

Jeeves in the Springtime

by P.G. Wodehouse

“Morning, Jeeves,” I said.

“Good morning, sir,” said Jeeves.

He put the good old cup of tea softly on the table by my bed, and I took a refreshing sip. Just right, as usual. Not too hot, not too sweet, not too weak, not too strong, not too much milk, and not a drop spilled in the saucer. A most amazing cove,¹ Jeeves. So dashed competent in every respect. I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again. I mean to say, take just one small instance. Every other valet I’ve ever had used to barge into my room in the morning while I was still asleep, causing much misery; but Jeeves seems to know when I’m awake by a sort of telepathy. He always floats in with the cup exactly two minutes after I come to life. Makes a deuce of a lot of difference to a fellow’s day.

“How’s the weather, Jeeves?”

“Exceptionally clement, sir.”

“Anything in the papers?”

“Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans,² sir. Otherwise, nothing.”

“I say, Jeeves, a man I met at the club last night told me to put my shirt on³ Privateer for the two o’clock race this afternoon. How about it?”

“I should not advocate it, sir. The stable is not sanguine.”

That was enough for me. Jeeves knows. How, I couldn’t say, but he knows. There was a time when I would laugh lightly, and go ahead, and lose my little all⁴ against his advice, but not now.

“Talking of shirts,” I said, “have those mauve ones I ordered arrived yet?”

“Yes, sir. I sent them back.”

¹ *cove*: slang for “a fellow” (*OED*)

² *slight friction threatening in the Balkans*: Bertie Wooster (the narrator) later implies that this story begins in April or May. If the events are set in the same year the story was published (1921), Jeeves may be alluding to the second Greco-Turkish War (1921-1922) which began with a Greek offensive in January 1921. In April 1921, the Turkish military temporarily repulsed the Greek forces.

³ *put my shirt on*: bet on (a horse race)

⁴ *my little all*: everything I have, which is not very much. This description is obviously not literally true; the narrator is fabulously wealthy and never loses everything on one horse-race.

“Sent them back?”

“Yes, sir. They would not have become you.”

Well, I must say I’d thought fairly highly of those shirtings, but I bowed to superior knowledge. Weak? I don’t know. Most fellows, no doubt, are all for having their valets confine their activities to creasing trousers and what not without trying to run the home; but it’s different with Jeeves. Right from the first day he came to me, I have looked on him as a sort of guide, philosopher, and friend.

“Mr. Little rang up on the telephone a few moments ago, sir. I informed him that you were not yet awake.”

“Did he leave a message?”

“No, sir. He mentioned that he had a matter of importance to discuss with you, but confided no details.”

“Oh, well, I expect I shall be seeing him at the club.”

“No doubt, sir.”

I wasn’t what you might call in a fever of impatience. Bingo Little⁵ is a chap I was at school with, and we see a lot of each other still. He’s the nephew of old Mortimer Little, who retired from business recently with a goodish pile.⁶ (You’ve probably heard of Little’s Liniment—It Limbers Up the Legs.) Bingo biffs⁷ about London on a pretty comfortable allowance given him by his uncle, and leads on the whole a fairly unclouded life. It wasn’t likely that anything which he described as a matter of importance would turn out to be really so frightfully important. I took it that he had discovered some new brand of cigarette which he wanted me to try, or something like that, and didn’t spoil my breakfast by worrying.

After breakfast I lit a cigarette and went to the open window to inspect the day. It certainly was one of the best and brightest.

“Jeeves,” I said.

“Sir?” said Jeeves. He had been clearing away the breakfast things, but at the sound of the young master’s voice cheesed⁸ it courteously.

⁵ *Bingo Little*: Other stories reveal that this character’s given name is Richard Little. “Bingo” is his nickname from when he and Bertie Wooster were at school together.

⁶ *goodish pile*: considerable amount (of money)

⁷ *biffs*: “go[es], proceed[s]” (*OED*)

⁸ *cheesed*: stopped

“You were absolutely right about the weather. It is a juicy⁹ morning.”

“Decidedly, sir.”

“Spring and all that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the spring, Jeeves, a livelier iris gleams upon the burnished dove.”¹⁰

“So I have been informed, sir.”

“Right ho! Then bring me my whangee,¹¹ my yellowest shoes, and the old green Homburg.¹² I’m going into the Park¹³ to do pastoral dances.”¹⁴

I don’t know if you know that sort of feeling you get on these days round about the end of April and the beginning of May, when the sky’s a light blue, with cotton-wool clouds, and there’s a bit of a breeze blowing from the west? Kind of uplifted feeling. Romantic, if you know what I mean. I’m not much of a ladies’ man, but on this particular morning it seemed to me that what I really wanted was some charming girl to buzz up and ask me to save her from assassins or something. So that it was a bit of an anti-climax when I merely ran into young Bingo Little, looking perfectly foul in a crimson satin tie decorated with horseshoes.

