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BOOTLES' BABY.

CHAPTER

When Bootles showed his face in the mess-room the following morning he was greeted by such a volley of chaff as would have driven a more nervous man, or one less of a favorite than himself, to despair. Already the story had gone the rounds of the barracks, and Bootles found the greater part of his brother officers ready and willing to take Miles' view of the affair, whether in chaff or downright good earnest, he could not say.

"Halloo! Bootles, my man," shouted one when he entered, "what's this story we hear? Is it possible that Bootles—our immaculate and philanthropical Bootles—Oh, Bootles! Bootles! how are the mighty fallen!"

"Hey?" inquired Bootles, sweetly.

"I wouldn't have believed it of you, Bootles; I wouldn't, indeed. Any other fellow in the regiment—that soft-headed Lacy grinning over there, for instance—but *our Bootles*—" He broke off as if words could not express the volumes he thought, but found his tongue and went on again before Bootles could open his mouth. "Our Bootles with an acknowledged wife sworn not to disclose her marriage—our Bootles with a baby—our Bootles a papa!" Oh lor!"

"Why didn't you manage better, Bootles?" cried another. "You might have sent her an odd fiver now and then. You have plenty."

"Is she pretty, Bootles?" asked a third.

"Was there by any chance a flaw in the marriage?" inquired a fourth.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" asked Bootles pleasantly. "I tell you it's a plant. I know nothing about the creature."

"Just my view," struck in Miles. "Just what I said last night. It's absurd, you know, to expect him to own it. No fellow would. Besides, does Bootles look like the father of a fine bouncing baby that goes 'Chucka, chucka, chuck?' It's absurd, you know."

Even Bootles joined in the laugh which followed, and Miles continued:

"The only thing is—and it really is awkward for Bootles—the extraordinary likeness. Blue eyes, golden hair, fair complexion. I should say myself"—looking at his comrade critically—"that at the same age Bootles was just such a baby as that which turned up so mysteriously last night."

"That's as may be. Any way, the youngster is not mine," said Bootles, emphatically; "and what to do with the little beggar *I* don't know."

"Send it back to it's mother," suggested Dawson.

"But I don't know who the mother is," Bootles answered, impatiently.

"Oh, no; so you say. Well, then, the brat must have growed, like Topsy. If I were you I should send it to the police station."

"The police station? Oh, no; hang it all, the poor little beggar has done nothing to start the world in that way," Bootles answered.

"Did any one of you," asked Miles of the general company, "ever hear of a chap called Solomon?"

"I—er—did," answered Lacy, promptly. "His other name was—er—Fligg. The Reverend Solomon Fligg."

"Oh, we've all heard of *him!* But I meant a rather more celebrated person. There is a story about him—I rather think it's in Proverbs"—eliciting a yell of laughter. "Not Proverbs! Well, perhaps it's in the Song of Solomon. It's about two mothers, who each had a baby, and one of them managed to smother hers in the night, and finding it dead when she woke up in the morning, claimed the other baby. Of course the other woman kicked up a row, a regular shindy, and they came before Solomon to get the matter settled. 'Both claim it,' said he. 'Oh, chop it in half, and let each have a share—' But you all know the rest. How the real mother gave up her claim sooner than see the child halved. Now in this case, you see, Bootles hasn't the heart to send the child off to the police station, as he would if—"

"Here's the colonel," said some one at this point, and in less than two seconds he appeared.

"Why, Ferrers," he said, "I've been hearing a queer tale about you."

"Yes, sir," said Bootles, dismally, "and where it will end *I* don't know! Here am I saddled—"

"Well, of course you know whether the child has any claim upon you—" the colonel began.

"Upon my honor it has not, colonel," said Bootles, earnestly.

"Then that, of course, settles the question," replied the colonel, with a frown at the grinning faces along the table. "I should send the child to the workhouse immediately."

"The workhouse?" repeated Bootles, reflectively.

"I'll bet any one a fiver he don't," murmured Miles to his neighbors.

"Not he. Mme. la Mere knew what she was doing when she picked out Bootles. He'll get one of the sergeants' wives to look after it; see if he don't."

After the chief had left the room Bootles continued his breakfast in silence, considering the two suggestions for the disposal of the child. Now, if the truth be told, Bootles had a horror of workhouses. He had gone deeply into the "Casual" question, and pitied a tramp from the very inmost recesses of his kind heart. It fairly made him sick to think of that bonny golden head growing up among the shorn and unlovely locks of a pauper brood—to think of the little soft fingers that had twined themselves so confidently about his own, and had picked at the embroideries of his mess waistcoat, being slapped by the matron, or set, as soon as they should be strong enough to do coarse and hard word, to develop into the unnaturally widened and unkempt hand of a "Marchioness"—to think of that little dainty thing being nourished on skilly, or on whatever hard fare pauper children are fed—to think of that little aristocrat being brought up among the children of thieves and vagabonds!

"Oh, confound it all," he broke out, "I *can't.*"

"I never expected you could," retorted Miles. "It wouldn't be natural if you did."

This time Bootles did not laugh; on the contrary, he looked up and regarded Miles with a grave and searching gaze, rather disconcerting to that quizzical young gentleman.

"Are you judging me out of your own bushel?" he asked.

"How? What do you mean?" Miles stammered.

"Do *you* happen to know anything of the matter?" Bootles persisted.

"I? Oh, no. On my honor I don't."

"Ah! As the colonel said just now, that settles the question. You're a very witty fellow, Miles, very. I shouldn't wonder, after a while, if you ain't quite the sharp man of the regiment. Only your jokes are like the clown's jokes at the circus—one gets to know them. They're in this kind of way:

"'Ever been in Paris, Mr. Lando?'

"'Yes, of course, Bell.'

"'Ever been in Vienna, Mr. Lando?'

"'To be sure, Bell.'

"'Ever been in Geneva, Mr. Lando?'

"'Of course I have, Bell.'

"'Ever been in jail, Mr. Lando?'

"'Of course I have, Bell—at least—that's to say—I mean—no, of course I haven't.'

"'Why, Mr. Lando, I *saw* you there.'

"'You saw me in jail, Bell? And what were you doing to see me?'

"'Oh!' grandly, 'I was staying with the governor for the good of my 'ealth.'

"'And hadn't stealing a cow something to do with it, eh, Bell?'

"'Yah. Who stole a watch?'

"'A Jersey cow, eh, Bell?'

"'Yah. What time is it, Mr. Lando?'

"'Just about milking time, Bell, my friend.'

"It's all very funny *once*, you know, Miles," Bootles ended, disdainfully. "But when you've been to the circus half a dozen times you don't see anything to laugh at, somehow."

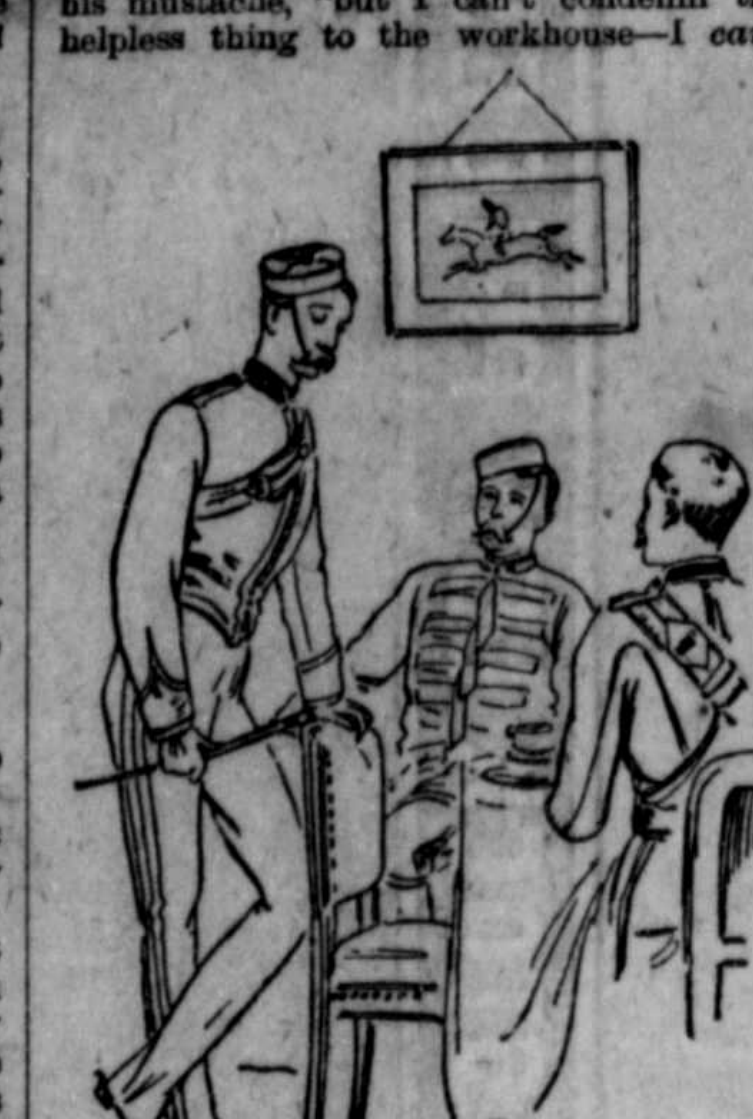
For grace's sake Miles was obliged to laugh, for every one else roared, except Bootles, who went on speaking very gravely:

"I know it's very amusing to make a joke of the affair, to say I know more about it than I will confess. I have told the colonel *on my honor* that the child is not mine, nor do I know whose it is. If it were mine I should not have made the story public property—it's not in reason that I should. My difficulty is what to do with it. The colonel suggests the workhouse, Dawson the police station—one simply means the other, and I can't bring me to do it. It's an awful thing for the child of a tramp or a thief to be reared in a workhouse—and this is no common person's child. For anything I know it may belong to one of you."

