

WON IN A CANTER.

[CONTINUED]

Then there was a Miss Bullion, an heiress, the daughter of a large cotton spinner, with a hundred thousand the day she married, but he was so exceedingly plain, that no one as yet had come forward to pop the momentous question.

Dunkington had heard of her, and at once got an introduction, to let her talk of hunting his horses, his races and steeplechases, and brought away to his heart's content, and as the young lady was not much sought after, he had it pretty well his own way. He attended himself her cavalier for the evening and made strong running, but a pair of eyes were watching him the little thought of at the back of the orchestra, with several others, sat Alice Lee quietly looking on.

By five o'clock, remarked the Colonel to that gentleman, but Duffler's coming at strong in that quarter, nodding his head sapiently towards where the couple were seated, that that will be a case.

Very likely, Colonel, she has plenty of money, and though very plain and of no beauty, which all these Yorkshire people look for, is I am told a very nice girl.

"Any girl would be too good for that nob," remarked the Colonel, as he turned away.

Mary Thornhill looked beautiful, and was the acknowledged belle of the room. Charlie had not asked her to dance, as he was yet too weak to take any violent exercise.

Sir William paid the young lady evident and marked attention, he had been constantly at the Thornhills lately on the pretence of calling on Charlie, but somehow or other that gentleman was always too unwell to see him.

The fact was, Charlie did not like the young baronet, why will presently appear. Mary had already danced twice with him and that was twice too many to please Thornhill.

"Here, Charlie," exclaimed Lady Mary Slyfox, "come and sit by me, I never saw any one look so utterly wretched and woe-begone as you are—what is the matter?"

"I am tired and weary," said the young man, as he sat down by her, "I want to get home, but supper will not be ready for nearly an hour, and Mary says she is engaged to the very last dance; and there is no chance of moving my uncle from the whist-table."

"Charlie," said her Ladyship, looking keenly at him, "you are a noodle; I always gave you credit for being a sharp fellow, but really I begin to imagine that such is not the case; you can have all you want for asking" (this she said with marked emphasis) "and yet you will not ask."

"I do not know what you mean, Lady Mary," replied the young man, coloring up, "I—I—there is some one calling me, I suppose it is about the supper," and he abruptly left her.

The lady smiled as he too; his departure.

"He understood me perfectly," she thought, "but young men now are not half what they used to be, what a goose Slyfox made of himself to be sure, how he blustered and stammered, and her Ladyship laughed quietly to herself, as she called to mind how her husband had proposed to her.

Charlie wandered moodily and uneasily about, and presently came on his cousin, who was engaged in an animated conversation with Sir William; he was turning away when she recalled him.

"Charlie," she said, getting up and taking his arm, "you look dreadfully ill. Excuse me, Sir William, I must look after my cousin a little, he is far from strong yet, and she marched Charlie away, "let us go into the promenade," she continued, "it is cooler there."

This was a large place which had been added on to the ball-room, and beautifully decorated with flowers, shrubs, flags, easy chairs, sofas, &c.; there was only one couple in it as they entered, Mr. Duffler and Miss Bullion, who sauntered away carelessly as soon as they entered.

"Charlie, what is the matter with you?" asked his cousin, as they took their seats at the far end and quite out of sight, "you look deathly pale, do you feel worse to night?" "No, I will go to papa and he will return home immediately."

"No, I am not worse," he returned, "but I feel tired, I would not for the world you left, especially as you seem to be enjoying yourself so, and have such an attraction."

"Attraction?" asked the wondering girl, "what attraction? I have not the least idea what you mean."

"Why, Mary, Sir William Wadman has hardly been from your side the whole evening, he is attracted by every one."

"I cannot help that," replied she, slightly coloring, "I cannot be rude to him, I am sure I do not wish him near me."

"Mary, Mary," exclaimed Charlie, passionately, "I give me, I did not mean it, I am in a nervous mood, but, Mary, I will learn to do as you do, you do not know how madly, how madly I love you, and have for months, but I cannot say so, yet I dare not speak, I love you better than anything on earth, and sometimes I have even thought of proposing to you, but I dare not."

cared for any one save yourself, you might have known that; but hush! here comes Sir William."

