

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Jeeves in the Offing

P.G. Wodehouse

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## About the Book

### *A Jeeves and Wooster novel*

Jeeves is on holiday in Herne Bay, and while he's away the world caves in on Bertie Wooster. For a start, he's astonished to read in *The Times* of his engagement to the mercurial Bobbie Wickham. Then at Brinkley Court, his Aunt Dahlia's establishment, he finds his awful former head master in attendance ready to award the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School. And finally the Brinkley butler turns out for reasons of his own to be Bertie's nemesis in disguise, the brain surgeon Sir Roderick Glossop.

With all occasions informing against him, Bertie has to hightail it to Herne Bay to liberate Jeeves from his shrimping net. And after that, the fun really starts.

## About the Author

**Pelham Grenville Wodehouse** (always known as 'Plum') wrote more than ninety novels and some three hundred short stories over 73 years. He is widely recognised as the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century writer of humour in the English language.

Wodehouse mixed the high culture of his classical education with the popular slang of the suburbs in both England and America, becoming a 'cartoonist of words'. Drawing on the antics of a near-contemporary world, he placed his Drones, Earls, Ladies (including draconian aunts and eligible girls) and Valets, in a recently vanished society, whose reality is transformed by his remarkable imagination into something timeless and enduring.

Perhaps best known for the escapades of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, Wodehouse also created the world of Blandings Castle, home to Lord Emsworth and his cherished pig, the Empress of Blandings. His stories include gems concerning the irrepressible and disreputable Ukridge; Psmith, the elegant socialist; the ever-so-slightly-unscrupulous Fifth Earl of Ickenham, better known as Uncle Fred; and those related by Mr Mulliner, the charming raconteur of *The Angler's Rest*, and the Oldest Member at the Golf Club.

Wodehouse collaborated with a variety of partners on straight plays and worked principally alongside Guy Bolton on providing the lyrics and script for musical comedies with such composers as George Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. He liked to say that the royalties for 'Just My Bill', which Jerome Kern incorporated into *Showboat*, were enough to keep him in tobacco and whisky for the rest of his life.

In 1936 he was awarded The Mark Twain Medal for 'having made an outstanding and lasting contribution to the happiness of the world'. He was made a Doctor of Letters by Oxford University in 1939 and in 1975, aged 93, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. He died shortly afterwards, on St Valentine's Day.

To have created so many characters that require no introduction places him in a very select group of writers, lead by Shakespeare and Dickens.

Also by P.G. Wodehouse

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*Bachelors Anonymous*  
*Barmy in Wonderland*  
*Big Money*  
*Bill the Conqueror*  
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*Carry On, Jeeves*  
*The Clicking of Cuthbert*  
*Cocktail Time*  
*The Code of the Woosters*  
*The Coming of Bill*  
*Company for Henry*  
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*Do Butlers Burgle Banks*  
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*The Girl on the Boat*  
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*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*  
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*The Man with Two Left Feet*  
*The Mating Season*  
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*Mike and Psmith*  
*Mike at Wrykyn*  
*Money for Nothing*  
*Money in the Bank*  
*Mr Mulliner Speaking*  
*Much Obligated, Jeeves*  
*Mulliner Nights*  
*Not George Washington*  
*Nothing Serious*  
*The Old Reliable*  
*Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*  
*A Pelican at Blandings*  
*Piccadilly Jim*  
*Pigs Have Wings*  
*Plum Pie*  
*The Pothunters*  
*A Prefect's Uncle*  
*The Prince and Betty*  
*Psmith, Journalist*



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*Quick Service*  
*Right Ho, Jeeves*  
*Ring for Jeeves*  
*Sam me Sudden*  
*Service with a Smile*  
*The Small Bachelor*  
*Something Fishy*  
*Something Fresh*  
*Spring Fever*  
*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*  
*Summer Lightning*  
*Summer Moonshine*  
*Sunset at Blandings*  
*The Swoop*  
*Tales of St Austin's*  
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*Ukridge*  
*Uncle Dynamite*  
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*Very Good, Jeeves*  
*The White Feather*  
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*Young Men in Spats*

### **Omnibuses**

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*The World of Jeeves*  
*The World of Mr Mulliner*  
*The World of Psmith*  
*The World of Ukridge*  
*The World of Uncle Fred*  
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### **Letters**

