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Hattl ews.	13	11	13	8	16	11
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"HOUP-LA."

CHAPTER II.

The little acrobat, in his worn and shabby tights, when Capt. Ferrers told him to get into the cab, seated himself meekly and with fear and trembling, though with now and then a glance of passionate admiration and reverence at his deliverer on the opposite seat to him. He hardly knew what to think of him—certainly a something scarcely human, for humanity of Ferrers' type had never before dawned upon the, till now, changeless horizon of his sad life. He had never heard of God or of heaven, except in such ways as did not give him any idea of their blessed goodness and peace; he had never heard of the angels at all, or perhaps he might have likened Ferrers to one of them; but as it was, he simply, in his uninformed and ignorant mind, thought of how he should like to be in a circus of which "the swell was boss."

The soldier guessed something of what was passing through his mind.

"Are you cold?" he asked in his kindly voice, the voice which had brought comfort to many and many an aching and weary heart.

The boy nodded. "Aye, sir," and shivered.

"Well, never mind, my lad, you shall be warm by and by. Oh, what's your name?"

"They call me Houp-La," the boy replied.

"Houp-La, eh! A very likely name for you. But what is your real name?"

"Tom Snow," hesitatingly. "Leastways, that was wot old Mrs. Wilson used to tell me my name was."

"And who is Mrs. Wilson?"

"She's dead. She was the lady wot kept the wardrobes."

Involuntarily the soldier's lips relaxed into a smile, and the boy struck in eagerly:

"She was werry good to poor Houp-La, Mrs. Wilson. She was a werry kind lady. Sometimes she used to give me my tea."

"And how long has she been dead?"

"Oh, a long time. I was a little chap then."

Ferrers smiled again. "You're not a very big one now, my boy. How old are you?"

"Twelve. Going on thirteen, sir."

"Ah!" Then, after a pause, "Can you read?"

The brown head was vigorously shaken, and the blue eyes stared widely at the question.

"Or write?"

The head was shaken again. "No; but I can do the snake trick and the wriggling dodge—they're both werry difficult," eagerly.

Ferrers laughed. "Yes, I know. I've seen you do them both. Now here we are," as the cab stopped at the door of the officers' quarters. "Come with me."

There were several officers, some in uniform and some in plain clothes, standing about the doorway, who stared in surprise as Ferrers, followed by the little acrobat, alighted from the cab.

"Why, Bootles," cried one of them, "what are you up to now?"

"At it again," asked another.

"Yes, at it again. I'll tell you all about it by and by," said Bootles, good-naturedly, and disappeared with his strange companion.

"Why, it is young Houp-La from the circus," exclaimed Lacy. "I'm going after him—or—to see what it means."

He found the favorite of the regiment, which Bootles was to every man, from commanding officer down to the last-joined subaltern and most lately-enlisted private, sitting in a big chair before the fire watching the boy, who was crouched all of a heap on the bearskin rug, luxuriating in the heat and warm light of the bright flames which blazed half-way up the chimney.

Bootles looked up. "Ah, is that you, Lacy! Come in."

Lacy closed the door, and pushed the easiest chair he could find up to the firesides.

"Bootles," he said solemnly, "Spivey, are you going to establish a Foundling—or—Hospital? Because, if you are—you had—better take my advice and make its headquarters at Ferrwers. Court wrathor than in Idlemister Bawrack."

Bootles laughed outright.

"You mean young Houp-La, there. Oh, he's all right; he's going under Terry's care. Don't trouble about him; he'll be in no body's way, and Terry has been asking for extra help over so long."

"Where did you pick him up?" asked Lacy.

"Down at the circus. That bruto Frisco was toaching him a new trapezo trick, with the aid of that," pointing to the long white whip set up against the dressing-table; "and I stopped him and brought young Houp-La away. That's all."

"Of course," Lacy murmured. "It goes without saying. And—er—how did the elegant Mr. Ferrwers come off?"

"He welloped 'im," put in young Houp-La, jerking his thumb towards Bootles, a whole world of delight shining in his bright and intelligent eyes.

"Ah! wallloped him, did he?" repeated Lacy with interest; "and what did Mr. Ferrwsco say to that?"

