

# The Boar-Pig

Saki

“There is a back way on to the lawn,” said Mrs. Philidore Stossen to her daughter, “through a small grass paddock and then through a walled fruit garden full of gooseberry bushes. I went all over the place last year when the family were away. There is a door that opens from the fruit garden into a shrubbery, and once we emerge from there we can mingle with the guests as if we had come in by the ordinary way. It’s much safer than going in by the front entrance and running the risk of coming bang up against the hostess; that would be so awkward when she doesn’t happen to have invited us.”

“Isn’t it a lot of trouble to take for getting admittance to a garden party?”

“To a garden party, yes; to *the* garden party of the season, certainly not. Every one of any consequence in the county, with the exception of ourselves, has been asked to meet the Princess, and it would be far more troublesome to invent explanations as to why we weren’t there than to get in by a roundabout way. I stopped Mrs. Cuvering in the road yesterday and talked very pointedly about the Princess. If she didn’t choose to take the hint and send me an invitation it’s not my fault, is it? Here we are: we just cut across the grass and through that little gate into the garden.”

Mrs. Stossen and her daughter, suitably arrayed for a county garden party function with an infusion of Almanack de Gotha, sailed through the narrow grass paddock and the ensuing gooseberry garden with the air of state barges making an unofficial progress along a rural trout stream. There was a certain amount of furtive haste mingled with the stateliness of their advance, as though hostile search-lights might be turned on them at any moment; and, as a matter of fact, they were not unobserved. Matilda Cuvering, with the alert eyes of thirteen years old and the added advantage of an exalted position in the branches of a medlar tree, had enjoyed a good view of the Stossen flanking movement and had foreseen exactly where it would break down in execution.

“They’ll find the door locked, and they’ll jolly well have to go back the way they came,” she remarked to herself. “Serves them right for not coming in by the proper entrance. What a pity Tarquin Superbus isn’t loose in the paddock. After all, as every one else is enjoying themselves, I don’t see why Tarquin shouldn’t have an afternoon out.”

Matilda was of an age when thought is action; she slid down from the branches of the medlar tree, and when she clambered back again Tarquin, the huge white Yorkshire boar-pig, had exchanged the narrow limits of his sty for the wider range of the grass paddock. The discomfited Stossen expedition, returning in recriminatory but otherwise orderly retreat from

the unyielding obstacle of the locked door, came to a sudden halt at the gate dividing the paddock from the gooseberry garden.

“What a villainous-looking animal,” exclaimed Mrs. Stossen; “it wasn’t there when we came in.”

“It’s there now, anyhow,” said her daughter. “What on earth are we to do? I wish we had never come.”

The boar-pig had drawn nearer to the gate for a closer inspection of the human intruders, and stood champing his jaws and blinking his small red eyes in a manner that was doubtless intended to be disconcerting, and, as far as the Stossens were concerned, thoroughly achieved that result.

“Shoo! Hish! Hish! Shoo!” cried the ladies in chorus.

“If they think they’re going to drive him away by reciting lists of the kings of Israel and Judah they’re laying themselves out for disappointment,” observed Matilda from her seat in the medlar tree. As she made the observation aloud Mrs. Stossen became for the first time aware of her presence. A moment or two earlier she would have been anything but pleased at the discovery that the garden was not as deserted as it looked, but now she hailed the fact of the child’s presence on the scene with absolute relief.

“Little girl, can you find some one to drive away—” she began hopefully.

“*Comment? Comprends pas,*” was the response.

“Oh, are you French? *Êtes vous française?*”

“*Pas de tous. ’Suis anglaise.*”

“Then why not talk English? I want to know if—”

“*Permettez-moi expliquer.* You see, I’m rather under a cloud,” said Matilda. “I’m staying with my aunt, and I was told I must behave particularly well to-day, as lots of people were coming for a garden party, and I was told to imitate Claude, that’s my young cousin, who never does anything wrong except by accident, and then is always apologetic about it. It seems they thought I ate too much raspberry trifle at lunch, and they said Claude never eats too much raspberry trifle. Well, Claude always goes to sleep for half an hour after lunch, because he’s told to, and I waited till he was asleep, and tied his hands and started forcible feeding with a whole bucketful of raspberry trifle that they were keeping for the garden-party. Lots of it went on to his sailor-suit and some of it on to the bed, but a good deal went

down Claude's throat, and they can't say again that he has never been known to eat too much raspberry trifle. That is why I am not allowed to go to the party, and as an additional punishment I must speak French all the afternoon. I've had to tell you all this in English, as there were words like 'forcible feeding' that I didn't know the French for; of course I could have invented them, but if I had said *nourriture obligatoire* you wouldn't have had the least idea what I was talking about. *Mais maintenant, nous parlons français.*"

"Oh, very well, *très bien*," said Mrs. Stossen reluctantly; in moments of flurry such French as she knew was not under very good control. "*Là, à l'autre côté de la porte, est un cochon*—"

"*Un cochon? Ah, le petit charmant!*" exclaimed Matilda with enthusiasm.