"That's true enough," observed a man who had not yet taken part in the discussion, except to laugh now and then. "But remember, Bootles, if you saddle yourself with the child you will have to go on with it. It will stick to you like a burr, and though we are all ready to accept your word of honor, the world may not be so. If you put the brat out to nurse in the regiment the story may crop up years hence, just when you least desire or expect it; and, you know, a story—mixed and confused by time and repetition—about a deserted wife may come to have a very ugly sound about it. Now if, as the colonel suggests, you send the child to the workhouse, you wash your hands of the whole business. Then, again, if the brat is brought up in the regiment, with the *disadvantage* of your protection, what will she be in twenty years' time? Neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. Far better the oblivion of pauperism than the distinction among the men of being Capt. Ferrers'—shall we say *protegee?*"

"Yes, there's a great deal in that," Bootles admitted. He had at all times a great respect for Harkness, and profound faith in the soundness of his judgment. He saw at once that any plan of bringing the child up among the married people of the regiment would not do, and yet—*the workhouse.*

He rose from the table and settled his forage cap upon his head. "I dare say you fellows will laugh at me," he said, almost desperately, as he pulled the chin-strap over his mustache, "but I can't condemn that helpless thing to the workhouse—I *can't*, and that's all about it. It seems to me," he went on, rubbing the end of his whip on the back of a chair, and looking at no one, "it seems to me that the child's future in this world and the next depends upon the course I take now. And you may laugh at me—I dare say you will," he said, quite nervously for him, "but I shall get a proper nurse to take charge of it, and I shall keep it myself until some one turns up to claim it—or—or for good."



I can't condemn that helpless thing to the workhouse.

Just then officers' call sounded, and Bootles made a clean bolt of it, leaving his brother officers staring amazedly at one another. The first of them to make a move was Lacy—the first, too, to speak.

"Upon my soul," said he, "Bootles is a devilish fine fellow; and, d—— it all," he added, getting very red, and scarcely drawling, in his intense rage of admiration, "if there were a few more fellows in the world like him, it would be a vewry diffewrent place to what it is."

CHAPTER III.

As soon as Bootles had a spare moment he made his way to the adjutant's quarters, where he found Mrs. Gray playing with the mysterious baby.

"Oh, is that you, Capt. Ferrers?" she exclaimed. "Come and see your waif. She is the dearest little thing. Why, I do believe she knows you."

Bootles whistled to the child, which promptly made a grab at his chain, and when he sat down on the sofa on which it was sprawling, tried very hard to get at the gold badge on his collar. Shoulder badges had not then come in.

"Mrs. Gray," Bootles said, "she's very well dressed, is she not?"

"Oh, very," Mrs. Gray answered, smoothing out the child's skirt so as to display the fine and deep embroidery. "Unusually so. All its clothes are of the finest and most expensive description."

"I thought so; it doesn't look like a common child, eh?"

"Not at all," replied the lady, promptly.

"Well," Bootles told her, "I've been most unmercifully chaffed, which was only to be expected; but the colonel takes my word about it, and of course the others don't matter. I can't think, though, why the mother has chosen me."

"Ah, well, you see, Capt. Ferrers," said the adjutant's wife, with a smile, "it is rather inconvenient sometimes to have a character for great kindness of heart. I should say you are the greatest favorite in the regiment, and, naturally enough, the officers speak of it sometimes in society. 'Oh, Bootles is this, and Bootles is that;' 'Bootles wouldn't turn a dog from his door;' 'Bootles would share his last sixpence with a poor chap who was down,' and so on. *I* have heard, Capt. Ferrers, of your emptying your pockets to divide among three poor tramps who had begged no more than a pipe of tobacco. *I* have heard of your standing up for"—with a deeper smile—"the poor devils of casuals; and if I hear it, why not others? why not the mother of this child?"

"True. But I think you all overrate my character," Bootles replied, modestly. "You know I don't go in for being saintly at all."

"That is just it. If you did you would have no more influence than Maj. Allardyce, whom every one laughs at. But you don't; you are one of themselves, and yet you will always help a man who is down; you will do any unfortunate creature a good turn. Oh, I hear a good deal, though you choose to make light of it. And you know, Capt. Ferrers, we are not told that the good Samaritan made a great spluttering about what he did; but the professional saints, the priest and the Levite, passed by on the other side."

"You are very complimentary," Bootles said, blushing a little; "much more than I deserve, I'm sure. The fellows," laughing at the remembrance, "were much less merciful. Then about the child. Dawson suggests sending it to the police station, the colonel to the workhouse; and one means the other, of course."

Mrs. Gray caught the child to her breast with a cry of dismay, and Bootles went on:

"Yes, I feel as you do about it. I *can't* do it, and that's all about it. It would be on my conscience all my life. Besides, some day the mother might come back for it, and though, of course, as the colonel says, there is no claim upon me, yet if for the sake of a few pounds I had turned the poor little beggar adrift, ruined its life—why I simply couldn't face her, and that's all about it. And besides that, Mrs. Gray, I have a lurking suspicion that the letter is genuine, and that it was not written to or intended for me. It reads to me like the letter of a woman who was desperate."

"Yes, a woman must have been desperate indeed to willingly part with such a child as that," said Mrs. Gray, smoothing the gold baby curls.

"So I think, for nature is nature all the world over," Bootles answered. "And besides, to tell you the honest truth, there is a resemblance in the child to some one I knew once——"

"Yes?" eagerly.

"Oh no, not that! She is dead. She was engaged to a fellow I knew, desperately fond of him, and he—jilted her."

"Mr. Kerr?"

Bootles stared. "Who told you?"

"He told me himself, I think to ease his mind," she answered, quietly.

"Ah! Well, it killed her. She died heart-broken. I saw her," he said, rising and going to the window, whence he stood staring out over the square, "a few hours after she died. That child's mother may look like that now, and I can't and won't turn it adrift, whatever the fellows or any one else chooses to think or say, and that's all about it."

Two bright tears gathered in Mrs. Gray's eyes, and falling, fell upon the baby's curls of gold, two priceless diamonds from the unfathomable and exhaustless mines of pity. For a moment or two there was silence, broken at last by the child's laugh, as a ray of sickly winter sunshine fell upon the glittering chain in its little hands. The sound recovered Bootles, who turned from the window.

"And so, Mrs. Gray,' he said, carefully avoiding the gaze of her wet eyes, "I have determined to keep the little beggar: but Harkness, who's no fool, you know, has convinced me that it won't do to trust to any of the barrack women to look after her. Therefore, if you won't mind undertaking it for a few days, I will advertise for a respectable elderly nurse to take entire charge of the creature. I dare say I can arrange with Smithers for an extra room, and you'll let me come to you for advice now and then, won't you?"

