

Battling the Storm

Anna huddled against the side of the engine, hiding her face in her arms. It was taking them forever to reach the firehouse.

Just then, the horses turned abruptly to the left. The next moment they were inside the stable, snorting and stamping their hooves. Several men ran forward to unhitch the engine. Everyone began brushing the icy snow off their clothes.

Suddenly, Grandpa became very serious. "The thermometer says five degrees above zero, and the temperature is still dropping. We must get home as fast as possible. Mrs. Sweeney, you and Miss Beaver had better come with us."

"Here, Miss," a fireman said. "Put these boots on. You can return them when the storm is over."

"Oh, thank you," Addie Beaver said.

Anna had forgotten about Addie's high-button shoes.

"Whatever you do, Anna, you are not to let go of my hand." Grandpa spoke firmly.

"Mr. Jensen, would you mind if I held your other hand?" asked Mrs. Sweeney.

"Not a bit," said Grandpa. "Anna, you take hold of Miss Beaver's hand. No one is to let go under any circumstances. Do you all understand?"

Anna had never heard Grandpa talk like that before. Was he frightened too?

They plunged into the deep snow, moving slowly along the south side of Fifteenth Street. The wind had piled the snow into huge drifts on the north side of the street.

When they reached Broadway, the wind was blowing up the avenue with the force of a hurricane. Telephone and telegraph wires were down. Thousands of them cut through the air like whips. If only they could reach the other side, Anna thought. Then they would be on their very own block.

No one spoke. They clung to one another as they blindly made their way across the avenue. Mrs. Sweeney lost her balance and fell forward in the snow. For a moment, Anna thought she was there to stay. But Grandpa tugged at her arm and helped her get to her feet.