ANDREW PENNELL sat in an armchair on the wide veranda of his old-fashioned house, holding a pair of battered field glasses to his dim eyes. Beyond the broad stretch of lawn and roadway was the Public Square, in the center of which stood the Town Hall so bunting-swathed and flag-bedecked as to be almost hidden from view. As far as Andrew could see, Old Glory held full sway. Things moving and things immovable attested the enthusiasm with which Pinckneyville was prepared to observe the day of mourning for her patriotic dead.

It was not at the flags and bunting that Andrew gazed with longing eyes; it was at the groups of blue-clad veterans passing in and out of the Hall or gathered in little knots near the Marshal of the Day. Andrew knew every veteran in every group, and he knew by heart the stories each man had to tell. Andrew had known those stories in their infancy; had been present at the various stages of their development from mere incidents to marvelous, hair-breadth escapes on gory battlefields. Moreover, so zealously had he participated in the reminiscence orgies of the veterans, that he had come to believe implicitly in the stories as they were told after years of culture by innocent old egoists.

Perhaps it was Andrew’s unflagging interest and warmth of belief that made him so general a favorite with “the boys” of Lincoln Post—on three hundred and sixty-four days in the year. On the three hundred and sixty-fifth day, however, he was distinctly an alien and a man apart, for the three hundred and sixty-fifth day was Decoration Day, the day that belonged to veterans, living and dead—and Andrew was not a veteran. He alone of all of his friends had not shouldered a musket when the long-ago call to arms had come.

Sarah Pennell, bright-faced and energetic, pattered out of the house:

“Why, Andrew, ain’t you ready yet? I told Jim to be at the corner of the Town Hall with the horses at ten o’clock. First thing you know the p’rade will begin to form.”

Andrew answered without turning his head: “I ain’t a-goin’ to dress an’ I ain’t a-goin’ to the p’rade, an’ more, I ain’t a-goin’ to the exercises.”

“Andrew Pennell, how you talk! Not goin’ to the exercises when they’re goin’ to present Dan Ellison with that flag us wimmen been workin’ on for three long months, an’ when Dan’s the best friend you ever had an’ him comin’ here for the first time in twenty years?”
THE MAN WHO STAYED AT HOME

Andrew turned now with pained defiance in his eyes: "I ain't a-goin'," he reiterated stubbornly, "I reckon Dan won't miss me none; he'll be too busy admirin' his flag an' talkin' over war times with the boys."

Sarah gave a disdainful little sniff: "War times indeed! Dan Ellison'd rather see you than any man in Pinckneyville. He ain't forgot what you done for him—I'll wager that."

Andrew shook his head slowly but without bitterness: "I didn't do anything for Dan to remember all this long time. Dan's a big man now—he's been in Congress an' in the Senate for years, an' he ain't got time to remember plain folks like me."

"S-sh!" warned Sarah, and even as she gave the warning Andrew's sister-in-law marched gloomily out of the door. One look into Ellen Pennell's face accounted for caution where she was concerned. There were little mean lines around her little mean eyes, and there were deep creases that seemed to fasten the drooping corners of her mouth to some indefinite button beneath the chin.

"Loitering, as usual," she snapped. "One would think that on this day, dedicated to our sainted dead, you could at least be on time."

Sarah squared herself to shield Andrew from Ellen's sharp gaze: "We ain't goin', Ellen; Andrew don't seem to be feelin' real well. You can fill up the carriage with your friends if you like."

"Sulking, you mean," said Ellen scornfully. "Andrew can't stand it to have it bore in on him that it ain't fitting for the man who staid home to put himself on an equal footing with the man who answered his country's call and went to the front. I'd rather my Sam'd be lying out there in the Soldiers' Circle as he has all these years, than to feel he was cowardly enough to stay at home."

Andrew shrank as though from a blow, and Ellen hurried rather breathlessly away. This was the first time she had ever quite dared to put her thought into words, and the look in her usually gentle sister-in-law's face made even the redoubtable Ellen quail.

"Sarah," said Andrew piteously, "I ain't sure but what Ellen's right. Late years I've got to thinkin' more an' more that mebbe I was really afraid to go to war and just made it seem like my duty to stay home. Like as not the folks would have got along all right; others did." His voice quavered and broke: "Sarah, when I see the boys all dressed up in their uniforms an' think how brave they was, it makes me feel—ashamed."

"It makes me feel that way, too," said Sarah promptly—"ashamed to think they set such store by themselves. And as for Ellen, I'd like to know what her an' her three children would have done if you had gone chasin' off at the drop of the hat like Sam did."
THE MAN WHO STAID AT HOME

The loud shriek of a siren horn heralded the approach of a huge red touring car that whirled around the corner and came to an abrupt stop at Andrew’s gate.

Instantly all grievances were forgotten. “It’s Dan!” they cried in unison, and with one accord they hastened down the path to meet the heavy-set, powerful-looking man who carried his years as lightly as he carried his weight.

