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I gave him the eye. The evening had begun to draw in a bit by now and the visibility, in consequence, was not so hot, but there still remained ample light to enable me to see him clearly. And what I saw convinced me that I should be a lot easier in my mind with a stout rustic bench between us. I rose, accordingly, modelling my style on that of a rocketing pheasant, and proceeded to deposit myself on the other side of the object named.

My prompt agility was not without its effect. He seemed somewhat taken aback. He came to a halt, and, for about the space of time required to allow a bead of persp. to trickle from the top of the brow to the tip of the nose, stood gazing at me in silence.

"So!" he said at length, and it came as a complete surprise to me that fellows ever really do say "So!" I had always thought it was just a thing you read in books. Like "Quotha!" I mean to say, or "Odds bodikins!" or even "Eh, ba goom!"

Still, there it was. Quaint or not quaint, bizarre or not bizarre, he had said "So!" and it was up to me to cope with the situation on those lines.

It would have been a duller man than Bertram Wooster who had failed to note that the dear old chap was a bit steamed up. Whether his eyes were actually shooting forth flame, I couldn't tell you, but there appeared to me to be a distinct

incandescence. For the rest, his fists were clenched, his ears quivering, and the muscles of his jaw rotating rhythmically, as if he were making an early supper off something.

His hair was full of twigs, and there was a beetle hanging to the side of his head which would have interested Gussie Fink-Nottle. To this, however, I paid scant attention. There is a time for studying beetles and a time for not studying beetles.

"So!" he said again.

Now, those who know Bertram Wooster best will tell you that he is always at his shrewdest and most level-headed in moments of peril. Who was it who, when gripped by the arm of the law on boat-race night not so many years ago and hauled off to Vine Street police station, assumed in a flash the identity of Eustace H. Plimsoll, of The Laburnums, Alleyn Road, West Dulwich, thus saving the grand old name of Wooster from being dragged in the mire and avoiding wide publicity of the wrong sort? Who was it ...

But I need not labour the point. My record speaks for itself. Three times pinched, but never once sentenced under the correct label. Ask anyone at the Drones about this.

So now, in a situation threatening to become every moment more scaly, I did not lose my head. I preserved the old sang-froid. Smiling a genial and affectionate

smile, and hoping that it wasn't too dark for it to register, I spoke with a jolly cordiality:

"Why, hallo, Tuppy. You here?"

He said, yes, he was here.

"Been here long?"

"I have."

"Fine. I wanted to see you."

"Well, here I am. Come out from behind that bench."

"No, thanks, old man. I like leaning on it. It seems to rest the spine."

"In about two seconds," said Tuppy, "I'm going to kick your spine up through the top of your head."

I raised the eyebrows. Not much good, of course, in that light, but it seemed to help the general composition.

"Is this Hildebrand Glossop speaking?" I said.

He replied that it was, adding that if I wanted to make sure I might move a few feet over in his direction. He also called me an opprobrious name.

I raised the eyebrows again.

"Come, come, Tuppy, don't let us let this little chat become acrid. Is 'acrid' the word I want?"

"I couldn't say," he replied, beginning to sidle round the bench.

I saw that anything I might wish to say must be said quickly. Already he had sidled some six feet. And though, by dint of sidling, too, I had managed to keep the bench between us, who could predict how long this happy state of affairs would last?

I came to the point, therefore.

"I think I know what's on your mind, Tuppy," I said. "If you were in those bushes during my conversation with the recent Angela, I dare say you heard what I was saying about you."

"I did."

"I see. Well, we won't go into the ethics of the thing. Eavesdropping, some people might call it, and I can imagine stern critics drawing in the breath to some extent. Considering it—I don't want to hurt your feelings, Tuppy—but considering it un-English. A bit un-English, Tuppy, old man, you must admit."

"I'm Scotch."

"Really?" I said. "I never knew that before. Rummy how you don't suspect a man of being Scotch unless he's Mac-something and says 'Och, aye' and things like that. I wonder," I went on, feeling that an academic discussion on some neutral topic might ease the tension, "if you can tell me something that has puzzled me a good deal. What exactly is it that they put into haggis? I've often wondered about that."

