The houses themselves were crowded together, and between the main streets were even narrower streets that ran through rows of older, smaller houses.

The streets held another surprise: a huge number of men in uniform. Eleanor thought she had seen plenty of soldiers on the streets of Indianapolis, but that was nothing compared to the troops that the cab was passing. Men from both the Army and the Navy were everywhere, from the harbor to the streets, stores, and markets. Eleanor had heard patriotic speakers boast about how large the American war effort was, but seeing so many troops in one place made it seem much more real than before.

“Is this your first time in the city?” asked the cab driver. Eleanor wondered if he had looked back at her and noticed the way she had been staring out of the cab.

“I’ve been here since February,” Eleanor’s father told him, “but my wife and daughter waited until the school year was over to join me.”

“Are you moving here to stay?” the cab driver asked him.

“Just as long as the war goes on,” replied Eleanor’s father. “That’s why we came.”

“Daddy builds ships so we can send things over to the Allies,” added Eleanor.

The cab driver glanced back at her father. “Is that right?”

Eleanor’s father chuckled. “Well, I don’t actually build the ships,” he said. “I just help keep the books.”

“Hey, everybody’s gotta do their bit,” said the cab driver. “We all kick in, and Fritzie’ll be heading back to Berlin in no time. I just read in the paper that the doughboys are stickin’ it to ’em in someplace called...uh, Boys-Dee-Bellow, I think it is. Something like that.”

“I believe the French pronounce it *Bois de Belleau*,” said Eleanor’s father. “Belleau Wood to you and me. I saw that in the paper, too.”

“However you say it, I’ll bet Fritzie wishes our boys weren’t there,” said the cab driver. “Maybe it won’t be too long before the war’s over.”

“Let’s hope so,” said Eleanor’s mother.

“So where are y’all coming from?” the cab driver asked.

“Indiana,” Eleanor’s mother replied.

“Really?” asked the cab driver. “I’ve never met anyone from there before. That makes you my first...uh, what do you call people from Indiana?”

“Hoosiers!” Eleanor answered enthusiastically.

The cab driver looked over his shoulder at her curiously for a moment. “That’s a funny name. What’s it mean?”

“No one’s really certain,” said Eleanor’s father. “It’s one of those names that stuck without anyone remembering where it came from.”

The cab driver shrugged. “Whatever suits you.” He glanced back at Eleanor again. “So how do you like Baltimore so far, sweetheart?”

Eleanor smiled shyly. “It’s so busy,” she replied. “And there are so many soldiers around.”

“Yeah, lots of doughboys come through here on their way to France,” said the cab driver. He looked back at her again and smiled as he added, “Could be pretty nice for you if this war does

keep going on. You could have doughboys lining up to court you someday.”

Eleanor blushed and quickly looked away—which, she figured, was probably the reaction the cab driver had been aiming for. At only eleven years old, she was hardly ready for anyone to be courting her, let alone someone in the Army. She hoped there weren’t too many more people in the city who thought it was amusing to make little girls feel awkward.

Fortunately, the cab ride didn’t last much longer, sparing Eleanor more chances for embarrassment. They turned one last corner and pulled up in front of a three-story red brick house. Eleanor’s father had brought them photographs of the building and their second-floor apartment inside it, but the actual house was a far more impressive sight. It was probably older than any building in the entire city of Indianapolis, but it had a stately appearance that defied the passage of time. It even had an open space on one side of it, unlike all of the other houses, which were crammed together. Eleanor caught a glimpse of a high board fence surrounding what she hoped was a back yard. But the most striking sight of all was a set of gleaming white marble steps and a shiny brass rail that led up to the front door.

A well-dressed woman who looked a few years older than Eleanor’s parents came out to meet them. “Welcome back, Mr. Blizzard!” she called. “I hope your trip went well.”

“Everything went fine, Mrs. Palmer,” Eleanor’s father replied cheerfully. “Allow me to introduce my family. This is my wife Alma and our daughter Eleanor.”

“How delightful to meet you at last,” enthused Mrs. Palmer. She walked down the white marble steps to join them on the sidewalk.

“It’s good to meet you, too, Mrs. Palmer,” said Eleanor’s mother. “Charles speaks highly of you and your husband. We’re glad he found such a wonderful place for us to stay.”

“Please, call me Lucy,” smiled Mrs. Palmer. “Mr. Blizzard has talked about you so much that I feel like we’re friends already.” Turning to Eleanor, she added, “And you, sugar, are simply adorable. It’s going to be quite a change, having a child around here.”

Eleanor smiled. Mrs. Palmer spoke with the same Southern accent as the rest of the people she had met in recent days, but it had a more genteel quality to it. “Pleased to meet you, ma’am,” she replied.

“Well now, why don’t y’all come in?” invited Mrs. Palmer. She turned and started back toward the door. “Your rooms are all ready, so I’ll let you get settled.”

“Is Mr. Palmer around?” Eleanor’s father asked. “We should probably say hello to him as well.”

