Thankful Blossom

by Bret Harte, 1836-1902

Published: 1887

Table of Contents

Chapter I

The time was the year of grace 1779; the locality, Morristown, New Jersey.

It was bitterly cold. A northeasterly wind had been stiffening the mud of the morning's thaw into a rigid record of that day's wayfaring on the Baskingridge road. The hoof-prints of cavalry, the deep ruts left by baggage-wagons, and the deeper channels worn by artillery, lay stark and cold in the waning light of an April day. There were icicles on the fences, a rime of silver on the windward bark of maples, and occasional bare spots on the rocky protuberances of the road, as if Nature had worn herself out at the knees and elbows through long waiting for the tardy spring. A few leaves disinterred by the thaw became crisp again, and rustled in the wind, making the summer a thing so remote that all human hope and conjecture fled before them.

Here and there the wayside fences and walls were broken down or dismantled; and beyond them fields of snow downtrodden and discolored, and strewn with fragments of leather, camp equipage, harness, and cast-off clothing, showed traces of the recent encampment and congregation of men. On some there were still standing the ruins of rudely constructed cabins, or the semblance of fortification equally rude and incomplete. A fox stealing along a half-filled ditch, a wolf slinking behind an earthwork, typified the human abandonment and desolation.

One by one the faint sunset tints faded from the sky; the far-off crests of the Orange hills grew darker; the nearer files of pines on the Whatnong Mountain became a mere black background; and, with the coming-on of night, came too an icy silence that seemed to stiffen and arrest the very wind itself. The crisp leaves no longer rustled; the waving whips of alder and willow snapped no longer; the icicles no longer dropped a cold fruitage from barren branch and spray; and the roadside trees relapsed into stony quiet, so that the sound of horse's hoofs breaking through the thin, dull, lustreless films of ice that patched the furrowed road, might have been heard by the nearest Continental picket a mile away.

Either a knowledge of this, or the difficulties of the road, evidently irritated the viewless horseman. Long before he became visible, his voice was heard in half-suppressed objurgation of the road, of his beast, of the country folk, and the country generally. "Steady, you jade!" "Jump, you devil, jump!" "Curse the road, and the beggarly farmers that durst not mend it!" And then the moving bulk of horse and rider suddenly arose above the hill, floundered and splashed, and then as suddenly disappeared, and the rattling hoof-beats ceased.

The stranger had turned into a deserted lane still cushioned with untrodden snow. A stone wall on one hand—in better keeping and condition than the boundary monuments of the outlying fields—bespoke protection and exclusiveness. Half-way up the lane the rider checked his speed, and, dismounting, tied his horse to a wayside sapling. This done, he went cautiously forward toward the end of the lane, and a farm-house from whose gable window a light twinkled through the deepening night. Suddenly he stopped, hesitated, and uttered an impatient ejaculation. The light had disappeared. He turned sharply on his heel, and retraced his steps until opposite a farm-shed that stood a few paces from the wall. Hard by, a large elm cast the gaunt shadow of its leafless limbs on

the wall and surrounding snow. The stranger stepped into this shadow, and at once seemed to become a part of its trembling intricacies.

At the present moment it was certainly a bleak place for a tryst. There was snow yet clinging to the trunk of the tree, and a film of ice on its bark; the adjacent wall was slippery with frost, and fringed with icicles. Yet in all there was a ludicrous suggestion of some sentiment past and unseasonable: several dislodged stones of the wall were so disposed as to form a bench and seats, and under the elm-tree's film of ice could still be seen carved on its bark the effigy of a heart, divers initials, and the legend, "Thine Forever."

The stranger, however, kept his eyes fixed only on the farm-shed and the open field beside it. Five minutes passed in fruitless expectancy. Ten minutes! And then the rising moon slowly lifted herself over the black range of the Orange hills, and looked at him, blushing a little, as if the appointment were her own.

The face and figure thus illuminated were those of a strongly built, handsome man of thirty, so soldierly in bearing that it needed not the buff epaulets and facings to show his captain's rank in the Continental army. Yet there was something in his facial expression that contradicted the manliness of his presence—an irritation and querulousness that were inconsistent with his size and strength. This fretfulness increased as the moments went by without sign or motion in the faintly lit field beyond, until, in peevish exasperation, he began to kick the nearer stones against the wall.

"*Moo-oo-w!*"

The soldier started. Not that he was frightened, nor that he had failed to recognize in these prolonged syllables the deep-chested, half-drowsy low of a cow, but that it was so near him—evidently just beside the wall. If an object so bulky could have approached him so near without his knowledge, might not she—

"*Moo-oo!*"

He drew nearer the wall cautiously. "So, Cushy! Mooly! Come up, Bossy!" he said persuasively. "Moo"—but here the low unexpectedly broke down, and ended in a very human and rather musical little laugh.

"Thankful!" exclaimed the soldier, echoing the laugh a trifle uneasily and affectedly as a hooded little head arose above the wall.

"Well," replied the figure, supporting a prettily rounded chin on her hands, as she laid her elbows complacently on the wall—"well, what did you expect? Did you want me to stand here all night, while you skulked moonstruck under a tree? Or did you look for me to call you by name? did you expect me to shout out, *Capt. Allan Brewster—*"

"Thankful, hush!"

"Capt. Allan Brewster of the Connecticut Contingent," continued the girl, with an affected raising of a low, pathetic voice that was, however, inaudible beyond the tree. "Capt. Brewster, behold me—your obleeged and humble servant and sweetheart to command."

Capt. Brewster succeeded, after a slight skirmish at the wall, in possessing himself of the girl's hand; at which; although still struggling, she relented slightly.

"It isn't every lad that I'd low for," she said, with an affected pout, "and there may be others that would not take it amiss; though there be fine ladies enough at the assembly halls at Morristown as might think it hoydenish?"

“Nonsense, love,” said the captain, who had by this time mounted the wall, and encircled the girl’s waist with his arm. “Nonsense! you startled me only. But,” he added, suddenly taking her round chin in his hand, and turning her face toward the moon with an uneasy half-suspicion, “why did you take that light from the window? What has happened?”

“We had unexpected guests, sweetheart,” said Thankful: “the count just arrived.”

“That infernal Hessian!” He stopped, and gazed questioningly into her face. The moon looked upon her at the same time: the face was as sweet, as placid, as truthful, as her own. Possibly these two inconstants understood each other.

“Nay, Allan, he is not a Hessian, but an exiled gentleman from abroad—a nobleman—”

“There are no noblemen now,” sniffed the trooper contemptuously. “Congress has so decreed it. All men are born free and equal.”

“But they are not, Allan,” said Thankful, with a pretty trouble in her brows: “even cows are not born equal. Is yon calf that was dropped last night by Brindle the equal of my red heifer whose mother come by herself in a ship from Surrey? Do they look equal?”

“Titles are but breath,” said Capt. Brewster doggedly. There was an ominous pause.

“Nay, there is one nobleman left,” said Thankful; “and he is my own—my nature’s nobleman!”

Capt. Brewster did not reply. From certain arch gestures and wreathed smiles with which this forward young woman accompanied her statement, it would seem to be implied that the gentleman who stood before her was the nobleman alluded to. At least, he so accepted it, and embraced her closely, her arms and part of her mantle clinging around his neck. In this attitude they remained quiet for some moments, slightly rocking from side to side like a metronome; a movement, I fancy, peculiarly bucolic, pastoral, and idyllic, and as such, I wot, observed by Theocritus and Virgil.

At these supreme moments weak woman usually keeps her wits about her much better than your superior reasoning masculine animal; and, while the gallant captain was losing himself upon her perfect lips, Miss Thankful distinctly heard the farm-gate click, and otherwise noticed that the moon was getting high and obtrusive. She half released herself from the captain’s arms, thoughtfully and tenderly—but firmly. “Tell me all about yourself, Allan dear,” she said quietly, making room for him on the wall—“all, everything.”

She turned upon him her beautiful eyes—eyes habitually earnest and even grave in expression, yet holding in their brave brown depths a sweet, childlike reliance and dependency; eyes with a certain tender, deprecating droop in the brown-fringed lids, and yet eyes that seemed to say to every man who looked upon them, “I am truthful: be frank with me.” Indeed, I am convinced there is not one of my impressible sex, who, looking in those pleading eyes, would not have perjured himself on the spot rather than have disappointed their fair owner.

Capt. Brewster’s mouth resumed its old expression of discontent.

“Everything is growing worse, Thankful, and the cause is lost. Congress does nothing, and Washington is not the man for the crisis. Instead of marching to

Philadelphia, and forcing that wretched rabble of Hancock and Adams at the point of the bayonet, he writes letters."

"A dignified, formal old fool," interrupted Mistress Thankful indignantly; "and look at his wife! Didn't Mistress Ford and Mistress Baily, ay, and the best blood of Morris County, go down to his Excellency's in their finest bibs and tuckers, and didn't they find my lady in a pinafore doing chores? Vastly polite treatment, indeed! As if the whole world didn't know that the general was taken by surprise when my lady came riding up from Virginia with all those fine cavaliers, just to see what his Excellency was doing at these assembly balls. And fine doings, I dare say."

"This is but idle gossip, Thankful," said Capt. Brewster with the faintest appearance of self-consciousness; "the assembly balls are conceived by the general to strengthen the confidence of the townsfolk, and mitigate the rigors of the winter encampment. I go there myself rarely: I have but little taste for junketing and gavotting, with my country in such need. No, Thankful! What we want is a leader; and the men of Connecticut feel it keenly. If I have been spoken of in that regard," added the captain with a slight inflation of his manly breast, "it is because they know of my sacrifices—because as New England yeomen they know my devotion to the cause. They know of my suffering—"

The bright face that looked into his was suddenly afire with womanly sympathy, the pretty brow was knit, the sweet eyes overflowed with tenderness. "Forgive me, Allan. I forgot—perhaps, love—perhaps, dearest, you are hungry now."

"No, not now," replied Captain Brewster, with gloomy stoicism; "yet," he added, "it is nearly a week since I have tasted meat."

"I—I—brought a few things with me," continued the girl, with a certain hesitating timidity. She reached down, and produced a basket from the shadow of the wall. "These chickens"—she held up a pair of pullets—"the commander-in-chief himself could not buy: I kept them for MY commander! And this pot of marmalade, which I know my Allan loves, is the same I put up last summer. I thought [very tenderly] you might like a piece of that bacon you liked so once, dear. Ah, sweetheart, shall we ever sit down to our little board? Shall we ever see the end of this awful war? Don't you think, dear [very pleadingly], it would be best to give it up? King George is not such a very bad man, is he? I've thought, sweetheart [very confidently], that mayhap you and he might make it all up without the aid of those Washingtons, who do nothing but starve one to death. And if the king only knew you, Allan—should see you as I do, sweetheart—he'd do just as you say."

During this speech she handed him the several articles alluded to; and he received them, storing them away in such receptacles of his clothing as were convenient—with this notable difference, that with HER the act was graceful and picturesque: with him there was a ludicrousness of suggestion that his broad shoulders and uniform only heightened.

"I think not of myself, lass," he said, putting the eggs in his pocket, and buttoning the chickens within his martial breast. "I think not of myself, and perhaps I often spare that counsel which is but little heeded. But I have a duty to my men—to Connecticut. [He here tied the marmalade up in his handkerchief.] I

confess I have sometimes thought I might, under provocation, be driven to extreme measures for the good of the cause. I make no pretence to leadership, but—"

"With you at the head of the army," broke in Thankful enthusiastically, "peace would be declared within a fortnight."