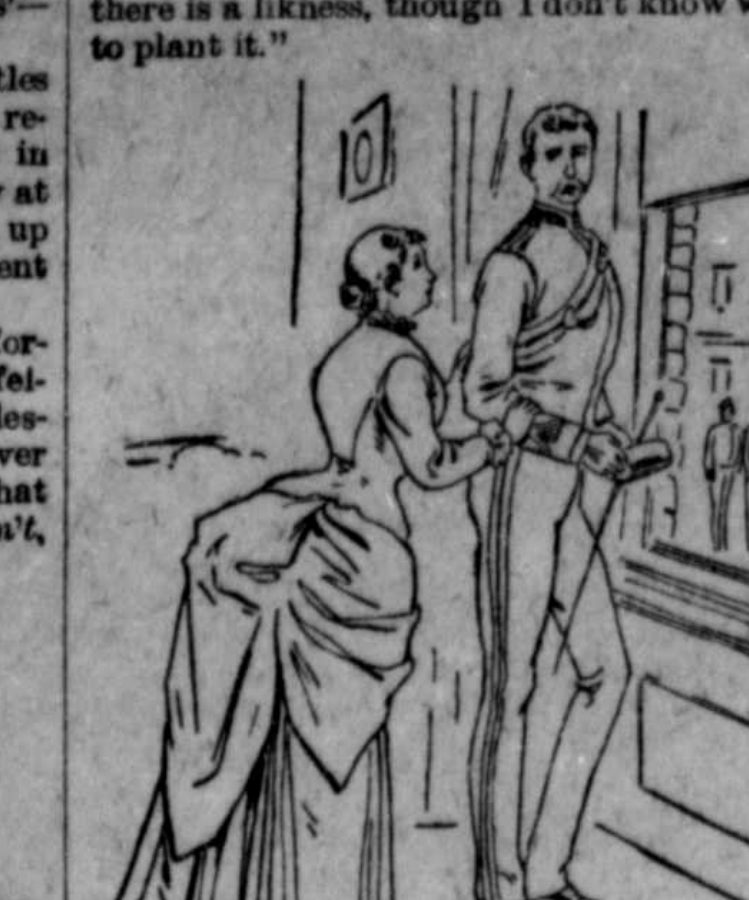
Mrs. Gray rose and went close to him, laying her hand upon his arm. "Capt. Ferrers," she said, earnestly, "you will have your reward. God will bless you for this."

"Oh, please don't, Mrs. Gray," Bootles stammered. "Really, I'd rather you'd chaff me."

Mrs. Gray laughed outright. "Well, you know what my sentiments are, so for the future I will chaff you unmercifully. Come in," she added, in a louder tone, as a "tap-tap" sounded on the door.

The permission was followed by the entrance of Lacy, who came in with a pleasant "Good—er—morning," and a soft laugh at the sight of the baby on the sofa.

"I—er—[illegible] old Bootles would be here," he [illegible] "And besides—I—er—wanted to see the babay. Seems to me, Bootles," he added, staring with an absurd air of reflective wisdom at the infant, "as if the face is somehow familiar to me. Oh, I don't mean you. It isn't a bit like you. But there is a likness, though I don't know where to plant it."



"Capt. Ferrers," she said, "God will bless you for this."

"Perhaps it will grow," suggested Bootles.

"Ah! pewraps it will, and pewraps it won't. The worst of the affair is that it is cwreating a pwrecedent"—not for worlds would he have admitted to his friend that he thought him the fine fellow he had declared him in the mess-room that morning—"and if we are *all* inundated with babays I wreally don't know," plaintively, "what the wregiment will come to."

"Gar—ah—gar—ah!" chuckled the subject of this speech over the gold knob at the top of Lacy's whip. "Cluck—cluck—cluck!"

"Little beggah seems to find it a good joke, any way," Lacy cried. "I'm a gwreat hand at nursing. Our adjutant's wife in the White Dwragoons had thwree—*all* at once. I say, Mrs. Gwray, stick something on it, and I'll take it out and show it wround."

"Dare you?" she asked.

"Dawre I! Just twry. By-the-bye, it's cold this morning—vewry cold."

Mrs. Gray therefore fetched the child's white coat and cap, and those other white woolen articles, which Bootles now discovered to be leggings, and quickly transformed the little woman into a sort of snowball. The two men watched the operation with intense interest.

"*La figlia del wreggimento,*" laughed Lacy. "I declare, Bootles, she's quite a credit to us. I never saw such a *petite mademoiselle.*"

Bootles started. It reminded him who had been jilted by his friend and died for love. He had always called her Mademoiselle Mignon.

"Mademoiselle Mignon," he said, carelessly; "not a bad name for her."

"Vewry good," returned Lacy, preparing to present arms.

He proved himself a much better nurse than Bootles. He gathered the child on his left arm and marched off to the anteroom, in front of which the officers were standing about, waiting for church. They set up a shout at the sight of him, and crowded round to inspect the new importation. Mademoiselle Mignon bore the inspection calmly, conscious perhaps—as she was such a knowing little person—of the effect of her big, blue, star-like eyes under the white fur of her cap.

"What a pity she ain't twenty years older!" was the first comment, and it was said in such a tone of genuine regret that all the fellows laughed again. Miss Mignon gobbled with satisfaction.

"Seems a jolly little beggar," said another.

"Chut—chut—chut!" remarked Miss Mignon.

"Never saw such a jolly little beggar in all my life," asserted another voice.

"Pretty work she'll make in the regiment sixteen or seventeen years hence," grumbled old Garnet.

"Ah, well, nevah mind, Garnet—nevah you mind, Maj. Garnet, sir," cried Hartog, "we shall all be dead by then;" but this being an exceedingly old and threadbare regimental joke was instantly snubbed in the face of the new and substantial one.

"Has it any teeth?" demanded Miles, the orderly officer for the day.

"Don't know. Open your mouth, little one," said Lacy, gravely.

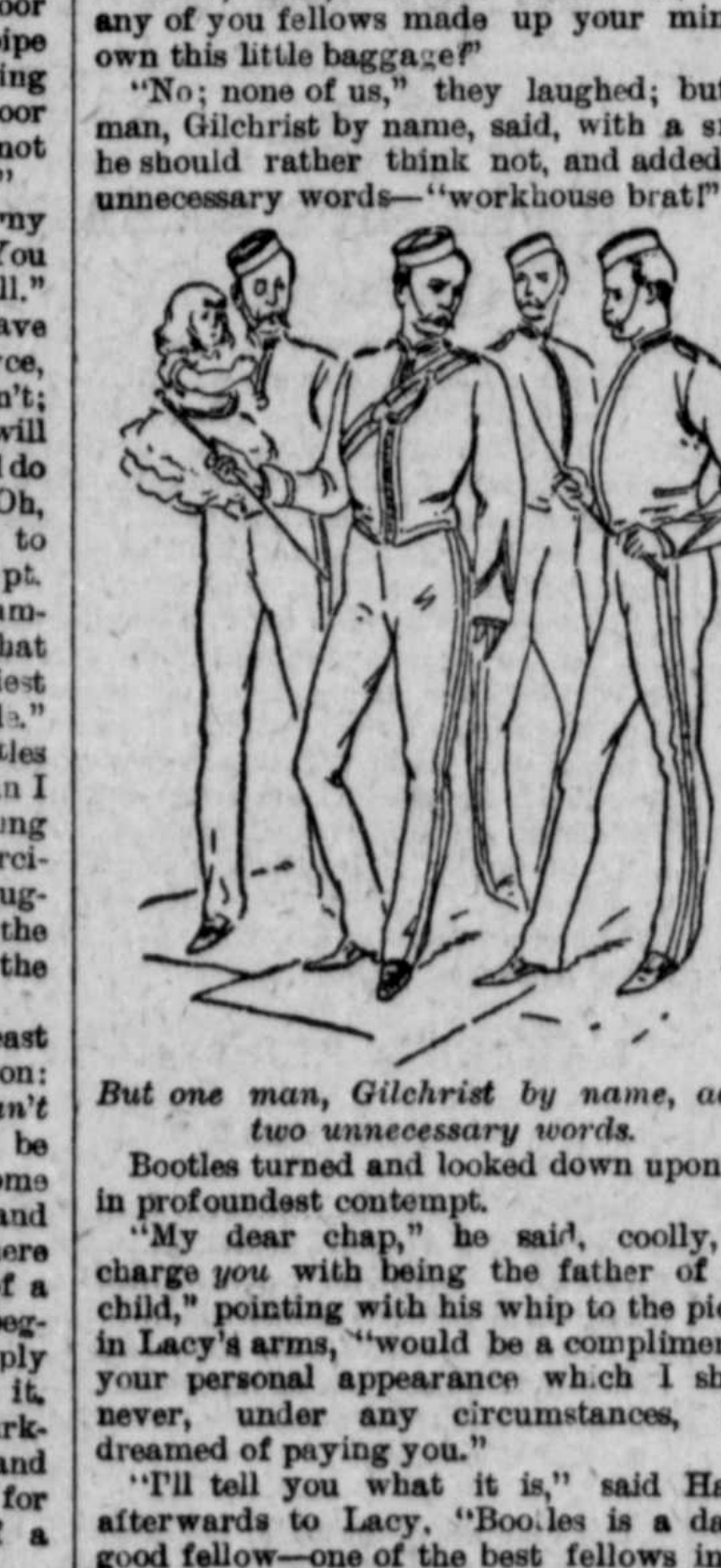
At this point Miss Mignon made a delighted lunge in the direction of the belt across Miles' breast. Lacy shouted, "Whoa, whoa," and Miles immediately backed out of reach. Miss Mignon's mouth went dismally down, until Lacy remembered the knob of his whip, and held it up for delectation.

