

ЛЕГКО ЧИТАЕМ  
ПО-АНГЛИЙСКИ

4  
УРОВЕНЬ



P. G. Wodehouse

THE CODE OF THE WOOSTERS

Пелам Гренвилл Вудхаус

ФАМИЛЬНАЯ ЧЕСТЬ

ВУСТЕРОВ

словарь • комментарии

Легко читаем по-английски

Пелам Гренвилл Вудхаус

**The Code of the Woosters /  
Фамильная честь Вустеров**

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**Пелам Гренвилл Вудхаус**  
**Семейная честь Вустеров /**  
**The Code of the Woosters**

Адаптация текста и словарь С. А. Матвеева

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse

THE CODE OF THE WOOSTERS

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## One

"I reached out a hand from under the blankets, and rang the bell for Jeeves. "Good evening, Jeeves<sup>1</sup>."

"Good morning, sir."

This surprised me. "Is it morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure? It seems very dark outside."

"There is a fog, sir. We are now in autumn—season of mists and **mellow fruitfulness**<sup>2</sup>."

"Season of what?"

"Mists, sir, and mellow fruitfulness."

"Oh? Yes, I see. Well, get me one of those cocktails of yours, will you?"

"I have one in the fridge."

He shimmered out, and I sat up in bed feeling I was going to die in about five minutes. On the previous night, I had given a little dinner to **Gussie Fink-Nottle**<sup>3</sup> who was going to marry **Madeline**<sup>4</sup>, only daughter of **Sir Watkyn Bassett**<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, just before Jeeves came in, I had been dreaming that some bounder was driving spikes through my head—not just ordinary spikes, but **red-hot**<sup>6</sup> ones.

Jeeves returned with his morning revive. After drinking it, my skull flew up to the ceiling and the eyes shot out of their sockets and rebounded from the opposite wall like racquet balls. I felt better.

"Ha!" I said, retrieving the eyeballs and replacing them in position. "Well, Jeeves, what goes on in the great world? Is that the paper you have there?"

"No, sir. It is some literature from the Travel Bureau. I thought that you might care to glance at it."

"Oh?" I said. "You did, did you?"

And there was a brief and—if that's the word I want—pregnant silence. I suppose that when two men of iron live in close association with one another, there are occasional clashes. Jeeves was trying to get me to go on a Round-The-World cruise, and I would have none of it. But in spite of my firm statements to this effect, scarcely a day passed without him bringing me those illustrated folders which the travel agents usually send out. Jeeves was like some assiduous hound who will persist in laying a dead rat on the drawing-room carpet.

"Jeeves," I said, "this nuisance must now cease."

"Travel is highly educational, sir."

"No more education. I was full up years ago. No, Jeeves, I know what's the matter with you. That old Viking blood of yours! You yearn for the tang of the salt breezes. You see yourself walking the deck in a yachting cap. Possibly someone has been telling you about the Dancing Girls of Bali. I understand, and I sympathize. But not for me. I refuse."

"**Very good, sir.**"<sup>7</sup>

He spoke with a certain what-is-it in his voice, so I tactfully changed the subject.

"Well, Jeeves, it was quite a satisfactory binge last night."

"Indeed, sir?"

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeeves – Дживз

<sup>2</sup> **mellow fruitfulness** – обильная жатва

<sup>3</sup> **Gussie Fink-Nottle** – Гасси Финк-Ноттл

<sup>4</sup> **Madeline** – Медлин

<sup>5</sup> **Watkyn Bassett** – Уаткин Бассет

<sup>6</sup> **red-hot** – докрасна раскалённый

<sup>7</sup> **Very good, sir** – Слушаюсь, сэр.

“Oh, most. An excellent time was had by all. Gussie sent his regards.”

“I appreciate the kind thought, sir. I trust Mr. Fink-Nottle was in good spirits?”

“Extraordinarily good, considering that he will shortly have Sir Watkyn Bassett for a father-in-law. **Sooner him than me**<sup>8</sup>, Jeeves, sooner him than me.”

I spoke with strong feeling, and I'll tell you why. A few months before, while celebrating **Boat Race**<sup>9</sup> night, I had fallen into the clutches of the Law for trying to separate a policeman from his helmet, and I had been fined. **A fiver**<sup>10</sup>! The magistrate who had inflicted this monstrous sentence was none other than old Bassett, father of Gussie's bride-to-be.

I was one of his last clients, for a couple of weeks later he inherited a pot of money from a distant relative and retired to the country. That, at least, was the story. My own view was that he had got the stuff by sticking like glue to the fines. Five quid here, five quid there—a lot of money, eh?

“You have not forgotten that man of wrath, Jeeves? Eh?”

“Possibly Sir Watkyn is less formidable in private life, sir.”

“I doubt it. A hellhound is always a hellhound. But enough of this Bassett. Any letters today?”

“No, sir.”

“Telephone communications?”

“One, sir. From **Mrs Travers**<sup>11</sup>.”

“**Aunt Dahlia**<sup>12</sup>? She's back in town, then?”

“Yes, sir. She expressed a desire that you would ring her up at your earliest convenience.”

“I will do even better,” I said cordially. “**I will call in person.**<sup>13</sup>”

And half an hour later I was near the steps of her residence. I did not know that I was to become involved in an imbroglio that would test the Wooster soul as it had seldom been tested before. The story was connected with Gussie Fink-Nottle, Madeline Bassett, old Pop Bassett, **Stiffy Byng**<sup>14</sup>, the **Rev. H. P. (“Stinker”) Pinker**<sup>15</sup>, the eighteenth-century **cow-creamers**<sup>16</sup> and the small, brown, leather-covered notebook.

\* \* \*

But I was looking forward with bright anticipation to the coming reunion with Dahlia—she, being my good and deserving aunt, not to be confused with **Aunt Agatha**<sup>17</sup>, who eats broken bottles and wears **barbed wire**<sup>18</sup> next to the skin. Apart from the mere intellectual pleasure of talking to her, there was the prospect that I might be able to get an invitation to lunch. **Anatole**<sup>19</sup>, her French cook, was outstanding!

The door of the morning room was open. Aunt Dahlia greeted me:

“Hallo, ugly,” she said. “What brings you here?”

“I understood, that you wished to talk to me.”

---

<sup>8</sup> **Sooner him than me.** – Слава богу, что он, а не я.

<sup>9</sup> **Boat Race** – лодочные гонки

<sup>10</sup> **fiver** – пятёрка, банкнота в пять фунтов

<sup>11</sup> **Travers** – Трэверс

<sup>12</sup> **Dahlia** – Далия

<sup>13</sup> **I will call in person.** – Лично навещу.

<sup>14</sup> **Stiffy Byng** – Стиффи Бинг

<sup>15</sup> **Rev. H. P. (“Stinker”) Pinker** – Преподобный Г. П. («Мерзавец, Вонючка») Пинкер

<sup>16</sup> **cow-creamers** – кувшинчик для сливок

<sup>17</sup> **Agatha** – Агата

<sup>18</sup> **barbed wire** – колючая проволока

<sup>19</sup> **Anatole** – Анатолий

"I didn't want you to come in, interrupting my work. A few words on the telephone would've been enough. But I suppose some instinct told you that this was my busy day."

"If you were wondering if I could come to lunch, have no anxiety. By the way, what will Anatole be giving us?"

