


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Summer Lightning

P.G. Wodehouse

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About the Book

The Empress of Blandings, prize-winning pig and all-consuming passion of Clarence, Ninth Earl of Emsworth, has disappeared.

Blandings Castle is in uproar and there are suspects aplenty - from Galahad Threepwood (who is writing memoirs so scandalous they will rock the aristocracy to its foundations) to the Efficient Baxter, chilling former secretary to Lord Emsworth. Even Beach the Butler seems deeply embroiled. And what of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, Clarence's arch-rival, and his passion for prize-winning pigs?

With the castle full of deceptions and impostors, will Galahad's memoirs ever see the light of day? And will the Empress be returned ...?

About the Author

The author of almost a hundred books and the creator of Jeeves, Blandings Castle, Psmith, Ukridge, Uncle Fred and Mr Mulliner, P.G. Wodehouse was born in 1881 and educated at Dulwich College. After two years with the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank he became a full-time writer, contributing to a variety of periodicals including *Punch* and the *Globe*. He married in 1914. As well as his novels and short stories, he wrote lyrics for musical comedies with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern, and at one time had five musicals running simultaneously on Broadway. His time in Hollywood also provided much source material for fiction.

At the age of 93, in the New Year's Honours List of 1975, he received a long-overdue knighthood, only to die on St Valentine's Day some 45 days later.

Also by P.G. Wodehouse

Fiction

Aunts Aren't Gentlemen

The Adventures of Sally

Bachelors Anonymous

Barmy in Wonderland

Big Money

Bill the Conqueror

Blandings Castle and Elsewhere

Carry On, Jeeves

The Clicking of Cuthbert

Cocktail Time

The Code of the Woosters

The Coming of Bill

Company for Henry

A Damsel in Distress

Do Butlers Burgle Banks

Doctor Sally

Eggs, Beans and Crumpets

A Few Quick Ones

French Leave

Frozen Assets

Full Moon

Galahad at Blandings

A Gentleman of Leisure

The Girl in Blue

The Girl on the Boat

The Gold Bat

*The Head of Kay's
The Heart of a Goof
Heavy Weather
Hot Water
Ice in the Bedroom
If I Were You
Indiscretions of Archie
The Inimitable Jeeves
Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit
Jeeves in the Offing
Jill the Reckless
Joy in the Morning
Laughing Gas
Leave it to Psmith
The Little Nugget
Lord Emsworth and Others
Louder and Funnier
Love Among the Chickens
The Luck of Bodkins
The Man Upstairs
The Man with Two Left Feet
The Mating Season
Meet Mr Mulliner
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
Psmith in the City
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 Moonshine
Sunset at Blandings
The Swoop
Tales of St Austin's
Thank You, Jeeves
Ukridge
Uncle Dynamite
Uncle Fred in the Springtime
Uneasy Money
Very Good, Jeeves
The White Feather

William Tell Told Again
Young Men in Spats

Omnibuses

The World of Blandings
The World of Jeeves
The World of Mr Mulliner
The World of Psmith
The World of Ukridge
The World of Uncle Fred
Wodehouse Nuggets (edited by Richard Usborne)
The World of Wodehouse Clergy
The Hollywood Omnibus
Weekend Wodehouse

Paperback Omnibuses

The Golf Omnibus
The Aunts Omnibus
The Drones Omnibus
The Jeeves Omnibus 1
The Jeeves Omnibus 3

Poems

The Parrot and Other Poems

Autobiographical

Wodehouse on Wodehouse (comprising Bring on the Girls, Over Seventy, Performing Flea)

Letters

Yours, Plum

P. G. WODEHOUSE
Summer Lightning



PREFACE

A CERTAIN CRITIC – for such men, I regret to say, do exist – made the nasty remark about my last novel that it contained ‘all the old Wodehouse characters under different names’. He has probably by now been eaten by bears, like the children who made mock of the prophet Elisha: but if he still survives he will not be able to make a similar charge against *Summer Lightning*. With my superior intelligence, I have outgeneralled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names. Pretty silly it will make him feel, I rather fancy.