“Hallo, Bertie,” said Bingo.

“My God, man!” I gargled. “The cravat! The gent’s neckwear! Why? For what reason?”

“Oh, the tie?” He blushed. “I—er—I was given it.”

He seemed embarrassed, so I dropped the subject. We toddled along a bit, and sat down on a couple of chairs by the Serpentine.¹⁵

⁹ *juicy*: “excellent, ... first-rate” (*OED*)

¹⁰ *In the spring, ... a livelier iris gleams upon the burnished dove*:

“In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish’d dove;
In the Spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.”

— Tennyson, “Locksley Hall” (1835/1842)

¹¹ *whangee*: a cane or walking-stick made of a plant resembling bamboo (*OED*)

¹² *Homburg*: indented felt hat (*OED*)

¹³ *the Park*: Hyde Park, London

¹⁴ *pastoral dances*: literally, dances performed by shepherds—possibly an allusion to the *pastorale* or *pastourelle*, “one of the figures of a quadrille, likened to a dance of shepherds and shepherdesses” (*OED*). Bertie may be suggesting that he will enjoy nature in the way that idealized shepherds do.

¹⁵ *Serpentine*: lake in Hyde Park, London

“Jeeves tells me you want to talk to me about something,” I said.

“Eh?” said Bingo, with a start. “Oh yes, yes. Yes.”

I waited for him to unleash the topic of the day, but he didn’t seem to want to get going. Conversation languished. He stared straight ahead of him in a glassy sort of manner.

“I say, Bertie,” he said, after a pause of about an hour and a quarter.

“Hallo!”

“Do you like the name Mabel?”

“No.”

“No?”

“No.”

“You don’t think there’s a kind of music in the word, like the wind rustling gently through the tree-tops?”

“No.”

He seemed disappointed for a moment; then cheered up.

“Of course, you wouldn’t. You always were a fatheaded worm without any soul, weren’t you?”

“Just as you say. Who is she? Tell me all.”

For I realised now that poor old Bingo was going through it once again. Ever since I have known him—and we were at school together—he has been perpetually falling in love with someone, generally in the spring, which seems to act on him like magic. At school he had the finest collection of actresses’ photographs of anyone of his time; and at Oxford his romantic nature was a byword.

“You’d better come along and meet her at lunch,” he said, looking at his watch.

“A ripe suggestion,” I said. “Where are you meeting her? At the Ritz?”¹⁶

“Near the Ritz.”

He was geographically accurate. About fifty yards east of the Ritz there is one of those blighted tea-and-bun shops you see dotted about all over London, and into this, if you’ll believe me,

¹⁶ *Ritz*: five-star hotel in London

young Bingo dived like a homing rabbit; and before I had time to say a word we were wedged in at a table, on the brink of a silent pool of coffee left there by an early luncher.

I'm bound to say I couldn't quite follow the development of the scenario. Bingo, while not absolutely rolling in the stuff, has always had a fair amount of the ready.¹⁷ Apart from what he got from his uncle, I knew that he had finished up the jumping season¹⁸ well on the right side of the ledger. Why, then, was he lunching the girl at this God-forsaken eatery? It couldn't be because he was hard up.

Just then the waitress arrived. Rather a pretty girl.

"Aren't we going to wait——?" I started to say to Bingo, thinking it somewhat thick¹⁹ that, in addition to asking a girl to lunch with him in a place like this, he should fling himself on the foodstuffs before she turned up, when I caught sight of his face, and stopped.

The man was goggling. His entire map²⁰ was suffused with a rich blush. He looked like the Soul's Awakening²¹ done in pink.

"Hallo, Mabel!" he said, with a sort of gulp.

"Hallo!" said the girl.

"Mabel," said Bingo, "this is Bertie Wooster, a pal of mine."

"Pleased to meet you," she said. "Nice morning."

"Fine," I said.

"You see I'm wearing the tie," said Bingo.

"It suits you beautiful," said the girl.

Personally, if anyone had told me that a tie like that suited me, I should have risen and struck them on the mazzard,²² regardless of their age and sex; but poor old Bingo simply got all flustered with gratification, and smirked in the most gruesome manner.

"Well, what's it going to be to-day?" asked the girl, introducing the business touch into the

¹⁷ *stuff... the ready*: money

¹⁸ *jumping season*: season in horse racing (on which Bingo Little has been betting)

¹⁹ *somewhat thick*: slang for "too much to manage or to stand; *spec.* too gross, indecent, or indelicate" (*OED*)

²⁰ *map*: colloquially, "a person's face" (*OED*)

²¹ *the Soul's Awakening*: a much-reproduced painting by James Sant (1820-1916), depicting a young woman holding a (presumably religious) book and gazing upward

²² *mazzard*: slang for "head or face" (*English Dialect Dictionary*)

conversation.

