

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## "THE ONE THING NEEDFUL."

By Annie S. Swan.

The little schoolmistress came tripping over the street with a smile on her lips. Her arms were full of parcels, the big brown velvet bag, hung by the draw-strings over her right arm, fairly bulged with them; the side pockets of her fur coat showed mysterious humps, and brown paper peeped out from the slits thereof. Why was she thus laden? Because it wanted but five days to Christmas, and this was the last Saturday she could come in for Christmas purchases.

Joe Elmar, the farmer on the next section to her little homestead, had waited with great patience till she had accomplished all her shopping; and when she came into the stable-yard of the Crescent Hotel he was getting the horses into the sleigh. With his big fur coat and the flaps of his cap tied down over his ears, he looked not unlike a big woolly bear, but the eyes looking out from under the bushy brows were honest and true, and they took a very tender survey of the little schoolmistress as she appeared, laden with all her purchases, within range of his vision.

"I guess you're full up, Miss Willett," he said, good-naturedly. "Why didn't you leave them at the stores, and let me stop for 'em as we went by?"

"They're not a bit heavy, thank you, Mr. Elmar, and I always like to see all my parcels tied up with my own eyes; see?"

"Don't trust the Eldridge storekeepers, eh?" queried Joe, with a twinkle in his eye.

She laughed back, as she began to bundle her goods into the sleigh.

"I do hope I haven't forgot anybody or anything, Joe," she said, anxiously. "You see, I lost my list, and it took me a good half-hour last night to make it out."

"Give 'em a half-holiday next Thursday, if you have, Miss Willett, and I'll hitch up an' fetch you in again—always a pleasure to me, sure."

She smiled up into his face, a queer sort of far-away smile, which made Joe's heart beat faster. As he helped her in and tucked the buffalo robe about her, he took a desperate resolve. With eight good miles in front of them, speeding like the wind across the frozen snow, what was to hinder him making one more attempt to win the little schoolmistress, whom he had faithfully loved since the very day he had clapped eyes on her, when, as school manager, he had driven in to meet her on her first journey from the East. That was a year ago, and she had so entwined herself about all their hearts, his especially, that she had become the pivot of his existence. Many would have given her shelter and board for live of her bright, unselfish spirit, and Joe would have given half his possessions for the right to shelter her for ever, but she had said "No" to all. She preferred the little lonely shack hard by the school-house, where she lived in perfect security and safety, her door on the latch summer and winter, day and night, and no companionship but the stars. For such a bright creature, her spirit loved solitude, and knew neither loneliness nor fear. She had received nothing but kindness from all living creatures through the short span of her simple life.

The horses, whetted and spurred by the sharpness of a temperature forty below zero, simply flew across the frozen trail. They swept down the steep slope of the bluff whereon the little town was perched like a bird in an eyrie, crossed the icebound river by the bridge, and so to the open country gleaming under the pale opal of the

sky, with the stars like lamps to guide them on their way.

"Seems like we'll have fine weather for Christmas," said Joe. "I wish you'd go right up to Aunt Emily Winslow's next Friday and stop over the holidays. It ain't no Christmas for a lone little woman in a shack all by herself."

"I shan't be lonely. I'm going to have all the children to tea Christmas Day, and I shall be ever so busy getting ready and decorating the school. I shall want some help with the flags, Joe. Just lately I don't seem to be so spry as I used to be."

"I'll be right there, you bet," said Joe. "Are you warm enough, sure?"

"Quite; but so sleepy. Do you mind if I don't talk much?"

"No, I don't mind," replied Joe, as he drew another fold of the fur closer about her, and urged forward the willing beasts. In an incredibly short time they had covered the distance, and came within sight of the white school-house, and the little brown shack beside it.

"Don't come in by the gate, Joe, the snow's so soft. Just stop right here, and let me carry my things up. There's a lot, but there isn't any weight in them. There; that's all, and ever so many thanks."

She looked up at him as he stood by the restive horses, and once more Joe screwed his courage to the sticking point.

"Do say you'll go up to Aunt Emily Winslow's next Friday. You can just as well have the kids there. She'd like it uncommon."

"I won't do that, but I'll go on the Saturday if you like to come and fetch me. Good-night, Joe, and thank you for everything."