There is no flattery, however outrageous, that a man will not accept from the woman whom he believes loves him. He will perhaps doubt its influence in the colder judgment of mankind; but he will consider that this poor creature, at least, understands him, and in some vague way represents the eternal but unrecognized verities. And when this is voiced by lips that are young and warm and red, it is somehow quite as convincing as the bloodless, remoter utterance of posterity.

Wherefore the trooper complacently buttoned the compliment over his chest with the pullets.

"I think you must go now, Allan," she said, looking at him with that pseudo-maternal air which the youngest of women sometimes assume to their lovers, as if the doll had suddenly changed sex, and grown to man's estate. "You must go now, dear; for it may so chance that father is considering my absence overmuch. You will come again a' Wednesday, sweetheart; and you will not go to the assemblies, nor visit Mistress Judith, nor take any girl pick-a-back again on your black horse; and you will let me know when you are hungry?"

She turned her brown eyes lovingly, yet with a certain pretty trouble in the brow, and such a searching, pleading inquiry in her glance, that the captain kissed her at once. Then came the final embrace, performed by the captain in a half-perfunctory, quiet manner, with a due regard for the friable nature of part of his provisions. Satisfying himself of the integrity of the eggs by feeling for them in his pocket, he waved a military salute with the other hand to Miss Thankful, and was gone. A few minutes later the sound of his horse's hoofs rang sharply from the icy hillside.

But, as he reached the summit, two horsemen wheeled suddenly from the shadow of the roadside, and bade him halt.

"Capt. Brewster, if this moon does not deceive me?" queried the foremost stranger with grave civility.

"The same. Major Van Zandt, I calculate?" returned Brewster querulously.

"Your calculation is quite right. I regret Capt. Brewster, that it is my duty to inform you that you are under arrest."

"By whose orders?"

"The commander-in-chief's."

"For what?"

"Mutinous conduct, and disrespect of your superior officers."

The sword that Capt. Brewster had drawn at the sudden appearance of the strangers quivered for a moment in his strong hand. Then, sharply striking it across the pommel of his saddle, he snapped it in twain, and cast the pieces at the feet of the speaker.

"Go on," he said doggedly.

"Capt. Brewster," said Major Van Zandt, with infinite gravity, "it is not for me to point out the danger to you of this outspoken emotion, except practically in its effect upon the rations you have in your pocket. If I mistake not, they have suffered equally with your steel. Forward, march!"

Capt. Brewster looked down, and then dropped to the rear, as the discased yolks of Mistress Thankful's most precious gift slid slowly and pensively over his horse's flanks to the ground.

Chapter II

Mistress Thankful remained at the wall until her lover had disappeared. Then she turned, a mere lissom shadow in that uncertain light, and glided under the eaves of the shed, and thence from tree to tree of the orchard, lingering a moment under each as a trout lingers in the shadow of the bank in passing a shallow, and so reached the farmhouse and the kitchen door, where she entered. Thence by a back staircase she slipped to her own bower, from whose window half an hour before she had taken the signalling light. This she lit again and placed upon a chest of drawers; and, taking off her hood and a shapeless sleeveless mantle she had worn, went to the mirror, and proceeded to re-adjust a high horn comb that had been somewhat displaced by the captain's arm, and otherwise after the fashion of her sex to remove all traces of a previous lover. It may be here observed that a man is very apt to come from the smallest encounter with his dulcinea distrait, bored, or shame-faced; to forget that his cravat is awry, or that a long blond hair is adhering to his button. But as to Mademoiselle—well, looking at Miss Pussy's sleek paws and spotless face, would you ever know that she had been at the cream-jug?

Thankful was, I think, satisfied with her appearance. Small doubt but she had reason for it. And yet her gown was a mere slip of flowered chintz, gathered at the neck, and falling at an angle of fifteen degrees to within an inch of a short petticoat of gray flannel. But so surely is the complete mould of symmetry indicated in the poise or line of any single member, that looking at the erect carriage of her graceful brown head, or below to the curves that were lost in her shapely ankles, or the little feet that hid themselves in the broad-buckled shoes, you knew that the rest was as genuine and beautiful.

Mistress Thankful, after a pause, opened the door, and listened. Then she softly slipped down the back staircase to the front hall. It was dark; but the door of the "company-room," or parlor, was faintly indicated by the light that streamed beneath it. She stood still for a moment hesitatingly, when suddenly a hand grasped her own, and half led, half dragged her, into the sitting-room opposite. It was dark. There was a momentary fumbling for the tinder-box and flint, a muttered oath over one or two impeding articles of furniture, and Thankful laughed. And then the light was lit; and her father, a gray wrinkled man of sixty, still holding her hand, stood before her.

"You have been out, mistress!"

"I have," said Thankful.

"And not alone," growled the old man angrily.

"No," said Mistress Thankful, with a smile that began in the corners of her brown eyes, ran down into the dimpled curves of her mouth, and finally ended in the sudden revelation of her white teeth—"no, not alone."

“With whom?” asked the old man, gradually weakening under her strong, saucy presence.

“Well, father,” said Thankful, taking a seat on a table, and swinging her little feet somewhat ostentatiously toward him, “I was with Capt. Allan Brewster of the Connecticut Contingent.”

“That man?”

“That man!”

“I forbid you seeing him again.”

Thankful gripped the table with a hand on each side of her, to emphasize the statement, and swinging her feet replied—

“I shall see him as often as I like, father.”

“Thankful Blossom!”

“Abner Blossom!”

“I see you know not,” said Mr. Blossom, abandoning the severely paternal mandatory air for one of confidential disclosure, “I see you know not his reputation. He is accused of inciting his regiment to revolt—of being a traitor to the cause.”

“And since when, Abner Blossom, have YOU felt such concern for the cause? Since you refused to sell supplies to the Continental commissary, except at double profits? since you told me you were glad I had not polities like Mistress Ford—”

“Hush!” said the father, motioning to the parlor.

“Hush,” echoed Thankful indignantly. “I won’t be hushed! Everybody says *Hush* to me. The count says *Hush!* Allan says *Hush!* You say *Hush!* I’m a-weary of this hushing. Ah, if there was a man who didn’t say it to me!” and Mistress Thankful lifted her fine eyes to the ceiling.

“You are unwise, Thankful—foolish, indiscreet. That is why you require much monition.”

Thankful swung her feet in silence for a few moments, then suddenly leaped from the table, and, seizing the old man by the lapels of his coat, fixed her eyes upon him, and said suspiciously. “Why did you keep me from going in the company-room? Why did you bring me in here?”

Blossom senior was staggered for a moment. “Because, you know, the count—”

“And you were afraid the count should know I had a sweetheart? Well, I’ll go in and tell him now,” she said, marching toward the door.

“Then, why did you not tell him when you slipped out an hour ago? eh, lass?” queried the old man, grasping her hand. “But ’tis all one, Thankful: ’twas not for him I stopped you. There is a young spark with him—ay, came even as you left, lass—a likely young gallant; and he and the count are jabbering away in their own lingo, a kind of Italian, belike; eh, Thankful?”

“I know not,” she said thoughtfully. “Which way came the other?” In fact, a fear that this young stranger might have witnessed the captain’s embrace began to creep over her.

“From town, my lass.”

Thankful turned to her father as if she had been waiting a reply to a long-asked question: “Well?”

“Were it not well to put on a few furbelows and a tucker?” queried the old man. “’Tis a gallant young spark; none of your country folk.”

“No,” said Thankful, with the promptness of a woman who was looking her best, and knew it. And the old man, looking at her, accepted her judgment, and without another word led her to the parlor door, and, opening it, said briefly, “My daughter, Mistress Thankful Blossom.”

With the opening of the door came the sound of earnest voices that instantly ceased upon the appearance of Mistress Thankful. Two gentlemen lolling before the fire arose instantly, and one came forward with an air of familiar yet respectful recognition.

“Nay, this is far too great happiness, Mistress Thankful,” he said, with a strongly marked foreign accent, and a still more strongly marked foreign manner. “I have been in despair, and my friend here, the Baron Pomposo, likewise.”

The slightest trace of a smile, and the swiftest of reproachful glances, lit up the dark face of the baron as he bowed low in the introduction. Thankful dropped the courtesy of the period—i. e., a duck, with semicircular sweep of the right foot forward. But the right foot was so pretty, and the grace of the little figure so perfect, that the baron raised his eyes from the foot to the face in serious admiration. In the one rapid feminine glance she had given him, she had seen that he was handsome; in the second, which she could not help from his protracted silence, she saw that his beauty centred in his girlish, half fawn-like dark eyes.

“The baron,” explained Mr. Blossom, rubbing his hands together as if through mere friction he was trying to impart a warmth to the reception which his hard face discountenanced—“the baron visits us under discouragement. He comes from far countries. It is the custom of gentlefolk of—of foreign extraction to wander through strange lands, commenting upon the habits and doings of the peoples. He will find in Jersey,” continued Mr. Blossom, apparently appealing to Thankful, yet really evading her contemptuous glance, “a hard-working yeomanry, ever ready to welcome the stranger, and account to him, penny for penny, for all his necessary expenditure; for which purpose, in these troublous times, he will provide for himself gold or other moneys not affected by these local disturbances.”

“He will find, good friend Blossom,” said the baron in a rapid, voluble way, utterly at variance with the soft, quiet gravity of his eyes, “Beauty, Grace, Accomplishment, and—eh—Santa Maria, what shall I say?” He turned appealingly to the count.

“Virtue,” nodded the count.

“Truly, Birtoo! all in the fair lady of thees countries. Ah, believe me, honest friend Blossom, there is mooch more in thees than in thoss!”

So much of this speech was addressed to Mistress Thankful, that she had to show at least one dimple in reply, albeit her brows were slightly knit, and she had turned upon the speaker her honest, questioning eyes.

“And then the General Washington has been kind enough to offer his protection,” added the count.

“Any fool—any one,” supplemented Thankful hastily, with a slight blush—“may have the general’s pass, ay, and his good word. But what of Mistress Prudence Bookstaver?—she that has a sweetheart in Knyphausen’s brigade, ay—I warrant a Hessian, but of gentle blood, as Mistress Prudence has often told me—and, look you, all her letters stopped by the general, ay, I warrant, read by my Lady

Washington too, as if 'twere HER fault that her lad was in arms against Congress. Riddle me that, now!"

"'Tis but prudence, lass," said Blossom, frowning on the girl. "'Tis that she might disclose some movement of the army, tending to defeat the enemy."

"And why should she not try to save her lad from capture or ambuscade such as befell the Hessian commissary with the provisions that you—"

Mr. Blossom, in an ostensible fatherly embrace, managed to pinch Mistress Thankful sharply. "Hush, lass," he said with simulated playfulness; "your tongue clacks like the Whippany mill.—My daughter has small concern—'tis the manner of womenfolk—in politics," he explained to his guests. "These dangersome days have given her sore affliction by way of parting comrades of her childhood, and others whom she has much affected. It has in some sort soured her."

Mr. Blossom would have recalled this speech as soon as it escaped him, lest it should lead to a revelation from the truthful Mistress Thankful of her relations with the Continental captain. But to his astonishment, and, I may add, to my own, she showed nothing of that disposition she had exhibited a few moments before. On the contrary, she blushed slightly, and said nothing.

