

A Curl.

Tonight as I turned back the pages of a book time had fingered before, and whose leaves he'd color of ages, and imprints of much usage wore, a little brown curl I discovered that fell from the book to the floor. Had I sinners? Heaven grant me its pardon! Did a lover's sad tear the page spot? Who pressed there the gem of the garden, the flower "forget-me-not"? It lay as if carved on a gravestone, and all of its sweetness forgot.

THE SNOW BLOCKADE

In the fall of 1884 I was at St. Paul. My friend, John Hall, conductor, had persuaded me to go with him over the Northern Pacific road to San Francisco. It was late in the season, and I feared a blockade. However, I provided myself with a basket of provisions, for use in case my fears were realized, and started on my journey.

When I reached the depot I found a gentleman and lady seated in my sleeper. I had scarcely time to take a good look at the latter—and in fact I could not make much out of my inspection, for she was heavily veiled—when Hall entered, and passing me with a hasty "good-morning," went up to the lady's companion. I was busy storing away my numerous traps, and did not hear what was said, until, as it was getting near the time to start, Hall observed that he must go and see if all was clear.

"Look well after Mrs. Forsyth, Hall, and when you give up the train, speak to the next conductor about her." "I will do my best for the lady, sir," said Hall, who a moment after left the car.

"You'll have the drawing-room to yourself," continued Mrs. Forsyth's escort, "and need not be bothered with any one."

My back was toward the speaker, and in a little side mirror between the windows I saw that he cast a suspicious and significant glance in my direction as he spoke the last words.

In a moment more he was gone, and we were started on our long journey. My solitary companion retreated to her room, and I was left a rather desolate master of the situation.

With the help of newspapers, books and an occasional word with Hall as he passed through the car, the morning passed quickly enough. We were to carry a dining-car the first day or day and a half—a fact that also added to my sense of general satisfaction.

When the first call for dinner was made, I was not long in answering it, but quick as I was, many others had been before me, and I was fortunate in securing the last table. Scarcely had I comfortably seated myself, and settled on the details of my dinner, when Hall entered, piloting the lady who had been spoken of as Mrs. Forsyth. Seeing that all the tables had one or more occupants, he brought her over to the one at which I sat. He introduced me, placed her opposite, and to say that I was charmed with her face would be to give only a very faint indication of my feelings. She appeared to be about 23 or 24 years of age, and was dressed in mourning, though not of a sufficiently distinctive character to tell whether or not she was a widow.

However, that even at the moment the question occurred to me, I wished that it might be decided in the affirmative. The meal passed off delightfully at least to me, and I managed to ascertain that I should have Mrs. Forsyth's company for the greater portion of the journey, her destination being Seattle. I took her back to our car, when she again withdrew into the drawing-room, and I resolved to smoke the soothing cigar.

In search of company and a chat, I sought the smoker of the next car, which was occupied exclusively by men, who after a time dropped one or two quiet hints about the evanescence of my position, and their desire to exchange berths. By-and-by a little game of poker was proposed, and would have doubtless helped to pass a good deal of time, but a clergyman read us such a lecture on the sin of gambling that no one felt quite disposed to materialize as one of his "terrible examples."

So, after a while, I went back to my own car and my books. At supper time, Mrs. Forsyth's door was open, and I ventured to ask her if I might have the pleasure of talking to her to the table, and was rewarded by a gracious smile and a prompt acquiescence. Although I tried, without seeming to be inquisitive, to skirt round the subject, I did not succeed in gaining any information as to her matrimonial condition. The next day, however, I was fortunate enough to discover that I had two or three times met Mrs. Forsyth's single sister when she had been visiting some mutual acquaintances in San Francisco. This fact served as a better introduction than Hall's had been, and in the more intimate conversation that followed I at last learned with delight that Mrs. Forsyth was a widow of over a year's standing, and that she was intending to make her future home with her sister.

We lost our dining-car, much to our regret, on the second day. The third day saw snow incessantly descending, and Mrs. Forsyth began to prophesy all kinds of disasters, and even suggested the advisability of her lying over at the next station of any size. "Erskine," remarked Mrs. Forsyth, "the road lies so smooth we could without any inconvenience."

"You give the road too much credit, ma'am. The fact is, we haven't moved the last thirty minutes."

"You don't mean to say we're at the station already?"

"No, ma'am; we're stuck."

"Stuck!" repeated Mrs. Forsyth.

