

Great Storm Turns Quiet Village Into a Fairy Iceland

[Written by Katherine McDowell Rice for The Sunday Republican]

On Saturday a light snow had fallen on an icy foundation and on Sunday there was intermittent rain with freezing toward evening. I took my favorite walk through the pines at Alderbest in the afternoon and as I neared home on the crusty snow in the dusk, picked some grass stems on which the ice was so thick that I looked at the coating on the trees and found it was growing extremely heavy. During the night I drowsily heard crashing to the ground what I supposed were patches of ice and snow from roofs of the house and buildings. At 3 o'clock I put my head out of the window. It was pitch dark with rain falling. I thought with relief, "This will take the ice all off the trees and there will be no breakage."

I awoke just before dawn and from my windows on the north it seemed in the faint light as though I could see objects outside that were dangling from the trees. From my east window there were more of these dark swaying objects. To my consternation I realized that these were broken branches and that the snowy ground below was covered with them. Slowly the tragedy was revealed. Our row of maples in front of the house and other trees about the grounds were losing limb after limb.

Reports Like Pistol Shots

There were sharp reports here and there like pistol shots, the same sounds I had heard in the night and credited to snow avalanches. There had been none of these. The snow and ice were still undisturbed on the roofs and on that of the main house lay a huge maple limb that had crashed perilously near one of the chimneys. I saw walking about outside an ulstered figure, at first unrecognizable, then as the light strengthened, discovered it was my sister. I hastily dressed and joined her. We compared notes as to our night of disturbed sleep.

As we took refuge in the storm-door from the falling branches we listened and looked in terror and fascination at the havoc going on about us. A report, a shower of ice, a heavy thud, and a limb that we perhaps well knew and loved had fallen at our feet.

Oh, for daylight! A day with sun for we knew the sun, only, could stop this demolition.

For in the distance and nearer at hand came repetitions of reports, splinterings and thuds as heavy branches fell everywhere. Had there ever been such a storm! From our childhood we had known sleet and ice storms but never anything like this. We looked across the way to the old Woodbridge place. It was growing lighter and we could see at greater distance. Limb after limb in the maple grove near the house fell to the ground or hung caught in the trees.

Was there perchance a storm like this the winter young William Cullent Bryant studied law in this house under Judge Howe? No, we were quite sure not, for he certainly would have celebrated it in song.

Would the mails go out from our little village, we wondered? As if in answer, the man carrying the mail to Huntington appeared with his lighted lantern. Next came the western mail-carrier driving a single horse, before whose path we saw a great limb fall, cleverly evaded by the driver. Then the third mail carrier drove away from the post office. Yes, our drivers were dauntless. All our mails had gone out!

Neighbors now began to gather in front of the house well out in the road away from the danger where we joined them to talk over the storm.

Like One 80 Years Ago

"Never anything like this in my memory," said one after another and when the oldest residents were consulted, they said the same. But there was one man of an old Worthington family who said, "I remember my father used to tell me and my brothers when we were boys about a great ice storm here when he was a young man.

He said That storm destroyed everything and he said it in such a way that I have always felt

it must have been a very terrible storm. We were born in 1819 so we concluded there might have been a storm like this about 80 years ago. This surmise as it passed from lip to lip during the day evidently gained in strength for before night a man from the next village announced to me with authority, "There was a storm like this exactly 80 years ago."

My sister and I decided in spite of the rain to go about and see if the devastation at any other place was equal to ours. The walking was safe if one picked one's way over fallen limbs and wires seeking the fields if there were danger from falling branches.

Amidst Bombardment

We started up the north road where a terrific crash as we set out prepared us for the discovery at the old Trowbridge Ward place of a huge limb torn from a massive elm, an elm with a girth of 13 feet that stands in front of the house. The limb, fully three feet in circumference at the breaking point, had fallen on the roof of the house, but fortunately not broken it, the weight having partly rested on the roof of a sleeping porch on the second floor and on the railing of this porch. We went on to our brother's summer place known as "The Farm" and found the old apple trees in the orchard apparently destroyed and many other trees damaged. But the young apple trees planted in between the old had not suffered at all. The near-to-be-forgotten picture here (and there seemed to be one such at every place) was the great willow over 100 years old that overhangs the watering trough in the barn yard.

This was twisted and broken but still picturesque in its heavy coat of ice and snow. As it seemed dangerous to go further on through the beech woods for trees were constantly falling there, we came back home to make short runs into more open country for to stay indoors was impossible with all this beauty and grandeur outside.

"The North Pole Please"

We ran into central. "Will you connect us please, with the North Pole?" "I can connect you as easily with that as any place in the world" was the ready answer.

