

I remember Jeeves saying on one occasion—I forgot how the subject had arisen—he may simply have thrown the observation out, as he does sometimes, for me to take or leave—that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. And until tonight I had always felt that there was a lot in it. I had never scorned a woman myself, but Pongo Twistleton once scorned an aunt of his, flatly refusing to meet her son Gerald at Paddington and give him lunch and see him off to school at Waterloo, and he never heard the end of it. Letters were written, he tells me, which had to be seen to be believed. Also two very strong telegrams and a bitter picture post card with a view of the Little Chilbury War Memorial on it.

Until tonight, therefore, as I say, I had never questioned the accuracy of the statement. Scorned women first and the rest nowhere, was how it had always seemed to me.

But tonight I revised my views. If you want to know what hell can really do in the way of furies, look for the chap who has been hornswoggled into taking a long and unnecessary bicycle ride in the dark without a lamp.

Mark that word "unnecessary". That was the part of it that really jabbed the iron into the soul. I mean, if it was a case of riding to the doctor's to save the child with croup, or going off to the local pub to fetch supplies in the event of the cellar having run dry, no one would leap to the handlebars more readily than I. Young Lochinvar, absolutely. But this business of being put through it merely to gratify

one's personal attendant's diseased sense of the amusing was a bit too thick, and I chafed from start to finish.

So, what I mean to say, although the providence which watches over good men saw to it that I was enabled to complete the homeward journey unscathed except in the billowy portions, removing from my path all goats, elephants, and even owls that looked like my Aunt Agatha, it was a frowning and jaundiced Bertram who finally came to anchor at the Brinkley Court front door. And when I saw a dark figure emerging from the porch to meet me, I prepared to let myself go and uncork all that was fizzing in the mind.

"Jeeves!" I said.

"It is I, Bertie."

The voice which spoke sounded like warm treacle, and even if I had not recognized it immediately as that of the Bassett, I should have known that it did not proceed from the man I was yearning to confront. For this figure before me was wearing a simple tweed dress and had employed my first name in its remarks. And Jeeves, whatever his moral defects, would never go about in skirts calling me Bertie.

The last person, of course, whom I would have wished to meet after a long evening in the saddle, but I vouchsafed a courteous "What ho!"

There was a pause, during which I massaged the calves. Mine, of course, I mean.

"You got in, then?" I said, in allusion to the change of costume.

"Oh, yes. About a quarter of an hour after you left Jeeves went searching about and found the back-door key on the kitchen window-sill."

"Ha!"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"I thought you said something."

"No, nothing."

And I continued to do so. For at this juncture, as had so often happened when this girl and I were closeted, the conversation once more went blue on us. The night breeze whispered, but not the Bassett. A bird twittered, but not so much as a chirp escaped Bertram. It was perfectly amazing, the way her mere presence seemed to wipe speech from my lips—and mine, for that matter, from hers. It

began to look as if our married life together would be rather like twenty years among the Trappist monks.

"Seen Jeeves anywhere?" I asked, eventually coming through.

"Yes, in the dining-room."

"The dining-room?"

"Waiting on everybody. They are having eggs and bacon and champagne.... What did you say?"

I had said nothing—merely snorted. There was something about the thought of these people carelessly revelling at a time when, for all they knew, I was probably being dragged about the countryside by goats or chewed by elephants, that struck home at me like a poisoned dart. It was the sort of thing you read about as having happened just before the French Revolution—the haughty nobles in their castles callously digging in and quaffing while the unfortunate blighters outside were suffering frightful privations.

The voice of the Bassett cut in on these mordant reflections:

"Bertie."

"Hullo!"

Silence.

"Hullo!" I said again.

No response. Whole thing rather like one of those telephone conversations where you sit at your end of the wire saying: "Hullo! Hullo!" unaware that the party of the second part has gone off to tea.

Eventually, however, she came to the surface again:

"Bertie, I have something to say to you."

"What?"

"I have something to say to you."

"I know. I said 'What?'"

"Oh, I thought you didn't hear what I said."

"Yes, I heard what you said, all right, but not what you were going to say."

"Oh, I see."

"Right-ho."

So that was straightened out. Nevertheless, instead of proceeding she took time off once more. She stood twisting the fingers and scratching the gravel with her foot. When finally she spoke, it was to deliver an impressive boost:

"Bertie, do you read Tennyson?"

"Not if I can help."

"You remind me so much of those Knights of the Round Table in the 'Idylls of the King'."

Of course I had heard of them—Lancelot, Galahad and all that lot, but I didn't see where the resemblance came in. It seemed to me that she must be thinking of a couple of other fellows.

"How do you mean?"

"You have such a great heart, such a fine soul. You are so generous, so unselfish, so chivalrous. I have always felt that about you—that you are one of the few really chivalrous men I have ever met."

Well, dashed difficult, of course, to know what to say when someone is giving you the old oil on a scale like that. I muttered an "Oh, yes?" or something on those lines, and rubbed the billowy portions in some embarrassment. And there was another silence, broken only by a sharp howl as I rubbed a bit too hard.

