

FLORENCE PARKER SIMISTER

GIRL WITH A MUSKET



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GIRL WITH A MUSKET

"Will you remember, then," he asked, "that I will be here in my blacksmith shop if ever you want me? Will you remember that I love you? Will you remember that through all this war, through whatever it is you will do?"

"I will remember," Anne promised, and looked for a long time into his kind blue eyes.

Eighteen-year-old Anne is faced with two choices: enter into the security of a happy marriage like the other young ladies around her, or fulfill her patriotic desire to fight for her country. Posing as a young man, she enlists in the United States Army and joins the fight for freedom amid harsh conditions, dangerous missions, and even betrayal. Through it all, Anne learns valuable lessons of love, courage, and the true meaning of patriotism. Will Anne's secret identity keep her safe, or will betrayal and the need to survive put her in harm's way?

Based on a true story, *Girl with a Musket* is a treasure that will be enjoyed for years to come.


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Chapter One

“No,” Anne Saunders repeated, and shook her head to emphasize the point. “No, Sam, I will not marry you.”

She could feel his eyes searching her face for some sign of weakening. Then he dropped them to the hand bill he had brought her announcing the occupation of Newport to the British. He looked at the piece of paper as if that were the reason for her refusal. Finally, his eyes met hers again.

“I always thought,” he said softly, “that you would someday be my wife.”

“I never meant you to understand that,” Anne protested.

“But, Anne, you walked with me, rode with me, talked with me...”

Anne broke in, “Oh, Sam, yes, I talked with you, I walked with you, I rode with you, and if I become your wife, we would do that all our lives. That would be safe and pleasant, I know.”

“I would try to make your life secure,” Sam said. Then he added quickly before she could speak, “Besides, you would have your own house, your own things, different from the way you live now.”

“Yes,” she said, “it is tempting, what you offer me. But there is more to life than that.” She tapped the handbill on the table. “And more than this little town.” Her voice became intense. “I

want more, do you hear? I want more from life than that!”

“More?” Sam asked. He came forward to the table. His long, thin body was tense. His large hands rolled and rerolled the brim of his hat. His gentle, plain face was flushed. “What more is there in life than love and peace?” he asked.

“But there is no peace!” Anne flung his words back at him. “We are fighting a war! The Redcoats have just taken Newport. And love—well, that has to wait in time of war.” She put a hand on Sam’s arm. “Sam,” she said pleadingly, “all my life I worked for others, did for others. I was only ten when I came here to the Brownes’ to work. I don’t blame my aunt for sending me out; she couldn’t keep an orphan any longer. For eight years now I have worked for the Brownes and had to scheme to get a bit of learning for myself. Now they allow me to use the parlor as a school, but a dame school is of no importance in these times. There is a war being waged, a revolution, and I want to be a part of it! Teaching children isn’t part of it.” Softly she added, “You are a good man, Sam, but marrying you isn’t part of it, either.”

“What is then?” asked Sam.

Before Anne could answer, the sound of a fife and drum drifted to them from the far end of the common on which the house stood.

“Another band of soldiers leaving,” said Anne. “That’s a part of it, Sam! Oh, what I would give to be going. What I would give!”

As the fife and drum became louder, she went to the window. A small group of men marched down the road past the house. They carried old muskets and powder horns taken from over the mantles of their homes. They wore breeches and leather aprons and waistcoats and hunting shirts.

“Soldiers!” snorted Sam behind her. “They look no more like soldiers than...”

Anne whirled on him. “What does it matter what they wear?” she cried. “They are patriots!”

Sam interrupted. “I am a patriot, too,” he said in a voice that was not quite angry but was gruff with emotion. “You forget, Anne, that I offered my services. I wanted to enlist, but they refused me because I make bayonets in my blacksmith shop. They need bayonets just as they need the paper from Mr. Brownes’ mill to wrap the cartridges. These are weapons of war!” He stopped abruptly. He looked as if he were sorry for his outburst.

“Very well,” said Anne. “You are exempted from fighting because you make bayonets. Mr. Browne is exempted because he manufactures paper. But I am not exempted for keeping a dame school, and I wish I were going off to battle!”

Anne changed the tone of her voice. “What can women do?” she asked mournfully “What share can we take in the war except to work the farms and spin and do men’s chores where needed?” Her voice was full of passion again. “Mrs. Brownes’ only son, her only child, was killed at Lexington, and all she can do is sit and knit socks for the soldiers. Am I to be condemned to that, too? Oh, how I wish I were going off to battle!”

Sam seized her wrist. “I wish you were going to marry me, Anne,” he said in the most desperate tone Anne had ever heard him use.

Stubbornly she shook her head.

“Will you remember, then,” he asked, “that I will be here in my blacksmith shop if ever you want me? Will you remember that I love you? Will you remember that through all this war,

through whatever it is you will do?”

“I will remember,” Anne promised, and looked for a long time into his kind blue eyes.

Quickly then he leaned over and brushed his lips against the cap she wore on her hair, turned on his heel, and left the house.

Anne stood there alone in the room, thinking of Sam Prentice, blacksmith, the man she had gone to watch at his father’s forge when she first came to this town of Brownes’ Mill. She had been a child of ten then, Sam about fifteen. He had taught her so much. He had talked to her of books and book learning. He had suggested the idea of starting a school and had persuaded Mrs. Browne to let her do it. Sam would make a steady husband, thought Anne. He had offered her a place she could call home for the first time in her life, her own house, her own things. It was a safe and sure life, but it had nothing to do with the war for independence.

She heard running footsteps and turned again to the window. A boy, hardly more than thirteen or fourteen, carrying a musket whose weight seemed more than he could manage, ran down the road after the group that had just passed.

Going to Providence to enlist, thought Anne. The size of him! Why, I’m bigger than he is. If he can fight, why can’t I? She gasped at the thought that struck her. Why couldn’t I fight, if I were dressed in a man’s clothes?

Her knees began to shake at the boldness of the idea. She sank into a chair and thought about it. There were all of young Robert Brownes’ clothes upstairs in his room, all the things he left behind when he went off to war. They would fit her fairly well, no doubt, but would she look like a boy in them?

As soon as this question occurred to Anne, she climbed the