"I am come to claim you for this dance, Miss Thornhill," said the Baronet gaily, as he approached, "they have already commenced, I have been looking for you everywhere."

"You really must excuse me, Sir William, I am tired and do not intend to dance any more to-night, and I think we shall be going soon, as my cousin is far from well."

The young man bowed, and left. "Ah," he muttered to himself, "just an hour too late, Thornhill has proposed, for money; I feel certain of it; she is a sweet girl, but she would have refused me as she has others; better as it is."

"I'll take you down to supper," whispered Charlie to his betrothed, "I will not give you up to anyone else to-night, you have made me so happy, my darling, I feel quite another man;" and he looked it.

"I'll take you down to supper," whispered Duffler to Miss Bullion, "and I'll call and see how you are to-morrow; may I?"

"Of course you may," replied the young lady, "you may come as often as you like."

"There!" exclaimed old Mr. Thornhill, throwing down his cards, "single, double, and the rub, Forest. What is it Charlie? Mary does not want to go yet, does she? I've had no supper, and I am as hungry as a hunter."

"That is what I am here for; Lady Lavender is waiting for you take her down."

"Well, come along Charlie;" and he seized his nephew's arm; "you look better to-night—far better, my boy; you are picking up fast."

"I am afraid, uncle, you will be in a deuce of a rage with me when I tell you all; I have done it now!"

"Done it, done what?" asked the old gentleman.

"Why, I have proposed to Mary, uncle, and she has accepted me."

"Oh, yes, Charlie, I am in a rage, a deuce of a rage," chuckled the old gentleman; "you sly dog, so you want to rob me of my girl, do you? If you take her, you must take me too, for I must live with you, or rather you must remain where you are, with me. Nothing, my boy," continued the old gentleman, "has given me more pleasure for years than this you have just told me. Why with half an eye you might have seen she was dead nuts on you months ago, but God bless my soul! you young fellows of the present day, with all your sharpness, are not half as dashing as in my time, when a pretty girl is concerned; if we wanted to marry and objections were made, we did a little Gretna Green business, and all that sort of thing. Pror darling Mary, I am so glad, God bless you both!"

"Lady Lavender," whispered the old gentleman, as he was taking that lady down to supper, "what do you think? Charlie has proposed to Mary."

"At last!" exclaimed her Ladyship, "foolish fellow, he ought to have done so months ago; better late than never; I am really very very glad. What a handsome couple they will make."

Before the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the ball-room again, Lady Mary Slyfox was in the secret, as well as one or two others.

"God bless you, Charlie, my boy!" said Sir John Forest, squeezing his young friend's hand under the table. "I am truly delighted at what Thornhill has just told me; you have won the sweetest girl in the universe; you must get well now. By-the-way, what a charming person Mrs. John Turtletop is, I am glad she has been so well received, and that she has had so much attention paid her; how Turtletop could have been such a consummate ass, I cannot imagine. However, all's well that ends well, and I think he will make a good husband, she has wonderfully improved him already," which was a fact.

The conversation now turned on the forthcoming steeplechases and other matters, and the gentlemen presently left and joined the ladies.

"Could I have a few minutes' conversation with you Mr. Duffler?" asked a gentleman, as he was leaving the supper room.

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied Shirkington; he was in high good-humour with himself, full of Miss Bullion and her hundred thousand pounds; "let us go in here," pointing to the card-room, which was empty.

"I am Mr. Sharp," commenced the stranger, "sollicitor at —, I must introduce myself, perhaps I have chosen a wrong moment to broach a very unpleasant subject," and he rubbed his hands as visions of six and eightpences and bills of costs passed through his mind, "but the fact is, I believe you have engaged yourself to a young lady."

