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I gave him one of my looks.

"Jeeves," I said, "I had scarcely expected this of you. You are aware that I was up to an advanced hour last night. You know that I have barely had my tea. You cannot be ignorant of the effect of that hearty voice of Aunt Dahlia's on a man with a headache. And yet you come bringing me Fink-Nottles. Is this a time for Fink or any other kind of Nottle?"

"But did you not give me to understand, sir, that you wished to see Mr. Fink-Nottle to advise him on his affairs?"

This, I admit, opened up a new line of thought. In the stress of my emotions, I had clean forgotten about having taken Gussie's interests in hand. It altered things. One can't give the raspberry to a client. I mean, you didn't find Sherlock Holmes refusing to see clients just because he had been out late the night before at Doctor Watson's birthday party. I could have wished that the man had selected some more suitable hour for approaching me, but as he appeared to be a sort of human lark, leaving his watery nest at daybreak, I supposed I had better give him an audience.

"True," I said. "All right. Bung him in."

"Very good, sir."

"But before doing so, bring me one of those pick-me-ups of yours."

"Very good, sir."

And presently he returned with the vital essence.

I have had occasion, I fancy, to speak before now of these pick-me-ups of Jeeves's and their effect on a fellow who is hanging to life by a thread on the morning after. What they consist of, I couldn't tell you. He says some kind of sauce, the yolk of a raw egg and a dash of red pepper, but nothing will convince me that the thing doesn't go much deeper than that. Be that as it may, however, the results of swallowing one are amazing.

For perhaps the split part of a second nothing happens. It is as though all Nature waited breathless. Then, suddenly, it is as if the Last Trump had sounded and Judgment Day set in with unusual severity.

Bonfires burst out all in parts of the frame. The abdomen becomes heavily charged with molten lava. A great wind seems to blow through the world, and the subject is aware of something resembling a steam hammer striking the back of the head. During this phase, the ears ring loudly, the eyeballs rotate and there is a tingling about the brow.

And then, just as you are feeling that you ought to ring up your lawyer and see that your affairs are in order before it is too late, the whole situation seems to clarify. The wind drops. The ears cease to ring. Birds twitter. Brass bands start playing. The sun comes up over the horizon with a jerk.

And a moment later all you are conscious of is a great peace.

As I drained the glass now, new life seemed to burgeon within me. I remember Jeeves, who, however much he may go off the rails at times in the matter of dress clothes and in his advice to those in love, has always had a neat turn of phrase, once speaking of someone rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things. It was that way with me now. I felt that the Bertram Wooster who lay propped up against the pillows had become a better, stronger, finer Bertram.

"Thank you, Jeeves," I said.

"Not at all, sir."

"That touched the exact spot. I am now able to cope with life's problems."

"I am gratified to hear it, sir."

"What madness not to have had one of those before tackling Aunt Dahlia! However, too late to worry about that now. Tell me of Gussie. How did he make out at the fancy-dress ball?"

"He did not arrive at the fancy-dress ball, sir."

I looked at him a bit austerely.

"Jeeves," I said, "I admit that after that pick-me-up of yours I feel better, but don't try me too high. Don't stand by my sick bed talking absolute rot. We shot Gussie into a cab and he started forth, headed for wherever this fancy-dress ball was. He must have arrived."

"No, sir. As I gather from Mr. Fink-Nottle, he entered the cab convinced in his mind that the entertainment to which he had been invited was to be held at No. 17, Suffolk Square, whereas the actual rendezvous was No. 71, Norfolk Terrace. These aberrations of memory are not uncommon with those who, like Mr. Fink-Nottle, belong essentially to what one might call the dreamer-type."

"One might also call it the fatheaded type."

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"On reaching No. 17, Suffolk Square, Mr. Fink-Nottle endeavoured to produce money to pay the fare."

"What stopped him?"

