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BOOTLES' BABY.



CHAPTER I.

It was considerably after midnight when one of three officers seated at a white table in the mess-room of the Cavalry Barracks at Aldminster, where the Scarlet Lancers were quartered, called out, "Bootles, come and take a hand—there's a good chap."

Bootles stood in dismay staring at it. "Where, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you come from?" he asked aloud, looking at a safe distance lest it should suddenly start howling.

"You don't know me?" asked Miles. "No, no, of course not," returned Miles, promptly, but with an air which raised another about.

CHAPTER II. 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 fastidious nature, to despair.

"I wish you would. Some of the others are there," said Miles. "Well, eventually Mrs. Gray carried off the stranger to your quarters, and put it to bed. As for Bootles, he too went to bed, but during the whole of that blessed night he never slept a wink."

"Let's go and have a look at it," said Miles. "The assembled officers, five of them, trooped along the way Bootles had stumbled over alone in the blindness of his now forgotten headache. The baby was still in the cot, contentedly playing with the watch and chain, and at the sight of the five resplendent figures it set up a loud 'Boo—boo—booing,' followed by a 'Chucka—chucka—chucka—ing.'"

"I can't condemn that helpless thing to the workhouse," said Miles. "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."

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