"Bertie."

"Hullo?"

I heard her give a sort of gulp.

"Bertie, will you be chivalrous now?"

"Rather. Only too pleased. How do you mean?"

"I am going to try you to the utmost. I am going to test you as few men have ever been tested. I am going——"

I didn't like the sound of this.

"Well," I said doubtfully, "always glad to oblige, you know, but I've just had the dickens of a bicycle ride, and I'm a bit stiff and sore, especially in the—as I say, a bit stiff and sore. If it's anything to be fetched from upstairs——"

"No, no, you don't understand."

"I don't, quite, no."

"Oh, it's so difficult.... How can I say it?... Can't you guess?"

"No. I'm dashed if I can."

"Bertie—let me go!"

"But I haven't got hold of you."

"Release me!"

"Re——"

And then I suddenly got it. I suppose it was fatigue that had made me so slow to apprehend the nub.

"What?"

I staggered, and the left pedal came up and caught me on the shin. But such was the ecstasy in the soul that I didn't utter a cry.

"Release you?"

"Yes."

I didn't want any confusion on the point.

"You mean you want to call it all off? You're going to hitch up with Gussie, after all?"

"Only if you are fine and big enough to consent."

"Oh, I am."

"I gave you my promise."

"Dash promises."

"Then you really——"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, Bertie!"

She seemed to sway like a sapling. It is saplings that sway, I believe.

"A very parfait knight!" I heard her murmur, and there not being much to say after that, I excused myself on the ground that I had got about two pecks of dust down my back and would like to go and get my maid to put me into something loose.

"You go back to Gussie," I said, "and tell him that all is well."

She gave a sort of hiccup and, darting forward, kissed me on the forehead.

Unpleasant, of course, but, as Anatole would say, I can take a few smooths with a rough. The next moment she was legging it for the dining-room, while I, having bunged the bicycle into a bush, made for the stairs.

I need not dwell upon my buckedness. It can be readily imagined. Talk about chaps with the noose round their necks and the hangman about to let her go and somebody galloping up on a foaming horse, waving the reprieve—not in it.

Absolutely not in it at all. I don't know that I can give you a better idea of the state of my feelings than by saying that as I started to cross the hall I was conscious of so profound a benevolence toward all created things that I found myself thinking kindly thoughts even of Jeeves.

I was about to mount the stairs when a sudden "What ho!" from my rear caused me to turn. Tuppy was standing in the hall. He had apparently been down to the cellar for reinforcements, for there were a couple of bottles under his arm.

"Hullo, Bertie," he said. "You back?" He laughed amusedly. "You look like the Wreck of the Hesperus. Get run over by a steam-roller or something?"

At any other time I might have found his coarse badinage hard to bear. But such was my uplifted mood that I waved it aside and slipped him the good news.

"Tuppy, old man, the Bassett's going to marry Gussie Fink-Nottle."

"Tough luck on both of them, what?"

"But don't you understand? Don't you see what this means? It means that Angela is once more out of pawn, and you have only to play your cards properly——"

He bellowed rollickingly. I saw now that he was in the pink. As a matter of fact, I had noticed something of the sort directly I met him, but had attributed it to alcoholic stimulant.

"Good Lord! You're right behind the times, Bertie. Only to be expected, of course, if you will go riding bicycles half the night. Angela and I made it up hours ago."

"What?"

"Certainly. Nothing but a passing tiff. All you need in these matters is a little give and take, a bit of reasonableness on both sides. We got together and talked things over. She withdrew my double chin. I conceded her shark. Perfectly simple. All done in a couple of minutes."

"But——"

"Sorry, Bertie. Can't stop chatting with you all night. There is a rather impressive beano in progress in the dining-room, and they are waiting for supplies."

Endorsement was given to this statement by a sudden shout from the apartment named. I recognized—as who would not—Aunt Dahlia's voice:

"Glossop!"

"Hullo?"

"Hurry up with that stuff."

"Coming, coming."

"Well, come, then. Yoicks! Hard for-rard!"

"Tallyho, not to mention tantivy. Your aunt," said Tuppy, "is a bit above herself. I don't know all the facts of the case, but it appears that Anatole gave notice and has now consented to stay on, and also your uncle has given her a cheque for that paper of hers. I didn't get the details, but she is much braced. See you later. I must rush."

To say that Bertram was now definitely nonplussed would be but to state the simple truth. I could make nothing of this. I had left Brinkley Court a stricken home, with hearts bleeding wherever you looked, and I had returned to find it a sort of earthly paradise. It baffled me.

I bathed bewilderedly. The toy duck was still in the soap-dish, but I was too preoccupied to give it a thought. Still at a loss, I returned to my room, and there was Jeeves. And it is proof of my fogged condish that my first words to him were words not of reproach and stern recrimination but of inquiry:

"I say, Jeeves!"

"Good evening, sir. I was informed that you had returned. I trust you had an enjoyable ride."