“Could not think of going by without stopping to say ‘Hello!’ Andrew, the sight of you is good for sore eyes; Sarah, you’re looking fine—you must have found the spring of perpetual youth. Yes, it’s been a long time, and yet now that I see you it seems only yesterday. Forgot you?” He put his hand on Andrew’s shoulder and looked deep into the tear-filled eyes. “There are some things a man never forgets. I ought to have written, I know, but one gets tangled up in the rush of things. I’m in the Senate, now, you know, and somehow the days go by too fast to count. By the way, Sarah, what’s all this about a big silk flag?”

“You’ve heard about it?” Sarah gasped. “That was to be a surprise.”

“I just heard a rumor. Out with it, Sarah. I won’t tell.”

“Long as you’ve heard so much I can’t see as there’s any harm in my telling it all. Pinckneyville wanted to do something out of the usual in honor of you, so the ladies of the town made a silk flag to be presented to the member of Lincoln Post who is voted at the exercises today as the man most worthy because of his bravery during the war.” She gave a pleased little laugh. “You was elected a member last meeting, so I reckon you can guess who’ll get the flag.”

“I don’t deserve it,” he remarked gravely; then he smiled. “But I can readily see that a fight will be started which will eventually wipe out the Post unless that flag is captured and taken out of town. Now I must run on. You’ll be at the exercises, of course.”

Andrew looked down. “I ain’t aimin’ to go,” he said in low tones.

The Senator would have protested, but Sarah spoke up quickly: “We ain’t either of us goin’, Dan, but we’ll be awful glad to have you drop in this afternoon.” Her eyes twinkled. “You’ll get to see Ellen then.”

“Ellen? Is she still with you? And has she changed?”

“Not a mite.”

“Well, you know whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and if Ellen’s like she used to be she’s a good deal of a scourge. But maybe a miracle will be wrought in Ellen yet.”

Andrew turned and walked hurriedly toward the house to hide
THE MAN WHO STAID AT HOME

his emotion, and as the Senator would have left Sarah caught him by the sleeve. "Dan," she said, imploringly, "won't you try, if you can do it without lettin' on it come from me—won't you try to make them hard-hearted old veterans see that sometimes it took more courage an' manhood to stay home than it did to enlist?"

A chord of memory in the Senator's heart was stirred—a chord that vibrated again and again.

Proudly the veterans formed in line to march to the cemetery, and it was a great parade; the Mayor and City Council, the escort and Speaker of the Day, citizens in carriages and citizens on foot, and schoolchildren on flower-laden floats.

Later the crowd returned and surged into the Town Hall. As the speaker mounted the platform there were many significant nudges and winks toward the bulky package that occupied a conspicuous place at the rear of the stage.

Slowly the Senator came forward, and as he looked into the upturned faces of his friends the mantle of statesmanship seemed to dissolve, and he was once more just plain Dan Ellison, the man with whom the veterans had marched as the fife and drum played gayly "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

"Boys!" he said fondly, breaking the silence with the familiar word of the veteran: "I wonder if you'll forgive me if I break away from the regulation Decoration Day speech. My heart is too full for that; I've been carried back today across the years until I've lost track of them; I've gone back to the time when we went away, and I've lived over the home-coming days. Some of us found things mighty different from the way they were when we left."

At this point several handkerchiefs were brought into violent service, the Senator's among the number. "Those were wonderful days and weeks and years," the speaker went on; "the long day's march, the nights upon the field with just the stars for covering, the excitement and the terror and the glory of the fray. I'm not speaking of the hardships, you see; we've all done quite a lot of talking about those. I'm not saying those were easy years, either; but boys, would you give up the memory for anything on this earth?"

He paused, and cries of "No! Not on your life!" reverberated in the room.

The eyes of the Senator twinkled, and he leaned forward ingratiatingly. "And now, boys," he queried in half-jesting, wholly friendly tones, "let's be honest with ourselves and with each other. Isn't it God's truth that to many of us the call of our country was but the call of our desire to get out into a new world that was all untried?" He immediately robbed the question of its sting by add-
ing: “This does not alter the fact that when we were put to the
test we made good; it does not alter the fact that through the valor
of the boys who went forth the Union was preserved, but as a matter
of fact, do you think many of us weighed very carefully the suffering
that might come to ‘the girls we left behind us,’ the mothers, and
sisters, and sweethearts, and wives?”

The tense silence that followed convinced the speaker that his
shot had told. He spoke a little faster, and with great earnestness:
“I enlisted at the first call, as did many of you. I had a chum
who was to have enlisted at the same time, but when I stopped for
him he was nowhere to be found. I did not see him until the day the
regiment left. I did not try to see him, for in my heart there was
nothing for him but contempt. His father and brother marched
away with our regiment, and the boy who was to have enlisted with
me remained behind. For three years I thought of that boy as a
coward. At the end of that time I came back, to find my mother
living in his home, and this is his story as she told it to me.

