

"I do believe that naughty Dandy has been in the wars again," she said. "Millicent, did you see him fighting any other dog?"  
 "No, mother. He met the doctor's poodle, but there was no fight." Minkie was always strictly accurate.  
 "What a wonder! Anyhow, he is muddy and wet. Ask cook to rub him over with a damp cloth."

Tibbie, pretending to be asleep, twitched one ear as she saw Dan being led off to the kitchen. "Gnar!" muttered Dan, who hates damp cloths. "Wait till I catch you in the garden!" Tibbie just smiled.  
 Well, Tibbie curled up like a hedgehog and listened, because we don't have many strangers at Dale End. The talk turned on Ostend.



They met Mr. Schwartz at Ostend, it seems, and he took such a fancy to Dolly that he wanted to marry her straight off. She wouldn't do that, even if Mam and the Guv'nor were agreeable, but she had not heard from Jack for ages, and Schwartz was really very attentive, besides being tremendously rich. Now, we at Dale End find it difficult to pay the hay and corn bills, so you see that a wealthy son-in-law would be what the sale catalogues call "a desirable acquisition."

I have heard a lot of people in the village say that Dolly is so pretty she ought to make a good match. When she did a skirt dance at the Cottage hospital bazaar the local paper spoke of her as "the beautiful Miss Grosvenor." She pretended to be very angry about that, but Tibbie says she bought a dozen papers and sent them to her girl friends, so the rest of the report must have been suitable. I suppose she is all right for a grownup. For my part, I prefer Minkie, who has a yellow mane and blue eyes and freckles. She is as straight as a soldier and has small hands and feet and the loveliest brown legs.

Anyhow, by the time tea was served Schwartz had further established himself in Mam's good graces. He was a clever chap in his way, and he could say the right thing to women occasionally, and he was wise enough not to bother Dorothy too much, though Tibbie saw out of the tail of her eye that the girl could not move from one side of the room to the other without Schwartz watching her approvingly. Tibbie knew by his eyes that he was saying to himself, "She will look all right in Brook street."

Dan announced the postman while Dorothy was pouring out the tea, and Minkie brought in a heap of letters, mostly Christmas cards. Minkie had a baker's dozen to herself, and five of them were addressed to "Minkie and Her Gang." Each of the five contained pictures of a girl, a horse, a dog, a cat and a parrot. She soon made out by the postmark and the handwriting who had sent every card, even though the names were not given. One seemed to puzzle her at first, and she slipped it into her pocket. The others were handed round before Dorothy arranged them on the mantelpiece with a number which had come by earlier deliveries, and Mr. Schwartz admired them immensely.

"It is so interesting to come back to the old country and find these pleasant customs in full swing," he said. "I have neither sent nor received a Christmas card for years. I was telling Millicent on our way from the station that by chance I have been out of England at this season every year for ten years."

"You did not mention the exact period, Mr. Schwartz," said Minkie. "I rather thought that ten years ago you were in Kimberley?"

"Oh, one speaks in round numbers. By the way, have you received a card from your elderly friend—the man we met driving the pair?"

"Driving a pair. Who was that, Millie?" asked her mother.  
 "Mr. Stanhope, Jack's uncle."

Dorothy dropped a piece of toast, and Mam bent over her letters, but she said quietly:

"I fear my girls will not be honored by any such attention on his part, Mr. Schwartz. Indeed, I think he is the only enemy we possess in the neighborhood. How did you come to describe him as a friend of yours, Millie?"

"I didn't."  
 "Perhaps I was mistaken," put in Schwartz, who was beginning to hate Minkie, yet had no wish to quarrel with her.

"I said Jack was my friend. Isn't that right, mother?"  
 "Oh, yes. I understand now. By the way, dearie, are you going to meet your father? It is nearly time to start. And be careful to wrap up well."

"The victoria will not be ready for another five minutes. I have time to bring you that paper if you would care to see it before dinner, Mr. Schwartz."

