

his right foot, and the completion of Hornby's glory,—
 "Why,—why it wouldn't go over my hand," he exclaimed, "and it buttons!" In sheer amazement the Captain again dropped it on the floor.

"How on earth did it get outside my door," he reflected, "and where," in sudden alarm, "is my *own* boot? Some stupidity of the porter's, I suppose; they seem generally to be employed on the strength of their idiocy. I haven't too much time now," looking at his watch, "and if my boot is not found pretty smartly I'll miss my train."

Irritation by this time possessed the Captain's soul, and kicking the intrusive buttoned boot out of his way, he marched over to the bell rope and assaulted it with great vigour.

The "Boots" (not Hornby's make) appeared in answer to his ring, to know what "he could do for the gentleman?"

"Look here," said the Captain, crossly, "who put these boots back at my door after they were brushed?"

"I did, sir," said "Boots."

"Then what do you mean by not putting back *my* boots?"

"Beg pardon, sir."

"There," said the Captain, grabbing up the buttoned boot—"there, that boot was left outside my door last night with one, only one, of my *own* boots. The quicker you take it back where it belongs and bring me my own property, the better for you."

"Yes, sir. I'll see about it at once, sir. There's been a mistake, sir," with which unnecessary remark the man disappeared. Presently he came back looking dismal.

"I've been down the 'ole corridor, both sides, sir, and all the boots 'as been mixed hup; and, what's wuss, sir, the numbers is rubbed off the soles, and 'ow I'm to match 'em again I don't know. It's a 'oax, that's what it is—a 'oax; but I picked up this one as I passed one of the doors, for it struck me as bein' like the one you 'as on your foot, now, sir," and he held out a boot that would have given Hornby & Co. the ague.

"That—that *my* boot!" stormed the incensed Captain, "how dare you say my boots look like that. Here," pulling off the boot he had on, "take that, and don't bring it back without the mate to it; and you had better look sharp. I leave here in half an hour, and if I miss my train I'll complain of you at the office and get you dismissed," and thus saying, he slammed the door in the porter's face.

Left to himself the Captain's rage, never at any time very lasting, dwindled rapidly. He felt ashamed, which was as it should be. He had certainly been unjust; of course it was not the man's fault. It was not likely that he would mix up forty odd pairs of boots for the pleasure of unmixing them—that was plainly absurd. Suddenly his eyes fell on the stray "buttoned" boot, which the porter had forgotten to take away, and which still lay on the floor. How small it was. The Captain picked it up,—a woman's boot, evidently. A little shabby, perhaps, but such a pretty shape. Round the top ran a narrow purple ribbon, stamped "Rivoli & Co., Penton." A woman's boot—how arched the instep, how neat the ankle it must have fitted. Poor little boot! How he had banged it about, as though it could help finding itself outside his door. The Captain felt like a brute. Presently he glanced from it to his own feet, which, though well shaped, were rather on the heroic scale, and in their red silk socks stood out bravely—and largely—in the dim light. Then he looked at the vagrant boot again; and then he roared with laughter. Outside in the corridor, the now thoroughly bewildered porter heard the sound tremblingly.

He mistook it for a roar of remonstrance at his own tardiness, and he spurred himself to fresh efforts. The Captain's door opened. Was he going at this hour to arouse the manager with complaint about his lost boot? "If so," thought the miserable man, with a groan, "what would be the consequences?"

"I say, my good fellow," broke in the Captain's voice, so radically changed since he last heard it, that the porter gazed at him in astonishment, "I say, I was a little hasty, just now. You haven't found it yet? Well, I'll help you," and he began to examine the various boots and shoes standing outside the different doors.

"I only wish," he went on, "that I could lay my hands on the practical joker who has caused all this trouble."

But what righteous punishment the Captain would have meted out had he caught the mischief maker will forever remain unknown, for at that moment the rays of "Boots" candle fell upon an object which, even in its flickering light, proclaimed the matchless hand of Hornby.

"There," cried the Captain, "there is my boot," and he pounced upon it with rapture, while glancing at the same time to see in what company it had been found. For some unaccountable reason he felt disappointed on observing that its *pro tem* companion was wide, flat and huge generally, and with never a sign of a button about it.

In two minutes the Captain's feet reposed once more in their accustomed retreats; "Boots" disappeared down the corridor, a half-crown in his pocket, with the candle in one hand, and in the other the buttoned boot, whose mate had yet to be found. Half an hour later the train for the north moved slowly out of London, bearing the Captain with it. He reclined in a comfortable corner of a first-class carriage. There was a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes, and he seemed lost in some calculation. "It couldn't," he muttered at last, as he glanced downwards, "it couldn't have been more than a No. 2."

CHAPTER II.

"I do wish," an angry hesitancy, "that people would contrive to keep their engagements at the proper time; and not upset all one's arrangements by turning up when they are not wanted."

Catherine Lupton, who spoke, beat an angry tattoo upon the window pane through which she was looking, without in the least being aware of the beauty of the winter scene that lay stretched before her. Snow-clad fields, snow-capped hedges, fir-trees, with glittering icicles, the frost elves' Christmas trees, all sparkling gloriously in the morning sunlight. She was a handsome girl, beautifully dressed, standing amidst beautiful surroundings, the expression on her own face being positively the only beautiful thing to be seen. That was sullen and lowering. Yet this girl had much to make it otherwise. Her brother was master of Lupton Hall, and the comfortable income pertaining thereto. Moreover he was a bachelor, and left in her hands the ordering and managing of his home, and a goodly portion of his income. Their father and mother were dead, and, though an old maiden aunt lived with them, the whole household from the aunt to the scullery maid realized and acknowledged that Miss Catherine Lupton, aged 21, was the mistress *de jure et de facto*. And so, she was young, handsome, rich, and, on this morning at least, unhappy.