"Yes—in the snow. Can't budge an inch. I've telegraphed for relief."

"Oh, dear me! When shall we get out?"

"I hope to-morrow," answered Hall

began to feel a sensible yearning to reach the breakfast station, and was meditating getting a cracker from my basket, when Hall came in, and expressed some surprise at seeing me up and dressed.

"I think it was hunger that roused me out," I answered. "That supper last night was pretty queer. Are we near the breakfast station?"

"The Forks are about fifteen miles ahead."

"And how long will it take to get there?"

"I don't think we'll get much farther yet awhile."

"Do you mean we're going to get stuck?"

"Guess so," replied Hall with a calmness which under the circumstances was a little aggravating.

"Well, if we can't get ahead, can't we go back?"

"Afraid not. We put on an extra engine and a plow last night. There's no switch near, and the cuts have filled up behind us."

"Then what are you going to do?" I asked, a little hotly.

"Stay till we're dug out. I've got telegraph instruments on board. When we do stick—won't be long now—I'll cut a wire and ask for a relief party."

"What about food?"

"Oh! they'll manage to send some from the Forks, by men on snow-shoes. They did last year."

I silently thanked Providence, for my well-stocked basket.

"Don't say anything," whispered Hall, as he heard the door of the drawing-room open. "Let me break it; I'm used to letting 'em down gently." Then turning to Mrs. Forsyth, who by that time had come out, said, cheerily:

"Good-morning, ma'am; hope you didn't find it too cold to sleep?"

"Oh, no, thank you," she replied; then, after saying "good-morning" to me, she again addressed Hall. "We seem to be going very slowly, and the windows are so frosted I can't see how deep the snow is."

"We're pushing ahead first rate," said the unmoved and unblushing conductor. "You don't feel the motion because the snow deadens the vibration."

Hall looked at me with a certain tremulousness about his left upper eyelid.

"Shall we breakfast soon?" was Mrs. Forsyth's next question.

"Well, it may be some little time," answered Hall.

"Oh, dear!" she gasped, in the prettiest way imaginable, "and I feel quite faint."

I dived for my basket. "I have some things here. We might manage to make a picnic breakfast."

"No, no; I won't trouble you. I'd rather wait till I can get some tea."

"I think you had better accept Mr. Austin's offer," suggested Hall. "We may be a little late getting to the regular breakfast station."

"Please let me be your host," I urged.

"I can even give you tea or coffee. Here's a spirit-lamp and a little saucepan, and I have—let me see—cold beef, curried chicken, foie gras, ox tongue, anchovy paste, a pot of marmalade, lots of crackers, sugar, condensed milk, and all the et-ceteras."

"Quite a larder, I declare," said Mrs. Forsyth, laughingly, as I finished checking off the contents of my basket.

"How stupid of me not to bring anything except some fruit, and one cannot live on fruit—out of Eden."

"I'll fix up a table," observed Hall, losing no time in putting his intention into action. "The porter's tired out; we kept him up late last night. Now, you're all comfortable, I'll see how the others are getting on."

"What shall I open for you?" I asked, as I stood, cap-on-ear in hand.

"I don't know; anything you like."

"No, then, all. Suppose we have a feast?" and I began to make a reckless assault on the curried chicken.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "One meat will be plenty."

"Will you be kind enough to make the tea?" I asked, as I handed the necessary implements and material.

"Certainly. What a dear little lamp and saucepan! I am sure they'll make delicious tea!"

"I have no doubt of it with your help. I'm sorry to say I haven't any butter. Didn't think it would keep."

"No matter; I like crackers soaked in my tea."

Infatuated as I was, I could not express my agreement with that essentially feminine predilection. I dished out the chicken as gracefully as I could, and we began our repast while the tea was drawing.

Presently Mrs. Forsyth looked at me and laughed. "This is funny, isn't it?"

"I think it's very jolly."

"Oh! I don't mean the breakfast, but my sitting down as your guest, when, three days ago, I had never seen you."

"I assure you," I said, "I'm an eminently respectable and proper person—that is, for a lawyer. The conductor can vouch for me. He has known me for years."

"Yes, he gave you a character."

"Then you inquired?" I asked eagerly.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a shade of mischief in her tone; "he volunteered the information."

"How good this tea is!" I observed, tasting some that she had handed me.

"I never could have made it so well myself."

"It certainly is nice, but it's not due to my skill, but to the quality of the tea."