"'Owled," answered the boy tersely, holding both his hands to the warmth of the fire. He had learned one lesson, this little circus rider, and that was to make a few words go a very long way. Both his hearers laughed, and then Lacy asked Bootles how it was that he had chanced to be in the circus at that time of day!

"Oh, I was going down to the club, and I happened to hear young Houp-La screaming as I passed. That was all about it," carelessly. "After all it is a very simple matter. He will be under Terry's charge—go to school, and make himself useful."

"I'm to be among the 'orses," explained the boy, suddenly finding his tongue, and turning his blazing eyes upon Lacy; "and I'm to have top boots and a tall 'at, like Mr. Frisco, and go out with the kerridge. And, my word, it were goo! to see 'im this a'ternoon. 'E come in, and 'e see wot 'e were up to, and when 'e 'it out at me, the capting, 'e 'its out at 'im, and 'e sands 'im flying down in the sawdust—and then," excitedly, "'e says, says 'e, 'Get up!' and 'e 'ad to get up, and then the capting 'e give him proper. I never see such a wolloping! Mr. Frisco, 'e won't do no double somersaut to-night, 'e wont. And then," getting on to his feet, and standing a small skinny figure, looking smaller than he really was by reason of the shabby old tights, worn and torn, with here and there a spangle still clinging to them; "and then, Mr. Frisco, 'e drops down at last, and 'e lies a-cussing and a-swearing like hurrear, and the capting 'e says, 'D'ye want some more o' this! Stop that 'ere row,' 'e says. 'D'ye hear?' I never see nothink so good afore," fairly chuckling. "With 'is own whip too—that was the best of it."

"It does cut," continued young Houp-La, nodding at the white thong. "I know it well!" Then his poor, pinched little face brightened up into positive radiance. "But the capting ain't never going to let me go back to 'im—never no more."

"Here is Terry. Now you shall go along with him and have some dinner and a tub and some warm clothes. And mind, you're not to go outside the barrack gates. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," then added earnestly, and looking his new master straight in the face: "Not if I were to swing for it."

Bootles laughed, but stayed the lad a moment before Terry took him away.

"Look here, my boy. Do you know what a lie is?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, I want you to remember this: That whatever happens to you, whatever trouble you may get into, you must never tell a lie by way of trying to save yourself. Lies always are found out sooner or later, and they never do any good at all to any one—never."

There was a moment's silence. Then the poor, miserable little waif fell down at Bootles' feet, and flung his arms round his knees.

"I'll never do nothink wot'll wex you," he cried, sobbing wildly. "I never will—not never—so; not if I was to swing for it."

"I'll never do nothink wot'll vex you."

"There, there, there!" said Bootles, patting the boy's brown head, that he might check this sudden outburst of passionate gratitude. "Now go along with Terry, and mind you do what he bids you. There, go along."

It occurred to both the officers at the same moment that he was by no means an ill-looking boy. True, he was undersized and meager, and his face was pinched and white, the lips very tight and drawn. But, though his face was tear-stained and the blue eyes red with weeping, he was not dirty. In fact, his nightly performances prevented any possibility of that, and he had always been considered one of the best-looking boys in the troupe.

"Poor little chap!" said Bootles, as the door closed behind the groom and the boy. "I'm glad I happened to be passing just then."

"Werry lucky for him," murmured Lacy.

"E's fortune's made."

Bootles laughed. "Oh, nonsense! I've no doubt he will turn out a very smart groom; and, as I said just now, Terry has been needing help badly for a long time."

He then told Lacy all the details of the scene he had witnessed—how Frisco had beaten the lad up the ladder twice, when it was evidently impossible he could perform the feat—how he had threatened to make him try it without the netting spread for protection below, and had even gone so far as to begin to undo the ropes which held it in place. Finally, how he had knocked the lad down and then made him get up and take a regular sound thrashing, just by way of letting him know what the cut of that particular whip was like.

"But I let the brute off too easily," Bootles wound up, regretfully. "I almost wish I had given him a little more."

"I don't suppose he does," laughed Lacy, rising.

"Well, I must to off."