And then the conversation changed—upon the weather, the hard winter, the prospects of the Cause, a criticism upon the commander-in-chief's management of affairs, the attitude of Congress, etc., between Mr. Blossom and the count; characterized, I hardly need say, by that positiveness of opinion that distinguishes the unprofessional. In another part of the room, it so chanced that Mistress Thankful and the baron were talking about themselves; the assembly balls; who was the prettiest woman in Morristown; and whether Gen. Washington's attentions to Mistress Pyne were only perfunctory gallantry, or what; and if Lady Washington's hair was really gray; and if that young aide-de-camp, Major Van Zandt were really in love with Lady or whether his attentions were only the zeal of a subaltern—in the midst of which a sudden gust of wind shook the house; and Mr. Blossom, going to the front door, came back with the announcement that it was snowing heavily.

And indeed, within that past hour, to their astonished eyes the whole face of nature had changed. The moon was gone, the sky hidden in a blinding, whirling swarm of stinging flakes. The wind, bitter and strong, had already fashioned white feathery drifts upon the threshold, over the painted benches on the porch, and against the door-posts.

Mistress Thankful and the baron had walked to the rear door—the baron with a slight tropical shudder—to view this meteorological change. As Mistress Thankful looked over the snowy landscape, it seemed to her that all record of her past experience had been effaced: her very footprints of an hour before were lost; the gray wall on which she leaned was white and spotless now; even the familiar farm-shed looked dim and strange and ghostly. Had she been there? had she seen the captain? was it all a fancy? She scarcely knew.

A sudden gust of wind closed the door behind them with a crash, and sent Mistress Thankful, with a slight feminine scream, forward into the outer darkness. But the baron caught her by the waist, and saved her from Heaven knows what imaginable disaster; and the scene ended in a half-hysterical laugh. But the wind

then set upon them both with a malevolent fury; and the baron was, I presume, obliged to draw her closer to his side.

They were alone, save for the presence of those mischievous confederates, Nature and Opportunity. In the half-obscurity of the storm she could not help turning her mischievous eyes on his. But she was perhaps surprised to find them luminous, soft, and, as it seemed to her at that moment, grave beyond the occasion. An embarrassment utterly new and singular seized upon her; and when, as she half feared yet half expected, he bent down and pressed his lips to hers, she was for a moment powerless. But in the next instant she boxed his ears sharply, and vanished in the darkness. When Mr. Blossom opened the door to the baron he was surprised to find that gentleman alone, and still more surprised to find, when they re-entered the house, to see Mistress Thankful enter at the same moment, demurely, from the front door.

When Mr. Blossom knocked at his daughter's door the next morning it opened upon her completely dressed, but withal somewhat pale, and, if the truth must be told, a little surly.

"And you were stirring so early, Thankful," he said: "'twould have been but decent to have bidden God-speed to the guests, especially the baron, who seemed much concerned at your absence."

Miss Thankful blushed slightly, but answered with savage celerity, "And since when is it necessary that I should dance attendance upon every foreign jack-in-the-box that may lie at the house?"

"He has shown great courtesy to you, mistress, and is a gentleman."

"Courtesy, indeed!" said Mistress Thankful.

"He has not presumed?" said Mr. Blossom suddenly, bringing his cold gray eyes to bear upon his daughter's.

"No, no," said Thankful hurriedly, flaming a bright scarlet; "but—nothing. But what have you there? a letter?"

"Ay—from the captain, I warrant," said Mr. Blossom, handing her a three-cornered bit of paper: "'twas left here by a camp-follower. Thankful," he continued, with a meaning glance, "you will heed my counsel in season. The captain is not meet for such as you."

Thankful suddenly grew pale and contemptuous again as she snatched the letter from his hand. When his retiring footsteps were lost on the stairs she regained her color, and opened the letter. It was slovenly written, grievously misspelled, and read as follows:

> "SWEETHEART: A tyranous Act, begotten in Envy and Jealousie, keeps me here a prisoner. Last night I was Basely arrested by Servile Hands for that Freedom of Thought and Expression for which I have already Sacrifized so much—aye all that Man hath but Love and Honour. But the End is Near. When for the Maintenance of Power, the Liberties of the Peoples are subdued by Martial Supremacy and the Dictates of Ambition the State is Lost. I lie in Vile Bondage here in Morristown under charge of Disrespeck—me that a twelvemonth past left a home and Respectable Connexions to serve my Country. Believe me still your own Love, albeit in the Power of Tyrants and condemned it may be to the scaffold.

"The Messenger is Trustworthy and will speed safely to me such as you may deliver unto him. The Provender sanktified by your Hands and made precious by yr. Love was wrested from me by Servil Hands and the Eggs, Sweetheart, were somewhat Addled. The Bacon is, methinks by this time on the Table of the Comr-in-Chief. Such is Tyranny and Ambition. Sweetheart, farewell, for the present.

ALLAN."

Mistress Thankful read this composition once, twice, and then tore it up. Then, reflecting that it was the first letter of her lover's that she had not kept, she tried to put together again the torn fragments, but vainly, and then in a pet, new to her, cast them from the window. During the rest of the day she was considerably distraite, and even manifested more temper than she was wont to do; and later, when her father rode away on his daily visit to Morristown, she felt strangely relieved. By noon the snow ceased, or rather turned into a driving sleet that again in turn gave way to rain. By this time she became absorbed in her household duties—in which she was usually skilful—and in her own thoughts that to-day had a novelty in their meaning. In the midst of this, at about dark, her room being in the rear of the house, she was perhaps unmindful of the trampling of horse without, or the sound of voices in the hall below. Neither was uncommon at that time. Although protected by the Continental army from forage or the rudeness of soldiery, the Blossom farm had always been a halting-place for passing troopers, commissary teamsters, and reconnoitring officers. Gen. Sullivan and Col. Hamilton had watered their horses at its broad, substantial wayside trough, and sat in the shade of its porch. Miss Thankful was only awakened from her daydream by the entrance of the negro farm-hand, Caesar.

"Fo' God, Missy Thankful, them sogers is g'wine into camp in the road, I reckon, for they's jest makin' theysevs free afo' the house, and they's an officer in the company-room with his spurs cocked on the table, readin' a book."

A quick flame leaped into Thankful's cheek, and her pretty brows knit themselves over darkening eyes. She arose from her work no longer the moody girl, but an indignant goddess, and, pushing the servant aside, swept down the stairs, and threw open the door.

An officer sitting by the fire in an easy, lounging attitude that justified the servant's criticism, arose instantly with an air of evident embarrassment and surprise that was, however, as quickly dominated and controlled by a gentleman's breeding.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a deep inclination of his handsome head, "but I had no idea that there was any member of this household at home—at least, a lady." He hesitated a moment, catching in the raising of her brown-fringed lids a sudden revelation of her beauty, and partly losing his composure. "I am Major Van Zandt: I have the honor of addressing—"

"Thankful Blossom," said Thankful a little proudly, divining with a woman's swift instinct the cause of the major's hesitation. But her triumph was checked by a new embarrassment visible in the face of the officer at the mention of her name.

"Thankful Blossom," repeated the officer quickly. "You are, then, the daughter of Abner Blossom?"

“Certainly,” said Thankful, turning her inquiring eyes upon him. “He will be here betimes. He has gone only to Morristown.” In a new fear that had taken possession of her, her questioning eyes asked, “Has he not?”

The officer, answering her eyes rather than her lips, came toward her gravely. “He will not return to-day, Mistress Thankful, nor perhaps even to-morrow. He is—a prisoner.”

Thankful opened her brown eyes aggressively on the major. “A prisoner—for what?”

“For aiding and giving comfort to the enemy, and for harboring spies,” replied the major with military curtness.

Mistress Thankful’s cheek flushed slightly at the last sentence: a recollection of the scene on the porch and the baron’s stolen kiss flashed across her, and for a moment she looked as guilty as if the man before her had been a witness to the deed. He saw it, and misinterpreted her confusion.

“Belike, then,” said Mistress Thankful, slightly raising her voice, and standing squarely before the major, “belike, then, I should be a prisoner too; for the guests of this house, if they be spies, were MY guests, and, as my father’s daughter, I was their hostess; ay, man, and right glad to be the hostess of such gallant gentlemen—gentlemen, I warrant, too fine to insult a defenceless girl; gentlemen spies that did not cock their boots on the table, or turn an honest farmer’s house into a tap-room.”

An expression of half pain, half amusement, covered the face of the major, but he made no other reply than by a profound and graceful bow. Courteous and deprecatory as it was, it apparently exasperated Mistress Thankful only the more.

“And pray who are these spies, and who is the informer?” said Mistress Thankful, facing the soldier, with one hand truculently placed on her flexible hip, and the other slipped behind her. “Methinks ’tis only honest we should know when and how we have entertained both.”

“Your father, Mistress Thankful,” said Major Van Zandt gravely, “has long been suspected of favoring the enemy; but it has been the policy of the commander-in-chief to overlook the political preferences of non-combatants, and to strive to win their allegiance to the good cause by liberal privileges. But when it was lately discovered that two strangers, although bearing a pass from him, have been frequenters of this house under fictitious names—”

“You mean Count Ferdinand and the Baron Pomposo,” said Thankful quickly—“two honest gentlefolk; and if they choose to pay their devoirs to a lass—although, perhaps, not a quality lady, yet an honest girl—”

“Dear Mistress Thankful,” said the major with a profound bow and smile, that, spite of its courtesy, drove Thankful to the verge of wrathful hysterics, “if you establish that fact—and, from this slight acquaintance with your charms, I doubt not you will—your father is safe from further inquiry or detention. The commander-in-chief is a gentleman who has never underrated the influence of your sex, nor held himself averse to its fascinations.”

“What is the name of this informer?” broke in Mistress Thankful angrily. “Who is it that has dared—”

"It is but king's evidence, mayhap, Mistress Thankful; for the informer is himself under arrest. It is on the information of Capt. Allan Brewster of the Connecticut Contingent."

Mistress Thankful whitened, then flushed, and then whitened again. Then she stood up to the major.

"It's a lie—a cowardly lie!"

Major Van Zandt bowed. Mistress Thankful flew up stairs, and in another moment swept back again into the room in riding hat and habit.

"I suppose I can go and see—my father," she said, without lifting her eyes to the officer.

"You are free as air, Mistress Thankful. My orders and instructions, far from implicating you in your father's offences, do not even suggest your existence. Let me help you to your horse."

The girl did not reply. During that brief interval, however, Caesar had saddled her white mare, and brought it to the door. Mistress Thankful, disdaining the offered hand of the major, sprang to the saddle.

The major still held the reins. "One moment, Mistress Thankful."

"Let me go!" she said, with suppressed passion.

"One moment, I beg."

His hand still held her bridle-rein. The mare reared, nearly upsetting her. Crimson with rage and mortification, she raised her riding-whip, and laid it smartly over the face of the man before her.

He dropped the rein instantly. Then he raised to her a face calm and colorless, but for a red line extending from his eyebrow to his chin, and said quietly—

"I had no desire to detain you. I only wished to say that when you see Gen. Washington I know you will be just enough to tell him that Major Van Zandt knew nothing of your wrongs, or even your presence here, until you presented them, and that since then he has treated you as became an officer and a gentleman."

Yet even as he spoke she was gone. At the moment that her fluttering skirt swept in a furious gallop down the hillside, the major turned, and re-entered the house. The few lounging troopers who were witnesses of the scene prudently turned their eyes from the white face and blazing eyes of their officer as he strode by them. Nevertheless, when the door closed behind him, contemporary criticism broke out:

"'Tis a Tory jade, vexed that she cannot befool the major as she has the captain," muttered Sergeant Tibbitts.