I, of course, dissented from this view, and took several cups—or at least glasses, for I had no cups—of that tea, which I was willing to swear was the most delicious beverage ever prepared.

We were just finishing when Hall came back and said: "Glad to see you getting on so comfortably."

"Erskine," remarked Mrs. Forsyth, "the road lies so smooth we could without any inconvenience."

"You give the road too much credit, ma'am. The fact is, we haven't moved the last thirty minutes."

"You don't mean to say we're at the station already?"

"No, ma'am; we're stuck."

"Stuck!" repeated Mrs. Forsyth.

"Yes—in the snow. Can't budge an inch. I've telegraphed for relief."

"Oh, dear me! When shall we get out?"

"I hope to-morrow," answered Hall

who assuredly disregarded truth in his desire to make things as pleasant as possible.

"Can't you back down?" asked the lady, after a brief pause, evidently spent in an inward struggle.

"No, ma'am."

"What shall we do?"

"We can only wait, ma'am. They'll try to send some provisions from the Forks by this evening."

"And in the meantime there is my basket," I observed in as cheerful a tone as I could command. I had been yearning to offer my sympathy during Hall's explanation, but thought it best not to interfere with the process which he called "letting 'em down easy."

"I was so anxious to get quickly to Seattle!" said Mrs. Forsyth. "I think I'll go and lie down for a little while. Perhaps I'll be able to get some sleep."

"She took it better than I expected," observed Hall, as the door hid her from our sight.

"She's a regular brick!" I exclaimed, with an amount of enthusiasm that would have done credit to a more fitting and tender designation.

"For all that, she's gone to have a good cry. Best thing for her; will do her lots of good. Come and have a smoke."

I thought Hall was an unfeeling brute, and I didn't consider I should be much better if I smoked while she was crying. Still, I went, and as I puffed at my cigar I regretted that Mrs. Forsyth could not know the consolation of tobacco.

In the afternoon Mrs. Forsyth resumed her usual cheerful demeanor, and even ventured out for a few minutes on the platform to look at the walls of snow by which we were overshadowed. We had recourse to the friendly basket for dinner, and in the late afternoon we had some cold meat and stale bread, which we considered vastly inferior to our tinned supplies. The novelty of the situation and the discussion of the chances of speedy extrication whittled away the day, which to me, at any rate, did not seem a long one. When I got up the next morning affairs did not seem to have changed. There was no sign of Mrs. Forsyth's stirring, so I went forward to find Hall and hear if there was any news. Unfortunately there was not, and after a brief talk I returned, and was agreeably surprised to find my fair fellow-passenger sitting in the car, with an expression on her face which I flattered myself indicated wonder as to what had become of me.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Forsyth. Were you pondering as to what had become of me?"

"Not at all," she answered, coolly; "I am scarcely awake enough to think about anything."

"Well, now for breakfast," I said endeavoring to hide my chagrin by wrestling with the basket. "What is to be this morning;—you know the menu."

"But I can't go on living on your provisions. Suppose we should have to stay here another day or two. Why, they would be all gone."

"You have no choice, unless it is the tough salt beef and very stale bread the snow-shoers brought. The only things worth their bringing were the beer and whiskey."

"That's just like a man."

"I wouldn't like to be like anything else. What do you say to some ox tongue? I'll open the tin while you make some tea." Then, as she gracefully began the necessary preparations, I ventured to add: "Upon my word, it begins to seem quite natural having you sit at my table and make my tea."

"Does it? Well, I sincerely hope I shan't have to do it much longer. What's the prospect of our getting out?"

"Not very brilliant. The snow is packed tight in the cut for two miles south."

"How awful! Wouldn't it be possible to get to the next station over the snow?"

"Only on snow-shoes. There is frozen crust on the snow that will bear anything. The relief party had the greatest trouble in getting there."

"How stupid of me to venture at this time of the year! But Fanny urged me to! She's been expecting me ever since I finally arranged my poor husband's affairs."

The widow's handkerchief went up to her eyes. I silently anatomized the deceased, and wished she wouldn't refer to him, especially at meal times.

By the aid of cards, talk, a very little reading, and two more assaults on the basket, we got through the second day of our imprisonment. Each hour saw my subjugation grow more and more complete, and I had to keep careful guard over my tongue for fear I should prematurely betray my feelings, and perhaps, through my impetuosity, lose all hope. It was true that Mrs. Forsyth came down early this afternoon, but she possessed a quiet though very effective way of checking any attempts to digress into tenderness.

