THE INIMITABLE JEEVES

(aka**JEEVES**)

by P. G. Wodehouse

(1923)

1

Jeeves Exerts the old Cerebellum

'Morning, Jeeves,' I said.

'Good morning, sir,' said Jeeves.

He put the good old cup of tea softly on the table by my bed, andI took a refreshing sip. Just right, as usual. Not too hot, not too sweet, not to weak, not too strong, not too much milk, and not adrop spilled in the saucer. A most amazing cove, Jeeves. So dashedcompetent in every respect. I've said it before, and I'll say it again.I mean to say, take just one small instance. Every other valet I'veever had used to barge into my room in the morning while I wasstill asleep, causing much misery: but Jeeves seems to know whenI'm awake by a sort of telepathy. He always floats in with the cupexactly two minutes after I come to life. Makes a deuce of a lot ofdifference to a fellow's day.

'How's the weather, Jeeves?'

'Exceptionally clement, sir.'

'Anything in the papers?'

'Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans, sir. Otherwise,nothing.'

'I say, Jeeves, a man I met at the club last night told me to putmy shirt on Privateer for the two o'clock race this afternoon. How about it?'

'I should not advocate it, sir. The stable is not sanguine.'

That was enough for me. Jeeves knows. How, I couldn't say, buthe knows. There was a time when I would laugh lightly, and goahead, and lose my little all against his advice, but not now.

'Talking of shirts,' I said, 'have those mauve ones I ordered arrivedyet?'

'Yes, sir. I sent then back.'

'Sent them back?'

'Yes, sir. They would not have become you.'

Well, I must say I'd thought fairly highly of those shirtings, but Ibowed to superior knowledge. Weak? I don't know. Most fellows,no doubt, are all for having their valets confine their activities tocreasing trousers and what not without trying to run the home; butit's different with Jeeves. Right from the first day he came to me, Ihave looked on him as a sort of guide, philosopher, and friend.

'Mr Little rang up on the telephone a few moments ago, sir. Iinformed him that you were not yet awake.'

'Did he leave a message?'

'No, sir. He mentioned that he had a matter of importance todiscuss with you, but confided no details.'

'Oh, well, I expect I shall be seeing him at the club.'

'No doubt, sir.'

I wasn't what you might call in a fever of impatience. Bingo Littleis a chap I was at school with, and we see a lot of each other still. He's the nephew of old Mortimer Little, who retired from businessrecently with a goodish pile. (You've probably heard of Little'sLiniment - It Limbers Up the Legs.) Bingo biffs about London ona pretty comfortable allowance given him by his uncle, and leads onthe whole a fairly unclouded life. It wasn't likely that anything whichhe described as a matter of importance would turn out to be reallyso frightfully important. I took it that he had discovered some newbrand of cigarette which he wanted me to try, or something likethat, and didn't spoil my breakfast by worrying.

After breakfast I lit a cigarette and went to the open window toinspect the day. It certainly was one of the best and brightest.'Jeeves,' I said.

'Sir?' said Jeeves. He had been clearing away the breakfast things,but at the sound of the young master's voice cheesed it courteously.'You were absolutely right about the weather. It is a juicy morning.'

'Decidedly, sir.'

'Spring and all that.'

'Yes, sir.'

'In the spring, Jeeves, a livelier iris gleams upon the burnisheddove.'

'So I have been informed, sir.'

'Right ho! Then bring me my whangee, my yellowest shoes, andthe old green Homburg. I'm going into the park to do pastoraldances.'

I don't know if you know that sort of feeling you get on thesedays round about the end of April and the beginning of May, when the sky's a light blue, with cotton-wool clouds,and there's a bit ofbreeze blowing from the west? Kind of uplifted feeling. Romantic,if you know what I mean. I'm not much of a ladies' man, but onthis particular morning it seemed to me that what I really wantedwas some charming girl to buzz up and ask me to save her fromassassins or something. So that it was a bit of an anti-climax whenI merely ran into young Bingo Little, looking perfectly foul in acrimson satin tie decorated with horseshoes.

'Hallo, Bertie,' said Bingo.

'My God, man!' I gargled. 'The cravat! The gent's neckwear!Why? For what reason?'

'Oh, the tie?' He blushed. 'I - er - I was given it.'

He seemed embarrassed, so I dropped the subject. We toddledalong a bit, and sat down on a couple of chairs by the Serpentine.

'Jeeves tells me you want to talk to me about something,' I said.

'Eh?' said Bingo, with a start. 'Oh yes, yes. Yes.'

I waited for him to unleash the topic of the day, but he didn'tseem to want to get along. Conversation languished. He staredstraight ahead of him in a glassy sort of manner.

'I say, Bertie,' he said, after a pause of about an hour and aquarter.

'Hallo!'

'Do you like the name Mabel?'

'No.'

'No?'

'No.'

'You don't think there's a kind of music in the word, like the windrustling gently through the tree-tops?'

'No.'

He seemed disappointed for a moment; then cheered up.

'Of course, you wouldn't. You always were a fatheaded worm without any soul, weren't you?'

'Just as you say. Who is she? Tell me all.'

For I realized now that poor old Bingo was going through it onceagain. Ever since I have known him - and we were at school together- he has been perpetually falling in love with someone, generally in the spring, which seems to act on him like magic. At school he hadthe finest collection of actresses' photographs of anyone of his time;and at Oxford his romantic nature was a byword.

'You'd better come along and meet her at lunch,' he said, lookingat his watch.

'A ripe suggestion,' I said. 'Where are you meeting her? At theRitz?'

'Near the Ritz.'

He was geographically accurate. About fifty yards east of the Ritzthere is one of those blighted tea-and-bun shops you see dottedabout all over London, and into this, if you'll believe me, young Bingo

dived like a homing rabbit; and before I had time to say aword we were wedged in at a table, on the brink of a silent pool ofcoffee left there by an early luncher.

I'm bound to say I couldn't quite follow the development of thescenario. Bingo, while not absolutely rolling in the stuff, has alwayshad a fair amount of the ready. Apart from what he got from his uncle, I knew that he had finished up the jumping season well onthe right side of the ledger. Why, then, was he lunching the girl atthis God-forsaken eatery? It couldn't be because he was hard up. Just then the waitress arrived. Rather a pretty girl.'Aren't we going to wait?' I started to say to Bingo, thinking itsomewhat thick that, in addition to asking a girl to lunch with himin a place like this, he should fling himself on the foodstuffs beforeshe turned up, when I caught sight of his face, and stopped.

The man was goggling. His entire map was suffused with a richblush. He looked like the Soul's Awakening done in pink.'Hullo, Mabel!' he said, with a sort of gulp.'Hallo!' said the girl.

'Mabel,' said Bingo, 'this is Bertie Wooster, a pal of mine.'

'Pleased to meet you,' she said. 'Nice morning.'

'Fine,' I said.

'You see I'm wearing the tie,' said Bingo.

'It suits you beautiful,' said the girl.

Personally, if anyone had told me that a tie like that suited me, Ishould have risen and struck them on the mazzard, regardless oftheir age and sex; but poor old Bingo simply got all flustered withgratification, and smirked in the most gruesome manner.

'Well, what's it going to be today?' asked the girl, introducing thebusiness touch into the conversation. Bingo studied the menu devoutly.

'I'll have a cup of cocoa, cold veal and ham pie, slice of fruit cake,and a macaroon. Same for you, Bertie?'

I gazed at the man, revolted. That he could have been a pal ofmine all these years and think me capable of insulting the old turnwith this sort of stuff cut me to the quick.

'Or how about a bit of hot steak-pudding, with a sparkling limado to wash it down?' said Bingo.

You know, the way love can change a fellow is really frightful tocontemplate. This chappie before me, who spoke in that absolutely careless way of macaroons and limado, was the man I had seen in happier days telling the head-waiter at Claridge's exactly how hewanted the chef to prepare the*sole frite augourmet aux champignons,*and saying he would jolly well sling it back if it wasn't just right. Ghastly! Ghastly!

A roll and butter and a small coffee seemed the only things onthe list that hadn't been specially prepared by the nastier-mindedmembers of the Borgia family for people they had a particular grudgeagainst, so I chose them, and Mabel hopped it.

'Well?' said Bingo rapturously.

I took it that he wanted my opinion of the female poisoner who had just left us.

'Very nice,' I said.

He seemed dissatisfied.

'You don't think she's the most wonderful girl you ever saw?' hesaid wistfully.

'Oh, absolutely!' I said, to appease the blighter. 'Where did youmeet her?'

'At a subscription dance at Camberwell.'

'What on earth were you doing at a subscription dance atCamberwell?'

'Your man Jeeves asked me if I would buy a couple of tickets. Itwas in aid of some charity or other.'

'Jeeves? I didn't know he went in for that sort of thing.'

'Well, I suppose he has to relax a bit every now and then. Anyway,he was there, swinging a dashed efficient shoe. I hadn't meant togo at first, but I turned up for a lark. Oh, Bertie, think what I might have missed!'

'What might you have missed?' I asked, the old lemon beingslightly clouded.

'Mabel, you chump. If I hadn't gone I shouldn't have met Mabel.'

'Oh, ah!'

At this pouit Bingo fell into a species of trance, and only came out of it to wrap himself round the pie and the macaroon.

'Bertie,' he said, 'I want your advice.'

'Carry on.'

'At least, not your advice, because that wouldn't be much goodto anybody. I mean, you're a pretty consummate old ass, aren't you?Not that I want to hurt your feelings, of course.'

'No, no, I see that.'

'What I wish you would do is to put the whole thing to that fellowJeeves of yours, and see what he suggests. You've often told me thathe has helped other pals of yours out of messes. From what you tell me, he's by way of being the brains of the family.'

'He's never let me down yet.'

'Then put my case to him.'

'What case?'

'My problem.'

'What problem?'

'Why, you poor fish, my uncle, of course. What do you think myuncle's going to say to all this? If I sprang it on him cold, he'd tiehimself in knots on the hearthrug.'

'One of these emotional johnnies, eh?'

'Somehow or other his mind has got to be prepared to receivethe news. But how?'

'Ah!'

'That's a lot of help, that "ah"! You see, I'm pretty well dependenton the old boy. If he cut off my allowance, I should be very muchin the soup. So you put the whole binge to Jeeves and see if he can't scare up a happy ending somehow. Tell him my future is in hishands, and that, if the wedding bells ring out, he can rely on me, even unto half my kingdom. Well, call it ten quid. Jeeves wouldexert himself with ten quid on the horizon, what?'

'Undoubtedly,' I said.

I wasn't in the least surprised at Bingo wanting to lug Jeeves intohis private affairs like this. It was the first thing I would have thoughtof doing myself if I had been in any hole of any description. As Ihave frequently had occasion to observe, he is a bird of the ripestintellect, full of bright ideas. If anybody could fix things for poorold Bingo, he could.

I stated the case to him that night after dinner.

'Jeeves.'

'Sir?'

'Are you busy just now?'

'No, sir.'

'I mean, not doing anything in particular?'

'No, sir. It is my practice at this hour to read some improvingbook; but, if you desire my services, this can easily be postponed, or indeed, abandoned altogether.'

'Well, I want your advice. It's about Mr Little.'

'Young Mr Little, sir, or the elder Mr Little, his uncle, who livesin Pounceby Gardens?'

Jeeves seemed to know everything. Most amazing thing. I'd been pally with Bingo practically all my life, and yet I didn't rememberhaving heard that his uncle lived anywhere in particular.

'How did you know he lived in Pounceby Gardens?' I said.

'I am on terms of some intimacy with the elder Mr Little's cook,sir. In fact, there is an understanding.'

I'm bound to say that this gave me a bit of a start. Somehow I'dnever thought of Jeeves going in for that sort of thing.

'Do you mean you're engaged?'

'It may be said to amount to that, sir.'

'Well, well!'

'She is a remarkably excellent cook, sir,' said Jeeves, as thoughhe felt called on to give some explanation. 'What was it you wishedto ask me about Mr Little?'

I sprang the details on him.

'And that's how the matter stands, Jeeves,' I said. 'I think weought to rally round a trifle and help poor old Bingo put the thingthrough. TeU me about old Mr Little. What sort of a chap is he?'

'A somewhat curious character, sir. Since retiring from businesshe has become a great recluse, and now devotes himself almost entirely to the pleasures of the table.'

'Greedy hog, you mean?'

'I would not, perhaps, take the liberty of describing him in precisely those terms, sir. He is what is usually called a gourmet. Veryparticular about what he eats, and for that reason sets a high valueon Miss Watson's services.

'The cook?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, it looks to me as though our best plan would be to shootyoung Bingo in on him after dinner one night. Melting mood, Imean to say, and all that.'

'The difficulty is, sir, that at the moment Mr Little is on a diet,owing to an attack of gout.'

'Things begin to look wobbly.'

'No, sir, I fancy that the elder Mr Little's misfortune may beturned to the younger Mr Little's advantage. I was speaking onlythe other day to Mr Little's valet, and he was telling me that it hasbecome his principle duty to read to Mr Little in the evenings. If Iwere in your place, sir, I should send young Mr Little to read to hisuncle.'

'Nephew's devotion, you mean? Old man touched by kindly action,what?'

'Partly that, sir. But I would rely more on young Mr Little's choiceof literature.'

'That's no good. Jolly old Bingo has a land face, but when itconies to literature he stops at the*Sporting Times."*

'That difficulty may be overcome. I would be happy to selectbooks for Mr Little to read. Perhaps I might explain my idea a littlefurther.'

'I can't say I quite grasp it yet.'

'The method which I advocate is what, I believe, the advertiserscall Direct Suggestion, sir, consisting as it does of driving an ideahome by constant repetition. You may have had experience of thesystem?'

'You mean they keep on telling you that some soap or other isthe best, and after a bit you come under the influence and chargeround the corner and buy a cake?'

'Exactly, sir. The same method was the basis of all the mostvaluable propaganda during the recent war. I see no reason why itshould not be adopted to bring about the desired result with regardto the subject's views on class distinctions. If young Mr Little were to read day after day to his uncle a series of narratives in whichmarriage with young persons of an inferior social status was held upas both feasible and admirable, I fancy it would prepare the elderMr Little's mind for the reception of the information that his nephewwishes to marry a waitress in a tea-shop.'

'Arethere any books of that sort nowadays? The only ones I eversee mentioned in the papers are about married couples who find lifegrey, and can't stick each other at any price.'

'Yes, sir, there are a great many, neglected by the reviewers butwidely read. You have never encountered*All for Love,* by Rosie M.Banks?'

'No.'

'Nor,*A Red, Red Summer,* by the same author?'

'No.'

'I have an aunt, sir, who owns an almost complete set of RosieM. Banks'. I could easily borrow as many volumes as young MrLittle might require. They make very light, attractive reading.'

'Well, it's worth trying.'

'I should certainly recommend the scheme, sir.'

'All right, then. Toddle round to your aunt's tomorrow and graba couple of the fruitiest. We can but have a dash at it.'

'Precisely, sir.'