*Yours, Plum*

# Jeeves in the Offing

P.G. Wodehouse



# CHAPTER 1

JEEVES PLACED THE sizzling eggs and b. on the breakfast table, and Reginald ('Kipper') Herring and I, licking the lips, squared our elbows and got down to it. A lifelong buddy of mine, this Herring, linked to me by what are called imperishable memories. Years ago, when striplings, he and I had done a stretch together at Malvern House, Bramley-on-Sea, the preparatory school conducted by that prince of stinkers, Aubrey Upjohn M.A., and had frequently stood side by side in the Upjohn study awaiting the receipt of six of the juiciest from a cane of the type that biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder, as the fellow said. So we were, you might say, rather like a couple of old sweats who had fought shoulder to shoulder on Crispin's day, if I've got the name right.

The *plat du jour* having gone down the hatch, accompanied by some fluid ounces of strengthening coffee, I was about to reach for the marmalade, when I heard the telephone tootling out in the hall and rose to attend to it.

'Bertram Wooster's residence,' I said, having connected with the instrument. 'Wooster in person at this end. Oh hullo,' I added, for the voice that boomed over the wire was that of Mrs Thomas Portarlington Travers of Brinkley Court, Market Snodsbury, near Droitwich - or, putting it another way, my good and deserving Aunt Dahlia. 'A very hearty pip-pip to you, old ancestor,' I said, well pleased, for she is a woman with whom it is always a privilege to chew the fat.

'And a rousing toodle-oo to you, you young blot on the landscape,' she replied cordially. 'I'm surprised to find you

up as early as this. Or have you just got in from a night on the tiles?’

I hastened to rebut this slur.

‘Certainly not. Nothing of that description whatsoever. I’ve been upping with the lark this last week, to keep Kipper Herring company. He’s staying with me till he can get into his new flat. You remember old Kipper? I brought him down to Brinkley one summer. Chap with a cauliflower ear.’

‘I know who you mean. Looks like Jack Dempsey.’

‘That’s right. Far more, indeed, than Jack Dempsey does. He’s on the staff of the *Thursday Review*, a periodical of which you may or may not be a reader, and has to clock in at the office at daybreak. No doubt, when I apprise him of your call, he will send you his love, for I know he holds you in high esteem. The perfect hostess, he often describes you as. Well, it’s nice to hear your voice again, old flesh and blood. How’s everything down Market Snodsbury way?’

‘Oh, we’re jogging along. But I’m not speaking from Brinkley. I’m in London.’

‘Till when?’

‘Driving back this afternoon.’

‘I’ll give you lunch.’

‘Sorry, can’t manage it. I’m putting on the nosebag with Sir Roderick Glossop.’

This surprised me. The eminent brain specialist to whom she alluded was a man I would not have cared to lunch with myself, our relations having been on the stiff side since the night at Lady Wickham’s place in Hertfordshire when, acting on the advice of my hostess’s daughter Roberta, I had punctured his hot-water bottle with a darning needle in the small hours of the morning. Quite unintentional, of course. I had planned to puncture the h-w-b of his nephew Tuppy Glossop, with whom I had a feud on, and unknown to me they had changed rooms. Just one of those unfortunate misunderstandings.

‘What on earth are you doing that for?’

‘Why shouldn’t I? He’s paying.’

I saw her point – a penny saved is a penny earned and all that sort of thing – but I continued surprised. It amazed me that Aunt Dahlia, presumably a free agent, should have selected this very formidable loony-doctor to chew the mid-day chop with. However, one of the first lessons life teaches us is that aunts will be aunts, so I merely shrugged a couple of shoulders.

‘Well, it’s up to you, of course, but it seems a rash act. Did you come to London just to revel with Glossop?’

‘No, I’m here to collect my new butler and take him home with me.’

‘New butler? What’s become of Seppings?’

‘He’s gone.’

I clicked the tongue. I was very fond of the major-domo in question, having enjoyed many a port in his pantry, and this news saddened me.

‘No, really?’ I said. ‘Too bad. I thought he looked a little frail when I last saw him. Well, that’s how it goes. All flesh is grass, I often say.’

‘To Bognor Regis, for his holiday.’

I unclicked the tongue.