“When the brother enlisted, he cheerfully and unselfishly sent
his wife and children to his mother’s house, with no provision for
their maintenance. His father, too, heard his country’s call, and
enlisted at once with no provision for taking care of the mortgage
that was on his farm, and without wondering what the wife would
do to keep together her own family and the family that had been
thrust upon her. That was the state of affairs as it existed when
the boy that was my friend went in to tell his mother he was going
to enlist. She did not put a straw in his way, and she sat up to mend
his clothes after he went upstairs. He could see the light from the
window in the living room as he lay in his bed, and that, I know,
although he never said so, was a long night to him. The next morning
at the breakfast table his father said: ‘Well, I’m proud to think
there are three fighters in this house.’ ‘Two,’ corrected the boy.
‘I think one of us is needed worse at home.’

“My mother told me the boy’s mother said that was the only
time he ever mentioned why he staid, but she said that many a
night she heard him sobbing in his room.”

Again the Senator paused, but the intense stillness encouraged
him to go on:

“His father and brother never came home, but I think he would
have gladly changed places with either of them. My mother he
took to his house when her own home burned, and indeed the Pennell
farm was a haven for all who were desolate. I want to close
with just one remark my mother made to me, a remark I heard
repeated today, and I want to know whether or not you agree with
her. She said: ‘Dan, I never want you to forget that sometimes it took more courage and manhood to stay at home than to enlist.’"

For a moment no one moved, then from the back of the room came a stalwart, white-haired veteran. “Boys,” he cried, “there is a clause in our constitution that says any man may be elected to our Post who served his country with distinguished valor during a time of war. Under this clause I move we elect to membership the man whose story we have heard today. We all know him, and yet none of us have ever known him until now. His name is Andrew Pennell.”

Over on the vine-covered porch Andrew and Sarah sat in a listening attitude.

“My, but they’re cheerin’ loud,” said Sarah eagerly; “they must be presentin’ the flag.”

For a few moments after this they heard nothing, and then the cheering began again, this time continuing as though the delight of the audience knew no bounds.

“Dan’s mighty popular,” exclaimed Andrew proudly; “an’ just to think of his stoppin’ to see me.”

“They’re comin’ out,” cried Sarah, “an’ Dan’s ahead carryin’ the flag. They’re comin’ this way. Oh, Andrew! he’s bringin’ his flag over on purpose to show it to you.”

Andrew had risen and was standing by the railing of the porch. “Looks like the hull town was comin’ along,” he chuckled; “guess they hate to see the last of the flag.”

“Well, I call it mighty friendly of Dan,” cooed Sarah, her cheeks flushing as pink as those of a girl; “an’ it’s nice of the rest. Now make them welcome, Pa.”

“Welcome!” cried Andrew exultantly; “I sh’d say they was.”

There was no time to say anything more, for Dan Ellison and half the population of Pinckneyville were crowding about the porch. Sarah noted with surprise that Ellen avoided the crowd by turning at the path that lay beside the hedge.

“It’s fine of you to bring your flag over here, Dan,” Andrew beamed. “And it’s awful kind of all you boys to come along.”

“An’ girls,” cried a cracked old voice; “don’t forget the girls.”

“All right, Abbie Ann Jones,” retorted Andrew, shaking his cane toward a little fat woman in gray. “I mind the time when I couldn’t sleep nights for thinkin’ about you, an’ you wasn’t so glib then a-tellin’ me not to forget.”

Sarah, with eyes shining and heart bubbling over with pride, pattered into the house and anxiously accosted Ellen, who was coming through the dark hall from a side door.
THE MAN WHO STAID AT HOME

"Ellen, do you think we could manage to give the crowd some cider? Some way it would seem so sociable, an' we've got a whole barrel that ain't a bit hard. Why, Ellen, you're cryin'? What is it? Why, Ellen!"

And in Sarah's arms, Ellen told her that she had been taught by an outsider what an ungrateful woman she was. "Do you think, Sarah, that some time you could forgive me, if I show you and Andrew how much I care?"

"Ellen, girl," said Sarah as she held her sister-in-law close, "we don't forgive those we love; we just forget."

"Forget!" cried Ellen as she gave a guilty but happy start. "Sarah, you run right out on the porch. I came near forgetting something far more important than how I feel. I'll draw the cider and have it ready by the time you get back."

"Looks like that miracle had come to pass," murmured Sarah smilingly as she hastened to follow Ellen's advice.

At the head of the steps stood Dan Ellison, still holding the flag. A hush had fallen on the assembled friends. As Sarah reached Andrew's side Dan spoke:

"Andrew Pennell, you have been unanimously elected a member of Lincoln Post, and you are ordered henceforth to wear in the lapel on your coat the Grand Army button which I now present to you."

"Oh, Andrew!" sighed Sarah rapturously; and then, because Andrew's fingers trembled, she proudly placed the button in his coat, while "the boys" gave cheer after cheer. Dan raised his hand, and instantly silence fell again.

"Andrew Pennell"—Dan's voice rang with pride—"I have the honor to ask you to accept this beautiful silk flag, made by the ladies of Pinckneyville, because in the judgment of your comrades and in the judgment of the Pinckneyville citizens you, more than any other member of Lincoln Post, served your country with distinguished valor during the war."

And while everybody present gave expression to his or her joy, in his or her own way, Dan Ellison laid the silk flag in Andrew's outstretched, shaking arms.