



# *The Phantom Drummer*

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North American

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Colonel Howell, of the king's troops, was a gay fellow, framed to make women false; but when he met the rosy, sweet-natured daughter of farmer Jarrett, near Valley Forge, he attempted no dalliance, for he fell too seriously in love. He might not venture into the old man's presence, for Jarrett had a son with Washington, and he hated a red-coat as he did the devil; but the young officer met the girl in secret, and they plighted troth beneath the garden trees, hidden in gray mist. As Howell bent to take his first kiss that night, a rising wind went past, bringing from afar the roll of a drum, and as they talked the drum kept drawing nearer, until it seemed at hand. The officer peered across the wall, then hurried to his mistress' side, as pale as death. The fields outside were empty of life.

Louder came the rattling drum; it seemed to enter the gate, pass but a yard away, go through the wall, and die in the distance. When it ceased, Howell started as if a spell had been lifted, laxed his grip on the maiden's hand, then drew her to his breast convulsively. Ruth's terror was more vague but no less genuine than his own, and some moments passed before she could summon voice to ask him what this visitation meant. He answered, "Something is about to change my fortunes for good or ill; probably for ill. Important events in my family for the past three generations have been heralded by that drum, and those events were disasters oftener than benefits." Few more words passed, and with another kiss the soldier scaled the wall and galloped away, the triple beat of his charger's hoofs sounding back into the maiden's ears like drum-taps. In a skirmish next

day Colonel Howell was shot. He was carried to farmer Jarrett's house and left there, in spite of the old man's protest, for he was willing to give no shelter to his country's enemies. When Ruth saw her lover in this strait she was like to have fallen, but when she learned that it would take but a few days of quiet and care to restore him to health, she was ready to forgive her fellow-countrymen for inflicting an injury that might result in happiness for both of them.

It took a great deal of teasing to overcome the scruples of the farmer, but he gruffly consented to receive the young man until his hurt should heal. Ruth attended him faithfully, and the cheerful, manly nature of the officer so won the farmer's heart that he soon forgot the color of Howell's coat. Nor was he surprised when Howell told him that he loved his daughter and asked for her hand; indeed, it had been easy to guess their affection, and the old man declared that but for his allegiance to a tyrant he would gladly own him as a son-in-law. It was a long struggle between love and duty that ensued in Howell's breast, and love was victor. If he might marry Ruth he would leave the army. The old man gave prompt consent, and a secret marriage was arranged. Howell had been ordered to rejoin his regiment; he could not honorably resign on the eve of an impending battle, and, even had he done so, a long delay must have preceded his release. He would marry the girl, go to the country, live there quietly until the British evacuated Philadelphia, when he would return and cast his lot with the Jarrett household.

Howell donned citizen's dress, and the wedding took place in the spacious best room of the mansion, but as he slipped the ring on the finger of his bride the roll of a drum was heard advancing up the steps into the room, then on and away until all was still again. The young colonel was pale; Ruth clung to him in terror; clergymen and guests looked at each other in amazement. Now there were voices at the porch, the door was flung open, armed men entered, and the bridegroom was a prisoner. He was borne to his quarters, and afterward tried for desertion, for a servant in the Jarrett household, hating all English and wishing them to suffer, even at each other's hands, had betrayed the plan of his master's guest. The court-martial found him guilty and condemned him to be shot. When the execution took place, Ruth, praying and sobbing in her chamber, knew that her husband was no more. The distant sound of musketry reverberated like the roll of a drum.

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