"Boo—boo!" she crowed.

"By Jove! She can half say Bootles already," ejaculated Hartog. "And here he comes."

"Now, then," Bootles called out, "have any of you fellows made up your mind to own this little baggage?"

"No; none of us," they laughed; but one man, Gilchrist by name, said, with a sneer, he should rather think not, and added two unnecessary words—"workhouse brat!"



But one man, Gilchrist by name, added two unnecessary words.

Bootles turned and looked down upon him in profoundest contempt.

"My dear chap," he said, coolly, "to charge *you* with being the father of *that* child," pointing with his whip to the picture in Lacy's arms, "would be a compliment on your personal appearance which I should never, under any circumstances, have dreamed of paying you."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Hartog afterwards to Lacy. "Bootles is a dashed good fellow—one of the best fellows in the world. I don't know that there's another I'd trust as far or as thoroughly, but all the same, Bootles is sometimes best left alone, and, for my part, I think Gilchrist and every one else had best leave him alone about this youngster."

"Ya—as," returned Lacy; then began to laugh. "Oh! but it was fine, though, about 'personal appearance.'" And then he added, "Ugly little beast!"

CHAPTER IV.

It was not to be expected, and Bootles did not expect it, that the story of the mysterious little stranger could be confined to the barracks. In fact, in the course of a few hours it had flown all over the town, gaining additions and alterations by the frequency of its repetition, until at last Bootles himself could hardly recognize it. A baby had been found in Capt. Ferrers' rooms; no one knew where it came from nor to whom it belonged. Then—Capt. Ferrers had rescued a young baby from a brutal father who was going to dash its brains out against the door-post. Then—Capt. Ferrers had picked up a new-born infant while hunting with the duke's hounds. Then—Capt. Ferrers was suffering from mental aberration, or, to speak plainly, was getting a bit cracked, and had adopted a child a year old out of Idleminster workhouse. Then—it was really most romantic, but Capt. Ferrers had been engaged to and jilted by a young lady long ago—which, of course, accounted for his being impervious to the fascinations of the Idleminster girls—who had married, been deserted by her husband, and now died—some versions of the story said "committed suicide"—leaving him the charge of a baby, etc.

Some people told one version of the story and some people told another, but nobody blamed Bootles very much. It might be because he was so rich and so handsome and pleasant; it might be because Idleminster society was free from that leaven of censoriousness which causes most people to look at most things from the worst possible view.

But Bootles went on his serene way, telling the true state of the case to every one who mentioned the affair to him, and always ending, "And hang it, you know, it's a pretty little beggar, and I couldn't send it to the workhouse."

He made no secret about it at all, and on the Saturday following the advent of the child an advertisement appeared in The Idleminster Chronicle which made Idleminster tongues clack for a week:

"Wanted, immediately, a highly respectable and thoroughly experienced nurse of middle age, to take the entire charge of a child about a year old. Good wages to a suitable person. Apply to Capt. Ferrers, Scarlet Lancers."

In due time this advertisement produced the right sort of person, and a staid and respectable widow of about fifty was soon installed in a room next to Mr. Gray's quarters, in charge of Miss Mignon, as the child had already come to be called by everybody.

It was a charming child—strong and healthy, seemed to have no trouble with temper or teeth, hardly ever cried, and might be seen morning and afternoon being wheeled by its nurse in a baby-carriage about the barrack square or along the road outside the Broad Arrow boundaries. And so, as the weeks rolled by and wore into months, it began to toddle about, and could say "Bootles" as plain as a pike-staff.

In April the Scarlet Lancers were moved from Idleminster to Blankhampton, where Bootles had to undergo a new experience, for every one there took him for a widower on account of the child.

Bootles would explain. "Take her about with me? Yes; she likes it. Always wants to go when she sees the trap. A bother? Not a bit of it; the jolliest little woman in creation, and as good as gold. What am I going to do with her when she grows up? Well, Lacy *says* he is going to marry her. If he don't, somebody else will—no fear."

Taking it all round, Miss Mignon had a remarkably good time of it, and seemed thoroughly to appreciate the pleasant places in which her lines had fallen. It was wonderful, too, what an immense favorite she was with "the fellows." At first she had been "Bootles' brat," but very soon that was dropped, and by the time she could toddle, which she did in very good time, no one thought of mentioning her or of speaking to her except as "Miss Mignon." Scarcely any of the officers dreamed for a moment of returning after a few days' leave without "taking along," as the Americans say, a box of sweets or a bundle of toys for Miss Mignon. Indeed, the young lady came to have such a collection that, after a while, Mrs. Nurse's patient soul arose, and, with Capt. Ferrers' permission, all the discarded ones were distributed among the less fortunate children of the regiment.

But Miss Mignon's favorite plaything was Bootles himself—after Bootles, Lacy. People said it was wonderful, the depth of the affection between the big soldier of 35 and the little dot of a child, scarcely 2. Bootles she adored, and where Bootles was she would be, if by hook or by crook she could convey her small person into his presence. Once she spied him turn in at the gates on the right hand of the colonel, when the regiment was returning from a field day, and escaping from her nurse's hand set off as hard as she could run in the direction of the band, which immediately preceded the commanding officer. Mrs. Nurse gave chase, but alas! Mrs. Nurse was stout, and had the ill luck, moreover, to come a cropper over a drain tile lying conveniently in her way, while the child, unconscious of danger, ran straight for Bootles. Neither Bootles nor Lacy, who was on the colonel's left, perceived her until she was close upon them, waving her small hands and shouting, in her shrill and joyous child's voice, "Bootles! Bootles!"

It seemed to Bootles, as he looked past the colonel, that the child was almost under the hoofs of Lacy's charger. "Lacy!" he called out—"Lacy!" But Lacy was already on the ground, and caught Miss Mignon out of harm's way; but when he turned round he saw that his friend's face was as white as chalk.

As for the colonel, when he saw Mrs Nurse gathering herself up with rueful looks at the drain tile, he simply roared, and Miss Mignon chimed in as if it were the finest joke in the world.

"That *was* a smash," she remarked, from her proud position on Lacy's shoulder, "just like Humpty Dumpty"—a comment which gave that estimable person the name of Mrs. Humpty Dumpty as long as she remained with the regiment.

A few weeks after this the annual inspection came off, and Miss Mignon, resenting the lengthened absence of her Bootles, again managed to escape from her nurse, and pattered boldly, as fast as her small feet would carry her, right into the mess-room, where Bootles was sitting, just opposite the general, at the late lunch. Miss Mignon, not seeing him at first, wandered coolly behind the row of scarlet-clad backs, until she spied him at the other side of the table. Then, having no awe whatever of inspecting officers, she wedged herself in between his chair and the colonel's with a triumphant and joyous laugh.

The general gave a great start, and the colonel laughed. Bootles, in dismay, jumped up, and came quickly round the table to take her away.

"Well, you little rogue," said the colonel, reaching a nectarine for her. "What do you want?"

"I wanted Bootles, sir," said Miss Mignon, confidentially. "And nurse falled asleep, so I tooked French leave." Almost the only peculiarity in her speech was the habit of making all verbs regular.

"And who are you, my little maid?" the general asked, in extreme amusement.

"Oh, I'm Miss Mignon," with dignity.

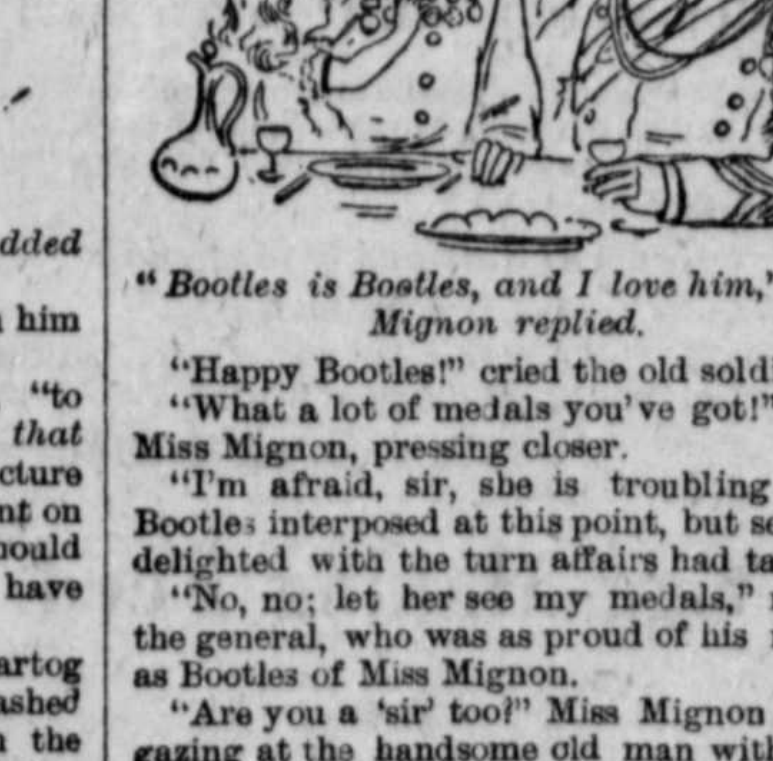
The old general fairly chuckled with delight, and as he had put his arm round the child, Bootles, who was standing behind, could not very well take her away.