"He won't be giving you anything, my young tapeworm. I am entertaining **Pomona Grindle**<sup>20</sup>, the novelist, to the midday meal."

"I should be charmed to meet her."

"Well, you're not going to. It is to be a strictly **tête-à-tête**<sup>21</sup> affair. All I wanted was to tell you to go to an antique shop in the **Brompton Road**<sup>22</sup>—it's just past the Oratory—you can't miss it—and sneer at a cow-creamer."

I was surprised. The impression I received was that my dear aunt was a little crazy.

"Do what to a what?"

"They've got an eighteenth-century cow-creamer there that your uncle Tom's going to buy this afternoon."

"Oh, it's silver, isn't it?"

"Yes. A sort of cream jug. Go there and ask them to show it to you, and when they do, show your scorn."

"What for?"

"To sow doubts and misgivings in their mind and make them lower the price a bit, chump. The cheaper Tom gets the thing, the better he will be pleased. And I want him to be in cheery mood, because if I succeed in signing the Grindle up for my serial, I shall be compelled to get some money from him. These women novelists want millions for their novels. So run away and shake your head at the thing."

I am always anxious to help my aunt, but I was compelled to refuse. Morning mixtures of Jeeves are practically magical in their effect, but...

"I can't shake my head. Not today."

She gazed at me.

"Oh, so that's how it is? Well, if your loathsome excesses have left you incapable of headshaking, you can at least **curl your lip**<sup>23</sup>."

"Oh, rather."

"Then carry on. And try clicking the tongue. Oh, yes, and tell them you think it's Modern Dutch."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Apparently it's something a cow-creamer ought not to be." She paused, and allowed her eye to roam thoughtfully over my face. "So you were completely drunk last night, my chicken? It's an extraordinary thing—every time I see you, you appear to be recovering from some debauch. Don't you ever stop drinking? How about when you are asleep?"

"**You wrong me**<sup>24</sup>, aunt. I am exceedingly moderate. A couple of cocktails, a glass of wine at dinner and possibly a liqueur with the coffee—that is Bertram Wooster. But last night I gave a small bachelor binge for Gussie Fink-Nottle."

"You did, did you?" She laughed—a bit louder than I could endure. "Spink-Bottle, eh? Bless his heart! How was the old newt-fancier?"

"Pretty roguish."

---

<sup>20</sup> **Pomona Grindle** – Помона Гриндл

<sup>21</sup> **tête-à-tête** – тет-а-тет (*франц.*)

<sup>22</sup> **Brompton Road** – Бромптон-роуд

<sup>23</sup> **curl your lip** – поджать губы

<sup>24</sup> **you wrong me** – ты клеветешь на меня

“Did he make a speech at this orgy of yours?”

“Yes. I was astounded. I was all prepared for a refusal. But no. We drank his health, and he rose to his feet as cool as some cucumbers, as Anatole would say, and held us spellbound.”

“Tight as a skunk, I suppose?”

“On the contrary. Absolutely sober.”

“Well, nice to hear.”

This Gussie was a fish-faced pal of mine, who had buried himself in the country and devoted himself entirely to the study of newts, keeping the little chaps in a glass tank and observing their habits with a sedulous eye. A confirmed recluse you would have called him, if you had happened to know the word, and you would have been right. But Love will find a way. Meeting Madeline Bassett one day, he had emerged from his retirement and started to woo, and after numerous vicissitudes had been successful. Now he was going to marry that ghastly girl.

I call her a ghastly girl because she was a ghastly girl. The Woosters are chivalrous, but they can tell the truth. Droopy, soupy, sentimental, with melting eyes and a cooing voice and the most extraordinary views on such things as stars and rabbits. I remember her telling me once that rabbits were gnomes in attendance on the Fairy Queen and that the stars were God’s daisy chain. Perfect nonsense, of course. They’re nothing of the sort.

Aunt Dahlia emitted a low, rumbling chuckle.

“Good old **Spink-Bottle**<sup>25</sup>! Where is he now?”

“Staying at the Bassett’s place—**Totleigh Towers, Glos**<sup>26</sup>. He went back there this morning. They’re having the wedding at the local church.”

“Are you going to it?”

“Definitely no.”

“No, I suppose it would be too painful for you. You were in love with the girl.”

I stared.

“In love? With a female who thinks that every time a fairy sneezes a baby is born?”

“Well, you were certainly engaged to her once.”

“For about five minutes, yes, and there was no fault of my own. My dear old relative,” I said, “you are perfectly well aware of the inside facts of that frightful affair.”

I winced. It was an incident in my career which I don’t like to remember. Briefly, what had occurred was this. Gussie had asked me to talk to Madeline Bassett for him. And when I did so, the **fat-headed**<sup>27</sup> girl thought I was pleading mine. With the result that she had refused Gussie and attached herself to me, and I had no option but **to take the rap**<sup>28</sup>. Mercifully, things went well and there was a reconciliation between them, but the thought of my peril was one at which I still shuddered.

“Well, if it is of any interest to you,” said Aunt Dahlia, “I am not proposing to attend that wedding myself. I disapprove of Sir Watkyn Bassett, and don’t think he ought to be encouraged.”

“You know **the old crumb**<sup>29</sup>, then?” I said, rather surprised. **It’s a small world**.<sup>30</sup>

“Yes, I know him. He’s a friend of Tom’s. They both collect old silver and snarl at one another like wolves about it all the time. We had him staying at **Brinkley**<sup>31</sup> last month. And would you care to hear how he repaid me for all the loving care I lavished on him while he was my guest? Behind my back he tried to steal Anatole!”

“No!”

---

<sup>25</sup> **Spink-Bottle** – Пенёк-Бутылёк

<sup>26</sup> **Totleigh Towers, Glos** – Тотлей-тауэрс в Глостере

<sup>27</sup> **fat-headed** – тупоголовая

<sup>28</sup> **to take the rap** – смириться с неизбежным

<sup>29</sup> **old crumb** – старый крохобор

<sup>30</sup> **It’s a small world**. – Мир тесен.

<sup>31</sup> **Brinkley** – Бринкли

“That’s what he did. Fortunately, Anatole proved staunch—after I had doubled his wages.”

“Double them again,” I said earnestly. “Keep on doubling them. Pour out money like water rather than lose that superb master of the roasts and hashes.”

I was visibly affected.

“Yes,” said Aunt Dahlia, “Sir Watkyn Bassett is a swindler. You had better warn Spink-Bottle to watch out on the wedding day. The slightest relaxation of vigilance, and the old man will probably steal his wedding ring. And now push off. Oh, and give this to Jeeves, when you see him. It’s the “Husbands’ Corner” article. It’s about men’s trousers, and I’d like him to read it. For all I know, it may be Red propaganda. And I can rely on you not to bungle that job? Tell me in your own words what it is you’re supposed to do.”

“Go to antique shop—”

“—in the Brompton Road—”

“—in, as you say, the Brompton Road. Ask to see cow-creamer—”

“—and sneer. Right. Go away. The door is behind you.”

It was with a light heart that I went out into the street and caught a cab. I was conscious only of pleasure at the thought that I had it in my power to perform this little act of kindness. Scratch **Bertram Wooster**<sup>32</sup>, I often say, and you find a **Boy Scout**<sup>33</sup>.