This story is a sort of Old Home Week for my – if I may coin a phrase – puppets. Hugo Carmody and Ronnie Fish appeared in *Money for Nothing*. Pilbeam was in *Bill the Conqueror*. And the rest of them, Lord Emsworth, the Efficient Baxter, Butler Beach, and the others have all done their bit before in *Something Fresh* and *Leave it to Psmith*. Even Empress of Blandings, that pre-eminent pig, is coming up for the second time, having made her debut in a short story called ‘Pig-hoo-oo-ey!’, which, with other Blandings Castle stories too fascinating to mention, will eventually appear in volume form.

The fact is, I cannot tear myself away from Blandings Castle. The place exercises a sort of spell over me. I am always popping down to Shropshire and looking in there to hear the latest news, and there always seems to be

something to interest me. It is in the hope that it will also interest My Public that I have jotted down the bit of gossip from the old spot which I have called *Summer Lightning*.

A word about the title. It is related of Thackeray that, hitting upon *Vanity Fair* after retiring to rest one night, he leaped out of bed and ran seven times round the room, shouting at the top of his voice. Oddly enough, I behaved in exactly the same way when I thought of *Summer Lightning*. I recognized it immediately as the ideal title for a novel. My exuberance has been a little diminished since by the discovery that I am not the only one who thinks highly of it. Already I have been informed that two novels with the same name have been published in England, and my agent in America cables to say that three have recently been placed on the market in the United States. As my story has appeared in serial form under its present label, it is too late to alter it now. I can only express the modest hope that this story will be considered worthy of inclusion in the list of the Hundred Best Books Called Summer Lightning.

P. G. WODEHOUSE

To

DENIS MACKAIL

*Author of 'Greenery Street', 'The Flower Show',
and other books which I wish
I had written*

1 TROUBLE BREWING AT BLANDINGS

I

BLANDINGS CASTLE SLEPT in the sunshine. Dancing little ripples of heat-mist played across its smooth lawns and stone-flagged terraces. The air was full of the lulling drone of insects. It was that gracious hour of a summer afternoon, midway between luncheon and tea, when Nature seems to unbutton its waistcoat and put its feet up.

In the shade of a laurel bush outside the back premises of this stately home of England, Beach, butler to Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, its proprietor, sat sipping the contents of a long glass and reading a weekly paper devoted to the doings of Society and the Stage. His attention had just been arrested by a photograph in an oval border on one of the inner pages: and for perhaps a minute he scrutinized this in a slow, thorough, popeyed way, absorbing its every detail. Then, with a fruity chuckle, he took a penknife from his pocket, cut out the photograph, and placed it in the recesses of his costume.

At this moment, the laurel bush, which had hitherto not spoken, said 'Psst!'

The butler started violently. A spasm ran through his ample frame.

'Beach!' said the bush.

Something was now peering out of it. This might have been a wood-nymph, but the butler rather thought not, and

he was right. It was a tall young man with light hair. He recognized his employer's secretary, Mr Hugo Carmody, and rose with pained reproach. His heart was still jumping, and he had bitten his tongue.

'Startle you, Beach?'

'Extremely, sir.'

'I'm sorry. Excellent for the liver, though. Beach, do you want to earn a quid?'

The butler's austerity softened. The hard look died out of his eyes.

'Yes, sir.'

'Can you get hold of Miss Millicent alone?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Then give her this note, and don't let anyone see you do it. Especially - and this is where I want you to follow me very closely, Beach - Lady Constance Keeble.'

'I will attend to the matter immediately, sir.'

He smiled a paternal smile. Hugo smiled back. A perfect understanding prevailed between these two. Beach understood that he ought not to be giving his employer's niece surreptitious notes: and Hugo understood that he ought not to be urging a good man to place such a weight upon his conscience.

'Perhaps you are not aware, sir,' said the butler, having trousered the wages of sin, 'that her ladyship went up to London on the three-thirty train?'

Hugo uttered an exclamation of chagrin.

'You mean that all this Red Indian stuff - creeping from bush to bush and not letting a single twig snap beneath my feet - has simply been a waste of time?' He emerged, dusting his clothes. 'I wish I'd known that before,' he said. 'I've severely injured a good suit, and it's a very moot question whether I haven't got some kind of a beetle down my back. However, nobody ever took a toss through being careful.'

