

[‘Edie’s Avalanche: Snowed Up’¹]

Snowed up: A Mistletoe Story

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(author of ‘A Midnight Skate’ etc.)

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January 2nd. Papa has just given me such a splendid set of furs, I never saw anything so beautiful. I do believe they must have cost three hundred pounds. I must make a note of it, but I shall never be a good diarist, my last entry I see was a month ago. Oh dear whenever shall I reduce this giddy head of mine to something like order. It was old Mr., I mean the very reverend, at least I’m not sure about his title but he is canon or something at the Cathedral who persuaded me to begin keeping a diary – he said it would help me to classify my ideas, and bring my mind into shape. Of course he put it in much grander words than that.

I shall wear the jacket to the theatre tonight, Lord Bilberton escorts me, perhaps it is not *de règle*², but I *must* wear it, it is so pretty and so warm, and new, and I can take it off. How *can* people keep their new things a month before they try them on?

Aurelles will be mad if he sees me there with ‘pantaloon’ as he calls his lordship. Why are guardsmen always so nice and why have they never got ten thousand a year like Mr. Alderman Thrigg, who I believe has been lending paper money, and now I think of it I shouldn’t wonder if these furs were bought with some of it. However I can’t bother myself about that – a poor little girl like me has so much to think of. I wish papa would let us go to Nice as we used to instead of staying in this horrid Berkeley Square. Why – there’s Lieut. Aurelles riding by again: why *does* he *always* ride by just at this time? I do believe he knows I am up here in my room overlooking the square.

I feel so wicked. I’ve kissed my hand to him: but I’m certain he could not see me – you can’t see in at a window at that distance off, now *can* you? He is so tall and strong and noble-looking, such a contrast to wizened little Bilberton, and stout Alderman Thrigg.

A poor girl is just like a shuttlecock or a tennis ball with all these gentlemen tossing her about one to the other. It is laughable when I think of it to see fat Mr Thrigg jump up and open the door for me, and Lord Bilberton screwing up his face into a smile of approval (though he hates the Alderman) and Lieut. Aurelles scowling at them both, and trying oh, so hard to play chess – which he does not understand – with papa; and all just because. Well, I suppose I *am* pretty. I think papa wants to play chess with me as the queen. Lord Bilberton has immense influence with the Ministry, and papa wants to be an Ambassador, and Alderman Thrigg has mountains of gold which he made by selling green peas in the City somewhere, and papa’s estate is encumbered. If guardsmen would only manage to be rich; but I’m not going to be sold exactly. We shall see!

Jan. 3rd. Phillip, I mean Mr Aurelles, did see me, and smiled, – perhaps he saw me kiss my hand too. He is a *dear* man – he is a kind of Newfoundland dog of a man. There – I shall be a poetess some day. When we came out of the theatre it was so still and quiet in the streets, almost like death itself – the snow had come down, and the carriage wheels made no noise at all. Poor Lord Bilberton – I can't call him 'Charley' as he wants me to, such an *old* thing as that: he shivered and shook, and now today he has sent round to say he'll try and come to dinner but the snow has given him such a cold. Why it is beautiful! I wish I was snowballing Aurelles. I never get any fun now I'm a woman. I'm nineteen you know. Papa wants me in the study – that's certain to be something disagreeable.

How hateful it is of gentlemen when they come to the point as they call it! We girls never care about such nonsense. It spoils life, I'm -sure it does and I reflect a great deal, this always coming to the point.

They have both done it. I hate them both, ugly, old – There I've no patience with such people! Lord Bilberton spoke about it yesterday, and Mr Thrigg early this morning. Why didn't they ask *me* first, I call it an insult. I shan't marry either of them, and papa and I have had a desperate quarrel. I won't, and besides I don't see why I should; there is no hurry, and if I did I should run away with – with Mr Aurelles or *somebody*, and -and – I could cry, but I am so cross.