Bingo studied the menu devoutly.

“I’ll have a cup of cocoa, cold veal and ham pie, slice of fruit cake, and a macaroon. Same for you, Bertie?”

I gazed at the man, revolted. That he could have been a pal of mine all these years and think me capable of insulting the old tum²³ with this sort of stuff cut me to the quick.

“Or how about a bit of hot steak-pudding, with a sparkling limado²⁴ to wash it down?” said Bingo.

You know, the way love can change a fellow is really frightful to contemplate. This chappie before me, who spoke in that absolutely careless way of macaroons and limado, was the man I had seen in happier days telling the head-waiter at Claridge’s²⁵ exactly how he wanted the *chef* to prepare the *sole frite au gourmet aux champignons*,²⁶ and saying he would jolly well sling it back if it wasn’t just right. Ghastly! Ghastly!

A roll and butter and a small coffee seemed the only things on the list that hadn’t been specially prepared by the nastier-minded members of the Borgia family²⁷ for people they had a particular grudge against, so I chose them, and Mabel hopped it.

“Well?” said Bingo rapturously.

I took it that he wanted my opinion of the female poisoner who had just left us.

“Very nice,” I said.

He seemed dissatisfied.

“You don’t think she’s the most wonderful girl you ever saw?” he said wistfully.

“Oh, absolutely!” I said, to appease the blighter.²⁸ “Where did you meet her?”

²³ *tum*: stomach

²⁴ *limado*: presumably something like lemonade, possibly shortened from Spanish *limonado* (lemon flavored)

²⁵ *Claridge’s*: a five-star hotel

²⁶ *sole frite au gourmet aux champignons*: gourmet fried sole with white mushrooms

²⁷ *Borgia family*: powerful family in Italy during the Renaissance. Machiavelli famously described Cesare Borgia hiring a minister to establish peace through brutal methods, then executing the minister and leaving his body in pieces. Based on stories like these, Bertie seems to be associating the Borgias with torture.

²⁸ *blighter*: slang for “a contemptible or unpleasant person,” here probably “merely as an extravagant substitute for ‘fellow’” (*OED*)

“At a subscription dance²⁹ at Camberwell.”³⁰

“What on earth were you doing at a subscription dance at Camberwell?”

“Your man Jeeves asked me if I would buy a couple of tickets. It was in aid of some charity or other.”

“Jeeves? I didn’t know he went in for that sort of thing.”

“Well, I suppose he has to relax a bit every now and then. Anyway, he was there, swinging a dashed efficient shoe. I hadn’t meant to go at first, but I turned up for a lark.³¹ Oh, Bertie, think what I might have missed!”

“What might you have missed?” I asked, the old lemon³² being slightly clouded.

“Mabel, you chump. If I hadn’t gone I shouldn’t have met Mabel.”

“Oh, ah!”

At this point Bingo fell into a species of trance, and only came out of it to wrap himself round³³ the pie and macaroon.

“Bertie,” he said, “I want your advice.”

“Carry on.”

“At least, not your advice, because that wouldn’t be much good to anybody. I mean, you’re a pretty consummate old ass, aren’t you? Not that I want to hurt your feelings, of course.”

“No, no, I see that.”

“What I wish you would do is to put the whole thing to that fellow Jeeves of yours, and see what he suggests. You’ve often told me that he has helped other pals of yours out of messes. From what you tell me, he’s by way of being the brains of the family.”

“He’s never let me down yet.”

“Then put my case to him.”

²⁹ *subscription dance*: dance “to which members, supporters, or participants pay a subscription” fee (*OED*)

³⁰ *Camberwell*: part of South London

³¹ *a lark*: “a frolicsome adventure, a spree” (*OED*)

³² *lemon*: slang for “the head” (*OED*)

³³ *wrap himself round*: eat

“What case?”

“My problem.”

“What problem?”

“Why, you poor fish, my uncle, of course. What do you think my uncle’s going to say to all this? If I sprang it on him cold, he’d tie himself in knots on the hearthrug.”

“One of these emotional Johnnies,³⁴ eh?”

“Somehow or other his mind has got to be prepared to receive the news. But how?”

“Ah!”

“That’s a lot of help, that ‘ah’! You see, I’m pretty well dependent on the old boy. If he cut off my allowance, I should be very much in the soup. So you put the whole binge³⁵ to Jeeves and see if he can’t scare up a happy ending somehow. Tell him my future is in his hands, and that, if the wedding bells ring out, he can rely on me, even unto half my kingdom.³⁶ Well, call it ten quid.³⁷ Jeeves would exert himself with ten quid on the horizon, what?”

