

WON IN A CANTER.

CONTINUED

"Yes, for my old governor," exclaimed the captain, "dashed if I wouldn't run to London, if he wanted me. I can't bear to see him like this."

"Well, Shirk, old boy, we must not remain any longer. God bless you," said Bluster. "I will come over again to-morrow and see you."

"Do you think, Mr. Bluster," asked Alice, "he will get over it?"

"He is very bad, Alice. Mrs. Duffer, I mean, but he is young and strong. Yes, I should say he will, but what do the medical men say?"

"They are very cautious, and I can get no decided answer from them."

"Of course you cannot, it hangs on a thread as yet, but I say he will recover." In his kindness he gave her all the hope he could.

Alice had gone out in the garden to take a little air, for the poor girl was faint and weary with her long watching, when she saw a gentleman on horseback cantoring up. As he came nearer she discovered it was Major Bluster.

"Why, Alice," he said, "who would have thought of seeing you here? It was only by the merest chance I found it out. I was hunting the country all round to find out some straw for the horses, and I was directed here: so of course I rode on. I am married now, and am living not far from this."

"I knew it, Major; in fact, I know it better than you came to reside here regularly; but I thought you had come to-day about this terrible accident."

"What accident, Alice? I have heard of none."

She then told him all from beginning to end.

"Poor Duffer!" he exclaimed; "I am grieved—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 hurt, 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 comfortable. 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 untrusting 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; dozed 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 doings. 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 up 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 attendance she can't have. Nothing half so jolly as in bygone days, when Spavin 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

beans, my boy. Condition sold them, and we had a pretty thing of it, buying nags for a mere song, high in bone, and low in flesh, and selling them at large prices in the bunk of condition; we were beginning to look up."

The band used to play twice a week when the weather was fine, in the open, and on such occasions, to keep the widow in good humor, we used to take it in turns to promenade her about, of which she was mighty proud, she was, by gad!

"Upon my soul, boys," said our Major, one evening, at mess, "I don't know what is to become of us and our horses; the widow is getting chary and shy."

"What do you mean, Major?" we asked. "Why, she hinted, yesterday, we owed her nearly four hundred for corn, and spoke about an early settlement and all that. It will look so infernally bad, you know, to give up our nags—bring discredit on the regiment and all that."

"Suppose I make love to her, Major?" said Sampson. "Do you think that would be any good?"

"Well, perhaps that might stave off the evil day," replied our chief. "But then, by Jupiter! she would be going in for marriage!"

"What of that?" said Sampson. He had six strong tumblers of whiskey-and-water in him, and was a fellow who, at any time, was up to anything. "Upon my soul, I'm game to marry her, if she has got the coin she says; you know we are for foreign service; and Mrs. Sampson, poor thing! might be taken away with yellow fever, cholera, or something of that sort. A hot climate is the devil for carrying them off."

Well, Jack commenced next day by making tremendous strong running, and we heard no more for some time of the hideous little bill. Jack's visits to her were generally of an evening, after mess, when he had a skiff of grog—we did not drink much wine, for we were at low water-mark with our wine merchant.

"It was beautiful to see Jack of a Sunday coming home from church with the widow, carrying an armful of books; they had to pass the barrack windows, and we 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 leg; 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 thee—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 small breakfast

other three weeks, so I will manage to come over and have a cigar with you."

Poor Duffer was glad to get home again; he was tired.

"I thought it would be too much for you, Shirk," said his wife; "but you would go." "I don't think it has done me any harm, Alice; but I am not so strong as I thought I was. What I should do without you I know not."

"I will always take care of you," replied his wife; "I only hope you will not go on as Colonel Downey does."

"What is the matter with him, Alice? he seems quiet enough."

"Oh, there is not much the matter; but Mrs. Downey says her husband is never at home, and will smoke; there is no harm in that; but to be always out, you know!"

