

"Duffer" he exclaimed, "I am very, very grieved to hear it, and I trust it may not be so bad as you paint it, of course you will let me see him? By gad! it is horrible to think of—I sincerely hope, my poor girl, you will not be a widow directly you are married."

"What do you think of him, Major?" she asked, as they left the room.

"He is hurt very badly, Mrs. Duffer, but I fancy he will recover. I have seen men in a much worse state than he is, pull through, and quickly too. I hope you will both live long, and will be happy and contented. I am sure he may be in this place and with you. I shall often come and inquire after him."

A sick room is a sad place at any time; but this was an especially bad one. A young man, without any friend on earth save one, that one he had made his wife when at death's door.

Friends he had cast from him with a wasteful hand, and as he lay there, helpless and crushed, he thought of what he might have been, and what he was.

Alice was a gentle and untiring nurse, and rarely did she leave his side; his wants were attended to, and his very thoughts anticipated.

The days passed wearily. What is there so trying to the sufferer, or those who attend on him, as a sick chamber. At the end of ten days he was pronounced out of danger, and a water-bed procured for him, for they were afraid from the time he would have to lie there, that he would get sores on him.

Alice had her piano brought up in his room and when he was in the humor, played and sang to him. Bluster and the Major would drive over and pass an hour with him. He would read and look through the papers, and in that way got through the day.

Weeks passed before he could be moved; but when he was, he rapidly regained strength, and in a short time he was able to be driven about in Alice's pony-chaise.

She was so pleased and proud to take him about, as he got stronger. She one day drove him to Brighton, and the first person they came across was Colonel Downey.

"By gad, Duffer! I'm glad to see you out again. I have heard all about you; dooed sorry I can tell you I was. We are down here for a few days; Cheltenham season over, and nothing to be done there; it is the very stupidest place I was ever at. All Mrs. Downey's domgs. But, Alice, you must go in and see her. Here we are at my door. I will take Duffer a little drive, while you go on and have a talk."

Alice went in, but unwillingly; she disliked leaving her husband even for a moment. But there was no help for it, the Colonel was in her seat, and driving slowly away.

"Well, Colonel, said Shirkington, "how do you like married life?"

"By gad, my dear boy? don't say a word about it; you have no idea the life Mrs. Downey leads me; constant attendances she must have. Nothing half so jolly as in Bygone days, when Spain and I used to have our port and nuts together. Mrs. D— wants walking out, driving out, dining out, and no smoking or grog of an evening. That last order, however, settled the matter; I kicked over the traces, set up a smoking-room, where I read my papers, and do just as I like. I bore it as long as I could, till human nature could stand it no longer, and revolted. But you don't know what a devil of a life I lead in consequence. I was much better as I was. I am something like my old chum, Jack Sampson; I'll tell you as we go along. Jack was a deuced fine fellow, by gad! one of ours; we were subs together. But Jack was like many of us, and could not make both ends meet; in fact, we were dooed hard up, that we were obliged to fly kites and back each other's bills. Well, we woresent into dull country quarters, and amongst other people got introduced to a corn merchant's widow; very wealthy, and with no children. She was about five-and-forty, not very good-looking, and somewhat of the Dutch build.

"We soon stuck up a tree with her, and every man Jack of us that could manage to get a nag, went in for one; and it was allowed that no such horses as ours were in the country for condition—six tuns a day, and

It was a beautiful day, Jack of a Sunday coming home from church with the widow, carrying an armful of books, they had to pass the barrack windows, and were generally there on the look-out for them.

"It's the devil," said poor Jack, "this church business. I have to find all the places for her, and I don't know how to do it. I'm obliged to have them all marked for me by our chaplain beforehand; and then when we get home, she will insist on my drinking three or four glasses of eighteen shilling sherry. I have told her a score of times I like Marsala better than anything; one would get that decent. I can't go on like this long; it's killing me; the stomach of an ostrich could not stand that infernal sherry.

But there was no help for it; something must be done for the honour of the corps.

"Don't you think you could go in for the widow yourself, Major?" asked Jack one day.

