

—you shall not tell. Oh, my poor boy! my dear boy! I know you have enlisted. I knew it when you first came home!”

II.

The crimson panorama was comfortably folded away at last from our sensitive sight. The disbanded armies and the disbanded lives had dispersed as best they might. The silken battle-flags, splashed and rent, were esthetically draped in the State Houses, and still pointed out to rural visitors on a pleasant Saturday afternoon. The birds sang shrilly in the great cemeteries at Arlington, at Gettysburg, and the rest. The old uniform was cut over to make a coat for the boy. Men had learned to pass the red cap of the messenger without touching their own. Women had already dared to scold the saved soldier, for whose life they would have sold their souls. The crape was worn out and the tears were dry. It was beginning to be too much to ask of one to follow the procession on Decoration Day. It was ten years after the war.

It was wearing to the end of a November day, and a poor sort of day even at that. The wind had blown from the east for forty-eight hours, and was rising still. The trees objected heavily to this fact with groaning bare boughs, and in these little suburban places there seemed to be a dismal superfluity of trees. They stood about forlornly in rows, like veterans who were no longer wanted. Now that the elm and maple leaves lay crushing paralytically under foot, or whirled hysterically over head and athwart through the gray air, of what use was all this gauntness of outline and tenacity of existence, except to drip into one's eyes and make the houses damp?

It was going to rain when it could make up its mind to. No one stayed out of doors who could help it. The pedestrians were few out here in these wide spaces. The afternoon drives were over.

The fat horses had bowled the carriages away to the luxurious stables. Ladies prattled shivering within, and ordered the parlor fire lighted. The gentlemen had come earlier, and crosser, than usual from their business. The lap-dogs sat in the bay-windows, occupying crimson cushions and wearing bows to match. The horse-car on the long single track made the chief sign of motion in the windy dusk, unless one noticed the milkman or had a personal stake involved in the coming of the evening express. Even the leaves had the air of trying to get indoors, and the whirls of dust wore a dejected look, as of objects dependent on private charity for shelter.

It was no night, it was no place, for a peddler, as anybody but a peddler would have known. The poor fellow who came toiling on behind the half-past five Scotch-plaid horse-car, which had stopped to let off the stout gentleman at the large, high-art green house that stood back from the streets, looked as if he would have shown more discouragement if he had been more used to hope. He walked most wearily, and as one observed him one might have seen that it was the weariness of disease, which differs from that of healthy fatigue with a kind of distinction that the well cannot perceive. He had a little bag or knapsack strapped across his shoulders in any easy way, as if they were well used to it; he bore it, indeed, with a certain grace. He had the figure of a man who would have walked erect if he had been well. He was tall and well put together. He had a pair of fine blue eyes, but these no comfortable person would have cared to examine, for fear that he should remember them: would have gone on, perhaps, as the stout gentleman did, whistling down an uneasy sense that he had seen the saddest thing yet in the whole November landscape.

“I might try it myself,” said the peddler, pausing before the high-art green house. That house was a novelty then,