'Very true, sir.'

Relieved by the information that the X-ray eye of the aunt of the girl he loved was operating elsewhere, Mr Carmody became conversational.

'Nice day, Beach.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You know, Beach, life's rummy. I mean to say, you never can tell what the future holds in store. Here I am at Blandings Castle, loving it. Sing of joy, sing of bliss, home was never like this. And yet, when the project of my coming here was first placed on the agenda, I don't mind telling you the heart was rather bowed down with weight of woe.'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Yes. Noticeably bowed down. If you knew the circumstances, you would understand why.'

Beach did know the circumstances. There were few facts concerning the dwellers in Blandings Castle of which he remained in ignorance for long. He was aware that young Mr Carmody had been, until a few weeks back, co-proprietor with Mr Ronald Fish, Lord Emsworth's nephew, of a night-club called the Hot Spot, situated just off Bond Street in the heart of London's pleasure-seeking area; that, despite this favoured position, it had proved a financial failure; that Mr Ronald had gone off with his mother, Lady Julia Fish, to recuperate at Biarritz; and that Hugo, on the insistence of Ronnie that unless some niche was found for his boyhood friend he would not stir a step towards Biarritz or any other blighted place, had come to Blandings as Lord Emsworth's private secretary.

'No doubt you were reluctant to leave London, sir?'

'Exactly. But now, Beach, believe me or believe me not, as far as I am concerned, anyone who likes can have London. Mark you, I'm not saying that just one brief night in the Piccadilly neighbourhood would come amiss. But to dwell in, give me Blandings Castle. What a spot, Beach!'

'Yes, sir.'

'A Garden of Eden, shall I call it?'

‘Certainly, sir, if you wish.’

‘And now that old Ronnie’s coming here, joy, as you might say, will be unconfined.’

‘Is Mr Ronald expected, sir?’

‘Coming either to-morrow or the day after. I had a letter from him this morning. Which reminds me. He sends his regards to you, and asks me to tell you to put your shirt on Baby Bones for the Medbury Selling Plate.’

The butler pursed his lips dubiously.

‘A long shot, sir. Not generally fancied.’

‘Rank outsider. Leave it alone, is my verdict.’

‘And yet Mr Ronald is usually very reliable. It is many years now since he first began to advise me in these matters, and I have done remarkably well by following him. Even as a lad at Eton he was always singularly fortunate in his information.’

‘Well, suit yourself,’ said Hugo, indifferently. ‘What was that thing you were cutting out of the paper just now?’

‘A photograph of Mr Galahad, sir. I keep an album in which I paste items of interest relating to the Family.’

‘What that album needs is an eye-witness’s description of Lady Constance Keeble falling out of a window and breaking her neck.’

A nice sense of the proprieties prevented Beach from endorsing this view verbally, but he sighed a little wistfully. He had frequently felt much the same about the chatelaine of Blandings.

‘If you would care to see the clipping, sir? There is a reference to Mr Galahad’s literary work.’

Most of the photographs in the weekly paper over which Beach had been relaxing were of peeresses trying to look like chorus-girls and chorus-girls trying to look like peeresses: but this one showed the perky features of a dapper little gentleman in the late fifties. Beneath it, in large letters, was the single word:

GALLY

Under this ran a caption in smaller print.

'The Hon. Galahad Threepwood, brother of the Earl of Emsworth. A little bird tells us that "Gally" is at Blandings Castle, Shropshire, the ancestral seat of the family, busily engaged in writing his Reminiscences. As every member of the Old Brigade will testify, they ought to be as warm as the weather, if not warmer.'

Hugo scanned the exhibit thoughtfully, and handed it back, to be placed in the archives.

'Yes,' he observed, 'I should say that about summed it up. That old bird must have been pretty hot stuff, I imagine, back in the days of Edward the Confessor.'

'Mr Galahad was somewhat wild as a young man,' agreed the butler with a sort of feudal pride in his voice. 'It was the opinion of the Servants' Hall that the Hon. Galahad shed lustre on Blandings Castle.'