It was surprising how soon young Houp-La, or Tom Snow, as he soon came to be called, settled down into his new life. He took to it as a young duck takes to water. Within a week he was wearing the darling ambition of his heart—that is, top boots and a tall hat with a cockade—and had achieved as smart a salute and "yessir" as any groom in the regiment. Bootles declared he was the sharpest-witted boy he had ever known, at which, of course, neither Bootles nor any one else wondered when his training was taken into consideration.

He was popular, too, with everybody, high and low. He worked hard at his lessons—he would do anything to please Terry—and he adored Bootles. All his master's belongings were sacred in his eyes, and his orders once given were as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. In Tom's eyes there was no officer in the whole of the regiment, nay, in the whole of the service—whom he would admit to be as strong or as clever, as handsome or as rich, as his master; not one who could ride, or drive, or shoot, or do any mortal thing with the same degree of excellence to which the cap'n attained. Yes, he had very early dropped the "capting," and now clipped the word as short as any soldier in the barracks. In fact, in Tom's eyes, Bootles, like the king, could do no wrong.

The winter months wore away, and by and by the Scarlet Lancers were moved from Idlemister to Aldershot, whom Tom numbered among his experiences a different kind of march to those which he had shared with the traveling wagons of the circus, for his master chose him to accompany Terry with his second charger, partly because he was an unusually light weight, and partly because he wanted to keep him under his own eye.

By that time Tom was thoroughly au fait of all the ins and outs of barrack life, had learned to speak very much better than when Ferrers had rescued him out of Frisco's cruel hands; could already read a page fairly well, if the words were not too long, and could write his own name legibly by dint of sprawling his left leg well out and lolling some two inches of his tongue out of the mouth which was not nearly so pinched and tight as it had been aforetime.

"Ah! he's all very smart and that just now," said Hartog one day to Bootles; "but wait a few months until the change has had time to work. He'll get fat, and then where will your nice smart lad be? Simply not worth his salt."

But Tom never did get fat, not even plump. He ate well and heartily, but though his lips grew less tight and his blue eyes rather less anxious and bright—less unnaturally bright, I should say—he never came to be anything but a skinny slip of a lad, with a pinched, pale face and a deadly sharp tongue, and he did not seem to grow at all. No one was sorry for that. Neither Bootles nor Terry wished him any taller or heavier. The lad himself boasted of his small size and weight. He had no further ambitions—he had, in fact, reached the summit of his hopes and desires. Capt. Ferrers needed a light-weight about his horses, and very often a sharp groom about himself. Tom supplied both needs to a nicety. He had no desire to grow into a man, because he was perfectly happy as Capt. Ferrers' boy. He had known rough weather, and now that he had got into a port which seemed only suited for small craft he was not anxious to go into a three-decker.

Thus more than two years passed away, and many changes came about in the Scarlet Lancers, such changes as do come about in a regiment during so long a space of time. A very graceful poet sings touchingly and tenderly upon that theme:

All are scattered now, and fled;
Some are married, some are dead.

It was true of the Scarlet Lancers, as of the circle of life—and among the married ones was Bootles!

But the tale of Bootles' love and marriage has been told already in the story called "Bootles' Baby." It is enough to say here that he married the widow of a brother-officer, a lady, who had one little child, whom, for other reasons than for the mother's sake, Bootles loved as his own flesh. But though he married he did not leave the service; he was, in fact, too thoroughly and really at heart a soldier to entertain that idea for a moment, and his wife, Mrs. Bootles, as all the Scarlet Lancers called her, was more than content to do whatever pleased her good and handsome husband best.

Lacy was still in the regiment; in command of a troop now, but otherwise unchanged. The same soft speech, the same gentle manners, the same kind heart—not married, but waiting, as he always said from the first he should wait, for Ferrers' little "Mignon." Terry was still Capt. Ferrers' head groom, and Tom Snow had positively not grown an inch.

And then there arose throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world rumors that affairs were what the young subalterns in the Scarlet Lancers called "uncommonly groggy in the east," and very soon, from being thus lightly and carelessly termed "very groggy," affairs in the east began to assume a serious aspect; indeed, so serious, in truth, that they soon resolved themselves into orders for that regiment to hold itself in readiness for active service.