Papa said in his nasty cynical way that I might have which I liked, it made no difference to him. Cool! As if it made no difference to me. He said the ancient name of Audeley was in danger of disgrace – bankruptcy, or something, and either he must get a good appointment under Government, or his mortgages must be paid off. His dear Edie – me of course – would not let our house tumble down, that's not how he put it but I can't remember the fine words. And our luxuries, and horses and carriages, and the towers in the country, and I must be a heroine like Edith my namesake two hundred years ago. And he hoped I had not entangled myself with a penniless soldier. *That* was just what I wanted.

Didn't I fly at him! Entangle myself! I wanted something to quarrel with him about. So I rushed away and left him. Why can't papa see how handsome Aurelles is?

I do hate this wearisome snow. It keeps coming down so quiet and calm, and cold, it mocks at me – it does not care a bit about *my* misery. I hope though Aurelles won't look in this evening – it would be rather awkward. I must send him a line and tell him to wait a day or two till the air is more settled in here.

Jan. 4th. I shall soon have nothing to do but keep this diary, for it's impossible to go out in this horrid snow. I've got a fire in my bedroom tonight, and am writing cosily before I retire as the books say. It's very jolly and snug here – if one only had *somebody* to chat with. I wonder if I had *somebody* here every evening I should get tired of him! I can just fancy him curled up on this rug at my feet (he raves about my little feet and little paws, and littleness altogether, and wicked black eyes and and – but no matter). He would be on that rug like a great dog, and make love to me so *nicely* I do believe *forever*.

Lord Bilberton sleeps here tonight. I wonder how he could face the weather to get here with his poor shivering ancient body. He says Piccadilly is quite impassable with the snow, and Curzon St blocked up, and his carriage could not get through it. I believe he was carried here on a man's shoulders. I daresay he is discussing me now downstairs with papa. But I *won't*, no I *won't*, and if I do I'll run away.

Jan. 5th. This is snow is really something awful. Aurelles can't ride by every afternoon. Lord Bilberton can't go home. He says with his wretched attempts at gallantry that the snow is his best friend and he should like to be imprisoned forever with me – pah! Papa is fidgety and cross, for he could not get his *Morning Post* this morning, and no letters came. It will be fun if we really do get snowed up.

Alderman Thrigg has got here! He has scrambled through and over the snow and he is bigger than Falstaff was. Such a spectacle as he presented I never saw before – my hand shakes now with laughter. 'Ah' said he, 'you need not laugh Miss Audeley, I assure you it is a very serious matter. But never mind I've got here – I shall perish in company with an angel! You are the North Star – magnetic attraction you know' – and there he broke down fairly for want of poetical language and left his absurd similes unfinished.

But if it is all true that he says it really is a serious matter. No one could possibly have believed it till it happened. Thrigg has kept a memorandum of the depth of the snow. The day before yesterday it was 21 inches deep in Cornhill (some stupid place in the East I think). All the trains were delayed. The Scotch express never reached town at all, and there's no news of them, for it seems a rough wind has blown down the telegraph poles and snapped the wires. There were crowds at the station all day – waiting for the trains. The Flying Dutchman from Exeter was seven hours late: they had to dig a passage through the drifts twice – one at Bath, and again between Reading and Didcot. Yesterday it never came in at all and Thrigg says he believes it stopped on the [] below Bristol. That's why papa has not heard from the steward at The Towers.

It was 33 inches deep yesterday in Faringdon St., and Thrigg is quite sure that no trains will be able to get in tomorrow: because of the deep drifts – though thousands of men are at work digging. But as fast as they clear it away it fills up again. I do wish Phillip would call – I wish I had not written him that note. I shan't be able to sleep for thinking of the snow.

I never saw anything like it. It has never ceased since we came home from the theatre. Papa in his nasty way says it serves us right for attempting to reach the North Pole – it's a judgment. Lord Bilberton–, who sits huddled up on the sofa with three carriage-rugs wrapped round him, is half silly with fright. One minute he chatters and grins and the next asks for a prayer book. To marry such a coward – pah! not for ten coronets.

