

was unusually fine; as soft and warm almost as a day in June. The air was clear and mild. There had already been frost and snow, but these had disappeared for some days. Many were disappointed for there would be no Christmas sleigh rides. In fact it seemed as if winter had taken an early leave, desirous of permitting the virgin spring to bring garlands of real flowers to decorate Christmas trees instead of the artificial ones so often used. As it was, wild flowers could be found here and there in certain spots, and laughing children could be seen gathering little bunches of these, delighted with their occupation.

Early in the afternoon of that day I left the house again, and took my way thoughtfully along until I reached my favorite rock-seat on the hill. I had not been there for some time, and I found this place of retirement now very enjoyable. I was followed as usual by Carlo our trusty dog, who, in his delight, kept running backwards and forwards and up and down the hill while I toiled rather slowly to the summit. I was never more charmed with the scene from this elevation than I was at that time. The air was balmy and refreshing, and there was a quietude which was most soothing. Not a sound could be heard save at times the shouting of boys at play; their light hearts knew nothing of sorrow. Most of them were no doubt anticipating presents from Santa Claus on the morrow; and for days past children had been talking of that quaint little visitor, and watching for his return, as if they soon expected to see him in his furs and vehicle coursing down to them on a moonbeam.

I had sat there for some hours thinking mostly of the past as usual, and was preparing to leave for home, when I heard shouting again, and on looking down I saw a number of little boys run across a field towards the road, for something new had attracted their attention. I watched in that direction and saw an apparently old man on the road below which ran close to the foot of the hill. He was bent and used a crutch. I noticed that he had but one leg, and he went along very slowly. He must have got off the stage at the near cross-roads tavern, or

it might be he had come from there. He wore a broad brimmed hat and a long grey coat, and he had a large bundle strapped on his back which led me to think he was a pedlar. Some of the younger boys may have thought that he was the veritable Santa Claus himself. Indeed at this particular season he might be taken by children to be the effigy of that mythical individual. The older boys went close to him, but I noticed that several of the little lads kept back as if afraid to venture nearer. The old man stopped to rest, and was evidently making some inquiries, and then when I saw two or three of the boys point directly towards our house, it immediately struck me that this was likely Anna Strong's visitor on his way to see us. Deciding to go down and meet him I started at once and got to where he stood looking about him like one pleased with the beautiful landscape spread around. Carlo barked at the stranger before we overtook him, but when the man heard the dog he looked at him for a moment or two, gave a low whistle and patted him on the head, and Carlo, though rather shy towards strangers, wagged his tail, became quite subdued as if in sympathy with the infirm old man, and followed close after him as we went along.

Ah me, what a wreck was this poor creature! This, I thought, is no doubt the old wounded soldier that Anna said would visit us. She had not exaggerated in describing his appearance. To say he was a poor broken soldier would give but a frail idea of what he really was. He had but one leg and one eye, and his left hand was turned inwards, having stiffened in that direction in consequence of a severe wound. His jaw had evidently been broken, his mouth someway torn and distorted, and one side of his face was blackened and disfigured as if a whole charge of powder had entered and lodged there, destroying also his eye.

When we met he looked at me intently for some moments, and then without saying a word or asking my name, he handed me a few lines written by Anna. She informed me that the bearer was the person who had been with them for some time, that as his health had improved a little he had decided on paying his