"And if you go up on Saturday, may I come on Sunday, and—and—take my chance?" he said, desperately.

She smiled, and the color wavered in her pure, round cheek.

"You may come, but you won't be taking any chances, Joe. I guess I'm just about tired bein' a school-marm. Good-night—dear."

She reached up, and gave him a little kiss, and then darted off, the echo of her sweet laugh ringing across the snow, and sending her lover home with a tumult at his heart. By the time she had opened her door and got all her parcels laid on the table, guided to it by the bright shaft of moonlight which fell athwart the floor, she could hear by the sleigh bells that Joe was already half a mile away. The smile lingered on her lips, very tender, and beautiful, and into her heart there crept a great peace. It had found its haven in the love of a good man, and the thought that she, homeless so long, had a home at last seemed to her a very sweet and wonderful thing.

The little living-room was the picture of neatness and homely comfort; it was cold, certainly, icy cold; but the fire was laid, a few moments more and the cheerful glow and crackle would make life in the little shack. She drew off her long fur mittens and began to fumble among her parcels; then her color grew a little grey and a sharp apprehension tugged at her heart. Matches—she had forgotten matches. It had been the first item on her list, the first and most needful thing. Without them she could have neither light nor heat, upon which her very life might depend. She was so cold now, she was glad to draw her mittens on again and run to the door.

But Joe was out of sight and sound, and it was a good mile to the nearest house. A sudden bank of cloud had sprung up to the north, swept thither by some unknown and cruel force, and she could hear the whistle of the rising wind. Already the beam of the moon had become fitful; ten minutes more

and it might be wholly obscured. She knew well the treacherous vagaries of the weather in these high latitudes, how death and destruction could become possible in an hour. A blizzard was coming up now across the vast prairie, which stretched like the steppes of Russia to the far horizon, with nothing to break or combat nature's forces. The fine powder of the on-coming snow beat against her face as she stood a moment in the open door wondering whether she might essay the hazard of the trail, and ask the one thing needful at the nearest house. No, she dared not, the risk was too great. She closed the door and crept back into the grey dark of the little house, crying weakly. And the storm came on, and beat upon the panes as the little schoolmistress huddled up in her rocker, her furs about her, and all her Christmas parcels on the table, fell asleep.

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Joe Elmar, in his comfortable frame house, made warm and cosy by the glow of his furnace fire, could not sleep. He was very happy, but there was something mingling with his happiness—a strange, new element, which he did not like to call fear. He rose betimes, far before his usual winter hour, and by six o'clock had his horses harnessed to the sleigh. It was a fine, clear morning, and the fresh fall of snow had raised the temperature slightly as well as obliterated yesterday's trail. He came to the corner where stood the school-house and the little brown shack, and there stood still. She would be asleep still in her bed, and what excuse had he for such a visit in the still morning hours of the new day? But something stronger than convention or propriety made him tie his team to the familiar posts and stride up to the door.

The handle yielded to his touch, and he stepped across the threshold and stood a moment just within the living-room. Then he drew his matchbox from his pocket and struck a light. His fingers trembled so that he could scarcely apply it to the lamp which stood in the middle of the table among all the debris of the Christmas shopping.

She was sitting very still and motionless in front of the stove; her face very sweet, even smiling, though the frozen tears were on her cheek.

The little schoolmistress, tired of teaching, had closed her eyes upon the winter desolations of the prairie and had opened them in that land which has no need of the sun.

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT  
BRIGADE.

Apropos of Tennyson's famous ballad, there ought not to be forgotten the story of the survivor of the Balaklava Charge, one of those of whom it is said that they were perfectly aware when obeying that word of command that they rode to certain death. He escaped, but he received a hurt soon afterwards that sent him to the hospital in a despondent mood, which prevented his recovery. To rouse him somebody produced a copy of Tennyson's poem then just published, and read it aloud. The man's eyes kindled, and he began a spirited description of the terrible charge. In short, he soon recovered, leaving the attendants uncertain as to whether the ballad cured him or the medical treatment. It is recorded that Tennyson wrote the poem "in a few minutes" after reading in the London Times the description of the charge, in which occurred the phrase "Some one had blundered." This phrase was the origin of the metre of the poem.—Edinburgh Dispatch.