

Sunshine was gilding the grounds of Brinkley Court and the ear detected a marked twittering of birds in the ivy outside the window when I woke next morning to a new day. But there was no corresponding sunshine in Bertram Wooster's soul and no answering twitter in his heart as he sat up in bed, sipping his cup of strengthening tea. It could not be denied that to Bertram, reviewing the happenings of the previous night, the Tuppy-Angela situation seemed more or less to have slipped a cog. With every desire to look for the silver lining, I could not but feel that the rift between these two haughty spirits had now reached such impressive proportions that the task of bridging same would be beyond even my powers.

I am a shrewd observer, and there had been something in Tuppy's manner as he booted that plate of ham sandwiches that seemed to tell me that he would not lightly forgive.

In these circs., I deemed it best to shelve their problem for the nonce and turn the mind to the matter of Gussie, which presented a brighter picture.

With regard to Gussie, everything was in train. Jeeves's morbid scruples about lacing the chap's orange juice had put me to a good deal of trouble, but I had surmounted every obstacle in the old Wooster way. I had secured an abundance of the necessary spirit, and it was now lying in its flask in the drawer of the dressing-table. I had also ascertained that the jug, duly filled, would be standing

on a shelf in the butler's pantry round about the hour of one. To remove it from that shelf, sneak it up to my room, and return it, laced, in good time for the midday meal would be a task calling, no doubt, for address, but in no sense an exacting one.

It was with something of the emotions of one preparing a treat for a deserving child that I finished my tea and rolled over for that extra spot of sleep which just makes all the difference when there is man's work to be done and the brain must be kept clear for it.

And when I came downstairs an hour or so later, I knew how right I had been to formulate this scheme for Gussie's bucking up. I ran into him on the lawn, and I could see at a glance that if ever there was a man who needed a snappy stimulant, it was he. All nature, as I have indicated, was smiling, but not Augustus Fink-Nottle. He was walking round in circles, muttering something about not proposing to detain us long, but on this auspicious occasion feeling compelled to say a few words.

"Ah, Gussie," I said, arresting him as he was about to start another lap. "A lovely morning, is it not?"

Even if I had not been aware of it already, I could have divined from the abruptness with which he damned the lovely morning that he was not in merry mood. I addressed myself to the task of bringing the roses back to his cheeks.

"I've got good news for you, Gussie."

He looked at me with a sudden sharp interest.

"Has Market Snodsbury Grammar School burned down?"

"Not that I know of."

"Have mumps broken out? Is the place closed on account of measles?"

"No, no."

"Then what do you mean you've got good news?"

I endeavoured to soothe.

"You mustn't take it so hard, Gussie. Why worry about a laughably simple job like distributing prizes at a school?"

"Laughably simple, eh? Do you realize I've been sweating for days and haven't been able to think of a thing to say yet, except that I won't detain them long. You bet I won't detain them long. I've been timing my speech, and it lasts five seconds.

What the devil am I to say, Bertie? What do you say when you're distributing prizes?"

I considered. Once, at my private school, I had won a prize for Scripture knowledge, so I suppose I ought to have been full of inside stuff. But memory eluded me.

Then something emerged from the mists.

"You say the race is not always to the swift."

"Why?"

"Well, it's a good gag. It generally gets a hand."

"I mean, why isn't it? Why isn't the race to the swift?"

"Ah, there you have me. But the nibs say it isn't."

"But what does it mean?"

"I take it it's supposed to console the chaps who haven't won prizes."

"What's the good of that to me? I'm not worrying about them. It's the ones that have won prizes that I'm worrying about, the little blighters who will come up on the platform. Suppose they make faces at me."

"They won't."

"How do you know they won't? It's probably the first thing they'll think of. And even if they don't—Bertie, shall I tell you something?"

"What?"

"I've a good mind to take that tip of yours and have a drink."

I smiled. He little knew, about summed up what I was thinking.

"Oh, you'll be all right," I said.

He became fevered again.

"How do you know I'll be all right? I'm sure to blow up in my lines."

"Tush!"

"Or drop a prize."

"Tut!"