"And going to try her tricks on the general," added Private Hicks.

Howbeit both these critics may have been wrong. For as Mistress Thankful thundered down the Morristown road she thought of many things. She thought of her sweetheart Allan, a prisoner, and pining for HER help and HER solicitude; and yet—how dared he—if he HAD really betrayed or misjudged her! And then she thought bitterly of the count and the baron, and burned to face the latter, and in some vague way charge the stolen kiss upon him as the cause of all her shame and mortification. And lastly she thought of her father, and began to hate everybody. But above all and through all, in her vague fears for her father, in her passionate indignation against the baron, in her fretful impatience of Allan, one thing was ever dominant and obtrusive; one thing she tried to put away, but could

not—the handsome, colorless face of Major Van Zandt, with the red welt of her riding-whip overlying its cold outlines.

Chapter III

The rising wind, which had ridden much faster than Mistress Thankful, had increased to a gale by the time it reached Morristown. It swept through the leafless maples, and rattled the dry bones of the elms. It whistled through the quiet Presbyterian churchyard, as if trying to arouse the sleepers it had known in days gone by. It shook the blank, lustreless windows of the Assembly Rooms over the Freemasons' Tavern, and wrought in their gusty curtains moving shadows of those amply petticoated dames and tightly hosed cavaliers who had swung in *Sir Roger*, or jigged in *Money Musk*, the night before.

But I fancy it was around the isolated "Ford Mansion," better known as the "headquarters," that the wind wreaked its grotesque rage. It howled under its scant eaves, it sang under its bleak porch, it tweaked the peak of its front gable, it whistled through every chink and cranny of its square, solid, unpicturesque structure. Situated on a hillside that descended rapidly to the Whippany River, every summer zephyr that whispered through the porches of the Morristown farm-houses charged as a stiff breeze upon the swinging half doors and windows of the "Ford Mansion"; every wintry wind became a gale that threatened its security. The sentry who paced before its front porch knew from experience when to linger under its lee, and adjust his threadbare outer coat to the bitter north wind.

Within the house something of this cheerlessness prevailed. It had an ascetic gloom, which the scant firelight of the reception-room, and the dying embers on the dining-room hearth, failed to dissipate. The central hall was broad, and furnished plainly with a few rush-bottomed chairs, on one of which half dozed a black body-servant of the commander-in-chief. Two officers in the dining-room, drawn close by the chimney-corner, chatted in undertones, as if mindful that the door of the drawing-room was open, and their voices might break in upon its sacred privacy. The swinging light in the hall partly illuminated it, or rather glanced gloomily from the black polished furniture, the lustreless chairs, the quaint cabinet, the silent spinet, the skeleton-legged centre-table, and finally upon the motionless figure of a man seated by the fire.

It was a figure since so well known to the civilized world, since so celebrated in print and painting, as to need no description here. Its rare combination of gentle dignity with profound force, of a set resoluteness of purpose with a philosophical patience, have been so frequently delivered to a people not particularly remarkable for these qualities, that I fear it has too often provoked a spirit of playful aggression, in which the deeper underlying meaning was forgotten. So let me add that in manner, physical equipoise, and even in the mere details of dress, this figure indicated a certain aristocratic exclusiveness. It was the presentment of a king—a king who by the irony of circumstances was just then waging war against all kingship; a ruler of men, who just then was fighting for the right of these men to govern themselves, but whom by his own inherent right he dominated. From the

crown of his powdered head to the silver buckle of his shoe he was so royal that it was not strange that his brother George of England and Hanover—ruling by accident, otherwise impiously known as the "grace of God"—could find no better way of resisting his power than by calling him "Mr. Washington."

The sound of horses' hoofs, the formal challenge of sentry, the grave questioning of the officer of the guard, followed by footsteps upon the porch, did not apparently disturb his meditation. Nor did the opening of the outer door, and a charge of cold air into the hall that invaded even the privacy of the reception-room, and brightened the dying embers on the hearth, stir his calm pre-occupation. But an instant later there was the distinct rustle of a feminine skirt in the hall, a hurried whispering of men's voices, and then the sudden apparition of a smooth, fresh-faced young officer over the shoulder of the unconscious figure.

"I beg your pardon, general," said the officer doubtingly, "but—"

"You are not intruding, Col. Hamilton," said the general quietly.

"There is a young lady without who wishes an audience of your Excellency. 'Tis Mistress Thankful Blossom—the daughter of Abner Blossom, charged with treasonous practice and favoring the enemy, now in the guard-house at Morristown."

"Thankful Blossom?" repeated the general interrogatively.

"Your Excellency doubtless remembers a little provincial beauty and a famous toast of the country-side—the Cressida of our Morristown epic, who led our gallant Connecticut captain astray—"

"You have the advantages, besides the better memory of a younger man, colonel," said Washington, with a playful smile that slightly reddened the cheek of his aide-de-camp. "Yet I think I HAVE heard of this phenomenon. By all means, admit her—and her escort."

"She is alone, general," responded the subordinate.

"Then the more reason why we should be polite," returned Washington, for the first time altering his easy posture, rising to his feet, and lightly clasping his ruffled hands before him. "We must not keep her waiting. Give her access, my dear colonel, at once; and even as she came—ALONE."

The aide-de-camp bowed and withdrew. In another moment the half-opened door swung wide to Mistress Thankful Blossom.

She was so beautiful in her simple riding-dress, so quaint and original in that very beauty, and, above all, so teeming with a certain vital earnestness of purpose just positive and audacious enough to set off that beauty, that the grave gentleman before her did not content himself with the usual formal inclination of courtesy, but actually advanced, and, taking her cold little hand in his, graciously led her to the chair he had just vacated.

"Even if your name were not known to me, Mistress Thankful," said the commander-in-chief, looking down upon her with grave politeness, "nature has, methinks, spared you the necessity of any introduction to the courtesy of a gentleman. But how can I especially serve you?"

Alack! the blaze of Mistress Thankful's brown eyes had become somewhat dimmed in the grave half-lights of the room, in the graver, deeper dignity of the erect, soldier-like figure before her. The bright color born of the tempest within and without had somehow faded from her cheek; the sauciness begotten from

bullying her horse in the last half-hour's rapid ride was so subdued by the actual presence of the man she had come to bully, that I fear she had to use all her self-control to keep down her inclination to whimper, and to keep back the tears, that, oddly enough, rose to her sweet eyes as she lifted them to the quietly critical yet placid glance of her interlocutor.

"I can readily conceive the motive of this visit, Miss Thankful," continued Washington, with a certain dignified kindliness that was more reassuring than the formal gallantry of the period; "and it is, I protest, to your credit. A father's welfare, however erring and weak that father may be, is most seemly in a maiden—"

Thankful's eyes flashed again as she rose to her feet. Her upper lip, that had a moment before trembled in a pretty infantine distress, now stiffened and curled as she confronted the dignified figure before her. "It is not of my father I would speak," she said saucily: "I did not ride here alone to-night, in this weather, to talk of HIM; I warrant HE can speak for himself. I came here to speak of myself, of lies—ay, LIES told of me, a poor girl; ay, of cowardly gossip about me and my sweetheart, Capt. Brewster, now confined in prison because he hath loved me, a lass without polities or adherence to the cause—as if 'twere necessary every lad should ask the confidence or permission of yourself or, belike, my Lady Washington, in his preferences."

She paused a moment, out of breath. With a woman's quickness of intuition she saw the change in Washington's face—saw a certain cold severity overshadowing it. With a woman's fateful persistency—a persistency which I humbly suggest might, on occasion, be honorably copied by our more politic sex — she went on to say what was in her, even if she were obliged, with a woman's honorable inconsistency, to unsay it an hour or two later; an inconsistency which I also humbly protest might be as honorably imitated by us—on occasion.

"It has been said," said Thankful Blossom quickly, "that my father has given entertainment knowingly to two spies—two spies that, begging your Excellency's pardon, and the pardon of Congress, I know only as two honorable gentlemen who have as honorably tendered me their affections. It is said, and basely and most falsely too, that my sweetheart, Capt. Allan Brewster, has lodged this information. I have ridden here to deny it. I have ridden here to demand of you that an honest woman's reputation shall not be sacrificed to the interests of politics; that a prying mob of ragamuffins shall not be sent to an honest farmer's house to spy and spy—and turn a poor girl out of doors that they might do it. 'Tis shameful, so it is; there! 'tis most scandalous, so it is: there, now! Spies, indeed! what are THEY, pray?"

In the indignation which the recollection of her wrongs had slowly gathered in her, from the beginning of this speech, she had advanced her face, rosy with courage, and beautiful in its impertinence, within a few inches of the dignified features and quiet gray eyes of the great commander. To her utter stupefaction, he bent his head and kissed her, with a grave benignity, full on the centre of her audacious forehead.

"Be seated, I beg, Mistress Blossom," he said, taking her cold hand in his, and quietly replacing her in the unoccupied chair. "Be seated, I beg, and give me, if you can, your attention for a moment. The officer intrusted with the ungracious task of

occupying your father's house is a member of my military family, and a gentleman. If he has so far forgotten himself—if he has so far disgraced himself and me as—"

"No! no!" uttered Thankful, with feverish alacrity, "the gentleman was most considerate. On the contrary—mayhap—I"—she hesitated, and then came to a full stop, with a heightened color, as a vivid recollection of that gentleman's face, with the mark of her riding-whip lying across it, rose before her.

"I was about to say that Major Van Zandt, as a gentleman, has known how to fully excuse the natural impulses of a daughter," continued Washington, with a look of perfect understanding; "but let me now satisfy you on another point, where it would seem we greatly differ."

He walked to the door, and summoned his servant, to whom he gave an order. In another moment the fresh-faced young officer who had at first admitted her re-appeared with a file of official papers. He glanced slyly at Thankful Blossom's face with an amused look, as if he had already heard the colloquy between her and his superior officer, and had appreciated that which neither of the earnest actors in the scene had themselves felt—a certain sense of humor in the situation.

Howbeit, standing before them, Col. Hamilton gravely turned over the file of papers. Thankful bit her lips in embarrassment. A slight feeling of awe, and a presentiment of some fast-coming shame; a new and strange consciousness of herself, her surroundings, of the dignity of the two men before her; an uneasy feeling of the presence of two ladies who had in some mysterious way entered the room from another door, and who seemed to be intently regarding her from afar with a curiosity as if she were some strange animal; and a wild premonition that her whole future life and happiness depended upon the events of the next few moments—so took possession of her, that the brave girl trembled for a moment in her isolation and loneliness. In another instant Col. Hamilton, speaking to his superior, but looking obviously at one of the ladies who had entered, handed a paper to Washington, and said, "Here are the charges."

"Read them," said the general coldly.

Col. Hamilton, with a manifest consciousness of another hearer than Mistress Blossom and his general, read the paper. It was couched in phrases of military and legal precision, and related briefly, that upon the certain and personal knowledge of the writer, Abner Blossom of the "Blossom Farm" was in the habit of entertaining two gentlemen, namely, the "Count Ferdinand" and the "Baron Pomposo," suspected enemies of the cause, and possible traitors to the Continental army. It was signed by Allan Brewster, late captain in the Connecticut Contingent.

As Col. Hamilton exhibited the signature, Thankful Blossom had no difficulty in recognizing the familiar bad hand and equally familiar mis-spelling of her lover.