2

No Wedding Bells for Bingo

Bingo reported three days later that Rosie M. Banks was the goodsand beyond a question the stuff to

give the troops. Old Little had jibbed somewhat at first at the proposed change of literary diet, henot being much of a lad for fiction and having stuck hitherto exclusively to the heavier monthly reviews; but Bingo had got chapter oneof All for Lovepast his guard before he knew what was happeningand after that there was nothing to it. Since then they had finishedA Red, Red Summer Rose, Madcap Myrtleand *Only a Factory Girl,* andwere half-way through*The Courtship of Lord Strathmorlick.*

Bingo told me all this in a husky voice over an egg beaten up insherry. The only blot on the thing from his point of view was thatit wasn't doing a bit of good to the old vocal cords, which were beginning to show signs of cracking under the strain. He had beenlooking his symptoms up in a medical dictionary, and he thought hehad got 'clergyman's throat'. But against this you had to set the factthat he was making an undoubted hit in the right quarter, and alsothat after the evening's reading he always stayed on to dinner; and,from what he told me, the dinners turned out by old Little's cookhad to be tasted to be believed. There were tears in the old blighter'seyes as he got on the subject of the clear soup. I suppose to a fellow who for weeks had been tackling macaroons and limado it must havebeen like Heaven.

Old Little wasn't able to give any practical assistance at thesebanquets, but Bingo said that he came to the table and had hiswhack of arrowroot, and sniffed the dishes, and told stories*of entrees*he had had in the past, and sketched out scenarios of what he wasgoing to do to the bill of fare in the future, when the doctor put him in shape; so I suppose he enjoyed himself, too, in a way.Anyhow, things seemed to be buzzing along quite satisfactorily, and Bingo said he had got an idea which, he thought, was going to clinchthe thing. He wouldn't tell me what it was, but he said it was a pippin.

'We make progress, Jeeves,' I said.

'That is very satisfactory, sir.'

'Mr Little tells me that when he came to the big scene in*Only a Factory Girl,* his uncle gulped like a stricken bullpup.'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Where Lord Claude takes the girl in his arms, you know, andsays -'

'I am familiar with the passage, sir. It is distinctly moving. It wasa great favourite of my aunt's.'

'I think we're on the right track.'

'It would seem so, sir.'

'In fact, this looks like being another of your successes. I've alwayssaid, and I always shall say, that for sheer brains, Jeeves, you stand alone. All the other great thinkers of the age are simply in the crowd, watching you go by.'

'Thank you very much, sir. I endeavour to give satisfaction.'

About a week after this, Bingo blew in with the news that hisuncle's gout had ceased to trouble him, and that on the morrow hewould be back at the old stand working away with knife and fork asbefore.

'And, by the way,' said Bingo, 'he wants you to lunch with himtomorrow.'

'Me? Why me? He doesn't know I exist.'

'Oh, yes, he does. I've told him about you.'

'What have you told him?'

'Oh, various things. Anyhow, he wants to meet you. And take mytip, laddie - you go! I should think lunch tomorrow would besomething special.'

I don't know why it was, but even then it struck me that therewas something dashed odd - almost sinister, if you know what Imean - about young Bingo's manner. The old egg had the air ofone who has something up his sleeve.

'There is more in this than meets the eye,' I said. 'Why shouldyour uncle ask a fellow to lunch whom he's never seen?'

'My dear old fathead, haven't I just said that I've been telling himall about you - that you're my best pal - at school together, and allthat sort of thing?'

'But even then - and another thing. Why are you so dashed keenon my going?'

Bingo hesitated for a moment.

'Well, I told you I'd got an idea. This is it. I want you to spring the news on him. I haven't the nerve myself.'

'What! I'm hanged if I do!'

'And you call yourself a pal of mine!'

'Yes, I know; but there are limits.'

'Bertie,' said Bingo reproachfully, 'I saved your life once.'

'When?'

'Didn't I? It must have been some other fellow, then. Well, anyway,we were boys together and all that. You can't let me down.'

'Oh, all right,' I said. 'But, when you say you haven't nerve enough for any dashed thing in the world, you misjudge yourself. A fellowwho-'

'Cheerio!' said young Bingo. 'One-thirty tomorrow. Don't be late.'

I'm bound to say that the more I contemplated the binge, the lessI liked it. It was all very well for Bingo to say that I was slated fora magnificent lunch; but what good is the best possible lunch to afellow if he is slung out into the street on his ear during the soupcourse? However, the word of a Wooster is his bond and all thatsort of rot, so at one-thirty next day I tottered up the steps of No.16, Pounceby Gardens, and punched the bell. And half a minutelater I was in the drawing-room, shaking hands with the fattest man I have ever seen in my life.

The motto of the Little family was evidently 'variety'. Young Bingois long and thin and hasn't had a superfluous ounce on him sincewe first met; but the uncle restored the average and a bit over. Thehand which grasped mine wrapped it round and enfolded it till Ibegan to wonder if I'd ever get it out without excavating machinery.

'Mr Wooster, I am gratified - I am proud - I am honoured.'

It seemed to me that young Bingo must have boosted me to somepurpose.

'Oh, ah!' I said.

He stepped back a bit, still hanging to the good right hand.

'You are very young to have accomplished so much!'

I couldn't follow the train of thought. The family, especially my Aunt Agatha, who has savaged me incessantly from childhood up,have always rather made a point of the fact that mine is a wastedlife, and that, since I won the prize at my first school for the bestcollection of wild flowers made during the summer holidays, Ihaven't done a dam' thing to land me on the nation's scroll of fame.I was wondering if he couldn't have got me mixed up with someoneelse, when the telephone bell rang outside in the hall, and the maidcame in to say that I was wanted. I buzzed down, and found it wasyoung Bingo.

'Hallo!' said young Bingo. 'So you've got there? Good man! Iknew I could rely on you. I say, old crumpet, did my uncle seem pleased to see you?'

'Absolutely all over me. I can't make it out.'

'Oh, that's all right. I just rang up to explain. The fact is, oldman, I know you won't mind, but I told him that you were the authorof those books I've been reading to him.'

'What!'

'Yes, I said that "Rosie M. Banks" was your pen-name, and youdidn't want it generally known, because you were a modest, retiringsort of chap. He'll listen to you now. Absolutely hang on your words.A brightish idea, what? I doubt if Jeeves in person could have thoughtup a better one than that. Well, pitch it strong, old lad, and keepsteadily before you the fact that I must have my allowance raised. I can't possibly marry on what I've got now. If this film is to end with the slow fade-out on the embrace, at least double is indicated. Well,that's that. Cheerio!'

And he rang off. At that moment the gong sounded, and thegenial host came tumbling downstairs like the delivery of a ton ofcoals.

I always look back to that lunch with a sort of aching regret. It wasthe lunch of a lifetime, and I wasn't in a fit state to appreciate it.Subconsciously, if you know what I mean, I could see it was prettyspecial, but I had got the wind up to such a frightful extent over the ghastly situation in which young Bingo had landed me that its deepermeaning never really penetrated. Most of the time I might have beeneating sawdust for all the good it did me.

Old Little struck the literary note right from the start.

'My nephew has probably told you that I have been making aclose study of your books of late?' he began.

'Yes. He did mention it. How - er - how did you like the ballythings?'

He gazed reverently at me.

'Mr Wooster, I am not ashamed to say that the tears came intomy eyes as I listened to them. It amazes me that a man as young asyou can have been able to plumb human nature so surely to itsdepths; to play with so unerring a hand on the quivering heart-strings of your reader; to write novels so true, so human, so moving,so vital!'

'Oh, it's just a knack,' I said.

The good old persp. was bedewing my forehead by this time ina pretty lavish manner. I don't know when I've been so rattled.

'Do you find the room a trifle warm?'

'Oh, no, no, rather not. Just right.'

'Then it's the pepper. If my cook has a fault - which I am notprepared to admit - it is that she is inclined to stress the pepper atrifle in her made dishes. By the way, do you like her cooking?'

I was so relieved that we had got off the subject of my literaryoutput that I shouted approval in a ringing baritone.

'I am delighted to hear it, Mr Wooster. I may be prejudiced, but to my mind that woman is a genius.'

'Absolutely!' I said.

'She has been with me seven years, and in all that time I havenot known her guilty of a single lapse from the highest standard.Except once, in the winter of 1917, when a purist might havecondemned a certain mayonnaise of hers as lacking in creaminess.But one must make allowances. There had been several air-raidsabout that time, and no doubt the poor woman was shaken. But nothing is perfect in this world, Mr Wooster, and I have had mycross to bear. For seven years I have lived in constant apprehensionlest some evilly-disposed person might lure her from my employment. To my certain knowledge she has received offers, lucrativeoffers, to accept service elsewhere. You may judge of my dismay,Mr Wooster, when only this morning the bolt fell. She gave notice!'

'Good Lord!'

'Your consternation does credit, if I may say so, to the heart ofthe author of*A Red, Red Summer Rose.* But I am thankful to say theworst has not happened. The matter has been adjusted. Jane is notleaving me.'

'Good egg!'

'Good egg, indeed - though the expression is not familiar to me.I do not remember having come across it

in your books. And,speaking of your books, may I say that what has impressed me aboutthem even more than the moving poignancy of the actual narrative,is your philosophy of life. If there were more men like you, MrWooster, London would be a better place.'

This was dead opposite to my Aunt Agatha's philosophy of life,she having always rather given me to understand that it is thepresence in it of chappies like me that makes London more or lessof a plague spot; but I let it go.

'Let me tell you, Mr Wooster, that I appreciate your splendiddefiance of the outworn fetishes of a purblind social system. Iappreciate it! *You* are big enough to see that rank is but the guineastamp and that, in the magnificent words of Lord Bletchmore inOnly a Factory Girl,"Be her origin ne'er so humble, a good womanis the equal of the finest lady on earth!" '

'I say! Do you think that?'

'I do, Mr Wooster. I am ashamed to say that there was a timewhen I was like other men, a slave to the idiotic convention whichwe call Class Distinction. But, since I read your book -'

I might have known it. Jeeves had done it again.

'You think it's all right for a chappie in what you might call acertain social position to marry a girl of what you might describe asthe lower classes?'

'Most assuredly I do, Mr Wooster.'

I took a deep breath, and slipped him the good news.

'Young Bingo - your nephew, you know - wants to marry awaitress,' I said.

'I honour him for it,' said old Little.

'You don't object?'

'On the contrary.'

I took another deep breath and shifted to the sordid side of thebusiness.

'I hope you won't think I'm butting in, don't you know,' I said,'but - er - well, how about it?'

'I fear I do not quite follow you.'

'Well, I mean to say, his allowance and all that. The money you'regood enough to give him. He was rather hoping that you might seeyour way to jerking up the total a bit.'

Old Little shook his head regretfully.

'I fear that can hardly be managed. You see, a man in my positionis compelled to save every penny. I will gladly continue my nephew'sexisting allowance, but beyond that I cannot go. It would not be fair to my wife.'

'What! But you're not married?'

'Not yet. But I propose to enter upon that holy state almostimmediately. The lady who for years has cooked so well for mehonoured me by accepting my hand this very morning.' A cold gleamof triumph came into his eye. 'Now let 'em try to get her away fromme!' he muttered defiantly.

'Young Mr Little has been trying frequently during the afternoon to reach you on the telephone, sir,' said Jeeves that night, when Igot home.

'Til bet he has,' I said. I had sent poor old Bingo an outline ofthe situation by messenger-boy shortly after lunch.

'He seemed a trifle agitated.'

'I don't wonder, Jeeves,' I said, 'so brace up and bite the bullet.I'm afraid I've bad news for you.

'That scheme of yours - reading those books to old Mr Little andall that - has blown out a fuse.'

'They did not soften him?'

'They did. That's the whole bally trouble. Jeeves, I'm sorry to saythat fianceeof yours - Miss Watson, you know - the cook, you know- well, the long and the short of it is that she's chosen riches insteadof honest worth, if you know what I mean.'

'Sir?'

'She's handed you the mitten and gone and got engaged to oldMr Little!'

'Indeed, sir?'

'You don't seem much upset.'

'The fact is, sir, I had anticipated some such outcome.'

I stared at him. 'Then what on earth did you suggest the schemefor?'

'To tell you the truth, sir, I was not wholly averse from a severanceof my relations with Miss Watson. In fact, I greatly desired it. I respect Miss Watson exceedingly, but I have seen for a long timethat we were not suited. Now, the*other* young person with whom Ihave an understanding -'

'Great Scott, Jeeves! There isn't another?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How long has this been going on?'

'For some weeks, sir. I was greatly attracted by her when I firstmet her at a subscription dance at Camberwell.'

'My sainted aunt! Not -'

Jeeves inclined his head gravely.

'Yes, sir. By an odd coincidence it is the same young person thatyoung Mr Little - I have placed the cigarettes on the small table.Good night, sir.'

3

Aunt Agatha Speaks her Mind

I suppose in the case of a chappie of really fine fibre and all thatsort of thing, a certain amount of gloom and anguish would havefollowed this dishing of young Bingo's matrimonial plans. I mean,if mine had been a noble nature, I would have been all broken up.But, what with one thing and another, I can't let it weigh on me very heavily. The fact that less than a week after he had had thebad news I came on young Bingo dancing like an untamed gazelleat Giro's helped me to bear up.

A resilient bird, Bingo. He may be down, but he is never out.While these little love-affairs of his are actually on, nobody couldbe more earnest and blighted; but once the fuse has blown out andthe girl has handed him his hat and begged him as a favour neverto let her see him again, up he bobs as merry and bright as ever. IfI've seen it happen once, I've seen it happen a dozen times.

So I didn't worry about Bingo. Or about anything else, as a matterof fact. What with one thing and another, I can't remember everhaving been chirpier than at about this period in my career. Everything seemed to be going right. On three separate occasions horseson which I'd invested a sizeable amount won by lengths instead ofsitting down to rest in the middle of the race, as horses usually dowhen I've got money on them.

Added to this, the weather continued topping to a degree; mynew socks were admitted on all sides to be just the kind that mothermakes; and to round it all off, my Aunt Agatha had gone to Franceand wouldn't be on hand to snooter me for at least another sixweeks. And, if you knew my Aunt Agatha, you'd agree that thatalone was happiness enough for anyone.

It suddenly struck me so forcibly, one morning while I was havingmy bath, that I hadn't a worry on earth that I began to sing like abally nightingale as I sploshed the sponge about. It seemed to methat everything was absolutely for the best in the best of all possibleworlds.

But have you ever noticed a rummy thing about life? I mean theway something always comes along to give it you in the neck at thevery moment when you're feeling most braced about things in general. No sooner had I dried the old limbs and shoved on the suitingand toddled into the sitting-room than the blow fell. There was a letter from Aunt Agatha on the mantelpiece.

'Oh gosh!' I said when I'd read it.

'Sir?' said Jeeves. He was fooling about in the background onsome job or other.

'It's from my Aunt Agatha, Jeeves. Mrs Gregson, you know.'

'Yes, sir?'

'Ah, you wouldn't speak in that light, careless tone if you knewwhat was in it,' I said with a hollow, mirthless laugh. 'The curse hascome upon us, Jeeves. She wants me to go and join her at - what'sthe name of the dashed place? - at Roville-sur-mer. Oh, hang itall!'

'I had better be packing, sir?'

'I suppose so.'