"Not yet, not yet, Mr. Sharp," interrupted Shirkington; he fully made up his mind that the wily lawyer had spotted his proceedings and wished to draw up the settlement, "but I do not follow you, Mr. Sharp; what unpleasantness can there be in it? I certainly do intend to propose to the young lady, and the first favorable opportunity, in fact, I have made an appointment for—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Duffler, I think there must be some mistake, for you have proposed."

"Mistake, sir," interrupted Shirkington, somewhat gravely, "no mistake, Miss

"Permit my interrupting you, Mr. Sharp, but all these things require proof, letters you know, and all that sort of thing, promises in fact."

"Exactly, Mr. Duffler, of course nothing would hold out without that."

"Of course not," exclaimed Mr. Duffler, triumphantly, "that is what I want to see."

"That is what you shall see, sir; my client has no wish to bring the matter before court, and is willing to arrange matters quietly, therefore you shall see the promises you have made. I will call on you to-morrow morning at ten, I think we need not prolong this interview, you are doubtless waiting to get back to the ball-room."

Dunkington did go back to the ball-room; but his spirits were gone, he knew he had made no promise of marriage, he was quite satisfied on that point, nevertheless he was uneasy and uncomfortable; he had been seen walking with Alice, no doubt, but that was no proof, as to a promise in writing, fiddle-de-dee, that was all nonsense.

"I thought, Mr. Duffler," said Miss Bullion, as Shirkington appeared to claim her for a waltz, "that gentlemen, especially fox-hunters, were merry after supper, you seem in the doleful, I suppose you are tired?"

"Oh! not in the least," replied he, brightening up, "merely tired of sitting at the supper-table so long."

"Then you must have been with yourself," she replied, "because all the gentlemen have been here ever so long."

"Ah, but I was with a friend, we were talking over the coming steeplechases and horse matters; never mind, let us be off," and he whirled his partner away in the waltz.

Never had there been a gayer hunt-hall, all but Duffler went home pleased; he was in a state of uncertainty that was far from pleasant, he could not sleep, he tossed about in his bed thinking and cogitating.

"Alice is a sweet pretty girl, I know," he ruminated, "and as far as that goes is quite as good as I am, but I want to make a great match. Still, I might do worse; she is well educated, plays the piano, too; fancy her taking a lady's maid's place instead of being a governess," and turning all this over in his troubled mind, he fell into an uneasy slumber.

"A gentleman is below stairs, waiting to see you, sir," said his servant, entering his room with the hot water, "he says you knew he was coming at ten o'clock this morning, but he begs you will not hurry yourself."

"Eh! what, is it ten, then, Mary? Tell him I will be down in a quarter of an hour," and he plunged into his bath. "Nothing like a cooler, after such a bout as last night, and by George this is one, it is freezing like the devil too; now we shall see what we shall see—this written promise, some infernal foolery or other."

He was soon dressed and down. Mr. Sharp was before the fire reading the morning paper.

"Good-morning, Mr. Duffler," said the lawyer rising, "I am to my time you see, a habit, or rather I may say a necessity, with us business men. I have driven over six miles in my brougham, bitter cold it is too; I took the liberty of opening your paper, I hope I may not see your name figuring in it for breach of promise, ha! ha!" and he laughed and rubbed his hands.

"Well, Mr. Sharp," replied Shirkington, "breakfast will be ready directly, but before we will go into this business if you please; you say you have a written promise, where is it?"

"Gently, Mr. Duffler, gently," exclaimed the man of law. "Now do you remember some time back meeting Alice Lee one evening; there, I will not go into all the matter, it is a most unpleasant one, because you did a very foolish thing that will not bear the light, so I will dismiss all that, by asking you if you remember one evening writing and signing a note and giving it to Miss Lee?"

It flashed across Shirkington all at once, and he colored violently.

"Yes, I do, he said, but it was no promise of marriage, quite on another subject."

"That may, or may not be, answered the other, "I only take facts as they are, is this your signature?"

"Certainly," said Duffler, "without doubt, that is my signature."

"So far so good, then I will read the contents of the letter."

