

I eyed him narrowly. I didn't like his looks. Mark you, I don't say I ever had, much, because Nature, when planning this sterling fellow, shoved in a lot more lower jaw than was absolutely necessary and made the eyes a bit too keen and piercing for one who was neither an Empire builder nor a traffic policeman. But on the present occasion, in addition to offending the aesthetic sense, this Glossop seemed to me to be wearing a distinct air of menace, and I found myself wishing that Jeeves wasn't always so dashed tactful. I mean, it's all very well to remove yourself like an eel sliding into mud when the employer has a visitor, but there are moments—and it looked to me as if this was going to be one of them—when the truer tact is to stick round and stand ready to lend a hand in the free-for-all.

For Jeeves was no longer with us. I hadn't seen him go, and I hadn't heard him go, but he had gone. As far as the eye could reach, one noted nobody but Tuppy. And in Tuppy's demeanour, as I say, there was a certain something that tended to disquiet. He looked to me very much like a man who had come to reopen that matter of my tickling Angela's ankles.

However, his opening remark told me that I had been alarming myself unduly. It was of a pacific nature, and came as a great relief.

"Bertie," he said, "I owe you an apology. I have come to make it."

My relief on hearing these words, containing as they did no reference of any sort to tickled ankles, was, as I say, great. But I don't think it was any greater than my surprise. Months had passed since that painful episode at the Drones, and until now he hadn't given a sign of remorse and contrition. Indeed, word had reached me through private sources that he frequently told the story at dinners and other gatherings and, when doing so, laughed his silly head off.

I found it hard to understand, accordingly, what could have caused him to abase himself at this later date. Presumably he had been given the elbow by his better self, but why?

Still, there it was.

"My dear chap," I said, gentlemanly to the gills, "don't mention it."

"What's the sense of saying, 'Don't mention it'? I have mentioned it."

"I mean, don't mention it any more. Don't give the matter another thought. We all of us forget ourselves sometimes and do things which, in our calmer moments, we regret. No doubt you were a bit tight at the time."

"What the devil do you think you're talking about?"

I didn't like his tone. Brusque.

"Correct me if I am wrong," I said, with a certain stiffness, "but I assumed that you were apologizing for your foul conduct in looping back the last ring that night in the Drones, causing me to plunge into the swimming b. in the full soup and fish."

"Ass! Not that, at all."

"Then what?"

"This Bassett business."

"What Bassett business?"

"Bertie," said Tuppy, "when you told me last night that you were in love with Madeline Bassett, I gave you the impression that I believed you, but I didn't. The thing seemed too incredible. However, since then I have made inquiries, and the facts appear to square with your statement. I have now come to apologize for doubting you."

"Made inquiries?"

"I asked her if you had proposed to her, and she said, yes, you had."

"Tuppy! You didn't?"

"I did."

"Have you no delicacy, no proper feeling?"

"No."

"Oh? Well, right-ho, of course, but I think you ought to have."

"Delicacy be dashed. I wanted to be certain that it was not you who stole Angela from me. I now know it wasn't."

So long as he knew that, I didn't so much mind him having no delicacy.

"Ah," I said. "Well, that's fine. Hold that thought."

"I have found out who it was."

"What?"

He stood brooding for a moment. His eyes were smouldering with a dull fire. His jaw stuck out like the back of Jeeves's head.

"Bertie," he said, "do you remember what I swore I would do to the chap who stole Angela from me?"

"As nearly as I recall, you planned to pull him inside out——"

"—and make him swallow himself. Correct. The programme still holds good."

"But, Tuppy, I keep assuring you, as a competent eyewitness, that nobody snitched Angela from you during that Cannes trip."

"No. But they did after she got back."

"What?"

"Don't keep saying, 'What?' You heard."

"But she hasn't seen anybody since she got back."

"Oh, no? How about that newt bloke?"

"Gussie?"

"Precisely. The serpent Fink-Nottle."

This seemed to me absolute gibbering.

"But Gussie loves the Bassett."

"You can't all love this blighted Bassett. What astonishes me is that anyone can do it. He loves Angela, I tell you. And she loves him."

"But Angela handed you your hat before Gussie ever got here."

"No, she didn't. Couple of hours after."

"He couldn't have fallen in love with her in a couple of hours."

"Why not? I fell in love with her in a couple of minutes. I worshipped her immediately we met, the popeyed little excrescence."

"But, dash it——"

"Don't argue, Bertie. The facts are all docketed. She loves this newt-nuzzling blister."

"Quite absurd, laddie—quite absurd."

"Oh?" He ground a heel into the carpet—a thing I've often read about, but had never seen done before. "Then perhaps you will explain how it is that she happens to come to be engaged to him?"

You could have knocked me down with a f.

"Engaged to him?"

"She told me herself."

"She was kidding you."

"She was not kidding me. Shortly after the conclusion of this afternoon's binge at Market Snodsbury Grammar School he asked her to marry him, and she appears to have right-hoed without a murmur."

"There must be some mistake."

"There was. The snake Fink-Nottle made it, and by now I bet he realizes it. I've been chasing him since 5.30."

"Chasing him?"

"All over the place. I want to pull his head off."

"I see. Quite."

"You haven't seen him, by any chance?"

"No."

"Well, if you do, say goodbye to him quickly and put in your order for lilies.... Oh, Jeeves."

"Sir?"

I hadn't heard the door open, but the man was on the spot once more. My private belief, as I think I have mentioned before, is that Jeeves doesn't have to open doors. He's like one of those birds in India who bung their astral bodies about—the chaps, I mean, who having gone into thin air in Bombay, reassemble the parts and appear two minutes later in Calcutta. Only some such theory will account for the fact that he's not there one moment and is there the next. He just seems to float from Spot A to Spot B like some form of gas.