Jan. 6th. Alderman Thrigg is in despair – he declares he shall be ruined. All his vegetables coming to London from fifty different places are snowed up on the way. He is a kind of gigantic greengrocer I think – very low. Still the snow comes down steadily. There is no wind today: and it falls all the thicker and faster.

All business in the City they say is at a standstill – the traffic is stopped, and the streets buried three or four feet deep. The milkman has not been for ever so long, nor the baker, nor the postman, nor anybody else; we have had to send for everything, and the prices are going up rapidly. A pint of milk the footman managed to get for tea cost half a crown! Tomorrow the shop-people said they should not have any for 'love or money'.

After all Mr Thrigg is not so silly as Lord Bilberton. He can talk sensibly enough except when he tries to pay me stupid compliments. He seems to understand the position better than either papa, or anybody else. He says all the provisions people eat in London are brought in daily – the meat and everything else, his darling cabbages

and onions included. (Fancy marrying a man who sold *onions*!) If the railway service be blocked for one week like this, all the stores will be exhausted – for they do not keep great quantities now like they used to in Joseph's time in Egypt. At least I think that was what he said. Then he burst out and looked as if he were going to cry – because he might have made his fortune (as if he were not rich enough already) at such a crisis if he could only have got his onions and potatoes in. We are all to be starved in fact.

Jan. 10th. I do believe we *shall* be starved. What do you think – we can't get a joint of meat for tomorrow's dinner! The footman and the coachman have just returned from a foraging expedition, and there's not a pound of meat to be bought – it's all sold and eaten. The last leg of mutton was bought for ten pounds; and people offered thirty pounds for another in vain. Wherever *can* Phillip be?

Jan. 14th. Snowing still – nothing but snow. Troubles are coming faster and faster. All the servants have left us, except my maid Ruth Pardon. They said they could not live on flour and water, and there was nothing else in the house.

Such fun! The Alderman has been helping me in the kitchen. Bilberton is helpless. Papa who is an invalid sits and smokes and sips his port, and says he's *quite* comfortable, and shan't stir a foot.

The fire was gone out in the kitchen, and I was trying to light it, when Mr Thrigg waddled in and down he dropped on his knees. I thought he was going to pop the question instead of which he began blowing the fire up with his mouth. He puffed away till we got a good blaze, and then begged my pardon, and took off coat, and went to fetch some coals from the cellar – he said he could not work without taking his coat off. 'It's habit you know Miss Audeley. It's the memory of them old times. Ah!' and the creature actually sighed. But I think there is some good in him. At all events he showed me how to make a pudding.

I hadn't the least idea. He rolled out the dough like – like a cook, and patted it with his great fat white ringers (they are always scrupulously clean) till his diamond ring was covered with flour. He said it would be as hard as a brick for want of something – fat I think. Then he searched the kitchen, and the larder. 'You see' said he 'Miss Audeley in this 'ere crisis the first thing to do is to take stock' by which he meant to ascertain our resources. We found three apples, a lemon, some spice, about a pound of tea, – the sugar was gone; and that was all. The coal cellar was nearly empty; there was only just enough flour to complete the Alderman's dumpling (I always thought the only thing Aldermen ate was turtle soup). The beer barrels were out – the servants having nothing to do had emptied them, and the brewer could not come round to his dray.

Meanwhile the dumpling or pudding was boiling away, 'Oh dear' sighed the Alderman sitting down and panting 'After all the feasts I have been to – all the Lord Mayor's dinners, and to come to a hard dumpling! Dear me – if we only had some potatoes or cabbage or anything, and there's heaps in my warehouses – at least if the poor people have not sacked them.'

I could not help laughing though I was really hungry, and becoming anxious about Phillip; but at dinnertime it was no laughing matter. The dumpling was so hard one *could* not masticate it; and at last papa in a towering rage kicked it downstairs like a football and returned to his cigar and port.

