

-12-

I don't know if it has happened you to at all, but a thing I've noticed with myself is that, when I'm confronted by a problem which seems for the moment to stump and baffle, a good sleep will often bring the solution in the morning.

It was so on the present occasion.

The nibs who study these matters claim, I believe, that this has got something to do with the subconscious mind, and very possibly they may be right. I wouldn't have said off-hand that I had a subconscious mind, but I suppose I must without knowing it, and no doubt it was there, sweating away diligently at the old stand, all the while the corporeal Wooster was getting his eight hours.

For directly I opened my eyes on the morrow, I saw daylight. Well, I don't mean that exactly, because naturally I did. What I mean is that I found I had the thing all mapped out. The good old subconscious m. had delivered the goods, and I perceived exactly what steps must be taken in order to put Augustus Fink-Nottle among the practising Romeos.

I should like you, if you can spare me a moment of your valuable time, to throw your mind back to that conversation he and I had had in the garden on the previous evening. Not the glimmering landscape bit, I don't mean that, but the concluding passages of it. Having done so, you will recall that when he informed

me that he never touched alcoholic liquor, I shook the head a bit, feeling that this must inevitably weaken him as a force where proposing to girls was concerned.

And events had shown that my fears were well founded.

Put to the test, with nothing but orange juice inside him, he had proved a complete bust. In a situation calling for words of molten passion of a nature calculated to go through Madeline Bassett like a red-hot gimlet through half a pound of butter, he had said not a syllable that could bring a blush to the cheek of modesty, merely delivering a well-phrased but, in the circumstances, quite misplaced lecture on newts.

A romantic girl is not to be won by such tactics. Obviously, before attempting to proceed further, Augustus Fink-Nottle must be induced to throw off the shackling inhibitions of the past and fuel up. It must be a primed, confident Fink-Nottle who squared up to the Bassett for Round No. 2.

Only so could the Morning Post make its ten bob, or whatever it is, for printing the announcement of the forthcoming nuptials.

Having arrived at this conclusion I found the rest easy, and by the time Jeeves brought me my tea I had evolved a plan complete in every detail. This I was about to place before him—indeed, I had got as far as the preliminary "I say, Jeeves"—when we were interrupted by the arrival of Tuppy.

He came listlessly into the room, and I was pained to observe that a night's rest had effected no improvement in the unhappy wreck's appearance. Indeed, I should have said, if anything, that he was looking rather more moth-eaten than when I had seen him last. If you can visualize a bulldog which has just been kicked in the ribs and had its dinner sneaked by the cat, you will have Hildebrand Glossop as he now stood before me.

"Stap my vitals, Tuppy, old corpse," I said, concerned, "you're looking pretty blue round the rims."

Jeeves slid from the presence in that tactful, eel-like way of his, and I motioned the remains to take a seat.

"What's the matter?" I said.

He came to anchor on the bed, and for awhile sat picking at the coverlet in silence.

"I've been through hell, Bertie."

"Through where?"

"Hell."

"Oh, hell? And what took you there?"

Once more he became silent, staring before him with sombre eyes. Following his gaze, I saw that he was looking at an enlarged photograph of my Uncle Tom in some sort of Masonic uniform which stood on the mantelpiece. I've tried to reason with Aunt Dahlia about this photograph for years, placing before her two alternative suggestions: (a) To burn the beastly thing; or (b) if she must preserve it, to shove me in another room when I come to stay. But she declines to accede. She says it's good for me. A useful discipline, she maintains, teaching me that there is a darker side to life and that we were not put into this world for pleasure only.

"Turn it to the wall, if it hurts you, Tuppy," I said gently.

"Eh?"

"That photograph of Uncle Tom as the bandmaster."

"I didn't come here to talk about photographs. I came for sympathy."

"And you shall have it. What's the trouble? Worrying about Angela, I suppose?"

Well, have no fear. I have another well-laid plan for encompassing that young

shrimp. I'll guarantee that she will be weeping on your neck before yonder sun has set."

He barked sharply.

"A fat chance!"

"Tup, Tushy!"

"Eh?"

"I mean 'Tush, Tuppy.' I tell you I will do it. I was just going to describe this plan of mine to Jeeves when you came in. Care to hear it?"

"I don't want to hear any of your beastly plans. Plans are no good. She's gone and fallen in love with this other bloke, and now hates my gizzard."

"Rot."

"It isn't rot."

"I tell you, Tuppy, as one who can read the female heart, that this Angela loves you still."

"Well, it didn't look much like it in the larder last night."

"Oh, you went to the larder last night?"

"I did."

"And Angela was there?"

"She was. And your aunt. Also your uncle."

I saw that I should require foot-notes. All this was new stuff to me. I had stayed at Brinkley Court quite a lot in my time, but I had no idea the larder was such a social vortex. More like a snack bar on a race-course than anything else, it seemed to have become.

"Tell me the whole story in your own words," I said, "omitting no detail, however apparently slight, for one never knows how important the most trivial detail may be."

He inspected the photograph for a moment with growing gloom.

"All right," he said. "This is what happened. You know my views about that steak-and-kidney pie."

"Quite."

"Well, round about one a.m. I thought the time was ripe. I stole from my room and went downstairs. The pie seemed to beckon me."

I nodded. I knew how pies do.

"I got to the larder. I fished it out. I set it on the table. I found knife and fork. I collected salt, mustard, and pepper. There were some cold potatoes. I added those. And I was about to pitch in when I heard a sound behind me, and there was your aunt at the door. In a blue-and-yellow dressing gown."

"Embarrassing."

"Most."

"I suppose you didn't know where to look."

"I looked at Angela."