“Undoubtedly,” I said.

I wasn’t in the least surprised at Bingo wanting to lug Jeeves into his private affairs like this. It was the first thing I would have thought of doing myself if I had been in any hole of any description. As I have frequently had occasion to observe, he is a bird of the ripest³⁸ intellect, full of bright ideas. If anybody could fix things for poor old Bingo, he could.

I stated the case to him that night after dinner.

“Jeeves.”

“Sir?”

“Are you busy just now?”

“No, sir.”

³⁴ *Johnnies*: fellows, chaps (*OED*)

³⁵ *binge*: slang for “a situation” (*Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang*)

³⁶ *even unto half my kingdom*: a biblical allusion (KJV):

“Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom” (Mark 6:23)

“What is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.” (Esther 5:3)

³⁷ *quid*: colloquially, one pound (British currency) (*OED*)

³⁸ *ripest*: showing the most “mature judgement or knowledge” (*OED*)

“I mean, not doing anything in particular?”

“No, sir. It is my practice at this hour to read some improving book; but, if you desire my services, this can easily be postponed, or, indeed, abandoned altogether.”

“Well, I want your advice. It’s about Mr. Little.”

“Young Mr. Little, sir, or the elder Mr. Little, his uncle, who lives in Pounceby Gardens?”³⁹

Jeeves seemed to know everything. Most amazing thing. I’d been pally with Bingo practically all my life, and yet I didn’t remember ever having heard that his uncle lived anywhere in particular.

“How did you know he lived in Pounceby Gardens?” I said.

“I am on terms of some intimacy with the elder Mr. Little’s cook, sir. In fact, there is an understanding.”

I’m bound to say that this gave me a bit of a start. Somehow I’d never thought of Jeeves going in for that sort of thing.

“Do you mean you’re engaged?”

“It may be said to amount to that, sir.”

“Well, well!”

“She is a remarkably excellent cook, sir,” said Jeeves, as though he felt called on to give some explanation. “What was it you wished to ask me about Mr. Little?”

I sprang the details on him.

“And that’s how the matter stands, Jeeves,” I said. “I think we ought to rally round a trifle and help poor old Bingo put the thing through. Tell me about old Mr. Little. What sort of a chap is he?”

“A somewhat curious character, sir. Since retiring from business he has become a great recluse, and now devotes himself almost entirely to the pleasures of the table.”

“Greedy hog, you mean?”

“I would not, perhaps, take the liberty of describing him in precisely those terms, sir. He is what is usually called a gourmet. Very particular about what he eats, and for that reason sets a high value on Miss Watson’s services.”

³⁹ *Pounceby Gardens*: apparently a fictional location

“The cook?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, it looks to me as though our best plan would be to shoot young Bingo in on him after dinner one night. Melting mood, I mean to say, and all that.”

“The difficulty is, sir, that at the moment Mr. Little is on a diet, owing to an attack of gout.”

“Things begin to look wobbly.”

“No, sir, I fancy that the elder Mr. Little’s misfortune may be turned to the younger Mr. Little’s advantage. I was speaking only the other day to Mr. Little’s valet, and he was telling me that it has become his principal duty to read to Mr. Little in the evenings. If I were in your place, sir, I should send young Mr. Little to read to his uncle.”

“Nephew’s devotion, you mean? Old man touched by kindly action, what?”

“Partly that, sir. But I would rely more on young Mr. Little’s choice of literature.”

“That’s no good. Jolly old Bingo has a kind face, but when it comes to literature he stops at the *Sporting Times*.”⁴⁰

“That difficulty may be overcome. I would be happy to select books for Mr. Little to read. Perhaps I might explain my idea further?”

“I can’t say I quite grasp it yet.”

“The method which I advocate is what, I believe, the advertisers call Direct Suggestion, sir, consisting as it does of driving an idea home by constant repetition. You may have had experience of the system?”

“You mean they keep on telling you that some soap or other is the best, and after a bit you come under the influence and charge round the corner and buy a cake?”

“Exactly, sir. The same method was the basis of all the most valuable propaganda during the recent war.⁴¹ I see no reason why it should not be adopted to bring about the desired result with regard to the subject’s views on class distinctions. If young Mr. Little were to read day after day to his uncle a series of narratives in which marriage with young persons of an inferior social status was held up as both feasible and admirable, I fancy it would prepare the elder Mr. Little’s mind for the reception of the information that his nephew wishes to marry a waitress in a tea-shop.”

⁴⁰ *Sporting Times*: periodical about sport, especially horse racing

⁴¹ *the recent war*: World War I (1914-1918)

“*Are* there any books of that sort nowadays? The only ones I ever see mentioned in the papers are about married couples who find life grey, and can’t stick each other at any price.”