To people who don't know my Aunt Agatha I find it extraordinarilydifficult to explain why it is that she has always put the wind up me to such a frightful extent. I mean, I'm not dependent on her financially or anything like that. It's simply personality, I've come to theconclusion. You see, all through my childhood and when I was akid at school she was always able to turn me inside out with a singleglance, and I haven't come out from under the 'fluence yet. We runto height a bit in our family, and there's about five-foot-nine of AuntAgatha, topped off with a beaky nose, an eagle eye, and a lot of greyhair, and the general effect is pretty formidable. Anyway, it nevereven occurred to me for a moment to give her the miss-in-baulk on this occasion. If she said I must go to Roville, it was all over exceptbuying the tickets.

'What's the idea, Jeeves? I wonder why she wants me.'

'I could not say, sir.'

Well, it was no good talking about it. The only gleam of consolation, the only bit of blue among the clouds, was the fact that atRoville I should at last be able to wear the rather fruity cummerbundI had bought six months ago and had never had the nerve to puton. One of those silk contrivances, you know, which you tie round your waist instead of a waistcoat, something on the order of a sashonly more substantial. I had never been able to muster up thecourage to put it on so far, for I knew that there would be troublewith Jeeves when I did, it being a pretty brightish scarlet. Still, at a place like Roville, presumably dripping with the gaiety and*joie de*vivreof France, it seemed to me that something might be done.

Roville, which I reached early in the morning after a beastly choppy crossing and a jerky night in the train, is a fairly nifty spot where achappie without encumbrances in the shape of aunts might spend a somewhat genial week or so. It is like all these French places, mainlysands and hotels and casinos. The hotel which had had the bad luckto draw Aunt Agatha's custom was the Splendide, and by the timeI got there there wasn't a member of the staff who didn't seem tobe feeling it deeply. I sympathized with them. I've had experienceof Aunt Agatha at hotels before. Of course, the real rough work wasall over when I arrived, but I could tell by the way everyone grovelledbefore her that she had started by having her first room changedbecause it hadn't a southern exposure and her next because it hada creaking wardrobe and that she had said her say on the subject ofthe cooking, the waiting, the chambermaiding and everything else,with perfect freedom and candour. She had got the whole gangnicely under control by now. The manager, a whiskered cove who looked like a bandit, simply tied himself into knots whenever shelooked at him.

All this triumph had produced a sort of grim geniality in her, andshe was almost motherly when we met.

'I am so glad you were able to come, Bertie,' she said. 'The airwill do you so much good. Far better for you than spending your time in stuffy London night clubs.'

'Oh, ah,' I said.

'You will meet some pleasant people, too. I want to introduce youto a Miss Hemmingway and her brother, who have become greatfriends of mine. I am sure you will like Miss Hemmingway. A nice,quiet girl, so different from so many of the bold girls one meets inLondon nowadays. Her brother is curate at Chipley-in-the-Glen in Dorsetshire. He tells me they are connected with the Kent Hem-mingways. A very good family. She is a charming girl.'

I had a grim foreboding of an awful doom. All this boosting wasso unlike Aunt Agatha, who normally is one of the most celebratedright-and-left-hand knockers in London society. I felt a clammysuspicion. And, by Jove, I was right.

'Aline Hemmingway,' said Aunt Agatha, 'is just the girl I shouldlike to see you marry, Bertie. You ought to be thinking of gettingmarried. Marriage might make something of you. And I could notwish you a better wife than dear Aline. She would be such a goodinfluence in your life.'

'Here, I say!' I chipped in at this juncture, chilled to the marrow.

'Bertie!' said Aunt Agatha, dropping the motherly manner for abit and giving me the cold eye.

'Yes, but I say -'

'It is young men like you, Bertie, who make the person with thefuture of the race at heart despair. Cursed with too much money, you fritter away in idle selfishness a life which might have beenmade useful, helpful and profitable. You do nothing but waste yourtime on frivolous pleasures. You are simply an anti-social animal, adrone. Bertie, it is imperative that you marry.'

'But, dash it all -'

'Yes! You should be breeding children to - '

'No, really, I say, please!' I said, blushing richly. Aunt Agathabelongs to two or three of these women's clubs, and she keepsforgetting she isn't in the smoking-room.

'Bertie,' she resumed, and would no doubt have hauled up herslacks at some length, had we not been interrupted. 'Ah, here theyare!' she said. 'Aline, dear!'

And I perceived a girl and a chappie bearing down on me, smilingin a pleased sort of manner.

'I want you to meet my nephew, Bertie Wooster,' said AuntAgatha. 'He has just arrived. Such a surprise! I had no notion thathe intended coming to Roville.'

I gave the couple the wary up-and-down, feeling like a cat in themiddle of a lot of hounds. Sort of trapped feeling, you know whatI mean. An inner voice was whispering that Bertram was up againstit.

The brother was a small round cove with a face rather like asheep. He wore pince-nez, his expression was benevolent, and hehad on one of those collars which button at the back.

'Welcome to Roville, Mr Wooster,' he said.

'Oh, Sidney!' said the girl. 'Doesn't Mr Wooster remind you ofCanon Blenkinsop, who came to Chipley to preach last Easter?'

'My dear! The resemblance is most striking!'

They peered at me for a while as if I were something in a glasscase, and I goggled back and had a good look at the girl. There'sno doubt about it, she was different from what Aunt Agatha hadcalled the bold girls one meets in London nowadays. No bobbedhair and gaspers about*her*\ I don't know when I've met anybodywho looked so - respectable is the only word. She had on a kind ofplain dress, and her hair was plain, and her face was sort of mildand saint-like. I don't pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes or anything of that order, but the moment I looked at her I said to myself, 'The girl plays the organ in a village church!'

Well, we gazed at one another for a bit, and there was a certainamount of chit-chat, and then I tore myself away. But before I wentI had been booked up to take brother and girl for a nice drive that afternoon. And the thought of it depressed me to such an extentthat I felt there was only one thing to be done. I went straight backto my room, dug out the cummerbund, and draped it round the oldturn. I turned round and Jeeves shied like a startled mustang.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said in a sort of hushed voice. 'Youare surely not proposing to appear in public in that thing?'

'The cummerbund?' I said in a careless, debonair way, passing itoff. 'Oh, rather!'

'I should not advise it, sir, really I shouldn't.'

'Why not?'

'The effect, sir, is loud in the extreme.'

I tackled the blighter squarely. I mean to say, nobody knows betterthan I do that Jeeves is a master mind and all that, but, dash it, afellow must call his soul his own. You can't be a serf to your valet. Besides, I was feeling pretty low and the cummerbund was the onlything which could cheer me up.

'You know, the trouble with you, Jeeves,' I said, 'is that you'retoo - what's the word I want? - too bally insular. You can't realizethat you aren't in Piccadilly all the time. In a place like this a bit ofcolour and touch of the poetic is expected of you. Why, I've justseen a fellow downstairs in a morning suit of yellow velvet.'

'Nevertheless, sir -'

'Jeeves,' I said firmly, 'my mind is made up. I am feeling a little low-spirited and need cheering. Besides, what's wrong with it? Thiscummerbund seems to me to be called for. I consider that it hasrather a Spanish effect. A touch of the hidalgo. Sort of Vicente yBlasco What's-his-name stuff. The jolly old hidalgo off to the bullfight.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jeeves coldly.

Dashed upsetting, this sort of thing. If there's one thing that givesme the pip, it's unpleasantness in the home; and I could see that relations were going to be fairly strained for a while. And, comingon top of Aunt Agatha's bombshell about the Hemmingway girl, Idon't mind confessing it made me feel more or less as though nobody loved me.

The drive that afternoon was about as mouldy as I had expected.The curate chappie prattled on of this and that; the girl admiredthe view; and I got a headache early in the proceedings which startedat the sole of my feet and got worse all the way up. I tottered backto my room to dress for dinner, feeling like a toad under the harrow.If it hadn't been for that cummerbund business earlier in the day Icould have sobbed on Jeeves's neck and poured out all my troubles to him. Even as it was, I couldn't keep the thing entirely to myself.

'I say, Jeeves,' I said.

'Sir?'

'Mix me a stiffish brandy and soda.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Stiffish, Jeeves. Not too much soda, but splash the brandy about a bit.'

'Very good, sir.'

After imbibing, I felt a shade better.

'Jeeves,' I said.

'Sir?'

'I rather fancy I'm in the soup, Jeeves.'

'Indeed, sir?'

I eyed the man narrowly. Dashed aloof his manner was. Still brooding over the cummerbund.

'Yes. Right up to the hocks,' I said, suppressing the pride of theWoosters and trying to induce him to be a bit matier. 'Have youseen a girl popping about here with a parson brother?'

'Miss Hemmingway, sir? Yes, sir.'

'Aunt Agatha wants me to marry her.'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Well, what about it?'

'Sir?'

'I mean, have you anything to suggest?'

'No, sir.'

The blighter's manner was so cold and unchummy that I bit thebullet and had a dash at being airy.

'Oh, well, tra-la-la!' I said.

'Precisely^ sir,' said Jeeves.

And that was, so to speak, that.

4

Pearls Mean Tears

I remember - it must have been when I was at school because Idon't go in for that sort of thing very largely nowadays - reading apoem or something about something or other in which there was aline which went, if I've got it rightly, 'Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy.' Well, what I'm driving at isthat during the next two weeks that's exactly how it was with me. Imean to say, I could hear the wedding bells chiming faintly in thedistance and getting louder and louder every day, and how the deuceto slide out of it was more than I could think. Jeeves, no doubt,could have dug up a dozen brainy schemes in a couple of minutes,but he was still aloof and chilly and I couldn't bring myself to askhim point-blank. I mean, he could see easily enough that the youngmaster was in a bad way and, if that wasn't enough to make himoverlook the fact that I was still gleaming brightly about the waistband, well, what it amounted to was that the old feudal spirit wasdead in the blighter's bosom and there was nothing to be done aboutit.

It really was rummy the way the Hemmingway family had taken tome. I wouldn't have said off-hand that there was anything particularlyfascinating about me - in fact, most people look on me as rather an ass; but there was no getting away from the fact that I went like abreeze with this girl and her brother. They didn't seem happy ifthey were away from me. I couldn't move a step, dash it, withoutone of them popping out from somewhere and freezing on. In fact, I'd got into the habit now of retiring to my room when I wanted totake it easy for a bit. I had managed to get a rather decent suite onthe third floor, looking down on to the promenade.

I had gone to earth in my suite one evening and for the first timethat day was feeling that life wasn't so bad after all. Right throughthe day from lunch-time I'd had the Hemmingway girl on my hands,Aunt Agatha having shooed us off together immediately after themidday meal. The result was, as I looked down on the lightedpromenade and saw all the people popping happily about on theirway to dinner and the Casino and what not, a kind of wistful feelingcame over me. I couldn't help thinking how dashed happy I couldhave contrived to be in this place if only Aunt Agatha and the otherblisters had been elsewhere.

I heaved a sigh, and at that moment there was a knock at thedoor.

'Someone at the door, Jeeves,' I said.

'Yes, sir.'

He opened the door, and in popped Aline Hemmingway and herbrother. The last persons I had

expected. I really had thought thatI could be alone for a minute in my own room.

'Oh, hallo!' I said.

'Oh, Mr Wooster!' said the girl in a gasping sort of way. 'I don't know how to begin.'

Then I noticed that she appeared considerably rattled, and as forthe brother, he looked like a sheep with a secret sorrow.

This made me sit up and take notice. I had supposed that thiswas just a social call, but apparently something had happened to give them a jolt. Though I couldn't see why they should come tome about it.

'Is anything up?' I said.

'Poor Sidney - it was my fault - I ought never to have let him gothere alone,' said the girl. Dashed agitated.

At this point the brother, who after shedding a floppy overcoatand parking his hat on a chair had been standing by wrapped in thesilence, gave a little cough, like a sheep caught in the mist on a mountain top.

'The fact is, Mr Wooster,' he said, 'a sad, a most deplorable thinghas occurred. This afternoon, while you were so kindly escortingmy sist-ah, I found the time hang a little heavy upon my hands andI was tempted to - ah - gamble at the Casino.'

I looked at the man in a kindlier spirit than I had been able toup to date. This evidence that he had sporting blood in his veinsmade him seem more human, I'm bound to say. If only I'd knownearlier that he went in for that sort of thing, I felt that we mighthave had a better time together.

'Oh!' I said. 'Did you click?'

He sighed heavily.

'If you mean was I successful, I must answer in the negative. I rashly persisted in the view that the colour red, having appeared nofewer than seven times in succession, must inevitably at no distantdate give place to black. I was in error. I lost my little all, MrWooster.'

'Tough luck,' I said.

'I left the Casino,' proceeded the chappie, 'and returned to thehotel. There I encountered one of my parishioners, a Colonel Mus-grave, who chanced to be holiday-making over here. I - er - inducedhim to cash me a cheque for one hundred pounds on my littleaccount in my London bank.'

'Well, that was all to the good, what?' I said, hoping to induce thepoor fish to look on the bright side. 'I mean, bit of luck finding someone to slip it into first crack out of the box.'

'On the contrary, Mr Wooster, it did but make matters worse. Iburn with shame as I make the confession, but I immediately wentback to the Casino and lost the entire sum - this time under the mistaken supposition that the colour black was, as I believe theexpression is, due for a run.'

'I say!' I said. 'You*are* having a night out!'

'And,' concluded the chappie, 'the most lamentable feature of the whole affair is that I have no funds in the bank to meet the chequewhen presented.'

I'm free to confess that, though I realized by this time that all thiswas leading up to a touch and that my ear was shortly going to be bitten in no uncertain manner, my heart warmed to the poor prune.Indeed, I gazed at him with no little interest and admiration. Neverbefore had I encountered a curate so genuinely all to the mustard.Little as he might look like one of the lads of the village, he certainlyappeared to be real tabasco, and I wished he had shown me thisside of his character before.

'Colonel Musgrave,' he went on, gulping somewhat, 'is not a manwho would be likely to overlook the matter. He is a hard man. Hewill expose me to my vic-ah. My vic-ah is a hard man. In short, Mr Wooster, if Colonel Musgrave presents that cheque I shall be ruined.And he leaves for England tonight.'

The girl, who had been standing by biting her handkerchief and gurgling at intervals while the brother got the above off his chest,now started in once more.

'Mr Wooster,' she cried, 'won't you, won't you help us? Oh, dosay you will! We must have the money to get back the cheque fromColonel Musgrave before nine o'clock - he leaves on the nine-twenty. I was at my wits' end what to do when I remembered howkind you had always been. Mr Wooster, will you lend Sidney themoney and take these as security?' And before I knew what she wasdoing she had dived into her bag, produced a case, and opened it.'My pearls,' she said. 'I don't know what they are worth - they werea present from my poor father -'

'Now, alas, no more -' chipped in the brother.

'But I know they must be worth ever so much more than theamount we want.'

Dashed embarrassing. Made me feel like a pawnbroker. Morethan a touch of popping the watch about the whole business.

'No, I say, really,' I protested. 'There's no need of any security,you know, or any rot of that kind. Only too glad to let you have themoney. I've got it on me, as a matter of fact. Rather luckily drew some this morning.'

And I fished it out and pushed it across. The brother shook hishead.

'Mr Wooster,' he said, 'we appreciate your generosity, your beautiful, heartening confidence in us, but we cannot permit this.'