"Oh, Miss Mignon—hey? And whom do you belong to?"

"Why, to Bootles," in surprise at his ignorance.

"To Bootles? And who is Bootles?"

"Bootles is Bootles and I love him," Miss Mignon replied, as if that settled everything



"Bootles is Bootles, and I love him," Miss Mignon replied.

"Happy Bootles!" cried the old soldier.

"What a lot of medals you've got!" cried Miss Mignon, pressing closer.

"I'm afraid, sir, she is troubling you," Bootles interposed at this point, but secretly delighted with the turn affairs had taken.

"No, no; let her see my medals," replied the general, who was as proud of his medals as Bootles of Miss Mignon.

"Are you a 'sir' too?" Miss Mignon asked, gazing at the handsome old man with more respect.

"What *does* she mean?" he cried.

Bootles laughed.

"Well, sir, she hears us speak to the colonel so, that is all."

"Dear me! What a remarkably intelligent and attractive child!" exclaimed the general, quietly. "How old is she?"

"About two, sir."

Now it happened that the old general had a craze for absolute accuracy, and he caught Bootles up with pleasant sharpness.

"Oh! Does that mean more or less?"

"I can't say, sir. She is about 2. I do not know the date of her birth."

"Then she is not yours?"

"I am not her father, sir, but at present she belongs to me," Bootles said, smiling "I'm afraid——"

"Not at all, but perhaps she had better go. What a charming child!" The last was perhaps because Miss Mignon, finding her time had come—and she never made a fuss on such occasions—put two soft arms round his neck and gave him such a genuine hug of friendship that the old man's heart was quite taken by storm.

So Miss Mignon was carried off, looking back to the last over Bootles' shoulder, and waving her adieu to the handsome old man, who had such a fascinating array of clasps and medals.

"I didn't *quite* understand—*what* relation is the child to him?" he asked of the colonel.

"None whatever. Ferrers found her late one night in his bed, with her wardrobe and a letter from her mother, written as if Ferrers was the father. He, however, gave me his word of honor that he knew nothing about it, and some of us think the whole affair was simply a plant, as he is known to be a very kind-hearted fellow. Others, however, Ferrers among them, think that note and child were intended for one of the others. Nobody, however, would own to it, and Ferrers has kept the child ever since—I don't suppose he would part with her now for anything. I wanted him to send her to the workhouse, but 'tis a jolly bright little soul, and I am glad he did not."

"Then he is not married?"

"Oh, dear no. He pays a woman £50 a year to look after her, and all her meals go from the mess. In fact, he is bringing her up as if she were his own; and the child adores him—simply adores him."

"I respect that man," said the general, warmly. "It is an awful thing for a child to be reared in a workhouse—awful."

"Yes, Bootles feels very strongly on the subject," replied the colonel, absently.

By the time Bootles returned, the officers had risen from the table, and he met the guests and the seniors just entering the anteroom.

"I'll shake hands with you, Capt. Ferrers, if you please," said the general, cordially. "I agree with you that it is an awful thing for a child to be brought up in a workhouse. It is a subject upon which I feel very strongly—very strongly. A child reared as a pauper does not start the world with a fair chance. I have met so often, in the course of my military experience, with recruits bred in the Unions—I never knew one do well. No; pauperism is ground into them, and they are never able to shake it off."

"Well, sir, that is my opinion," said Bootles, modestly. "I hope, though, you won't think my little maid is often so obtrusive as to-day. She is really always very good."

"A charming little child," replied the general, as if he meant it, too, and then he shook hands with Bootles again.

CHAPTER V.

There was only one blot in the sweetness and light of Miss Mignon's baby character, so far as the officers of the Scarlet Lancers were concerned. Among them all there was only one whom she did not like. She had degrees of love—Bootles ranked first, then Lacy, then two or three groups of friends whom she liked best, better and well; but she had no degrees of dislike where she did not love. She hated, hated fiercely and furiously, hated with all her baby heart and soul. There were several persons in her small world whom she detested thus, absolutely declining to hold communication or to accept overtures from them, however sweetly made; but there was only one of the officers who came under this head, and he was Gilchrist, the man who had dubbed her at first *workhouse brat*. Miss Mignon could not endure him. When old enough to understand that a certain box of sweeties had come from Mr. Gilchrist, she would drop it as if it burned her fingers, draw down the corners of her mouth, and remark, "Miss Mignon is very much obliged;" an observation which invariably sent Bootles and Lacy off into fits of laughter, at which the little maid would fly open-armed to him and cry, "But Mignon *loves* Bootles." But the fact remained the same, that Miss Mignon detested Gilchrist, who, indeed, was not a favorite in the regiment. Nor, indeed, did Gilchrist seem to like Miss Mignon any better, though he now and then brought his offerings of toys and bonbons, like the rest. In the face of Bootles' severe snub about the two odious words he had applied to her, he was hardly such a simpleton as to further rouse or annoy the most popular man in the regiment; yet if he could possibly cast a slur on Bootles or on the child he did it. Never from his lips came the pet name "Miss Mignon," never did his black eyes rest on her without a sneer or a jibe; if he could by any chance twist Bootles' words into an admission that the child was really his, he took care never to lose the opportunity.

"Oh, come, now," Preston cried one day, when he had been sneering at Bootles and Lacy, who had just driven away with the child between them, "Bootles is a right good sort—no mistake on that point. No sneaking hypocrisy about him. It would be well for you and me if we were half as fine chaps; but we are not, Gilchrist, and, what is more, we never shall be."

"Oh no; but where is the mother of that brat?"

"How should I know? or Bootles? I shouldn't mind laying my life that Bootles never did and never will cause her or any other woman to write such a letter as came with the child that night. Jolly good thing for this one if she was Bootles' wife, instead of being tied up to the hound who bound her to secrecy and deserted her. Perhaps she's dead, poor soul! Who knows?"

"Perhaps she isn't," Gilchrist sneered. "Some people never die."

Good-natured and not very wise Preston stared at him, and Hartog looked from behind his newspaper, aghast at the bitterness of his tone.

"Good heavens, Gilchrist!" Preston cried, "are you *wanting* somebody to die?"

Gilchrist tried to laugh, and succeeded very badly. He rose from his chair, knocking a few scattered cigar ashes carefully off his braided cuff.

"Well, I confess I should not be sorry to see that prating brat of Bootles' out of the road. We should perhaps get at the truth then." And having delivered himself of this feeling speech, he went out, banging the door after him.

"Well, upon my soul!" exclaimed Preston.

"Oh, the man's got a tile loose in his upper story," said Hartog, decidedly. "No man in his senses would talk such miserable rot as that. Always thought Gilchrist a crazy fool myself, but I'm sure of it now."

"And how he sticks to it Miss Mignon is Bootles' own child—as if it could be any good for him to say she isn't if she is."

"No. I shall tell Bootles to keep an eye on Gilchrist. I say, what a comfort it would be if he would only exchange! I suppose we can't manage to dazzle him with the delights of India, eh?"

"Not very well. Besides, he lost ever so much seniority by coming to us."

"No such luck. It's queer, though, he should be so persistent about Bootles and Miss Mignon. I suppose he wants to daub Bootles with some of his own mud. Thinks if he only throws enough, some of it's sure to stick, and so it would with most men. Happily, however, it don't in the least matter what a little cad like Gilchrist chooses to say about a man like Bootles—a jealous little beast?"

Neither of them said any more about the matter, but Hartog took the earliest opportunity of repeating to Bootles what "that ass Gilchrist" had said about seeing that prating brat of Bootles' out of the road and in consequence a kind of watch was set upon the child. Not that Bootles, though he had a very poor opinion of Gilchrist and Gilchrist's brains, was afraid for a moment that he would give Miss Mignon poisoned bonbons, or run off with her and drop her in the river; yet he did think it not improbable that he might encourage an already dangerous spirit of adventure, and of course be absolutely blameless if she could get trampled by a horse's cruel hoofs, or crushed by one of the many traps going in and out of barracks.