"My dear fellow," replied the cunning old fox, "do you imagine I would deprive you of a fortune? I'm a field officer, and have enough to live on. But you are a young fellow just entering on life, with fifty years before you. Go in and win, my boy. Have you not proposed yet?"

"No, not yet, Major," answered poor Sampson. "Upon my life, I have not courage to do so."

"One day the duns came so thick on Jack that he went boldly to work, and asked the widow to lend him two hundred.

"Upon my life, my dear lady," he said, "if you don't grant my request, I shall be obliged to sell out, which will be a great blow to me, as I like the service."

"Now I tell you what, Mr. Sampson, I'll do," returned the widow, "you are head over ears in debt, I know; and that old Major of yours is worse than all the rest. I'm owed over five hundred for corn. I tell you what I'll do, I'll buy you."

"Buy me, my dear lady? I don't know what you mean."

"Ah, Mr. Sampson!" exclaimed the widow, throwing herself into Jack's arms with a force that nearly knocked him off his legs. "You do know what I mean—you have compromised me," here she began to sigh and sob; "you have been seen about walking with me, and paying me unmistakable attentions; I can never show my face again. Marry me, and I will forgive the whole of it all they owe me. I have fifteen hundred a year of my own, and my property here will sell for ten thousand; I want to see life; I want to be a soldier's wife."

"Poor Jack was in the devil's own way, as you may suppose; although he did not owe above four hundred in the world, the offer was a good one, and not to be refused, so he closed with the bargain at once.

Jack put the matter into the hands of the Major, who was very wide awake. The lady had the income she mentioned, and her place was worth what she said, but he could not get her to settle a single farthing on Jack.

"He has his pay," she said. "I will give him what he wants in moderation, and purchase all his steps for him, but more I will not do."

"So he was obliged to be contented with that; and she insisted on a grand wedding with a swell breakfast.

"I shall never forget poor Jack, the day he was married. The whole of 'ours' were there. 'God bless you, old fellow!' exclaimed the Major, as Jack was jumping into the carriage which was to bear them away. 'I'll give you a week, that will do for you,' he said, with a wink, 'then I will recall you.'

"But before the week passed, the regiment was ordered to India.

"What a life that woman led poor Sampson to be sure. She was as jealous as Juno, and gave him no peace, but she kept her word and bought him all his steps. He got constant leave to go up to the hills, for the Colonel was afraid he'd cut his throat some day in sheer desperation. However, at the end of two years she popped off, leaving Jack about two thousand a year, besides his pay. He is a general now, and out of the service; no man gives better dinners, or is better mounted, but he never tried marriage again.

But we must turn back again. Mind you don't say a word about what I have told you, Duffer," continued the Colonel. "Mum's the word, my boy, we shall be here for an-

sharp enough for the continent." So, taking John Turtlefat aside, he had a long talk with him.

"I cannot tell you how much obliged to you I am, Sir John," said the young man. "I shall follow out your advice to the letter, and by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning we shall be on our way to Paris. I must take leave of all your party now."

Mona was more than astonished when she heard her husband's sudden determination; but, with her husband's quickness, she felt sure that Sir John had advised her husband to take the step, and she was not sorry for it. She liked home far better than wandering on the continent; she was so pleased to fall into her husband's idens, that it never for an instant occurred to her to propose home.

Their arrangements were soon made, and early on the following morning they had left Naples, the old lady being just as delighted as the young one to be gone.

The "Firefly" lay at her anchorage for a day or two more; but one morning she spread her white wings, and flitted away no one knew whither.

Mary came up on deck, which the gentlemen were already pacing, cigar in mouth.

"Why, we are sailing away!" she exclaimed. "Where are you going, Lord Verriest?"

"Oh, we had enough of Naples, and are off a little farther afield. We are bound for Greece, so you will soon have a chance of seeing the 'Maid of Athens.'

Swiftly did the beautiful vessel glide through the water, which had hardly a ripple on it.

The days passed pleasantly enough. They stopped here and there, never sailing by night; but always brought up and at anchor. At last they reached their destination.

"Now for fresh fruit, melons, and Greek wine," exclaimed Charlie. He had picked up wonderfully during his trip, and was in unusual spirits. His uncle, too, had enjoyed his trip amazingly.