Next came the news of the bombardment of Alexandria, and then the Scarlet Lancers got their final orders, and the whole regiment was in a state of exultation and delight.

It is true that down in the very lowest depths of their hearts there lay many an anxious thought and care for those who must be left behind; many a doubt if the glory which might come was worth all the bloodshed and misery which it must cost; but on the surface, the bearing of each and all was fearless and gay; hope rose uppermost, and cost was set aside as a thing of naught.

There was a vast amount of chaff over the first appearance of the new uniforms—the serge tunics, with their heavily wadded spine protectors; the rough boots, with their ample leg bandages, and all the other paraphernalia ingeniously contrived to ward off the ill effects of the treacherous Egyptian climate.

Lacy expressed himself as most highly delighted with his great goggle spectacles, and walked about the barrack square wearing them for hours after they came into his possession—by way, he said, of getting used to the feeling of them.

And then came the last awful morning, a morning dull and gray, with drizzling mist and rain, the Scarlet Lancers sailed away to the mockingly gay strains of "The Girl I Leave Behind Me," some to win honor and glory, indeed, but all to run the risk of coming home again maimed and shattered, or, perhaps, when the war should be all over, to lie, the very flower of a great nation, rotting in Egyptian soil.

CHAPTER III.

There was very little of bravado gayety when the good ship Clyde slipped adown the channel that night. Officers and men alike were very quiet, and Tom Snow crept softly in and out of the cabin shared by his master with Lacy and Hartog, and laid out his things with silent and reverent sympathy for the gravity on that master's face, for Bootles had not, as yet, got over the agony he felt as he encountered the yearning misery in his wife's beautiful eyes, and saw Mignon's parting sobs fell upon his ears. In truth, it was one of the three most bitter days that ever cast their shadow over the brightness of his pleasant and sunny life.

For himself, young Tom had no feelings save those of the wildest exultation and delight. Until the last moment he had never dared to think it possible he could accompany his master on the expedition. Night after night he had watered his pillow with tears at the thought of being left behind, and then—well, of course he was very sorry for the cause, and he pulled as long a face over the misfortune as anybody, though the young monkey's heart was beating and throbbing with joy at the chance it gave him. This was how the chance occurred. The very day before the regiment was to leave its quarters, Terry fell upon the stairs leading to one of the troop rooms, and slipped his knee cap.

Going was for him out of the question, and not to be thought of; in fact, nobody did think of it for a moment. And then Bootles had to cast about in order to find somebody suitable to fill Terry's place, for Terry, although he was in reality a groom, yet was accustomed to do much about his master's person.

"I'll take young Houp-La," he said suddenly to Mrs. Bootles, after he had gone over in his mind all the likely men he knew. "He knows how to do for me just as well as Terry does. I'll take him."

And so young Tom was rigged out in haste, and followed his master's fortunes into the land of the Pharaohs.

Bootles' choice proved to be a very wise selection. The voyage out was the most miserable time he had ever passed; true, he had at one period been more unhappy, but never had he known before what it was to really miss a daily presence out of his life, not one, but two—his wife and Mignon.

In every respect young Tom suited him; he knew just what he wanted, and just when he wanted it; he was great at holding his tongue, and never bothering his master with questions about this or that, as a strange servant must necessarily have done. He was intensely sympathetic to the sleepless pain in Capt. Ferrers' eyes; and, after all, what sympathy is there which is so sweet as the sympathy of those who themselves have known the extremes of pain and misery? Young Tom, too, was sympathetic in silence.

Then, moreover, apart from his services to his master, he proved quite a host in himself by way of relieving the tedium and weariness which the voyage was to the men.

In some way or other he managed to ward off the ill effects of the treacherous Egyptian climate.

And then came the last day of all, a day of glory, every mile as long as a dozen. It is always hard to keep men amused and content on board ship, particularly on board a troop ship, where, with all ranks, life is a continuous fight for daily bread, to say nothing of comfort, from port to port.

