

Thanksgiving Blues

by Tanaquific

"Heather, sweetheart, thank you." Gail took the pile of afghans Heather had brought for the latest drive outside City Hall. "Are you sure you don't need these yourself?"

Heather shook her head. "I've still got another dozen. My mom used knit them."

"Well, these are real pretty." Gail shook one out to look at it. "Your mom did beautiful work."

"Yes, she did." Heather watched Gail refold the blankets. It was a wrench to let them go—she'd spent several hours picking them over and deciding which ones to keep—but other people needed them more than she did.

"I'll be sure to let people know where they came from." Gail smiled at her. As Heather began to turn away, Gail added, "Oh, honey, I'm glad I caught you. I never really got to thank you for making ice when Johnston was sick. April told me without it he might not have lasted until the boys got back."

Heather wrapped her arms around herself and blushed. "I just did what I could...."

Much good it had done her. Jake had barely spoken two words to her since he returned from Rogue River. If that wasn't a clear message that she'd misread the signals and he wasn't interested, she didn't know what was.

She pulled herself up sharply. She hadn't done it for Jake, or to get Jake. She'd done it for Mayor Green. Because he was a good man, and a nice man, the town needed him. And for Mrs Green, because she'd been married nearly forty years, and she clearly loved her husband the way Heather's mom had loved Heather's dad.

"Anyway," Gail reached out and squeezed Heather's arm, "I know you don't have any family in Jericho, so we thought you might like to spend Thanksgiving with us."

Heather gaped at her. The first thought that flashed through her head was that Jake would think she didn't know when to back off. He might even think she'd invited herself—dropping enough hints that his mother had taken pity on her—so she could throw herself at him again.

"T-that's..." Heather took a deep breath and tried to pull herself together and stop stuttering. "That's very kind of you, Mrs Green., but...." But what? She couldn't just turn her down flat. She certainly couldn't tell her the real reason why she couldn't accept. Perhaps she could pretend someone else had already invited her? Though this was Jericho: better not be too specific, the way stuff got back to people. "I, uh, I already had an invitation...."

"Oh, well, that's nice." Gail patted her arm and smiled at her. "Just as long as you're not going to be on your own. You change your mind, you just let me know."

"I will." Heather gave her an awkward smile and backed away.

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She spent most of the day curled up on the couch under one her mom's afghans, with a book of

crossword puzzles she'd bought just before the bombs and had been saving for a special occasion. The afghan was comforting, but the crossword puzzles didn't quite keep her mind from drifting now and then to wondering what things must be like at the Greens'.

When it grew dark, she lit a couple of candles and ate the dinner she'd slow-cooked in the embers around the fire: a homemade turkey hamburger and vegetables, baked together in foil, and strips of roasted pumpkin, since a pie was pretty much out of the question.

As she sat back down after fetching the pumpkin, her gaze fell on the pictures of her parents that stood on the shelves. "Guess I should be thankful you packed me off to Girl Scout Camp so I could learn to cook stuff like this, huh?" She waved a forkful of pumpkin at the pictures.

She talked to the pictures quite often. Before the bombs, she'd told them stories about what her students had gotten up to, or about hikes along the river, or about working on Charlotte. She'd imagined her dad being all full of suggestions and questions about the truck, and her mom giving her recipes for the plants she'd seen on her walks. After the attacks, she told them about finding gas for the clinic, and about those poor people out at Bass Lake, and how she'd made ice for Johnston Green. Folks'd probably think she was crazy if they knew, but she reckoned Mom and Dad would understand.

And since this was Thanksgiving....

She put down her fork and pushed her plate away a little so she could clasp her hands together on the table. It had been a family tradition when she was growing up for them to go round the table and say what each of them was thankful for. This year, more than ever, it seemed like traditions were important.

She smiled at the pictures. "So. I guess I should start off by being thankful I'm still alive, shouldn't I?" She sighed. "And I miss you guys, but I'm thankful you're not over in New Bern worrying about me stuck over here. And here's not so bad, you know: they're good people, and we'll pull through. From what Mr Anderson says, things are a lot worse out there. So I guess I'm thankful I'm here in Jericho."

Heather picked up her fork again and tasted the pumpkin. She pulled a face: it was edible, so she'd eat it—because these days you didn't waste food—but it didn't taste so great. Maybe she had some chocolate sauce left somewhere to put on it.

As she poked around the kitchen cupboards, she wondered what Gail was feeding her family. She bet whatever it was, it tasted good; Gail had a reputation as a really good cook, and her pies and cakes had been quickly snapped up at the bake sale last Independence Day.

Coming back into the main room with a squeeze bottle of sauce that she hoped to persuade some more out of, her gaze fell on her parents' pictures again. She sighed. There was something else she needed to tell them, though she'd been putting it off.

Concentrating on taking the cap off the squeeze bottle so she could get the last scrapings out with a knife, she muttered. "Another thing. That guy I met? The one I told you about? Well, it didn't really work out." She shrugged one shoulder and smiled wryly. "Not the first time, huh? So don't worry about me. I'll survive."

Disclaimer: These stories are based on the Junction Entertainment/Fixed Mark Productions/CBS Paramount Television series *Jericho*. They were written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from them nor was any infringement of copyright intended.