'Has it ever occurred to you, Beach, that that book of his is going to make no small stir when it comes out?'

'Frequently, sir.'

'Well, I'm saving up for my copy. By the way, I knew there was something I wanted to ask you. Can you give me any information on the subject of a bloke named Baxter?'

'Mr Baxter, sir? He used to be private secretary to his lordship.'

'Yes, so I gathered. Lady Constance was speaking to me about him this morning. She happened upon me as I was taking the air in riding kit and didn't seem overpleased. "You appear to enjoy a great deal of leisure, Mr Carmody," she said. "Mr Baxter," she continued, giving me the meaning eye, "never seemed to find time to go riding when he was Lord Emsworth's secretary. Mr Baxter was always so hard at work. But, then, Mr Baxter," she added, the old

lamp becoming more meaning than ever, "loved his work. Mr Baxter took a real interest in his duties. Dear me! What a very conscientious man Mr Baxter was, to be sure!" Or words to that effect. I may be wrong, but I classed it as a dirty dig. And what I want to know is, if Baxter was such a world-beater, why did they ever let him go?'

The butler gazed about him cautiously.

'I fancy, sir, there was some Trouble.'

'Pinched the spoons, eh? Always the way with these zealous workers.'

'I never succeeded in learning the full details, sir, but there was something about some flower-pots.'

'He pinched the flower-pots?'

'Threw them at his lordship, I was given to understand.'

Hugo looked injured. He was a high-spirited young man who chafed at injustice.

'Well, I'm dashed if I see then,' he said, 'where this Baxter can claim to rank so jolly high above me as a secretary. I may be leisurely, I may forget to answer letters, I may occasionally on warm afternoons go in to some extent for the folding of the hands in sleep, but at least I don't throw flower-pots at people. Not so much as a pen-wiper have I ever bunged at Lord Emsworth. Well, I must be getting about my duties. That ride this morning and a slight slumber after lunch have set the schedule back a bit. You won't forget that note, will you?'

'No, sir.'

Hugo reflected.

'On second thoughts,' he said, 'perhaps you'd better hand it back to me. Safer not to have too much written matter circulating about the place. Just tell Miss Millicent that she will find me in the rose-garden at six sharp.'

'In the rose-garden ...'

'At six sharp.'

'Very good, sir. I will see that she receives the information.'

II

For two hours after this absolutely nothing happened in the grounds of Blandings Castle. At the end of that period there sounded through the mellow, drowsy stillness a drowsy, mellow chiming. It was the clock over the stables striking five. Simultaneously, a small but noteworthy procession filed out of the house and made its way across the sun-bathed lawn to where the big cedar cast a grateful shade. It was headed by James, a footman, bearing a laden tray. Following him came Thomas, another footman, with a gate-leg table. The rear was brought up by Beach, who carried nothing, but merely lent a tone.

The instinct which warns all good Englishmen when tea is ready immediately began to perform its silent duty. Even as Thomas set the gate-leg table to earth there appeared, as if answering a cue, an elderly gentleman in stained tweeds and a hat he should have been ashamed of. Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, in person. He was a long, lean, stringy man of about sixty, slightly speckled at the moment with mud, for he had spent most of the afternoon pottering round pig-styes. He surveyed the preparations for the meal with vague amiability through rimless pince-nez.

‘Tea?’

‘Yes, your lordship.’

‘Oh?’ said Lord Emsworth. ‘Ah? Tea, eh? Tea? Yes. Tea. Quite so. To be sure, tea. Capital.’

One gathered from his remarks that he realized that the tea hour had arrived and was glad of it. He proceeded to impart his discovery to his niece, Millicent, who, lured by that same silent call, had just appeared at his side.

‘Tea, Millicent.’

‘Yes.’

‘Er – tea,’ said Lord Emsworth, driving home his point.

Millicent sat down, and busied herself with the pot. She was a tall, fair girl with soft blue eyes and a face like the Soul's Awakening. Her whole appearance radiated wholesome innocence. Not even an expert could have told that she had just received a whispered message from a bribed butler and was proposing at six sharp to go and meet a quite ineligible young man among the rose-bushes.

'Been down seeing the Empress, Uncle Clarence?'