“Yes, sir, there are a great many, neglected by the reviewers but widely read. You have never encountered ‘All for Love,’ by Rosie M. Banks?”

“No.”

“Nor ‘A Red, Red Summer Rose,’ by the same author?”

“No.”

“I have an aunt, sir, who owns an almost complete set of Rosie M. Banks’. I could easily borrow as many volumes as young Mr. Little might require. They make very light, attractive reading.”

“Well, it’s worth trying.”

“I should certainly recommend the scheme, sir.”

“All right, then. Toddle round to your aunt’s to-morrow and grab a couple of the fruitiest.⁴² We can but have a dash at it.”

“Precisely, sir.”

* * * * *

Bingo reported three days later that Rosie M. Banks was the goods⁴³ and beyond a question the stuff to give the troops.⁴⁴ Old Little had jibbed⁴⁵ somewhat at first at the proposed change of literary diet, he not being much of a lad for fiction and having stuck hitherto exclusively to the heavier monthly reviews; but Bingo had got chapter one of “All for Love” past his guard before he knew what was happening, and after that there was nothing to it. Since then they had finished “A Red, Red Summer Rose,” “Madcap Myrtle” and “Only a Factory Girl,” and were halfway through “The Courtship of Lord Strathmorlick.”

Bingo told me all this in a husky voice over an egg beaten up in sherry. The only blot on the

⁴² *fruitiest*: colloquially, most “full of rich or strong quality; highly interesting, attractive, or suggestive” (*OED*)

⁴³ *was the goods*: colloquially, was “very good or impressive; ...exactly what is required; ...the genuine article” (*OED*)

⁴⁴ *the stuff to give the troops*: something of good quality. The phrase was “heard whenever rations or billets [for soldiers] ...turned out better or more plentiful than might have been expected” (John Brophy, quoted in *A Dictionary of Catch Phrases, American and British*).

⁴⁵ *jibbed... at*: like a horse, “refuse[d] to proceed or advance,” “start[ed] aside; ...sh[ied] at” (*OED*)

thing from his point of view was that it wasn't doing a bit of good to the old vocal cords, which were beginning to show signs of cracking under the strain. He had been looking his symptoms up in a medical dictionary, and he thought he had got "clergyman's throat."⁴⁶ But against this you had to set the fact that he was making an undoubted hit in the right quarter, and also that after the evening's reading he always stayed on to dinner; and, from what he told me, the dinners turned out by old Little's cook had to be tasted to be believed. There were tears in the old blighter's eyes as he got on the subject of the clear soup. I suppose to a fellow who for weeks had been tackling macaroons and limado it must have been like Heaven.

Old Little wasn't able to give any practical assistance at these banquets, but Bingo said that he came to the table and had his whack⁴⁷ of arrowroot,⁴⁸ and sniffed the dishes, and told stories of *entrees* he had had in the past, and sketched out scenarios of what he was going to do to the bill of fare in the future, when the doctor put him in shape; so I suppose he enjoyed himself, too, in a way. Anyhow, things seemed to be buzzing along quite satisfactorily, and Bingo said he had got an idea which, he thought, was going to clinch the thing. He wouldn't tell me what it was, but he said it was a pippin.⁴⁹

"We make progress, Jeeves," I said.

"That is very satisfactory, sir."

"Mr. Little tells me that when he came to the big scene in 'Only a Factory Girl,' his uncle gulped like a stricken bull-pup."⁵⁰

"Indeed, sir?"

"Where Lord Claude takes the girl in his arms, you know, and says——"

"I am familiar with the passage, sir. It is distinctly moving. It was a great favourite of my aunt's."

"I think we're on the right track."

"It would seem so, sir."

"In fact, this looks like being another of your successes. I've always said, and I always shall say, that for sheer brain, Jeeves, you stand alone. All the other great thinkers of the age are simply in

⁴⁶ "*clergyman's throat*": clergyman's sore throat, "loss of the voice from overuse, as by clergymen" (*Mosby's Medical Dictionary*, 9th edition)

⁴⁷ *whack*: "a portion, share, allowance; esp. a full share, a large portion or amount" (*OED*)

⁴⁸ *arrowroot*: a powdered starch obtained from certain tropical roots, formerly served "plain boiled with a little flavoring added, as an easily digestible food for invalids and children" (*The Grocer's Encyclopedia*)

⁴⁹ *pippin*: colloquially, "an excellent, pleasing, or beautiful person or thing" (*OED*)

⁵⁰ *bull-pup*: "a young bull-dog" (*OED*)

the crowd, watching you go by.”

“Thank you very much, sir. I endeavour to give satisfaction.”

About a week after this, Bingo blew in with the news that his uncle’s gout had ceased to trouble him, and that on the morrow he would be back at the old stand working away with knife and fork as before.

“And, by the way,” said Bingo, “he wants you to lunch with him tomorrow.”