The third morning again showed no apparent change in the outside situation. When Hall came in he, however, appeared unusually cheerful.

"You look as if we were going to get out," I remarked.

"Not yet awhile. But that frost last night was splendid. I've got a message this morning that the Forks Snow-shoe club will come down early this afternoon, with extra snow-shoes, and that any of the men who think they can manage it may try to get to the Forks. I suppose you have been on shoes often?"

"Yes; but to tell you the truth, I'm not particularly anxious to get away."

Hall broke into a quiet laugh. "I thought I saw which way the wind was blowing."

I didn't quite relish his amusement, and was about to remonstrate and explain, when suddenly a brilliant idea struck me.

"Hall," I exclaimed, "I want you to do something for me, and I'll be grateful all my life."

"What is it?"

"When Mrs. Forsyth and I are at breakfast, I want you to—"

"At this moment the latch of her door clicked. I stopped, and pulling him along, said: "Come outside; I can tell you in a minute or two, but she must hear."

"On the platform I confided to him my scheme. What it was, and how it worked, the reader will soon learn.

On my return I lighted the lamp, put

on the water, and soon had the simple breakfast ready. Mrs. Forsyth did not keep me long waiting. When she came in she took her usual seat, and did not make her customary protestations about depleting my stock. I took this to be a good sign, and my spirits rose accordingly. She cast an amused glance at my preparations, and said:

"You're getting to be quite a domestic man. Suppose I had been shut up here with disagreeable people, and with scarcely anything fit to eat, I really don't know what I should have done without you."

"Don't you?" I cried; "please say that again."

"You mustn't spoil your palate with too many sweet things. Any news this morning?"

"Hall is expecting some every moment. He was going to the wire when I left him."

"I wish he could send us through by wire."

"I am not in a hurry."

"But I am. Think of my sister. I prefer to think of her sister."

At this moment Hall came in. His preternaturally solemn expression caught Mrs. Forsyth's eyes, and I believe spared me a rebuke.

"Why, conductor, what a long face you wear this morning! Surely things can't be worse than yesterday."

"I am afraid you won't like it, ma'am. The fact is, the difficulty to get food here is so great, the company has ordered that all the single men among the passengers are to try to push through to the Forks this afternoon."

"I could never manage it on these awkward snow-shoes."

"Very sorry, sir," said Hall, with well-assumed impertinence. The full meaning now seemed to dawn on Mrs. Forsyth. She began to weep.

"Do you mean to say," she expostulated, "that I am to be left here all alone? It's an outrage!"

"I shall be here, ma'am," said Hall, consolingly, "and there's an old clergyman in the next car."

"I don't want any old clergyman," she exclaimed from behind her handkerchief.

I made a sign to Hall, and he disappeared. As the door closed on him, Mrs. Forsyth took down her handkerchief and asked: "Has that brutal conductor gone?"

"Yes, dear Mrs. Forsyth. But it is really not his fault. He has no discretion in the matter."

"Oh, I suppose you're glad to get away."

"Indeed no. I'd much rather stay."

"Then stay."

"What is to become of me?"

"I'll take good care of you."

"I don't want to be taken care of—at least not by him. Can't I go too?"

"Impossible! It's even a great risk for me."

"It's disgraceful!" she exclaimed, again having recourse to the handkerchief. "They've no business to start trains in this weather. I know I shall die here, with nobody to care a bit."

My time had come, and I made a headlong plunge.

"Dear Mrs. Forsyth, there is a way by which I might stay."

"In Heaven's name, what is it?"

"I hardly dare to tell you. That order applies only to single men, or men without their wives."

"Well?"

"If—if—you would only—well, it's no use, Kate—yes, I know your name—saw it on one of your books. Kate, I love you. Don't say anything but hear me out. It is true I have known you but a few days—"

"Her face was hidden by the wretched handkerchief, but from behind it she sobbed, "Only I-f-five."

"Excuse me—nearly six; but we have seen so much of each other that it seems we have been acquainted for months—you said so yourself yesterday."

"No; it was you who said so."

"You didn't contradict me. And then I've met your sister."

"Yes, that is true," she assented, as she again permitted her face to be seen.

"I know enough of you," I continued "to feel sure of my love for you. Cannot you care for me a little? There is a clergyman on the train; he can marry us at once, and then I can remain with you, not only here, but all my life."