She rose to her feet. With eyes that showed her present trouble and perplexity as frankly as they had a moment before blazed with her indignation, she met, one by one, the glances of the group who now seemed to be closing round her. Yet with a woman's instinct she felt, I am constrained to say, more unfriendliness in the silent presence of the two women than in the possible outspoken criticism of our much-abused sex.

"Of course," said a voice which Thankful at once, by a woman's unerring instinct, recognized as the elder of the two ladies, and the legitimate keeper of the

conscience of some one of the men who were present—"of course Mistress Thankful will be able to elect which of her lovers among her country's enemies she will be able to cling to for support in her present emergency. She does not seem to have been so special in her favors as to have positively excluded any one."

"At least, dear Lady Washington, she will not give it to the man who has proven a traitor to HER," said the younger woman impulsively. "That is—I beg your ladyship's pardon"—she hesitated, observing in the dead silence that ensued that the two superior male beings present looked at each other in lofty astonishment.

"He that is trait'rous to his country," said Lady Washington coldly, "is apt to be trait'rous elsewhere."

"'Twere as honest to say that he that was trait'rous to his king was trait'rous to his country," said Mistress Thankful with sudden audacity, bending her knit brows on Lady Washington. But that lady turned dignifiedly away, and Mistress Thankful again faced the general.

"I ask your pardon," she said proudly, "for troubling you with my wrongs. But it seems to me that even if another and a greater wrong were done me by my sweetheart, through jealousy, it would not justify this accusation against me, even though," she added, darting a wicked glance at the placid brocaded back of Lady Washington, "even though that accusation came from one who knows that jealousy may belong to the wife of a patriot as well as a traitor." She was herself again after this speech, although her face was white with the blow she had taken and returned.

Col. Hamilton passed his hand across his mouth, and coughed slightly. Gen. Washington, standing by the fire with an impassive face, turned to Thankful gravely:

"You are forgetting, Mistress Thankful, that you have not told me how I can serve you. It cannot be that you are still concerned in Capt. Brewster, who has given evidence against your other—FRIENDS, and tacitly against YOU. Nor can it be on their account, for I regret to say they are still free and unknown. If you come with any information exculpating them, and showing they are not spies or hostile to the cause, your father's release shall be certain and speedy. Let me ask you a single question: Why do you believe them honest?"

"Because," said Mistress Thankful, "they were—were—gentlemen."

"Many spies have been of excellent family, good address, and fair talents," said Washington gravely; "but you have, mayhap, some other reason."

"Because they talked only to ME," said Mistress Thankful, blushing mightily; "because they preferred my company to father's; because"—she hesitated a moment—"because they spoke not of politics, but—of—that which lads mainly talk of—and—and,"—here she broke down a little—"and the baron I only saw once, but he"—here she broke down utterly—"I know they weren't spies: there, now!"

"I must ask you something more," said Washington, with grave kindness: "whether you give me the information or not, you will consider, that, if what you believe is true, it cannot in any way injure the gentlemen you speak of; while, on the other hand, it may relieve your father of suspicion. Will you give to Col. Hamilton, my secretary, a full description of them—that fuller description which Capt. Brewster, for reasons best known to yourself, was unable to give?"

Mistress Thankful hesitated for a moment, and then, with one of her truthful glances at the commander-in-chief, began a detailed account of the outward semblance of the count. Why she began with him, I am unable to say; but possibly it was because it was easier, for when she came to describe the baron, she was, I regret to say, somewhat vague and figurative. Not so vague, however, but that Col. Hamilton suddenly started up with a look at his chief, who instantly checked it with a gesture of his ruffled hand.

"I thank you. Mistress Thankful," he said quite impassively, "but did this other gentleman, this baron—"

"Pomposo," said Thankful proudly. A titter originated in the group of ladies by the window, and became visible on the fresh face of Col. Hamilton; but the dignified color of Washington's countenance was unmoved.

"May I ask if the baron made an honorable tender of his affections to you," he continued, with respectful gravity—"if his attentions were known to your father, and were such as honest Mistress Blossom could receive?"

"Father introduced him to me, and wanted me to be kind to him. He—he kissed me, and I slapped his face," said Thankful quickly, with cheeks as red, I warrant, as the baron's might have been.

The moment the words had escaped her truthful lips, she would have given her life to recall them. To her astonishment, however, Col. Hamilton laughed outright, and the ladies turned and approached her, but were checked by a slight gesture from the otherwise impassive figure of the general.

"It is possible, Mistress Thankful," he resumed, with undisturbed composure, "that one at least of these gentlemen may be known to us, and that your instincts may be correct. At least rest assured that we shall fully inquire into it, and that your father shall have the benefit of that inquiry."

"I thank your Excellency," said Thankful, still reddening under the contemplation of her own late frankness, and retreating toward the door. "I—think—I—must—go—now. It is late, and I have far to ride."

To her surprise, however, Washington stepped forward, and, again taking her hands in his, said with a grave smile, "For that very reason, if for none other, you must be our guest to-night, Mistress Thankful Blossom. We still retain our Virginian ideas of hospitality, and are tyrannous enough to make strangers conform to them, even though we have but perchance the poorest of entertainment to offer them. Lady Washington will not permit Mistress Thankful Blossom to leave her roof to-night until she has partaken of her courtesy as well as her counsel."

"Mistress Thankful Blossom will make us believe that she has at least in so far trusted our desire to serve her justly, by accepting our poor hospitality for a single night," said Lady Washington, with a stately courtesy.

Thankful Blossom still stood irresolutely at the door. But the next moment a pair of youthful arms encircled her; and the younger gentlewoman, looking into her brown eyes with an honest frankness equal to her own, said caressingly, "Dear Mistress Thankful, though I am but a guest in her ladyship's house, let me, I pray you, add my voice to hers. I am Mistress Schuyler of Albany, at your service, Mistress Thankful, as Col. Hamilton here will bear me witness, did I need any interpreter to your honest heart. Believe me, dear Mistress Thankful, I sympathize with you, and only beg you to give me an opportunity to-night to serve you. You

will stay, I know, and you will stay with me; and we shall talk over the faithlessness of that over-jealous Yankee captain who has proved himself, I doubt not, as unworthy of YOU as he is of his country."

Hateful to Thankful as was the idea of being commiserated, she nevertheless could not resist the gentle courtesy and gracious sympathy of Miss Schuyler. Besides, it must be confessed that for the first time in her life she felt a doubt of the power of her own independence, and a strange fascination for this young gentlewoman whose arms were around her, who could so thoroughly sympathize with her, and yet allow herself to be snubbed by Lady Washington.

"You have a mother, I doubt not?" said Thankful, raising her questioning eyes to Miss Schuyler.

Irrelevant as this question seemed to the two gentlemen, Miss Schuyler answered it with feminine intuition: "And you, dear Mistress Thankful—"

"Have none," said Thankful; and here, I regret to say, she whimpered slightly, at which Miss Schuyler, with tears in her own fine eyes, bent her head suddenly to Thankful's ear, put her arm about the waist of the pretty stranger, and then, to the astonishment of Col. Hamilton, quietly swept her out of the august presence.

When the door had closed upon them, Col. Hamilton turned half-smilingly, half-inquiringly, to his chief. Washington returned his glance kindly but gravely, and then said quietly—

"If your suspicions jump with mine, colonel, I need not remind you that it is a matter so delicate that it would be as well if you locked it in your own breast for the present; at least, that you should not intimate to the gentleman whom you may have suspected, aught that has passed this evening."

"As you will, general," said the subaltern respectfully; "but may I ask"—he hesitated—"if you believe that anything more than a passing fancy for a pretty girl—"

"When I asked your silence, colonel," interrupted Washington kindly, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the younger man, "it was because I thought the matter sufficiently momentous to claim my own private and especial attention."

"I ask your Excellency's pardon," said the young man, reddening through his fresh complexion like a girl; "I only meant—"

"That you would ask to be relieved to-night," interrupted Washington, with a benign smile, "forasmuch as you wished the more to show entertainment to our dear friend Miss Schuyler, and her guest; a wayward girl, colonel, but, methinks, an honest one. Treat her of your own quality, colonel, but discreetly, and not too kindly, lest we have Mistress Schuyler, another injured damsel, on our hands;" and with a half playful gesture peculiar to the man, and yet not inconsistent with his dignity, he half led, half pushed his youthful secretary from the room.

When the door had closed upon the colonel, Lady Washington rustled toward her husband, who stood still, quiet and passive, on the hearthstone.

"You surely see in this escapade nothing of political intrigue—no treachery?" she said hastily.

"No," said Washington quietly.

"Nothing more than an idle, wanton intrigue with a foolish, vain country girl?"

"Pardon me, my lady," said Washington gravely. "I doubt not we may misjudge her. 'Tis no common rustic lass that can thus stir the country side. 'Twere an

insult to your sex to believe it. It is not yet sure that she has not captured even so high game as she has named. If she has, it would add another interest to a treaty of comity and alliance."

"That creature!" said Lady Washington—"that light-o'-love with her Connecticut captain lover! Pardon me, but this is preposterous;" and with a stiff courtesy she swept from the room, leaving the central figure of history—as such central figures are apt to be left—alone.

Later in the evening Mistress Schuyler so far subdued the tears and emotions of Thankful, that she was enabled to dry her eyes, and re-arrange her brown hair in the quaint little mirror in Mistress Schuyler's chamber; Mistress Schuyler herself lending a touch and suggestion here and there, after the secret freemasonry of her sex. "You are well rid of this forsworn captain, dear Mistress Thankful; and methinks that with hair as beautiful as yours, the new style of wearing it, though a modish frivolity, is most becoming. I assure you 'tis much affected in New York and Philadelphia—drawn straight back from the forehead, after this manner, as you see."

The result was, that an hour later Mistress Schuyler and Mistress Blossom presented themselves to Col. Hamilton in the reception-room, with a certain freshness and elaboration of toilet that not only quite shamed the young officer's affaire negligence, but caused him to open his eyes in astonishment. "Perhaps she would rather be alone, that she might indulge her grief," he said doubtingly, in an aside to Miss Schuyler, "rather than appear in company."

"Nonsense," quoth Mistress Schuyler. "Is a young woman to mope and sigh because her lover proves false?"

"But her father is a prisoner," said Hamilton in amazement.

"Can you look me in the face," said Mistress Schuyler mischievously, "and tell me that you don't know that in twenty-four hours her father will be cleared of these charges? Nonsense! Do you think I have no eyes in my head? Do you think I misread the general's face and your own?"

"But, my dear girl," said the officer in alarm.

"Oh! I told her so, but not WHY," responded Miss Schuyler with a wicked look in her dark eyes, "though I had warrant enough to do so, to serve you for keeping a secret from ME!"

And with this Parthian shot she returned to Mistress Thankful, who, with her face pressed against the window, was looking out on the moonlit slope beside the Whippany River.

For, by one of those freaks peculiar to the American springtide, the weather had again marvellously changed. The rain had ceased, and the ground was covered with an icing of sleet and snow, that now glittered under a clear sky and a brilliant moon. The northeast wind that shook the loose sashes of the windows had transformed each dripping tree and shrub to icy stalactites that silvered under the moon's cold touch.