"Thanks. I shall be delighted—you wretched little imp," he added under his breath, but Tibbie heard him.

Minkie brought the paper.  
 "That is the paragraph I told you of," said she, pointing very daintily to something on one of the pages. I have seen her point that way to a dead rat when she wished Jim or Mole to throw it away.

"Much obliged. And here are the 5 sovereigns I promised you as a Christmas box."

"Mr. Schwartz!" broke in Mam, but he turned to her with his best manner.

"I beg of you to allow me to do this, Mrs. Grosvenor. It is really a harmless joke between Millicent and myself," he said.

"But £5!" protested Mam.  
 "That was in the bond. Pray let me explain.

By chance she mentioned some very useful information which this newspaper contained. I might not have heard of it otherwise. So I am adding a little to her Christmas present. That it all."

"It seems a great deal of money," sighed Mam, who often wanted a fiver and had to do without it, "but you two appear to have the matter cut and dried, so I suppose it is all right. What are you going to do with your fabulous wealth, Millicent?"



"Make a corner in toffee; make every kid in Dale End pay a penny for a ha'penny worth. That is the proper thing, isn't it, Mr. Schwartz?"

"I don't think I can teach you much," he replied, with his usual grin.

"Oh, yes, you can. Read the next paragraph, the one beginning 'The unhappy natives of the Upper Niger.' It tells about gas pipe guns and coal dust powder. Yes, mother, dear, going now."

It was quite dark, of course, when I brought Minkie to the station a second time. The weather had changed, too, from what the farmers call "soft" to a touch of frost, which made both Jim and me pleased that my shoes had been sharpened by the blacksmith that morning.

The train was rather late, so Minkie went into the station and interviewed a porter. He told her something which seemed to interest her, so she asked the booking clerk for change for a sovereign and gave the man a shilling.

She picked out her father the instant the train drew up at the platform. He looked worried, she told me afterward, but that passed when he saw her. He had the usual number of parcels which people carry at Christmas time, and Minkie grabbed all of them, but he stopped her, with a laugh.

"We can't rush off in the orthodox way tonight, Minkie," he said. "Mr. Schwartz's servant is on this train, and I promised to take him with us to the house. By the way, is Dandy with you in the carriage?"

"No, father, dear. Why do you ask?"  
 "Because this valet of Schwartz's is a black man, and Dandy might not approve of him at first sight."

"A black man?"  
 "Yes, polished ebony. Rather smart too. Speaks English perfectly. He came to me at Waterloo and said— Oh, there he is. Hi, you! Just follow me, will you?"

Minkie thought that the negro was an extraordinarily fine fellow and very well dressed. It was odd that Schwartz had not mentioned him, and she wondered where he would sleep. Perhaps he curled up on a mat outside his master's room. In that case she must make Dan clearly understand that she rather approved of the Ethiopian than otherwise.

His luggage appeared to be a small hand bag. He almost made the mistake of entering the carriage with Minkie and her father, but he showed his teeth in a good natured grin and climbed to Jim's side on the box. I had a look at him as he passed the near lamp, and he certainly did startle me. I am quite sure I should have shifted him if Minkie had not said quietly:

"All right, Bobby! Steady, old chap!"

On the way home I heard Minkie trying to cheer up her father by telling him little bits of village news, and he did his best to respond, but both of us felt there was something wrong, as the Guv'nor is likely enough most days.

"Mr. Schwartz has arrived, of course?" he inquired soon after we quitted the station. "I forgot to ask you sooner. I took it for granted when his servant turned up and told me he had missed the earlier train. What do you think of him, Minkie?"

"I hardly know yet, father, dear. I shall tell you—let me see—on New Year's eve."

"You demand seven days' experience, eh? Wise child. I wish some one had taught me at your age to wait a bit before I formed my opinions."

"One might form them quickly enough, but not express them."

