

WON IN A CANTER.

[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DINNER AT CARVIK HALL.

Sir Turbit Turtlefat was seated in his arm-chair porring over the columns of the *Times*, Lady Turtlefat was seated opposite him looking through her letters, the urn was hissing on the table, and the breakfast waiting.

"Where on earth is Jack this morning?" said the Knight some what testily. "I hate being kept waiting for my meals."

"Dear John will be here directly, he has only ridden over to Linden Hall to see how the invalid is, I am certain he will be here immediately."

"I don't know what the devil has come to that boy," exclaimed the gentleman, "he is never in time for anything."

"Pray don't get angry," said his wife, "he is generally punctually itself. And there he is now coming up the avenue."

"So much the better," replied her husband; "I don't see what good he does going to the Hall so often; young Thornhill is getting on well enough, now if he went there to see mademoiselle and to do any good in that quarter I should not mind, but Jack is such a chicken-hearted fool that the prize will slip from his grasp whilst he is thinking about it. I am sure I was not so shy when I was—was, you know what I mean, carrying on with you; no beating about the bush with me, I went slap at it, hit or miss."

"No, Turtlefat, there certainly was no beating about the bush with you; but then, remember, I had money."

"Well so you had," replied her husband, "and your ten thousand pounds I have turned into ten thousand a year, so I do not think you need complain."

"I am not complaining," said the lady, "I only want you not to be so hard on our boy; such a fine handsome fellow too."

"Handsome be hanged!" ejaculated the Knight sharply. He was in bad humor, for he had not been kept waiting for his breakfast. I see nothing handsome in him, a pasty-faced milk-sop."

The Knight was a bit of a bully at home, and Lady Turtlefat often got some bitter words from her better half when no one was near.

"I wish to heavens, Jack," said his father, "you would not keep me waiting for breakfast as you do, and there is not the slightest necessity for your going over to see young Thornhill every morning; if your journeys are taken to the Hall with the object of seeing Miss Thornhill, why the devil don't you go at a proper time and then you are likely to meet her?"

"Well, never mind," interrupted the lady, "breakfast is ready. Jack only does what is right."

"Oh! of course," said the Knight, sulkily, "you always side against me; but if this goes on much longer, damn me! I'll break fast in my own room."

"Are you never going to lunch again, Jack?" asked his father, after he had been gubbling down a bit of game pie. He was purple in the face from quick eating, and wanted to get a little wind before he attacked the *pate de foie gras*, which he had fixed his eyes on.

"I don't see the use of your keeping hunters in the stable eating their heads off—if you don't shoot, why the devil don't you hunt?"

"I commence again to-morrow," replied his son, "but the fact is, I did not like to go out before this affair of Thornhill's was blown over a little; a fellow gets so chafed and all that, you know, and to-morrow Miss Thornhill is going out on her new horse, Sultan."

"I tell you what, Jack," said the Knight; "if you don't propose to that girl, and make matters safe before six and thirty hours are over your head, you're an ass, and that is all I have to say on the matter;" and the Knight rose from the table and returned to his *Times*.

"All right, governor," replied his son, "all in good time, you know," and he sauntered out of the room.

"My dear," said Lady Turtlefat presently, "we really ought to think about giving a dinner: we owe lots of people one."

"Dinner!" gasped the Knight, throwing down his *Times*, and brightening up considerably, for the sound of dinner was music to his ears. "God bless me, you don't say so! Who do we owe a dinner to?"

"Well," returned the lady, "there are the Thornhills, the Lavenders, the Slyfoxes, Mr. Conyers of course, Lord Verriest, Sir John Forest, our Rector, and a host of others."

"Well, send out the invitations, and for any day you choose, it is all the same to me only let me know in time," and he took up the paper again, and was soon deep in its columns.

"I hate that fellow Thornhill though," he exclaimed suddenly, and starting her ladyship considerably, who was in the middle of

giving a dinner without all being properly paired off was impossible. Poor Lady Turtlefat was in the height of a dilemma, so she attacked her husband again after luncheon.