'What Sidney means,' said the girl, 'is that you really don't knowanything about us when you come to think of it. You mustn't risklending all this money without any security at all to two people who,after all, are almost strangers. If I hadn't thought that you would be quite business-like about this I would never have dared to come toyou.'

'The idea of - er - pledging the pearls at the local Mont de Piete was, you will readily understand, repugnant to us,' said the brother.

'If you will just give me a receipt, as a matter of form -'

'Oh, right-o!'

I wrote out the receipt and handed it over, feeling more or lessof an ass.

'Here you are,' I said.

The girl took the piece of paper, shoved it in her bag, grabbedthe money and slipped it to brother Sidney, and then, before I knewwhat was happening, she had darted at me, kissed me, and leggedit from the room.

I'm bound to say the thing rattled me. So dashed sudden andunexpected. I mean, a girl like that. Always been quiet and demureand what not - by no means the sort of female you'd have expectedto go about the place kissing fellows. Through a sort of mist I couldsee that Jeeves had appeared from the background and was helpingthe brother on with his coat; and I remember wondering idly howthe dickens a man could bring himself to wear a coat like that, itbeing more like a sack than anything else. Then the brother came up to me and grasped my hand.

'I cannot thank you sufficiently, Mr Wooster!'

'Oh, not at all.'

'You have saved my good name. Good name in man or woman,dear my lord,' he said, massaging the fin with some fervour, 'is theimmediate jewel of their souls. Who steals my purse steals trash.'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he thatfilches my good name robs me of that which enriches not him andmakes me poor indeed. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.Good night, Mr Wooster.'

'Good night, old thing,' I said.

I blinked at Jeeves as the door shut. 'Rather a sad affair, Jeeves,'I said.

'Yes, sir.'

'Luckily I happened to have all that money handy.'

'Well - er - yes, sir.'

'You speak as though you didn't think much of it.'

'It is not my place to criticize your actions, sir, but I will ventureto say that I think you behaved a little rashly.'

'What, lending that money?'

'Yes, sir. These fashionable French watering places are notoriously infested by dishonest characters.'

This was a bit too thick.

'Now look here, Jeeves,' I said. 'I can stand a lot but when itcomes to your casting asp-whatever-the-word-is on a bird in HolyOrders -'

'Perhaps I am over-suspicious, sir. But I have seen a great dealof these resorts. When I was in the employment of Lord FrederickRanelagh, shortly before I entered your service, his lordship wasvery neatly swindled by a criminal known, I believe, by the soubriquetof Soapy Sid, who scraped

acquaintance with us in Monte Carlowith the assistance of a female accomplice. I have never forgotten the circumstances.'

'I don't want to butt in on your reminiscences, Jeeves,' I said, coldly, 'but you're talking through your hat. How can there havebeen anything fishy about the business? They've left me the pearls,haven't they? Very well, then, think before you speak. You had betterbe tooling down to the desk now and having these things shoved in the hotel safe.' I picked up the case and opened it. 'Oh, Great Scott!'

The bally thing was empty!

'Oh, my Lord!' I said, staring. 'Don't tell me there's been dirtywork at the crossroads after all!'

'Precisely, sir. It was in exactly the same manner that Lord Frederick was swindled on the occasion to which I have alluded. While his female accomplice was gratefully embracing his lordship, Soapy Sid substituted a duplicate case for the one containing the pearls andwent off with the jewels, the money and the receipt. On the strengthof the receipt he subsequently demanded from his lordship thereturn of the pearls, and his lordship, not being able to produce them, was obliged to pay a heavy sum in compensation. It is a simplebut effective ruse.'

I felt as if the bottom had dropped out of things with a jerk.

'Soapy Sid? Sid!*Sidney!* Brother Sidney! Why, by Jove, Jeeves,do you think that parson was Soapy Sid?'

'Yes, sir.'

'But it seems extraordinary. Why, his collar buttoned at the back- I mean, he would have deceived a bishop. Do you really think hewas Soapy Sid?'

'Yes, sir. I recognized him directly he came into the room.'

I stared at the blighter.

'You recognized him?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then, dash it all,' I said, deeply moved. 'I think you might havetold me.'

'I thought it would save disturbance and unpleasantness if I merelyextracted the case from the man's pocket as I assisted him with hiscoat, sir. Here it is.'

He laid another case on the table beside the dud one, and, byJove, you couldn't tell them apart. I opened it, and there were thegood old pearls, as merry and bright as dammit, smiling up at me.I gazed feebly at the man. I was feeling a bit overwrought.

'Jeeves,' I said. 'You're an absolute genius!'

'Yes, sir.'

Relief was surging over me in great chunks by now. Thanks toJeeves I was not going to be called on to

cough up several thousandquid.

'It looks to me as though you have saved the old home. I mean,even a chappie endowed with the immortal rind of dear old Sid ishardly likely to have the nerve to come back and retrieve these little chaps.'

'I should imagine not, sir.'

'Well, then - Oh, I say, you don't think they are just paste oranything like that?'

'No, sir. These are genuine pearls and extremely valuable.'

'Well, then, dash it, I'm on velvet. Absolutely reclining on thegood old plush! I may be down a hundred quid but I'm up a jolly good string of pearls. Am I right or wrong?'

'Hardly that, sir. I think that you will have to restore the pearls.'

'What! To Sid? Not while I have my physique!'

'No, sir. To their rightful owner.'

'But who is their rightful owner?'

'Mrs Gregson, sir.'

'What! How do you know?'

'It was all over the hotel an hour ago that Mrs Gregson's pearlshad been abstracted. I was speaking to Mrs Gregson's maid shortlybefore you came in and she informed me that the manager of thehotel is now in Mrs Gregson's suite.'

'And having a devil of a time, what?'

'So I should be disposed to imagine, sir.'

The situation was beginning to unfold before me.

'I'll go and give them back to her, eh? It'll put me one up, what?'

'Precisely, sir. And, if I may make the suggestion, I think it mightbe judicious to stress the fact that they were stolen by-.'

'Great Scott! By the dashed girl she was hounding me on tomarry; by Jove!'

'Exactly, sir.'

'Jeeves,' I said, 'this is going to be the biggest score off my jollyold relative that has ever occurred in the world's history.'

'It is not unlikely, sir.'

'Keep her quiet for a bit, what? Make her stop snootering me fora while?'

'It should have that effect, sir.'

'Golly!' I said, bounding for the door.

Long before I reached Aunt Agatha's lair I could tell that the huntwas up. Divers chappies in hotel uniform and not a few chambermaids of sorts were hanging about in the corridor, and through thepanels I could hear a mixed assortment of voices, with Aunt Agatha'stopping the lot. I knocked but no one took any notice, so I trickledin. Among those present I noticed a chambermaid in hysterics, Aunt

Agatha with her hair bristling and the whiskered cove who lookedlike a bandit, the hotel manager fellow.

'Oh, hallo!' I said. 'Hallo-allo-allo!'

Aunt Agatha shooshed me away. No welcoming smile for Bertram.

'Don't bother me now, Bertie,' she snapped, looking at me as ifI were more or less the last straw.

'Something up?'

'Yes, yes, yes! I've lost my pearls.'

'Pearls? Pearls? Pearls?' I said. 'No, really. Dashed annoying. Where did you see them last?'

'What does it matter where I saw them last? They have beenstolen.'

Here Wilfred the Whisker King, who seemed to have been takinga rest between rounds, stepped into the ring again and began to talkrapidly in French. Cut to the quick he seemed. The chambermaid whooped in the corner.

'Sure you've looked everywhere?' I said.

'Of course I've looked everywhere.'

'Well, you know, I've often lost a collar stud and -'

'Do try not to be so maddening, Bertie! I have enough to bearwithout your imbecilities. Oh, be quiet! Be quiet!' she shouted in the sort of voice used by sergeant-majors and those who call thecattle home across the Sands of Dee. And such was the magnetismof her forceful personality that Wilfred subsided as if he had run into a wall. The chambermaid continued to go strong.

'I say,' I said, 'I think there's something the matter with this girl. Isn't she crying or something? You may not have spotted it, but I'mrather quick at noticing things.'

'She stole my pearls! I am convinced of it.'

This started the whisker specialist off again, and in about a coupleof minutes Aunt Agatha had reached the frozen grande-dame stageand was putting the last of the bandits through it in the voice she usually

reserves for snubbing waiters in restaurants.

'I tell you, my good man, for the hundredth time -'

'I say,' I said, 'don't want to interrupt you and all that sort ofthing, but these aren't the little chaps by any chance, are they?'

I pulled the pearls out of my pocket and held them up.

'These look like pearls, what?'

I don't know when I've had a more juicy moment. It was one ofthose occasions about which I shall prattle to my grandchildren - ifI ever have any, which at the moment of going to press seems moreor less of a hundred-to-one shot. Aunt Agatha simply deflated beforemy eyes. It reminded me of when I once saw some chappies lettingthe gas out of a balloon.

'Where - where - where -' she gurgled.

'I got them from your friend, Miss Hemmingway.'

Even now she didn't get it.

'From Miss Hemmingway. Miss*Hemmingwayl* But - but how didthey come into her possession?'

'How?' I said. 'Because she jolly well stole them. Pinched them!Swiped them! Because that's how she makes her living, dash it - palling up to unsuspicious people in hotels and sneaking their jewellery. I don't know what her alias is, but her bally brother, the chapwhose collar buttons at the back, is known in criminal circles asSoapy Sid.'

She blinked.

'Miss Hemmingway a thief! I - I-' She stopped and lookedfeebly at me. 'But how did you manage to recover the pearls, Bertiedear?'

'Never mind,' I said crisply. 'I have my methods.' I dug out my entire stock of manly courage, breathed a short prayer and let her have it right in the thorax.

'I must say, Aunt Agatha, dash it all,' I said severely, 'I think youhave been infernally careless. There's a printed notice in every bedroom in this place saying that there's a safe in the manager'soffice, where jewellery and valuables ought to be placed, and youabsolutely disregarded it. And what's the result? The first thief whocame along simply walked into your room and pinched your pearls. And instead of admitting that it was all your fault, you started bitingthis poor man here in the gizzard. You have been very, very unjustto this poor man.'

'Yes, yes,' moaned the poor man.

'And this unfortunate girl, what about her? Where does she getoff? You've accused her of stealing the things on absolutely noevidence. I think she would be jolly well advised to bring an actionfor - for whatever it is and soak you for substantial damages.'

'Mais oui, mais ouis, c'est trap fortfshouted the Bandit Chief,backing me up like a good 'un. And the

chambermaid looked upinquiringly, as if the sun was breaking through the clouds.

'I shall recompense her,' said Aunt Agatha feebly.

'If you take my tip you jolly well will, and that eftsoons or rightspeedily. She's got a cast-iron case, and if I were her I wouldn'ttake a penny under twenty quid. But what gives me the pip most isthe way you've unjustly abused this poor man here and tried to givehis hotel a bad name -'

'Yes, by damn! It's too bad! cried the whiskered marvel. 'Youcareless old woman! You give my hotel bad names, would you orwasn't it? Tomorrow you leave my hotel, by great Scotland!'

And more to the same effect, all good, ripe stuff. And presently having said his say he withdrew, taking the chambermaid with him,the latter with a crisp tenner clutched in a vice-like grip. I supposeshe and the bandit split it outside. A French hotel manager wouldn'tbe likely to let real money wander away from him without countinghimself in on the division.

I turned to Aunt Agatha, whose demeanour was now rather likethat of one who, picking daisies on the railway, has just caught thedown express in the small of the back.

'I don't want to rub it in, Aunt Agatha,' I said coldly, 'but I shouldjust like to point out before I go that the girl who stole your pearls is the girl you've been hounding me on to marry ever since I gothere. Good heavens! Do you realize that if you had brought the thing off I should probably have had children who would havesneaked my watch while I was dandling them on my knee? I'm nota complaining sort of chap as a rule, but I must say that anothertime I do think you might be more careful how you go about egging me on to marry females.'

I gave her one look, turned on my heel and left the room.

'Ten o'clock, a clear night, and all's well, Jeeves,' I said, breezing back into the good old suite.

'I am gratified to hear it, sir.'

'If twenty quid would be any use to you, Jeeves -'

'I am much obliged, sir.'

There was a pause. And then - well, it was a wrench, but I didit. I unstripped the cummerbund and handed it over.

'Do you wish me to press this, sir?'

I gave the thing one last, longing look. It had been very dear tome.

'No,' I said, 'take it away; give it to the deserving poor - I shallnever wear it again.'

'Thank you very much, sir,' said Jeeves.

5

The Pride of the Woosters isWounded

If there's one thing I like, it's a quiet life. I'm not one of thosefellows who get all restless and depressed if things aren't happeningto them all the time. You can't make it too placid for me. Give meregular meals, a good show with decent music every now and then,and one or two pals to totter round with, and I ask no more.

That is why the jar, when it came, was such a particularly nastyjar. I mean, I'd returned from Roville with a sort of feeling thatfrom now on nothing could occur to upset me. Aunt Agatha, Iimagined, would require at least a year to recover from the Hem-mingway affair: and apart from Aunt Agatha there isn't anybody whoreally does much in the way of harrying me. It seemed to me that the skies were blue, so to speak, and no clouds in sight.

I little thought... Well, look here, what happened was this, andI ask you if it wasn't enough to rattle anybody.

Once a year Jeeves takes a couple of weeks' vacation and biffs offto the sea or somewhere to restore his tissues. Pretty rotten for me,of course, while he's away. But it has to be stuck, so I stick it; andI must admit that he usually manages to get hold of a fairly decentfellow to look after me in his absence.

Well, the time had come round again, and Jeeves was in thekitchen giving the understudy a few tips about his duties. I happenedto want a stamp or something, and I toddled down the passage toask him for it. The silly ass had left the kitchen door open, and Ihadn't gone two steps when his voice caught me squarely in the eardrum.

'You will find Mr Wooster,' he was saying to the substitute chappie, 'an exceedingly pleasant and amiable young gentleman, but notintelligent. By no means intelligent. Mentally he is negligible - quite negligible.'

Well, I mean to say, what!

I suppose, strictly speaking, I ought to have charged in and tickedthe blighter off properly in no uncertain voice. But I doubt whetherit's humanly possible to tick Jeeves off. Personally, I didn't even havea dash at it. I merely called for my hat and stick in a marked mannerand legged it. But the memory rankled, if you know what I mean.We Woosters do not lightly forget. At least, we do - some things -appointments, and people's birthdays, and letters to post, and allthat - but not an absolute bally insult like the above. I brooded likethe dickens.

I was still brooding when I dropped in at the oyster-bar at Buck'sfor a quick bracer. I needed a bracer rather particularly at themoment, because I was on my way to lunch with Aunt Agatha. Apretty frightful ordeal, believe me or believe me not, even though Itook it that after what had happened at Roville she would be in afairly subdued and amiable mood. I had just had one quick andanother rather slower, and was feeling about as cheerio as waspossible under the circs, when a muffled voice hailed me from the north-east, and, turning round, I saw young Bingo Little proppedup in a corner, wrapping himself round a sizeable chunk of breadand cheese.

