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CARRISTON'S GIFT.

By HUGH CONWAY.

Author of "Called Back," "Dark Days," "A Family Affair," etc.

[SOLD BY PHILIP BRAND, M. D., LONDON.]

"Bing him!" panted Carriston; "there is cord in my pocket." He appeared to have some quite prepared for contingencies. While Carriston still embraced his prostrate foe, and Brand, to facilitate matters, knelt on his shoulders, sat on his head, or something else useful, I drew out from first pocket I tried a nice length of half-in line, and had the immense satisfaction trussing up my scowling friend in a most workmanlike manner. He must have felt those turns on his wrists for days afterwards. Yet when we were at last at liberty to rise and leave him lying helpless on his kitchen floor, I consider I exercised great self-denial in not bestowing a few kicks on him, as he swore at us in his broadest vernacular in a way which, under the circumstances, was no doubt a great comfort to him.

We scarcely noticed the man's wife while we rendered her husband helpless. As we entered she attempted to fly out, but Brand, with a promptitude which I am glad to record, intercepted her, closed the door, turned and pocketed the key. After that the woman sat on the floor and rocked herself to and fro.

For some moments, while recovering his breath, Carriston stood and positively glared at his prostrate foe. At last he roared words:

"Where is she? Where is the boy, you hound?" he thundered out, stooping over the fellow, and shaking him with a violence which did my heart good. As he received no answers save the unrecordable expressions above mentioned, we unbuttoned the wretch's pockets, and searched those greasy receptacles. Among the usual litter we did finally find a key. Carriston snatched at it, and shouting, "Madeline! Madeline! I come!" rushed out of the room like a maniac, leaving Brand and me to keep guard over our prisoners.

"I filled a pipe, lit it, and then came back to my fallen foe.

"I say, old chap," I said, stirring him gently with the toe of my boot, "this will be a lesson to you. Remember, I told you that it costs nothing. If you had given me Criston Leal accommodation instead of making me wear out my poor boots on that infernal chair, you could have jogged along in your respectably quite comfortably, so far as I am concerned."

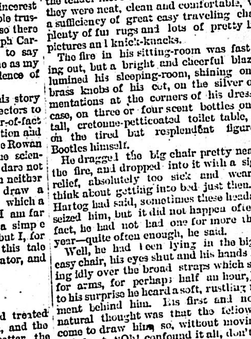
He was very ungrateful—so much so that my desire to kick him was incensified. I should not like to swear. I did not to a slight degree yield to the temptation.

"Push a handkerchief in his mouth," cried Brand, suddenly.

"A lady is coming."

Twist right good will it did as the doctor prest at.

Just then Carriston returned. Idn't want to raise home temperature, yet I must say he was disappointed by the most beautiful creature eyes have ever light of upon. True, she was pale as a lily—I should think and del cate, and her face bore traces of anxiety and suffering, but for all that she was beautiful—beautiful for this world, I thought, as I looked at her. She was clinging in a half-frightened, half-confiding way to Carriston, and new happy fellow!—regardless of our presence, was showering down kisses on her sweet pale face. Confound it! I grow quite remarkable. I recall the sight of these lovers. A most curious young man, that Carriston! He came to us, the lovely girl on his arm, without showing a trace of his recent excitement.



Carriston came to us with the lovely girl on his arm.

"Let us go now," he said, as calmly as if he had been taking a quiet evening drive. Then he turned to me.

"Do you think, Mr. Fenton, you could without much trouble get the dogcart up to the house?"

I said I would try to do so.

"But what about these people?" asked Brand.

Carriston gave them a contemptuous glance. "Leave them alone," he said. "They are but the tools of another—him I cannot touch. Let us go."

"Yes, yes. But why not verify your suspicions while you can?"

"Just like Brand! He's always wanting to verify everything.

In searching for the key we had found some papers on our prisoner. Brand examined them, and handed to Carriston an envelope which contained what looked like a banknote.