Poor Bilberton was as cadaverous as a ghost. Mr Thrigg was very thoughtful. Presently he started up 'I'll try' he said 'I'm old and not so strong as I used to be but I'll try and bring something from my warehouses.' But when I went to let him out we could not open the door – the snow had drifted against it so high. Not to be daunted however, he got out of the first floor window and dropped onto the heap of snow. To my horror he sank up to his shoulders, and could not move. He puffed and struggled but the more he tried the worse it was, till I really feared he would be suffocated in the snow which kept drifting along.

Papa came up and they got the bellrope but he and Bilberton and I all pulled and pulled and pulled, but it was no use; poor Thrigg was so heavy. There he stuck. It was growing dark now (of course the gas had not been lit for days in the streets – luckily we always used lamps and had a can of oil left) – poor Thrigg was chilled to the bone. Papa shut the window, and laughed at him.

'Ow – ow – ow!' cried the miserable Alderman shivering, and stretching out his hand to me, 'Don't Miss Audeley – don't leave me here in the dark! Ow – ow – ow! I'm perishing with cold! Please Miss – Miss – Miss Audeley!!'

It served him right for daring to ask papa to marry me; but I couldn't see him left like that. So I put on my fur jacket and wrapped myself up well, and sat at that window in the cold room shivering, till it became dark, when I brought a tump so that he might see a light at all events.

'Miss Audeley – Miss Audeley – ow – ow – ow!' I opened the window a little way.

'Do please throw me a bottle of port wine or I shall die with cold.'

I threw it to him as well as I could, but then he had no corkscrew, so I handed him the poker with which he knocked the neck off. I suppose the wine revived him a little for he began to say that he suffered for me – it was his devotion to me that had brought him into that horrible –

'Devotion' cried a voice I knew well, and there was Phillip in the darkness, he had been guided he told me afterwards by my lamp at the window.

I couldn't help myself I was so glad. 'Oh you dear fellow' I shouted. 'Do come in – make haste – don't step on the Alderman' – He came to the window sideways – it seems the Alderman had stepped into a place where the snow had only just drifted up, and it was hard all round. 'So you've been forcing yourself on Miss Audeley Sir, have you' said Phillip, putting his foot on Thrigg's shoulder, and giving him a push deeper in the snow. There was a smothered 'ow! ow! ow!'

I begged and prayed Phillip to help him out, and at last he did pull him halfway up, but the Alderman was staunch; to every demand of Phillip's that he would cease to ask my hand he replied he would die first. So Phillip pushed him down again and I grew terribly frightened. I threatened to call the police if Phillip didn't help him out but he only laughed and said that there were none within miles and miles. However he pulled the Alderman up half way.

'Do please say what he wants' I cried. 'You are mistaken Mr Thrigg. I could never have you though you do make such beautiful dumplings. All my heart is Phillip's.' The Alderman uttered a groan, but gave the promise, and Phillip hauled him in at the window. Thrigg shook himself, and went down to the kitchen fire. Phillip slipped his arm – no never mind. 'And all your heart is mine dearest' he said.

'No that it's not sir' I replied and boxed his ears. I sat by Lord Bilberton on the sofa, and talked so sweetly to him. Phillip scowled at me. Papa smoked and smoked

