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Gussie, on arrival, proved to be still showing traces of his grim experience. The face was pale, the eyes gooseberry-like, the ears drooping, and the whole aspect that of a man who has passed through the furnace and been caught in the machinery. I hitched myself up a bit higher on the pillows and gazed at him narrowly. It was a moment, I could see, when first aid was required, and I prepared to get down to cases.

"Well, Gussie."

"Hullo, Bertie."

"What ho."

"What ho."

These civilities concluded, I felt that the moment had come to touch delicately on the past.

"I hear you've been through it a bit."

"Yes."

"Thanks to Jeeves."

"It wasn't Jeeves's fault."

"Entirely Jeeves's fault."

"I don't see that. I forgot my money and latchkey——"

"And now you'd better forget Jeeves. For you will be interested to hear, Gussie," I said, deeming it best to put him in touch with the position of affairs right away, "that he is no longer handling your little problem."

This seemed to slip it across him properly. The jaws fell, the ears drooped more limply. He had been looking like a dead fish. He now looked like a deader fish, one of last year's, cast up on some lonely beach and left there at the mercy of the wind and tides.

"What!"

"Yes."

"You don't mean that Jeeves isn't going to——"

"No."

"But, dash it——"

I was kind, but firm.

"You will be much better off without him. Surely your terrible experiences of that awful night have told you that Jeeves needs a rest. The keenest of thinkers strikes a bad patch occasionally. That is what has happened to Jeeves. I have seen it coming on for some time. He has lost his form. He wants his plugs decarbonized. No doubt this is a shock to you. I suppose you came here this morning to seek his advice?"

"Of course I did."

"On what point?"

"Madeline Bassett has gone to stay with these people in the country, and I want to know what he thinks I ought to do."

"Well, as I say, Jeeves is off the case."

"But, Bertie, dash it——"

"Jeeves," I said with a certain asperity, "is no longer on the case. I am now in sole charge."

"But what on earth can you do?"

I curbed my resentment. We Woosters are fair-minded. We can make allowances for men who have been parading London all night in scarlet tights.

"That," I said quietly, "we shall see. Sit down and let us confer. I am bound to say the thing seems quite simple to me. You say this girl has gone to visit friends in the country. It would appear obvious that you must go there too, and flock round her like a poultice. Elementary."

"But I can't plant myself on a lot of perfect strangers."

"Don't you know these people?"

"Of course I don't. I don't know anybody."

I pursed the lips. This did seem to complicate matters somewhat.

"All that I know is that their name is Travers, and it's a place called Brinkley Court down in Worcestershire."

I unpursed my lips.

"Gussie," I said, smiling paternally, "it was a lucky day for you when Bertram Wooster interested himself in your affairs. As I foresaw from the start, I can fix everything. This afternoon you shall go to Brinkley Court, an honoured guest."

He quivered like a mousse. I suppose it must always be rather a thrilling experience for the novice to watch me taking hold.

"But, Bertie, you don't mean you know these Traverses?"

"They are my Aunt Dahlia."

"My gosh!"

"You see now," I pointed out, "how lucky you were to get me behind you. You go to Jeeves, and what does he do? He dresses you up in scarlet tights and one of the foulest false beards of my experience, and sends you off to fancy-dress balls. Result, agony of spirit and no progress. I then take over and put you on the right lines. Could Jeeves have got you into Brinkley Court? Not a chance. Aunt Dahlia isn't his aunt. I merely mention these things."

"By Jove, Bertie, I don't know how to thank you."

"My dear chap!"

"But, I say."

"Now what?"

"What do I do when I get there?"

"If you knew Brinkley Court, you would not ask that question. In those romantic surroundings you can't miss. Great lovers through the ages have fixed up the preliminary formalities at Brinkley. The place is simply ill with atmosphere. You will stroll with the girl in the shady walks. You will sit with her on the shady lawns. You will row on the lake with her. And gradually you will find yourself working up to a point where——"

"By Jove, I believe you're right."

"Of course, I'm right. I've got engaged three times at Brinkley. No business resulted, but the fact remains. And I went there without the foggiest idea of indulging in the tender pash. I hadn't the slightest intention of proposing to anybody. Yet no sooner had I entered those romantic grounds than I found myself reaching out for the nearest girl in sight and slapping my soul down in front of her. It's something in the air."

"I see exactly what you mean. That's just what I want to be able to do—work up to it. And in London—curse the place—everything's in such a rush that you don't get a chance."

"Quite. You see a girl alone for about five minutes a day, and if you want to ask her to be your wife, you've got to charge into it as if you were trying to grab the gold ring on a merry-go-round."

"That's right. London rattles one. I shall be a different man altogether in the country. What a bit of luck this Travers woman turning out to be your aunt."