The antique shop in the Brompton Road proved to be an antique shop in the Brompton Road and, like all antique shops, dingy outside and dark and smelly within. I don’t know why it is, but the proprietors of these establishments always seem to be cooking some food in the back room.

“I say,” I began, entering; then paused as I perceived that the man was attending to two other customers.

“Oh, sorry,” I was about to add, when the words froze on my lips.

In spite of the poor light I was able to note that the smaller and elder of these two customers was no stranger to me. It was old Pop Bassett in person. Himself. Not a picture. But I stood firm. After all, I had paid my debt to Society and had nothing to fear from this swindler. So I remained where I was.

He turned and shot a quick look at me, and then he had been peering at me sideways. It was only a question of time, I felt, before he would realize that the figure leaning on its umbrella was an old acquaintance. And he came across to where I stood.

“Hallo, hallo,” he said. “I know you, young man. I never forget a face. You came up before me once.” I bowed slightly. “But not twice. Good! Learned your lesson, eh? Going straight now? Good. Now, let me see, what was it? Don’t tell me. Of course, yes. **Bag-snatching**<sup>34</sup>.”

“No, no. It was—”

“Bag-snatching,” he repeated firmly. “I remember it distinctly. Still, it’s all past, eh? We live a new life, don’t we? Splendid. **Roderick**<sup>35</sup>, come over here. This is most interesting.”

His friends, who had been examining a salver, put it down and joined us. He was about seven feet in height, and about six feet across, he caught the eye and arrested it. It was as if Nature had intended to make a gorilla, and had changed its mind at the last moment.

His gaze was keen and piercing. I don’t know if you have even seen those pictures in the papers of Dictators with blazing eyes, inflaming the populace with fiery words, but that was what he reminded me of.

“Roderick,” said old Bassett, “I want you to meet this fellow. Here is a case which illustrates exactly what I have so often said—that prison life does not degrade, that it does not warp the character and prevent a man rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.”

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<sup>32</sup> **Bertram Wooster** – Бертрам Вустер

<sup>33</sup> **Boy Scout** – бой-скаут

<sup>34</sup> **bag-snatching** – воровство сумок

<sup>35</sup> **Roderick** – Родерик

I recognized the gag—one of Jeeves's—and wondered where he could have heard it.

"Look at this chap. I gave him three months not long ago for snatching bags at railway stations, and it is quite evident that his term in jail has had the most excellent effect on him. He has reformed."

"Oh, yes?" said the Dictator. I didn't like the way he spoke. He was looking at me with a nasty sort of supercilious expression.

"What makes you think he has reformed?"

"Of course he has reformed. Look at him. Well groomed, well dressed, a decent member of Society. What his present walk in life is, I do not know, but it is perfectly obvious that he is no longer stealing bags. What are you doing now, young man?"

"Stealing umbrellas, apparently," said the Dictator. "I notice he's got yours."

I was going to deny the accusation hotly—I had, indeed, already opened my lips to do so—when I remembered that I had come out without my umbrella, and yet here I was, beyond any question of doubt, had one! What had caused me to take up the one that had been leaning against a seventeenth-century chair, I cannot say, unless it was the primeval instinct which makes a man without an umbrella reach out for the nearest one in sight, like a flower groping toward the sun.

"I say, I'm most frightfully sorry."

Old Bassett said he was, too, sorry and disappointed. He said it was this sort of thing that made a man sick at heart. The Dictator asked if he should call a policeman, and old Bassett's eyes gleamed for a moment. A magistrate loves the idea of calling policemen. It's like a tiger tasting blood. But he shook his head.

"No, Roderick. I couldn't. Not today—the happiest day of my life."

The Dictator pursed his lips, as if feeling that the better the day, the better the deed.

"But listen," I said, "it was a mistake."

"Ha!" said the Dictator. "I thought that umbrella was mine."

"That," said old Bassett, "is the fundamental trouble with you, my man. You are totally unable to distinguish between mine and yours. Well, I am not going to have you arrested this time, but I advise you to be very careful. Come, Roderick."

They went out, the Dictator pausing at the door to give me another look and say "Ha!" again. The proprietor of the shop emerged from the inner room, accompanied by a rich smell of stew, and enquired what he could do for me. I said that I knew that he had an eighteenth-century cow-creamer for sale.

He shook his head.

"You're too late. It's promised to a customer."

"Name of Travers?"

"Ah."

"Then that's all right. That Travers is my uncle. He sent me here to have a look at the thing. So dig it out, will you? I expect it's rotten."

"It's a beautiful cow-creamer."

"Ha!" I said, "That's what you think. We shall see."

It was a silver cow. But when I say "cow", don't think about some decent, self-respecting animal such as you may observe loading grass into itself in the nearest meadow. This was a sinister, leering, underworld sort of animal. It was about four inches high and six long. Its back **opened on a hinge**<sup>36</sup>. Its tail was arched, so that the tip touched the spine—thus, I suppose, affording a handle for the creamlover to grasp. The sight of it seemed to take me into a different and dreadful world.

It was, consequently, an easy task for me to carry out the programme indicated by Aunt Dahlia. I curled the lip and clicked the tongue, all in one movement. I also drew in the breath sharply.

---

36 on a hinge — на петлях

“Oh, tut, tut, tut!” I said, “Oh, dear, dear, dear! Oh, no, no, no, no, no! I don’t think much of this,” I said, curling and clicking freely. “All wrong.”

“All wrong?”

“All wrong. Modern Dutch.”

“Modern Dutch? What do you mean, Modern Dutch? It’s eighteenth-century English. Look at the hallmark.”

“I can’t see any hallmark.”

“Are you blind? Here, take it outside in the street. It’s lighter there.”

“Right,” I said, and started for the door, like a connoisseur a bit bored at having his time wasted. I had only taken a couple of steps when I **tripped over**<sup>37</sup> the cat, and shot out of the door like someone wanted by the police. The cow-creamer flew from my hands, and it was a lucky thing that I happened to barge into a fellow citizen outside. Well, not absolutely lucky, as a matter of fact, for it turned out to be Sir Watkyn Bassett. He stood there goggling at me with horror and indignation behind the pince-nez. First, bag-snatching; then umbrella-pinching; and now this. It was **the last straw**<sup>38</sup>.

“Call a policeman, Roderick!” he cried.

The Dictator bawled: “Police!”

“Police!” yipped old Bassett, up in the tenor clef.

“Police!” roared the Dictator, taking the bass. And a moment later something large loomed up in the fog and said: “What’s all this?”

Well, I didn’t want to stick around and explain. I picked up the feet and was gone like the wind. A voice shouted “Stop!” but of course I didn’t. I legged it down byways and along side streets, and eventually fetched up somewhere in the neighbourhood of **Sloane Square**<sup>39</sup>. There I got aboard a cab and started back to civilization.

My original intention was to drive to the Drones and get a bite of lunch there, but I hadn’t gone far when I realized that I wasn’t equal to it. Changing my strategy, I told the man to take me to the nearest Turkish bath.

I returned to the flat late. It was, indeed, practically with a merry tra-la-la on my lips that I made for the sitting room. And the next I saw a pile of telegrams on the table.