‘Oh, I see. That puts a different complexion on the matter. Odd how all these pillars of the home seem to be dashing away on toots these days. It’s like what Jeeves was telling me about the great race movements of the middle ages. Jeeves starts his holiday this morning. He’s off to Herne Bay for the shrimping, and I’m feeling like that bird in the poem who lost his pet gazelle or whatever the animal was. I don’t know what I’m going to do without him.’

‘I’ll tell you what you’re going to do. Have you a clean shirt?’

‘Several.’

‘And a toothbrush?’

‘Two, both of the finest quality.’

‘Then pack them. You’re coming to Brinkley tomorrow.’

The gloom which always envelops Bertram Wooster like a fog when Jeeves is about to take his annual vacation lightened perceptibly. There are few things I find more agreeable than a sojourn at Aunt Dahlia's rural lair. Picturesque scenery, gravel soil, main drainage, company's own water and, above all, the superb French cheffing of her French chef Anatole, God's gift to the gastric juices. A full hand, as you might put it.

'What an admirable suggestion,' I said. 'You solve all my problems and bring the blue bird out of a hat. Rely on me. You will observe me bowling up in the Wooster sports model tomorrow afternoon with my hair in a braid and a song on my lips. My presence will, I feel sure, stimulate Anatole to new heights of endeavour. Got anybody else staying at the old snake pit?'

'Five inmates in all.'

'Five?' I resumed my tongue-clicking. 'Golly! Uncle Tom must be frothing at the mouth a bit,' I said, for I knew the old buster's distaste for guests in the home. Even a single weekender is sometimes enough to make him drain the bitter cup.

'Tom's not there. He's gone to Harrogate with Cream.'

'You mean lumbago.'

'I don't mean lumbago. I mean Cream. Homer Cream. Big American tycoon, who is visiting these shores. He suffers from ulcers, and his medicine man has ordered him to take the waters at Harrogate. Tom has gone with him to hold his hand and listen to him of an evening while he tells him how filthy the stuff tastes.'

'Antagonistic.'

'What?'

'I mean altruistic. You are probably not familiar with the word, but it's one I've heard Jeeves use. It's what you say of a fellow who gives selfless service, not counting the cost.'

'Selfless service, my foot! Tom's in the middle of a very important business deal with Cream. If it goes through, he'll

make a packet free of income tax. So he's sucking up to him like a Hollywood Yes-man.'

I gave an intelligent nod, though this of course was wasted on her because she couldn't see me. I could readily understand my uncle-by-marriage's mental processes. T. Portarlington Travers is a man who has accumulated the pieces of eight in sackfuls, but he is always more than willing to shove a bit extra away behind the brick in the fireplace, feeling – and rightly – that every little bit added to what you've got makes just a little bit more. And if there's one thing that's right up his street, it is not paying income tax. He grudges every penny the Government nicks him for.

'That is why, when kissing me goodbye, he urged me with tears in his eyes to lush Mrs Cream and her son Willie up and treat them like royalty. So they're at Brinkley, dug into the woodwork.'

'Willie, did you say?'

'Short for Wilbert.'

I mused. Willie Cream. The name seemed familiar somehow. I seemed to have heard it or seen it in the papers somewhere. But it eluded me.

'Adela Cream writes mystery stories. Are you a fan of hers? No? Well, start boning up on them directly you arrive, because every little helps. I've brought a complete set. They're very good.'

'I shall be delighted to run an eye over her material,' I said, for I am what they call an a-something of novels of suspense. Aficionado, would that be it? 'I can always do with another corpse or two. We have established, then, that among the inmates are this Mrs Cream and her son Wilbert. Who are the other three?'

'Well, there's Lady Wickham's daughter Roberta.'

I started violently, as if some unseen hand had goosed me.

'What! Bobbie Wickham? Oh, my gosh!'

'Why the agitation? Do you know her?'



'You bet I know her.'

'I begin to see. Is she one of the gaggle of girls you've been engaged to?'

'Not actually, no. We were never engaged. But that was merely because she wouldn't meet me half way.'

'Turned you down, did she?'

'Yes, thank goodness.'

'Why thank goodness? She's a one-girl beauty chorus.'

'She doesn't try the eyes, I agree.'

'A pippin, if ever there was one.'

'Very true, but is being a pippin everything? What price the soul?'

'Isn't her soul like mother makes?'

'Far from it. Much below par. What I could tell you . . . But no, let it go. Painful subj.'