"That is because she never let him have a minute's peace at home, Alice. She is always nagging him; he told me so himself, to-day."

"Well, that shall not be said of me, Shirk; as long as you are a good boy, you will never find any change in me, and your comforts will always be attended to; directly you are a little stronger, I shall take you away for change of air."

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

The Russian said but little to Sir John Forest, and the little he did say was not caught by either of the gentlemen.

"I shall now, Charlie, have a serious talk with 'Turtlefat,'" continued the Baronet. "It will not do for him to remain here any longer, for directly we are gone that infernal Count would be trying to get an entree of the house again; not that he would succeed, but he shall not have the chance. I know 'Turtlefat' will take my advice—it will be for him to return home at once; he is not half 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 ideas, 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 rep-

leading the other, leaving the carriage beside the road.

A lovely and enjoyable day it was; not too hot, with a gentle breeze wafted from the Mediterranean.

The things were unpacked, and they sat down to enjoy themselves at a little round a hundred yards from the road; there were some very large boulders of stone, and from this spot they had an uninterrupted and magnificent view.

They soon despatched their luncheon, and Charlie, lighting a cigar, strolled away with his betrothed, laying out plans, and talking as only two young people who are very much in love with each other can talk.

They might have proceeded nearly a quarter of a mile, when Thornhill's attention was caught by something.

His powerful glasses were instantly out of their cases, and at his eyes.

"Come along, Mary, darling," he exclaimed after a short survey. "I am afraid there is mischief brewing."

"What is it, Charlie? oh, do tell me."

"Nothing much, dearest, only there are a lot of fellows about a mile off, in the hollow there, coming this way; it will be better we get back to our party as soon as possible."

On arriving at where they had lunched, they found the old gentleman, Lord Verriest, and Sir John quietly smoking their cigars. Lady Verriest was strolling about a short distance off.

Charlie immediately reported what he had seen.

"By Jupiter!" said his Lordship, "if they should be these cursed Greek brigands, we shall be in a mess, for they would want a heavy ransom. Charlie, my boy, do you think that carriage could be pulled up here?"

Certainly it could, in five minutes, and before that time was passed, it was effected.

"If it is as I fear," continued the nobleman, "the carriage is far better here than in the road; it might have served them as a cover. Here it will be of great service to us."

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 bluck. 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 gestimating

only chance we have, for you may depend they will be on us in numbers ere long."

"My dear boy," exclaimed his uncle, "how are we to part from you? Still, it seems to me to be a good plan; it is evident our rascally driver is in it, for the hour is long passed he was to have come back with the horses."

"Then I'll go, uncle. I must bid Mary and Lady Verriest adieu," and he went up to carriage.

"I am come to bid you and Lady Verriest good-bye for the present," he said. "I will soon return with help."

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, if anything were to happen to you. What an ill-fated expedition this has been!"

"And all my fault," said the young man sorrowfully; "if it had not been for me, the thing would never have been proposed."

"Oh, Mr. Thornhill," interposed Lady Verriest, "do not say that it is any fault of yours. You did it for our pleasure. We are not a bit afraid; our only fear will be for you, that you may not get away safely."

"Have no fear on that head, Lady Verriest, I shall be quite content if I get half a mile start. I am quite well and strong now, and they could never overtake me; besides, I have my revolver, and plenty of ammunition."

They were both pale and anxious as he took his departure and watched him eagerly.

"Good keep you, my poor boy," said his uncle, shaking him by the hand; "for your own—for all our sakes be cautious."

Slowly and cautiously did Charlie creep down the little gullet, watched with intense anxiety by his friends. At last they gave a sigh of relief, as he disappeared from view. They knew well that, as they could not see him, their besiegers could not, for they were considerably lower down than they were. Half an hour passed; yet nothing could be seen of him.

The scoundrels in the road were waiting patiently, smoking and laughing. They were evidently looking out for a reinforcement.

"By Jupiter! there he is," 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 a 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