But we were not as cut off from the world as this might make us appear, for I will here say that our mails came and went every day and our trusty Republican never failed to come through, so we were closely in touch with friends and affairs.

The great hope of everyone in the town was that the sun would come out, but the sky continued leaden and with rain, and freezing rain at that.

Hung With Crystal Balls

How wondrous were the orchards everywhere with their frozen "apples"! So called we the icy balls that were massed not only on the fruit trees but on many others. We found these globules everywhere not only on bushes, shrubs and trees but on stems of grass and weeds. They were from the size of "agates" that the boys play marbles with, up to that of the apple. We would gather an armful of these of many sizes, only to drop them when something more novel would claim our fancy. We were children again!

The prayer of the entire community was for a night without wind for if the wind should start up, whatever was left of Worthington's trees would be utterly destroyed for the freezing rain was still adding to the weight of ice on the trees. The prayer was answered. Never was there a more quiet night.

In the morning we went up to "The Spruces," and found our friends there taking pictures. But could any one ever hope to portray the majesty and grandeur of that row of 30 spruce trees, 75 feet in height, clad in heavy snowy ice, so awesome in their beauty? We seemed in another part of the world as we walked among these towering spruces and some of their equally large but more scattered companions, the white snow beneath our feet. Our alpenstocks bore the names of places we had climbed in the Dolomites but nothing there

had been more thrillingly beautiful than these.

About five minutes after the last picture of the spruces had been taken and just as we had again started on our way, we were told that the top of one of these had fallen. We hastened to measure it and found it was over fourteen feet in length, looking quite like a little tree itself as it lay there at the foot of its austere parent. Shortly after the heads of two others in this lordly row of sentinels fell, but each time we had just missed seeing the fall.

We continued our interrupted walk of the day before on the north road and when we came to Westmoreland, the two occupants of the little cottage warned us not to approach. "This limb has just fallen," the two women called, "and another next it may snap any moment. How do you dare to go out?" they inquired as undaunted we came on. We told them it was the most wonderful storm known to history and that we wanted to see it in all possible phases. "Then come round to the back of the house," was the response. "We don't dare talk to you here."

We obeyed and they came to the woodshed door to tell us their experiences and to hear of ours. Their most thrilling one was in connection with a group of spruces covered with ice some distance away, whose tops had been falling with great noise. As we talked there was a loud report and we had just time to turn and see the top of one of these trees crash to the ground bringing what seemed tons of ice in its train. At last we had really seen a spruce top fall!

Another quiet night. Another gray day with the sun for only a half hour and that too late in the afternoon to melt the ice.

The Great Nine Pointed Star

I went again to Alderbest to see what had happened there, and especially to find if anything had befallen the large white birch with its so styled "nine trunks," called one of the most beautiful specimens of birch in the county. As I neared the place I could see nothing of the tree, Surely it could not have fallen with all those wonderful trunk-like branches! On coming nearer I found the tree all sprawled on the ground, a mass of ice, its nine parts making a great nine pointed star. As far as I could discover no limb had been broken but there was so much ice it was hard to determine. I tried to release some of the tree's burden, but could make no impression on the ice whatever. At the cottage a little higher up, a white birch with two trunk-like branches, which stands 20 feet from the door, was bent also to the ground, one half blocking up the cottage door, the other half bent in the opposite direction closing entirely the wooded entrance to the garden.

The pine trees all about had assumed most grotesque shapes. They stood like figures wrapped in cloaks, dark green ice-covered cloaks. Some tall and majestic, some with bent heads. One group was quite ludicrous, the bodies all bending in different directions. Never had they seemed so human. Even among the 5000 of them, no two seemed quite alike.

Had I been blindfolded and set down in this place, I wondered if with sight restored I should have known it. The low-growing juniper—a wonderful specimen 60 feet in circumference, lay flat in the snow, unrecognizable with a heavy plate of ice all over it. Could it ever emerge?

Then Thursday dawned and gloriously. The sun came out at 9, making everything dazzlingly beautiful. The masses of ice that hung high in tropical profusion from the branches of the row of tall elms at an eastern entrance to the village waved in the sun and gentle wind. Great branches of these massed frozen globes brushed lightly against other such masses, making a music all their own.

And the Trees Clapped Their Hands

Verily the trees were clapping their hands!

Now, with a joyful song in our hearts must we hasten everywhere for effects before they shall be gone. To see the young trees on the other common more than ever like fountains as they drip in the sun, more than ever like weeping willows as they shed their iridescent tears. To see the red brown church with its fast disappearing fringe of many colored icicles on cornice and clapboards. To watch the young pine trees casting aside their cloaks and coyly lifting their heads; the grotesque ones more slowly giving up their masquerade.