"I have got the notes all ready to send, Sir Turbit," she said; "but there is a horrible difficulty, for there are nine gentlemen whom we must ask, and there are only seven available ladies, and if any refuse, goodness gracious knows what we shall do."

"Read over your list," said the Knight shortly; he was tasting a new sample of Madeira, and did not like to be interrupted.

"Well," commenced the lady, "there is Lord Verriest, Lord Lavender, Sir John Forest, Captain Slyfox, Mr. Conyers, Mr. Thornhill—the Knight gave a grant as this name was uttered—the Rector, John, and yours; that makes nine. Then there is Lady Lavender, Lady Mary Slyfox, Miss Thornhill, the Rector's wife and daughter, Miss Duichbill—we must ask her—and myself; that is only seven. What on earth are we to do for two more?"

"Hanged if I know," replied the Knight. "Some of the men must go in by themselves." The Madeira did not come up to his idea of being first-class and he was in no mood to argue about dinners, only to eat them.

"Well, I have an idea," resumed the lady, "there are two now coming in our neighborhood, a Mrs. and Miss Sprightly, you have seen them you know—the mother is exceedingly ladylike, and the daughter is charming; suppose I were to have the carriage round, call on them, and ask them to dinner in a friendly way. I am certain to find them at home, for it is a non-hunting day, and as Mrs. Sprightly always accompanies her daughter to the Meets, it is not likely she will have her pony-carriage out two days running. Jack tells me, too, they are noticed by a great many people, Lord Verriest among the number; it would only look friendly, what do you say?"

"A capital idea, anything you like," said Sir Turbit, good-humouredly, he was at a second glass of the Madeira, which went better than the first, so he was in the mood to acquiesce in anything.

The lady therefore ordered the baronch round, and was soon on her road to call on Mrs. Sprightly. Great was the surprise when Lady Turtlefat's card was sent in, and the lady herself shortly after ushered into their pretty little drawing-room. There was little ceremony, for Lady Turtlefat, when away from her pompous old husband, was not so dignified as she wished people to believe. They were mutually pleased with each other, and the city Knight's wife congratulated herself at having secured two such acquisitions for her dinner party—her only fear was that some might refuse, then all her calculations would fall to the ground. Happily this was not the case; the neighbourhood was not noted for its gaily, little besides hunting was doing, the only one who was inclined to send an excuse was Lord Verriest, but his valet, who was *au fait* on all that was going on in the county, having informed his master that Mrs. and Miss Sprightly were to be at Sir Turbit's, decided that nobleman on accepting the invitation. He thought it would be a capital opportunity to know more of the young lady, and to make the acquaintance of her mamma, for he had not yet called on them as he promised.

Lady Turtlefat was in a seventh heaven at finding there was not one refusal, and her party of eighteen complete. Sir Turbit, too, was glad of an excuse for overeating himself.

Many were the consultations the Knight and his *chef* had in the former's study, the cook wanted one thing, Sir Turbit another; but at length the matter was compromised, the Knight was to have his way with the soups (one of which was to be turtle with iceed punch), but he was in no way to interfere with the entrées, and with this arrangement the old gourmand was feign to accede.

The evening arrived, and Lady Turtlefat was gorgeous in her black velvet, feathers, and diamonds. She had none of those fears which people of small means are obliged to worry themselves about, none of those mysterious whisperings, and gliding stealthily out of the room to see that the table has been properly laid, to argue with the cook who would drink, or expostulate with the hired waiter who had already filched half a bottle of sherry, soiled his gloves, had his limp white neckcloth awry, and who was in fact, anything but fit for the post assigned to him; nor had Lady Turtlefat any fears that her servants would be guilty of over-setting the contents of a soup-plate into a lady's lap, or drag the lace scarf off their shoulders by their trepidation and clumsiness.

All the servants in the Turtlefat establishment were good and well appointed, from the kitchen-maid upwards. The only one who had any misgivings was Sir Turbit himself, who was in agony lest the fifteen port should be ill-decantered, or the Madeira and claret overwashed.

"By George, Johnson!" exclaimed the Knight to his old butler, and whose pantry he had entered for the twentieth time for the last

after. Mrs. Sprightly was quietly but well dressed, her daughter looking lovely, and so Lord Verriest seemed to think as he approached, made his bow, and shook hands with her.

