

The 1888 Blizzard

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March 12th the day was a cold dull gray with a brisk and a chill west wind
At 3 o'clock the snow came down, an evening to stay in.
But I had a patient on Pomfret Street, three fourths of a mile away
So I set out in the tempest, driving hard my horse and sleigh.

REFRAIN:

Cold blows the bitter blast

Pass safely through the storm

The sleigh could make no headway in the blowing wind and snow
So I turned back and saddled my horse, but through it, he'd not go.
At last, I asked my hostler, a strong and strapping Swede,
To accompany me by foot down the road to see to my patient's needs.

REFRAIN

The road was drifted full, so we walked upon stone walls.
The wind blew us off, our lantern smashed and we were forced to crawl.
We staggered on in darkness but a quarter mile from home.
We featherweights of humanity were blown across the road.

REFRAIN

We clung together with clasped hands, only to be hurled down
By fiendish winds and biting snow we scarce could move around
"Don't stop! We must keep moving", I cried with what seemed my last breath.
We struggled on, knowing to stop would surely mean our death.

REFRAIN

The cold so great no overcoat could hope to keep you warm.
An icy helmet we each wore upon on our facial forms
We had to break the ice on our brow to see where we were going.
We stumbled blindly along, towards what, we had no way of knowing.

REFRAIN

At last we reached what seemed a fence and the wall of what seemed a house.
We took a breath in the lea of the wind and made a solemn vow,
To reach a place of succor and warmth before our lives were o'er.
At last we dug our way through the drifts and to Ben Grosvenor's door.

REFRAIN

Ben Grosvenor opened the door at last and gladly took us in.
Never were wearier travelers welcomed to his inn.
On snowshoes the next day we went back home through drifts of snow
That reached our second floor windows. We dug our way to the door.

REFRAIN

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Two others in town, not nearly blessed as my hostler and I
Mrs. Whitney worked for Fred Hopkins, and both of them did die.
They tried to feed the cattle in the middle of the storm.
A week passed before they both were found, a lantern in their arms.
REFRAIN

Back in their house, the table laid with food for their last meal.
Some meat and bread and buckwheat cakes a scene that seemed unreal.
Their cattle, sheep and horses were starved or dead in the barn.
They dug through drifts, when both were found, frozen, arm in arm.
REFRAIN

And now in June, the last drifts lie still icy on the ground
Reminding us of the worst storm ever struck our sleepy town.
We hope and pray no future gales will cause such loss of life
The '88 Blizzard we'll ne'er forget that caused such pain and strife.
REFRAIN

*This story was taken from Susan Griggs' **Folklore and Firesides of Pomfret**. She apparently had read an account of the storm written by Doctor Sawtelle himself. If anyone knows where that manuscript is, I'd love to read the original story.*