

THE ONE-ROOM COUNTRY SCHOOL

The one-room country school house,
A scene from yesterday,
Tugs at the memories in my mind
And brings the past my way.

The weathered boards and sagging step,
The dingy floor and wall,
The inkwells perched on wooden desks,
The prayer before roll call.

Blackboards scarred throughout the years,
The teacher's meagre pay,
The heads bent low while pencils scratch,
The special holiday.

The cloakroom chilled with frosty air,
A saucy, hungry mouse,
The trampled path behind the school,
The shabby "comfort house".

The rusty hooks along one wall
To hold each coat and cap,
And in the teacher's top desk drawer -
The dreaded leather strap!

The wrinkled brown ribbed hosiery,
The cotton gingham frocks,
Gum rubbers, pigtails and barrettes,
And home-knit woollen socks.

The water bucket scarred with age
Filled at a neighbour's well,
The carved initials on a desk,
The wooden-handled bell.

The dipper chipped from years of use
Left dripping by the pail,
The splintered yellowed pointer
Suspended on a nail.

The woodshed full of winter's store,
The hungry stove to feed,
The older ones who try to help
The little ones to read.

The sweltering scholars near the stove,
The cinders on the floor,
The shivering students at the back,
The crack beneath the door.

The copybook, an Arbour Day,
The Junior Red Cross fun,
The Superintendent's drop-in call,
The games when work was done.

The outdoor fun at recess time,
The argued baseball score,
And once the forts were strong enough,
A playful snowball war.

"Go In and Out the Windows" too
And angels in the snow,
And dusty playground races:
"Get ready!" "Set!" and "Go!"

The bell which rang a warning clang
That leisure time was o'er,
The red-cheeked boys and giggling girls,
Snow puddles on the floor.

Heavy snow on woollen pants,
The broom to sweep it off,
Chicken pox and stubborn lice,
The flu and whooping cough.

The musty smell of wet wool mitts
Left steaming near the heat,
The appetizing smell of stew:
A tasty hot-lunch treat.

Blackboards trimmed for Christmas time
With bits of coloured chalk,
The year-end field day picnic feast,
The fun-filled nature walk.

The grammar drill, the lard pail lunch,
The ragged, threadbare map,
The rusty, twisted stovepipe wire,
The tattered Union Jack.

The fine tidbits of wisdom gleaned
Directed to each grade,
The challenge of a spelling bee,
The Valentines, home-made.

The tables, learned from memory,
The facts, the Golden Rule,
The place where childhood dreams began -
The one-room country school.

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