“Me? Why me? He doesn’t know I exist.”

“Oh, yes, he does. I’ve told him about you.”

“What have you told him?”

“Oh, various things. Anyhow, he wants to meet you. And take my tip, laddie—you go! I should think lunch to-morrow would be something special.”

I don’t know why it was, but even then it struck me that there was something dashed odd—almost sinister, if you know what I mean—about young Bingo’s manner. The old egg⁵¹ had the air of one who has something up his sleeve.

“There is more in this than meets the eye,” I said. “Why should your uncle ask a fellow to lunch whom he’s never seen?”

“My dear old fathead, haven’t I just said that I’ve been telling him all about you—that you’re my best pal—at school together, and all that sort of thing?”

“But even then—and another thing. Why are you so dashed keen on my going?”

Bingo hesitated for a moment.

“Well, I told you I’d got an idea. This is it. I want you to spring the news on him. I haven’t the nerve myself.”

“What! I’m hanged if I do!”

“And you call yourself a pal of mine!”

“Yes, I know; but there are limits.”

“Bertie,” said Bingo reproachfully, “I saved your life once.”

⁵¹ *old egg*: “old chap, old fellow, old sport” (*OED*)

“When?”

“Didn’t I? It must have been some other fellow, then. Well, anyway, we were boys together and all that. You can’t let me down.”

“Oh, all right,” I said. “But, when you say you haven’t nerve enough for any dashed thing in the world, you misjudge yourself. A fellow who——”

“Cheerio!” said young Bingo. “One-thirty to-morrow. Don’t be late.”

* * * * *

I’m bound to say that the more I contemplated the binge, the less I liked it. It was all very well for Bingo to say that I was slated for a magnificent lunch; but what good is the best possible lunch to a fellow if he is slung out into the street on his ear during the soup course? However, the word of a Wooster is his bond and all that sort of rot, so at one-thirty next day I tottered up the steps of No. 16, Pounceby Gardens, and punched the bell. And half a minute later I was up in the drawing-room, shaking hands with the fattest man I have ever seen in my life.

The motto of the Little family was evidently “variety.” Young Bingo is long and thin and hasn’t had a superfluous ounce on him since we first met; but the uncle restored the average and a bit over. The hand which grasped mine wrapped it round and enfolded it till I began to wonder if I’d ever get it out without excavating machinery.

“Mr. Wooster, I am gratified—I am proud—I am honoured.”

It seemed to me that young Bingo must have boosted⁵² me to some purpose.

“Oh, ah!” I said.

He stepped back a bit, still hanging on to the good right hand.

“You are very young to have accomplished so much!”

I couldn’t follow the train of thought. The family, especially my Aunt Agatha, who has savaged me incessantly from childhood up, have always rather made a point of the fact that mine is a wasted life, and that, since I won the prize at my first school for the best collection of wild flowers made during the summer holidays, I haven’t done a dam’ thing to land me on the nation’s scroll of fame.⁵³ I was wondering if he couldn’t have got me mixed up with someone else, when the telephone-bell rang outside in the hall, and the maid came in to say that I was wanted. I buzzed down, and found it was young Bingo.

“Hallo!” said young Bingo. “So you’ve got there? Good man! I knew I could rely on you. I say,

⁵² *boosted*: “praise[d]... extol[led]” (*OED*)

⁵³ *scroll of fame*: imaginary list of names representing everyone famous and accomplished

old crumpet,⁵⁴ did my uncle seem pleased to see you?”

“Absolutely all over me. I can’t make it out.”

“Oh, that’s all right. I just rang up to explain. The fact is, old man, I know you won’t mind, but I told him that you were the author of those books I’ve been reading to him.”

“What!”

“Yes, I said that ‘Rosie M. Banks’ was your pen-name, and you didn’t want it generally known, because you were a modest, retiring sort of chap. He’ll listen to you now. Absolutely hang on your words. A brightish idea, what? I doubt if Jeeves in person could have thought up a better one than that. Well, pitch it strong, old lad, and keep steadily before you the fact that I must have my allowance raised. I can’t possibly marry on what I’ve got now. If this film is to end with the slow fade-out on the embrace, at least double is indicated. Well, that’s that. Cheerio!”

And he rang off. At that moment the gong sounded, and the genial host came tumbling downstairs like the delivery of a ton of coals.

* * * * *

I always look back to that lunch with a sort of aching regret. It was the lunch of a lifetime, and I wasn’t in a fit state to appreciate it. Subconsciously, if you know what I mean, I could see it was pretty special, but I had got the wind up to such a frightful extent over the ghastly situation in which young Bingo had landed me that its deeper meaning never really penetrated. Most of the time I might have been eating sawdust for all the good it did me.

Old Little struck the literary note right from the start.