"Or something. I can feel it in my bones. As sure as I'm standing here, something is going to happen this afternoon which will make everybody laugh themselves sick at me. I can hear them now. Like hyenas.... Bertie!"

"Hullo?"

"Do you remember that kids' school we went to before Eton?"

"Quite. It was there I won my Scripture prize."

"Never mind about your Scripture prize. I'm not talking about your Scripture prize. Do you recollect the Bosher incident?"

I did, indeed. It was one of the high spots of my youth.

"Major-General Sir Wilfred Bosher came to distribute the prizes at that school," proceeded Gussie in a dull, toneless voice. "He dropped a book. He stooped to pick it up. And, as he stooped, his trousers split up the back."

"How we roared!"

Gussie's face twisted.

"We did, little swine that we were. Instead of remaining silent and exhibiting a decent sympathy for a gallant officer at a peculiarly embarrassing moment, we howled and yelled with mirth. I loudest of any. That is what will happen to me this afternoon, Bertie. It will be a judgment on me for laughing like that at Major-General Sir Wilfred Bosher."

"No, no, Gussie, old man. Your trousers won't split."

"How do you know they won't? Better men than I have split their trousers.

General Bosher was a D.S.O., with a fine record of service on the north-western frontier of India, and his trousers split. I shall be a mockery and a scorn. I know it. And you, fully cognizant of what I am in for, come babbling about good news. What news could possibly be good to me at this moment except the information that bubonic plague had broken out among the scholars of Market Snodsbury Grammar School, and that they were all confined to their beds with spots?"

The moment had come for me to speak. I laid a hand gently on his shoulder. He brushed it off. I laid it on again. He brushed it off once more. I was endeavouring to lay it on for the third time, when he moved aside and desired, with a certain petulance, to be informed if I thought I was a ruddy osteopath.

I found his manner trying, but one has to make allowances. I was telling myself that I should be seeing a very different Gussie after lunch.

"When I said I had good news, old man, I meant about Madeline Bassett."

The febrile gleam died out of his eyes, to be replaced by a look of infinite sadness.

"You can't have good news about her. I've dished myself there completely."

"Not at all. I am convinced that if you take another whack at her, all will be well."

And, keeping it snappy, I related what had passed between the Bassett and myself on the previous night.

"So all you have to do is play a return date, and you cannot fail to swing the voting. You are her dream man."

He shook his head.

"No."

"What?"

"No use."

"What do you mean?"

"Not a bit of good trying."

"But I tell you she said in so many words——"

"It doesn't make any difference. She may have loved me once. Last night will have killed all that."

"Of course it won't."

"It will. She despises me now."

"Not a bit of it. She knows you simply got cold feet."

"And I should get cold feet if I tried again. It's no good, Bertie. I'm hopeless, and there's an end of it. Fate made me the sort of chap who can't say 'bo' to a goose."

"It isn't a question of saying 'bo' to a goose. The point doesn't arise at all. It is simply a matter of——"

"I know, I know. But it's no good. I can't do it. The whole thing is off. I am not going to risk a repetition of last night's fiasco. You talk in a light way of taking

another whack at her, but you don't know what it means. You have not been through the experience of starting to ask the girl you love to marry you and then suddenly finding yourself talking about the plumlike external gills of the newly-born newt. It's not a thing you can do twice. No, I accept my destiny. It's all over. And now, Bertie, like a good chap, shove off. I want to compose my speech. I can't compose my speech with you mucking around. If you are going to continue to muck around, at least give me a couple of stories. The little hell hounds are sure to expect a story or two."

"Do you know the one about——"

"No good. I don't want any of your off-colour stuff from the Drones' smoking-room. I need something clean. Something that will be a help to them in their after lives. Not that I care a damn about their after lives, except that I hope they'll all choke."

"I heard a story the other day. I can't quite remember it, but it was about a chap who snored and disturbed the neighbours, and it ended, 'It was his adenoids that adenoid them.'"

He made a weary gesture.

