Snowbound

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My eyes turn again to the horizon, and as I watch the colors fade, I see a leaf drop slowly, slowly to the ground.

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SNOWBOUND. Marie looked up from her book of Whittier's poems to gaze thoughtfully out of the window. How romantic the thought had always been; yet today, how real. She pulled her sweater closer about her shoulders. The air in the schoolroom was still cool, and the floor! —Some water she spilled froze almost immediately. She had been crazy to think some of the children might come to school in this wild snow storm. If only these farmers would realize how much worry a few phones would prevent! Still, she had smiled this morning at Mrs. Thompson's sober face and the huge sheep-lined coat they had forced over her own heavy coat.

The half mile sleigh ride had been an adventure, but she had felt a vague uneasiness when the horses snorted up to the white

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frame building standing alone in the midst of a white fury of wind-whipped snow. Getting inside the building had been scant comfort. An almost visible cold greeted her—such a quiet, dead cold. The thermometer by the blackboard had registered thirty below. It hadn't taken long to start a roaring fire in the heater, but the icy wind moaned down the chimney to suck out most of the heat before it could warm the room.

**SINCE** noon she had sat in the swivel chair, huddled close to the stove, with her feet on a rug-padded stool. This day was too unreal for lesson plans and correcting papers. Frequently she had interrupted her reading of Whittier to go see whether Mr. Thompson was coming for her with his sleigh and horses. Several times she had run to the front door, thinking she heard the stamping of hoofs. Each time she had opened the door a blast of cold air slapped her, and walls of wind-driven snow had whipped past across the yard to the adjoining fields—but there were no signs of human life.

How that wind tore at the building and howled down the chimney! She mustn't give the fire too much draft. How awful if the building should catch fire! Marie lifted her feet from the stool, swung forward in the swivel chair and bounded to her feet to close the draft the last fraction of an inch. My, there was scarcely any heat coming from this stove! And this window by the stove was draftiest of them all. Marie pulled aside the thin cotton sash curtains. If only Mr. Thompson would come! Surely he must realize no child had attended school today. Again she peered down the road for a sign of horses and sleigh. Suddenly a new onslaught of snow whipped by. Why, she couldn't see Thompson's grove. A man could lose his way in this storm. She couldn't blame Mr. Thompson for not coming. But the drifts would be getting deeper. Surely he wasn't expecting her to walk home!

Above the raging snow a few blackbirds were hanging in mid-air as though suspended by an invisible rod, powerless to move forward or backward. How helpless one of the children would be in this. How helpless any person would be!

On the ground, the snow swirled and snaked, shaping new drifts. Snowbound. That didn't happen nowadays—but what if the snow should drift across the front porch. Once she had come
back after a weekend at home to find three-fourths of the front
door covered. Coatless, Marie hurried from the drafty schoolroom
to the almost breezy hall, pulled at the warped front door, then
stumbled back with the sudden loosening. It was drifting here;
already it was a foot high! Frantically she pushed on the screen
door. Yes, she could open it enough to squeeze through. Perhaps
she had better walk home! If only she could stay on the road
and keep the grove in sight.

MARIE hastily banked the fire and stumbled between the rows
of empty seats to her wraps. First her snow pants, then her
jacket and sheep-lined cap, now the four-buckle overshoes, her
coat, mittens and finally the sheepskin. Quickly she surveyed the
room, pulled the chair back, glanced once more at the stove and
clumsily stumbled out of the building, locking the door behind
her.

For a few moments Marie stood in the shelter of the building,
then stepped out into the direct path of the wind. Her clumsy
four-buckle overshoes squeaked over the rock-like drifts, while
the snaky, slithering snow tagged at her feet to wipe out the faint
traces of her footsteps. The driveway was covered with a huge
drift that reminded her of an Indian mound. Her feet barely
made a print on the cement-like crust as she stepped out on the
road. The wind must not be so strong now. She could see
Thompson's grove.

Suddenly Marie stopped. Right ahead of her a stretch of gravel
road was almost bare! The ditches must have caught most of the
snow. She could see a single big drift ahead, but it might be firm
enough to walk over.

She looked back at the school building, but a fury of cutting
snow seemed to shoot from a huge funnel. Hastily she turned
her back and started down the road...