"Whilst the usual mysterious whisperings of the host were going on, telling his gentleman guests who they were to take in to dinner, Mrs. Sprightly was engaged in an animated conversation with Lord Lavender and Mr. Conyers, which was put an end to by dinner being announced.

Young Turtlefat would have much liked to have taken in Miss Thornhill, or Miss Sprightly, but as the host's son, Lady Mary Slyfox fell to him, his father leading the way with Lady Lavender, and his mother bringing up the rear with Lord Lavender. However, by a skilful coup, and which he gave himself great credit for, he managed to have Miss Sprightly on one side of him, and Miss Thornhill directly opposite.

Sir Turbit, greatly to his wife's annoyance would insist on being helped twice to soup, and as many times again to the iced rum punch, and he pressed his guests to follow his example.

"Have some more turtle soup, Lavender," exclaimed the knight, in a loud voice; "do as I do;" but the worthy gentlemen was disappointed when his Lordship and other declined. Had they accepted his invitation he would have gone in for a third supply; as it was, he determined to have some warmed for himself and taken up into his room when all had gone, and also to pitch into his butler for helping him to so little.

"How is your cousin this evening, Miss Thornhill?" asked Jack Turtlefat after he had taken several glasses of wine, to screw his courage up to the point, "I trust he is much better now?"

"Thank you," answered the young lady, "though still weak he is getting on famously, and desired to be remembered to you, and to thank you for so kindly inquiring after him. If the weather is mild, I hope to be able to take him out in my pony carriage in a few days."

Jack did not seem to approve of this, though he said nothing, but his face was an index to his feelings, and turning to Miss Sprightly, said in a low voice, "It's deuced hard, Miss Sprightly, that I am saddled with any share of this unfortunate occurrence; the fact is I never fired at all, Brag had two sizes of shot in his gun," (Bouncer was not there to contradict him so he could say what he liked) "he fired both barrels."

"But how could he have been hit on both sides?" asked the young lady.

Jack Turtlefat, was rather nonplussed at this question, but he was equal to the occasion, and answered, after gulping down a glass of sherry to hide his embarrassment, "Easily enough, Miss Sprightly, as he received his first shot he turned round, and so got the contents of the second barrel into him."

He had been cunning enough when the accident occurred, and when running up with the others, to put a cartridge into his discharged barrel, and which had been discovered by the sharp eye of the keeper, but as Bouncer Brag's gun had only one barrel fired off, this lame attempt of the illustrious Jack's went for nothing.

Lady Turtlefat, whose quick ears had caught a portion of the preceding conversation, and was ever alive to her son's interest, exclaimed, "Ah, Miss Sprightly, you are talking of poor Mr. Thornhill; I believe my son John is totally innocent."

"Don't believe anything of the sort, Miss Sprightly," interrupted Sir Turbit, "Jack is the worst shot in the neighborhood; he has peppered half the keepers and beaters in the country, and it will end in his really killing somebody, if he goes on shooting."

Lady Turtlefat looked unutterable things, and her son, to hide his indignation and confusion, took relief in a glass of sherry; and assuming a nonchalant air, asked Mr. Conyers if he had fixed on the date for the hunt ball, the Knight's attention being at that moment taken up by winking at his butler, and making dumb show for a glass of Madeira, which he still had an idea would be over-warm.

The dinner at length concluded, and Lady Turtlefat, having succeeded in catching Lady Lavender and Lady Mary's eye, they rose from the table followed by the others, and left for the drawing-room; the old Knight then took his wife's place at the bottom of the table to get away from the draught of the door, and invited his guests to draw up. He was terribly disgusted on Johnson presently appearing with the coffee, at least half an hour before the time, and inwardly vowed to give that worthy a double dose when he came to his room with the soup and Madeira.

His son had already taken his departure for the drawing-room, whither the other gentlemen presently followed.

When they entered, they found Jack Turtlefat, who was a fair pianist, though he had a miserably weak voice, accompanying himself, and in the midst of a song—

"After all, you still should doubt and fear me

"I have rarely seen three ladies go as you did," exclaimed the Lordship to the young lady, "than last Tuesday, when you, Miss Miss Thornhill, and Mrs. Allsnob were out with the hounds—I never saw such riding in my life; upon my soul, I don't know who rides the best."