“My nephew has probably told you that I have been making a close study of your books of late?” he began.

“Yes. He did mention it. How—er—how did you like the bally⁵⁵ things?”

He gazed reverently at me.

“Mr. Wooster, I am not ashamed to say that the tears came into my eyes as I listened to them. It amazes me that a man as young as you can have been able to plumb human nature so surely to its depths; to play with so unerring a hand on the quivering heart-strings⁵⁶ of your reader; to write novels so true, so human, so moving, so vital!”

⁵⁴ *old crumpet*: “a trivial term of endearment” (*OED*)

⁵⁵ *bally*: “as a vague intensive (usually as a euphemism for *bloody*): confounded, dashed, blasted” (*OED*)

⁵⁶ *play... on the... heart-strings*: “with punning allusion to stringed musical instruments... to move deeply” (*OED*)

“Oh, it’s just a knack,” I said.

The good old *persp.*⁵⁷ was bedewing my forehead by this time in a pretty lavish manner. I don’t know when I’ve been so rattled.

“Do you find the room a trifle warm?”

“Oh, no, no, rather not. Just right.”

“Then it’s the pepper. If my cook has a fault—which I am not prepared to admit—it is that she is inclined to stress the pepper a trifle in her made dishes.⁵⁸ By the way, do you like her cooking?”

I was so relieved that we had got off the subject of my literary output that I shouted approval in a ringing baritone.

“I am delighted to hear it, Mr. Wooster. I may be prejudiced, but to my mind that woman is a genius.”

“Absolutely!” I said.

“She has been with me seven years, and in all that time I have not known her guilty of a single lapse from the highest standard. Except once, in the winter of 1917, when a purist might have condemned a certain mayonnaise of hers as lacking in creaminess. But one must make allowances. There had been several air-raids⁵⁹ about that time, and no doubt the poor woman was shaken. But nothing is perfect in this world, Mr. Wooster, and I have had my cross to bear.⁶⁰ For seven years I have lived in constant apprehension lest some evilly-disposed person might lure her from my employment. To my certain knowledge she has received offers, lucrative offers, to accept service elsewhere. You may judge of my dismay, Mr. Wooster, when only this morning the bolt fell. She gave notice!”

“Good Lord!”

“Your consternation does credit, if I may say so, to the heart of the author of ‘A Red, Red Summer Rose.’ But I am thankful to say the worst has not happened. The matter has been adjusted. Jane is not leaving me.”

⁵⁷ *persp.*: perspiration

⁵⁸ *made dishes*: “fancy dish[es] of various ingredients, depending for... success on the cook’s skill” (*OED*)

⁵⁹ *air-raids*: German bombing of London from aircraft during World War I

⁶⁰ *cross to bear*: “a trial or affliction viewed in its Christian aspect, to be borne for Christ’s sake with Christian patience” (*OED*). The metaphor comes from passages in the gospels such as the following: “And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38, KJV).

“Good egg!”⁶¹

“Good egg, indeed—though the expression is not familiar to me. I do not remember having come across it in your books. And, speaking of your books, may I say that what has impressed me about them even more than the moving poignancy of the actual narrative, is your philosophy of life. If there were more men like you, Mr. Wooster, London would be a better place.”

This was dead opposite to my Aunt Agatha’s philosophy of life, she having always rather given me to understand that it is the presence in it of chappies like me that makes London more or less of a plague spot;⁶² but I let it go.

“Let me tell you, Mr. Wooster, that I appreciate your splendid defiance of the outworn fetishes⁶³ of a purblind⁶⁴ social system. I appreciate it! You are big enough to see that rank is but the guinea stamp⁶⁵ and that, in the magnificent words of Lord Bletchmore in ‘Only a Factory Girl,’ ‘Be her origin ne’er so humble, a good woman is the equal of the finest lady on earth!’”

I sat up.

“I say! Do you think that?”

“I do, Mr. Wooster. I am ashamed to say that there was a time when I was like other men, a slave to the idiotic convention which we call Class Distinction. But, since I read your books——”

I might have known it. Jeeves had done it again.

“You think it’s all right for a chappie in what you might call a certain social position to marry a girl of what you might describe as the lower classes?”

“Most assuredly I do, Mr. Wooster.”

⁶¹ *Good egg!*: slang: “(a) an excellent person or object; (b) an exclamation of enthusiastic approbation” (*OED*)

⁶² *plague spot*: “a place associated with bubonic plague”—figuratively, in this case, with the additional association of “an evil or undesirable person regarded as a symptom of the diseases of society” (*OED*).