"The fact that he had no money, sir. He discovered that he had left it, together with his ticket of invitation, on the mantelpiece of his bedchamber in the house of his uncle, where he was residing. Bidding the cabman to wait, accordingly, he rang the door-bell, and when the butler appeared, requested him to pay the cab, adding that it was all right, as he was one of the guests invited to the dance. The butler then disclaimed all knowledge of a dance on the premises."

"And declined to unbelt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Upon which——"

"Mr. Fink-Nottle directed the cabman to drive him back to his uncle's residence."

"Well, why wasn't that the happy ending? All he had to do was go in, collect cash and ticket, and there he would have been, on velvet."

"I should have mentioned, sir, that Mr. Fink-Nottle had also left his latchkey on the mantelpiece of his bedchamber."

"He could have rung the bell."

"He did ring the bell, sir, for some fifteen minutes. At the expiration of that period he recalled that he had given permission to the caretaker—the house was officially closed and all the staff on holiday—to visit his sailor son at Portsmouth."

"Golly, Jeeves!"

"Yes, sir."

"These dreamer types do live, don't they?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened then?"

"Mr. Fink-Nottle appears to have realized at this point that his position as regards the cabman had become equivocal. The figures on the clock had already reached a substantial sum, and he was not in a position to meet his obligations."

"He could have explained."

"You cannot explain to cabmen, sir. On endeavouring to do so, he found the fellow sceptical of his bona fides."

"I should have legged it."

"That is the policy which appears to have commended itself to Mr. Fink-Nottle. He darted rapidly away, and the cabman, endeavouring to detain him, snatched at his overcoat. Mr. Fink-Nottle contrived to extricate himself from the coat, and it would seem that his appearance in the masquerade costume beneath it came as something of a shock to the cabman. Mr. Fink-Nottle informs me that he heard a species of whistling gasp, and, looking round, observed the man crouching against the railings with his hands over his face. Mr. Fink-Nottle thinks he was praying. No doubt an uneducated, superstitious fellow, sir. Possibly a drinker."

"Well, if he hadn't been one before, I'll bet he started being one shortly afterwards. I expect he could scarcely wait for the pubs to open."

"Very possibly, in the circumstances he might have found a restorative agreeable, sir."

"And so, in the circumstances, might Gussie too, I should think. What on earth did he do after that? London late at night—or even in the daytime, for that matter—is no place for a man in scarlet tights."

"No, sir."

"He invites comment."

"Yes, sir."

"I can see the poor old bird ducking down side-streets, skulking in alley-ways, diving into dust-bins."

"I gathered from Mr. Fink-Nottle's remarks, sir, that something very much on those lines was what occurred. Eventually, after a trying night, he found his way to Mr. Sipperley's residence, where he was able to secure lodging and a change of costume in the morning."

I nestled against the pillows, the brow a bit drawn. It is all very well to try to do old school friends a spot of good, but I could not but feel that in espousing the cause of a lunkhead capable of mucking things up as Gussie had done, I had taken on a contract almost too big for human consumption. It seemed to me that what Gussie needed was not so much the advice of a seasoned man of the world as a padded cell in Colney Hatch and a couple of good keepers to see that he did not set the place on fire.



Indeed, for an instant I had half a mind to withdraw from the case and hand it back to Jeeves. But the pride of the Woosters restrained me. When we Woosters put our hands to the plough, we do not readily sheathe the sword. Besides, after that business of the mess-jacket, anything resembling weakness would have been fatal.

"I suppose you realize, Jeeves," I said, for though one dislikes to rub it in, these things have to be pointed out, "that all this was your fault?"

"Sir?"

"It's no good saying 'Sir?' You know it was. If you had not insisted on his going to that dance—a mad project, as I spotted from the first—this would not have happened."

"Yes, sir, but I confess I did not anticipate——"

"Always anticipate everything, Jeeves," I said, a little sternly. "It is the only way. Even if you had allowed him to wear a Pierrot costume, things would not have panned out as they did. A Pierrot costume has pockets. However," I went on more kindly, "we need not go into that now. If all this has shown you what comes of going about the place in scarlet tights, that is something gained. Gussie waits without, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then shoot him in, and I will see what I can do for him."

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