"Oh! Lord Verriest, there is not the slightest doubt upon that point, Mrs. Allsnob is by far the better horsewoman"—she meant it, and was quite honest in her opinion—"she has had much longer experience than I have, Miss Thornhill, too, rides quite as well as I do, and is much better mounted, her horse, Sultan, is the most perfect lady's hunter I ever saw."

"Is he?" said the nobleman, looking earnestly at her, "well, if you like you shall have a dozen of them quite as good."

What more he might have said was cut short by Mr. Conyers coming up, and the carriages presently being announced, the guests took their departure.

"Well, Jack," said Lady Turtlefat, when they were alone, "where is your father?"

"Johnson," returned the dutiful son, "has just taken a great bowl of turtle soup and half a bottle of Madeira into his study. He will eat himself into a fit of apoplexy some day, I know his will, and serve him right too." He was deeply exasperated at the way his father had snubbed him at the dinner-table.

"Oh! Jack," exclaimed the mother, "don't talk in that disrespectful way of your father; you don't mean it, I know. But how did you get on with Miss Thornhill?"

"Get on? Not at all. She was nearly as bad as the governor. I could not get a word out of her. I saw she was laughing at my song, and I am fully convinced it is no go with her; that cad Thornhill, her new-found cousin, has cooked my goose in that quarter, and wishing his mother good-night, he took his departure for a cigar and a glass of grog in his own room."

CHAPTER XVII.

COLONEL DUFFY TO THE FOLE.

Shirkington was deeply exasperated at what he termed his friend's treachery in endeavoring to steal a march upon him, and fully determined, as he rode homewards, that he would pitch into Bluster remarkably hot; but this he was not able to do, as he found his friend had retired to rest some half-hour before he arrived, so Shirkington consoled himself with a glass of brandy-and-water, over which he vowed deadly revenge against Bluster on the morrow.

The following morning, however, before he was up, brought him a little pink note with a neat monogram, and one of the same size and dimensions was taken to the Captain's room.

"Who did this come from?" asked Shirkington, sitting up in bed and rubbing his eyes for he was hardly awake.

"Eastern brought it over, sir," said the servant, "with Miss Sprightly's compliments."

"Ah," chuckled Shirkington to himself triumphantly, as he jumped out of bed to pull up the blind, and let more light in the room, "poor little Bessy could not wait the week, how I will crow over that fellow Bluster at breakfast," and he jumped into bed again to read the contents of the note at his ease. As he scanned its lines hurriedly, his face became scarlet, and dashing it down on the counterpane exclaimed, "Damn her! who the deuce would have thought it?"

The contents of the note was as follows:

"DEAR MR. DUFFY,
You had no sooner left this evening than I thought how wrong it would be to ask you to wait a week for my answer to your flattering proposal. I have thought over everything, our intimacy at Brighton, and our friendship here, but I must tell you candidly and at once, so that you may not hereafter say I have encouraged you by false hopes. I, therefore, without losing any time, inform you that I decline the honor you propose doing me. Mamma and myself will be always glad to receive you as a friend, and I trust you will often give us the pleasure of seeing you; but without alluding further to this subject, as my mind is fully made up,
I am, dear Mr. Duffy,
Yours very truly,
BESSIE SPRIGHTLY."

The tenor of the Captain's note was pretty nearly the same as that of his friend's.

When both gentlemen met in the breakfast-room they looked anything but amiably at each other.

Shirkington looked particularly black; he remembered his cool treatment of the young lady at Brighton, and felt by no means assured that though he had been refused that his friend had not been accepted, for he had found out that the Captain had received a "billet doux" at the same as himself.

Bluster had the same idea, and thought it very probable that Shirkington, through having stolen a march on him and so being first in the field, was the accepted man.