---

<sup>37</sup> **tripped over** – споткнулся о

<sup>38</sup> **the last straw** – последняя капля

<sup>39</sup> **Sloane Square** – Слоун-сквер

## Two

I had had the idea at first glance that there were about twenty of the telegrams, but a closer scrutiny revealed only three. They all bore the same signature. They ran as follows:

The first:

*Wooster, Berkeley Mansions, **Berkeley Square**<sup>40</sup>, London.*

*Come immediately. Serious rift Madeline and self<sup>41</sup>. Reply.*

*Gussie*

The second:

*Surprised receive no answer my telegram saying Come immediately serious rift Madeline and self. Reply.*

*Gussie*

And the third:

*I say, Bertie, why don't you answer my telegrams? Sent you two today saying Come immediately serious rift Madeline and self. **Unless you come earliest possible moment prepared lend every effort effect reconciliation**<sup>42</sup>, wedding will be broken off. Reply.*

*Gussie*

Something had whispered to me on seeing those envelopes that here we had a big trouble, and here we had.

The sound of the familiar footsteps had brought Jeeves. A glance was enough to tell him that all was not well with the employer.

"Are you ill, sir?" he enquired solicitously.

I sank into a chair.

"Not ill, Jeeves, but I am going to die. Read these."

He read the telegrams.

"Most disturbing, sir." His voice was grave. I could see that he hadn't missed the gist. The sinister idea of those telegrams was as clear to him as it was to me. There was no need to explain to him why I now lighted a cigarette with a visible effort.

"What do you suppose has happened, Jeeves?"

"It is difficult to hazard a conjecture, sir."

"The wedding may be scratched, he says. Why? That is what I ask myself."

"Yes, sir."

"And I have no doubt that that is what you ask yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"A difficult case, Jeeves."

"Extremely difficult, sir."

"What shall I do, Jeeves?"

"I think it would be best to proceed to Totleigh Towers, sir."

"But how can I? Old Bassett would drive me out the moment I arrived."

---

<sup>40</sup> **Berkeley Square** – Беркли-сквер

<sup>41</sup> **Serious rift Madeline and self.** – Серьёзно поссорился с Медлин.

<sup>42</sup> **unless you come earliest possible moment prepared lend every effort effect reconciliation** – если ты не прибудешь как можно раньше и не помиришь нас

“Possibly if you were to telegraph to Mr. Fink-Nottle, sir, explaining your difficulty, he might have some solution to suggest.”

This seemed reasonable. I hastened out to the post office, and wired as follows:

*Fink-Nottle, Totleigh Towers,  
**Totleigh-in-the-Wold**<sup>43</sup>.*

*Yes, that's all very well. You say come here immediately, but how can I? You don't understand relations between Pop Bassett and myself. He would not say “welcome” to Bertram. What is to be done? What has happened? Why serious rift? What serious rift? How do you mean wedding broken off? What have you been doing to the girl? Reply.*

*Bertie*

The answer to this came during dinner:

*Wooster, Berkeley Mansions, Berkeley Square, London.  
See difficulty, but think **can work it**<sup>44</sup>. In spite strained relations, Madeline still speaking. Am telling her have received urgent letter from you pleading be allowed come here. Expect invitation shortly.*

*Gussie*

And in the morning, I received three telegrams. The first ran:

*Have worked it. Invitation dispatched. When you come, will you bring book entitled **My Friends The Newts by Loretta Peabody**<sup>45</sup> published **Popgood and Grooly**<sup>46</sup>.*

*Gussie*

The second:

*Bertie, you old ass, I hear you are coming here. Delighted, as something very important want you do for me.*

*Stiffy*

The third:

*Please come here if you wish, but, oh Bertie, is this wise? Will not it cause you needless pain seeing me? Surely merely **twisting knife wound**<sup>47</sup>.*

*Madeline*

Jeeves was bringing me the morning cup of tea when I read these telegrams, and I handed them to him in silence. He read them. Then he spoke.

“I think that we should start at once, sir.”

“I suppose so.”

“I will pack immediately. Would you wish me to call Mrs Travers on the telephone?”

“Why?”

“She has rung up several times this morning.”

“Oh? Then perhaps you had better give her a call.”

“I think it will not be necessary, sir. I fancy that this would be the lady now.”

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<sup>43</sup> **Totleigh-in-the-Wold** – Тотли-на-нагорье

<sup>44</sup> **think can work it** – думаю, ты сможешь всё уладить

<sup>45</sup> **Loretta Peabody** – Лоретта Пибоди

<sup>46</sup> **Popgood and Grooly** – «Попгуд и Грули» (название издательства)

<sup>47</sup> **twisting knife wound** – бредишь рану

A long peal had sounded from the front door. A moment later it was plain that his intuition had not deceived him. A booming voice rolled through the flat.

“Isn’t that young hound awake yet, Jeeves?... Oh, there you are.”

Aunt Dahlia appeared. The breath came jerkily, and the eyes gleamed with a goofy light.

“I’ve been awake some little time,” I corrected. “As a matter of fact, I was just about to partake of the morning meal. You will join me, I hope? Bacon and eggs may, eh?”

She snorted

“Eggs! What I want is a brandy and soda. Tell Jeeves to mix me one. And if he forgets to put in the soda, it will be all right with me. Bertie, a frightful thing has happened.”

“Let’s go to the dining saloon, my dear aunt,” I said. “We shall not be interrupted there. Jeeves will come in here to pack.”

“Are you off somewhere?”

“Totleigh Towers. I have had a most disturbing—”

“Totleigh Towers? Well, I’m dashed! That’s just where I came to tell you you had got to go immediately”

“Eh?”

“Matter of life and death.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll soon see, when I’ve explained.”

“Then come along to the dining room and explain at your earliest convenience.”

“Now then, my dear old auntie,” I said, when Jeeves had brought the foodstuffs and withdrawn, “tell me all.”

For an instant, there was silence, broken only by the musical sound of an aunt drinking brandy and soda. Then she drew a deep breath. “Bertie,” she said, “I wish to begin by saying a few words about Sir Watkyn Bassett. May greenfly attack his roses. May his cook be drunk on the night of the big dinner party. May all his hens die.”

“Does he keep hens?” I said. “May his cistern start leaking, and may white ants, if there are any in England, gnaw away the foundations of Totleigh Towers. And when he walks to the church with his daughter Madeline, may he get a sneezing fit and find that he has come out without a pocket handkerchief”

She paused.

“Quite,” I said. “I agree with you in too. But what has he done?”

“I will tell you. You remember that cow-creamer?”

I dug into a fried egg, quivering a little.

“Remember it? I shall never forget it. You will scarcely believe this, Aunt Dahlia, but when I got to the shop, who should be there by the most amazing coincidence but this same Bassett—”

“It wasn’t a coincidence. He had gone there to have a look at the thing, to see if it was all Tom had said it was. For—can you imagine such lunacy, Bertie?—that uncle of yours had told the man about it. Tom lunched with Sir Watkyn Bassett at the latter’s club yesterday. And the fiend Bassett had come to the shop and bought the cow-creamer. The man had promised to hold it for Tom till three o’clock, but naturally when three o’clock came and he didn’t turn up and there was another customer looking at the thing, and he let it go. So there you are. Bassett has the cow-creamer, and took it down to Totleigh last night.”

It was a sad story, of course. A magistrate who could nick a fellow for five pounds, when a mere reprimand would more than have met the case, was capable of anything, but I couldn’t see what she thought there was to be done about it. It’s better to start a new life and try to forget. That’s what I said to my aunt. She gazed at me in silence for a moment.