"You expect me to work that in, do you, into a speech to be delivered to an audience of boys, every one of whom is probably riddled with adenoids? Damn it,

they'd rush the platform. Leave me, Bertie. Push off. That's all I ask you to do. Push off.... Ladies and gentlemen," said Gussie, in a low, soliloquizing sort of way, "I do not propose to detain this auspicious occasion long——"

It was a thoughtful Wooster who walked away and left him at it. More than ever I was congratulating myself on having had the sterling good sense to make all my arrangements so that I could press a button and set things moving at an instant's notice.

Until now, you see, I had rather entertained a sort of hope that when I had revealed to him the Bassett's mental attitude, Nature would have done the rest, bracing him up to such an extent that artificial stimulants would not be required. Because, naturally, a chap doesn't want to have to sprint about country houses lugging jugs of orange juice, unless it is absolutely essential.

But now I saw that I must carry on as planned. The total absence of pep, ginger, and the right spirit which the man had displayed during these conversational exchanges convinced me that the strongest measures would be necessary.

Immediately upon leaving him, therefore, I proceeded to the pantry, waited till the butler had removed himself elsewhere, and nipped in and secured the vital jug. A few moments later, after a wary passage of the stairs, I was in my room. And the first thing I saw there was Jeeves, fooling about with trousers.

He gave the jug a look which—wrongly, as it was to turn out—I diagnosed as censorious. I drew myself up a bit. I intended to have no rot from the fellow.

"Yes, Jeeves?"

"Sir?"

"You have the air of one about to make a remark, Jeeves."

"Oh, no, sir. I note that you are in possession of Mr. Fink-Nottle's orange juice. I was merely about to observe that in my opinion it would be injudicious to add spirit to it."

"That is a remark, Jeeves, and it is precisely——"

"Because I have already attended to the matter, sir."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. I decided, after all, to acquiesce in your wishes."

I stared at the man, astounded. I was deeply moved. Well, I mean, wouldn't any chap who had been going about thinking that the old feudal spirit was dead and then suddenly found it wasn't have been deeply moved?

"Jeeves," I said, "I am touched."

"Thank you, sir."

"Touched and gratified."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"But what caused this change of heart?"

"I chanced to encounter Mr. Fink-Nottle in the garden, sir, while you were still in bed, and we had a brief conversation."

"And you came away feeling that he needed a bracer?"

"Very much so, sir. His attitude struck me as defeatist."

I nodded.

"I felt the same. 'Defeatist' sums it up to a nicety. Did you tell him his attitude struck you as defeatist?"

"Yes, sir."

"But it didn't do any good?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, then, Jeeves. We must act. How much gin did you put in the jug?"

"A liberal tumblerful, sir."

"Would that be a normal dose for an adult defeatist, do you think?"

"I fancy it should prove adequate, sir."

"I wonder. We must not spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar. I think I'll add just another fluid ounce or so."

"I would not advocate it, sir. In the case of Lord Brancaster's parrot——"

"You are falling into your old error, Jeeves, of thinking that Gussie is a parrot. Fight against this. I shall add the oz."

"Very good, sir."

"And, by the way, Jeeves, Mr. Fink-Nottle is in the market for bright, clean stories to use in his speech. Do you know any?"

"I know a story about two Irishmen, sir."

"Pat and Mike?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who were walking along Broadway?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just what he wants. Any more?"

"No, sir."

"Well, every little helps. You had better go and tell it to him."

"Very good, sir."

He passed from the room, and I unscrewed the flask and tilted into the jug a generous modicum of its contents. And scarcely had I done so, when there came to my ears the sound of footsteps without. I had only just time to shove the jug

behind the photograph of Uncle Tom on the mantelpiece before the door opened and in came Gussie, curveting like a circus horse.

"What-ho, Bertie," he said. "What-ho, what-ho, what-ho, and again what-ho. What a beautiful world this is, Bertie. One of the nicest I ever met."

I stared at him, speechless. We Woosters are as quick as lightning, and I saw at once that something had happened.

I mean to say, I told you about him walking round in circles. I recorded what passed between us on the lawn. And if I portrayed the scene with anything like adequate skill, the picture you will have retained of this Fink-Nottle will have been that of a nervous wreck, sagging at the knees, green about the gills, and picking feverishly at the lapels of his coat in an ecstasy of craven fear. In a word, defeatist. Gussie, during that interview, had, in fine, exhibited all the earmarks of one licked to a custard.