Carriston glanced at it. "The handwriting is, of course, disguised," he said, carelessly, "but the postmark shows whence it came. It is as I always told you. You see with me now?"

"I am afraid I must," said Brand, humbly.

"Let us do something about this man," he continued.

Horsewhip Carriston turned to our prisoner. "Listen, you villain," he said. "I will let you go scot-free if you breathe no word of this to your employer for the next fortnight. If he learns from you what has happened before that time, I swear you shall go to penal servitude. Which do you choose?"

I pulled out the gag, and it is needless to say which the fellow chose.

Then I went off, and recovered the horse and cart. I relighted the lamps, and with some difficulty got the dogcart up to the house. Carriston must have exactly anticipated the events of the night. The parcel he had brought with him contained a bonnet and a thick, warm cloth cloak. His beautiful friend was equipped with these; then leaving the woman of the house to untie her husband at her leisure and pleasure, away we started; the doctor sitting by me; Carriston and the lady behind.

We just managed to catch the last train from [illegible]. Not feeling sure as to what form inquiries might take to-morrow, I thought it better to go up to town with my friends, so, as we passed through Midcombe, I stopped, paid my bill, and gave instructions for my luggage to be forwarded to me. At 6 o'clock the next morning we were all in London.

THE BRAND IN CONCLUSION.

I asked Dick Fenton to relate his story. I did not mean him to do so as well. But there, as he has written, his writing is not a labor of love with him. Let it go.

When Madeline Rowan found the bed, by the side of which she had thrown herself in an ecstasy of grief, untenanted, she knew in a moment that she was the victim of a deep-laid plot. Being ignorant of Carriston's true position in the world, she could conceive no reason for the elaborate scheme which had been devised to lure her so many miles from her home, and make a prisoner of her.

A prisoner she was. Not only was the door locked upon her, but a slip of paper lay on the bed. It bore these words: "No harm is meant you, and in due time you will be released. Ask no questions, make no foolish attempts at escape, and you will be well treated."

Upon reading this the girl's first thought was one of thankfulness. She saw at once that the reported accident to her lover was but an invention. The probabilities were that Carrision was alive, and in his usual health. Now that she felt certain of this, she could bear anything.

From the day on which she entered that room to that on which we rescued her Madeline was to all intents and purposes as close a prisoner in that lonely house on the hillside as she might have been in the deepest dungeon in the world. Threats, entreaties, promises of bribes availed nothing. She was not unkindly treated—that is, suffered no absolute ill-usage. Books, materials for needlework and other little aids to while away time were supplied. But the only living creatures she saw were the woman of the house, who attended to her wants, and, on one or two occasions, the man whom Carriston asserted he had seen in his trance. She had suffered from the close confinement, but had always felt certain that sooner or later her lover would find her, and effect her deliverance. Now that she knew he was alive she could not be unhappy.

I did not choose to ask her why she had felt so certain on the above points. I wished to add no more puzzles to the one which, to tell the truth, exercised, even annoyed, me more than I care to say. But I did ask her if, during her incarceration, her jailer had ever laid his hand upon her.

She told me that some short time after her arrival a stranger had gained admittance to the house. While he was there the man had entered her room, held her arm, and threatened her with violence if she made any outcry. After hearing this I did not pursue the subject.

Carriston and Madeline were married at the earliest possible moment, and left England immediately after the ceremony. A week after their departure, by Carriston's request, I forwarded the cardboard found upon our prisoner to Mr. Ralph Carriston. With it I sent a few lines stating where and under what peculiar circumstances we had become possessed of it. I never received any reply to my communication, so, with and improbable as it seems, I am bound to believe that Charles Carriston's surmise was right—that Madeline was decoyed away and concealed, not from any ill-will towards herself, but with a view to the possible baneful effect which her mysterious disappearance might work upon her lover's strange and excitable organization; and I firmly believe that had it not in some inexplicable way been firmly convinced that she was alive and faithful to him the plot would have been fatal to our success, and Charles Carriston would have spent the rest of his days in an asylum.