“Oh? So that’s how you feel, is it?”

“I do, yes.”

“You admit, I hope, that by every moral law that cow-creamer belongs to Tom?”

“Oh, certainly”.

“But would you allow this ugly man to get away with the swag? You would just sit tight and say ‘Well, well!’ and do nothing?”

I weighed this.

“Possibly not ‘Well, well!’, but I wouldn’t do anything.”

“Well, I’m going to do something. I’m going to steal the damn thing.”

I started at her, astounded. I uttered no verbal rebuke, but there was a distinct “Tut, tut!” in my gaze. Even though the provocation was, I admitted, I could not approve of these strong methods. And I was about to awaken her dormant conscience, when she added:

“Or, rather, you are!”

“Who, me?”

“That’s right. You’re going to stay at Tottleigh. You will have a hundred excellent opportunities —”

“**But, dash it!**<sup>48</sup>”

“—and I must have it, because otherwise I shall never be able to dig a cheque out of Tom for that Pomona Grindle serial. He simply won’t be in the mood. And I signed the old girl up yesterday at a fabulous price, half the sum agreed upon to be paid in advance a week from current date. So, my lad. I can’t understand why you are so surprised. It doesn’t seem to me much to do for a loved aunt.”

“It seems to me a dashed thing. I’m not going to—”

“Oh, yes you are, because you know what will happen, if you don’t.”

She paused significantly.

“**You follow me, Watson**<sup>49</sup>?”

I was silent. She had no need to tell me what she meant. This was not the first time she had displayed a sword. This ruthless relative has one all powerful weapon which she holds constantly over my head like the sword. The threat that if I don’t obey she will bar me from her board and wipe Anatole’s cooking from my lips. I shall not forget the time when she placed sanctions on me for a whole month—right in the middle of the pheasant season. I made one last attempt to reason with her.

“But why does Uncle Tom want his frightful cow-creamer? It’s a ghastly object. He would be far better without it.”

“He doesn’t think so. Well, there it is. Perform this simple, easy task for me, or guests at my dinner table will soon be saying: ‘Why is it that we never seem to see Bertie Wooster here anymore?’ Bless my soul, what an amazing lunch that was that Anatole gave us yesterday! ‘Superb’ is the only word. I don’t wonder you’re fond of his cooking. As you sometimes say, it melts in the mouth.”

I eyed her sternly. “Aunt Dahlia, this is blackmail!”

“Yes, isn’t it?” she said, and **beetled off**<sup>50</sup>. I resumed my seat, and ate a moody slice of cold bacon.

Jeeves entered. “The bags are packed, sir.”

“Very good, Jeeves,” I said. “Then let us be starting.”

\* \* \*

“Jeeves,” I said, breaking a thoughtful silence which had lasted for about eighty seven miles, “I am in a big trouble.”

“Sir?”

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<sup>48</sup> **Dash it!** – Чёрт побери!

<sup>49</sup> **Watson** – Уотсон

<sup>50</sup> **beetled off** – упорхнула

I frowned. The man was discreet, and this was no time for discretion.

"Don't pretend you don't know all about it, Jeeves," I said coldly. "You were in the next room throughout my interview with Aunt Dahlia, and her remarks must have been audible in **Piccadilly**<sup>51</sup>."

He dropped the mask.

"Well, yes, sir, I must confess that I gathered the substance of the conversation."

"Very well, then. You agree with me that the situation is dreadful?"

"Certainly a somewhat sharp crisis in your affairs would appear to have been precipitated, sir."

"If I had my life to live again, Jeeves, I would start it as an orphan without any aunts. Don't they put aunts in Turkey in sacks and drop them in **the Bosphorus**<sup>52</sup>?"

"**Odaliques**<sup>53</sup>, sir, I understand. Not aunts."

"Well, why not aunts? Look at the trouble they cause in the world. I tell you, Jeeves, and you may quote me as saying this—behind every poor, innocent, harmless blighter who is going down, you will find, if you look carefully enough, the aunt."

"There is much in what you say, sir."

"It is no use telling me that there are bad aunts and good aunts. They are all alike. Consider this Dahlia, Jeeves. I have always respected her. But what did she offer? We are familiar with Wooster, the supposed bag-snatcher. But this aunt is going to present to the world a Wooster who goes to the houses of retired magistrates and, while eating their bread and salt, steals their cow-creamers. Oh!"

"Most disturbing, sir."

"I wonder how old Bassett will receive me, Jeeves."

"It will be interesting to observe his reactions, sir."

"He can't throw me out, I suppose, Miss Bassett having invited me?"

"No sir".

"On the other hand, he can—and I think he will—look at me over the top of his pince-nez and make terrible noises. The prospect is not an agreeable one."

"No, sir."

"I mean to say, even if this cow-creamer thing had not come up, conditions would be terrible."

"Yes, sir. Might I enquire how are you going to carry out Mrs Travers's wishes?"

"That is the problem which is torturing me, Jeeves. I can't make up my mind. When I think of being barred from those menus of Anatole's, I say to myself that I will fulfill the task. Old Bassett is firmly convinced that I am a combination of a swindler and a thief and steal everything I see."

"Sir?"

"Didn't I tell you about that? I had another encounter with him yesterday. He now looks upon me as the king of the criminal world—if not **Public Enemy**<sup>54</sup> Number One, certainly Number Two or Three."

I informed him briefly of what had occurred. Jeeves does not often smile, but now a distinct simper had begun to wreath his lips.

"A laughable misunderstanding, sir."

"Laughable, Jeeves?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I should have said 'disturbing'."

"Quite. But even if I want to steal cow-creamers, how am I going to find the time? You have to plan and plot and lay schemes. And I shall think about this business of Gussie's."

"Exactly, sir."

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<sup>51</sup> **Piccadilly** – Пикадилли

<sup>52</sup> **Bosphorus** – Босфор

<sup>53</sup> **odaliques** – одалиски (*служанки в гареме султана*)

<sup>54</sup> **Public Enemy** – враг рода человеческого

“And, as if that wasn’t enough to have on my mind, there is that telegram of Stiffy’s. You remember the third telegram that came this morning. It was from Miss Stephanie Byng, Miss Bassett’s cousin, who resides at Totleigh Towers. You’ve met her. She came to lunch at the flat a week or two ago. A very small girl.”

“Oh, yes, sir. I remember Miss Byng. A charming young lady.”

“Maybe. But what does she want me to do for her? That’s the question. Probably something completely unfit for me. So I’ve got that to worry about, too. What a life!”

“Yes, sir.”

We noted a signpost where had been inscribed the words ‘Totleigh-in-the-Wold, 8 miles’. Soon I braked the car. “Journey’s end, Jeeves?”

“I can imagine, sir.”

Having turned in at the gateway and fetched up at the front door, we were informed by the butler that this was indeed the lair of Sir Watkyn Bassett.

Sir Watkyn, the butler explained, had gone for a walk.

“I fancy he is somewhere in the garden with **Mr. Roderick Spode**<sup>55</sup>.”

I was shocked. After that affair at the antique shop, the name Roderick was, as you may imagine, rather deeply graven on my heart.

“Roderick Spode? Big chap with a small moustache and the sort of eye that can open an oyster at sixty paces?”