"Which means that you don't like Schwartz? Well, he is not exactly my sort, I admit, but he is wealthy, Minkie, and one must bow the knee before the golden calf occasionally. And his repute stands high in the city, so he might be a useful friend. We must make the best of him, eh?"

"One always does that with one's guests, of course," said Minkie, who could feel a heavy assortment of gold and silver coins in her pocket.

Minkie jumped out when I pulled up at the front entrance. Dan was standing on the top step and wondering what in the world was sitting beside Jim on the box. Before he could say a word Minkie grabbed him and whispered in his ear. But he was very uneasy, because the black man sprang down almost as promptly as Minkie and nearly frightened Evangeline into a fit when she met him in the hall. He took his hat off in quite an elegant way.

"I am Mr. Schwartz's valet," he said. "Mr. Grosvenor was good enough to bring me with him from London. Is my master in his room now?"  
 "No-no, sir," stut-tered Evangeline. He gave her the queerest feeling, she told Cookie later.

"Well, if you will kindly show me to his suit I will prepare his clothes for dinner," went on the negro, who appeared to be more anxious to get to work than any of our servants.

Evangeline glanced at Minkie and the Guv'nor. She was sure it must be all right, as the negro had arrived in their company, but she dared not go upstairs with him. Wild horses would not drag her there, she said, though I would back myself to haul her to the top attic before she could say "knife." "It's the blue room," she said—"first on the left in that corridor," and she pointed to the side of the house where Mr. Schwartz was lodged. The big darky went up at once. Evangeline helped to carry in some of the parcels, and Minkie took her

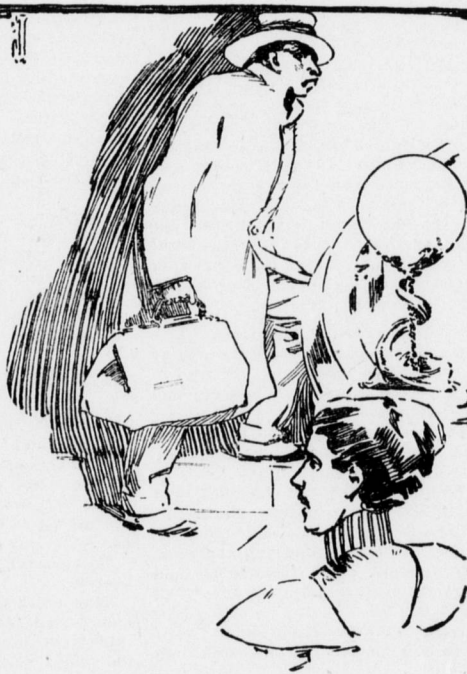
father's overcoat and hat, but kept an eye on Dan, who was looking at the stairs anxiously. Dolly came running to kiss the Old Man, and Mam appeared.

"Where is Mr. Schwartz?" asked the Guv'nor.  
 "Here I am," said Schwartz, appearing in the drawing room doorway. "I am afraid you had a cold journey from town. It was exceedingly kind of you to send me on ahead. My only regret is that you could not come with me."

"Business, my dear fellow. It pursues me to the last hour, even in holiday time."

"But that is good. It argues success. Your idle man is rare! successful."