'Hallo-allo-allo!' I said. 'Haven't seen you for ages. You've notbeen in here lately, have you?'

'No. I've been living out in the country.'

'Eh?' I said, for Bingo's loathing for the country was well known.'Whereabouts?'

'Down in Hampshire, at a place called Ditteredge.'

'No, really? I know some people who've got a house there. TheGlossops. Have you met them?'

'Why, that's where I'm staying!' said young Bingo. 'I'm tutoring the Glossop kid.'

'What for?' I said. I couldn't seem to see young Bingo as a tutor.Though, of course, he did get a degree of sorts at Oxford, and I suppose you can always fool some of the people some of the time.

'What for? For money, of course! An absolute sitter came unstitched in the second race at Haydock Park,' said young Bingo,with some bitterness, 'and I dropped my entire month's allowance.I hadn't the nerve to touch my uncle for any more, so it was a caseof buzzing round to the agents and getting a job. I've been down there three weeks.'

'I haven't met the Glossop kid.'

'Don't!' advised Bingo, briefly.

'The only one of the family I really know is the girl.' I had hardlyspoken these words when the most extraordinary change came overyoung Bhigo's face. His eyes bulged, his cheeks flushed, and his Adam's apple hopped about like one of those india-rubber balls onthe top of the fountain in a shooting-gallery.

'Oh, Bertie!' he said, in a strangled sort of voice.

I looked at the poor fish anxiously. I knew that he was alwaysfalling in love with someone, but it didn't seem possible that evenhe could have fallen in love with Honoria Glossop. To me the girlwas simply nothing more nor less than a pot of poison. One of thosedashed large, brainy, strenuous, dynamic girls you see so many of these days. She had been at Girton, where, in addition to enlargingher brain to the most frightful extent, she had gone in for every kindof sport and developed the physique of a middle-weight catch-as-catch-can wrestler. I'm not sure she didn't box for the Varsity whileshe was up. The effect she had on me whenever she appeared wasto make me want to slide into a cellar and lie low till they blew theAll Clear.

Yet here was young Bingo obviously all for her. There was nomistaking it. The love light was in the blighter's eyes.

'I worship her, Bertie! I worship the very ground she treads on!'continued the patient, in a loud, penetrating voice. Fred Thompsonand one or two fellows had come hi, and McGarry, the chappiebehind the bar, was listening with his ears flapping. But there's noreticence about Bingo. He always reminds me of the hero of amusical comedy who takes the centre of the stage, gathers the boysround him in a circle, and tells them all about his love at the top ofhis voice.

'Have you told her?'

'No, I haven't the nerve. But we walk together in the garden mostevenings, and it sometimes seems to me that there is a look in hereyes.'

'I know that look. Like a sergeant-major.'

'Nothing of the kind! Like a tender goddess.'

'Half a second, old thing,' I said. 'Are you sure we're talkingabout the same girl? The one I mean is Honoria. Perhaps there's ayounger sister or something I've not heard of?'

'Her name is Honoria,' bawled Bingo reverently.

'And she strikes you as a tender goddess?'

'She does.'

'God bless you!' I said.

'She walks in beauty like the night of cloudless climes and starryskies; and all that's best of dark and bright meet in her aspect andher eyes. Another bit of bread and cheese,' he said to the lad behindthe bar.

'You're keeping your strength up,' I said.

'This is my lunch. I've got to meet Oswald at Waterloo at one-fifteen, to catch the train back. I brought him up to town to see thedentist.'

'Oswald? Is that the kid?'

'Yes. Pestilential to a degree.'

'Pestilential! That reminds me, I'm lunching with my Aunt Agatha.I'll have to pop off now, or I'll be late.'

I hadn't seen Aunt Agatha since that little affair of the pearls;and, while I didn't anticipate any great pleasure from gnawing a bonein her society, I must say that there was one topic of conversation I felt pretty confident she wouldn't touch on, and that was the subjectof my matrimonial future. I mean, when a woman's made a bloomerlike the one Aunt Agatha made at Roville, you'd naturally think thata decent shame would keep her off it for, at any rate, a month ortwo.

But women beat me. I mean to say, as regards nerve. You'll hardlycredit it, but she actually started in on me with the fish. Absolutelywith the fish, I give you my solemn word. We'd hardly exchanged aword about the weather, when she let me have it without a blush.

'Bertie,' she said, 'I've been thinking again about you and how necessary it is that you should get married. I quite admit that I wasdreadfully mistaken in my opinion of that terrible, hypocritical girlat Roville, but this time there is no danger of an error. By greatgood luck I have found the very wife for you, a girl whom I have only recently met, but whose family is above suspicion. She hasplenty of money, too, though that does not matter in your case. The great point is that she is strong, self-reliant and sensible, and will counterbalance the deficiencies and weaknesses of your character.She has met you; and, while there is naturally much in you of whichshe disapproves, she does not dislike you. I know this, for I have sounded her - guardedly, of course - and I am sure you have onlyto make the first advance - '

'Who is it?' I would have said it long before, but the shock hadmade me swallow a bit of roll the wrong way, and I had only justfinished turning purple and trying to get a bit of air back into theold windpipe.

'Who is it?'

'Sir Roderick Glossop's daughter, Honoria.'

'No, no!' I cried, paling beneath the tan.

'Don't be silly, Bertie. She is just the wife for you.'

'Yes, but look here -'

'She will mould you.'

'But I don't want to be moulded.'

Aunt Agatha gave me the land of look she used to give me whenI was a kid and had been found in the jam cupboard.

'Bertie! I hope you are not going to be troublesome.'

'Well, but I mean -'

'Lady Glossop has very kindly invited you to Ditteredge Hallfor a few days. I told her you would be delighted to come down tomorrow.'

'I'm sorry, but I've got a dashed important engagement tomorrow.'

'What engagement?'

'Well-er-'

'You have no engagement. And, even if you had, you must put itoff. I shall be very seriously annoyed, Bertie, if you do not go toDitteredge Hall tomorrow.'

'Oh, right-o!' I said.

It wasn't two minutes after I had parted from Aunt Agatha beforethe old fighting spirit of the Woosters reasserted itself. Ghastly asthe peril was which loomed before me, I was conscious of a rummy sort of exhilaration. It was a tight corner, but the tighter the corner, I felt, the more juicily should I score off Jeeves when I got myselfout of it without a bit of help from him. Ordinarily, of course, Ishould have consulted him and trusted to him to solve the difficulty;but after what I had heard him saying in the kitchen, I was dashedif I was going to demean myself. When I got home I addressed theman with light abandon.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'I'm in a bit of a difficulty.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, sir.'

'Yes, quite a bad hole. In fact, you might say on the brink of aprecipice, and faced by an awful doom.'

'If I could be of any assistance, sir -

'Oh, no. No, no. Thanks very much, but no, no. I won't troubleyou. I've no doubt I shall be able to get out of it by myself.'

'Very good, sir.'

So that was that. I'm bound to say I'd have welcomed a bit morecuriosity from the fellow, but that is Jeeves all over. Cloaks his emotions, if you know what I mean.

Honoria was away when I got to Ditteredge on the followingafternoon. Her mother told me that she was staying with somepeople named Braythwayt in the neighbourhood, and would be backnext day, bringing the daughter of the house with her for a visit.She said I would find Oswald out in the grounds, and such is amother's love that she spoke as if that were a bit of a boost for thegrounds and an inducement to go there.

Rather decent, the grounds at Ditteredge. A couple of terraces,a bit of lawn with a cedar on it, a bit of shrubbery, and finally asmall but goodish lake with a stone bridge running across it. DirectlyI'd worked my way round the shrubbery I spotted young Bingoleaning against the bridge smoking a cigarette. Sitting on the stone work, fishing, was a species of kid whom I took to be Oswald thePlague-Spot.

Bingo was both surprised and delighted to see me, and introducedme to the kid. If the latter was surprised and delighted too, heconcealed it like a diplomat. He just looked at me, raised his eyebrows slightly, and went on fishing. He was one of those superciliousstriplings who give you the impression that you went to the wrongschool and that your clothes don't fit.

'This is Oswald,' said Bingo.

'What,' I replied cordially, 'could be sweeter? How are you?'

'Oh, all right,' said the kid.

'Nice place, mis.'

'Oh, all right,' said the kid.

'Having a good time fishing?'

'Oh, all right,' said the kid.

Young Bingo led me off to commune apart.

'Doesn't jolly old Oswald's incessant flow of prattle make your head ache sometimes?' I asked.

Bingo sighed.

'It's a hard job.'

'What's a hard job?'

'Loving him.'

'Do you love him?' I asked, surprised. I shouldn't have thought itcould be done.

'I try to,' said young Bingo, 'for Her sake. She's coming back tomorrow, Bertie.'

'So I heard.'

'She is coming, my love, my own -'

'Absolutely,' I said. 'But touching on young Oswald once more.

Do you have to be with him all day? How do you manage to stickit?'

'Oh, he doesn't give much trouble. When we aren't working hesits on that bridge all the time, trying to catch tiddlers.'

'Why don't you shove him in?'

'Shove him in?'

'It seems to me distinctly the thing to do,' I said, regarding thestripling's back with a good deal of dislike. 'It would wake him up a bit, and make him take an interest in things.'

Bingo shook his head a bit wistfully.

'Your proposition attracts me,' he said, 'but I'm afraid it can't bedone. You see, She would never forgive me. She is devoted to thelittle brute.'

'Great Scott!' I cried. 'I've got it!' I don't know if you know thatfeeling when you get an inspiration, and tingle all down your spine from the soft collar as now worn to the very soles of the old Wauk-eesis? Jeeves, I suppose, feels that way more or less all the time, butit isn't often it comes to me. But now all Nature seemed to beshouting at me. 'You've clicked!' and I grabbed young Bingo by thearm in a way that must have made him feel as if a horse had bittenhim. His finely-chiselled features were twisted with agony and whatnot, and he asked me what the dickens I thought I was playing at.

'Bingo,' I said, 'what would Jeeves have done?'

'How do you mean, what would Jeeves have done?'

'I mean what would he have advised in a case like yours? I meanyou wanting to make a hit with Honoria Glossop and all that. Why,take it from me, he would have shoved you behind that clump ofbushes over there; he would have got me to lure Honoria on to thebridge somehow; then, at the proper time, he would have told meto give the kid a pretty hefty jab in the small of the back, so as to shoot him into the water; and then you would have dived in andhauled him out. How about it?'

'You didn't think that out by yourself, Bertie?' said young Bingo,in a hushed sort of voice.

'Yes, I did. Jeeves isn't the only fellow with ideas.'

'But it's absolutely wonderful.'

'Just a suggestion.'

'The only objection I can see is that it would be so dashedawkward for you. I mean to say, suppose the kid turned round andsaid you had shoved him in, that would make you frightfully unpopular with Her.'

'I don't mind risking that.'

The man was deeply moved.

'Bertie, this is noble.'

'No, no.'

He clasped my hand silently, then chuckled like the last drop ofwater going down the waste pipe in a bath.

'Now what?' I said.

'I was only thinking,' said young Bingo, 'how fearfully wet Oswaldwill get. Oh, happy day!'

6

The Hero's Reward

I don't know if you've noticed it, but it's rummy how nothing in this world ever seems to be absolutely perfect. The drawback to thisotherwise singularly fruity binge was, of course, the fact that Jeeveswouldn't be on the spot to watch me in action. Still, apart from thatthere wasn't a flaw. The beauty of the thing was, you see, thatnothing could possibly go wrong. You know how it is, as a rule,when you want to get Chappie A on Spot B at exactly the samemoment when Chappie C is on Spot D. There's always a chance of a hitch. Take the case of a general, I mean to say, who's planningout a big movement. He tells one regiment to capture the hill withthe windmill on it at the exact moment when another regiment istaking the bridgehead or something down in the valley; and everything gets all messed up. And then, when they're chatting the thingover in camp that night, the colonel of the first regiment says, 'Oh,sorry! Did you say the hill with the windmill? I thought you said theone with the flock of sheep?' And there you are! But in this case,nothing like that could happen, because Oswald and Bingo wouldbe on the spot right along, so that all I had to worry about wasgetting Honoria there in due season. And I managed that all right,first shot, by asking her if she would come for a stroll in the groundswith me, as I had something particular to say to her.

She had arrived shortly after lunch in the car with the Braythwaytgirl. I was introduced to the latter, a tallish girl with blue eyes andfair hair. I rather took to her - she was so unlike Honoria - and, ifI had been able to spare the time, I shouldn't have minded talkingto her for a bit. But business was business - I had fixed it up withBingo to be behind the bushes at three sharp, so I got hold ofHonoria and steered her out through the grounds in the directionof the lake.

'You're very quiet, Mr Wooster,' she said.

Made me jump a bit. I was concentrating pretty tensely at themoment. We had just come in sight of the lake, and I was castinga keen eye over the ground to see that everything was in order.Everything

appeared to be as arranged. The kid Oswald was hunchedup on the bridge; and, as Bingo wasn't visible, I took it that he hadgot into position. My watch made it two minutes after the hour.

'Eh?' I said. 'Oh, ah, yes. I was just thinking.'

'You said you had something important to say to me.'

'Absolutely!' I had decided to open the proceedings by sort ofpaving the way for young Bingo. I mean to say, without actuallymentioning his name, I wanted to prepare the girl's mind for thefact that, surprising as it might seem, mere was someone who hadlong loved her from afar and all that sort of rot. 'It's like this,' Isaid. 'It may sound rummy and all that, but there's somebody who'sfrightfully in love with you and so forth - a friend of mine, youknow.'

'Oh, a friend of yours?'

'Yes.'

She gave a kind of a laugh.

'Well, why doesn't he tell me so?'

'Well, you see, that's the sort of chap he is. Kind of shrinking,diffident kind of fellow. Hasn't got the nerve. Thinks you so muchabove him, don't you know. Looks on you as a sort of goddess.Worships the ground you tread on, but can't whack up the gingerto tell you so.'

'This is very interesting.'

'Yes. He's not a bad chap, you know, in his way. Rather an ass,perhaps, but well-meaning. Well, that's the posish. You might justbear it in mind, what?'

'How funny you are!'

She chucked back her head and laughed with considerable vim.She had a penetrating sort of laugh. Rather like a train going intoa tunnel. It didn't sound over-musical to me, and on the kid Oswaldit appeared to jar not a little. He gazed at us with a good deal ofdislike.

'I wish the dickens you wouldn't make that row,' he said. 'Scaring all the fish away.'

It broke the spell a bit. Honoria changed the subject.

'I do wish Oswald wouldn't sit on the bridge like that,' she said.Tm sure it isn't safe. He might easily fall in.'

'I'll go and tell him,' I said.

I suppose the distance between the kid and me at this juncture wasabout five yards, but I got the impression that it was nearer ahundred. And, as I started to toddle across the intervening space, Ihad a rummy feeling that I'd done this very thing before. Then I remembered. Years ago, at a country-house party, I had been roped in to play the part of a butler in some amateur theatricals in aid ofsome ghastly

charity or other; and I had had to open the proceedings by walking across the empty stage from left upper entrance and shoving a tray on a table down right. They had impressed it on me at rehearsals that I mustn't take the course at a quick heel-and-toe,like a chappie finishing strongly in a walking-race; and the resultwas that I kept the brakes on to such an extent that it seemed to meas if I was never going to get to the bally table at all. The stageseemed to stretch out in front of me like a trackless desert, andthere was a kind of breathless hush as if all Nature had paused to concentrate its attention on me personally. Well, I felt just like thatnow. I had a kind of dry gulping in my throat, and the more I walked the farther away the kid seemed to get, till suddenly I found myself standing just behind him without quite knowing how I'd got there.