⁶³ *fetishes*: things (here, social values) that are “irrationally revered” (*OED*)

⁶⁴ *purblind*: metaphorically blind or short-sighted, “having imperfect perception or discernment; lacking in or incapable of understanding or foresight; dim-witted; stupid” (*OED*)

⁶⁵ *rank is but the guinea stamp*: quotation from Robert Burns, “A Man’s a Man For A’ That” (1795):

“The rank is but the guinea’s stamp.

The Man’s the gowd for all that.”

A “guinea” is a gold (“gowd”) coin with the coin’s image stamped on it. The coin’s socially perceived value derives from the “stamp,” but its inherent value derives from the gold it is made of. In the same way, a person’s social “rank” determines social value in some people’s eyes, but a person’s inherent value does not depend on rank.

I took a deep breath, and slipped him the good news.

“Young Bingo—your nephew, you know—wants to marry a waitress,” I said.

“I honour him for it,” said old Little.

“You don’t object?”

“On the contrary.”

I took another deep breath and shifted to the sordid side of the business.

“I hope you won’t think I’m butting in, don’t you know,” I said, “but—er—well, how about it?”

“I fear I do not quite follow you.”

“Well, I mean to say, his allowance and all that. The money you’re good enough to give him. He was rather hoping that you might see your way to jerking up the total a bit.”

Old Little shook his head regretfully.

“I fear that can hardly be managed. You see, a man in my position is compelled to save every penny. I will gladly continue my nephew’s existing allowance, but beyond that I cannot go. It would not be fair to my wife.”

“What! But you’re not married?”

“Not yet. But I propose to enter upon that holy state almost immediately. The lady who for years has cooked so well for me honoured me by accepting my hand this very morning.” A cold gleam of triumph came into his eye. “Now let ’em try to get her away from me!” he muttered, defiantly.

* * * * *

“Young Mr. Little has been trying frequently during the afternoon to reach you on the telephone, sir,” said Jeeves that night, when I got home.

“I’ll bet he has,” I said. I had sent poor old Bingo an outline of the situation by messenger-boy shortly after lunch.

“He seemed a trifle agitated.”

“I don’t wonder. Jeeves,” I said, “so brace up and bite the bullet.⁶⁶ I’m afraid I’ve bad news for you.

⁶⁶ *bite the bullet*: “behave courageously” (*OED*)

“That scheme of yours—reading those books to old Mr. Little and all that—has blown out a fuse.”

“They did not soften him?”

“They did. That’s the whole bally trouble. Jeeves, I’m sorry to say that *fiancee* of yours—Miss Watson, you know—the cook, you know—well, the long and the short of it is that she’s chosen riches instead of honest worth,⁶⁷ if you know what I mean.”

“Sir?”

“She’s handed you the mitten⁶⁸ and gone and got engaged to old Mr. Little!”

“Indeed, sir?”

“You don’t seem much upset.”

“That fact is, sir, I had anticipated some such outcome.”

I stared at him. “Then what on earth did you suggest the scheme for?”

“To tell you the truth, sir, I was not wholly averse from a severance of my relations with Miss Watson. In fact, I greatly desired it. I respect Miss Watson exceedingly, but I have seen for a long time that we were not suited. Now, the *other* young person with whom I have an understanding——”

“Great Scott,⁶⁹ Jeeves! There isn’t another?”

⁶⁷ *chosen riches instead of honest worth*: “honest worth” (often meaning a person’s value deriving from virtue or good character) was often contrasted with “riches” or social rank, as an argument for the value of people who were not upper class. The following are two examples:

“For every tombstone bears some moral law;
Each shows, that power and riches all are
nought,
Virtue and honour not with them are bought:
'Tis truth and charity makes man adored,
'Tis not his being a titled noble lord;
'Tis honest worth that shines the grave above,
That wins below our fellow-creatures’ love”
— Edward Moxon, *The Prospect* (1826)

“Those gentle folk who pride themselves
Upon their wealth and birth,
And look with scorn on those who have
Naught else but honest worth,
Your gentle birth we laugh to scorn
For we hold it as our creed
That none are gentle, save the one
Who does a gentle deed.”
— Marie Jousse, “Only a Working Girl”
(1895)

⁶⁸ *handed you the mitten*: broken up with or rejected you

⁶⁹ *Great Scott*: “expressing surprise, amazement, annoyance, admiration, etc.” with (apparently) the name of U.S. army general Winfield Scott (1786–1866) (*OED*)

“Yes, sir.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“For some weeks, sir. I was greatly attracted by her when I first met her at a subscription dance at Camberwell.”

“My sainted aunt! Not——”

Jeeves inclined his head gravely.

“Yes, sir. By an odd coincidence it is the same young person that young Mr. Little—I have placed the cigarettes on the small table. Good night, sir.”

—1921

Text: Archive.org. <<http://www.archive.org/stream/deathattheexcels08176gut/7dexc10.txt>>

Emendations by AFM: orthography, “turn” to “tum”

Notes by AFM