"'Tis a beautiful sight, ladies," said a bluff, hearty, middle-aged man, joining the group by the window. "But God send the spring to us quickly, and spare us any more such cruel changes! My lady moon looks fine enough, glittering in yonder treetops; but I doubt not she looks down upon many a poor fellow shivering under his tattered blankets in the camp beyond. Had ye seen the Connecticut

tatterdemalions file by last night, with arms reversed, showing their teeth at his Excellency, and yet not daring to bite; had ye watched these faint-hearts, these doubting Thomases, ripe for rebellion against his Excellency, against the cause, but chiefly against the weather, — ye would pray for a thaw that would melt the hearts of these men as it would these stubborn fields around us. Two weeks more of such weather would raise up not one Allan Brewster, but a dozen such malcontent puppies ripe for a drum-head court-martial."

"Yet 'tis a fine night, Gen. Sullivan," said Col. Hamilton, sharply nudging the ribs of his superior officer with his elbow. "There would be little trouble on such a night, I fancy, to track our ghostly visitant." Both of the ladies becoming interested, and Col. Hamilton having thus adroitly turned the flank of his superior officer, he went on, "You should know that the camp, and indeed the whole locality here, is said to be haunted by the apparition of a gray-coated figure, whose face is muffled and hidden in his collar, but who has the password pat to his lips, and whose identity hath baffled the sentries. This figure, it is said, forasmuch as it has been seen just before an assault, an attack, or some tribulation of the army, is believed by many to be the genius or guardian spirit of the cause, and, as such, has incited sentries and guards to greater vigilance, and has to some seemed a premonition of disaster. Before the last outbreak of the Connecticut militia, Master Graycoat haunted the outskirts of the weather-beaten and bedraggled camp, and, I doubt not, saw much of that preparation that sent that regiment of faint-hearted onion-gatherers to flaunt their woes and their wrongs in the face of the general himself."

Here Col. Hamilton, in turn, received a slight nudge from Mistress Schuyler, and ended his speech somewhat abruptly.

Mistress Thankful was not unmindful of both these allusions to her faithless lover, but only a consciousness of mortification and wounded pride was awakened by them. In fact, during the first tempest of her indignation at his arrest, still later at the arrest of her father, and finally at the discovery of his perfidy to her, she had forgotten that he was her lover; she had forgotten her previous tenderness toward him; and, now that her fire and indignation were spent, only a sense of numbness and vacancy remained. All that had gone before seemed not something to be regretted as her own act, but rather as the act of another Thankful Blossom, who had been lost that night in the snow-storm: she felt she had become, within the last twenty-four hours, not perhaps ANOTHER woman, but for the first time a WOMAN.

Yet it was singular that she felt more confused when, a few moments later, the conversation turned upon Major Van Zandt: it was still more singular that she even felt considerably frightened at that confusion. Finally she found herself listening with alternate irritability, shame, and curiosity, to praises of that gentleman, of his courage, his devotion, and his personal graces. For one wild moment Thankful felt like throwing herself on the breast of Mistress Schuyler, and confessing her rudeness to the major; but a conviction that Mistress Schuyler would share that secret with Col. Hamilton, that Major Van Zandt might not like that revelation, and, oddly enough associated with this, a feeling of unconquerable irritability toward that handsome and gentle young officer, kept her mouth closed. "Besides," she said to herself, "he ought to know, if he's such a fine gentleman as

they say, just how I was feeling, and that I don't mean any rudeness to him;" and with this unanswerable feminine logic poor Thankful to some extent stilled her own honest little heart.

But not, I fear, entirely. The night was a restless one to her: like all impulsive natures, the season of reflection, and perhaps distrust, came to her upon acts that were already committed, and when reason seemed to light the way only to despair. She saw the folly of her intrusion at the headquarters, as she thought, only when it was too late to remedy it; she saw the gracelessness and discourtesy of her conduct to Major Van Zandt, only when distance and time rendered an apology weak and ineffectual. I think she cried a little to herself, lying in the strange gloomy chamber of the healthfully sleeping Mistress Schuyler, the sweet security of whose manifest goodness and kindness she alternately hated and envied; and at last, unable to stand it longer, slipped noiselessly from her bed, and stood very wretched and disconsolate before the window that looked out upon the slope toward the Whippany River. The moon on the new-fallen, frigid, and untrodden snow shone brightly. Far to the left it glittered on the bayonet of a sentry pacing beside the river-bank, and gave a sense of security to the girl that perhaps strengthened another idea that had grown up in her mind. Since she could not sleep, why should she not ramble about until she could? She had been accustomed to roam about the farm in all weathers and at all times and seasons. She recalled to herself the night—a tempestuous one—when she had risen in serious concern as to the lying-in of her favorite Alderney heifer, and how she had saved the life of the calf, a weakling, dropped apparently from the clouds in the tempest, as it lay beside the barn. With this in her mind, she donned her dress again, and, with Mistress Schuyler's mantle over her shoulders, noiselessly crept down the narrow staircase, passed the sleeping servant on the settee, and, opening the rear door, in another moment was inhaling the crisp air, and tripping down the crisp snow of the hillside.

But Mistress Thankful had overlooked one difference between her own farm and a military encampment. She had not proceeded a dozen yards before a figure apparently started out of the ground beneath her, and, levelling a bayoneted musket across her path, called, "Halt!"

The hot blood mounted to the girl's cheek at the first imperative command she had ever received in her life: nevertheless she halted unconsciously, and without a word confronted the challenger with her old audacity.

"Who comes there?" reiterated the sentry, still keeping his bayonet level with her breast.

"Thankful Blossom," she responded promptly.

The sentry brought his musket to a "present." "Pass, Thankful Blossom, and God send it soon and the spring with it, and good-night," he said, with a strong Milesian accent. And before the still-amazed girl could comprehend the meaning of his abrupt challenge, or his equally abrupt departure, he had resumed his monotonous pace in the moonlight. Indeed, as she stood looking after him, the whole episode, the odd unreality of the moonlit landscape, the novelty of her position, the morbid play of her thoughts, seemed to make it part of a dream which the morning light might dissipate, but could never fully explain.

With something of this feeling still upon her, she kept her way to the river. Its banks were still fringed with ice, through which its dark current flowed noiselessly. She knew it flowed through the camp where lay her faithless lover, and for an instant indulged the thought of following it, and facing him with the proof of his guilt; but even at the thought she recoiled with a new and sudden doubt in herself, and stood dreamily watching the shimmer of the moon on the icy banks, until another, and, it seemed to her, equally unreal vision suddenly stayed her feet, and drove the blood from her feverish cheeks.

A figure was slowly approaching from the direction of the sleeping encampment. Tall, erect, and habited in a gray surtout, with a hood partially concealing its face, it was the counterfeit presentment of the ghostly visitant she had heard described. Thankful scarcely breathed. The brave little heart that had not quailed before the sentry's levelled musket a moment before now faltered and stood still, as the phantom with a slow and majestic tread moved toward her. She had only time to gain the shelter of a tree before the figure, majestically unconscious of her presence, passed slowly by. Through all her terror Thankful was still true to a certain rustic habit of practical perception to observe that the tread of the phantom was quite audible over the crust of snow, and was visible and palpable as the imprint of a military boot.

The blood came back to Thankful's cheek, and with it her old audacity. In another instant she was out from the tree, and tracking with a light feline tread the apparition that now loomed up the hill before her. Slipping from tree to tree, she followed until it passed before the door of a low hut or farm-shed that stood midway up the hill. Here it entered, and the door closed behind it. With every sense feverishly alert, Thankful, from the secure advantage of a large maple, watched the door of the hut. In a few moments it re-opened to the same figure free of its gray enwrappings. Forgetful of every thing now, but detecting the face of the impostor, the fearless girl left the tree, and placed herself directly in the path of the figure. At the same moment it turned toward her inquiringly, and the moonlight fell full upon the calm, composed features of Gen. Washington.

In her consternation Thankful could only drop an embarrassed courtesy, and hang out two lovely signals of distress in her cheeks. The face of the pseudo ghost alone remained unmoved.

"You are wandering late, Mistress Thankful," he said at last, with a paternal gravity; "and I fear that the formal restraint of a military household has already given you some embarrassment. Yonder sentry, for instance, might have stopped you."

"Oh, he did!" said Thankful quickly; "but it's all right, please your Excellency. He asked me *Who went there*, and I told him; and he was vastly polite, I assure you."

The grave features of the commander-in-chief relaxed in a smile. "You are more happy than most of your sex in turning a verbal compliment to practical account. For know then, dear young lady, that in honor of your visit to the headquarters, the password to-night through this encampment was none other than your own pretty patronymic—*Thankful Blossom*."

The tears glittered in the girl's eyes, and her lip trembled; but, with all her readiness of speech, she could only say, "Oh, your Excellency."

“Then you DID pass the sentry?” continued Washington, looking at her intently with a certain grave watchfulness in his gray eyes. “And doubtless you wandered at the river-bank. Although I myself, tempted by the night, sometimes extend my walk as far as yonder shed, it were a hazardous act for a young lady to pass beyond the protection of the line.”

“Oh! I met no one, your Excellency,” said the usually truthful Thankful hastily, rushing to her first lie with grateful impetuosity.

“And saw no one?” asked Washington quietly.

“No one,” said Thankful, raising her brown eyes to the general’s.

They both looked at each other—the naturally most veracious young woman in the colonies, and the subsequent allegorical impersonation of truth in America—and knew each other lied, and, I imagine, respected each other for it.

“I am glad to hear you say so, Mistress Thankful,” said Washington quietly; “for ’twould have been natural for you to have sought an interview with your recreant lover in yonder camp, though the attempt would have been unwise and impossible.”

“I had no such thought, your Excellency,” said Thankful, who had really quite forgotten her late intention; “yet, if with your permission I could hold a few moments’ converse with Capt. Brewster, it would greatly ease my mind.”

“’Twould not be well for the present,” said Washington thoughtfully. “But in a day or two Capt. Brewster will be tried by court-martial at Morristown. It shall be so ordered that when he is conveyed thither his guard shall halt at the Blossom Farm. I will see that the officer in command gives you an opportunity to see him. And I think I can promise also, Mistress Thankful, that your father shall be also present under his own roof, a free man.”

They had reached the entrance to the mansion, and entered the hall. Thankful turned impulsively, and kissed the extended hand of the commander. “You are so good! I have been so foolish—so very, very wrong,” she said, with a slight trembling of her lip. “And your Excellency believes my story; and those gentlemen were NOT spies, but even as they gave themselves to be.”

“I said not that much,” replied Washington with a kindly smile, “but no matter. Tell me rather, Mistress Thankful, how far your acquaintance with these gentlemen has gone; or did it end with the box on the ear that you gave the baron?”

“He had asked me to ride with him to the Baskingridge, and I—had said—yes,” faltered Mistress Thankful.

“Unless I misjudge you, Mistress Thankful, you can without great sacrifice promise me that you will not see him until I give you my permission,” said Washington, with grave playfulness.

The swinging light shone full in Thankful’s truthful eyes as she lifted them to his.

“I do,” she said quietly.

“Good-night,” said the commander, with a formal bow.

“Good-night, your Excellency.”

Chapter IV

The sun was high over the Short Hills when Mistress Thankful, the next day, drew up her sweating mare beside the Blossom Farm gate. She had never looked prettier, she had never felt more embarrassed, as she entered her own house. During her rapid ride she had already framed a speech of apology to Major Van Zandt, which, however, utterly fled from her lips as that officer showed himself respectfully on the threshold. Yet she permitted him to usurp the functions of the grinning Caesar, and help her from her horse; albeit she was conscious of exhibiting the awkward timidity of a bashful rustic, until at last, with a stammering, "Thank ye," she actually ran up stairs to hide her glowing face and far too conscious eyelids.

