

Lightfoot Gordon

"Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald"

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The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald
by Gordon Lightfoot
(An account of the giant ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald,
which sank in Lake Superior in November, 1975)

The legend lives on, from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they call Gitchee Gumee.
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead
When the skies of november turn gloomy.
With a load of iron ore, 26,000 tons more
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty,
That good ship and crew was a bone to be chewed,
When the gales of November came early.

The ship was the pride of the American side
Comin' back from some mill in Wisconsin.
As the big freighters go, it was bigger than most
With a crew and good captain well seasoned.
Concluding some terms with a couple of steel firms,
When they left fully loaded for Cleveland,
And late that night when the ship's bell rang
Could it be the north wind they'd been feelin'?

The wind in the wires made a tattletale sound,
And a wave broke over the railing,
And every man knew as the captain did too,
'twas the Witch of November come stealin'.
The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait,
When the gales of November came slashin'.
When afternoon came it was freezin' rain,
In the face of a hurricane west wind.

When suppertime came, the old cook came on deck
Sayin' "Fellas, it's too rough to feed ya".
At seven p.m., the main hatchway caved in,
he said "Fellas, it's been good to know ya".
The captain wired in he had water comin' in
And the good ship and crew was in peril,
And later that night when its lights went out of sight
Came the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

Does anyone know where the love of God goes,
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?
The searchers all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay
If they'd put fifteen more miles behind 'em.
They might have split up or they might have capsized,
They may have broke deep and took water.
And all that remains is the faces and the names
Of the wives and the sons and the daughters.

Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings
In the rooms of her ice water mansions.
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams,
The islands and bays are for sportsmen.
And farther below Lake Ontario
Takes in what Lake Erie can send her.
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know
With the gales of November remembered.

In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed
in the Maritime Sailors' Cathedral
The church bell chimed 'til it rang 29 times,
For each man on the Edmund Fitzgerald.
The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they called Gitche Gumee
Superior, they said, never gives up her dead,
When the gales of November come early. Transcribed
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