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Palmer.	6	3	5	3	11	3	10 a.m.
Hall.	12	16	11	7	17	9	9.30 a.m
Matthews.	15	17	12	10	18	10	10 a.m
Carter.	11		10	0	9	8	9.30 "
Bartlett.	5	2	4	2	10	2	11 "

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Jury, Tuesday 6th April, and 5th October, at 10 a.m.
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Canadian Champion

AND COUNTY OF HALTON INTELLIGENCER.

VOLUME 25. MILTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1886. NO. 35.

BOOTLES' BABY.

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 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, 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 a cold 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. "That's 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 'Chucks, chucks, chucks?' 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 you—Bootles—the extraordinary likeness. Fine eyes, gold 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," 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—r—did," answered Lacy, promptly. "It's a name we—r—Fligg. The Rovers call him Solomon Fligg."

"Oh, we've all heard of him! But I meant a real live respectable person. There is a story about him—I rather think it's in 'Proverbs'—something or other, you know. Not exactly. Well, perhaps it's in the Book of Proverbs. It's about two mothers, were each had a baby, and one of them managed to smother it in the night, and it didn't do her any good to wake up in the morning and find 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. Rich chaffing it, said he. 'Oh, chop it in half, and let each have a share.' But you ask 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 a bachelor—

"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. Miss la Mere knew what she was doing when she picked out Bootles. He'll get one of the sergeant's 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 baby golden head growing up among the sharp and unlovely locks of a pauper brood—to think of the little soft fingers that had twined themselves so confidingly 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 work, to develop into the unnaturally w'ite 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 matter?" Bootles persisted.

"If. 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 hin't quite the sharpest 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. Landor?'

"'Yes, of course, Bell.'

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

"'To be sure, Bell.'

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

"'Of course I have, Bell.'

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

"'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 health.'

"'And what were you doing a cow something to do with—'

"'Yes—I—I stole a watch!'

"'A Jersey cow, eh, Bell?'

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

"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 reared, 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 deprecatorily, as he pulled the chin-strap over his moustache, "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, "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—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—n 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 vewy different place to what it is."

CHAPTER III.

Assoon 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 wife. 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, chiff."

"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 deuced smile—'the poor devils of casuals, and if I hear it, why not others?' Why not the mother of this child?"

"Why not, indeed, I'm sure, I'm sure," Bootles replied, modestly. "You overrate my character, Mrs. Gray, in thinking I would have done it for me. 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 splutter 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 our 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 know 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 anyone 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—thought old Bootles would be here," he explained. "And I could—s—t—wanted to see the baby. Seems to me, Bootles," he added, staring with an absurd air of reflective wisdom at the infant, "as if the face is somewhat 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! perhaps it will, and perhaps it won't. The worst of the affair is that it is awesting a mysterious—in—t for world is would be sure to be declared thought him the fine fellow he had declared him in the mess-room that morning—"and if we are *all* inundated with babys I wonder we don't know," plaintively, "what the wrogi—well come to."

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

"Little bergah seems to fan it a good joke, any way," Lacy cried. "I'm a great hand at nursing. Our adjutant's wife in the White Dwragons had thiwwee—*all* at once I say, Mrs. Gwray, stick something on it, and I'll take it out and show it wound."

"Dare you!" she asked.

"Dawe I! Just twwy. By-the-bye, it's cold this morning—vewy 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 vreggimento,*" laughed Lacy. "Capital! 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."

"Vewy 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 inspection. Mademoiselle Mignon bore the inspection calmly, consoling herself with the idea that she was such a knowing creature 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.

"Gad—shut—shut!" 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 Capt. Garnet.

"Ah, well, never mind, Garnet—never mind, old Garnet old fellow—don't you mind, Mrs. Garnet, we shall all be dead by then—but this is getting exceedingly old, and threadbare as a joke, and the constant jokes was instantly snubbed in the face of the saw and substantial one.

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

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

At this point Miss Mignon made a dash lighted lungs 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!"

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

"Happy Bootles!" cried the old soldier.

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

"I'm afraid, sir, she is trembling 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.

"Why, *does* she mean?" he cried.

Bootles laughed.

"Well, sir, she appears to 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.

"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 noto 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 senior just entering the anteroom.

"I'll make 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. I have met so often, in the course of my military experience, with recruits bred in the Unions—I never knew one do well. Not pauperism is ground into them, 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 obstreperous. She is really always very good—quite a charming little child," replied the general, as if he meant it, too, and then he shook hands with Bootles again.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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