"*Mais non, pas du tout petit, et pas du tout charmant; un bête féroce—*"

"*Une bête*," corrected Matilda; "a pig is masculine as long as you call it a pig, but if you lose your temper with it and call it a ferocious beast it becomes one of us at once. French is a dreadfully unsexing language."

"For goodness' sake let us talk English then," said Mrs. Stossen. "Is there any way out of this garden except through the paddock where the pig is?"

"I always go over the wall, by way of the plum tree," said Matilda.

"Dressed as we are we could hardly do that," said Mrs. Stossen; it was difficult to imagine her doing it in any costume.

"Do you think you could go and get some one who would drive the pig away?" asked Miss Stossen.

"I promised my aunt I would stay here till five o'clock; it's not four yet."

"I am sure, under the circumstances, your aunt would permit—"

"My conscience would not permit," said Matilda with cold dignity.

"We can't stay here till five o'clock," exclaimed Mrs. Stossen with growing exasperation.

"Shall I recite to you to make the time pass quicker?" asked Matilda obligingly. " 'Belinda, the little Breadwinner,' is considered my best piece, or, perhaps, it ought to be something in French. Henri Quatre's address to his soldiers is the only thing I really know in that language."

“If you will go and fetch some one to drive that animal away I will give you something to buy yourself a nice present,” said Mrs. Stossen.

Matilda came several inches lower down the medlar tree.

“That is the most practical suggestion you have made yet for getting out of the garden,” she remarked cheerfully; “Claude and I are collecting money for the Children’s Fresh Air Fund, and we are seeing which of us can collect the biggest sum.”

“I shall be very glad to contribute half a crown, very glad indeed,” said Mrs. Stossen, digging that coin out of the depths of a receptacle which formed a detached outwork of her toilet.

“Claude is a long way ahead of me at present,” continued Matilda, taking no notice of the suggested offering; “you see, he’s only eleven, and has golden hair, and those are enormous advantages when you’re on the collecting job. Only the other day a Russian lady gave him ten shillings. Russians understand the art of giving far better than we do. I expect Claude will net quite twenty-five shillings this afternoon; he’ll have the field to himself, and he’ll be able to do the pale, fragile, not-long-for-this-world business to perfection after his raspberry trifle experience. Yes, he’ll be *quite* two pounds ahead of me by now.”

With much probing and plucking and many regretful murmurs the beleaguered ladies managed to produce seven-and-sixpence between them.

“I am afraid this is all we’ve got,” said Mrs. Stossen.

Matilda showed no sign of coming down either to the earth or to their figure.

“I could not do violence to my conscience for anything less than ten shillings,” she announced stiffly.

Mother and daughter muttered certain remarks under their breath, in which the word “beast” was prominent, and probably had no reference to Tarquin.

“I find I *have* got another half-crown,” said Mrs. Stossen in a shaking voice; “here you are. Now please fetch some one quickly.”

Matilda slipped down from the tree, took possession of the donation, and proceeded to pick up a handful of over-ripe medlars from the grass at her feet. Then she climbed over the gate and addressed herself affectionately to the boar-pig.

“Come, Tarquin, dear old boy; you know you can’t resist medlars when they’re rotten and

squashy.”

Tarquin couldn't. By dint of throwing the fruit in front of him at judicious intervals Matilda decoyed him back to his sty, while the delivered captives hurried across the paddock.

“Well, I never! The little minx!” exclaimed Mrs. Stossen when she was safely on the high road. “The animal wasn't savage at all, and as for the ten shillings, I don't believe the Fresh Air Fund will see a penny of it!”

There she was unwarrantably harsh in her judgment. If you examine the books of the fund you will find the acknowledgment: “Collected by Miss Matilda Cuvering, 2s. 6d.”

Downloaded from [www.libraryofshortstories.com](http://www.libraryofshortstories.com)

This work is in the public domain of Australia. Please check your local copyright laws if you live elsewhere.