'Hallo!' I said, with a sickly sort of grin - wasted on the kid,because he didn't bother to turn round and look at me. He merely wiggled his left ear in a rather peevish manner. I don't know whenI've met anybody in whose life I appeared to mean so little.

'Hallo!' I said. 'Fishing?'

I laid my hand in a sort of elderly-brotherly way on his shoulder.

'Here, look out!' said the kid, wobbling on his foundations.

It was one of those things that want doing quickly or not at all. Ishut my eyes and pushed. Something seemed to give. There was ascrambling sound, a kind of yelp, a scream in the offing, and asplash. And so the long day wore on, so to speak.

I opened my eyes. The kid was just coming to the surface.

'Help!' I shouted, cocking an eye on the bush from which youngBingo was scheduled to emerge.

Nothing happened. Young Bingo didn't emerge to the slightestextent whatever.

'I say! Help!' I shouted again.

I don't want to bore you with reminiscences of my theatricalcareer, but I must just touch once more on that appearance of mineas the butler. The scheme on that occasion had been that when Iput the tray on the table the heroine would come on and say a fewwords to get me off. Well, on the night the misguided female forgotto stand by, and it was a full minute before the search-party locatedher and shot her on to the stage. And all that time I had to standthere, waiting. A rotten sensation, believe me, and this was just thesame, only worse. I understood what these writer-chappies meanwhen they talk about time standing still.

Meanwhile, the kid Oswald was presumably being cut off in hisprime, and it began to seem to me that some sort of steps ought tobe taken about it. What I had seen of the lad hadn't particularlyendeared him to me, but it was undoubtedly a bit thick to let him pass away. I don't know when I have seen anything more grubbyand unpleasant than the lake as viewed from the bridge; but thething apparently had to be done. I chucked off my coat and vaultedover.

It seems rummy that water should be so much wetter when you go into it with your clothes on than when you're just bathing, buttake it from me that it is. I was only under about three seconds, Isuppose, but I came up feeling like the bodies you read of in thepaper which 'had evidently been in the water several days'. I feltclammy and bloated.

At this point the scenario struck another snag. I had assumed thatdirectly I came to the surface I should get hold of the kid and steerhim courageously to shore. But he hadn't waited to be steered.When I had finished getting the water out of my eyes and had timeto look round, I saw him about ten yards away, going strongly andusing, I think, the Australian crawl. The spectacle took all the heartout of me. I mean to say, the whole essence of a rescue, if you knowwhat I mean, is that the party of the second part shall keep fairlystill and on one spot. If he starts swimming off on his own accountand can obviously give you at least forty yards in the hundred, whereare you? The whole thing falls through. It didn't seem to me that there was much to be done except get ashore, so I got ashore. Bythe time I had landed, the kid was half-way to the house. Look atit from whatever angle you like, the thing was a wash-out.

I was interrupted in my meditations by a noise like the Scotchexpress going under a bridge. It was Honoria Glossop laughing. Shewas standing at my elbow, looking at me in a rummy manner.

'Oh, Bertie, you are funny!' she said. And even in that momentthere seemed to me something sinister in the words. She had never called me anything except 'Mr Wooster' before. 'How wet you are!'

'Yes, I am wet.'

'You had better hurry into the house and change.'

'Yes.'

I wrung a gallon or two of water out of my clothes.

'You*are* funny!' she said again. 'First proposing in that extraordinary roundabout way, and then pushing poor little Oswald into thelake so as to impress me by saving him.'

I managed to get the water out of my throat sufficiently to try tocorrect this fearful impression.'No, no!'

'He said you pushed him in, and I saw you do it. Oh, I'm notangry, Bertie. I think it was too sweet of you. But I'm quite sure it'stime that I took you in hand. You certainly want someone to lookafter you. You've been seeing too many moving-pictures. I supposethe next thing you would have done would have been to set thehouse on fire so as to rescue me.' She looked at me in a proprietarysort of way. 'I think,' she said, 'I shall be able to make somethingof you, Bertie. It is true yours has been a wasted life up to the present, but you are still young, and there is a lot of good in you.'

'No, really there isn't.'

'Oh, yes, there is. It simply wants bringing out. Now you runstraight up to the house and change your wet clothes, or you willcatch cold.'

And, if you know what I mean, there was a sort of motherly notein her voice which seemed to tell me, even more than her actual words, that I was for it.

As I was coming downstairs after changing, I ran into young Bingo,looking festive to a degree.

'Bertie!' he said. 'Just the man I wanted to see. Bertie, a wonderfulthing has happened.'

'You blighter!' I cried. 'What became of you? Do you know-'

'Oh, you mean about being in those bushes? I hadn't time to tellyou about that. It's all off.'

'All off?'

'Bertie, I was actually starting to hide in those bushes when themost extraordinary thing happened. Walking across the lawn I saw the most radiant, the most beautiful girl in the world. There is nonelike her, none. Bertie, do you believe in love at first sight? You dobelieve in love at first sight, don't you, Bertie, old man? Directly Isaw her she seemed to draw me like a magnet. I seemed to forgeteverything. We two were alone in a world of music and sunshine. Ijoined her. I got into conversation. She is a Miss Braythwayt, Bertie- Daphne Braythwayt. Directly our eyes met, I realized that what Ihad imagined to be love for Honoria Glossop had been a merepassing whim. Bertie, you do believe in love at first sight, don't you?She is so wonderful, so sympathetic. Like a tender goddess - 'At this point I left the blighter.

Two days later I got a letter from Jeeves.

' - The weather,' it ended, 'continues fine. I have had one exceedingly enjoyable bathe.'

I gave one of those hollow, mirthless laughs, and went downstairsto join Honoria. I had an appointment with her in the drawing-room. She was going to read Ruskin to me.

7

Introducing Claude and Eustace

The blow fell precisely at one-forty-five (summer time). Spenser,Aunt Agatha's butler, was offering me the fried potatoes at the moment, and such was my emotion that I lofted six of them on tothe sideboard with the spoon. Shaken to the core, if you know what I mean.

Mark you, I was in a pretty enfeebled condition already. I hadbeen engaged to Honoria Glossop nearly two weeks, and during allthat time not a day had passed without her putting in some heavywork in the direction of what Aunt Agatha had called 'moulding'me. I had read solid literature till my eyes bubbled; we had leggedit together through miles of picture-galleries; and I had been compelled to undergo classical concerts to an extent you would hardlybelieve. All in all, therefore, I was in no fit state to receive shocks, especially shocks like this. Honoria had lugged me round to lunchat Aunt Agatha's, and I had just been saying to myself, 'Death,where is thy jolly old sting?' when she hove the bomb.

'Bertie,' she said, suddenly, as if she had just remembered it,'what is the name of that man of yours - your valet?'

'Eh? Oh, Jeeves.'

'I think he's a bad influence for you,' said Honoria. 'When weare married, you must get rid of Jeeves.'

It was at this point that I jerked the spoon and sent six of the bestand crispest sailing on to the sideboard, with Spenser gambollingafter them like a dignified old retriever.

'Get rid of Jeeves!' I gasped.

'Yes. I don't like him.'

'*I*don't like him,' said Aunt Agatha.

'But I can't. I mean - why, I couldn't carry on for a day withoutJeeves.'

'You will have to,' said Honoria. 'I don't like him at all.'

'*I*don't like him at all,' said Aunt Agatha. 'I never did.'

Ghastly, what? I'd always had an idea that marriage was a bit ofa wash-out, but I'd never dreamed that it demanded such frightful sacrifices from a fellow. I passed the rest of the meal in a sort ofstupor.

The scheme had been, if I remember, that after lunch I should go off and caddy for Honoria on a shopping tour down RegentStreet; but when she got up and started collecting me and the rest of her things, Aunt Agatha stopped her.

'You run along, dear,' she said. 'I want to say a few words toBertie.'

So Honoria legged it, and Aunt Agatha drew up her chair andstarted in.

'Bertie,' she said, 'dear Honoria does not know it, but a littledifficulty has arisen about your marriage.'

'By Jove! Not really?' I said, hope starting to dawn.

'Oh, it's nothing at all, of course. It is only a little exasperating.The fact is, Sir Roderick is being rather troublesome.'

'Thinks I'm not a good bet? Wants to scratch the fixture? Well,perhaps he's right.'

'Pray do not be so absurd, Bertie. It is nothing so serious as that.But the nature of Sir Roderick's profession unfortunately makes him- over-cautious.'

I didn't get it.

'Over-cautious?'

'Yes. I suppose it is inevitable. A nerve specialist with his extensivepractice can hardly help taking a rather warped view of humanity.'

I got what she was driving at now. Sir Roderick Glossop, Hono-ria's father, is always called a nerve specialist, because it soundsbetter, but everybody knows that he's really a sort of janitor to theloony-bin. I mean to say, when your uncle the Duke begins to feelthe strain a bit and you find him in the blue drawing-room stickingstraws in his hair, old Glossop is the first person you send for. Hetoddles round, gives the patient the once-over, talks about overexcited nervous systems, and recommends complete rest and seclusion and all that sort of thing. Practically every posh family in thecountry has called him in at one time or another, and I supposethat, being in that position - I mean constantly having to sit onpeople's heads while their nearest and dearest phone to the asylumto send round the wagon - does tend to make a chappie take whatyou might call a warped view of humanity.

'You mean he thinks I may be a loony, and he doesn't want aloony son-in-law?' I said.

Aunt Agatha seemed rather peeved than otherwise at my deadlyintelligence.

'Of course, he does not think anything so ridiculous. I told youhe was simply exceedingly cautious. He wants to satisfy himself thatyou are perfectly normal.' Here she paused, for Spenser had comein with the coffee. When he had gone, she went on: 'He appears to have got hold of some extraordinary story about your having pushedhis son Oswald into the lake at Ditteredge Hall. Incredible, ofcourse. Even you would hardly do a thing like that.'

'Well, I did sort of lean against him, you know, and he shot off the bridge.'

'Oswald definitely accuses you of having pushed him into the water. That has disturbed Sir Roderick, and unfortunately it hascaused him to make inquiries, and he has heard about your poor Uncle Henry.'

She eyed me with a good deal of solemnity, and I took a gravesip of coffee. We were peeping into the family cupboard and having a look at the good old skeleton. My late Uncle Henry, you see, wasby way of being the blot on the Wooster escutcheon. An extremelydecent chappie personally, and one who had always endeared himselfto me by tipping me with considerable lavishness when I was atschool; but there's no doubt he did at times do rather rummy things,notably keeping eleven pet rabbits in his bedroom; and I suppose a purist might have considered him more or less off his onion. In fact, to be perfectly frank, he wound up his career, happy to the last andcompletely surrounded by rabbits, in some sort of a home.

'Is is very absurd, of course,' continued Aunt Agatha. 'If any ofthe family had inherited poor Henry's eccentricity - and it wasnothing more - it would have been Claude and Eustace, and therecould not be two brighter boys.'

Claude and Eustace were twins, and had been kids at school withme in my last summer term. Casting my mind back, it seemed tome that 'bright' just about described them. The whole of that term,as I remembered, had been spent in getting them out of a series offrightful rows.

'Look how well they are doing at Oxford. Your Aunt Emily hada letter from Claude only the other day saying that they hoped tobe elected shortly to a very important college club, called TheSeekers.'

'Seekers?' I couldn't recall any club of the name in my time atOxford. 'What do they seek?'

'Claude did not say. Truth or knowledge, I should imagine. It isevidently a very desirable club to belong to, for Claude added thatLord Rainsby, the Earl of Datchet's son, was one of his fellowcandidates. However, we are wandering from the point, which isthat Sir Roderick wants to have a quiet talk with you quite alone.Now I rely on you, Bertie, to be - I won't say intelligent, but at least sensible. Don't giggle nervously; try to keep that horrible glassyexpression out of your eyes; don't yawn or fidget; and rememberthat Sir Roderick is the president of the West London branch ofthe anti-gambling league, so please do not talk about horse-racing.He will lunch with you at your flat tomorrow at one-thirty. Please remember that he drinks no wine, strongly disapproves of smoking, and can only eat the simplest food, owing to an impaired digestion. Do not offer him coffee, for he considers it the root of half the nerve-trouble in the world.'

'I should think a dog-biscuit and a glass of water would aboutmeet the case, what?'

'Bertie!'

'Oh, all right. Merely persiflage.'

'Now it is precisely that sort of idiotic remark that would be calculated to arouse Sir Roderick's worst suspicions. Do please tryto refrain from any misguided flippancy when you are with him.He is a very serious-minded man... Are you going? Well, please remember all I have said. I rely on you, and, if anything goes wrong,I shall never forgive you.'

'Right-o!' I said.

And so home, with a jolly day to look forward to.

I breakfasted pretty late next morning and went for a stroll afterwards. It seemed to me that anything I could do to clear the oldlemon ought to be done, and a bit of fresh air generally relieves that rather foggy feeling that comes over a fellow early in the day. I hadtaken a stroll in the park, and got back as far as Hyde Park Corner, when some blighter sloshed me between the shoulder-blades. It was young Eustace, my cousin. He was arm-in-arm with two other fellows, the one on the outside, being my cousin Claude and the onein the middle a pink-faced chappie with light hair and an apologetic sort of look.

'Bertie, old egg!' said young Eustace affably.

'Hallo!' I said, not frightfully chirpily.

'Fancy running into you, the one man in London who can supportus in the style we are accustomed to! By the way, you've never metthe old Dog-Face, have you? Dog-Face, this is my cousin Bertie. Lord Rainsby - Mr Wooster. We've just been round to your flat,Bertie. Bitterly disappointed that you were out, but were hospitablyentertained by old Jeeves. That man's a corker, Bertie. Stick to him.'

'What are you doing in London?' I asked.

'Oh, buzzing round. We're just up for the day. Flying visit, strictlyunofficial. We oil back on the three-ten. And now, touching thatlunch you very decently volunteered to stand us, which shall it be?Ritz? Savoy? Carlton? Or, if you're a member of Giro's or theEmbassy, that would do just as well.'

'I can't give you lunch. I've got an engagement myself. And, byJove,' I said, taking a look at my watch, 'I'm late.' I hailed a taxi. 'Sorry.'

'As man to man, then,' said Eustace, 'lend us a fiver.'

I hadn't time to stop and argue. I unbelted the fiver and hoppedinto the cab. It was twenty to two when I got to the flat. I boundedinto the sitting-room, but it was empty.

Jeeves shimmied in.

'Sir Roderick has not yet arrived, sir.'

'Good egg!' I said. 'I thought I should find him smashing up thefurniture.' My experience is that the less you want a fellow, the morepunctual he's bound to be, and I had had a vision of the old ladpacing the rug in my sitting-room, saying 'He cometh not!' and generally hotting up. 'Is everything in order?'

'I fancy you will find the arrangements quite satisfactory, sir.'