I had been about to mention fifty-seven or so of the reasons why the prudent operator, if he valued his peace of mind, deemed it best to stay well away from the red-headed menace under advisement, but realized that at a moment when I was wanting to get back to the marmalade it would occupy too much time. It will be enough to say that I had long since come out of the ether and was fully cognisant of the fact that in declining to fall in with my suggestion that we should start rounding up clergymen and bridesmaids, the beasel had rendered me a signal service, and I'll tell you why.

Aunt Dahlia, describing this young blister as a one-girl beauty chorus, had called her shots perfectly correctly. Her outer crust was indeed of a nature to cause those beholding it to rock back on their heels with a startled whistle. But while equipped with eyes like twin stars, hair ruddier than the cherry, oomph, *espièglerie* and all the fixings, B. Wickham had also the disposition and general outlook on life of a ticking bomb. In her society you always had the uneasy feeling that something was likely to go off at any moment with a pop. You never knew what she was going to

do next or into what murky depths of soup she would carelessly plunge you.

‘Miss Wickham, sir,’ Jeeves had once said to me warningly at the time when the fever was at its height, ‘lacks seriousness. She is volatile and frivolous. I would always hesitate to recommend as a life partner a young lady with quite such a vivid shade of red hair.’

His judgment was sound. I have already mentioned how with her subtle wiles this girl had induced me to sneak into Sir Roderick Glossop’s sleeping apartment and apply the darning needle to his hot-water bottle, and that was comparatively mild going for her. In a word, Roberta, daughter of the late Sir Cuthbert and Lady Wickham of Skeldings Hall, Herts, was pure dynamite and better kept at a distance by all those who aimed at leading the peaceful life. The prospect of being immured with her in the same house, with all the facilities a country house affords an enterprising girl for landing her nearest and dearest in the mulligatawny, made me singularly dubious about the shape of things to come.

And I was tottering under this blow when the old relative administered another, and it was a haymaker.

‘And there’s Aubrey Upjohn and his stepdaughter Phyllis Mills,’ she said. ‘That’s the lot. What’s the matter with you? Got asthma?’

I took her to be alluding to the sharp gasp which had escaped my lips, and I must confess that it had come out not unlike the last words of a dying duck. But I felt perfectly justified in gasping. A weaker man would have howled like a banshee. There floated into my mind something Kipper Herring had once said to me. ‘You know, Bertie,’ he had said, in philosophical mood, ‘we have much to be thankful for in this life of ours, you and I. However rough the going, there is one sustaining thought to which we can hold. The storm clouds may lower and the horizon grow dark, we may get a nail in our shoe and be caught in the rain without an

umbrella, we may come down to breakfast and find that someone else has taken the brown egg, but at least we have the consolation of knowing that we shall never see Aubrey Gawd-help-us Upjohn again. Always remember this in times of despondency,' he said, and I always had. And now here the boulder was, bobbing up right in my midst. Enough to make the stoutest-hearted go into his dying-duck routine.

'Aubrey Upjohn?' I quavered. 'You mean *my* Aubrey Upjohn?'

'That's the one. Soon after you made your escape from his chain gang he married Jane Mills, a friend of mine with a colossal amount of money. She died, leaving a daughter. I'm the daughter's godmother. Upjohn's retired now and going in for politics. The hot tip is that the boys in the back room are going to run him as the Conservative candidate in the Market Snodsbury division at the next by-election. What a thrill it'll be for you, meeting him again. Or does the prospect scare you?'

'Certainly not. We Woosters are intrepid. But what on earth did you invite him to Brinkley for?'

'I didn't. I only wanted Phyllis, but he came along, too.'

'You should have bunged him out.'

'I hadn't the heart to.'

'Weak, very weak.'

'Besides, I needed him in my business. He's going to present the prizes at Market Snodsbury Grammar School. We've been caught short as usual, and somebody has got to make a speech on ideals and the great world outside to those blasted boys, so he fits in nicely. I believe he's a very fine speaker. His only trouble is that he's stymied unless he has his speech with him and can read it. Calls it referring to his notes. Phyllis told me that. She types the stuff for him.'

'A thoroughly low trick,' I said severely. 'Even I, who have never soared above the Yeoman's Wedding Song at a village concert, wouldn't have the crust to face my public unless I'd