“Yes, sir. He arrived yesterday with Sir Watkyn from London. They went out shortly after lunch. Miss Madeline, I believe, is at home, but it may take some little time to locate her.”

“How about Mr. Fink-Nottle?”

“I think he has gone for a walk, sir.”

“Oh? Well, right. Then I’ll just walk a bit, too.”

I was glad of the chance of being alone for a while. I strolled off along the terrace. The news that Roderick Spode was here had shaken me greatly.

I mean, imagine how some unfortunate criminal would feel, on coming down to do a murder somewhere, if he found that not only was **Sherlock Holmes**<sup>56</sup> putting in the weekend there, but **Hercule Poirot**<sup>57</sup>, as well.

The more I thought about pinching that cow-creamer, the less I liked the idea. I was trying hard to find some formula.

Old Bassett, I noted, had laid out his money to excellent advantage. I am a bit of a connoisseur of country houses, and I found this one excellent. Nice facade, spreading grounds, smoothly shaven lawns, and a general atmosphere of what is known as old-world peace. Cows were mooing in the distance, sheep and birds respectively bleating and tooting. Totleigh Towers might be a place where man was vile, but undoubtedly every prospect pleased.

And I was strolling up and down, my attention was arrested by the interior of a room on the ground floor, visible through an open French window.

It was a sort of minor drawing room, if you know what I mean. And it was filled with glass cases and statuettes. It was evident that I was looking at the Bassett collection.

I paused. Something forced me to enter the room. And the next moment, there I was with my old pal the silver cow. It was standing in a small case over by the door, and I peered in at it, breathing heavily on the glass. I dipped in, and fished it out.

At this point a voice behind me said “Hands up!” and, turning, I observed Roderick Spode in the window. He had a shotgun in his hand.

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<sup>55</sup> **Spode** – Споуд

<sup>56</sup> **Sherlock Holmes** – Шерлок Холмс

<sup>57</sup> **Hercule Poirot** – Эркюль Пуаро

## Three

I had described Roderick Spode to the butler as a man with an eye that could open an oyster at sixty paces, and it was an eye of this nature that he was directing at me now. I saw that I had been mistaken in supposing him to be seven feet in height. Eight, at least. Also the slowly working jaw muscles.

I hoped he was not going to say "Ha!" but he did. And that concluded the dialogue sequence for the moment. Then, still keeping his eyes glued on me, he shouted: "Sir Atkyn!" There was a distant sound of Eh-yes-here-I-am-what-is-it-ing. "Come here, please. I have something to show you." Old Bassett appeared in the window, adjusting his pince-nez.

"Look!" said Spode. "Would you have thought such a thing possible?"

Old Bassett was goggling at me with a sort of stunned amazement.

"Good God! It's the bag-snatcher!"

"Yes. Isn't it incredible?"

"It's unbelievable. Why, damn it, I's persecution. Fellow follows me everywhere. Never a free moment. How did you catch him?"

"I was walking along the drive, and I saw a furtive figure slink in at the window. I hurried up, and covered him with my gun. Just in time. He had already begun to loot the place."

"Well, I'm most obliged to you, Roderick. But what I can't understand is the chap's pertinacity. But no. Well, he will be sorry he did."

"I suppose this is too serious a case for you to deal with summarily?"

"I can issue a warrant for his arrest. Bring him along to the library, and I'll do it now. The case will have to go to the Assizes."

"What will he get, how do you think?"

"Not easy to say. But certainly not less than—"

"Hoy!" I said. I had intended to speak in a quiet, reasonable voice—to explain that I was on these premises as an invited guest, but for some reason the word came out like a thunder. Spode said: "Don't shout like that! "

"Nearly broke my ear-drum," grumbled old Bassett.

"But listen!" I yelled. "Will you listen!"

A certain amount of confused argument then ensued, and in the middle of it all, the door opened and somebody said "Goodness gracious!"

I looked round. Those parted lips... those saucer-like eyes... that slender figure... Madeline Bassett came in. "Goodness gracious!" she repeated. She was definitely the sort of girl who puts her hands over a husband's eyes, as he is crawling in to breakfast with a morning head, and says: "Guess who!"

I once stayed at the residence of a newly married pal of mine, and his bride had had carved in large letters over the fireplace in the drawing room, where it was impossible to miss it, the legend: "Two Lovers Built This Nest." Whether Madeline Bassett, on entering the marital state, would do the same, I could not say, but it seemed most probable. She was looking at us with a sort of pretty, wide-eyed wonder. "What is all the noise about?" she said. "Why, Bertie! When did you get here?"

"Oh, hallo. I've just arrived."

"Did you have a nice journey?"

"Oh, rather, thanks."

"You must be quite exhausted."

"Oh, no, thanks, rather not."

"Well, tea will be ready soon. I see you've met Daddy."

"And Mr. Spode."

“And Mr. Spode. I don’t know where Augustus is, but he’s sure to be in to tea.”

Old Bassett had been listening to these courtesies with a dazed expression on the face. To him, Bertram was a creature of the underworld who stole bags and umbrellas and, what made it worse, didn’t even steal them well.

“You don’t mean you know this man?” he said. Madeline Bassett laughed the tinkling, silvery laugh.

“Why, Daddy, you’re too absurd. Of course I know him. Bertie Wooster is an old, old, a very dear old friend of mine. I told you he was coming here today.”

“This isn’t your friend Mr. Wooster?”

“Of course.”

“But he snatches bags.”

“Umbrellas,” prompted Spode.

“And umbrellas,” assented old Bassett. “And makes daylight raids on antique shops.”

“Daddy!” said Madeline

“He does, I tell you. I’ve caught him at it,” Old Bassett said

“I’ve caught him at it,” said Spode.

“We’ve both caught him at it,” said old Bassett. “All over London. Wherever you go in London, there you will find this fellow stealing bags and umbrellas. And now in the heart of Gloucestershire<sup>58</sup>.”

“Nonsense!” said Madeline. I saw that it was time to put an end to all this rot.

“Of course it’s nonsense,” I thundered. “The whole thing is one of those laughable misunderstandings.”

I must say I was expecting that my explanation would have gone better than it did. But old Bassett, like so many of these police court magistrates, was a difficult man to convince. He kept interrupting and asking questions, and looking at me as he asked them. You know what I mean—questions beginning with “Just one moment—” and “You say—” and “Then you are asking us to believe—” Offensive, very.

However, I managed to get him straight on the umbrella, and he conceded that he might have judged me unjustly about that.

“But how about the bags?”

“There weren’t any bags.”

“I certainly sentenced you for something at **Bosher Street**<sup>59</sup>. I remember it vividly”

“I pinched a policeman’s helmet.”

“That’s just as bad as snatching bags.”

Roderick Spode intervened unexpectedly. He had been standing by, thoughtfully listening to my statements.

“No,” he said, “I don’t think you can go so far as that. When I was at Oxford, I once stole a policeman’s helmet myself.”

I was astounded. It just showed, as I often say, that there is good in the worst of us. But old Bassett said,

“Well, how about that affair at the antique shop? Hey? Didn’t we catch him in the act of running off with my cow-cream? What has he got to say to that?”

Spode nodded.

“The bloke at the shop had given it to me to look at,” I said shortly. “He advised me to take it outside, where the light was better.”

“You were rushing out.”

“I trod on the cat.”