"I don't know what you mean, turning out to be my aunt. She has been my aunt all along."

"I mean, how extraordinary that it should be your aunt that Madeline's going to stay with."

"Not at all. She and my Cousin Angela are close friends. At Cannes she was with us all the time."

"Oh, you met Madeline at Cannes, did you? By Jove, Bertie," said the poor lizard devoutly, "I wish I could have seen her at Cannes. How wonderful she must have looked in beach pyjamas! Oh, Bertie——"

"Quite," I said, a little distantly. Even when restored by one of Jeeves's depth bombs, one doesn't want this sort of thing after a hard night. I touched the bell and, when Jeeves appeared, requested him to bring me telegraph form and pencil. I then wrote a well-worded communication to Aunt Dahlia, informing her that I was sending my friend, Augustus Fink-Nottle, down to Brinkley today to enjoy her hospitality, and handed it to Gussie.

"Push that in at the first post office you pass," I said. "She will find it waiting for her on her return."

Gussie popped along, flapping the telegram and looking like a close-up of Joan Crawford, and I turned to Jeeves and gave him a précis of my operations.

"Simple, you observe, Jeeves. Nothing elaborate."

"No, sir."

"Nothing far-fetched. Nothing strained or bizarre. Just Nature's remedy."

"Yes, sir."

"This is the attack as it should have been delivered. What do you call it when two people of opposite sexes are bunged together in close association in a secluded spot, meeting each other every day and seeing a lot of each other?"



"Is 'propinquity' the word you wish, sir?"

"It is. I stake everything on propinquity, Jeeves. Propinquity, in my opinion, is what will do the trick. At the moment, as you are aware, Gussie is a mere jelly when in the presence. But ask yourself how he will feel in a week or so, after he and she have been helping themselves to sausages out of the same dish day after day at the breakfast sideboard. Cutting the same ham, ladling out communal kidneys and bacon—why——"

I broke off abruptly. I had had one of my ideas.

"Golly, Jeeves!"

"Sir?"

"Here's an instance of how you have to think of everything. You heard me mention sausages, kidneys and bacon and ham."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there must be nothing of that. Fatal. The wrong note entirely. Give me that telegraph form and pencil. I must warn Gussie without delay. What he's got to do

is to create in this girl's mind the impression that he is pining away for love of her. This cannot be done by wolfing sausages."

"No, sir."

"Very well, then."

And, taking form and p., I drafted the following:

Fink-Nottle

Brinkley Court,

Market Snodsbury

Worcestershire

Lay off the sausages. Avoid the ham. Bertie.

"Send that off, Jeeves, instanter."

"Very good, sir."

I sank back on the pillows.

"Well, Jeeves," I said, "you see how I am taking hold. You notice the grip I am getting on this case. No doubt you realize now that it would pay you to study my methods."

"No doubt, sir."

"And even now you aren't on to the full depths of the extraordinary sagacity I've shown. Do you know what brought Aunt Dahlia up here this morning? She came to tell me I'd got to distribute the prizes at some beastly seminary she's a governor of down at Market Snodsbury."

"Indeed, sir? I fear you will scarcely find that a congenial task."

"Ah, but I'm not going to do it. I'm going to shove it off on to Gussie."

"Sir?"

"I propose, Jeeves, to wire to Aunt Dahlia saying that I can't get down, and suggesting that she unleashes him on these young Borstal inmates of hers in my stead."

"But if Mr. Fink-Nottle should decline, sir?"

"Decline? Can you see him declining? Just conjure up the picture in your mind, Jeeves. Scene, the drawing-room at Brinkley; Gussie wedged into a corner, with Aunt Dahlia standing over him making hunting noises. I put it to you, Jeeves, can you see him declining?"

"Not readily, sir. I agree. Mrs. Travers is a forceful personality."

"He won't have a hope of declining. His only way out would be to slide off. And he can't slide off, because he wants to be with Miss Bassett. No, Gussie will have to toe the line, and I shall be saved from a job at which I confess the soul shuddered. Getting up on a platform and delivering a short, manly speech to a lot of foul school-kids! Golly, Jeeves. I've been through that sort of thing once, what? You remember that time at the girls' school?"

"Very vividly, sir."

"What an ass I made of myself!"

"Certainly I have seen you to better advantage, sir."

"I think you might bring me just one more of those dynamite specials of yours, Jeeves. This narrow squeak has made me come over all faint."

I suppose it must have taken Aunt Dahlia three hours or so to get back to Brinkley, because it wasn't till well after lunch that her telegram arrived. It read like a telegram that had been dispatched in a white-hot surge of emotion some two minutes after she had read mine.