'Eh? Oh, yes. Yes, my dear. I have been with her all the afternoon.'

Lord Emsworth's mild eyes beamed. They always did when that noble animal, Empress of Blandings, was mentioned. The ninth Earl was a man of few and simple ambitions. He had never desired to mould the destinies of the State, to frame its laws and make speeches in the House of Lords that would bring all the peers and bishops to their feet, whooping and waving their hats. All he yearned to do, by way of ensuring admittance to England's Hall of Fame, was to tend his prize sow, Empress of Blandings, so sedulously that for the second time in two consecutive years he would win the silver medal in the Fat Pigs class at the Shropshire Agricultural Show. And every day, it seemed to him, the glittering prize was coming more and more within his grasp.

Earlier in the summer there had been one breathless sickening moment of suspense, and disaster had seemed to loom. This was when his neighbour, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, of Matchingham Hall, had basely lured away his pig-man, the superbly gifted George Cyril Wellbeloved, by the promise of higher wages. For a while Lord Emsworth had feared lest the Empress, mourning for her old friend and valet, might refuse food and fall from her high standard of obesity. But his apprehensions had proved groundless. The Empress had taken to Pirbright, George Cyril's successor, from the first, and was tucking away her

meals with all the old abandon. The Right triumphs in this world far more often than we realize.

‘What do you do to her?’ asked Millicent, curiously. ‘Read her bedtime stories?’

Lord Emsworth pursed his lips. He had a reverent mind, and disliked jesting on serious subjects.

‘Whatever I do, my dear, it seems to effect its purpose. She is in wonderful shape.’

‘I didn’t know she had a shape. She hadn’t when I last saw her.’

This time Lord Emsworth smiled indulgently. Gibes at the Empress’s rotundity had no sting for him. He did not desire for her that school-girl slimness which is so fashionable nowadays.

‘She has never fed more heartily,’ he said. ‘It is a treat to watch her.’

‘I’m so glad. Mr Carmody,’ said Millicent, stooping to tickle a spaniel which had wandered up to take pot-luck, ‘told me he had never seen a finer animal in his life.’

‘I like that young man,’ said Lord Emsworth emphatically. ‘He is sound on pigs. He has his head screwed on the right way.’

‘Yes, he’s an improvement on Baxter, isn’t he?’

‘Baxter!’ His lordship choked over his cup.

‘You didn’t like Baxter much, did you, Uncle Clarence?’

‘Hadn’t a peaceful moment while he was in the place. Dreadful feller! Always fussing. Always wanting me to *do* things. Always coming round corners with his infernal spectacles gleaming and making me sign papers when I wanted to be out in the garden. Besides he was off his head. Thank goodness I’ve seen the last of Baxter.’

‘But have you?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘If you ask me,’ said Millicent, ‘Aunt Constance hasn’t given up the idea of getting him back.’

Lord Emsworth started with such violence that his pince-nez fell off. She had touched on his favourite nightmare. Sometimes he would wake trembling in the night, fancying that his late secretary had returned to the castle. And though on these occasions he always dropped off to sleep again with a happy smile of relief, he had never ceased to be haunted by the fear that his sister Constance, in her infernal managing way, was scheming to restore the fellow to office.

‘Good God! Has she said anything to you?’

‘No. But I have a feeling. I know she doesn’t like Mr Carmody.’

Lord Emsworth exploded.

‘Perfect nonsense! Utter, absolute, dashed nonsense. What on earth does she find to object to in young Carmody? Most capable, intelligent boy. Leaves me alone. Doesn’t fuss me. I wish to heaven she would ...’

He broke off, and stared blankly at a handsome woman of middle age who had come out of the house and was crossing the lawn.

‘Why, here she is!’ said Millicent, equally and just as disagreeably surprised. ‘I thought you had gone up to London, Aunt Constance.’

Lady Constance Keeble had arrived at the table. Declining, with a distrait shake of the head, her niece’s offer of the seat of honour by the tea-pot, she sank into a chair. She was a woman of still remarkable beauty, with features cast in a commanding mould and fine eyes. These eyes were at the moment dull and brooding.