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<sup>58</sup> Gloucestershire – Глостершир

<sup>59</sup> Bosher Street – Бошер-стрит

“What cat?”

“It lives there, I suppose.”

“Hm! I saw no cat. Did you see a cat, Roderick?”

“No, no cat.”

“Ha! But what were you doing with that cow-creamer? You say you were looking at it. You are asking us to believe that you were merely looking at it. Why? What was your motive? What possible interest could it have for a man like you?”

“Exactly,” said Spode. “The very question I was going to ask myself.”

“You say the proprietor of the shop handed it to you. But I say that you snatched it up and were running away. And now Mr. Spode catches you here, with the thing in your hands. How do you explain that? What’s your answer to that? Hey?”

“Why, Daddy!” said Madeline. “Naturally your silver would be the first thing Bertie would want to look at. Of course, he is interested in it. Bertie is Mr. Travers’s nephew.”

“What!”

“Didn’t you know that? Your uncle has a wonderful collection, hasn’t he, Bertie? I suppose he has often spoken to you of Daddy’s.”

There was a pause. Old Bassett was breathing heavily. I didn’t like the look of him at all. He glanced from me to the cow-creamer, and from the cow-creamer to me, then back from me to the cow-creamer again.

“Oh!” he said. Just that. Nothing more. But it was enough.

“I say,” I said, “could I send a telegram?”

“You can telephone it from the library,” said Madeline. “I’ll take you there.”

She conducted me to the instrument and left me, saying that she would be waiting in the hall when I had finished. I established connection with the post office, and after a brief conversation with what appeared to be the village idiot, telephoned as follows:

*Mrs Travers, 47, **Charles Street**<sup>60</sup>, Berkeley Square, London.*

I paused for a moment, then proceeded thus:

*Deeply regret quite impossible carry out assignment you know what.  
Atmosphere one of keenest suspicion and **any sort of action instantly fatal**<sup>61</sup>. You  
ought to have seen old Bassett’s eye just now on learning of blood relationship of  
myself and Uncle Tom. Sorry and all that, but nothing doing.  
Love. Bertie*

I then went down to the hall to join Madeline Bassett. She was standing by the barometer, which would have been pointing to “Stormy” instead of “Set Fair”. She turned and gazed at me with a tender goggle which sent a thrill of dread creeping down the spine.

“Oh, Bertie,” she said, in a low voice like beer trickling out of a jug, “you ought not to be here!”

My recent interview with old Bassett and Roderick Spode had rather set me thinking along those lines myself. But I hadn’t time to explain that this was no idle social visit, and that if Gussie hadn’t been sending out SOSs I wouldn’t have dreamed of coming here. She went on, looking at me as if I were a rabbit which she was expecting shortly to turn into a gnome.

“Why did you come? Oh, I know what you are going to say. You felt that you had to see me again, just once. You could not resist the urge to take away with you one last memory, which you could cherish down the lonely years. Oh, Bertie, you remind me of **Rudel**<sup>62</sup>.”

The name was new to me. “Rudel?”

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<sup>60</sup> **Charles Street** – Чарлз-стрит

<sup>61</sup> **any sort of action instantly fatal** – любая попытка заранее обречена на провал

<sup>62</sup> **Rudel** – Жофре Рюдель (один из первых провансальских трубадуров XII в.)

“The Seigneur Geoffrey Rudel, Prince of **Blay-en-Saintonge**<sup>63</sup>.”

I shook my head. “Never met him, I’m afraid. Pal of yours?”

“He lived in the Middle Ages. He was a great poet. And he fell in love with the wife of the Lord of **Tripoli**<sup>64</sup>.”

I stirred uneasily.

“For years he loved her, and at last he could resist no longer. He took ship to Tripoli, and his servants carried him ashore. ”

“Not feeling so good?” I said. “**Rough crossing**?<sup>65</sup>”

“He was dying. Of love.”

“Oh, ah.”

“They bore him into the **Lady Melisande**’s<sup>66</sup> presence on a litter, and he had just strength enough to reach out and touch her hand. Then he died.”

She paused, and heaved a sigh. A silence ensued.

“Terrific,” I said, feeling I had to say something. She sighed again.

“You see now why I said you reminded me of Rudel. Like him, you came to take one last glimpse of the woman you loved. It was dear of you, Bertie, and I shall never forget it. It will always remain with me as a fragrant memory, like a flower pressed between the leaves of an old album. But was it wise? Should you not have been strong? Would it not have been better to have ended it all cleanly, that day when we said goodbye at Brinkley Court, and not to have reopened the wound? We had met, and you have loved me, and I had had to tell you that my heart was another’s. That should have been our farewell.”

“Absolutely,” I said. I mean to say, all that was perfectly clear, as far as it went. If her heart really was another’s, fine. Nobody more pleased than Bertram. “But I had a communication from Gussie, more or less indicating that you and he were...”

She looked at me like someone who has just solved the crossword puzzle.

“So that was why you came! You thought that there might still be hope? Oh, Bertie, I’m sorry... sorry... so sorry.”

Her eyes were about the size of soup plates.

“No, Bertie, really there is no hope, none. You must not build dream castles. It can only cause you pain. I love Augustus. He is my man.”

“And you haven’t quarreled?”

“Of course not.”

“Then what did he mean by saying ‘Serious rift Madeline and self’?”

“Oh, that?” She laughed another tinkling, silvery one. “That was nothing. It was all too perfectly silly and ridiculous. Just the little misunderstanding. I thought I had found him flirting with my cousin Stephanie, and I was silly and jealous. But he explained everything this morning. He was only taking a fly out of her eye.”

“So everything’s all right, is it?”

“Everything. I have never loved Augustus more than I do now.”

“Haven’t you?”

“Each moment I am with him, his wonderful nature seems to open before me like some lovely flower.”

“Does it?”

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<sup>63</sup> **Blay-en-Saintonge** – Бле-ан-Сентонж

<sup>64</sup> **Tripoli** – Триполи

<sup>65</sup> **Rough crossing?** – На море штормило?

<sup>66</sup> **Melisande** – Мелисанда

“Every day I find myself discovering some new facet of his extraordinary character. For instance... you have seen him quite lately, have you not?”

“Oh, rather. I gave him a dinner only the night before last.”

“I wonder if you noticed any difference in him?”

I threw my mind back to the binge. As far as I could recollect, Gussie had been the same freak I had always known.

“Difference? No, I don’t think so. Of course, at that dinner I hadn’t the chance to observe him very closely—subject his character to the final analysis, if you know what I mean. He sat next to me, and we talked of this and that, but you know how it is when you’re a host—you have all sorts of things to divert your attention, keeping an eye on the waiters, trying to make the conversation general... a hundred little duties. But he seemed to me much the same. What sort of difference?”

“An improvement, if such a thing were possible. Have you not sometimes felt in the past, Bertie, that, if Augustus had a fault, it was a tendency to be a little timid?”

I saw what she meant.

“Oh, ah, yes, of course, definitely.” I remembered something Jeeves had once called Gussie. “A sensitive plant, eh?”

“Exactly. You know **Shelley**<sup>67</sup>, Bertie.”

“Oh, am I?”

“That is what I have always thought him—a sensitive plant, hardly fit for the rough and tumble of life. But recently—in this last week, in fact—he has shown, together with that wonderful dreamy sweetness of his, a force of character which I had not suspected that he possessed. He seems completely to have lost his diffidence.”