"It really is aggravating, most aggravating," and again she tapped impatiently on the window.

"My dear, as it cannot be helped now, suppose you say nothing more about it."

This suggestion was made by Mrs. Merchiston, Katherine's bosom friend, at present visiting the Luptons. As she spoke she resumed her tatting, with an air that plainly indicated that she, at least, had done with the subject.

"Ah, I dare say, Muriel, but I never was so provoked. Why could she not come here the day she mentioned?"

"But, my dear Katherine, does it make so very much difference? She said she would be here at twelve o'clock yesterday, and comes at twelve to-day—a matter of twenty-four hours."

"Quite matter enough, indeed. I should not mind so much, but my ridiculous brother insists upon my driving over to the station to meet her, and consequently, as I said a minute ago, my plans are all upset."

"What were your plans?"

"Oh I can't explain them to you," crossly. And really she could not explain, even to her bosom friend, with that lady's bright eyes scanning her face, that her chief plan had been a long walk—arranged by herself—through the park with Captain Hill, who had arrived the previous day, and whom Katherine was inclined to regard as her own special property.

"I don't see," she began again, "why John could not put off asking her here till after Christmas. I told him that it would be inconvenient just now, and I think he should consider my wishes." Her blue eyes snapped angrily, and Mrs. Merchiston laughed softly.

"I am afraid, dear Katherine, you hardly appreciate your brother's kind-heartedness in remembering the poor relation at this time, when he has so many other people with him."

"Kind-heartedness! Really, Muriel, John should be delighted with your appreciation of him. Of course to send an invitation for Christmas to a cousin, and then to go off shooting the day she arrives, and leave some one else to meet her and look after her, may be a very kind-hearted thing to do, but I must say that I fail to see it," and Miss Lupton left the room, shutting the door with emphasis.

Somebody greeted her in the hall, a pleasant somebody evidently, for her ruffled face smoothed a little.

"Ah! is that you, Captain Hill? I was just going to look for you. Is it not provoking our walk this morning must be put off."

"Our walk, Miss Lupton? Oh—ah—yes, to be sure. Put off,—oh, that's too bad," and the Captain endeavoured to look grieved.

"Yes, a cousin of ours, who should have arrived yesterday, wires that she will be here on the 12.20 this morning, and John insists upon my driving over to meet her; but though we cannot have our walk we could have a drive, and I shall be charmed to take you with me in the carriage."

Miss Lupton's tones were coaxing, her eyes eager. Shame to say, the Captain was impervious to both. His "thanks very much" was rather half-hearted, and he thought that "perhaps there won't be room."

Katherine grew snappish again,—

"There will be plenty of room, but of course if you do not wish to go, please say so."

"I beg pardon; certainly, I shall be delighted to go," and the Captain smiled immediately. His grieved expression had cost him an effort, and he parted with it reluctantly.

So, presently the trap came round and they drove off together for the village at whose little brown station the London express stopped for a minute on its thundering journey to the north. It was rather a long drive. The air was pleasant and the Captain exerted himself to be the same, so when the station was reached they together had chased the clouds from Miss Lupton's brow, and with a smiling face she crossed the platform to meet the incoming train.

Thus it was that when Kaburn Lupton descended from the railway carriage, she was pleasantly greeted, and almost warmly welcomed. Then she was introduced to the Captain, who expressed the usual hope that she had had a pleasant journey, and offered to see after her trunks. As the Captain went off Katherine suddenly remembered her grievances.

"We expected you yesterday, Kaburn."

"I know. I am so sorry. I was detained at the hotel in London."

"Indeed. Were you ill?"

"No, oh no. I was not ill,—it wasn't that. I—I lost my boot!"

"Lost your boot?—really I do not understand."

Kaburn flushed. Poor girl, she was a governess, and a poorly salaried one at that. Moreover, she was, what poor people cannot afford to be, proud, and her pride would not let her explain to this beautiful, beautifully dressed woman, that she only possessed one pair of boots fit to travel in. What did her cousin know about governesses' salaries or any other kind of poverty.

"I could not come without it, because—because it was not convenient," she stammered, trying to look dignified, and failing signally. In truth she looked so young and girlish, so adorably pretty, with the blushes in her cheeks, that the Captain, coming up at that moment, was quite enchanted.

"I found your trunk all right, and the porter put it in the carriage," he said to Kaburn, "and we are quite ready to start. I am sure you must be ready for lunch. I know I am,—and Miss Lupton, too." That last was added as an afterthought, on noting Katherine's expression. On the way home the Captain sat on the back seat, opposite to Kaburn, and admired vastly the view.

At dinner he found himself facing her again. While taking his soup he was forming an opinion about his vis-à-vis. He finished both together, and both were good. The opinion was that her eyes were very truthful, her smile very winning. So Kaburn's neighbour seemed to think, too. He was a young "Sub" in the Captain's own regiment. Certainly he did all he knew to win the smiles, and judging from appearances—proverbially deceitful—with very fair success. This made the Captain unaccountably cross. "After dinner I'll have a chat with her," he said to himself confidently, "there is more in her face than prettiness."

But he reckoned without the "Sub," an enterprising youth, who told himself he knew a good thing when he saw it, and as he placed Kaburn under the head of "good things," he showed his judgment. So, after dinner, when some of the men went up to the drawing room, two of them were animated with a single purpose, viz., without loss of time, to secure a seat beside this delightful girl, and monopolise her for the rest of the evening—which was modest, to say the least.

As before remarked, the "Sub" was bold, and the Captain felt strangely diffident this evening. While looking around for an excuse to join Kaburn, the "Sub," who never