From the fact that his only response to the question was to leap over the bench and make a grab at me, I gathered that his mind was not on haggis.

"However," I said, leaping over the bench in my turn, "that is a side issue. If, to come back to it, you were in those bushes and heard what I was saying about you——"

He began to move round the bench in a nor'-nor'-easterly direction. I followed his example, setting a course sou'-sou'-west.

"No doubt you were surprised at the way I was talking."

"Not a bit."

"What? Did nothing strike you as odd in the tone of my remarks?"

"It was just the sort of stuff I should have expected a treacherous, sneaking hound like you to say."

"My dear chap," I protested, "this is not your usual form. A bit slow in the uptake, surely? I should have thought you would have spotted right away that it was all part of a well-laid plan."

"I'll get you in a jiffy," said Tuppy, recovering his balance after a swift clutch at my neck. And so probable did this seem that I delayed no longer, but hastened to place all the facts before him.

Speaking rapidly and keeping moving, I related my emotions on receipt of Aunt Dahlia's telegram, my instant rush to the scene of the disaster, my meditations in the car, and the eventual framing of this well-laid plan of mine. I spoke clearly and well, and it was with considerable concern, consequently, that I heard him observe—between clenched teeth, which made it worse—that he didn't believe a damned word of it.

"But, Tuppy," I said, "why not? To me the thing rings true to the last drop. What makes you sceptical? Confide in me, Tuppy."

He halted and stood taking a breather. Tuppy, pungently though Angela might have argued to the contrary, isn't really fat. During the winter months you will find him constantly booting the football with merry shouts, and in the summer the tennis racket is seldom out of his hand.

But at the recently concluded evening meal, feeling, no doubt, that after that painful scene in the larder there was nothing to be gained by further abstinence, he had rather let himself go and, as it were, made up leeway; and after really immersing himself in one of Anatole's dinners, a man of his sturdy build tends to lose elasticity a bit. During the exposition of my plans for his happiness a certain animation had crept into this round-and-round-the mulberry-bush jamboree of ours—so much so, indeed, that for the last few minutes we might have been a rather oversized greyhound and a somewhat slimmer electric hare doing their stuff on a circular track for the entertainment of the many-headed.

This, it appeared, had taken it out of him a bit, and I was not displeased. I was feeling the strain myself, and welcomed a lull.

"It absolutely beats me why you don't believe it," I said. "You know we've been pals for years. You must be aware that, except at the moment when you caused me to do a nose dive into the Drones' swimming bath, an incident which I long

since decided to put out of my mind and let the dead past bury its dead about, if you follow what I mean—except on that one occasion, as I say, I have always regarded you with the utmost esteem. Why, then, if not for the motives I have outlined, should I knock you to Angela? Answer me that. Be very careful."

"What do you mean, be very careful?"

Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't quite know myself. It was what the magistrate had said to me on the occasion when I stood in the dock as Eustace Plimsoll, of *The Laburnums*: and as it had impressed me a good deal at the time, I just bunged it in now by way of giving the conversation a tone.

"All right. Never mind about being careful, then. Just answer me that question. Why, if I had not your interests sincerely at heart, should I have ticked you off, as stated?"

A sharp spasm shook him from base to apex. The beetle, which, during the recent exchanges, had been clinging to his head, hoping for the best, gave it up at this and resigned office. It shot off and was swallowed in the night.

"Ah!" I said. "Your beetle," I explained. "No doubt you were unaware of it, but all this while there has been a beetle of sorts parked on the side of your head. You have now dislodged it."

He snorted.

"Beetles!"

"Not beetles. One beetle only."

"I like your crust!" cried Tuppy, vibrating like one of Gussie's newts during the courting season. "Talking of beetles, when all the time you know you're a treacherous, sneaking hound."

It was a debatable point, of course, why treacherous, sneaking hounds should be considered ineligible to talk about beetles, and I dare say a good cross-examining counsel would have made quite a lot of it.

But I let it go.