At any other moment, a crack like that would have woken the fiend in Bertram Wooster. I barely noticed it. I was intent on getting to the bottom of this mystery.

"But I say, Jeeves, what?"

"Sir?"

"What does all this mean?"

"You refer, sir——"

"Of course I refer. You know what I'm talking about. What has been happening here since I left? The place is positively stiff with happy endings."

"Yes, sir. I am glad to say that my efforts have been rewarded."

"What do you mean, your efforts? You aren't going to try to make out that that rotten fire bell scheme of yours had anything to do with it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't be an ass, Jeeves. It flopped."

"Not altogether, sir. I fear, sir, that I was not entirely frank with regard to my suggestion of ringing the fire bell. I had not really anticipated that it would in

itself produce the desired results. I had intended it merely as a preliminary to what I might describe as the real business of the evening."

"You gibber, Jeeves."

"No, sir. It was essential that the ladies and gentlemen should be brought from the house, in order that, once out of doors, I could ensure that they remained there for the necessary period of time."

"How do you mean?"

"My plan was based on psychology, sir."

"How?"

"It is a recognized fact, sir, that there is nothing that so satisfactorily unites individuals who have been so unfortunate as to quarrel amongst themselves as a strong mutual dislike for some definite person. In my own family, if I may give a homely illustration, it was a generally accepted axiom that in times of domestic disagreement it was necessary only to invite my Aunt Annie for a visit to heal all breaches between the other members of the household. In the mutual animosity excited by Aunt Annie, those who had become estranged were reconciled almost immediately. Remembering this, it occurred to me that were you, sir, to be established as the person responsible for the ladies and gentlemen being forced to

spend the night in the garden, everybody would take so strong a dislike to you that in this common sympathy they would sooner or later come together."

I would have spoken, but he continued:

"And such proved to be the case. All, as you see, sir, is now well. After your departure on the bicycle, the various estranged parties agreed so heartily in their abuse of you that the ice, if I may use the expression, was broken, and it was not long before Mr. Glossop was walking beneath the trees with Miss Angela, telling her anecdotes of your career at the university in exchange for hers regarding your childhood; while Mr. Fink-Nottle, leaning against the sundial, held Miss Bassett enthralled with stories of your schooldays. Mrs. Travers, meanwhile, was telling Monsieur Anatole——"

I found speech.

"Oh?" I said. "I see. And now, I suppose, as the result of this dashed psychology of yours, Aunt Dahlia is so sore with me that it will be years before I can dare to show my face here again—years, Jeeves, during which, night after night, Anatole will be cooking those dinners of his——"

"No, sir. It was to prevent any such contingency that I suggested that you should bicycle to Kingham Manor. When I informed the ladies and gentlemen that I had found the key, and it was borne in upon them that you were having that long ride

for nothing, their animosity vanished immediately, to be replaced by cordial amusement. There was much laughter."

"There was, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I fear you may possibly have to submit to a certain amount of good-natured chaff, but nothing more. All, if I may say so, is forgiven, sir."

"Oh?"

"Yes, sir."

I mused awhile.

"You certainly seem to have fixed things."

"Yes, sir."

"Tuppy and Angela are once more betrothed. Also Gussie and the Bassett; Uncle Tom appears to have coughed up that money for Milady's Boudoir. And Anatole is staying on."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you might say that all's well that ends well."

"Very apt, sir."

I mused again.

"All the same, your methods are a bit rough, Jeeves."

"One cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, sir."

I started.

"Omelette! Do you think you could get me one?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Together with half a bot. of something?"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Do so, Jeeves, and with all speed."

I climbed into bed and sank back against the pillows. I must say that my generous wrath had ebbed a bit. I was aching the whole length of my body,

particularly toward the middle, but against this you had to set the fact that I was no longer engaged to Madeline Bassett. In a good cause one is prepared to suffer. Yes, looking at the thing from every angle, I saw that Jeeves had done well, and it was with an approving beam that I welcomed him as he returned with the needful.

He did not check up with this beam. A bit grave, he seemed to me to be looking, and I probed the matter with a kindly query:

"Something on your mind, Jeeves?"

"Yes, sir. I should have mentioned it earlier, but in the evening's disturbance it escaped my memory, I fear I have been remiss, sir."

"Yes, Jeeves?" I said, champing contentedly.

"In the matter of your mess-jacket, sir."

A nameless fear shot through me, causing me to swallow a mouthful of omelette the wrong way.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that while I was ironing it this afternoon I was careless enough to leave the hot instrument upon it. I very much fear that it will be impossible for you to wear it again, sir."

One of those old pregnant silences filled the room.

"I am extremely sorry, sir."

For a moment, I confess, that generous wrath of mine came bounding back, hitching up its muscles and snorting a bit through the nose, but, as we say on the Riviera, *à quoi sert-il?* There was nothing to be gained by g.w. now.

We Woosters can bite the bullet. I nodded moodily and speared another slab of omelette.

"Right ho, Jeeves."

"Very good, sir."