During the rest of that day Major Van Zandt quietly kept out of the way, without obtrusively seeming to avoid her. Yet, when they met casually in the performance of her household duties, the innocent Mistress Thankful noticed, under her downcast penitential eyelids, that the eyes of the officer followed her intently. And thereat she fell unconsciously to imitating him; and so they eyed each other furtively like cats, and rubbed themselves along the walls of rooms and passages when they met, lest they should seem designedly to come near each other, and enacted the gravest and most formal of genuflexions, courtesies, and bows, when they accidentally DID meet. And just at the close of the second day, as the elegant Major Van Zandt was feeling himself fast becoming a drivelling idiot and an awkward country booby, the arrival of a courier from headquarters saved that gentleman his self-respect forever.

Mistress Thankful was in her sitting-room when he knocked at her door. She opened it in sudden, conscious trepidation.

"I ask pardon for intruding, Mistress Thankful Blossom," he said gravely; "but I have here"—he held out a pretentious document— "a letter for you from headquarters. May I hope that it contains good news—the release of your father—and that it relieves you from my presence, and an espionage which I assure you cannot be more unpleasant to you than it has been to myself."

As he entered the room, Thankful had risen to her feet with the full intention of delivering to him her little set apology; but, as he ended his speech, she looked at him blankly, and burst out crying.

Of course he was in an instant at her side, and holding her cold little hand. Then she managed to say, between her tears, that she had been wanting to make an apology to him; that she had wanted to say ever since she arrived that she had been rude, very rude, and that she knew he never could forgive her; that she had been trying to say that she never could forget his gentle forbearance: "only," she added, suddenly raising her tear-fringed brown lids to the astonished man, "YOU WOULDN'T EVER LET ME!"

"Dear Mistress Thankful," said the major, in conscience-stricken horror, "if I have made myself distant to you, believe me it was only because I feared to intrude upon your sorrow. I really—dear Mistress Thankful—I—"

"When you took all the pains to go round the hall instead of through the dining-room, lest I should ask you to forgive me," sobbed Mistress Thankful, "I thought—you—must—hate me, and preferred to—"

"Perhaps this letter may mitigate your sorrow, Mistress Thankful," said the officer, pointing to the letter she still held unconsciously in her hand.

With a blush at her pre-occupation, Thankful opened the letter. It was a half-official document, and ran as follows:

> "The Commander-in-Chief is glad to inform Mistress Thankful Blossom that the charges preferred against her father have, upon fair examination, been found groundless and trivial. The Commander-in-Chief further begs to inform Mistress Blossom that the gentleman known to her under the name of the *Baron Pomposo* was his Excellency Don Juan Morales, Ambassador and Envoy Extraordinary of the Court of Spain, and that the gentleman known to her as the *Count Ferdinand* was Senor Godoy, Secretary to the Embassy. The Commander-in-Chief wishes to add that Mistress Thankful Blossom is relieved of any further obligation of hospitality toward these honorable gentlemen, as the Commander-in-Chief regrets to record the sudden and deeply-to-be-deplored death of his Excellency this morning by typhoid fever, and the possible speedy return of the Embassy.
>
> "In conclusion, the Commander-in-Chief wishes to bear testimony to the Truthfulness, Intuition, and Discretion of Mistress Thankful Blossom.
>
> "By order of his Excellency,
>
> "Gen. GEORGE WASHINGTON.
>
> "ALEX. HAMILTON, Secretary.
>
> "To Mistress THANKFUL BLOSSOM, of Blossom Farm."

Thankful Blossom was silent for a few moments, and then raised her abashed eyes to Major Van Zandt. A single glance satisfied her that he knew nothing of the imposture that had been practised upon her—knew nothing of the trap into which her vanity and self-will had led her.

"Dear Mistress Thankful," said the major, seeing the distress in her face, "I trust the news is not ill. Surely I gathered from the sergeant that—"

"What?" said Thankful, looking at him intently.

"That in twenty-four hours at furthest your father would be free, and that I should be relieved—"

"I know that you are a-weary of your task, major," said Thankful bitterly: "rejoice, then, to know your information is correct, and that my father is exonerated—unless—unless this is a forgery, and Gen. Washington should turn out to be somebody else, and YOU should turn out to be somebody else—" And she stopped short, and hid her wet eyes in the window-curtains.

"Poor girl!" said Major Van Zandt to himself. "This trouble has undoubtedly frenzied her. Fool that I was to lay up the insult of one that sorrow and excitement had bereft of reason and responsibility! 'Twere better I should retire at once, and leave her to herself," and the young man slowly retreated toward the door.

But at this moment there were alarming symptoms of distress in the window-curtain; and the major paused as a voice from its dimity depths said plaintively, "And YOU are going without forgiving *me!*"

"Forgive YOU, Mistress Thankful," said the major, striding to the curtain, and seizing a little hand that was obtruded from its folds,— "forgive you? rather can you forgive me for the folly—the cruelty of mistaking—of—of"—and here the major, hitherto famous for facile compliments, utterly broke down. But the hand he held was no longer cold, but warm and intelligent; and in default of coherent speech he held fast by that as the thread of his discourse, until Mistress Thankful quietly withdrew it, thanked him for his forgiveness, and retired deeper behind the curtain.

When he had gone, she threw herself in a chair, and again gave way to a passionate flood of tears. In the last twenty-four hours her pride had been utterly humbled: the independent spirit of this self-willed little beauty had met for the first time with defeat. When she had got over her womanly shock at the news of the sham baron's death, she had, I fear, only a selfish regard at his taking off; believing that if living he would in some way show the world—which just then consisted of the headquarters and Major Van Zandt—that he had really made love to her, and possibly did honorably love her still, and might yet give her an opportunity to reject him. And now he was dead, and she was held up to the world as the conceited plaything of a fine gentleman's masquerading sport. That her father's cupidity and ambition made him sanction the imposture, in her bitterness she never doubted. No! Lover, friend, father—all had been false to her, and the only kindness she had received was from the men she had wantonly insulted. Poor little Blossom! indeed, a most premature Blossom; I fear a most unthankful Blossom, sitting there shivering in the first chill wind of adversity, rocking backward and forward, with the skirt of her dimity short-gown over her shoulders, and her little buckled shoes and clocked stockings pathetically crossed before her.

But healthy youth is re-active; and in an hour or two Thankful was down at the cow-shed, with her arms around the neck of her favorite heifer, to whom she poured out much of her woes, and from whom she won an intelligent sort of slobbering sympathy. And then she sharply scolded Caesar for nothing at all, and a moment after returned to the house with the air and face of a deeply injured angel, who had been disappointed in some celestial idea of setting this world right, but was still not above forgiveness—a spectacle that sunk Major Van Zandt into the dark depths of remorse, and eventually sent him to smoke a pipe of Virginia with his men in the roadside camp; seeing which, Thankful went early to bed, and cried herself to sleep. And Nature possibly followed her example; for at sunset a great thaw set in, and by midnight the freed rivers and brooks were gurgling melodiously, and tree and shrub and fence were moist and dripping.

The red dawn at last struggled through the vaporous veil that hid the landscape. Then occurred one of those magical changes peculiar to the climate, yet perhaps pre-eminently notable during that historic winter and spring. By ten o'clock on that 3d of May, 1780, a fervent June-like sun had rent that vaporous veil, and poured its direct rays upon the gaunt and haggard profile of the Jersey hills. The chilled soil responded but feebly to that kiss; perhaps a few of the willows that yellowed the river-banks took on a deeper color. But the country folk

were certain that spring had come at last; and even the correct and self-sustained Major Van Zandt came running in to announce to Mistress Thankful that one of his men had seen a violet in the meadow. In another moment Mistress Thankful had donned her cloak and pattens to view this firstling of the laggard summer. It was quite natural that Major Van Zandt should accompany her as she tripped on; and so, without a thought of their past differences, they ran like very children down the moist and rocky slope that led to the quaggy meadow. Such was the influence of the vernal season.

But the violets were hidden. Mistress Thankful, regardless of the wet leaves and her new gown, groped with her fingers among the withered grasses. Major Van Zandt leaned against a bowlder, and watched her with admiring eyes.

"You'll never find flowers that way," she said at last, looking up to him impatiently. "Go down on your knees like an honest man. There are some things in this world worth stooping for."

The major instantly dropped on his knees beside her. But at that moment Mistress Thankful found her posies, and rose to her feet. "Stay where you are," she said mischievously, as she stooped down, and placed a flower in the lapel of his coat. "That is to make amends for my rudeness. Now get up."

But the major did not rise. He caught the two little hands that had seemed to flutter like birds against his breast, and, looking up into the laughing face above him, said, "Dear Mistress Thankful, dare I remind you of your own words, that *there be some things worth stooping for?* Think of my love, Mistress Thankful, as a flower—mayhap not as gracious to you as your violets, but as honest and—and—and—as—"

"Ready to spring up in a single night," laughed Thankful. "But no; get up, major! What would the fine ladies of Morristown say of your kneeling at the feet of a country girl—the play and sport of every fine gentleman? What if Mistress Bolton should see her own cavalier, the modish Major Van Zandt, proffering his affections to the disgraced sweetheart of a perjured traitor? Leave go my hand, I pray you, major—if you respect—"

She was free, yet she faltered a moment beside him, with tears quivering on her long brown lashes. Then she said tremulously, "Rise up, major. Let us think no more of this. I pray you forgive me, if I have again been rude."

The major struggled to rise to his feet. But he could not. And then I regret to have to record that the fact became obvious that one of his shapely legs was in a bog-hole, and that he was perceptibly sinking out of sight. Whereat Mistress Thankful trilled out a three-syllabled laugh, looked demure and painfully concerned at his condition, and then laughed again. The major joined in her mirth, albeit his face was crimson. And then, with a little cry of alarm, she flew to his side, and put her arms around him.

"Keep away, keep away, for Heaven's sake, Mistress Blossom," he said quickly, "or I shall plunge you into my mishap, and make you as ridiculous as myself."

But the quick-witted girl had already leaped to an adjacent bowlder. "Take off your sash," she said quickly; "fasten it to your belt, and throw it to me." He did so. She straightened herself back on the rock. "Now, all together," she cried, with a preliminary strain on the sash; and then the cords of her well-trained muscles stood out on her rounded arms, and, with a long pull and a strong pull and a pull

all together, she landed the major upon the rock. And then she laughed; and then, inconsistent as it may appear, she became grave, and at once proceeded to scrape him off, and rub him down with dried leaves, with fern-twigs, with her handkerchief, with the border of her mantle, as if he were a child, until he blushed with alternate shame and secret satisfaction.

They spoke but little on their return to the farm-house, for Mistress Thankful had again become grave. And yet the sun shone cheerily above them; the landscape was filled with the joy of resurrection and new and awakened life; the breeze whispered gentle promises of hope, and the fruition of their hopes in the summer to come. And these two fared on until they reached the porch, with a half-pleased, half-frightened consciousness that they were not the same beings who had left it a half-hour before.

Nevertheless at the porch Mistress Thankful regained something of her old audacity. As they stood together in the hall, she handed him back the sash she had kept with her. As she did so, she could not help saying, "There are some things worth stooping for, Major Van Zandt."