"I, Shirkington Duffler, Esq., late ensign in her Majesty's 180th Regiment of Foot, hereby promise to marry Miss Alice Lee, at present in the employ of Miss Sprightly, of — Cottage — Yorkshire, within two months of this date."

—SHIRKINGTON DUFFLER.
"11th November, 187—"

"Well, Mr. Duffler," said the lawyer, looking up from his paper and smiling, "all is right, I hope?"

"Quite right, Mr. Sharp, I have agreed to marry Alice; we will breakfast together and talk over matters."

"Now, Miss Lee, that all is settled amicably," commenced Mr. Sharp, "and I am certain Mr. Duffler is too much of a gentleman to go back from his plighted word given before me, I think I may tell him he will not have a portionless wife. Miss Lee, sir, would not tell you she had any money because her pride revolted, fancying you would take her for what she had, she is, I believe, really, attached to you, or she would not have done what she has. Had you refused to marry her she would not have sued you, but she wished to try you, and I must honestly say she has put a little pressure on you, but let that pass and by-gones be by-gones; but perhaps she will tell you her good fortune her own way."

"Oh, Shirk!" exclaimed the pleased girl, "I will tell you all. You know my poor father died in difficulties, and that was the reason I went out, but I had an uncle in Sussex, a wealthy farmer; he has died childless, I am in mourning for him as you see," pointing to her sable garments. "A week ago I had a letter, saying by his will he had left me all, that is a good house in Sussex, three hundred acres of land, all the live stock, furniture, farm implements, &c., and fifteen thousand pounds hard cash; it is all mine. I hinted to you the other day you might have a farm, but you treated me so coldly that you stopped me."

"Good gracious, Alice, is this all true?"

"Well, I am glad of it, you shall draw up the settlements, Sharp. I cannot be married till after the steeplechases; I shall then give up this cottage and all the horses save the two I had from Allsnob; upon my soul I am a very lucky fellow."

"More lucky than sharp," muttered the lawyer, "fancy a man signing a letter in the dark; if the gray mare does not prove to be the better horse in this case, I am no judge of human nature."

Lord and Lady Verrieffast were extremely glad when they heard of Alice's good luck. "So you hooked him and brought him to book," said the nobleman laughingly. "I give you credit, Alice, for your sharpness; you have got the whip hand and must keep him straight."

Alice left her place at once, and went down to Sussex, and took possession of her house and farm; she kept on all her uncle's old servants, so everything went on as usual. All she did in the way of alteration was to paper, paint, and re-furnish the dining and sitting room prettily, comfortably, and in the best taste; there were luxurious arm-chairs and sofas, a nice writing table, in fact, the poor girl had done everything to make her intended husband comfortable.

Lord Verrieffast had given her a hundred pounds on her quitting them, as a marriage present, and this money she had spent on the two sitting-rooms. Luckily for her, her uncle's old servants were to be depended upon, so everything went on well and prosperously; she was an active, busy little body, and looked after everything with the greatest care.

She had not been there a month before she was quite at home, and had got all in tip top order, where we leave her for the present.

"No, I do not. I knew the poor innocent little thing was coming into the world, and I have allowed you ample to keep it and yourself respectably; remember, I need not have done anything for you, I might have cast you adrift in the world penniless. How often have I put up with your tempers, though I believe they are not natural to you, and your heedless jealousies? You are comfortable and have the means to be so; all I require now is to be left alone in peace and quietness."

"Then you will not look on your child, Verrieffast?" she asked.

"I had rather not do so, Emily, but here is a present for him," and drawing out his purse he placed a fifty pound Bank of England note in her hand. "Go home again. I shall be happy to hear every now and then from you, to know you are well and happy."

"By the God that is above me, Verrieffast," she exclaimed vehemently, "if you do not allow me five hundred a year, I will go to your lady and tell her all."

"Do so," said the nobleman, "and then I stop your annuity, and take the horse from you—the child I will always support. Go home, quietly, I tell you, or it may be worse for you," and touching his cob rode rapidly away.