'What are you giving us?'

'Cold consomme, a cutlet, and a savoury, sir. With lemon-squash,iced.'

'Well, I don't see how that can hurt him. Don't go getting carriedaway by the excitement of the thing and start bringing in coffee.'

'No, sir.'

'And don't let your eyes get glassy, because, if you do, you're aptto find yourself in a padded cell before you know where you are.'

'Very good, sir.'

There was a ring at the bell.

'Stand by, Jeeves,' I said. 'We're off!'

8

Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch

I had met Sir Roderick Glossop before, of course, but only when Iwas with Honoria; and there is something about Honoria whichmakes almost anybody you meet in the same room seem sort of under-sized and trivial by comparison. I had never realized till thismoment what an extraordinarily formidable old bird he was. He hada pair of shaggy eyebrows which gave his eyes a piercing look which was not at all the sort of thing a fellow wanted to encounter on an empty stomach. He was fairly tall and fairly broad, and he had themost enormous head, with practically no hair on it, which made itseem bigger and much more like the dome of St Paul's. I suppose he must have taken about a nine or something in hats. Shows what a rotten thing it is to let your brain develop too much.

'What ho! What ho! What ho!' I said, trying to strike the genialnote, and then had a sudden feeling that that was just the sort ofthing I had been warned not to say. Dashed difficult it is to startthings going properly on an occasion like this. A fellow living in aLondon flat is so handicapped. I mean to say, if I had been theyoung squire greeting the visitor in the country, I could have said, 'Welcome to Meadowsweet Hall!' or something zippy like that. Itsounds silly to say 'Welcome to Number 6A, Crichton Mansions,Berkeley Street, W.'

'I am afraid I am a little late,' he said, as we sat down. 'I wasdetained at my club by Lord Alastair Hungerford, the Duke ofRamfurline's son. His Grace, he informed me, had exhibited arenewal of the symptoms which have been causing the family somuch concern. I could not leave him immediately. Hence myunpunctuality, which I trust has not discommoded you.'

'Oh, not at all. So the Duke is off his rocker, what?'

'The expression which you use is not precisely the one I shouldhave employed myself with reference to the head of perhaps thenoblest family in England, but there is no doubt that cerebral excitement does, as you suggest, exist in no small degree.' He sighed aswell as he could with his mouth full of cutlet. 'A profession like mine is a great strain, a great strain.'

'Must be.'

'Sometimes I am appalled at what I see around me.' He stoppedsuddenly and sort of stiffened. 'Do you keep a cat, Mr Wooster?'

'Eh? What? Cat? No, no cat.'

'I was conscious of a distinct impression that I had heard a catmewing either in the room or very near to where we are sitting.'

'Probably a taxi or something in the street.'

'I fear I do not follow you.'

'I mean to say, taxis squawk, you know. Rather like cats in a sortof way.'

'I had not observed the resemblance,' he said, rather coldly.

'Have some lemon-squash,' I said. The conversation seemed tobe getting rather difficult.

'Thank you. Half a glassful, if I may.' The hell-brew appeared tobuck him up, for he resumed in a slightly more pally manner. 'I have a particular dislike for cats. But I was saying - Oh, yes. Sometimes Iam positively appalled at what I see around me. It is not only thecases which come under my professional notice, painful as many ofthose are. It is what I see as I go about London. Sometimes itseems to me that the whole world is mentally unbalanced. This verymorning, for example, a most singular and distressing occurrencetook place as I was driving from my house to the club. The daybeing clement, I had instructed my chauffeur to open my laudaulette, and I was leaning back, deriving no little pleasure from the sunshine, when our progress was arrested in the middle of the thoroughfare by one of those blocks in the traffic which are inevitable in so congested a system as that of London.'

I suppose I had been letting my mind wander a bit, for when hestopped and took a sip of lemon-squash I had a feeling that I waslistening to a lecture and was expected to say something.

'Hear, hear!' I said.

'I beg your pardon?'

'Nothing, nothing. You were saying -'

'The vehicles proceeding in the opposite direction had also been temporarily arrested, but after a moment they were permitted toproceed. I had fallen into a meditation, when suddenly the most extraordinary thing took place. My hat was snatched abruptly from my head! And as I looked back I perceived it being waved in a kindof feverish triumph from the interior of a taxicab, which, even as I looked, disappeared through a gap in the traffic and was lost tosight.'

I didn't laugh, but I distinctly heard a couple of my floating ribspart from their moorings under the strain.

'Must have been meant for a practical joke,' I said. 'What?'

This suggestion didn't seem to please the old boy.

'I trust,' he said, 'I am not deficient in an appreciation of thehumorous, but I confess that I am at a loss to detect anything akinto pleasantry in the outrage. The action was beyond all question that of a mentally unbalanced subject. These mental lesions may expressthemselves in almost any form. The Duke of Ramfurline, to whom I had occasion to allude just now, is under the impression - this isin the strictest confidence - that he is a canary: and his seizuretoday, which so perturbed Lord Alastair, was due to the fact that acareless footman had neglected to bring him his morning lump ofsugar. Cases are common, again, of men waylaying women andcutting off portions of their hair. It is from a branch of this latterform of mania that I should be disposed to imagine that my assailantwas suffering. I can only trust that he will be placed under propercontrol before he - Mr Wooster, there*is* a cat close at hand! It isnot inthe street! The mewing appears to come from the adjoiningroom.'

This time I had to admit there was no doubt about it. There was adistinct sound of mewing coming from the next room. I punchedthe bell for Jeeves, who drifted in and stood waiting with an air of respectful devotion.

'Sir?'

'Oh, Jeeves,' I said. 'Cats! What about it? Are there any cats inthe flat?'

'Only the three in your bedroom, sir.'

'What!'

'Cats in his bedroom!' I heard Sir Roderick whisper in a kind of stricken way, and his eyes hit me amidships like a couple of bullets.

'What do you mean,' I said, 'only the three in my bedroom?'

'The black one, the tabby and the small lemon-coloured animal,sir.'

'What on earth - ?'

I charged round the table in the direction of the door. Unfortunately, Sir Roderick had just decided to edge in that directionhimself, with the result that we collided in the doorway with a gooddeal of force, and staggered out into the hall together. He came smartly out of the clinch and grabbed an umbrella from the rack.

'Stand back!' he shouted, waving it overhead. 'Stand back, sir! I am armed!'

It seemed to me that the moment had come to be soothing.

'Awfully sorry I barged into you,' I said. 'Wouldn't have had ithappen for worlds. I was just dashing out to have a look into things.'

He appeared a trifle reassured, and lowered the umbrella. Butjust then the most frightful shindy started in the bedroom. It sounded as though all the cats in London, assisted by delegates from outlyingsuburbs, had got together to settle their differences once for aU. Asort of augmented orchestra of cats.

'This noise is unendurable,' yelled Sir Roderick. 'I cannot hearmyself speak.'

'I fancy, sir,' said Jeeves respectfully, 'that the animals may havebecome somewhat exhilarated as the result of having discovered thefish under Mr Wooster's bed.'

The old boy tottered.

'Fish! Did I hear you rightly?'

'Sir?'

'Did you say that there was a fish under Mr Wooster's bed?'

'Yes, sir.'

Sir Roderick gave a low moan, and reached for his hat and stick.

'You aren't going?' I said.

'Mr Wooster, I*am* going! I prefer to spend my leisure time inless eccentric society.'

'But I say. Here, I must come with you. I'm sure the wholebusiness can be explained. Jeeves, my hat.'

Jeeves rallied round. I took the hat from him and shoved it on myhead.

'Good heavens!'

Beastly shock it was! The bally thing had absolutely engulfed me, if you know what I mean. Even as I was putting it on I got a sort ofimpression that it was a trifle roomy; and no sooner had I let it gothan it settled down over my ears like a kind of extinguisher.

'I say! This isn't my hat!'

'It is*my* hat!' said Sir Roderick in about the coldest, nastiest voiceI'd ever heard. 'The hat which was stolen from me this morning as I drove in my car.'

'But-'

I suppose Napoleon or somebody like that would have been equalto the situation, but I'm bound to say it was too much for me. I juststood there goggling in a sort of coma, while the old boy lifted thehat off me and turned to Jeeves.

'I should be glad, my man,' he said, 'if you would accompany mea few yards down the street. I wish to ask you some questions.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Here, but, I say- !' I began, but he left me standing. He stalkedout, followed by Jeeves. And at that moment the row in the bedroomstarted again, louder than ever.

I was about fed up with the whole thing. I mean, cats in yourbedroom - a bit thick, what? I didn't know how the dickens theyhad got in, but I was jolly well resolved that they weren't going to stay picnicking there any longer. I flung open the door. I got amomentary flash of about a hundred and fifteen cats of all sizes and colours scrapping in the middle of the room, and then they all shotpast me with a rush and out of the front door; and all that was leftof the mob-scene was the head of a whacking big fish, lying on the carpet and staring up at me in a rather austere sort of way, as if itwanted a written explanation and apology.

There was something about the thing's expression that absolutelychilled me, and I withdrew on tiptoe and shut the door. And, as Idid so, I bumped into someone.

'Oh, sorry!' he said.

I spun round. It was the pink-faced chappie, Lord Something orother, the fellow I had met with Claude and Eustace.

'I say,' he said apologetically, 'awfully sorry to bother you, butthose weren't my cats I met just now legging it downstairs, werethey? They looked like my cats.'

'They came out of my bedroom.'

'Then they*were* my cats!' he said sadly. 'Oh, dash it.'

'Did you put cats in my bedroom?'

'Your man, what's-his-name, did. He rather decently said I couldkeep them there till my train went. I'd just come to fetch them. Andnow they've gone! Oh, well, it can't be helped, I suppose. I'll take the hat and the fish, anyway.'

I was beginning to dislike this chappie.

'Did you put that bally fish there, too?'

'No, that was Eustace's. The hat was Claude's.'

I sank limply into a chair.

'I say, you couldn't explain this, could you?' I said. The chappiegazed at me in mild surprise.

'Why, don't you know all about it? I say!' He blushed profusely.'Why, if you don't know about it, I shouldn't wonder if the wholething didn't seem rummy to you.'

'Rummy is the word.'

'It was for The Seekers, you know?'

'The Seekers?'

'Rather a blood club, you know, up at Oxford, which your cousinsand I are rather keen on getting into. You have to pinch something,you know, to get elected. Some sort of a souvenir, you know. A policeman's helmet, you know, or a door-knocker or something, youknow. The room's decorated with the things at the annual dinner,and everybody makes speeches and all that sort of thing. Ratherjolly! Well, we wanted rather to make a sort of special effort and dothe thing in style, if you understand, so we came up to London tosee if we couldn't pick up something here that would be a bit outof the ordinary. And we had the most amazing luck right from the start. Your cousin Claude managed to collect a quite decent top-hat out of a passing car and your cousin Eustace got away with a reallygoodish salmon or something from Harrods, and I snaffed threeexcellent cats all in the first hour. We were fearfully braced, I cantell you. And then the difficulty was to know where to park thethings till our train went. You look so beastly conspicuous, you know,tooling about London with a fish and a lot of cats. And then Eustaceremembered you, and we all came on here in a cab. You were out,but your man said it would be all right. When we met you, you werein such a hurry that we hadn't time to explain. Well, I think I'll betaking the hat, if you don't mind.'

'It's gone.'

'Gone?'

'The fellow you pinched it from happened to be the man whowas lunching here. He took it away with him.'

'Oh, I say! Poor old Claude will be upset. Well, how about thegoodish salmon or something?'

'Would you care to view the remains?' He seemed all broken upwhen he saw the wreckage.

'I doubt if the committee would accept that,' he said sadly. 'Thereisn't a frightful lot of it left, what?'

'The cats ate the rest.'

He sighed deeply.

'No cats, no fish, no hat. We've had all our trouble for nothing.

I do call that hard! And on top of that - I say, I hate to ask you,but you couldn't lend me a tenner, could you?'

'A tenner? What for?

'Well, the fact is, I've got to pop round and bail Claude andEustace out. They've been arrested.'

'Arrested!'

'Yes. You see, what with the excitement of collaring the hat andthe salmon or something, added to the fact that we had rather afestive lunch, they got a bit above themselves, poor chaps, and triedto pinch a motor-lorry. Silly, of course, because I don't see howthey could have got the thing to Oxford and shown it to the committee. Still, there wasn't any reasoning with them, and when the driverstarted making a fuss, there was a bit of a mix-up, and Claude andEustace are more or less languishing in Vine Street police stationtill I pop round and bail them out. So if you could manage a tenner- Oh, thanks, that's fearfully good of you. It would have been toobad to leave them there, what? I mean, they're both such frightfully good chaps, you know. Everybody likes them up at the Varsity. They're fearfully popular.'

'I bet they are!' I said.

When Jeeves came back, I was waiting for him on the mat. I wantedspeech with the blighter.

'Well?' I said.

'Sir Roderick asked me a number of questions, sir, respectingyour habits and mode of life, to which I replied guardedly.'

'I don't care about that. What I want to know is why you didn't explain the whole thing to him right at the start? A word from youwould have put everything clear.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now he's gone off thinking me a loony.'

'I should not be surprised, from his conversation with me, sir, ifsome such idea had not entered his head.'

I was just starting to speak, when the telephone bell rang. Jeeves answered it.

'No, madam, Mr Wooster is not in. No, madam, I do not know when he will return. No, madam, he left no message. Yes, madam,I will inform him.' He put back the receiver. 'Mrs Gregson, sir.'

Aunt Agatha! I had been expecting it. Ever since the luncheon-party had blown out a fuse, her shadow had been hanging over me,so to speak.

'Does she know? Already?'

'I gather that Sir Roderick has been speaking to her on thetelephone, sir, and - '

'No wedding bells for me, what?'

Jeeves coughed.

'Mrs Gregson did not actually confide in me, sir, but I fancy thatsome such thing may have occurred. She seemed decidedly agitated,sir.'

It's a rummy thing, but I'd been so snootered by the old boy and the cats and the fish and the hat and the pink-faced chappie and allthe rest of it that the bright side simply hadn't occurred to me tillnow. By Jove, it was like a bally weight rolling off my chest! I gavea yelp of pure relief.

'Jeeves!' I said, 'I believe you worked the whole thing!'

'Sir?'

'I believe you had the jolly old situation in hand right from thestart.'

'Well, sir, Spenser, Mrs Gregson's butler, who inadvertentlychanced to overhear something of your

conversation when you werelunching at the house, did mention certain of the details to me; andI confess that, though it may be a liberty to say so, I entertained hopes that something might occur to prevent the match. I doubt ifthe young lady was entirely suitable to you, sir.'

'And she would have shot you out on your ear five minutes afterthe ceremony.'

'Yes, sir. Spenser informed me that she had expressed some suchintention. Mrs Gregson wishes you to call upon her immediately,sir.'

'She does, eh? What do you advise, Jeeves?'

'I think a trip abroad might prove enjoyable, sir.'

I shook my head. 'She'd come after me.'

'Not if you went far enough afield, sir. There are excellent boatsleaving every Wednesday and Saturday for New York.'

'Jeeves,' I said, 'you are right, as always. Book the tickets.'