It is a tedious and irksome enough time to the officers, who have the best accommodation which the ship affords; but for those who live between decks, with but few papers and amusements and but a limited amount of beer and tobacco, matters are still worse; and it is not easy to find words to convey anything like an adequate idea of what that life's weariness and ennui really is.

It was here that young Tom, from being only a sharp-tongued general favorite, suddenly grew, like Capt. Garnet's head, as Lacy remarked one night when they were steaming past the African coast, into "a own—and, seeing that, the circus waif rose great and—er—shining light." With his master's permission and some help from the sailors, he got the tailor to make him up a set of clown's garments, and furbished up all his old circus tricks with such right good will that more than once he had the honor of appearing before the most distinguished officers on board the Clyde. He pleased them each and all so greatly that when he took his white hat round for contributions to the fund for the wives and children who had been left behind, he obtained so good a sum that Bootles, whose heart was tender to every man who could in any way approach or share his feelings on that subject, made it up to the even and respectable amount of £5 out of his own pocket.

And then at last they steamed into the harbor of Alexandria, and the voyage was over. For some of them it was very near indeed to the close of the voyage of life. But they never seemed to think of it, action was the order of the day, and dispiritedness and down-heartedness apparently had flown from their midst. All was energy and bustle—tall lancers clanker along the half ruined eastern-looking streets, tramped in and out of the bazaars and cafes, laughing in good-natured British contempt at nearly everything they saw, grumbled in true British style at all discomforts, swore roundly at the flies and the dust, hob-nobbed with sunburned tars from the ships of war in the harbor, and scattered everywhere the energetic signs of British rule and occupation.

"I say, Bill," said one strapping, broad-shouldered red jacket to one of a group of his comrades one night, "wasn't the chap in lain preaching about the seven plagues of Egypt the Sunday afore we left 'oms?"

"Ay!" responded Bill, sending a great cloud of smoke into the midst of a cloud of flies.

"Do you remember what they was?"

"Why," answered Bill, hesitatingly, "there was frogs, flies and lice—and darkness, and blood—that's four. And hail, and blains—I suppose they're boils, or wuss—and the loss of the firstborn."

"By gum!" ejaculated the first, "but old Pharaoh must have 'ad some grit in him to stand all that. I wonder if they had any bacoy in them days," and then he, too, took a mighty draw at his big pipe, and let the flies in his immediate neighborhood have the full benefit thereof, after which he spat contemptuously into the midst of the swarm by way of distinctly adding insult to injury.

The flies did not particularly seem to appreciate the attention, and they forthwith settled down upon Private John Wood, No. 741, as if they had a special mission from Arabi Pasha to determine the exact value of "grit" as "grit" goes, in the ranks of the British army.

"Blowed if ever I knew the like o' this," quoth Private John Wood, No. 741. "Why, old Pharaoh must have 'ad a hide like Boccle'ulus."

CHAPTER IV.

Private John Wood, No. 741, was not the only man in the Scarlet Lancers whose "grit" the flies took an opportunity of valuing. They settled down upon Lacy as if he were a sweet and toothsome morsel such as did not often come in their way, which probably was exactly the true state of the case.

But Bootles they left strangely alone—perhaps he took after Pharaoh of old. Any way, certain it is that he suffered less from the climate and its attendant plagues than any other officer in the regiment, and it was partly owing to this—at least it was entirely due to his habitually cool and self-possessed demeanor, which he could not have maintained had the flies pestered him as they did some of the others, Lacy, for instance—that one evening, a few days after they had left Alexandria and Ramleh behind them, when he was lying half asleep in his hammock, a thump-thump sounded upon the wood on box which stood just outside the entrance to his tent.

"Yes—what is it?" he called out sleepily; then, as an orderly appeared in the doorway, asked, "Well, orderly; what is it?"

"The colonel's compliments, sir, and he wishes to see you as soon as possible."

"Very well. Tell the colonel, with my compliments, that I'll be with him immediately," he answered, and the orderly, saluting, disappeared.

With all haste he rolled out of the hammock, and straightened himself as regarded his hair and the fastenings of his undress jacket, buckled on his sword, and went off to the colonel's quarters, in ignorance that young Tom Snow, who had been loitering outside the tent until his master should shout for him when it was time to dress for mess, and so had heard the message which the orderly had brought, was following him, and that, when Bootles went in, he flung himself down upon the sandy ground, in blissful disregard of any plague that might be lurking there, be it Egyptian or otherwise.