"Bessy, my darling," he said, on reaching his wife's room. "I am come to have a long talk with you. How would you like a cruise in my yacht for three or four months? We will go directly the steeplechases are over if you like."

"I should enjoy it of all things," she replied. "I am a capital sailor."

"Well then, Bessy, I will give orders to have her ready at once. You need not be afraid. The vessel is over two hundred tons. The cabin is a large one, with a piano in it. I think I may say there is every comfort and convenience; now for another matter, which you must give some attention to. You know that men, unmarried men as a rule, are not too steady. Now, I do not wish you to understand I have been worse than others, but I have been what the world calls a wild man. You know of the connection I formed some years ago; I told you all before we were married, and that I had liberally provided for the woman."

"I know, Verrieffast, you have," she interrupted, "say no more about it; it was before I knew you, therefore I have nothing to complain of; let bygones be bygones."

"Yes, but Bessy, this unfortunately is not the worst of it; this woman has followed me down here. I met her on the road just now, coming towards the house; she swears she will have another two hundred a year, or she will come and tell you all. She is little aware you know everything. I told her if she came here I would stop her allowance."

"But surely, Verrieffast, you have not been foolish enough to promise her more?"

"No, Bessy, no, I would not do it. She had the child. She had the child with her, and I gave her fifty as a present for it."

"You dear silly old goose," exclaimed his wife, "just like you; this comes of entangling yourself with loose women; never mind, let her come. I will give her an answer. She will be here presently; there, go away now to the stables and see how my horses are getting on. You know I must win the ladies' race with one of them."

"A lady wishes to see your Ladyship," said the old butler, entering the room a few minutes after Lord Verrieffast had left it. "I did not know if you would see her. She is in the small drawing-room."

"Show her in here, Powell, there is no fire there. And mind when I ring, you come yourself. I wish no one to see her but yourself, you understand."

"Mrs. Bruton, my Lady," said the old butler, ushering in Emily and her maid. Bessy rose and slightly bowed.

"I am come, Lady Verrieffast," commenced the woman, somewhat timidly, "to speak to you about your husband, and to expose his—"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Mrs. Bruton, but are you—the—the?" per-son she was going to say but she would not hurt her feelings, so she said, "are you the lady Lord Verrieffast calls Emily—if so, I will spare you the pain of telling me anything, for I know all, and have for some time; in fact, his Lordship explained everything to me before his marriage."

The stranger looked aghast, and said nothing for a moment. "But, Lady Verrieffast," she at length exclaimed, "did he tell you he had a child, that child there," pointing to where the attendant was holding it.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Bruton, he told me of that too," going up to the nurse and looking at the infant; "a remarkably fine child indeed, and I must say very like his Lordship. No, Mrs. Bruton, this is no news to me. Lord Verrieffast has informed me that he distinctly told you just now, if you came here and annoyed me or him, he would stop your annuity, and take your house away from you. I think he has behaved most liberally to you. Now, if you engage not to pester him any more, I will guarantee the allowance shall be kept up, and you shall retain possession of your house; but if this annoyance is repeated, I shall get him to act. I think we now understand each other, and need not prolong this conversation. Good-morning to you," and she rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXIII.
OUT OF THE FIRE.

Lord Verrieffast was riding his cob home quietly one fine afternoon about a week after the ball, and turning over in his mind what he would do after the steeplechases—hunting and shooting would be ended, he had no wish for a season in London, for he was not a London man, and his wife detested it.

"Hang me if I do not have a yacht out and take Bessy a cruise down the Mediterranean, she would enjoy it immensely, and it would do me good too, for my head sometimes now feels infernally dizzy; a cruise of four or five months would set me up again."

Having thus determined it in his mind, he resolved to broach the subject directly he got home; he knew he should meet with no opposition, for his wife was much attached to him, and every wish of his was most rigidly attended to.

About a mile from his place he saw in advance of him a lady walking along, a nursemaid was some way behind carrying a baby.

There was something in the figure or dress that riveted his Lordship's attention; as he came nearer he looked still more earnestly at the lady, who was walking slowly along.