"Have you seen Mr. Fink-Nottle, Jeeves?"

"No, sir."

"I'm going to murder him."

"Very good, sir."

Tuppy withdrew, banging the door behind him, and I put Jeeves abreast.

"Jeeves," I said, "do you know what? Mr. Fink-Nottle is engaged to my Cousin Angela."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Well, how about it? Do you grasp the psychology? Does it make sense? Only a few hours ago he was engaged to Miss Bassett."

"Gentlemen who have been discarded by one young lady are often apt to attach themselves without delay to another, sir. It is what is known as a gesture."

I began to grasp.

"I see what you mean. Defiant stuff."

"Yes, sir."

"A sort of 'Oh, right-ho, please yourself, but if you don't want me, there are plenty who do.'"

"Precisely, sir. My Cousin George——"

"Never mind about your Cousin George, Jeeves."

"Very good, sir."

"Keep him for the long winter evenings, what?"

"Just as you wish, sir."

"And, anyway, I bet your Cousin George wasn't a shrinking, non-goose-bo-ing jellyfish like Gussie. That is what astounds me, Jeeves—that it should be Gussie who has been putting in all this heavy gesture-making stuff."

"You must remember, sir, that Mr. Fink-Nottle is in a somewhat inflamed cerebral condition."

"That's true. A bit above par at the moment, as it were?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing—he'll be in a jolly sight more inflamed cerebral condition if Tuppy gets hold of him.... What's the time?"

"Just on eight o'clock, sir."

"Then Tuppy has been chasing him for two hours and a half. We must save the unfortunate blighter, Jeeves."

"Yes, sir."

"A human life is a human life, what?"

"Exceedingly true, sir."

"The first thing, then, is to find him. After that we can discuss plans and schemes. Go forth, Jeeves, and scour the neighbourhood."

"It will not be necessary, sir. If you will glance behind you, you will see Mr. Fink-Nottle coming out from beneath your bed."

And, by Jove, he was absolutely right.

There was Gussie, emerging as stated. He was covered with fluff and looked like a tortoise popping forth for a bit of a breather.

"Gussie!" I said.

"Jeeves," said Gussie.

"Sir?" said Jeeves.

"Is that door locked, Jeeves?"

"No, sir, but I will attend to the matter immediately."

Gussie sat down on the bed, and I thought for a moment that he was going to be in the mode by burying his face in his hands. However, he merely brushed a dead spider from his brow.

"Have you locked the door, Jeeves?"

"Yes, sir."

"Because you can never tell that that ghastly Glossop may not take it into his head to come——"

The word "back" froze on his lips. He hadn't got any further than a b-ish sound, when the handle of the door began to twist and rattle. He sprang from the bed,

and for an instant stood looking exactly like a picture my Aunt Agatha has in her dining-room—The Stag at Bay—Landseer. Then he made a dive for the cupboard and was inside it before one really got on to it that he had started leaping. I have seen fellows late for the 9.15 move less nippily.

I shot a glance at Jeeves. He allowed his right eyebrow to flicker slightly, which is as near as he ever gets to a display of the emotions.

"Hullo?" I yipped.

"Let me in, blast you!" responded Tuppy's voice from without. "Who locked this door?"

I consulted Jeeves once more in the language of the eyebrow. He raised one of his. I raised one of mine. He raised his other. I raised my other. Then we both raised both. Finally, there seeming no other policy to pursue, I flung wide the gates and Tuppy came shooting in.

"Now what?" I said, as nonchalantly as I could manage.

"Why was the door locked?" demanded Tuppy.

I was in pretty good eyebrow-raising form by now, so I gave him a touch of it.

"Is one to have no privacy, Glossop?" I said coldly. "I instructed Jeeves to lock the door because I was about to disrobe."

"A likely story!" said Tuppy, and I'm not sure he didn't add "Forsooth!" "You needn't try to make me believe that you're afraid people are going to run excursion trains to see you in your underwear. You locked that door because you've got the snake Fink-Nottle concealed in here. I suspected it the moment I'd left, and I decided to come back and investigate. I'm going to search this room from end to end. I believe he's in that cupboard.... What's in this cupboard?"

"Just clothes," I said, having another stab at the nonchalant, though extremely dubious as to whether it would come off. "The usual wardrobe of the English gentleman paying a country-house visit."

"You're lying!"

Well, I wouldn't have been if he had only waited a minute before speaking, because the words were hardly out of his mouth before Gussie was out of the cupboard. I have commented on the speed with which he had gone in. It was as nothing to the speed with which he emerged. There was a sort of whir and blur, and he was no longer with us.

I think Tuppy was surprised. In fact, I'm sure he was. Despite the confidence with which he had stated his view that the cupboard contained Fink-Nottles, it plainly

disconcerted him to have the chap fizzing out at him like this. He gargled sharply, and jumped back about five feet. The next moment, however, he had recovered his poise and was galloping down the corridor in pursuit. It only needed Aunt Dahlia after them, shouting "Yoicks!" or whatever is customary on these occasions, to complete the resemblance to a brisk run with the Quorn.

I sank into a handy chair. I am not a man whom it is easy to discourage, but it seemed to me that things had at last begun to get too complex for Bertram.

"Jeeves," I said, "all this is a bit thick."

"Yes, sir."

"The head rather swims."

"Yes, sir."

"I think you had better leave me, Jeeves. I shall need to devote the very closest thought to the situation which has arisen."

"Very good, sir."

The door closed. I lit a cigarette and began to ponder.