The sentry on duty outside the colonel's tent, of course, noticed him, and uttered a facetious remark after the manner in which most of the Scarlet Lancers were accustomed to address the sharp-tongued, amusing little circus waif.

"Ello, young Houp-La. What may you be adoing of?"

"I ain't a-doing of 'rothing," retorted young Houp-La, civilly, "except a-waiting of my master, Capt'n Ferrers, who you see a-going into the colonel's quarters jes' now."

The sentry laughed and wheeled round on his allotted twenty yards of sentry-go, never dreaming of ordering young Tom off, for he was generally considered in the regiment as a thing of naught, beyond the fact of his being a favorite protege of Capt. Ferrers.

So there he remained, and there, with his sharp young ears pressed close to a little discrepancy in the canvas, which protected the officer commanding the Scarlet Lancers from the night dews and damps, Tom Snow, the circus waif, became cognizant of and acquainted with the details and particulars of one of the most important and dangerous missions which was intrusted to or accepted by any one of the officers and men who carried her majesty's uniform into the land of the Pharaohs in the campaign of '82.

He heard every word that passed between his master and the three gray-haired officers whom he found there.

It was not only a very difficult, but a very dangerous errand which Capt. Ferrers had been chosen to perform. The order was given in the simplest and most soldierly words, and so young Tom was able to gather its exact meaning as clearly as Bootles himself could do. In substance it was to convey a certain paper, written in cypher, to the officer commanding a body of troops lying about five miles from the Scarlet Lancers' camp, which was but a short distance from the town of Abu-Goum, held by a strong force of the rebels, under the command of Arabi himself.

To reach the other British camp the envoy must pass almost through the rebel lines, else he would find himself close under the walls of Abu-Goum on the one hand, or involved in the swamp, which skirted the margin of Lake Goum on the other.

The general impressed upon Bootles the need for caution and dispatch as he intrusted the paper to his hands, not without first making him exactly acquainted with its contents in case of accident by the way, so that if the paper were damaged or rendered illegible he might not reach the other camp in ignorance of his mission.

And young Tom heard it all—every word! Not only heard, but saw! Saw the general give the paper—saw his master place it in a small pocket book of brown leather and low himself out, after a silent grip of the hands outstretched to him—saw then that he left the tent and went hastily in the direction of his own—and, seeing that, the circus waif rose up from his post of observation and followed him swiftly.

When he reached Capt. Ferrers' tent he found his master leaning over a brass-bound box which stood in one corner of it—a box which Tom knew contained his revolvers.

"Is that you, Tom?" he asked.

"Yessir," answered Tom, with a salute, and advancing into the middle of the tent.

"Take my flask round to the mess tent and get it filled with brandy—and be quick."

"Yessir," said Tom.

He never hesitated an instant what he should do. The moment he entered the tent he had seen that on the chest which formed his master's table Capt. Ferrers had laid down the brown leather pocket book which contained the all-important dispatch.

Quick as thought Tom snatched it up with the flask and ran out; once outside, he threw the flask to the winds and made for the outposts.

It was not difficult for him to pass them; on the contrary, in truth, he simply threw himself flat upon his stomach, and, by means of the snake trick on which he had so proided himself of old, wriggled past the various sentries with the stealth and noiselessness of an Indian scout. Having passed the last one he took the pocket book from between his teeth, where he had carried it for safety, and folding the precious dispatch neatly to half its former size, concealed it to a little pocket within the breast of his scarlet and black striped waistcoat, one which had been put there by Capt. Ferrers' orders, so that the lad might carry a few shillings in safety, and without fear of being relieved of it by pickpockets.

Then he threw the book away, and with a last look in the direction of the camp, turned his face toward the five miles of difficulty and danger which lay between him and the mission which he had taken upon himself—say, which he had in reality stolen from him to whom it had been intrusted—difficult, because of the inky darkness of the night, and of his ignorance of the surrounding country (an ignor