"Well," said Duffy, opening the ball, "you played me a nice trick last night Blus-

"Doocid fino girl that Miss Sprightly, Rasper," blowing a huge cloud of smoke from between his lips, "she is by Gad, sir! rides tip-top, should not mind making her Mrs. Downey, but—"

"The devil you would not," ejaculated the Major, somewhat hastily, "why I am spooney there myself, toss you up who pops."

"If you had not interrupted me, Rasper," replied the Colonel, "I was going to say, but she won't do for me."

"Not do for you, Downey, why not? devilish pretty girl, a good stepper, looks a thorough bred one all over, and a thou a year."

"Ah," said the Colonel, winking sapiently, "that's just it, there's no coin, my boy, thou a year is a snare and a delusion; it is only a thousand pounds, and by Gad, sir! that's a fact."

"Ah," said the Major, "that alters the case entirely: no woman is pretty without money, at least in my eyes; dash it! you know, Colonel, I couldn't keep a wife on my pay, not to be thought of for a moment; it's a devilish pity though, for she is a very neat little filly."

"You found out all about it, Rasper, I'm not to be caught napping. It is just this: Mamma Sprightly, who, by-the-way, is a doocid nice lady-like woman, had about a couple of hundred a year of her own, and she lately fell into a legacy of five thousand, which will give her two hundred and fifty a year more, four hundred and fifty in all, my hundred and twenty added to it would make five hundred and seventy a year, which would allow me to live at Cheltenham, keep my cob and pony-chair for the missis, so I am going to enter for the all-age stakes."

"No, are you though?" asked the Major; "but she is rather a level-toothed one, is she not?"

"Well, perhaps she is a little past mark of mouth; but by Gad, sir! one does not marry teeth, you know."

"But the daughter," interrupted the Major; "do you mean to say she has no coin?"

"Just a thousand pounds, Rasper, not a stiver more. Won't do," sighed the Major; "it's devilish odd I can't find a woman with any of the ready—just my luck."

Mrs. Sprightly and her daughter were lingering over the remains of their breakfast, little imagining that they were being so canvassed in different quarters.

"Bessy," said her mother, "did you really mean what you told me last night, that you have absolutely and unequivocally refused both Duffy and Bluster?"

"Most decidedly I have," answered the young lady; "I will meet them as friends, but I will never marry either of them, that I am quite decided on."

"But I thought, Bessy, that we came here on purpose to hook—I mean that you might play your cards."

"I know, I understand, mamma, but I have other views, now."

"Why you don't mean to say, Bessy, that you have formed any other attachment?"

"I never told I had any attachment for either Mr. Duffy or Captain Bluster; it was a matter of necessity with me. You know we could not have gone on living as we did. But now," continued the girl brightening up and looking exceedingly pretty, "I have found some one I really like, rich, handsome, and a perfect gentleman."

"Good Heavens, child! what on earth do you mean?" looking at her in perfect bewilderment.

"Mamma," said the girl triumphantly, "how would a title suit me? I don't mean strawberry leaves or anything of that sort, but just simple 'Lady'; how do you think Lady Verriest would sound?"

"Lady Verriest! what—you don't mean to say that Lord Verriest has proposed?"

"Well no, mamma, not exactly yet, but he will, and that before the week is out."

"What a wonderful girl!" murmured the astonished lady, as her daughter vanished from the room. "Lady Verriest!" soliloquized she; "ah, then I shall have to go into dinner after her."

"Non-hunting days are generally devoted by ladies to making calls, especially if they can capture their husbands to accompany them; and Lady Lavender fondly hoped that she would be able to get her lord and master to accompany her on a visit she was going to make to Charlie Thornhill, who was going to see his friends.

"Utterly impossible, my dear," replied he, as the question was put to him; "you know the shooting season is coming to an end, and there are covers I have not yet touched, forget that Forest and old Mr. Thornhill and Slyfox will be here presently."

"Ah," sighed the lady, "true, I had quite forgotten that; well, I shall drive over to Lady Mary early, and talk her with me to Linden Hall: I must go and see poor Charlie, he will think it so utterly unkind of us."

"You could not do a better thing," replied his Lordship; "poor fellow, he has indeed had a hard time of it; I shall never forget his look as he sat on the ground trying to staunch those two gaping wounds. It is enough to sicken one of shooting. Look at