"That's the second time you've called me that. And," I said firmly, "I insist on an explanation. I have told you that I acted throughout from the best and kindest motives in roasting you to Angela. It cut me to the quick to have to speak like that, and only the recollection of our lifelong friendship would have made me do it. And now you say you don't believe me and call me names for which I am not sure I couldn't have you up before a beak and jury and mulct you in very substantial damages. I should have to consult my solicitor, of course, but it

would surprise me very much if an action did not lie. Be reasonable, Tuppy. Suggest another motive I could have had. Just one."

"I will. Do you think I don't know? You're in love with Angela yourself."

"What?"

"And you knocked me in order to poison her mind against me and finally remove me from your path."

I had never heard anything so absolutely loopy in my life. Why, dash it, I've known Angela since she was so high. You don't fall in love with close relations you've known since they were so high. Besides, isn't there something in the book of rules about a man may not marry his cousin? Or am I thinking of grandmothers?

"Tuppy, my dear old ass," I cried, "this is pure banana oil! You've come unscrewed."

"Oh, yes?"

"Me in love with Angela? Ha-ha!"

"You can't get out of it with ha-ha's. She called you 'darling'."

"I know. And I disapproved. This habit of the younger g. of scattering 'darlings' about like birdseed is one that I deprecate. Lax, is how I should describe it."

"You tickled her ankles."

"In a purely cousinly spirit. It didn't mean a thing. Why, dash it, you must know that in the deeper and truer sense I wouldn't touch Angela with a barge pole."

"Oh? And why not? Not good enough for you?"

"You misunderstand me," I hastened to reply. "When I say I wouldn't touch Angela with a barge pole, I intend merely to convey that my feelings towards her are those of distant, though cordial, esteem. In other words, you may rest assured that between this young prune and myself there never has been and never could be any sentiment warmer and stronger than that of ordinary friendship."

"I believe it was you who tipped her off that I was in the larder last night, so that she could find me there with that pie, thus damaging my prestige."

"My dear Tuppy! A Wooster?" I was shocked. "You think a Wooster would do that?"

He breathed heavily.

"Listen," he said. "It's no good your standing there arguing. You can't get away from the facts. Somebody stole her from me at Cannes. You told me yourself that she was with you all the time at Cannes and hardly saw anybody else. You gloated over the mixed bathing, and those moonlight walks you had together——"

"Not gloated. Just mentioned them."

"So now you understand why, as soon as I can get you clear of this damned bench, I am going to tear you limb from limb. Why they have these bally benches in gardens," said Tuppy discontentedly, "is more than I can see. They only get in the way."

He ceased, and, grabbing out, missed me by a hair's breadth.

It was a moment for swift thinking, and it is at such moments, as I have already indicated, that Bertram Wooster is at his best. I suddenly remembered the recent misunderstanding with the Bassett, and with a flash of clear vision saw that this was where it was going to come in handy.

"You've got it all wrong, Tuppy," I said, moving to the left. "True, I saw a lot of Angela, but my dealings with her were on a basis from start to finish of the purest

and most wholesome camaraderie. I can prove it. During that sojourn in Cannes my affections were engaged elsewhere."

"What?"

"Engaged elsewhere. My affections. During that sojourn."

I had struck the right note. He stopped sidling. His clutching hand fell to his side.

"Is that true?"

"Quite official."

"Who was she?"

"My dear Tuppy, does one bandy a woman's name?"

"One does if one doesn't want one's ruddy head pulled off."

I saw that it was a special case.

"Madeline Bassett," I said.

"Who?"

"Madeline Bassett."

He seemed stunned.

"You stand there and tell me you were in love with that Bassett disaster?"

"I wouldn't call her 'that Bassett disaster', Tuppy. Not respectful."

"Dash being respectful. I want the facts. You deliberately assert that you loved that weird Gawd-help-us?"

"I don't see why you should call her a weird Gawd-help-us, either. A very charming and beautiful girl. Odd in some of her views perhaps—one does not quite see eye to eye with her in the matter of stars and rabbits—but not a weird Gawd-help-us."

"Anyway, you stick to it that you were in love with her?"

"I do."

"It sounds thin to me, Wooster, very thin."

I saw that it would be necessary to apply the finishing touch.

"I must ask you to treat this as entirely confidential, Glossop, but I may as well inform you that it is not twenty-four hours since she turned me down."

"Turned you down?"