They wandered about all day, saw what was to be seen, and did what was to be done.

"Let us get a good conveyance, and go up the country," said Charlie one morning.

The only one who did not seem to approve of it altogether, was his uncle.

"You know, my boy," he said, "the country is in a very wild, unsettled state; but I suppose such a large party as ours would be pretty safe. There are four of us men, and we could take our six-shooters with us."

Lord Verriest and Sir John thought there would not be the slightest danger; so the following day the six set off, taking their lunch with them, and each gentleman had his six-chambered pistol with him, and many rounds of ammunition.

The ramshackle carriage jostled over the rough roads, shaking them dreadfully; but they only laughed at it.

"If the old machine will only hold together till we get home," remarked his Lordship, "we shall be lucky. I cannot say much either for horses, carriage, or driver, who, by the way, seems to be a most taciturn fellow. One cannot get a civil answer out of him."

A little farther on the nobleman had a regular dispute with the man, who insisted on going one road, whilst his Lordship was just as determined on going another, very much to the fellow's disgust, who was in the end obliged to give in.

After a drive of some two hours, they came to a lovely spot, where they agreed to have luncheon.

"I don't think milords will like this place," remarked the driver, in broken English, "no tree—no shade."

"Just the very reason, my fine fellow, we prefer it," said Sir John. "We have a capital view here. Hang your trees and shade, in a strange country, especially one like this. Give me a good sight, where I can see all that is going on."

"Messieurs will do as they please," replied the man, "but it is impossible for me to remain here with the horses. No water—no, nothing. I will go to a place I know of, not far from this. What time will messieurs like the carriage?"

On being told, in three hours, the fellow mounted one of his animals, and rode away;

Lady Verriest and her companion were in a state of great trepidation.

"Don't be alarmed, Bessie," said her husband. "Perhaps, after all, it is nothing; but there certainly is a lot of the fellows. I make out nine of them, Charlie. Hang it, we four can settle that lot if it comes to fight. We could keep this place for a week against any reasonable number."

The carriage was drawn well into the stone and the ladies placed in safety within it.

Lord Verriest had taken the command of the little party.

"If it comes to shooting," he said, "we shall do pretty well, for we have each nearly thirty rounds, beside what we have in our pistols; but, perhaps, after all, it is nothing."

"I can't agree with you, Verriest," remarked Sir John, who had been attentively studying them through Charlie's field-glasses; "they are a ruffianly lot of looking fellows, and I see some have guns."

The men continued to approach, and shortly stopped exactly opposite to them in the road, about a hundred yards off; here they had a consultation.

At length one detached from his comrades, and approached, having something white in his hand.

"No harm will come to milords Inglis, and the two ladies," he said in French, "if they will come quietly. All that will be required will be a moderate ransom, which, no doubt, milords can easily get."

"Look here my fine fellow," replied Sir John, in good French. "Just go back and tell your fellows that we don't intend doing anything of the sort. We are all armed, and well armed, as you will find if you try it on with us, and, moreover, when we left this morning, it was well known where we were going. If we are not back by six this evening assistance will be sent. We will pay no ransom, and if you or your companions come any nearer we will shoot.—It is as well," he said, "to show plenty of pluck. They are a cowardly lot of scoundrels; but I really did make such arrangements. Help will come, and we must keep it off till it does."

The man returned, and presently the whole body was moving towards them.

"Now, Charlie," said Lord Verriest, "you take the big fellow, he is the leader, shoot in the thigh, or dead if you like. We will all of us reserve our shots, to see what effect yours will have. If they still come on then you must let them have it. I wish to God Bessie and Mary were safe. This is the doing of our rascally driver; it was lucky we came this road, or he would have let us into a nice trap. They have only old muzzle-loading guns."

The men continued to approach. "I'll cripple him," said Charlie, and as he uttered the word he fired.

A cry of agony followed the report of the pistol, and the man fell. He was quickly picked up by his companions, who rushed back into the road.

"There's one less," said Lord Verriest. "Well shot, Charlie; we can lick all these fellows easily. My only fear is that more may come up, and then it will be a bad business; we are in an infernal mess as it is."