"I fear it is possible for a busy man to score a loss occasionally. I expect you have finished tea long since? Can you squeeze the pot, Mam?"  
 "It will be here in a minute, Tom," said Mam, smiling. "My husband hates to miss his tea, Mr. Schwartz. He would drink three cups now if I were to let him, though we dine at 7."  
 "By the way, that reminds me," said the Old Man, dropping into his regular chair in the drawing room. "I fell in with your servant a Waterloo, Schwartz."  
 "My servant!" said Schwartz blankly, and both Dan and Tibbie heard every word, as Minkie had collected Dan again before she took her usual perch on a hassock near her father. If the Guv'nor had said he came across Schwartz's balloon at the Southwestern terminus our visitor could not have put more bewilderment into his voice.  
 "Yes, your black valet!" explained the Guv'nor.  
 "My black valet! I don't possess such an article. I left my man at Brook street, and he is a Frenchman!"  
 Schwartz had risen to his feet. He looked strangely pale. Minkie told me his face was a flea bitten gray. The Guv'nor jumped up too. So did Minkie and Dan and Tibbie. You see, Mam and Dorothy knew nothing about the gentleman who had gone to Schwartz's bedroom to arrange his dress suit and put the studs in his shirt.  
 "Then who the blazes is the nigger who is in your room upstairs at this moment?" said the Old Man, forgetting that there were ladies present.  
 "Nigger! My room!"  
 Schwartz's voice cracked. He gasped as though he had run a mile. He glared at the Guv'nor and then glared at Minkie. Stifle me, he thought it was some trick she had played on him. But if the head of our family was not much good at business he was in the front row where prompt action was needed.  
 "Follow me, quick!" he shouted and made for the door. He was just a second too late. The tall negro was coming downstairs three at a time. He bounded across the hall and had his hand on the latch just as the Guv'nor rushed at him. Out went the black, out went Mr. Grosvenor after him, with Minkie and Dan a dead heat half a length behind, and Schwartz whipping in. On the level the nigger drew away, but Dan overhauled him at the turn near the clump of rhododendrons, and Dan never makes the mistake of advertising his whereabouts when the matter is serious. So he nailed the make believe valet by the ankle, and his teeth closed on bone and sinew without ever a sound. Down went the nigger with a crash and a yell. It was pitch dark among the shrubs, but the Old Man groped for him and got a knee in the small of his back, bending his head upward at the same time by grabbing a handful of wool. That is a good trick. It simply paralyzes the other fellow.  
 "I've got him!" he shouted, but Schwartz just roared "Help!" at the top of his voice and kept to the open drive. Minkie heard Dan sawing away and growling a bit now. She closed in, clutched a loose leg that was kicking wildly and said:  
 "Are you all right, Dad?"  
 "Yes. Tell James to fetch a stable lantern and a rope."  
 Minkie wasn't going to leave her father nor miss any of the fun. She sung out directions, and Jim came along at a gallop. The unfortunate nigger was screaming that the dog was eating him, but when they had tied his hands behind his back and Minkie pulled Dan off he seemed to be more frightened than hurt. Polly told me next day that these black fellows are always weak below the knee joints, however gigantic they may be otherwise.  
 But the previous excitement was a small affair compared with the row which sprang up when Jim held the lantern so that Schwartz could see the negro's face.  
 "Gott in himmel!" he shrieked in a kind of frenzy, "it's Prince John!"  
 "Yes, you thief!" said the prisoner, who seemed to regain his self possession and his dignity when he set eyes on Schwartz.  
 "Where is it? Where is it? Give it to me or I'll tear your liver out!" squealed the other, dancing close up to him in an extraordinary passion, being one of those men who fly into a delirium when rage gets the better of them.  
 "I have not got it," said Prince John, if that was his name. He turned to the Guv'nor. "If you will take me back to the house, Mr. Grosvenor," he continued, "and keep that dog off I will explain everything and trust to your sense of justice to clear me of any suspicion of wrongdoing. That man is the thief, not me," and he actually spat at Schwartz.  
 Jim said that it gave him a turn to hear a buck nigger talking like that, but it took him and the Guv'nor all the time to keep Schwartz from using his nails on the man's eyes. Then the two began to shout at one another, and it appeared that all the trouble arose about a thing called a ju-ju, which the black man said Schwartz had stolen from his people, a tribe on the Upper Niger. Anyhow, the Guv'nor marched his captive back to the house, and Schwartz rushed upstairs. He tore down again, more like a lunatic than ever, as the ju-ju had gone from the dressing case in which he had left it.  
 He searched the negro and was almost ready to cut him open in case he had swallowed it, but the ju-ju was not in the man's possession. Then he went out with Jim and the lantern and hunted every inch of the drive and shrubbery, but could find nothing, though it was



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