Both Sir Charles—he succeeded to his title shortly after his marriage—and Lady Carriston are now dead, or I should not have ventured to relate these things concerning them. They had twelve years of happiness. If measured by time the period was but a short one; but I feel sure that in it they enjoyed more true happiness than many others find in the course of a prolonged life. In word, thought and deed they were as one. She died, in Rome, of fever, and her husband, without, so far as I know, any particular complaint, simply followed her.

I was always honored with their sincerest friendship, and Sir Charles left me sole trustee and guardian to his three sons; so there are now plenty of lives between Ralph Carriston and his desire. I am pleased to say that the boys, who are as dear to me as my own children, as yet show no evidence of possessing any gifts beyond Nature.

I know that my having made this story public will cause two sets of objectors to fall equally foul of me—the matter-of-fact prosaic who will say that the abduction and subsequent imprisonment of Madeline Rowan was an absurd impossibility, and the scientific man, like myself, who cannot, dare not believe that Charles Carriston, from neither memory nor imagination, could draw a face, and describe peculiarities, by which a certain man could be identified. I am far from saying there may not be a simple natural explanation of the puzzle, but I, for one, have failed to find it, so close this tale as I began it by saying I am a narrator, and nothing more.

THE END.

A Painted Hen.

It's often thought that the world treated people very much as they deserved, and the belief is that a person deserved the better the world treated him. It's precisely the same way with hens. A muddy-colored little chicken got its leg hurt and went lame, and the whole flock of hens bore down on her, and pecked and maltreated her. The poor thing led a horrible life till I caught her, and painted her head with gold paint, and made eyes like peacock's, with iridescent paint all down her sides, and glided her loose among her former persecutors. The effect was stunning. That hen walked into the sun, and she was something dazzling. The unpainted hens were dazed with admiration. She has received the unremitting attentions ever since of the four gentlemen belonging to my farm. Duels are daily fought on her account upon my premises. What will happen when the gilding soaks off I can't say; but at present she is the boss and queen of the coop.

Stay on the Farm.

Come, boys, I have something to tell you,
Come near—I would whisper it low;
You are thinking of leaving the homestead;
Don't be in a hurry to go.
The city has many attractions,
But think of the vices and sins;
When once in the vortex of fashion,
How soon the course downward begins!

You talk of mines of Australia,
They've wealth in the red gold, no doubt,
But, ah! there is gold on the farm, boys,
If only you'll shovel it out.
The mercantile life is a hazard,
The goods are first high and then low;
Better risk the old farm a while longer—
Don't be in a hurry to go.

The great busy west has inducements,
And so has the busiest mart;
But wealth is not made in a day, boys;
Don't be in a hurry to start!
The bankers and brokers are wealthy,
They rake in their thousands or so;
Ah! think of the frauds and deceptions—
Don't be in a hurry to go.

The farm is the safest and surest,
The orchards are loaded to-day!
You are free as the air in the mountains,
And monarch of all you survey;
Better stay on the farm a while longer,
Though profit comes in rather slow;
Remember you've nothing to risk, boys,
Don't be in a hurry to go.

Riddle.

(Orange County Farmer.)

In many a northern land you'll know,
I live midst ice and drifts of snow.
I draw St. Nicholas' capacious sleigh,
From the polar lands, far, far away.

Here's a Tangle.

Myd earch fldr enac sify cuo sure adth isiss pleasn ence.

BOOTLES' BABY.

The Loom-Shell.

CHAPTER I.

It was considerably after midnight when one of three officers seated at a whist table in the messroom of the Cavalry Barracks at Idleminster, where the Sea-let Lancers were quartered, called out, "Bootles, come and take a hand—there's a good chap."

Capt. Algernon Ferrers, more commonly known as "Bootles," looked up.

"I don't mind if I do," he said, rising and moving towards them. "What do you want me to do? Who's my partner?"

