

character, and thought everything was going on swimmingly, and that my friends were sure to win their money. Scarcely had the cloth been removed, when Mrs. Dundee said:

"I have a pleasing surprise for you all, good people. A few days ago, I received an invitation from Sir George and Lady Connel to a ball at their house this evening, with permission to bring any of my friends. Sir George lives twelve miles off. Dundee has secured the large omnibus from the inn, and ordered four horses, and we are to start at nine o'clock. We can all go together; we shall have a jolly evening, and I am delighted to think, Miss Fenwick, that you will have such an excellent opportunity of enjoying yourself!"

Great Powers! how my heart sank within me! My bet held good until we all separated. All was lost unless I could think of some excuse. I knew I could never get through a ball. I pleaded my dress being high, and not suitable for a ball.

"My maid shall fix you up with one of my evening dresses," said Mrs. Dundee.

"No, that she shan't!" I almost shrieked, then faltered, "excuse me—I mean—no, thanks! If I must go, I will go just as I am! I have a very delicate chest, and the doctors have forbidden me to wear low dresses."

"Perhaps, dear, you would like her to dress your hair differently? She is very clever."

"Oh no, thank you!" said I; and most bitterly did I, inwardly, abuse my luck, as I almost gasped: "If you have a spare room where I could wash my hands and put my hair straight myself, I would be very much obliged."

I was shown into a room, and sat down the very picture of despair. It now occurred to me that what was, to say the least, a not very creditable joke amongst larky brother officers, would be very dishonourable if practised on society at large; that it would be very wrong of me to go to a ball at Sir George's disguised as a young lady; that I might get into some awkward scene, and be the unintentional means of causing pain to

ladies. I doubted in my mind whether I had better be taken suddenly ill, and have myself conveyed home, or whether I should send for Mrs. Dundee, and make a clean breast of it—little dreaming the part she herself was playing! But then my friends would lose their money. What was to be done? Just at that moment my hand unluckily touched the pocket in which was my flask. To pull it out and drain it was the work of a moment or two. My courage returned at once; my spirits rose only too rapidly. I would go through it, I would win! My scruples vanished into thin air—I forgot them. I was not drunk, only slightly excited.

When the lady's maid entered with the water, brushes, etc., I remember I was strongly tempted to chuck her under the chin, and ask her to get some more brandy. The mere thought, however, steadied me at once, as it struck me how nearly I had made a mess of the whole matter. I sat down before the glass, touched up my hair, composed my flushed face to the best of my ability, rinsed my mouth with Eau de Cologne to remove the smell of brandy, and put scent on a new lace pocket handkerchief I had borrowed from Mrs. Dundee. I had often acted a lady's part in private theatricals, and was up to most of the moves of the game. When I descended to the drawing-room, Mrs. Dundee looked me over. Oh, how I shuddered when she touched one of my coils of hair, and wished to put in a hair pin! Knowing as she did my assumed character, she must have been highly amused at the way in which I said, "Oh, please don't! I hate all finishing touches of any kind!"

In due course of time the 'bus came round, and we drove to Sir George Connel's. My spirits again sank to zero; I feared I should not be able to keep up my character, and instinctively I again felt that I was doing wrong. There were, of course, several of my military friends in the room who were in the secret, and danced with me. Anyone who had overheard us would have been amazed at our conversation.

"Fred, my boy, when will supper be ready?"