‘I missed my train,’ she explained. ‘However, I can do all I have to do in London tomorrow. I shall go up by the eleven-fifteen. In a way, it will be more convenient, for Ronald will be able to motor me back. I will look in at Norfolk Street and pick him up there before he starts.’

‘What made you miss your train?’

‘Yes,’ said Lord Emsworth, complainingly. ‘You started in good time.’

The brooding look in his sister’s eyes deepened.

‘I met Sir Gregory Parsloe.’ Lord Emsworth stiffened at the name. ‘He kept me talking. He is extremely worried.’ Lord Emsworth looked pleased. ‘He tells me he used to know Galahad very well a number of years ago, and he is very much alarmed about this book of his.’

‘And I bet he isn’t the only one,’ murmured Millicent.

She was right. Once a man of the Hon. Galahad Threepwood’s antecedents starts taking pen in hand and being reminded of amusing incidents that happened to my dear old friend So-and-So, you never know where he will stop; and all over England, among the more elderly of the nobility and gentry, something like a panic had been raging ever since the news of his literary activities had got about. From Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, of Matchingham Hall, to grey-headed pillars of Society in distant Cumberland and Kent, whole droves of respectable men who in their younger days had been rash enough to chum with the Hon. Galahad were recalling past follies committed in his company and speculating agitatedly as to how good the old pest’s memory was.

For Galahad in his day had been a notable lad about town. A *beau sabreur* of Romano’s. A Pink ‘Un. A Pelican. A crony of Hughie Drummond and Fatty Coleman; a brother-in-arms of the Shifter, the Pitcher, Peter Blobbs and the rest of an interesting but not strait-laced circle. Bookmakers had called him by his pet name, barmaids had simpered beneath his gallant chaff. He had heard the chimes at midnight. And when he had looked in at the old Gardenia, commissionaires had fought for the privilege of throwing him out. A man, in a word, who should never have been taught to write and who, if unhappily gifted with that ability, should have been restrained by Act of Parliament from writing Reminiscences.

So thought Lady Constance, his sister. So thought Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, his neighbour. And so thought the pillars of society in distant Cumberland and Kent. Widely as they differed on many points, they were unanimous on this.

‘He wanted me to try to find out if Galahad was putting anything about him into it.’

‘Better ask him now,’ said Millicent. ‘He’s just come out of the house and seems to be heading in this direction.’

Lady Constance turned sharply: and, following her niece’s pointing finger, winced. The mere sight of her deplorable brother was generally enough to make her wince. When he began to talk and she had to listen, the wince became a shudder. His conversation had the effect of making her feel as if she had suddenly swallowed something acid.

‘It always makes me laugh,’ said Millicent, ‘when I think what a frightfully bad shot Uncle Gally’s godfathers and godmothers made when they christened him.’

She regarded her approaching relative with that tolerant – indeed, admiring – affection which the young of her sex, even when they have Madonna-like faces, are only too prone to lavish on such of their seniors as have had interesting pasts.

‘Doesn’t he look marvellous?’ she said. ‘It really is an extraordinary thing that anyone who has had as good a time as he has can be so amazingly healthy. Everywhere you look, you see men leading model lives and pegging out in their prime, while good old Uncle Gally, who apparently never went to bed till he was fifty, is still breezing along as fit and rosy as ever.’

‘All our family have had excellent constitutions,’ said Lord Emsworth.

‘And I’ll bet Uncle Gally needed every ounce of his,’ said Millicent.

The Author, ambling briskly across the lawn, had now joined the little group at the tea-table. As his photograph

had indicated, he was a short, trim, dapper little man of the type one associates automatically in one's mind with checked suits, tight trousers, white bowler hats, pink carnations, and race-glasses bumping against the left hip. Though bare-headed at the moment and in his shirt-sleeves, and displaying on the tip of his nose the ink-spot of the literary life, he still seemed out of place away from a paddock or an American bar. His bright eyes, puckered at the corners, peered before him as though watching horses rounding into the straight. His neatly-shod foot had about it a suggestion of pawing in search of a brass rail. A jaunty little gentleman, and, as Millicent had said, quite astonishingly fit and rosy. A thoroughly misspent life had left the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, contrary to the most elementary justice, in what appeared to be perfect, even exuberantly perfect physical condition. How a man who ought to have had the liver of the century could look and behave as he did was a constant mystery to his associates. His eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated. And when, skipping blithely across the turf, he tripped over the spaniel, so graceful was the agility with which he recovered his balance that he did not spill a drop of the whisky-and-soda in his hand. He continued to bear the glass aloft like some brave banner beneath which he had often fought and won. Instead of the blot on the proud family, he might have been a teetotal acrobat.