"She came in with my aunt?"

"No. With your uncle, a minute or two later. He was wearing mauve pyjamas and carried a pistol. Have you ever seen your uncle in pyjamas and a pistol?"

"Never."

"You haven't missed much."

"Tell me, Tuppy," I asked, for I was anxious to ascertain this, "about Angela. Was there any momentary softening in her gaze as she fixed it on you?"

"She didn't fix it on me. She fixed it on the pie."

"Did she say anything?"

"Not right away. Your uncle was the first to speak. He said to your aunt, 'God bless my soul, Dahlia, what are you doing here?' To which she replied, 'Well, if it comes to that, my merry somnambulist, what are you?' Your uncle then said that he thought there must be burglars in the house, as he had heard noises."

I nodded again. I could follow the trend. Ever since the scullery window was found open the year Shining Light was disqualified in the Cesarewitch for boring, Uncle Tom has had a marked complex about burglars. I can still recall my emotions when, paying my first visit after he had bars put on all the windows and attempting to thrust the head out in order to get a sniff of country air, I nearly fractured my skull on a sort of iron grille, as worn by the tougher kinds of mediaeval prison.



"What sort of noises?' said your aunt. 'Funny noises,' said your uncle.

Whereupon Angela—with a nasty, steely tinkle in her voice, the little buzzard—observed, 'I expect it was Mr. Glossop eating.' And then she did give me a look. It was the sort of wondering, revolted look a very spiritual woman would give a fat man gulping soup in a restaurant. The kind of look that makes a fellow feel he's forty-six round the waist and has great rolls of superfluous flesh pouring down over the back of his collar. And, still speaking in the same unpleasant tone, she added, 'I ought to have told you, father, that Mr. Glossop always likes to have a good meal three or four times during the night. It helps to keep him going till breakfast. He has the most amazing appetite. See, he has practically finished a large steak-and-kidney pie already'."

As he spoke these words, a feverish animation swept over Tuppy. His eyes glittered with a strange light, and he thumped the bed violently with his fist, nearly catching me a juicy one on the leg.

"That was what hurt, Bertie. That was what stung. I hadn't so much as started on that pie. But that's a woman all over."

"The eternal feminine."

"She continued her remarks. 'You've no idea,' she said, 'how Mr. Glossop loves food. He just lives for it. He always eats six or seven meals a day, and then starts

in again after bedtime. I think it's rather wonderful.' Your aunt seemed interested, and said it reminded her of a boa constrictor. Angela said, didn't she mean a python? And then they argued as to which of the two it was. Your uncle, meanwhile, poking about with that damned pistol of his till human life wasn't safe in the vicinity. And the pie lying there on the table, and me unable to touch it. You begin to understand why I said I had been through hell."

"Quite. Can't have been at all pleasant."

"Presently your aunt and Angela settled their discussion, deciding that Angela was right and that it was a python that I reminded them of. And shortly after that we all pushed back to bed, Angela warning me in a motherly voice not to take the stairs too quickly. After seven or eight solid meals, she said, a man of my build ought to be very careful, because of the danger of apoplectic fits. She said it was the same with dogs. When they became very fat and overfed, you had to see that they didn't hurry upstairs, as it made them puff and pant, and that was bad for their hearts. She asked your aunt if she remembered the late spaniel, Ambrose; and your aunt said, 'Poor old Ambrose, you couldn't keep him away from the garbage pail'; and Angela said, 'Exactly, so do please be careful, Mr. Glossop.' And you tell me she loves me still!"

I did my best to encourage.

"Girlish banter, what?"

"Girlish banter be dashed. She's right off me. Once her ideal, I am now less than the dust beneath her chariot wheels. She became infatuated with this chap, whoever he was, at Cannes, and now she can't stand the sight of me."

I raised my eyebrows.

"My dear Tuppy, you are not showing your usual good sense in this Angela-chap-at-Cannes matter. If you will forgive me saying so, you have got an *idée fixe*."

"A what?"

"An *idée fixe*. You know. One of those things fellows get. Like Uncle Tom's delusion that everybody who is known even slightly to the police is lurking in the garden, waiting for a chance to break into the house. You keep talking about this chap at Cannes, and there never was a chap at Cannes, and I'll tell you why I'm so sure about this. During those two months on the Riviera, it so happens that Angela and I were practically inseparable. If there had been somebody nosing round her, I should have spotted it in a second."

He started. I could see that this had impressed him.

"Oh, she was with you all the time at Cannes, was she?"

"I don't suppose she said two words to anybody else, except, of course, idle conv. at the crowded dinner table or a chance remark in a throng at the Casino."

"I see. You mean that anything in the shape of mixed bathing and moonlight strolls she conducted solely in your company?"

"That's right. It was quite a joke in the hotel."

"You must have enjoyed that."

"Oh, rather. I've always been devoted to Angela."

"Oh, yes?"

"When we were kids, she used to call herself my little sweetheart."

"She did?"

"Absolutely."

"I see."

He sat plunged in thought, while I, glad to have set his mind at rest, proceeded with my tea. And presently there came the banging of a gong from the hall below, and he started like a war horse at the sound of the bugle.

"Breakfast!" he said, and was off to a flying start, leaving me to brood and ponder. And the more I brooded and pondered, the more did it seem to me that everything now looked pretty smooth. Tuppy, I could see, despite that painful scene in the larder, still loved Angela with all the old fervour.

This meant that I could rely on that plan to which I had referred to bring home the bacon. And as I had found the way to straighten out the Gussie-Bassett difficulty, there seemed nothing more to worry about.

It was with an uplifted heart that I addressed Jeeves as he came in to remove the tea tray.

-----