

younger members of the family, who shyly informed her that "Pa and Ma and Aunt Lutildy had driven into town to buy groceries and see the doctor."

Whereupon Miss Myra enjoined the small Lanes to tell their elders of her visit, giving her name, and expressing her pleasure should her call be speedily returned, and pleasant, neighbourly relations established—all of which the tangled-haired youngsters promptly forgot in the subsequent excitement over a newly-discovered gopher-hole and its nimble proprietor.

Ignorant of this fact Miss Myra naturally felt grieved and indignant and made a stern resolution that henceforth she would make no further attempts at neighbourliness.

Nevertheless, when stories of the Lanes' troubles and Miss Lutilda's burdened life reached her ears, gentle pity tugged at her heart-strings. And now, on this Christmas Eve, the words of the passing cowboys awakened anxious, uncomfortable thoughts. For she had been in the west long enough to know something of the difficulties a sheep-herder has to encounter, not the least one of these being the exposure of his flock to a heavy snowstorm. At such a time, all huddled together, the warmth of the bodies of the sheep melts the thick layer of snow clinging to their wool; it may be that a sudden change of temperature takes place, and then all the dripping moisture is speedily congealed into ice, and the poor ewes and lambs, shivering and suffering in their frosty armour, not infrequently succumb to disease and death. Were such a fate to befall the Lane flock, Miss Myra knew what loss, and perhaps utter ruin, would result.

Thinking gravely on this things she presently reached her home, a cosy, one-storied building, well banked by sod and straw, double-doored and double-windowed, with a huge stove in the sitting-room gleaming ruddily with blazing lignite coal.

Frederica, the Swedish housemaid, Miss Myra's only companion in her lonely life, looked up from bread-toasting and beamed a cheery welcome,

"Glad you beest home, Miss Myra! The storm he coom! Plenty snow soon for Christmas, eh?"

Miss Myra removed her wraps and sat down to her evening meal: after it was eaten, the dishes cleared away, and Frederica had settled down to the knitting of a woollen stocking of

huge proportions and gorgeous colours, her mistress turned to the pile of magazines somewhat neglected during the busy school week.

But somehow neither story nor poem held her attention; her thoughts wandered toward her neighbour and old-time friend, Lutilda Lane—to Lutilda and the poor, innocent, helpless sheep!

At last, after three hours had passed and Frederica had retired, she went to the door of her little entry, opened it and looked out. The white mist of snow still filled earth and sky, but the air was no longer damp and still; an icy chill pervaded it and a piercing wind was whirling the snowflakes into little mounds and wreaths. For a minute or two Miss Myra stood irresolute, then, turning to the inner room, she donned her thick cloak and hood, and with a few brief words to wondering, sleepy Frederica, she sallied forth again into the night.

And now, even in the brief delay, a strange transformation in the whiteness without had taken place; the lace-work, thistle-down, and cobweb-like weaving of the snow had vanished. Flakes were still falling, but they were tiny in size—myriads of smallest frost atoms, and their touch on one's face was like the prick of a needle. The wind itself was also sharp; great icy blasts were sweeping down from the northern *buffles* with the snarl and howl of a pack of wild beasts eager to rend and to destroy.

Miss Myra shuddered as she thought of the gentler animals—the flock of sheep over yonder where the purple-black line of the sky touched the white earth. Thither she made her way, hood drawn well over her face, and shoulders bowed to the buffeting blast. As the latter whirled up the snow-wreaths, filling the air anew with blinding, stinging particles, and drawing a misty veil of bewildering whiteness across the guiding line of the horizon, a feeling of misgiving and dread took possession of her. What if she were to lose her way and perish? It was Christmas Eve, too, and her fireside had been so warm, pleasant, and secure! A fool, she, to risk health and life for an idle notion, a silly, quixotic suggestion! What was Lutilda Lane to her? A friend no longer—surely *that* fact had been proven.

Nevertheless, onward Miss Myra forced her way through the cold and the storm until, presently, her out-