But she had not calculated upon the audacity of the man; and as she turned to fly she was caught by his strong arm, and pinioned to his side. She struggled, honestly I think, and perhaps more frightened at her own feelings than at his strength; but it is to be recorded that he kissed her in a moment of comparative yielding, and then, frightened himself, released her quickly, whereat she fled to her room, and threw herself panting and troubled upon her bed. For an hour or two she lay there, with flushed cheeks and conflicting thoughts. "He must never kiss me again," she said softly to herself, "unless"—but the interrupting thought said, "I shall die if he kiss me not again; and I never can kiss another." And then she was roused by a footstep upon the stair, which in that brief time she had learned to know and look for, and a knock at the door. She opened it to Major Van Zandt, white and so colorless as to bring out once more the faint red line made by her riding-whip two days before, as if it had risen again in accusation. The blood dropped out of her cheeks as she gazed at him in silence.

"An escort of dragoons," said Major Van Zandt slowly, and with military precision, "has just arrived, bringing with them one Capt. Allan Brewster, of the Connecticut Contingent, on his way to Morristown to be tried for mutiny and treason. A private note from Col. Hamilton instructs me to allow him to have a private audience with you—if YOU so wish it."

With a woman's swift and too often hopeless intuition, Thankful knew that this was not the sole contents of the letter, and that her relations with Capt. Brewster were known to the man before her. But she drew herself up a little proudly, and, turning her truthful eyes upon the major, said, "I DO so wish it."

"It shall be done as you desire, Mistress Blossom," returned the officer with cold politeness, as he turned upon his heel.

"One moment, Major Van Zandt," said Thankful swiftly.

The major turned quickly; but Thankful's eyes were gazing thoughtfully forward, and scarcely glanced at him. "I would prefer," she said timidly and hesitatingly, "that this interview should not take place under the roof where—where—where—my father lives. Half-way down the meadow there is a barn, and before it a broken

part of the wall, fronting on a sycamore-tree. HE will know where it is. Tell him I will see him there in half an hour."

A smile, which the major had tried to make a careless one, curled his lip satirically as he bowed in reply. "It is the first time," he said dryly, "that I believe I have been honored with arranging a tryst for two lovers; but believe me, Mistress Thankful, I will do my best. In half an hour I will turn my prisoner over to you."

In half an hour the punctual Mistress Thankful, with a hood hiding her pale face, passed the officer in the hall, on the way to her rendezvous. An hour later Caesar came with a message that Mistress Thankful would like to see him. When the major entered the sitting-room, he was shocked to find her lying pale and motionless on the sofa; but as the door closed she rose to her feet, and confronted him.

"I do not know," she said slowly, "whether you are aware that the man I just now parted from was for a twelvemonth past my sweetheart, and that I believed I loved him, and KNEW I was true to him. If you have not heard it, I tell you now, for the time will come when you will hear part of it from the lips of others, and I would rather you should take the whole truth from mine. This man was false to me. He betrayed two friends of mine as spies. I could have forgiven it, had it been only foolish jealousy; but it was, I have since learned from his own lips, only that he might gratify his spite against the commander-in-chief by procuring their arrest, and making a serious difficulty in the American camp, by means of which he hoped to serve his own ends. He told me this, believing that I sympathized with him in his hatred of the commander-in-chief, and in his own wrongs and sufferings. I confess to my shame, Major Van Zandt, that two days ago I did believe him, and that I looked upon you as a mere catch-poll or bailiff of the tyrant. That I found out how I was deceived when I saw the commander-in-chief, you, major, who know him so well, need not be told. Nor was it necessary for me to tell this man that he had deceived me: for I felt that—that—was—not—the—only reason—why I could no longer return—his love."

She paused, as the major approached her earnestly, and waved him back with her hand. "He reproached me bitterly with my want of feeling for his misfortunes," she went on again: "he recalled my past protestations; he showed me my love-letters; and he told me that if I were still his true sweetheart I ought to help him. I told him if he would never call me by that name again; if he would give up all claim to me; if he would never speak, write to me, nor see me again; if he would hand me back my letters—I would help him." She stopped: the blood rushed into her pale face. "You will remember, major, that I accepted this man's love as a young, foolish, trustful girl; but when I made him this offer—he—he accepted it."

"The dog!" said Major Van Zandt. "But in what way could you help this double traitor?"

"I HAVE helped him," said Thankful quietly.

"But how?" said Major Van Zandt.

"By becoming a traitor myself," she said, turning upon him almost fiercely. "Hear me! While you were quietly pacing these halls, while your men were laughing and talking in the road, Caesar was saddling my white mare, the fleetest in the country. He led her to the lane below. That mare is now two miles away, with Capt. Brewster on her back. Why do you not start, major? Look at me. I am a

traitor, and this is my bribe;" and she drew a package of letters from her bosom, and flung them on the table.

She had been prepared for an outbreak or exclamation from the man before her, but not for his cold silence. "Speak," she cried at last, passionately. "Speak! Open your lips, if only to curse me! Order in your men to arrest me. I will proclaim myself guilty, and save your honor. But only speak!"

"May I ask," said Major Van Zandt coldly, "why you have twice honored me with a blow?"

"Because I loved you; because, when I first saw you I saw the only man that was my master, and I rebelled; because, when I found I could not help but love you, I knew I never had loved before, and I would wipe out with one stroke all the past that rose in judgment against me; because I would not have you ever confronted with one endearing word of mine that was not meant for you."

Major Van Zandt turned from the window where he had stood, and faced the girl with sad resignation. "If I have in my foolishness, Mistress Thankful, shown you how great was your power over me, when you descended to this artifice to spare my feelings by confessing your own love for me, you should have remembered that you were doing that which forever kept me from wooing or winning you. If you had really loved me your heart, as a woman's, would have warned you against that which my heart, as a gentleman's, has made a law of honor; when I tell you, as much for the sake of relieving your own conscience as for the sake of justifying mine, that if this man, a traitor, my prisoner, and your recognized lover, had escaped from my custody without your assistance, connivance, or even knowledge, I should have deemed it my duty to forsake you until I caught him, even if we had been standing before the altar."

Thankful heard him, but only as a strange voice in the distance, as she stood with fixed eyes, and breathless, parted lips before him. Yet even then I fear that, womanlike, she did not comprehend his rhetoric of honor, but only caught here and there a dull, benumbing idea that he despised her, and that in her effort to win his love she had killed it, and ruined him forever.

"If you think it strange," continued the major, "that, believing as I do, I stand here only to utter moral axioms when my duty calls me to pursue your lover, I beg you to believe that it is only for your sake. I wish to allow a reasonable time between your interview with him, and his escape, that shall save you from any suspicion of complicity. Do not think," he added with a sad smile, as the girl made an impatient step toward him, "do not think I am running any risk. The man cannot escape. A cordon of pickets surrounds the camp for many miles. He has not the countersign, and his face and crime are known."

"Yes," said Thankful eagerly, "but a part of his own regiment guards the Baskingridge road."

"How know you this?" said the major, seizing her hand.

"He told me."

Before she could fall on her knees, and beg his forgiveness, he had darted from the room, given an order, and returned with cheeks and eyes blazing.

"Hear me," he said rapidly, taking the girl's two hands, "you know not what you've done. I forgive you. But this is no longer a matter of duty, but my personal

honor. I shall pursue this man alone. I shall return with him, or not at all. Farewell. God bless you!"

But before he reached the door she caught him again. "Only say you have forgiven me once more."

"I do."

"Guert!"

There was something in the girl's voice more than this first utterance of his Christian name, that made him pause.

"I told—a—lie—just—now. There is a fleeter horse in the stable than my mare; 'tis the roan filly in the second stall."

"God bless you!"

He was gone. She waited to hear the clatter of his horse's hoofs in the roadway. When Caesar came in a few moments later, to tell the news of Capt. Brewster's escape, the room was empty; but it was soon filled again by a dozen turbulent troopers.

"Of course she's gone," said Sergeant Tibbitts: "the jade flew with the captain."

"Ay, 'tis plain enough. Two horses are gone from the stable besides the major's," said Private Hicks.

Nor was this military criticism entirely a private one. When the courier arrived at headquarters the next morning, it was to bring the report that Mistress Thankful Blossom, after assisting her lover to escape had fled with him. "The renegade is well off our hands," said Gen. Sullivan gruffly: "he has saved us the public disgrace of a trial. But this is bad news of Major Van Zandt."

"What news of the major?" asked Washington quickly.

"He pursued the vagabond as far as Springfield, killing his horse, and falling himself insensible before Major Merton's quarters. Here he became speedily delirious, fever supervened, and the regimental surgeon, after a careful examination, pronounced his case one of small-pox."

A whisper of horror and pity went around the room. "Another gallant soldier, who should have died leading a charge, laid by the heels by a beggar's filthy distemper," growled Sullivan. "Where will it end?"

"God knows," said Hamilton. "Poor Van Zandt! But whither was he sent—to the hospital?"

"No: a special permit was granted in his case; and 'tis said he was removed to the Blossom Farm—it being remote from neighbors—and the house placed under quarantine. Abner Blossom has prudently absented himself from the chances of infection, and the daughter has fled. The sick man is attended only by a black servant and an ancient crone; so that, if the poor major escapes with his life or without disfigurement, pretty Mistress Bolton of Morristown need not be scandalized or jealous."

Chapter V

The ancient crone alluded to in the last chapter had been standing behind the window-curtains of that bedroom which had been Thankful Blossom's in the

weeks gone by. She did not move her head, but stood looking demurely, after the manner of ancient crones, over the summer landscape. For the summer had come before the tardy spring was scarce gone, and the elms before the window no longer lisped, but were eloquent in the softest zephyrs. There was the flash of birds in among the bushes, the occasional droning of bees in and out the open window, and a perpetually swinging censer of flower incense rising from below. The farm had put on its gayest bridal raiment; and looking at the old farm-house shadowed with foliage and green with creeping vines, it was difficult to conceive that snow had ever lain on its porches, or icicles swung from its mossy eaves.

"Thankful!" said a voice still tremulous with weakness.

The ancient crone turned, drew aside the curtains, and showed the sweet face of Thankful Blossom, more beautiful even in its paleness.

"Come here, darling," repeated the voice.

Thankful stepped to the sofa whereon lay the convalescent Major Van Zandt.

"Tell me, sweetheart," said the major, taking her hand in his, "when you married me, as you told the chaplain, that you might have the right to nurse me, did you never think that if death spared me I might be so disfigured that even you, dear love, would have turned from me with loathing?"

"That was why I did it, dear," said Thankful mischievously. "I knew that the pride, and the sense of honor, and self-devotion of some people, would have kept them from keeping their promises to a poor girl."

"But, darling," continued the major, raising her hand to his lips, "suppose the case had been reversed: suppose you had taken the disease, that I had recovered without disfigurement, but that this sweet face—"

"I thought of that too," interrupted Thankful. "Well, what would you have done, dear?" said the major, with his old mischievous smile.

"I should have died," said Thankful gravely.

"But how?"

"Somehow. But you are to go to sleep, and not ask impertinent and frivolous questions; for father is coming to-morrow."

"Thankful, dear, do you know what the trees and the birds said to me as I lay there tossing with fever?"

"No, dear."

"Thankful Blossom! Thankful Blossom! Thankful Blossom is coming!"

"Do you know what I said, sweetheart, as I lifted your dear head from the ground when you reeled from your horse just as I overtook you at Springfield?"

"No, dear."

"There are some things in life worth stooping for."

And she winged this Parthian arrow home with a kiss.