The three other men stared at one another in surprise, for Bootle was one of the best whist players in the regiment, and in an ordinary way would as soon have thought of counting honors as of settling the question of partners other than by cutting, except in the case of a revoque.

"Why, take a card, of course, my friend," laughed Lacy, in a ridiculously soft voice. Lacy was a recent importation from the White Dragoons, and had taken possession of the place left vacant in Bootles' everyday life by Scott Laurie's marriage.

"Ah, yes; to be sure—cut, of course. I believe," said Bootles, looking at the three faces before him in an uncertain way—"I believe I've got a headache."

"Oh, nothing like whist for a headache," answered Hartoz, turning up the last card. "Ace of diamonds." However, after stumbling through one game—after twice trumping his partner's trick, a revoke, and several such like blunders—he rose to his feet.

"It's no use, you fellows; I'm no good to-night—I can't even see the cards. Get some one to take my place and make a fresh start."

"Why, you're ill, Bootles," cried Preston.

"What is it?"

"It's a devil of a headache," answered Bootles promptly. "Here's Miles—this very man. Good night."

"Good night," called the fellows after him. Then they settled down to their game, and Preston dealt.

"Never saw Bootles seedy before," said Lacy.

"Oh, yes; he gets these headaches sometimes," answered Hartoz. "Not often, though. Miles, your lead."

Meantime Bootles went wearily away, almost feeling his road under the veranda in front of the officers' quarters, and up the wide flight of stone steps to his rooms facing the green of the barrack square. Being the senior captain, with only one bachelor brother officer in the regiment, he had two large and pleasant rooms, not very grandly furnished, for though a rich man, he was not an extravagant one, and saw no fun in having costly goods and chattels to be at the tender mercies of soldier servants; but they were neat, clean and comfortable, with a sufficiency of great easy traveling chairs, plenty of fur rugs and lots of pretty little pictures and knick-knacks.

The fire in his sitting-room was fast dying out, but a bright and cheerful blaze illumined his sleeping-room, shining on the brass knobs of his cot, on the silver ornamentations at the corners of his dressing-case, on three or four scent bottles on the tall, cretonne-petticoated little table, and on the tired but resplendent figure of Bootles himself.

He dragged the big chair pretty near to the fire, and dropped into it with a sigh of relief, absolutely too sick and weary to think about getting into bed just then. As Hartog had said, sometimes these headaches seized him, but it did not happen often; in fact, he had not had one for more than a year—quite often enough, he said.

Well, he had been lying in the big and easy chair, his eyes shut and his hands hanging idly over the broad straps which served for arms, for perhaps half an hour, when to his surprise he heard a soft, rustling movement behind him. His first and not unnatural thought was that the fellows had come to draw him so, without moving, he called out, "Oh! confound it all, don't come boring a poor devil with a headache. By Jove, it's cruelty to animals, neither more nor less."

The soft rustling ceased, and Bootles closed his eyes again, with a devout prayer that they would, in response to this appeal, take themselves off. But presently it began again, accompanied by a sound which made his heart jump almost into his mouth, and beat so furiously as to be simply suffocating. It stopped—was repeated—"*The*—DEVIL," muttered Bootles.

But it was not the devil at all—more like a little angel, in truth; for after a moment's irresolution he sprang from his chair and faced the horror behind him. It really was a horror to him, for there, sitting up among the pillows of the cot, with the clothes pushed back, was a baby, a baby whose short golden curls shone in the firelight—a little child dressed in white, with a pair of wide-open, wondering eyes, as bright as stars and as blue as sapphires.

Bootles stood in dismay staring at it.

"Where, in the name of all that's wonderful, did you come from?" he asked aloud, keeping at a safe distance lest it should suddenly start screaming.

But the little stranger did not howl; on the contrary, as its bewildered eyes fell upon Bootles' resplendent figure, his gold laced scarlet jacket and gold embroidered waistcoat of white velvet, his gold laced overall, and jingling spurs, it stretched out its little arms and cried, "Boo, boo, boo—!"