Vastly different was the Gussie who stood before me now. Self-confidence seemed to ooze from the fellow's every pore. His face was flushed, there was a jovial light in his eyes, the lips were parted in a swashbuckling smile. And when with a genial hand he sloshed me on the back before I could sidestep, it was as if I had been kicked by a mule.

"Well, Bertie," he proceeded, as blithely as a linnet without a thing on his mind, "you will be glad to hear that you were right. Your theory has been tested and proved correct. I feel like a fighting cock."

My brain ceased to reel. I saw all.

"Have you been having a drink?"

"I have. As you advised. Unpleasant stuff. Like medicine. Burns your throat, too, and makes one as thirsty as the dickens. How anyone can mop it up, as you do, for pleasure, beats me. Still, I would be the last to deny that it tunes up the system. I could bite a tiger."

"What did you have?"

"Whisky. At least, that was the label on the decanter, and I have no reason to suppose that a woman like your aunt—staunch, true-blue, British—would deliberately deceive the public. If she labels her decanters Whisky, then I consider that we know where we are."

"A whisky and soda, eh? You couldn't have done better."

"Soda?" said Gussie thoughtfully. "I knew there was something I had forgotten."

"Didn't you put any soda in it?"

"It never occurred to me. I just nipped into the dining-room and drank out of the decanter."

"How much?"

"Oh, about ten swallows. Twelve, maybe. Or fourteen. Say sixteen medium-sized gulps. Gosh, I'm thirsty."

He moved over to the wash-stand and drank deeply out of the water bottle. I cast a covert glance at Uncle Tom's photograph behind his back. For the first time since it had come into my life, I was glad that it was so large. It hid its secret well. If Gussie had caught sight of that jug of orange juice, he would unquestionably have been on to it like a knife.

"Well, I'm glad you're feeling braced," I said.

He moved buoyantly from the wash-hand stand, and endeavoured to slosh me on the back again. Foiled by my nimble footwork, he staggered to the bed and sat down upon it.

"Braced? Did I say I could bite a tiger?"

"You did."

"Make it two tigers. I could chew holes in a steel door. What an ass you must have thought me out there in the garden. I see now you were laughing in your sleeve."

"No, no."

"Yes," insisted Gussie. "That very sleeve," he said, pointing. "And I don't blame you. I can't imagine why I made all that fuss about a potty job like distributing prizes at a rotten little country grammar school. Can you imagine, Bertie?"

"Exactly. Nor can I imagine. There's simply nothing to it. I just shin up on the platform, drop a few gracious words, hand the little blighters their prizes, and hop down again, admired by all. Not a suggestion of split trousers from start to finish. I mean, why should anybody split his trousers? I can't imagine. Can you imagine?"

"No."

"Nor can I imagine. I shall be a riot. I know just the sort of stuff that's needed—simple, manly, optimistic stuff straight from the shoulder. This shoulder," said Gussie, tapping. "Why I was so nervous this morning I can't imagine. For anything simpler than distributing a few footling books to a bunch of grimy-faced

kids I can't imagine. Still, for some reason I can't imagine, I was feeling a little nervous, but now I feel fine, Bertie—fine, fine, fine—and I say this to you as an old friend. Because that's what you are, old man, when all the smoke has cleared away—an old friend. I don't think I've ever met an older friend. How long have you been an old friend of mine, Bertie?"

"Oh, years and years."

"Imagine! Though, of course, there must have been a time when you were a new friend.... Hulloo, the luncheon gong. Come on, old friend."

And, rising from the bed like a performing flea, he made for the door.

I followed rather pensively. What had occurred was, of course, so much velvet, as you might say. I mean, I had wanted a braced Fink-Nottle— indeed, all my plans had had a braced Fink-Nottle as their end and aim —but I found myself wondering a little whether the Fink-Nottle now sliding down the banister wasn't, perhaps, a shade too braced. His demeanour seemed to me that of a man who might quite easily throw bread about at lunch.