When Bootles had taken his first long leave after Miss Mignon's coming, he had left her at Idleminster in charge of her nurse; but when long leave came round again and she must have been about two and a half, he decided to take her with him. One reason for this was certainly a fear of any pranks Gilchrist might choose to play, another that Lacy was taking his leave at the same time, and Bootles was afraid, in the absence of both, Miss Mignon might fret herself into a fever. And, besides, he had missed the child during a fortnight's deer-stalking in Scotland that autumn more than he would have liked to own.

From Blankhampton, therefore, they went to his place, Ferrers Court, where he was to entertain a rather large party for Christmas, with a sister of his mother's, and his only near relative, to do the honors for him, and among his guests a Mrs. Smith, a widow, and sister to that dead girl to whom he fancied a resemblance in Miss Mignon. However, at the last moment, Mrs. Smith wrote to excuse herself.

"I am very, very sorry," she said, "but a very dear friend of mine, with whom I spent two winters in Italy, has suddenly appeared, with a traveling companion and two maids, to pay me a long-promised visit of at least two months. She is a Russian countess—a widow, like myself, and wishes, I fancy, to improve her English, which she already speaks very well. Of course I am dreadfully disappointed, but cannot help it."

Now, it happened that Bootles had a very deep and great respect and liking for Mrs. Smith, and not for all the widowed countesses in Russia was he willing to upset his plans; therefore he wrote off at once to Mrs. Smith, after a five minutes' consultation with Lady Marion, to beg her to carry out her original intentions and bring Madame and her retinue "along." Would she telegraph her reply?

Mrs. Smith did so, the reply being, Yes. Moreover, she supplemented the telegram by a letter, in which she mentioned among other things that Mme. Gourbolska's traveling companion must be treated in all ways as an ordinary guest.

So, at the time originally appointed for Mrs. Smith's coming, the party of six—three ladies and three maids—arrived. Bootles himself went to the station to meet them. He found that Mme. Gourbolska was young, not more than thirty, of the plump and fair Russian type, quite fair enough to hold her own beside Mrs. Smith, whom he regarded as the most beautiful woman of his acquaintance. The third lady, Miss Grace, was fair also, perhaps not so positively beautiful as either the English or the Russian lady, but fair-haired, fair-skinned, with soft blue-gray eyes, intensely blue in some lights, as Bootles noticed directly. Graceful she was to a degree, and as he watched her move across the little station he thought how wonderfully her name suited her.

Mrs. Smith smiled at him as he helped her to mount to the top of the omnibus. "Is not the likeness wonderful?" she said, with one of those quick sighs with which we speak of our dead; and then she said, "Poor Rosy."

Bootles turned and looked at Miss Grace again, his mind going back to those dark days, past and gone now, when he and his best friend had been estranged for honor's sake. When he and this imperially beautiful woman had stood side by side watching a young life die out; had together seen the sacrifice of a heart, the martyr of love to man.

"Yes, it is very great," he said, briefly.

That dead sister of Mrs. Smith had always been and would always be a not-to-be-broken bond of union between them, for the widow knew how gladly "that grand Bootles," as she always called him, would have tried to make up for the love she had lost, while to Bootles Mrs. Smith stood out from the rest of womankind as the sister of the only woman he had ever wished or asked to marry him.

He helped Miss Grace up to the seat beside Mrs. Smith, and took his own place beside the Russian lady, who entertained him very well during the three miles' drive between Eagles Station and Ferrers Court.

"Oh, but what a paradise!" she cried as the carriage turned into the court-yard.

"I am delighted that it pleases you," he answered, glancing round to see what effect his ancestral home had upon Miss Grace.

"Lovely!" she murmured to Mrs. Smith.

In another moment they had drawn up at the great Gothic door-way, and immediately the figure of a little child dressed in white appeared on the top of the broad steps, kissing her small hands in token of welcome.

"Go in directly; you'll get cold. Go in, I say," Bootles called out. It was, indeed, bitterly cold, and a few flakes of snow were falling. But Miss Mignon had a budget of news for her Bootles, and was not to be done out of telling it.

"Lal has had a letter from home," she piped out in her shrill voice. Lal was her name for Lacy, and home meant Blankhampton Barracks. "And the St. Bernard has gotted two puppies—beauties—and I'm to have one. Lal says so. And Terry has broked his leg." Terry was one of Bootles' grooms. "And Maj. Ally's going to be married."

Bootles was so surprised that he forgot the cold and his order that Miss Mignon should go in.

"What!" he exclaimed, incredulously.

Just then Lacy himself came to the top of the steps with open arms, so to speak, and carried off Mrs. Smith into the house. Miss Mignon took advantage of the opportunity to run down the steps just as Bootles helped Mme. Gourbolska to the ground.

"I welcome you with much pleasure," he said, cordially—"Miss Grace also," as he gave her his hand to jump the last step. "I am afraid you are tired. You are very white."

"I am tired," she said, in a low voice, not looking at him, but at the child.

"It is so bitterly cold. Don't stand a moment. Mignon, *will* you go in?"

Miss Mignon skipped up the steps, and the Russian lady caught her in her arms.

"Oh, you little angel! and what is your name?"

"I'm Miss Mignon. You're a very pretty lady," returned Mignon, critically. "I wanted to go to the station, but Bootles said it was too cold, and Lal——"

"Madame does not know what Bootles and Lal mean," interrupted Bootles.

"This is Bootles, and that's Lal," Miss Mignon informed her. "I'm Miss Mignon, and I belong to Bootles."

"Oh, you belong to Bootles. I am sure he must be very proud of you," Madame answered.

"I believe I'm a great bother to him," Miss Mignon announced, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Bootles laughed. "Come to the fire, madame," he said. Then, turning to Miss Grace, "I'm sure you are very cold—you are as white as a ghost. I'm sure," addressing Lady Marion, "Aunt Marion, wine would be much better than this tea."

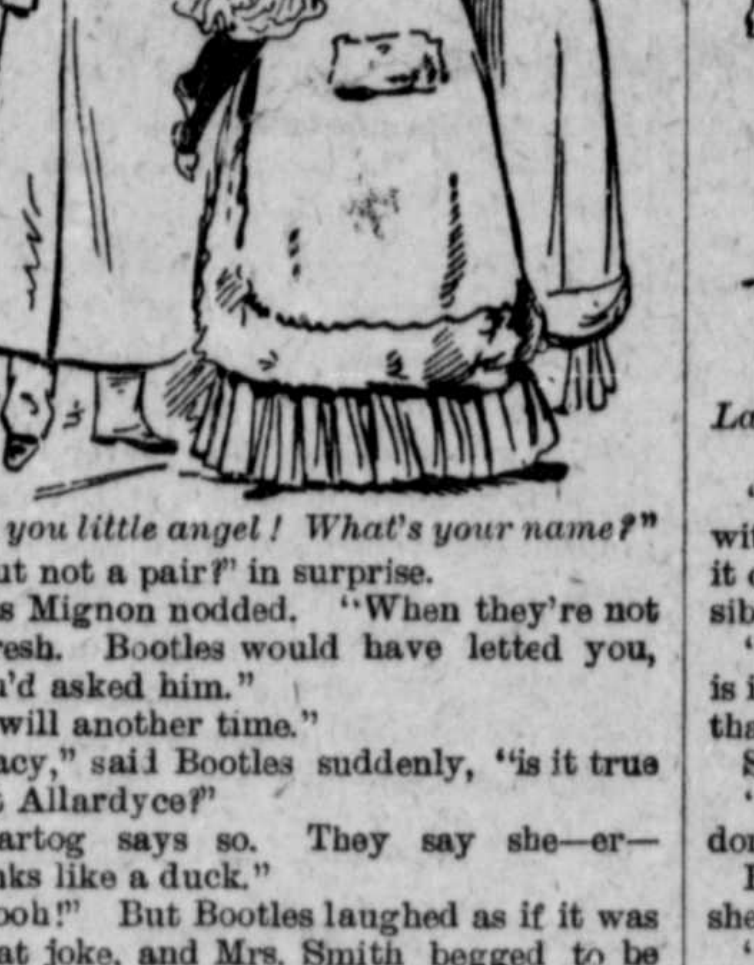
"No, no; tea," they cried—at least the two elder ladies, for Miss Grace seemed to have no ears for any one but the child.

"Won't you speak to me?" she asked, presently, as Miss Mignon gravely regarded her with her big blue eyes.

Miss Mignon went close to her immediately. "Did Bootles let you drive?" she asked, with interest.

Miss Grace shook her head, and lifted Miss Mignon on to her knee. "I did not ask him," she said.

"Oh!" Then, after a pause, "I al—ways do."



"Oh, you little angel! What's your name?"

"But not a pair?" in surprise.

Miss Mignon nodded. "When they're not too fresh. Bootles would have letted you, if you'd asked him."

"I will another time."