Bootles took a step back in his surprise, and his headache vanished as if by magic.

"By—Jove!" he exclaimed.

"Boo—boo—boo!" crowed the usurper of the cot, cheerily.

Bootles went a step nearer. "Why, you're a queer little beggar," he remarked. "Where did you come from, eh?"

The "queer little beggar" suddenly changed its tone, and started another system of crowing more triumphant and cheery than the first.

"Chucka—chucka—chucka—chuck!" it went.

Bootles began to laugh. "Can't tally, boy! Well, what do you want?" as it struggled fiercely to rise, and stretched out its small arms more impatiently than before. "Want to be lifted up, hey? Oh, but dash it," scratching his head perplexedly, "I can't lift you up, you know; it's out of the question—impossible. By Jove, I might let you drop and smash you!"

"Chucka—chucka—chucka! Boo—oo—oo!" gobbled the baby, as if it were the best joke in the world.

Bootles positively roared.

"You don't mind! Well, come along, then," approaching very gingerly, and wondering where he should begin to get hold of it, so to speak.

The baby soon settled that question, holding out its arms towards his neck. Then, somehow, he gathered it up and carried it in doubt and trepidation to the big chair by the fire, where the creature sat contentedly upon his knee, the curly golden head resting against his scarlet jacket, the soft fingers of one baby hand tight twined round one of his, the other picking and wandering aimlessly about the scrolls and curves of the gold embroidery on his waistcoat.

"By Jove! you're a jolly little chap," said Bootles, just as if it could understand him. "But the question is, where did you come from, and what's to be done with you? You can't stop here, you know."

The babe's big blue eyes raised themselves to his, and the fingers which had been twined round his made a grab at his watch chain.

"Gar—gar—garr—rah!" it remarked, in such evident delight that Bootles laughed again.

"Oh, you like it, do you? Well, you're a queer little beggar; no mistake about that. I wonder whom you belong to, and where you live when you are at home! Can't be a barrack child—too dainty-looking; and not slobbery enough. And this dress!"—taking hold of the richly embroidered white skirt—"this must have cost a lot; and it's all lace, too."

He knew what embroidery cost by his own mess waistcoats and his tunics. Then not only was the dress of the child of a very costly description, but its sleeves were tied up with Cambridge blue ribbons that were evidently new, and its waist was encircled by a broad sash of the same material and tint. Altogether it was just such a child as he was occasionally called upon to admire in the houses of his married brother officers; yet that any lady in the regiment would lend her baby for a whole night to a set of harum scarum young fellows for the purpose of playing a trick on a brother officer was manifestly absurd. And besides that, Bootles was so good-natured and such a favorite with the ladies of the regiment that he thought he knew all their babies by sight, and he became afraid that this one was indeed a little stranger in the land, welcome or unwelcome.

Yet if it was the fellows' doing, where had they got it? And if it was not the fellows' doing, why should any one leave a baby asleep in his cot? The whole thing was inexplicable.

Just then the child, in playing with his chain, slipped a little on the smooth cloth of his overalls, and Bootles, with a "Whoa! whoa, my lad!" hauled it up again. In doing so he felt a piece of paper rustle somewhere about the embroidered skirt.

"A note. This grows melodramatic," said Bootles, cranking his neck to find it. "Oh, here we are! Now we shall see."

The note was written in a firm, large, yet thoroughly feminine hand, and ran thus:

"You will not absolve me from my oath of secrecy respecting our marriage, though now that I have offended you, I may starve or go to the workhouse. I cannot break my oath, though you have broken *all* yours, but I am determined that you *shall* acknowledge your child. I am going to leave her to-night in your rooms with her clothes. By midnight I shall be out of the country. I do this because I have obtained a good situation, and because when I reach my destination I shall have spent my last shilling. I give your fair warning, however, that if you desert the child, or fail to acknowledge her, I will break my oath and proclaim our marriage. If you engage a nurse she will not be much trouble. She is a good and sweet-tempered child, and I have called her Mary, after your dear mother. Oh, how she would pity me if she could see me now! Farewell."