Fortunately, however, the settled gloom of those round him exercised a restraining effect upon him at the table. It would have needed a far more plastered man to have been rollicking at such a gathering. I had told the Bassett that there were aching hearts in Brinkley Court, and it now looked probable that

there would shortly be aching tummies. Anatole, I learned, had retired to his bed with a fit of the vapours, and the meal now before us had been cooked by the kitchen maid—as C3 a performer as ever wielded a skillet.

This, coming on top of their other troubles, induced in the company a pretty unanimous silence—a solemn stillness, as you might say—which even Gussie did not seem prepared to break. Except, therefore, for one short snatch of song on his part, nothing untoward marked the occasion, and presently we rose, with instructions from Aunt Dahlia to put on festal raiment and be at Market Snodsbury not later than 3.30. This leaving me ample time to smoke a gasper or two in a shady bower beside the lake, I did so, repairing to my room round about the hour of three.

Jeeves was on the job, adding the final polish to the old topper, and I was about to apprise him of the latest developments in the matter of Gussie, when he forestalled me by observing that the latter had only just concluded an agreeable visit to the Wooster bedchamber.

"I found Mr. Fink-Nottle seated here when I arrived to lay out your clothes, sir."

"Indeed, Jeeves? Gussie was in here, was he?"

"Yes, sir. He left only a few moments ago. He is driving to the school with Mr. and Mrs. Travers in the large car."

"Did you give him your story of the two Irishmen?"

"Yes, sir. He laughed heartily."

"Good. Had you any other contributions for him?"

"I ventured to suggest that he might mention to the young gentlemen that education is a drawing out, not a putting in. The late Lord Brancaster was much addicted to presenting prizes at schools, and he invariably employed this dictum."

"And how did he react to that?"

"He laughed heartily, sir."

"This surprised you, no doubt? This practically incessant merriment, I mean."

"Yes, sir."

"You thought it odd in one who, when you last saw him, was well up in Group A of the defeatists."

"Yes, sir."

"There is a ready explanation, Jeeves. Since you last saw him, Gussie has been on a bender. He's as tight as an owl."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Absolutely. His nerve cracked under the strain, and he sneaked into the dining-room and started mopping the stuff up like a vacuum cleaner. Whisky would seem to be what he filled the radiator with. I gather that he used up most of the decanter. Golly, Jeeves, it's lucky he didn't get at that laced orange juice on top of that, what?"

"Extremely, sir."

I eyed the jug. Uncle Tom's photograph had fallen into the fender, and it was standing there right out in the open, where Gussie couldn't have helped seeing it. Mercifully, it was empty now.

"It was a most prudent act on your part, if I may say so, sir, to dispose of the orange juice."

I stared at the man.

"What? Didn't you?"

"No, sir."

"Jeeves, let us get this clear. Was it not you who threw away that o.j.?"

"No, sir. I assumed, when I entered the room and found the pitcher empty, that you had done so."

We looked at each other, awed. Two minds with but a single thought.

"I very much fear, sir——"

"So do I, Jeeves."

"It would seem almost certain——"

"Quite certain. Weigh the facts. Sift the evidence. The jug was standing on the mantelpiece, for all eyes to behold. Gussie had been complaining of thirst. You found him in here, laughing heartily. I think that there can be little doubt, Jeeves, that the entire contents of that jug are at this moment reposing on top of the existing cargo in that already brilliantly lit man's interior. Disturbing, Jeeves."

"Most disturbing, sir."

"Let us face the position, forcing ourselves to be calm. You inserted in that jug— shall we say a tumblerful of the right stuff?"

"Fully a tumblerful, sir."

"And I added of my plenty about the same amount."

"Yes, sir."

"And in two shakes of a duck's tail Gussie, with all that lapping about inside him, will be distributing the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School before an audience of all that is fairest and most refined in the county."

"Yes, sir."

"It seems to me, Jeeves, that the ceremony may be one fraught with considerable interest."

"Yes, sir."

"What, in your opinion, will the harvest be?"

"One finds it difficult to hazard a conjecture, sir."

"You mean imagination boggles?"

"Yes, sir."

I inspected my imagination. He was right. It boggled.