"Lacy," said Bootles suddenly, "is it true about Allardyce?"

"Hartog says so. They say she—er—dwrinks like a duck."

"Pooh!" But Bootles laughed as if it was a great joke, and Mrs. Smith begged to be enlightened.

"Oh! don't you remember Allardyce? He's the great military teetotal light."

"And—er—he wreally is an *awful* duffah," remarked Miss Mignon, in so exact and so unconscious an imitation of Lacy's drawl that her hearers went off into fits of laughter, and Miss Grace, clasping her close to her breast, bent and kissed the luxuriant golden curls.

"You're crying," said Miss Mignon promptly, scanning Miss Grace's face with her big eyes.

"No; but you made me laugh," she said hastily.

"Some people do cry when they laugh," Miss Mignon informed her. "Our colonel does. Now, Maj. Garnet always chokes, and then Bootles thumps him. I don't know what he'll do," she added in a tone of deep concern, "if he chokes while we are away."

"I never saw such an original little piece of mischief in my life," cried Mrs. Smith. "And how charmingly dressed—is she not, madame? So sensible of you to cover her up with that warm serge up to her throat and down to her wrists. Who put you up to it?"

"I fancy we evolved the idea among us. You see, she runs in and out of my rooms, her own, and Mrs. Gray's, the adjutant's wife, that is," Bootles answered. "And barrack corridors are not exactly hot-houses. Besides, our doctor keeps his eye on her, and he blames the wrapping-up for her never having a day's illness."

"I believe in it," asserted Mrs. Smith.

"And I—oh! our married ladies tell me I am quite an authority on the subject. I can tell you we get fearfully chaffed about her, Lacy and I."

"Why?" Miss Grace asked.

"Well, because she goes about with us a good deal, and people seem to find the situation difficult to understand." He took it for granted that she knew all about Miss Mignon, and she did not press the question further. But half an hour later, when Mrs. Smith was thinking of dressing, Miss Grace tapped at her door and entered.

"Could you lend me a few black pins?" she asked. "Madame and I have both forgotten them."

"Certainly, my dear—take the box."

But Miss Grace only took a few in the pink palm of her hand.

"What a pretty child that is," she said carelessly. "Did the mother die when it was born?"

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Smith, "she is not Capt. Ferrers' child. No relation whatever."

"No? Whose, then?"

"Ah! That is a question." Then she briefly told Miss Mignon's history, ending: "But he will never part with her now. He is so fond of her, and she adores him."

"He is a fine fellow," said Miss Grace, toying with the pins in her hand.

"A fine fellow! He is a splendid character," Mrs. Smith cried warmly. "I assure you I have studied that man—and I have known him for years—and I *cannot* find a fault in him. Years ago, when we were in great trouble, my mother and I, at the time my sister died, oh, he was so good, so—well,' with a quick sigh, "I cannot explain it all, but he was such a comfort to us, and she died, poor darling, under very painful circumstances, especially for me. Oh, there are very few in the world like him—not one in ten thousand. Take his action as regarded that dear little child, for instance. His brother officers wanted him to send her to the workhouse, but, as he wrote to me, 'Some day I may meet the mother, and how should I face her?'"

"Ah!" murmured Miss Grace, and Mrs. Smith went on.

"It was no small undertaking for a man in his position, for he has not left her to the entire care of servants—she is continually with him and Mr. Lacy, who is also very fond of her. Do you know, he pays her nurse fifty pounds a year. In fact, she is just as if she were really his own child. But it is just like him."

"And they would have sent her to the workhouse?"

"One or two of them—not Mr. Lacy, of course."

Miss Grace was silent for a few moments. Then she roused herself as from a brown study.

"Well, I am detaining you, Mrs. Smith, and shall be late myself. Thank you very much." Then she went away, passing softly down the corridor, and entered her room, locking the door behind her. But once in that safe shelter, she flung the pins on the table and dropped upon her knees, burying her face in her hands, while the scalding tears forced their way between her fingers, and the great sobs shook her frame.

"'Some day he might meet the mother,'" she sobbed, "'and how should he face her?' Oh, my child, my little child, how shall I face him? How shall I bear it? How shall I live in the same house with him without falling on my knees and blessing him for saving my little child from—God knows what!"

CHAPTER VI.

A month had passed, and the three ladies still remained at Ferrers Court, though other visitors had come and gone, lots of them. Lacy was still there also, and occupied in making desperate love to the Russian lady, utterly ignoring two important facts—one that she only laughed at him, the other that she was three years his senior.

But while all this was going on, Bootles had fallen in love at last, as men and women only fall once in their lives, and of course the lady was Mme. Gourbolska's friend, Miss Grace—had he but known it, the mother of Mignon.

But Bootles never suspected that for a moment. True, there was a likeness so strong as to proclaim the truth, and many a time Miss Grace wondered, when she caught sight of the child's face and her own in a glass, that all these people did not see it. Yet neither Bootles nor any one else did see it, and the game of love was played on with desperate earnestness on his side, and with equally desperate desire to prevent it on hers.

But Bootles admired shy game, and Miss Grace's evident shyness made him only the more earnest; and not being troubled with that faint heart which never won fair lady, he had no intention of allowing Mme. Gourbolska to depart from beneath his roof without asking Miss Grace to return to it as its mistress. Therefore one afternoon, when he returned from hunting in much bespattered pink, and went into the fire-lit library, where he found Miss Grace half dreaming by the fire, he shut the door with the intention of getting it over at once. Miss Grace rose with some signs of confusion.

"Don't go for a minute," said Bootles; "I want to speak to you. It seems to me that you have grown very fond of my little Mignon. Is it not so?"

Miss Grace caught at the carvings of the oaken chimney shelf to steady herself, and her heart began to beat hard and fast.

"Yes, I am very fond of her," she stammered.

"I wish you would take her for your own," Bootles said very gently.

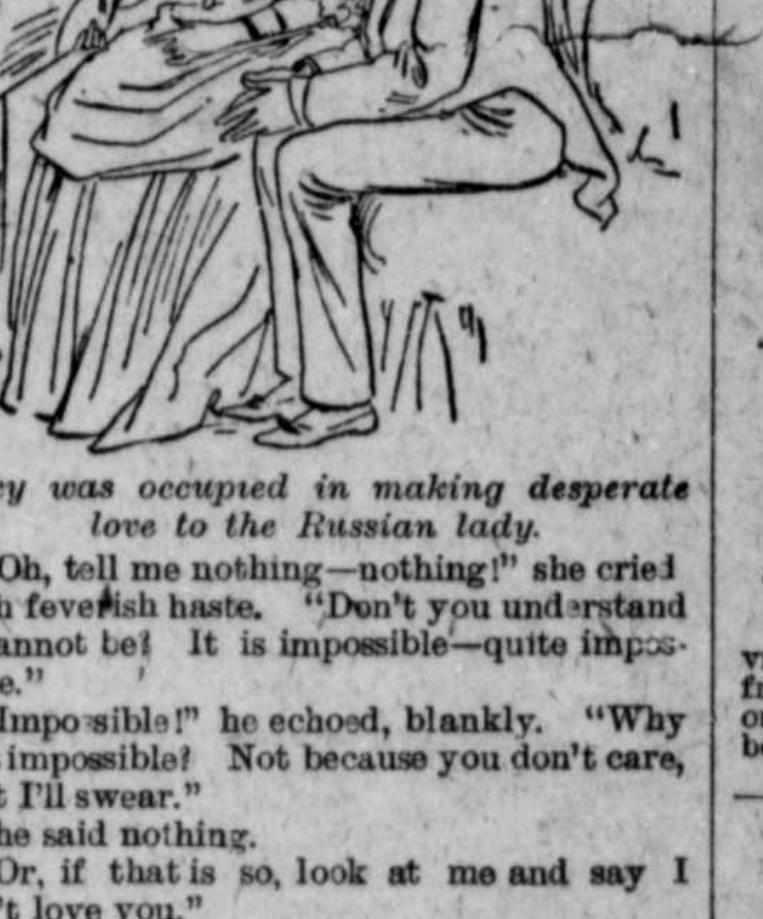
"For—my own?" sharply. "What do you mean?"

For a moment she thought he knew all, but his next words undeceived her.

"If she had such a mother as you, poor little motherless waif, and if *I* had such a wife, and if Ferrers Court had such a mistress! Oh! don't you understand what I mean?" taking her hand.

Miss Grace snatched the hand away. "Oh, don't, *don't*, DON'T!" she said, turning away.

But Bootles possessed himself of it again. "Must I tell you more? Oh, my darling, how from the very first day I ever saw you I loved you with all my heart and soul! How, when I bade you welcome to my house, I could, and would if I had dared, have taken you up to my heart and kissed you before every one! How——"



Lacy was occupied in making desperate love to the Russian lady.