"What!" she cried, in dismay; "the married all in a hurry, without any warning, and to you, whom I— And then I have no trousseau. No, it's impossible! Leave me, and let me die."

I don't know what form of consolation I should have tried as she sank back weeping, but at this juncture Hall came in.

"Mr. Austin," said he, "you'd better be packing up the trifles you want to take with you." Then turning to her: "It's no use crying, ma'am; we have to make the best of it."

"Have you ever been snowed up before?"

"Yes, ma'am, last year—twenty-two days." And with that tremulous eyelid again noticeable, he went out.

"Twenty-two days alone," ejaculated Mrs. Forsyth, "in a snowy tomb, with a conductor and an old clergyman!"

"Kate, dear Kate, won't you listen to me? Together the time will not be half so long, for we will share it. Think of what you may save me from. I am not used to snow-shoes, and may perish on the way."

"I would not keep you here for selfish reasons," she said, after a brief pause; "but to save your life, I might be tempted—"

"Then you consent?" I cried.

"Are you very sure you love me?"

"As certain as that I breathe."

"Then Robert—yes, I know your name—that nice conductor told me—you may ask the clergyman if he will. But oh! it's awful to be married without a wedding dress."

"You shall have the handsomest that is to be got when we reach the coast."

"That won't be like being married in it. Remember, if you ever repent this, that I only marry you to save your life."

"I shall never repent. I love you, too much." I started toward the door to see the clergyman.

She called me back, and as I held her in my arms she whispered, "Robert, I think I am a little selfish, after all."

The only way to have a friend is to be one.

TALKING ABOUT HENS. How a Coolness Sprang Up Between Two Friends—New Use for Spring Chickens.

A Rochester man named Muggs has been out in the town of Wheatland visiting some friends who live on a farm. Mr. Muggs is not only a man of more than average intelligence, but he is also of an inquiring turn of mind; and while he was visiting on the farm he managed to pick up a good deal of valuable information by asking questions about things. The first day that he was there he went around with the farmer to look at the stock. One of the first things that excited his curiosity was a hen that was on a nest under the end of a lumber pile.

"This must be a hen," said Muggs confidently.

"It is," said the farmer.

"She seems to be taking life pretty easy," ventured Muggs.

"Quite the contrary," said the farmer. "She is busy."

"Laying an egg, probably," suggested Muggs.

"Probably not," said the farmer. "She is setting."

Then Muggs made some patronizing remark to the hen and reached down to stroke the fur on her neck. The hen was busy, but not too busy to keep an eye on Muggs, and when his hand came within reach she picked a small piece of skin off from it. Muggs took his hand away with wonderful quickness and put it into his pocket. Then he stood and contemplated the hen in silence for several minutes. At length he said:

"I suppose hens seldom have hydrophobia?"

"Seldom," said the farmer.

"But when they do have it they have it pretty bad, don't they?" inquired Muggs with considerable anxiety.

"Oh, you needn't be alarmed," said the farmer. "The hen is mad, but not in that way. Her fangs are not poisonous."

"I suppose, now," said Muggs, "that an industrious, persistent hen like that will hatch out a chicken every day, and not feel it."

"There is a difference in hens," said the farmer. "Some hens set harder than others and hatch chickens faster. I have got one that hatched out a brood of chickens last summer in ten days. She never stopped for Sundays or legal holidays, but just kept right at it. But it wasn't a very good job because it was rushed too much. Nine of the chickens were foolish and the other four were not any too bright. You see they were not expecting it and they set Muggs still more thoughtfully, as if an idea had occurred to him.

"Yes, I remember," said the farmer, who was also beginning to have an idea. "What of it?"

"O, nothing; only I thought perhaps they belonged to this brood that you have been speaking about. We broiled them a couple of days and then gave them to my boy to cut up into bean-shooters."

A coolness has since existed between Muggs and the farmer.

A Free and Fearless Bill-Poster.

The New York bill-poster has from time immemorial been a free and fearless rover of the highways. In the days when Harry Paulding, now dead and gone, had his headquarters in a Park Row cellar and drank champagne as a beverage, these bill-posters' wars were incessant. A truce was called to one of these wars by the death of the first Paulding, who had a monopoly of the business. He made a mint of money and tyrannized the whole community that had to deal with him. Then opposition started up and he set to work to fight it. The streets were full of war and the police courts kept busy fining the contending factions. Now and then one would commit a murderous assault, and on at least one occasion that I recall a murder was scored against the adhesive guild.