

The Blizzard Banquet.

By JULIA P. DEANE.



"HELLO, CENTRAL."

"Hello, Central. Please give me 5683. Yes, that's right. It this Mr. Robert Duncombe's office and may I—I beg pardon? Oh! is it you, Rob? I didn't sound like your voice. Yes, I received your note, and I am calling you up to tell you I shall not be at home this evening. The firm is sending me to Hamilton. I leave at 4.30 this afternoon. What? Now, Rob, dear, you must not say that—the firm is very kind to me. You say I was not made for such a life." The telephone registered a girlish sigh. "Well, I sometimes wonder what I was made for—Oh dear, no, I didn't mean to give you a chance to say that. But, Rob, dear, you must admit it is a perfectly honorable calling. No, indeed I haven't forgotten the letter. How could I? I wish I could give you the answer you want, Rob—but while your father and mother disapprove I cannot. You're their only son, Rob. Yes, on the electric. What's that? Your father—on the same train—to Hamilton? Please, Central, don't cut us off. Are you sure, Robert? On the 4.30? I am certain to know him because of his resemblance to you. Good-bye, dear. The expressman is here for my baggage. Yes, I'll consider—but don't expect me to change my mind unless—Good-bye."

For a half-hour the passengers on the Chicago-Hamilton Electric line had been peering apprehensively through the frosty windows, as the car with many stops and delays forced its slow way against the storm. Apprehension was changed to disagreeable certainty as the conductor opened the door with a vicious jerk, announcing: "You might as well all try to make yourselves as comfortable as you can, for we're up against a hard proposition—nothing more nor less than a blizzard, and it's getting worse every minute. The rails are all ice, the electric current is cut off, and even if it wasn't, the snow's piled up in such drifts right here that we couldn't pull through."

"Where are we?" inquired a passenger.

"Ten miles from nowhere, more or less," replied the official gruffly.

"Any farmhouses in sight?" asked a masculine voice.

"In sight?" answered the conductor scornfully. "Just you stick your head outside that door and see what's in sight. If there was a fifteen-story sky-scraper a foot away a body couldn't see it. It's a blizzard, I say, a regular Dakota blizzard that's onto its business and has learned a few dozen tricks from a Kansas cyclone to help it along."

The passengers nestled uncomfortably in their seats.

"Hear it!" exclaimed the conductor, as a particularly vindictive blast shook the car. With various expressions of dismay and resignation the little company listened.

"This means freezing and starving until morning at least," commented a portly gentleman in a dejected tone, as he strode up and down the aisle. A child whimpered fretfully that it was hungry. Passengers indulged in grumbling criticism of the road. A woman began to recount in a dismal tone the blizzard fatalities of the season. Then silence heavy

and sullen, fell upon the occupants of the car. For five minutes the blizzard had it all to itself. Like a wild beast seeking its prey, it growled and raged. It crept beneath the car and tried to lift it bodily. It sought for cracks and crevices through which it might gain an entrance for its icy fingers. It dashed against the glass as if it would shatter it into fragments, and shrieked its direful prophecies of the night that lay before the marooned travelers.

"Now, Judge Duncombe, just how much would you give for a good square meal?"

The question, asked in a distinct, cheerful voice audible throughout the car, had the desired effect of arousing every passenger from his lethargy of discomfort to await the answer. The girl in the blue zibelline, with eyes that matched, raised her head and listened with an interest quite out of proportion to the occasion.

It was the portly gentleman whom he addressed. He has ceased his uneasy pacing back and forth, and now sat gloomily in the corner of his seat, watching the conductor's efforts to lighten the gloom of the long car with an old kerosene lamp.

"I can tell you, Jillson," he answered with some spirit, "with my present feelings the remuneration wouldn't be a stingy one. I'm downright hungry. I hurried down-town to keep an engagement, and so was cut short on breakfast. I was entertained at luncheon by one of my wife's friends—one of those abominably picturesque affairs that may do for a canary, but for a hungry, hard-working lawyer—well you know, Jillson, you've been there. I was counting on catching that 3.50 Rock Island and getting even on the dining-car on the way out, but I missed it by two minutes and had to take the electric. That's the situation. Yes, sir, for a good, satisfying meal, I don't care what it is, I'd let the other fellow set his price."

His companion laughed. "I think I'll advertise this interesting want. May be some provisions stored away under the seats." He turned smilingly towards the passengers. "Here's the chance of a lifetime, ladies and gentlemen. Judge Duncombe offers any of his possessions, real, personal or mixed, to the individual who will furnish him a square meal. The judge is a man of his word, and abundantly able to keep his promise."

"He ain't risking anything much by that offer," volunteered a gaunt individual savagely.

The figure in the blue zibelline had been quietly studying the face of the judge. Now she rose with nervous haste and flushed cheeks, and moved towards the front of the car. She lifted a heavy suit case from the seat, unlocked it, took from it sundry articles and packages. The eyes of her curious fellow-passengers followed every movement. Placing the case upon two empty seats, she improvised a table, and on it arranged a chafing dish. A quiet word with the watchful conductor secured matches and a panful of spotless snow. By the time the melted snow was boiling cheerfully over the blaze, the blizzard had become a secondary attraction. Guesses were hazarded through the car as to the meaning of the preparations.



"GOOD BYE."

"Looks as if she had taken you at your word, Judge," the jovial man suggested. "Wields that spoon as gracefully as if it were a violin bow," commented another man. Her audience had not long to

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