"Like a bedspread. In this very garden."

"Twenty-four hours?"

"Call it twenty-five. So you will readily see that I can't be the chap, if any, who stole Angela from you at Cannes."

And I was on the brink of adding that I wouldn't touch Angela with a barge pole, when I remembered I had said it already and it hadn't gone frightfully well. I desisted, therefore.

My manly frankness seemed to be producing good results. The homicidal glare was dying out of Tuppy's eyes. He had the aspect of a hired assassin who had paused to think things over.

"I see," he said, at length. "All right, then. Sorry you were troubled."

"Don't mention it, old man," I responded courteously.

For the first time since the bushes had begun to pour forth Glossops, Bertram Wooster could be said to have breathed freely. I don't say I actually came out from behind the bench, but I did let go of it, and with something of the relief which those three chaps in the Old Testament must have experienced after sliding out of the burning fiery furnace, I even groped tentatively for my cigarette case.

The next moment a sudden snort made me take my fingers off it as if it had bitten me. I was distressed to note in the old friend a return of the recent frenzy.

"What the hell did you mean by telling her that I used to be covered with ink when I was a kid?"

"My dear Tuppy——"

"I was almost finickingly careful about my personal cleanliness as a boy. You could have eaten your dinner off me."

"Quite. But——"

"And all that stuff about having no soul. I'm crawling with soul. And being looked on as an outsider at the Drones——"

"But, my dear old chap, I explained that. It was all part of my ruse or scheme."

"It was, was it? Well, in future do me a favour and leave me out of your foul ruses."

"Just as you say, old boy."

"All right, then. That's understood."

He relapsed into silence, standing with folded arms, staring before him rather like a strong, silent man in a novel when he's just been given the bird by the girl and is thinking of looking in at the Rocky Mountains and bumping off a few bears. His manifest pippedness excited my compash, and I ventured a kindly word.

"I don't suppose you know what au pied de la lettre means, Tuppy, but that's how I don't think you ought to take all that stuff Angela was saying just now too much."

He seemed interested.

"What the devil," he asked, "are you talking about?"

I saw that I should have to make myself clearer.

"Don't take all that guff of hers too literally, old man. You know what girls are like."

"I do," he said, with another snort that came straight up from his insteps. "And I wish I'd never met one."

"I mean to say, it's obvious that she must have spotted you in those bushes and was simply talking to score off you. There you were, I mean, if you follow the psychology, and she saw you, and in that impulsive way girls have, she seized the opportunity of ribbing you a bit—just told you a few home truths, I mean to say."

"Home truths?"

"That's right."

He snorted once more, causing me to feel rather like royalty receiving a twenty-one gun salute from the fleet. I can't remember ever having met a better right-and-left-hand snorter.

"What do you mean, 'home truths'? I'm not fat."

"No, no."

"And what's wrong with the colour of my hair?"

"Quite in order, Tuppy, old man. The hair, I mean."

"And I'm not a bit thin on the top.... What the dickens are you grinning about?"

"Not grinning. Just smiling slightly. I was conjuring up a sort of vision, if you know what I mean, of you as seen through Angela's eyes. Fat in the middle and thin on the top. Rather funny."

"You think it funny, do you?"

"Not a bit."

"You'd better not."

"Quite."

It seemed to me that the conversation was becoming difficult again. I wished it could be terminated. And so it was. For at this moment something came shimmering through the laurels in the quiet evenfall, and I perceived that it was Angela.

She was looking sweet and saintlike, and she had a plate of sandwiches in her hand. Ham, I was to discover later.

"If you see Mr. Glossop anywhere, Bertie," she said, her eyes resting dreamily on Tuppy's facade, "I wish you would give him these. I'm so afraid he may be hungry, poor fellow. It's nearly ten o'clock, and he hasn't eaten a morsel since dinner. I'll just leave them on this bench."

She pushed off, and it seemed to me that I might as well go with her. Nothing to keep me here, I mean. We moved towards the house, and presently from behind us there sounded in the night the splintering crash of a well-kicked plate of ham sandwiches, accompanied by the muffled oaths of a strong man in his wrath.

"How still and peaceful everything is," said Angela.