As follows:

Am taking legal advice to ascertain whether strangling an idiot nephew counts as murder. If it doesn't look out for yourself. Consider your conduct frozen limit. What do you mean by planting your loathsome friends on me like this? Do you think Brinkley Court is a leper colony or what is it? Who is this Spink-Bottle? Love. Travers.

I had expected some such initial reaction. I replied in temperate vein:

Not Bottle. Nottle. Regards. Bertie.

Almost immediately after she had dispatched the above heart cry, Gussie must have arrived, for it wasn't twenty minutes later when I received the following:

Cipher telegram signed by you has reached me here. Runs "Lay off the sausages. Avoid the ham." Wire key immediately. Fink-Nottle.

I replied:

Also kidneys. Cheerio. Bertie.

I had staked all on Gussie making a favourable impression on his hostess, basing my confidence on the fact that he was one of those timid, obsequious, teacup-passing, thin-bread-and-butter-offering yes-men whom women of my Aunt Dahlia's type nearly always like at first sight. That I had not overrated my acumen was proved by her next in order, which, I was pleased to note, assayed a markedly larger percentage of the milk of human kindness.

As follows:

Well, this friend of yours has got here, and I must say that for a friend of yours he seems less sub-human than I had expected. A bit of a pop-eyed bleater, but on the whole clean and civil, and certainly most informative about newts. Am considering arranging series of lectures for him in neighbourhood. All the same I like your nerve using my house as a summer-hotel resort and shall have much to say to you on subject when you come down. Expect you thirtieth. Bring spats. Love. Travers.

To this I riposted:

On consulting engagement book find impossible come Brinkley Court. Deeply regret. Toodle-oo. Bertie.

Hers in reply stuck a sinister note:

Oh, so it's like that, is it? You and your engagement book, indeed. Deeply regret my foot. Let me tell you, my lad, that you will regret it a jolly sight more deeply if you don't come down. If you imagine for one moment that you are going to get out of distributing those prizes, you are very much mistaken. Deeply regret Brinkley Court hundred miles from London, as unable hit you with a brick. Love. Travers.

I then put my fortune to the test, to win or lose it all. It was not a moment for petty economies. I let myself go regardless of expense:

No, but dash it, listen. Honestly, you don't want me. Get Fink-Nottle distribute prizes. A born distributor, who will do you credit. Confidently anticipate Augustus Fink-Nottle as Master of Revels on thirty-first inst. would make genuine sensation. Do not miss this great chance, which may never occur again. Tinkerty-tonk. Bertie.

There was an hour of breathless suspense, and then the joyful tidings arrived:

Well, all right. Something in what you say, I suppose. Consider you treacherous worm and contemptible, spineless cowardly custard, but have booked Spink-Bottle. Stay where you are, then, and I hope you get run over by an omnibus. Love. Travers.

The relief, as you may well imagine, was stupendous. A great weight seemed to have rolled off my mind. It was as if somebody had been pouring Jeeves's pick-me-ups into me through a funnel. I sang as I dressed for dinner that night. At the Drones I was so gay and cheery that there were several complaints. And when I got home and turned into the old bed, I fell asleep like a little child within five minutes of inserting the person between the sheets. It seemed to me that the whole distressing affair might now be considered definitely closed.

Conceive my astonishment, therefore, when waking on the morrow and sitting up to dig into the morning tea-cup, I beheld on the tray another telegram.

My heart sank. Could Aunt Dahlia have slept on it and changed her mind? Could Gussie, unable to face the ordeal confronting him, have legged it during the night down a water-pipe? With these speculations racing through the brain, I tore open the envelope And as I noted contents I uttered a startled yip.

"Sir?" said Jeeves, pausing at the door.

I read the thing again. Yes, I had got the gist all right. No, I had not been deceived in the substance.

"Jeeves," I said, "do you know what?"



"No, sir."

"You know my cousin Angela?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know young Tuppy Glossop?"

"Yes, sir."

"They've broken off their engagement."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir."

"I have here a communication from Aunt Dahlia, specifically stating this. I wonder what the row was about."

"I could not say, sir."

"Of course you couldn't. Don't be an ass, Jeeves."

"No, sir."

I brooded. I was deeply moved.

"Well, this means that we shall have to go down to Brinkley today. Aunt Dahlia is obviously all of a twitter, and my place is by her side. You had better pack this morning, and catch that 12.45 train with the luggage. I have a lunch engagement, so will follow in the car."

"Very good, sir."

I brooded some more.

"I must say this has come as a great shock to me, Jeeves."

"No doubt, sir."

"A very great shock. Angela and Tuppy.... Tut, tut! Why, they seemed like the paper on the wall. Life is full of sadness, Jeeves."

"Yes, sir."

"Still, there it is."

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Right ho, then. Switch on the bath."

"Very good, sir."