She was a pretty stylish-looking woman of five or six and twenty years.

"Ah, Verrieffast," she said, as she came up, "how are you? I have come down to see you."

"Good heavens, Emily, what brings you here? you know you promised never to annoy me in any way. I have done for you what few men would."

"I don't know that you have given me more than you ought, but the fact is you must be still more liberal, you really must."

His Lordship turned very red, and it was easy to see that he was exceedingly angry.

"You are ungrateful, Emily," he said, "I

"I am tired and do not intend to dance any more to-night, and I think we shall be going soon, as my cousin is far from well."

The young man bowed, and left. "Ah," he muttered to himself, "just an hour too late, Thornhill has proposed, for money; I feel certain of it; she is a sweet girl, but she would have refused me as she has others; better as it is."

"I'll take you down to supper," whispered Charlie to his betrothed, "I will not give you up to anyone else to-night, you have made me so happy, my darling, I feel quite another man;" and he looked it.

"I'll take you down to supper," whispered Duffler to Miss Bullion, "and I'll call and see how you are to-morrow; may I?"

"Of course you may," replied the young lady, "you may come as often as you like."

"There!" exclaimed old Mr. Thornhill, throwing down his cards, "single, double, and the rub, Forest. What is it Charlie? Mary does not want to go yet, does she? I've had no supper, and I am as hungry as a hunter."

"That is what I am here for; Lady Lavender is waiting for you take her down."

"Well, come along Charlie;" and he seized his nephew's arm; "you look better to-night—far better, my boy; you are picking up fast."

"I am afraid, uncle, you will be in a deuce of a rage with me when I tell you all; I have done it now!"

"Done it, done what?" asked the old gentleman.

"Why, I have proposed to Mary, uncle, and she has accepted me."

"Oh, yes, Charlie, I am in a rage, a deuce of a rage," chuckled the old gentleman; "you sly dog, so you want to rob me of my girl, do you? If you take her, you must take me too, for I must live with you, or rather you must remain where you are, with me. Nothing, my boy," continued the old gentleman, "has given me more pleasure for years than this you have just told me. Why with half an eye you might have seen she was dead nuts on you months ago, but God bless my soul! you young fellows of the present day, with all your sharpness, are not half as dashing as in my time, when a pretty girl is concerned; if we wanted to marry and objections were made, we did a little Gretna Green business, and all that sort of thing. Pror darling Mary, I am so glad, God bless you both!"

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"At last!" exclaimed her Ladyship, "foolish fellow, he ought to have done so months ago; better late than never; I am really very very glad. What a handsome couple they will make."

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"Good-morning, Mr. Duffler," said the lawyer rising, "I am to my time you see, a habit, or rather I may say a necessity, with us business men. I have driven over six miles in my brougham, bitter cold it is too; I took the liberty of opening your paper, I hope I may not see your name figuring in it for breach of promise, ha! ha!" and he laughed and rubbed his hands.

"Well, Mr. Sharp," replied Shirkington, "breakfast will be ready directly, but before we will go into this business if you please; you say you have a written promise, where is it?"

"Gently, Mr. Duffler, gently," exclaimed the man of law. "Now do you remember some time back meeting Alice Lee one evening; there, I will not go into all the matter, it is a most unpleasant one, because you did a very foolish thing that will not bear the light, so I will dismiss all that, by asking you if you remember one evening writing and signing a note and giving it to Miss Lee?"

It flashed across Shirkington all at once, and he colored violently.

"Yes, I do, he said, but it was no promise of marriage, quite on another subject."

"That may, or may not be, answered the other, "I only take facts as they are, is this your signature?"

"Certainly," said Duffler, "without doubt, that is my signature."

"So far so good, then I will read the contents of the letter."

"I, Shirkington Duffler, Esq., late ensign in her Majesty's 180th Regiment of Foot, hereby promise to marry Miss Alice Lee, at present in the employ of Miss Sprightly, of — Cottage — Yorkshire, within two months of this date."

—SHIRKINGTON DUFFLER.
"11th November, 187—"