There was a grand consultation held in the road, and some of them were gesticulating vehemently; one of them, after a little time, was seen to leave and go in a contrary direction to which they had come by.

"There," remarked Sir John, "is one gone for assistance. This becomes serious. If it were not for the ladies, we could easily extort ourselves. What do you think is the best thing to be done under the circumstances? You see their guns, bad as they probably are, could reach us where our pistols could not touch them. No, we must stick here and face it out."

Charlie had been looking anxiously about all the time.

"You see, Sir John," he said, "one is hopelessly crippled, and one is gone; so there are only seven men. Look at this little hollow behind us; well, the carriage conceals it from these fellows. If I could creep down there, I should have at least a mile and a half start before I could be seen, and it is not probable they would see me. Athens is only eleven miles distant; I can easily do it in an hour and a half. What do you say to my trying, it appears to me the

best thing to be done. I am at length exclaimed Lord Verriest. "Glorious fellow, he is at least two miles away, going away at a swinging pace. How the deuce he managed to get so far without us seeing him, I cannot imagine; but he has, doubtless, taken advantage of the irregularities of the ground."

This was the case. On getting out of sight of his friends, Charlie made play, and proceeded at a quick pace. As he got on lower ground, and caught sight of the hill on which his friends were, he proceeded more cautiously, keeping a good look out behind and before. He would not take to the road because he knew he would be instantly discovered; but by management he kept pretty close to it, and out of sight.

"He is quite safe," said his Lordship, handing the glasses to Sir John, "he is clean out of sight to the naked eye, and it is not likely these fellows have any glasses."

Day was now beginning to close, and with that beautiful sky which we, in our foggy little island, never see.

"We must soon keep our weather eye open," remarked the baronet; "not much fear that they will do anything till they get help. At the rate Charlie was going, he will reach Athens in an hour and a half."

For an hour or more they sat smoking, and comforting the two ladies.

"Oh, George," said Lady Verriest, to her husband, as he came to the side of the carriage, "it will soon be dark, and then we shall all be murdered."

"It will not be dark to-night, Bessie; it is now full moon, and it will be even lighter in half an hour than it is now. Don't be afraid; if there should be any firing you are quite safe, for the carriage is thoroughly protected. They could not touch it from either side."

"But yourself, poor Mr. Thornhill, and Sir John."

"Oh, have no fear about us," said her husband laughingly, though he was ill at ease, plenty of cover for us behind these high rocks. Forest," he continued, as he rejoined his two friends, "these fellows have assistance coming; what is that moving down the hill to the right?"

"Men," shortly returned the Baronet; "now comes the tug of war. They will be up in ten minutes; there will be no quarter, I am afraid. Charlie, if he had luck arrived at Athens an hour ago; help for us is on the road I am certain. Seven more scoundrels are coming, I can count them now, that is fourteen in all—fearful odds."

There was a short consultation amongst the ruffians, as the two bands met. As you did one single himself out, and approached the little band behind the stones.

"No harm will come to you," said a voice in tolerable English, "if you will give yourself up to ransom; if not, we will shoot you down like dogs."

"Fire away, my lads, then," bawled out the nobleman. "We will make it hot for you."

The answer was no sooner given than balls began to patter against the rocks.

"Keep well under cover," said Sir John. "Only one fire at a time; that will give us time to re-load. What glorious things these breech-loaders are to be sure; it is no use spotting them all at till they are within forty yards. There is a glorious moon now; look out, they are coming."

When Charlie had put three between him and his enemies, he struck boldly into the road went along at a swinging pace; he remembered the road well. The poor fellow was in a state of the wildest excitement, for he knew that his idolized Mary was almost in the grasp and at the mercy of a band of ruffians.

He had got some six miles on his road and was still pressing on at an undiminished speed, with the perspiration pouring out of him, when he heard the smart trot of horses coming. To conceal himself was the work of an instant.

In a few moments, some twenty mounted military appeared, and amongst them he discovered the steward of the "Firefly," and their driver of the morning.

As may be supposed, Charlie lost no time in making himself known to them.

"If you will let me," he said, in answer to

[TO BE CONTINUED.]