and smoked, and sipped his port. The Alderman walked in the kitchen. About eleven o'clock papa had a fearful attack of the gout brought on by the wine and Phillip had to carry him to bed. We had no supper at all. Presently Thrigg came up. I suppose he thought it over, and being a sensible man in the main saw how absurd it was of him to want to marry a mere slip of a child like me. He offered his hand to Phillip in a manly way, and they became fast friends from that moment. Then I altered my tactics – I addressed myself to Mr Thrigg, and I believe I soon made up to him for his burial in the snow. If we had not been so hungry, we should have been jolly enough. Some one spoke of the dumpling, and poor Phillip was so sharp set that he actually hunted about, but the rats had eaten it. We could hear them all over the house – they came up the sewer no doubt, and were made bold by starvation and cold. Phillip told us of what had occurred out of doors. At first he said that people were merry over the snow, and played at pelting each other in crowds. Then when provisions disappeared, and all business was stopped, they seemed to grow despondent, and moped about. After a while the roughs began to plunder the houses (lucky for us they had not come yet to Berkeley Square). His regiment was called out to put down the rioting, and there were some fearful scenes in the city: but at last the snow grew so deep the horses could not charge, sinking in up to the saddle girths, and the roughs had their turn. Besides which the soldiers had no food, and very soon the troop melted away. Phillip was thirty-six hours making his way from Knightsbridge to our house. He could not get along – the drifts were so high he had to climb every step of the road.

Just before we went to bed we could hear the east wind raving again, and as we had [] last knob of coal every one spoke with dread of the []. But I did not fear much now Phillip was with us.

Jan. 15th. 'My fingers are so numb I can hardly write: but I must do something to pass away the miserable time while Phillip is out foraging for provisions. Papa is in bed helpless. Bilberton is in bed helpless. The Alderman caught such a violent cold he too is in bed helpless, or nearly. Phillip and I are left alone – for the maid is so frightened and she is nobody. We – or rather he has broken up nearly all our chairs for fuel and has begun upon the tables. We have not tasted meat or vegetables or bread I don't know how long: except the cat — the gentlemen dined on my Persian cat. I *could* not touch it. It is terrible while Phillip is hunting for a little flour. I have twice heard the gangs of roughs go by tonight swearing most fearfully. We dare not show a light.

Jan. 17th. I am *quite* sure if papa and the Alderman do not have a little meat or soup they will die. Yet there is not a snap left in all London. Phillip has risked his life to find some ever so many times. Papa is so weak he can scarcely speak. I do believe I cried two hours last night on Phillip's shoulder. And he is fearfully thin and gaunt. What has become or will become of the poor people no one can tell. And all through a little snow – the despised snow – so fine and impalpable, yet strong enough to completely conquer our civilization. No trains can run. No ships can come up the river. No food, no light, no help. All through the weak, feeble despised flakes of snow!

Jan. 18th. Phillip has gone upon the last forlorn hope. He has previously visited every warehouse the Alderman could remember till this morning. Thrigg suddenly thought of a small grocers and green grocers shop just the other side of St. Paul's or somewhere out there, where it seems he was born. It is such a little out of the way place, it is possible there may be something up there. If not papa must die. An awful

period of waiting for us. *Jan. 19th.* Phillip came back about six this morning after being out all night – he was so exhausted he fell down on the floor and it was an hour before he came to himself. Fortunately although we had no food we had plenty of wine and brandy and the brandy revived him. He brought us eight tins of preserved Australian beef, and a small bag of potatoes: and how he dragged them along I can't think. If it had not been dark they would have robbed and perhaps killed him.

Oh, what a feast we had this evening – the Alderman is still eating. Phillip is asleep on the sofa. How dreadfully worn and wearied he looks: yes, he has *all* my heart. He had such a journey: the state of London is something appalling. He had to make a long detour to reach the place he wished to find. The bitter east wind drives the hard frozen snow along so swiftly that it cuts the face – it struck him like the pellets from a shotgun. The draught through the narrow portals of Temple Bar kept them clear of drift but so savagely and fiercely did the frozen grains of snow drive in his face there that he could not get by. The people are mad – at least those left are. They could not light bonfires in the huts for the wind, so they set houses on fire, and stood near to warm themselves. Some prophesied about the end of the world – but I can't write these horrid things. The bonded warehouses and spirit stores are full of drunken men who have broken in, I shudder for the poor women and children.