From that moment Bootles absolved "the fellows" from any share in the affair; but what to do with the child he had not the least idea.

"It is the very devil," he said aloud, watching the busy fingers still playing with his chain.

He gathered it awkwardly in his arms, and rose to look for the clothing spoken of in the letter. Yes, there it was, a parcel of goodly size, wrapped in a stout brown paper cover, and on the chair beside his cot lay the out-door garments of a young child—a white coat bordered with fur, a fur-trimmed cap, and some other things which Bootles did not quite understand the use of; white wool fingerless gloves (at least he did not know what else they could be), and some longer things of the same class, like stockings without feet.

Bootles shook his head bewilderingly. "Mother means it to stop; *I* don't know what to do," he said helplessly.

It occurred to him then that perhaps the child might be able to make a suggestion. He did not know what to do with the child for the night, nor, for the matter of that, what to do with it for the moment. He had the sense not to take it out into the chill midnight air, and when he attempted to put it back into the cot it rebelled, clinging to his watch-chain with might and main.

"Well, have it then," he said, slipping it off.

The baby, pleased with the glittering toy, set up a cry of delight, and Bootles took the opportunity of slipping out. He entered the ante-room with a very rueful face, finding it pretty much as he had left it. Lacy was the first to catch sight of him.

"Hello, Bootles, what's the mat-tah?" he asked. "Is your head worse?"

"My head! Oh, I forgot all about it," Bootles replied. "But, I say, I'm in a mess. There's a baby in my room."

"A what?" they cried, with one voice.

"A baby," repeated Bootles, dismally.

"A—ive?" asked Lacy, with his head on one side.

"Alive. Oh, very, very much so, and means to stop, for it has brought its entire wardrobe and a letter of introduction with it, building the letter for any one to take who chose. It was Lacy who did so, and he asked if he should read it up.

"Yes, do," said Bootles, dropping into a chair with a groan. "Perhaps some one else will own to it."

So Lacy read the letter in his ridiculous drawl of a voice, and caused amid profound silence—"Fa-ah-well!"

"Well!" said Bootles, finding no one seemed inclined to speak. "Well!"

"Well," said Preston, solemnly, "if you want my opinion, Bootles, I think you ought to be assamed of yourself."

A general laugh followed, but Bootles protested.

"Oh, don't imagine it's me. I've nothing to do with it. I shouldn't have come to you fellows if I had."

"No, no, of course not," returned Miles, promptly, but with an air which raised another shout.

"Then it's a plant," announced Preston, in a tone of conviction.

"Of course it's a plant," cried Bootles; "but why in the wide world should it be planted on me?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Miles, feelingly.

"Besides," Bootles continued, "some of you know my mother, and that her name was not Mary, but Margaret."

"Now, as several of those present had known Lady Margaret Ferrers very well, that was a strong point in favor of Preston's assertion that the affair was a plant. The chief question, however, was what could be done with the little stranger for that night. Some woman, of course, must look after it, but who? It was then after 9 o'clock, and the lights had been out hours ago in the married people's quarters. Bootles did not know what to do, and said so.

"Is it in your room now?" Preston asked.

"Yes."

"Where did you find it?"

"In my cot."

"The devil you did! I wonder you weren't frightened out of your very wits."

"I nearly was," Bootles admitted.

"Did you see it at once? Was it howling?"

"Howling! Not a bit of it. Never saw a jollier little beggar in all my life."

"Oh!" ejaculated Miles, blankly. "I say, you fellows, don't that sound to you very much like the proud pap—ah?"

"You fellows" all laughed at this, even perplexed Bootles, and Hartog asked a question.

"Did you see it directly, Bootles?"

"Oh, no; not for half an hour or more."

"What on earth did you do?"

"Why, I looked at it, of course. What would you have done?"

"Did you *touch* it?"