"Oh, tell me nothing—nothing!" she cried with feverish haste. "Don't you understand it cannot be! It is impossible—quite impossible."

"Impossible!" he echoed, blankly. "Why is it impossible? Not because you don't care, that I'll swear."

She said nothing.

"Or, if that is so, look at me and say I don't love you."

But Miss Grace did not speak, nor yet did she look.

"Or will you tell me that there is some one else whom you like better?" he asked, regaining hope.

No, Miss Grace did not seem inclined to vouchsafe that information either.

"Or that the care of the child would be an objection?"

"*No!*" she burst out, in an agonized tone.

"Then what do you mean by impossible?" he asked. "It seems to me very possible indeed."

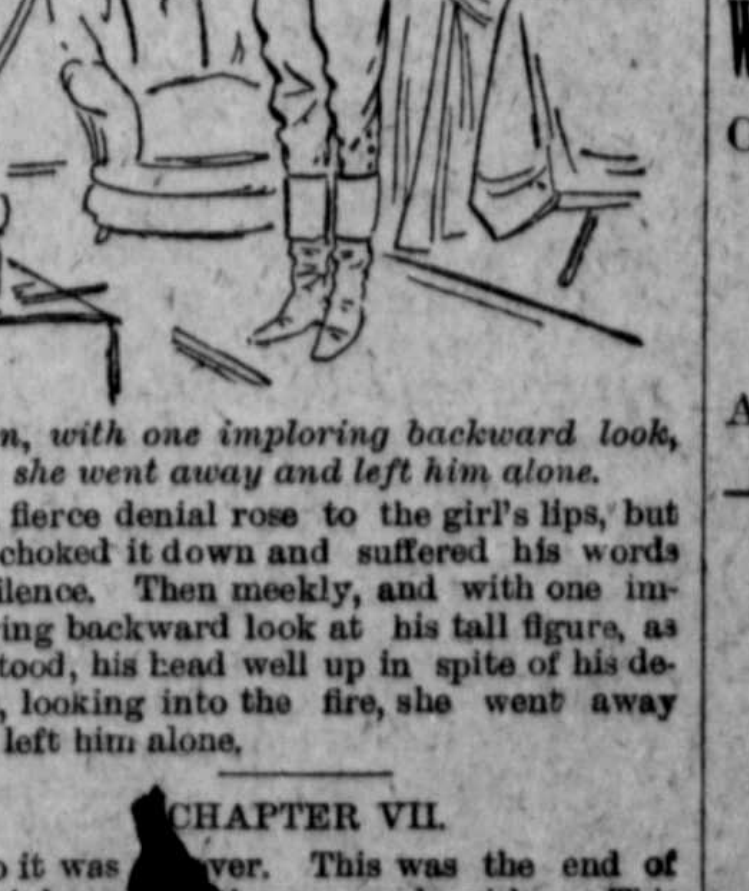
She looked at him, that proud, handsome, erect man, with a smile of expectant happiness on his good face—and tried to take her hands away.

"Oh!" she sobbed out, "don't you think I would if I could? I have not been so happy that I would throw away such happiness as you could give me. Some day you may know what it costs me to tell you that it is quite impossible."

"You give me no hope?" he asked in a dull voice, and she saw that he had grown white to his very lips.

"None," she returned; then added bitterly, "Oh, hope and I have had nothing to say to one another this long, long while."

Bootles dropped her hand listlessly. "Then it is no use my boring you," he said, turning away.



Then, with one imploring backward look, she went away and left him alone.

A fierce denial rose to the girl's lips, but she choked it down and suffered his words in silence. Then meekly, and with one imploring backward look at his tall figure, as he stood, his head well up in spite of his defeat, looking into the fire, she went away and left him alone.

CHAPTER VII.

So it was over. This was the end of all his hopes [illegible] dreams and wishes. This was the end! None of his bright hopes would ever be—none of his golden dreams would come to pass. His wishes had no weight with the woman he loved. He had looked forward—like a fool, he thought bitterly—and had pictured her in a dozen different ways: at the head of his table, in the hunting field, in the middle age, and in the decline of life, as Mignon's mother, as his wife. But it was all over now. When madame's visit was over, she would go from under his roof, never to come back to it any more forever.

He was still standing there when the door opened with some difficulty, and Miss Mignon appeared on the threshold.

"Bootles!" she said inquiringly.

Bootles turned round to her. "Well?" he answered.

Miss Mignon heard the misery in his voice and ran to him. "Bootles got a headache?" she asked.

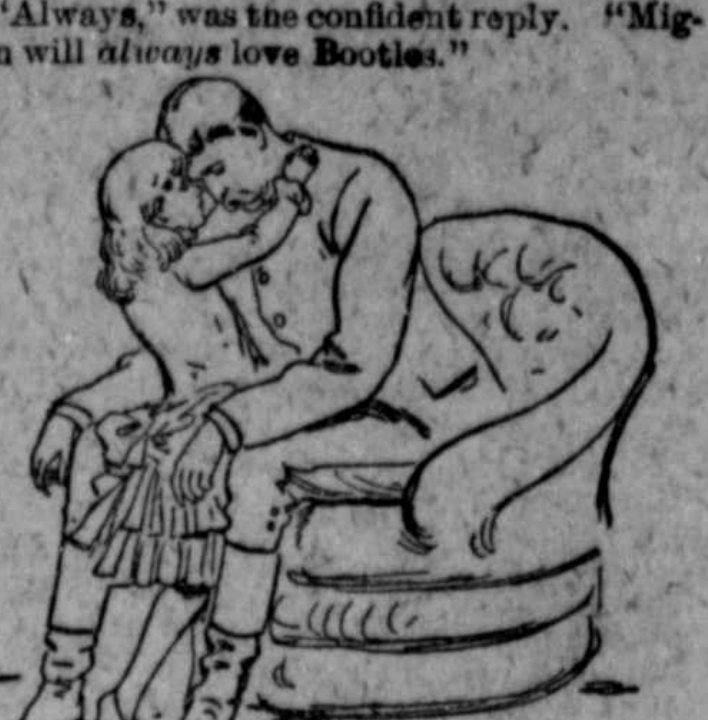
He dropped into a chair and took her in his arms. "Such a headache, Mignon!"

Miss Mignon knew what Bootles' headaches were, and drew his head down upon small shoulder with an air of protecting and comforting dignity, equally pretty and absurd in one so young.

"Mignon *loves* Bootles," she whispered.

"Will Mignon *always* love Bootles?" he asked.

"Always," was the confident reply. "Mignon will *always* love Bootles."



"Always," was the confident reply; "Mignon will always love Bootles."

And so in and because of his trouble the little child crept closer and closer into his heart, and drove out the greatest bitterness of his disappointment, and the clasp of her soft arms about his neck seemed to take away the sharpest sting of defeat. The touch of her baby lips upon his aching fore head—and it *did* ache—brought him a larger measure of comfort than any living thing had power to do at that moment.

If only he had known that Mignon was *her* child!

But Bootles was not the man to sulk with fate; if Miss Grace would not have him, no more was to be said, and no one but Mrs. Smith saw anything unusual between them. But trust Mrs. Smith. She walked into Miss Grace's room and taxed her with it—taxed her in so friendly a way that the girl began to cry miserably. Mrs. Smith fumed.

"It is absurd," she cried, "to refuse such a man—such a position—such—such— Oh! it's absurd. I have no patience with you. You will never have such a chance again—never."

"Oh, never," she sobbed.

"Why, then, throw it away? Let me go and tell——"

"No; tell him nothing. I have already told him it is impossible. Oh, Mrs. Smith!" she cried, passionately, "do you think any woman in her senses would refuse him if she could help it? Not I, I assure you."

"It is inexplicable," said Mrs. Smith, but she protested no further.

So the next day they left Ferrers Court, Bootles driving them to the station. But it was all very different now—very different, too, from the last time he had driven them anywhere. There was no laughter, no joking, no promise to come again. He was not outwardly angry, not harsh nor hard in any way, but he was very polite; and politeness from him was heart-breaking.

It was soon over when they reached the station—a few minutes of that kind of c versation which people make when th are waiting for a carriage or a train, they said the passenger of the London ma while walking up and down quietly waiti for the end. There was a handshaking a round, the lifting of Bootles' and Lacy's hat a fuss over Miss Mignon, and that was a Miss Grace, on looking out of the carriag window with tear dimmed eyes, saw tha they were together, the child's hand in his Miss Mignon's last words were yet ringing in her ears: "Bootles has gotted such a headache."

"Then Mignon must be very kind to him," Miss Grace whispered.

Ay, Miss Mignon had need to be kind, for Bootles had "gotted" such a heartache, too!

This Story to be continued.]

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