Coming back he heard or saw that in Trafalgar Square there was a drift against the National Gallery quite eighteen feet deep. The entrance to the Haymarket was blocked up. The wind having a clean sweep along the Thames embankment kept it clear, but the Houses of Parliament formed an obstacle against which it accumulated in immense heaps. There is a report that an iceberg is aground in the Thames. I believe Phillip was half dazed with fatigue and wandered about on his return hardly knowing where he went.

Jan. 22nd. We had such a terrible alarm last night – three or four of the roughs found us out. Thrigg says they must have smelt our cooking, by the bye, we had to chop our beautiful walnut table that used to stand in the drawing-room for fuel. Phillip had a revolver fortunately (how nice it is to have a soldier by one's side!) and he fired till they went away. But this morning about three o'clock the rats came up and ran over our beds, we all rushed about in *deshabille* and I thought we should have been gnawed to pieces, but thoughtful Phil had foreseen this attack for sometime, and opened a great tin of pepper which he flung over them. This held them at bay, but we can hear them all over the place – the sound of their sharp teeth makes me shudder at this minute.

Today papa got up for the first time and so did the Alderman. Papa thanked Phil in the great proud way he can employ when he is in his good moods, and said that we all owed our lives to him. The Alderman is always praising him. "Better than gold" he says "better than gold, courage is beyond banknotes in value." Poor Bilberton began to feel that he has cut a sorry figure, and is perpetually snuffling with his nose – a nasty habit he has whenever he is annoyed. As for little me I have lost all my spirits – Phil says I am as quiet as a dormouse – I'm afraid to look at myself in the glass, I am so pale and thin. Fancy having two invalids at once to look after, and see that they don't get into mischief – the fat Alderman and papa.

There is hope for us at last – a thick fog has come on, and the Alderman who knows everything is sure it means a thaw. However *did* this fearful storm of snow happen – no one can think: unless the Gulf Stream changed its course for a time.

Certainly the houses are beginning to drip – I can hear the drops falling now. Papa says people will think this storm most extraordinary, but its nothing at all to the convulsions of nature which the geologists have shown to have once taken place.

Jan. 14th. The sun at last! The fog still lingers though: and the streets and Berkeley Square are in such a state I can't describe it – one vast ocean of slush.

Jan. 25th. We have seen a hansom cab! Positively. We regarded it as a phenomenon: something like the olive branches brought into the Ark showing that the dry land had reappeared. Mr Thrigg is closeted with papa, what for I can't imagine.

Well I'm sure, I am to be a commodity bought and sold like the Alderman's onions. He has bought me – for Phil. He has just handed me over to Phil as he would a basket of vegetables! 'Better than gold' he repeated again. 'Better than gold Mr Audeley: this is the man for your daughter Sir.' They never stopped to ask me first and even Phillip seems to take it as a matter of course that I shan't object. On the whole as a means of escaping Lord Bilberton perhaps I may as well agree. So the snow was not such a bad thing for – for Phillip. The Alderman showers his gold on Phil and me, and we are to be married in May – if ever May comes any more.

There's such a noise in the streets now – people are running about once more almost as if nothing had happened. If the sky was to fall they would forget it in ten minutes on the Stock Exchange. That's what Phil says. Certainly *I* shan't forget it. It has sobered me. I mean to settle down and be a good girl, and make Phil a first rate wife! That is if I live, my limbs are chilled to the marrow. I don't think I shall live so as to give a surprise. Mr Thrigg pays Phil's debts [].

The Diary ends here. It's quite possible that a lady's fright may have exaggerated matters; but it is also pretty certain that if a fall of snow four feet deep occurred in London and remained on the ground – being supplied by fresh falls – for only one week, the great city of London depending as it does upon stores brought in by rail day after day, would find itself in a very awkward position.

Richard Jefferies
Author of 'A Midnight Skate', etc.

NOTES

1. Alternative titles in the manuscript.
2. It is not *de règle*: it is not the rule, it is not customary (Fr.).