Bootles laughed. "Yes, by Jove, the little beggar came to me like a bird."

"Great gods!" uttered Miles, "and you can doubt the fatherliness of *that*?"

"Oh, what an ass you are!" returned Hartog; then, as if by a bright inspiration, suggested, "I say, let's go and have a look at it."

"Let's go and have a look at it."

Thereupon 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-hoo—boo-ing," followed by a Chucka—chucka—chucka-ing." Evidently it considered this was the land of Goshen.

"Seems to take after its mother in its love for a scarlet jacket," remarked Miles sentiously. "I've heard that the child is father of the man—seems of the woman, too."

"Bootles," said Lacy, gravely, "isn't it very pwetty?"

"Yes, poor little beggar."

"Let's see you nurse it," cried Hartog.

So Bootles, proud of this new accomplishment, which had been useful only in his arms, pretty much as the night before he had done it had been useful of eggs, and he had made a wager he wouldn't break one of them. He carried it to the fire.

"Just light the candles, one of you," he said.

"It's the image of Bootles," persisted Miles.

"Well, it isn't mine, except by deed of gift," returned Bootles, with a laugh.

"Bootles," said Lacy, "look back over your past life—this may be made up."

"Well!" said Bootles, expectantly.

"Twig to think if you can twace any likeness to some early love, who may have married—or, for that matter, not have married—some one else, and never remembering your kind heart—for you have a big dashed kind heart, Bootles, there's no denying it—may have found herself hard up or too much encumbered—for—or you know, a baby is sometimes an awkward addition to a lady's belongings—and may have twusted to your—er—general—well, shall we say softness of chawacter to see it well pwovided for—or—eh?"

"No, I didn't. Of course I see what you mean, but I can't—can't—"

"Well—er—" Lacy broke in, "I—er—pewaps was not thinking so much of *your* case as of my own. You see," appealing to the other three, "the advent of this—er—baby twuly pwecious, and—er—if it should chance to occur to my first love—it would be awkward—for me, very awkward. Her name," plunging headlong into a story they all knew, "was Naomi, and—er—she—er—in fact, I fled my home for an elephantine parent, whose twevered name was—er—Fligg, Solomon Fligg. Now, if Mrs.—er—Solomon Fligg was to take it into her head to pack up the—er—eleven little Fliggs and send 'em to me—my wife would be what I should call awkward—devilish awkward." The laby's four heirs's positively roared, and the baby on Bootles' knee chuckled and crowed with delight.

"I believe it understands," said Preston.

Bootles, proud of his new accomplishment, lifted the child awkwardly.

"No. But it seems a jolly little chap," answered Bootles. "Oh, I forgot, 'tis a girl. I say, I do wish you fellows would advise me what to do. How can I get any one to attend to it?"

"Oh, roll it up in the bedclothes and sleep on the sofa. It will go to sleep when it's tired," said one.

"With it's clothes on!" said Bootles, doubtfully. "I rather fancy they undress babies when they put 'em to bed."

"I don't advise you to try. Oh, it won't hurt for to-night."

"There's a cab just driven up. I believe it's the Grays. I saw them go out dressed before dinner," said Hartog. The Grays were the adjutant and his wife, who lived in barracks. "She would help you in a minute."

"Oh, go and see; there's a good chap," Bootles cried, eagerly.

Hartog therefore went out. He found that it was the adjutant with his wife returning from a party, and to the lady he addressed himself. "Oh, Mrs. Gray, Bootles is in such trouble—" he began.

"In trouble!—Bootles!—Capt. Ferrers!" she said. "What is the matter?"

"Well, he's got a baby," Hartog answered.

"Got *what*?" Mrs. Gray cried.

"A baby. It's been left in his rooms, clothes and all, and Bootles don't know what the de—, what in the world, I mean, to do with it."

"Shall I go in and see it?" Mrs. Gray asked.

"I wish you would. Some of the others are there."

Well, eventually Mrs. Gray carried off the little stranger to her own 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.

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