

'I'm loth to let you go, Asie,' said the farmer, coming in from the fold-yard. 'It's beginning to snow again, and the wind is in the north.'

Asenath was a woman of few words at all times, and made no reply to her husband till they were all seated at the table and the children's first course of bread and milk well under way.

'I'm not afraid of the cold, nor of losing my road, my man,' was her answer, at last; 'the butter and eggs must go to-day, and I want yarn for the boys' socks, and a sight of things besides.'

The farmer thought Asenath had never been quite up to her usual strength since the last little one came, and was anxious about her having to face the threatening storm. Asenath knew his anxiety, but gave no sign of yielding. She finished her hearty, hasty breakfast, gave special charge to trusty little Susan about baby and about dinner, and began to wrap her plaid tightly and snugly to defy the weather, when her husband looked up and said, 'I'd a deal sooner go for you.'

The children's eyes twinkled with a hope that mother might agree; she only smiled a loving smile, and the farmer picked up the basket and went with her to the outer gate.

'There's no chickens then, and no geese, the basket is light enough by good luck to-day,' he said, giving it up to her as they reached the open road. 'Well, get back by daylight, Asie, and mind and get a lift home if possible.'

So the good couple parted. Asenath trudged off briskly, with her back to the east, where the dawn was making its silver rift in the dull sky, with her face westward towards the town of Ryne, some three miles and a half across the down, and with the north wind and the drifting snow whistling more fiercely round her than had seemed possible whilst she kept amid the shelter of the well-timbered hamlet.

We must leave Asenath Fryer doing battle with the storm, and return to take another look at the farm at dusk. Susan had rocked the baby to sleep, washed the dinner-things, and played with her two brothers to keep them quiet; but at last she began to long for her mother, knowing that when baby woke this time nothing but mother would pacify her. Fryer came in from the mill, found that his wife was not yet home, and set off to meet her. Alas! poor baby woke and wept, and refused all the food Susan's kind little heart prompted her to offer. Dark night came on. Fryer came back troubled and silent, and nursed the little one while Susan got supper for herself and the boys; then he told her to put her brothers to bed and go herself, and try to keep baby warm in bed with her.

'Where's mammy?' she asked timidly.

'I'm going out to fetch her as soon as you are all in bed,' Fryer answered. 'I don't know what to make of mother stopping away so long.'

'She flew away on the white snow-feathers, daddy,' said the younger boy.

'Farmer Hake has got home, and so has Mrs. Loveridge, and none of them has seen mother to-day at all;' and Fryer pressed the baby to his heart, to hide a suspicion that was beginning to take possession of him. Tidy little Susan righted up the fire, put the filled kettle on its hook above, undressed her brothers and herself, and then