“I’m afraid he’s asleep right now,” Mrs. Palmer replied. She turned to Eleanor’s mother and explained, “My husband is a bartender over at the Belvedere Hotel. He works nights mostly, so he sleeps during much of the day.”

“In that case, we’ll be happy to meet him later,” Eleanor’s mother told her.

“He should be up by the middle of the afternoon,” said Mrs. Palmer. “We were planning on going to Pimlico later on. Do y’all follow the racing news much?”

“My favorite driver is Jules Goux,” said Eleanor. She was trying to keep up with all the new and different things around her, hoping there might be something she could relate to.

Unfortunately, Eleanor’s remark only made Mrs. Palmer look puzzled. “Jules who?” she asked.

Eleanor’s father smiled. “I’m afraid we followed a different kind of racing in Indianapolis,” he said. “Jules Goux was the winner of our 500-mile automobile race a few years ago.”

“Oh!” laughed Mrs. Palmer. “No, sugar, I meant the horse races,” she told Eleanor. “Mr. Palmer and I go all the time. We’d love to tell you all about it.”

Eleanor nodded, deciding that it might be better not to say anything more for the moment. It was as if she had come to a completely new world with different surroundings and different people—a completely different life. It was exciting, but if the morning was any indication, it could be a challenge as well. There was no telling what she might have to face next.

PART I
AUGUST 1918

CHAPTER ONE

The sick old lady in the window across the street was crying again, just as she did every day. Eleanor was trying her best not to do the same.

The weeks since her family had arrived in Baltimore had become increasingly difficult. At first Eleanor had been excited and curious about all of the new and different things there were to see. She had gone with her mother to find a new market, a new butcher shop, and other places to buy the necessities for the household. She had met Asian people for the first time when her mother took her to the nearby Chinese laundry. Her family had walked around town or ridden the streetcars to Baltimore's many attractions and historical sights. But as time went on, the new and different inevitably became the old and familiar, and Eleanor soon felt as if she was dragging herself through days that had become impossibly long. Only the weekends, when her parents had time to take her on trips to the country or along Chesapeake Bay, still held any hope for adventure. Between one weekend and the next lay an ever-widening gulf of tedium.

A streetcar rumbled by. The clatter of its wheels on the tracks in the middle of the street pulled Eleanor's attention back to the scene outside. Across the street, the sick old lady's houseman

brought her two Pekingese dogs out for their midday walk. Eleanor watched as they went by, marking off the event on the list she kept in her head to help her get through the day.

She missed home. In Indiana, her family had a large house all their own, with a wide breezy front porch and a lush grassy yard around it. The apartment house in Baltimore was certainly much more grand, with its marble steps and fireplaces, its high ceilings, and its beautiful antique furniture, but her family was confined to a limited part of it. Their little apartment had only a small kitchen, a bathroom, a living and dining room where her parents also slept, and Eleanor's bedroom. The building's back yard was too small for Eleanor to play in it much, and she had to keep fairly quiet during the day anyway so that she wouldn't wake Mr. Palmer.

She also missed her friends. In Indiana, she had spent her days as part of the "secret" club her father had once dubbed "The Slick Six." They met regularly at one another's houses, filling their afternoons with private discussions and elaborate refreshments that their mothers prepared for them. Or, because it was the middle of summer, her family might have been at one of the many resorts and campgrounds along the White River that they usually went to, where she could have been playing with some of her cousins. There were no other children in her new neighborhood, and there weren't likely to be any others before the start of the school year. Until then, Eleanor was on her own in a world full of adults.

"Eleanor?" her mother called. Eleanor looked away from the window and saw her mother come into the room. "I'm going downstairs to see Mrs. Palmer for a few minutes," her mother told her.

"All right, Mama," Eleanor replied. "I'll be okay here."

Eleanor's mother turned and left. In a way, she was having many of the same troubles that Eleanor was having. Running the household had been a full-time job in Indiana. In Baltimore, there was much less to do. Her mother claimed not to mind, saying that she had more time to enjoy the many sewing projects she wanted to do, but there were times when Eleanor thought she must have felt just as much at a loss over what to do with herself as Eleanor felt. Worse, it had been a particularly difficult year for her mother's family, the Syerups. Grandma Syerup had passed away back in January, Grandpa Syerup wasn't in the best of health, and Eleanor's Uncle Alvin Syerup was in France as a member of the Medical Corps. Eleanor was sure that her mother's mind was never far from wondering how they were all doing.

Another streetcar rolled by. The sick old lady's houseman brought the dogs back from their walk. Eleanor wondered if the local organ grinder and his monkey would stop below her window later in the afternoon. She picked up the cardigan sweater she had started knitting back in Indianapolis and tried to work on it. She was still largely a beginner when it came to knitting, but she figured if she kept at it, she could finish the sweater before school started and the weather turned cooler. She could hardly believe that she was thinking of the new school year as something she wished would start soon.

There was a knock at the apartment door, followed by the sound of the door opening. "Miss Eleanor?" called a voice. "You in here?"

Eleanor smiled. It was Maggie Buell, a teenage Negro girl who worked for the Palmers as the building's housekeeper. Eleanor put her knitting aside and scurried into the other room.