“By Lord, yes,” I said, remembering. “That’s right. Do you know, he actually made a speech at that dinner of mine, and a most admirable one.”

“Why, only this morning,” she said, “he spoke to Roderick Spode quite sharply.”

“He did?”

“Yes. They were arguing about something, and Augustus told him to go and stop talking nonsense.”

“Well, well!” I said. Naturally, I didn’t believe it for a moment. That wasn’t possible.

I saw what had happened, of course. She was trying to make her boyfriend stronger and braver, like all girls. I’ve noticed the same thing in young wives. Women never know when to stop on these occasions.

I remembered Mrs Bingo Little once telling me, shortly after their marriage, that Bingo said poetic things to her about sunsets—his best friends being perfectly well aware, of course, that the old man never noticed a sunset in his life and that, if he did by a chance, the only thing he would say about it would be that it reminded him of a slice of roast beef, cooked just right. However, you can’t call a girl a liar; so I said: “Well, well!”

“It was the one thing that was needed to make him perfect. Sometimes, Bertie, I ask myself if I am worthy of so rare a soul.”

“Oh, of course you are,” I said heartily.

“It’s sweet of you to say so.”

“Not a bit. You two fit like pork and beans. Anyone could see that it was a what-do-you-call-it... ideal union. I’ve known Gussie since we were kids together, and when I met you, I said: ‘That’s the girl for him!’ When is the wedding to be?”

“On the twenty-third.”

“I’d make it earlier.”

“You think so?”

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<sup>67</sup> **Shelley** – Перси Биши Шелли, английский поэт

“Definitely. Get it over and done with. You can’t be married too soon to a chap like Gussie. Great chap. Splendid chap. Never met a chap I respected more. Gussie. One of the best.”

She reached out and grabbed my hand and pressed it. Unpleasant, of course, but what to do. “Ah, Bertie! Always the soul of generosity!”

“No, no, rather not. Just saying what I think.”

“It makes me so happy to feel that... all this... So many men in your position might have become embittered.”

“Silly asses.”

“But you are too fine for that. You can still say these wonderful things about him.”

“Oh, rather.”

“Dear Bertie!”

And on this cheery note we parted. I headed for the drawing room and got a cup of tea. She did not take tea, being on a diet. And I had reached the drawing room, and was about to open the door, when from the other side there came a voice. And what it was saying was: “So **do not talk rot**<sup>68</sup>, Spode!”

There was no possibility of mistake as to whose voice it was. Nor was there any possibility of mistake about what he had said. The words were precisely as I have stated, and to say that I was surprised would be to put it too weakly. I saw now that it was possible that there might be something, after all, in that wild story of Madeline Bassett’s. I mean to say, an Augustus Fink-Nottle who told Roderick Spode not to talk rot was an Augustus Fink-Nottle who might have told him to go and stop talking nonsense. I entered the room, marvelling. Sir Watkyn Bassett, Roderick Spode and Gussie were present. Gussie sighted me as I entered, and waved what seemed to me a patronizing hand.

“Ah, Bertie. So here you are.”

“Yes.”

“Come in, come in and have a drink.”

“Thanks.”

“Did you bring that book I asked you to?”

“Awfully sorry. I forgot.”

“Well, of all the asses that ever lived, you certainly are the worst.”

And he called for another potted-meat sandwich. All sense of **bien-être**<sup>69</sup> was destroyed by Gussie’s peculiar manner—he looked as if he had bought the place. It was a relief when the gang had finally drifted away, leaving us alone. There were mysteries here which I wanted to probe.

I thought it best, however, to begin by taking a second opinion on the position of affairs between himself and Madeline.

“I saw Madeline just now,” I said. “She tells me that you are sweethearts still. Correct?”

“Quite correct. There was a little temporary coolness about my taking a fly out of Stephanie Byng’s eye, and I got a bit panicked and wired you to come down. However, no need for that now. I was strong, and everything is all right. Still, stay a day or two, of course, as you’re here.”

“Thanks.”

“No doubt you will be glad to see your aunt. She arrives tonight, I understand.”

“You aren’t talking about my Aunt Dahlia?”

“Of course I’m talking about your Aunt Dahlia.”

“You mean Aunt Dahlia is coming here tonight?”

“Exactly.”

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<sup>68</sup> **do not talk rot** – не мелите чушь

<sup>69</sup> **bien-être** – благополучие (франц.)

This was nasty news. This sudden decision to follow me to Tottleigh Towers could mean only one thing: that Aunt Dahlia had become mistrustful of my will to win, and had felt it best to come and stand over me and see that I did not shirk the appointed task.

"Tell me," continued Gussie, "what sort of voice is she in these days? I ask, because if she is going to make those hunting noises of hers at me during her visit, I shall be compelled to **tick her off**<sup>70</sup> pretty sharply. I had enough of that sort of thing when I was staying at Brinkley."

"What's happened to you, Gussie?" I asked.

"Eh?"

"Since when have you been like this?"

"I don't understand you."

"Well, you are saying you're going to tick Aunt Dahlia off. And you are telling Spode not to talk rot. By the way, what was he talking rot about?"

"I forgot. He talks so much rot."

"I wouldn't have the nerve to tell Spode not to talk rot," I said frankly.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Bertie," said Gussie, "neither would I, a week ago."

"What happened a week ago?"

"I had a spiritual rebirth. Thanks to Jeeves. There's a chap, Bertie!"

"Ah!"

"We are as little children, frightened of the dark, and Jeeves is the wise nurse who takes us by the hand and—"

"Switches the light on?"

"Precisely. Would you care to hear about it?"

"Of course."

I settled myself in my chair. Gussie stood silent for a moment. He took off his spectacles and polished them.

"A week ago, Bertie," he began, "my affairs had reached a crisis. I discovered that I would have to make a speech at the wedding breakfast."

"Well, naturally."

"I know, but for some reason I had not foreseen it, and the news came as a blow. And shall I tell you why I was so overcome by stark horror at the idea of making a speech at the wedding breakfast? It was because Roderick Spode and Sir Watkyn Bassett would be in the audience. Do you know Sir Watkyn intimately?"

"Not very. He once fined me five quid at his police court."

"Well, he is a hard nut, and he strongly objects to having me as a son-in-law. He would have liked Madeline to marry Spode—who, I may mention, has loved her since she was a baby."

"Oh, yes?" I said, courteously concealing my astonishment that anyone except a boob like himself could love this girl.

"Yes. But apart from the fact that she wanted to marry me, he didn't want to marry her. He looks upon himself as **a Man of Destiny**<sup>71</sup>, you see, and feels that marriage would interfere with his mission."

"What do you mean, his mission? Is he someone special?"

"Don't you ever read the papers? Roderick Spode is the founder and head of the Saviours of Britain, a Fascist organization better known as the Black Shorts. His general idea is to make himself a Dictator."

"Well, what! A Dictator! I'm dashed! I thought he was something of that sort. That chin... Those eyes... And that moustache. By the way, when you say 'shorts', you mean 'shirts', of course."

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<sup>70</sup> to tick her off – поставить её на место

<sup>71</sup> **Man of Destiny** – избранник судьбы

“No. By the time Spode formed his association, there were no shirts left. He and his adherents wear black shorts.”

“How perfectly foul.”

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