Having disentangled himself from the spaniel and soothed the animal's wounded feelings by permitting it to sniff the whisky-and-soda, the Hon. Galahad produced a black-rimmed monocle, and, screwing it into his eye, surveyed the table with a frown of distaste.

'Tea?'

Millicent reached for a cup.

'Cream and sugar, Uncle Gally?'

He stopped her with a gesture of shocked loathing.

'You know I never drink tea. Too much respect for my inside. Don't tell me you are ruining your inside with that poison.'

'Sorry, Uncle Gally. I like it.'

'You be careful,' urged the Hon. Galahad, who was fond of his niece and did not like to see her falling into bad habits. 'You be very careful how you fool about with that stuff. Did I ever tell you about poor Buffy Struggles back in 'ninety-three? Some misguided person lured poor old Buffy into one of those temperance lectures illustrated with coloured slides, and he called on me next day ashen, poor old chap - ashen. "Gally," he said. "What would you say the procedure was when a fellow wants to buy tea? How would a fellow set about it?" "Tea?" I said. "What do you want tea for?" "To drink," said Buffy. "Pull yourself together, dear boy," I said. "You're talking wildly. You can't drink tea. Have a brandy-and-soda." "No more alcohol for me," said Buffy. "Look what it does to the common earthworm." "But you're not a common earthworm," I said, putting my finger on the flaw in his argument right away. "I dashed soon shall be if I go on drinking alcohol," said Buffy. Well, I begged him with tears in my eyes not to do anything rash, but I couldn't move him. He ordered in ten pounds of the muck and was dead inside the year.'

'Good heavens! Really?'

The Hon. Galahad nodded impressively.

'Dead as a door-nail. Got run over by a hansom cab, poor dear old chap, as he was crossing Piccadilly. You'll find the story in my book.'

'How's the book coming along?'

'Magnificently, my dear. Splendidly. I had no notion writing was so easy. The stuff just pours out. Clarence, I wanted to ask you about a date. What year was it there was that terrible row between young Gregory Parsloe and Lord Burper, when Parsloe stole the old chap's false teeth, and pawned them at a shop in the Edgware Road? '96? I should

have said later than that – '97 or '98. Perhaps you're right, though. I'll pencil in '96 tentatively.'

Lady Constance uttered a sharp cry. The sunlight had now gone quite definitely out of her life. She felt, as she so often felt in her brother Galahad's society, as if foxes were gnawing her vitals. Not even the thought that she could now give Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe the inside information for which he had asked was able to comfort her.

'Galahad! You are not proposing to print libellous stories like that about our nearest neighbour?'

'Certainly I am.' The Hon. Galahad snorted militantly. 'And, as for libel, let him bring an action if he wants to. I'll fight him to the House of Lords. It's the best documented story in my book. Well, if you insist it was '96, Clarence ... I'll tell you what,' said the Hon. Galahad, inspired. 'I'll say "towards the end of the nineties". After all, the exact date isn't so important. It's the facts that matter.'

And, leaping lightly over the spaniel, he flitted away across the lawn.

Lady Constance sat rigid in her chair. Her fine eyes were now protruding slightly, and her face was drawn. This and not the Mona Lisa's, you would have said, looking at her, was the head on which all the sorrows of the world had fallen.

'Clarence!'

'My dear?'

'What are you going to do about this?'

'Do?'

'Can't you see that something must be done? Do you realize that if this awful book of Galahad's is published it will alienate half our friends? They will think we are to blame. They will say we ought to have stopped him somehow. Imagine Sir Gregory's feelings when he reads that appalling story!'

Lord Emsworth's amiable face darkened.