9

A Letter of Introduction

You know, the longer I live, the more clearly I see that half thetrouble in this bally world is caused by the light-hearted and thoughtless way in which chappies dash off letters of introduction and handthem to other chappies to deliver to chappies of the third part. It'sone of those things that make you wish you were living in the Stone Age. What I mean to say is, if a fellow in those days wanted to giveanyone a letter of introduction, he had to spend a month or socarving it on a large-sized boulder, and the chances were that theother chappie got so sick of lugging the thing round in the hot sun that he dropped it after the first mile. But nowadays it's so easy towrite letters of introduction that everybody does it without a secondthought, with the result that some perfectly harmless cove like myselfgets in the soup.

Mark you, all the above is what you might call the result of myriper experience. I don't mind admitting that in the first flush of thething, so to speak, when Jeeves told me - this would be about threeweeks after I'd landed in America - that a blighter called CyrilBassington-Bassington had arrived and I found that he had broughta letter of introduction to me from Aunt Agatha ... where was I?Oh, yes...I don't mind admitting, I was saying, that just at first Iwas rather bucked. You see, after the painful events which had resulted in my leaving England I hadn't expected to get any sort ofletter from Aunt Agatha which would pass the censor, so to speak.And it was a pleasant surprise to open this one and find it almostcivil. Chilly, perhaps, in parts, but on the whole quite tolerably polite.I looked on the thing as a hopeful sign. Sort of olive branch, youknow. Or do I mean orange blossom? What I'm getting at is thatthe fact that Aunt Agatha was writing to me without calling me names seemed, more or less, like a step in the direction of peace.

And I was all for peace, and that right speedily. I'm not saying aword against New York, mind you. I liked the place, and was havingquite a ripe time there. But the fact remains that a fellow who'sbeen used

to London all his life does get a trifle homesick on a foreign strand, and I wanted to pop back to the cosy old flat inBerkeley Street - which could only be done when Aunt Agatha hadsimmered down and got over the Glossop episode. I know thatLondon is a biggish city, but, believe me, it isn't half big enough for any fellow to live in with Aunt Agatha when she's after him with theold hatchet. And so I'm bound to say I looked on this chump Bassington-Bassington, when he arrived, more or less as a Dove ofPeace, and was all for him.

He would seem from contemporary accounts to have blown inone morning at seven-forty-five, that being the ghastly sort of hourthey shoot you off the liner in New York. He was given the respectful raspberry by Jeeves, and told to try again about three hours later,when there would be a sporting chance of my having sprung frommy bed with a glad cry to welcome another day and all that sort ofthing. Which was rather decent of Jeeves, by the way, for it sohappened that there was a slight estrangement, a touch of coldness,a bit of a row in other words, between us at the moment becauseof some rather priceless purple socks which I was wearing againsthis wishes: and a lesser man might easily have snatched at the chanceof getting back at me a bit by loosing Cyril into my bedchamber ata moment when I couldn't have stood a two-minutes' conversationwith my dearest pal. For until I have had my early cup of tea andhave brooded on life for a bit absolutely undisturbed, I'm not muchof a lad for the merry chit-chat.

So Jeeves very sportingly shot Cyril out into the crisp morningair, and didn't let me know of his existence till he brought his cardin with the Bohea.

'And what might all this be, Jeeves?' I said, giving the thing theglassy gaze.

'The gentleman has arrived from England, I understand, sir. He called to see you earlier in the day.'

'Good Lord, Jeeves! You don't mean to say the day starts earlierthan this?'

'He desired me to say he would return later, sir.'

'I've never heard of him. Have*you* ever heard of him, Jeeves?'

'I am familiar with the name Bassington-Bassington, sir. There are three branches of the Bassington-Bassington family - the ShropshireBassington-Bassingtons, the Hampshire Bassington-Bassingtons, and the Kent Bassington-Bassingtons.'

'England seems pretty well stocked up with Bassington-Bassingtons.'

'Tolerably so, sir.'

'No chance of a sudden shortage, I mean, what?'

'Presumably not, sir.'

'And what sort of a specimen is this one?'

'I could not say, sir, on such short acquaintance.'

'Will you give me a sporting two to one, Jeeves, judging from whatyou have seen of him, that this chappie is not a blighter or an excrescence?'

'No, sir. I should not care to venture such liberal odds.'

'I knew it. Well, the only thing that remains to be discovered iswhat kind of a blighter he is.'

'Time will tell, sir. The gentleman brought a letter for you, sir.'

'Oh, he did, did he?' I said, and grasped the communication. Andthen I recognized the handwriting. 'I say, Jeeves, this is from myAunt Agatha!'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Don't dismiss it in that light way. Don't you see what this means?She says she wants me to look after this excrescence while he's inNew York. By Jove, Jeeves, if I only fawn on him a bit, so that hesends back a favourable report to headquarters, I may yet be ableto get back to England in time for Goodwood. Now is certainly thetime for all good men to come to the aid of the party, Jeeves. Wemust rally round and cosset this cove in no uncertain manner.'

'Yes, sir.'

'He isn't going to stay in New York long,' I said, taking anotherlook at the letter. 'He's headed for Washington. Going to give thenibs there the once-over, apparently, before taking a whirl at the Diplomatic Service. I should say that we can win this lad's esteemand affection with a lunch and a couple of dinners, what?'

'I fancy that should be entirely adequate, sir.'

'This is the jolliest thing that's happened since we left England. It looks to me as if the sun were breaking through the clouds.'

'Very possibly, sir.'

He started to put out my things, and there was an awkward sortof silence.

'Not those socks, Jeeves,' I said, gulping a bit but having a dashat the careless, off-hand tone. 'Give me the purple ones.'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Those jolly purple ones.'

'Very good, sir.'

He lugged them out of the drawer as if he were a vegetarianfishing a caterpillar out of the salad. You could see he was feeling deeply. Deuced painful and all that, this sort of thing, but a chappiehas got to assert himself every now and then. Absolutely.

I was looking for Cyril to show up again any time after breakfast,but he didn't appear: so towards one o'clock I trickled out to theLambs Club, where I had an appointment to feed the Wooster facewith a

cove of the name of Caffyn I'd got pally with since my arrival- George Caffyn, a fellow who wrote plays and what not. I'd madea lot of friends during my stay in New York, the city being crammedwith bonhomous lads who one and all extended a welcoming handto the stranger in their midst.

Caffyn was a bit late, but bobbed up finally, saying that he hadbeen kept at a rehearsal of his new musical comedy,*Ask Dad;* andwe started in. We had just reached the coffee, when the waiter cameup and said that Jeeves wanted to see me.

Jeeves was in the waiting-room. He gave the socks one painedlook as I came in, then averted his eyes.

'Mr Bassington-Bassington has just telephoned, sir.'

'Oh?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Where is he?'

'In prison, sir.'

I reeled against the wallpaper. A nice thing to happen to AuntAgatha's nominee on his first morning under my wing, I did*not*think!

'In prison!'

'Yes, sir. He said on the telephone that he had been arrested andwould be glad if you could step round and bail him out.'

'Arrested! What for?'

'He did not favour me with his confidence in that respect, sir.'

'This is a bit thick, Jeeves.'

'Precisely, sir.'

I collected old George, who very decently volunteered to staggeralong with me, and we hopped into a taxi. We sat around at thepolice station for a bit on a wooden bench in a sort of ante-room,and presently a policeman appeared, leading in Cyril.

'Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!' I said. 'What?'

My experience is that a fellow never really looks his best just afterhe's come out of a cell. When I was up at Oxford, I used to have aregular job bailing out a pal of mine who never failed to get pinchedevery Boat Race night, and he always looked like something thathad been dug up by the roots. Cyril was in pretty much the samesort of shape. He had a black eye and a torn collar, and altogetherwas nothing to write home about - especially if one was writing toAunt Agatha. He was a thin, tall chappie with a lot of light hair andpale-blue goggly eyes which made him look like one of the rarerkinds of fish.

'I got your message,' I said.

'Oh, are you Bertie Wooster?'

'Absolutely. And this is my pal George Caffyn. Writes plays andwhat not, don't you know.'

We all shook hands, and the policeman, having retrieved a pieceof chewing-gum from the underside of a chair, where he had parkedit against a rainy day, went off into a corner and began to contemplatethe infinite.

'This is a rotten country,' said Cyril.

'Oh, I don't know, you know, don't you know!' I said.

'We do our best,' said George.

'Old George is an American,' I explained. 'Writes plays, don'tyou know, and what not.'

'Of course, I didn't invent the country,' said George. 'That wasColumbus. But I shall be delighted to consider any improvements you may suggest and lay them before the proper authorities.'

'Well, why don't the policemen in New York dress properly?'

George took a look at the chewing officer across the room.

'I don't see anything missing,' he said.

'I mean to say, why don't they they wear helmets like they do inLondon? Why do they look like postmen? It isn't fair on a fellow.Makes it dashed confusing. I was simply standing on the pavement, looking at things, when a fellow who looked like a postman proddedme in the ribs with a club. I didn't see why I should have postmenprodding me. Why the dickens should a fellow come three thousandmiles to be prodded by postmen?'

'The point is well taken,' said George. 'What did you do?'

'I gave him a shove, you know. I've got a frightfully hasty temper, you know. All the Bassington-Bassingtons have got frightfully hastytempers, don't you know! And then he biffed me in the eye andtugged me off to this beastly place.'

Til fix it, old son,' I said. And I hauled out the bank-roll andwent off to open negotiations, leaving Cyril to talk to George. I don'tmind admitting that I was a bit perturbed. There were furrows inthe old brow, and I had a kind of foreboding feeling. As long as this chump stayed in New York, I was responsible for him: and he didn'tgive me the impression of being the species of cove a reasonable chappie would care to be responsible for for more than about threeminutes.

I mused with a considerable amount of tensity over Cyril thatnight, when I had got home and Jeeves had brought me the finalwhisky, I couldn't help feeling that this first visit of his to Americawas going to be one of those times that try men's souls and what not. I hauled out Aunt Agatha's letter of introduction and re-readit, and there was no getting away from the fact that she undoubtedlyappeared to be somewhat wrapped up in this blighter and to considerit my mission in life to shield him from harm while on the premises.I was deuced thankful that he had taken such a liking for GeorgeCaffyn, old George being a steady sort of cove. After I had got himout of his dungeon-cell, he and George had gone off together, as chummy as brothers, to watch the afternoon rehearsal of*Ask Dad.*There was some talk, I gathered, of

their dining together. I feltpretty easy in my mind while George had his eye on him.

I had got about as far as this in my meditations, when Jeeves camein with a telegram. At least, it wasn't a telegram: it was a cable -from Aunt Agatha, and this is what it said:-

Has Cyril Bassington-Bassington called yet?

On no account introducehim into theatrical circles.

Vitally important.

Letter follows.

I read it a couple of times.

'This is rummy, Jeeves!'

'Yes, sir?'

'Very rummy and dashed disturbing!'

'Will there be anything further tonight, sir?'

Of course, if he was going to be as bally unsympathetic as that there was nothing to be done. My idea had been to show him thecable and ask his advice. But if he was letting those purple socksrankle to that extent, the good old*noblesse oblige* of the Woosterscouldn't lower itself to the extent of pleading with the man. Absolutely not. So I gave it a miss.

'Nothing more, thanks.'

'Good night, sir.'

'Good night.'

He floated away, and I sat down to think the thing over. I hadbeen directing the best efforts of the old bean to the problem for amatter of half an hour, when there was a ring at the bell. I went tothe door, and there was Cyril, looking pretty festive.

'I'll come in for a bit if I may,' he said. 'Got something ratherpriceless to tell you.'

He curveted past me into the sitting-room, and when I got thereafter shutting the front door I found him reading Aunt Agatha'scable and giggling in a rummy sort of manner. 'Oughtn't to havelooked at this, I suppose. Caught sight of my name and read itwithout thinking. I say, Wooster, old friend of my youth, this israther funny. Do you mind if I have a drink? Thanks awfully andall that sort of rot. Yes, it's rather funny, considering what I cameto tell you. Jolly old Caffyn has given me a small part in that musical comedy of his,*Ask Dad*. Only a bit, you know, but quite tolerablyripe. I'm feeling frightfully braced, don't you know!'

He drank his drink, and went on. He didn't seem to notice thatI wasn't jumping about the room, yapping

with joy.

'You know, I've always wanted to go on the stage, you know,' he said. 'But my jolly old guv'nor wouldn't stick it at any price. Put the old Waukeesi down with a bang, and turned bright purple whenever the subject was mentioned. That's the real reason why I came over here, if you want to know. I knew there wasn't a chance of my beingable to work this stage wheeze in London without somebody gettingon to it and tipping off the guv'nor, so I rather brainily sprang thescheme of popping over to Washington to broaden my mind. There'snobody to interfere on this side, you see, so I can go right ahead!'

I tried to reason with the poor chump.

'But your guv'nor will have to know some time.'

That'll be all right. I shall be the jolly old star by then, and he won't have a leg to stand on.'

'It seems to me he'll have one leg to stand on while he kicks mewith the other.'

'Why, where do you come in? What have you got to do with it?'

'I introduced you to George Caffyn.'

'So you did, old top, so you did. I'd quite forgotten. I ought tohave thanked you before. Well, so long. There's an early rehearsalof*Ask Dad* tomorrow morning, and I must be toddling. Rummy the thing should be called*Ask Dad,* when that's just what I'm not goingto do. See what I mean, what, what? Well, pip-pip!'

'Toodle-oo!' I said sadly, and the blighter scudded off. I divedfor the phone and called up George Caffyn.

'I say, George, what's all this about Cyril Bassington-Bassington?'

'What about him?'

'He tells me you've given him a part in your show.'

'Oh, yes. Just a few lines.'

'But I've just had fifty-seven cables from home telling me on noaccount to let him go on the stage.'

'I'm sorry. But Cyril is just the type I need for that part. He'ssimply got to be himself.'

'It's pretty tough on me, George, old man. My Aunt Agatha sentthis blighter over with a letter of introduction to me, and she will hold me responsible.'

'She'll cut you out of her will?'

'It isn't a question of money. But - of course, you've never metmy Aunt Agatha, so it's rather hard to explain. But she's a sort ofhuman vampire-bat, and she'll make things most fearfully unpleasantfor me when I go back to England. She's the kind of woman whocomes and rags you before breakfast, don't you know.'

'Well, don't go back to England, then. Stick here and become President.'

'But, George, old top - !'

'Good night!'

'But, I say, George, old man!'

'You didn't get my last remark. It was "Good night!" You IdleRich may not need any sleep, but I've got to be bright and fresh inthe morning. God bless you!'

I felt as if I hadn't a friend in the world. I was so jolly well workedup that I went and banged on Jeeves's door. It wasn't a thing I'dhave cared to do as a rule, but it seemed to me that now was thetime for all good men to come to the aid of the party, so to speak,and that it was up to Jeeves to rally round the young master, evenif it broke up his beauty-sleep.

Jeeves emerged in a brown dressing gown.

'Sir?'

'Deuced sorry to wake you up, Jeeves, and what not, but all sortsof dashed disturbing things have been happening.'

'I was not asleep. It is my practice, on retiring, to read a few pagesof some instructive book.'

'That's good! What I mean to say is, if you've just finished exercising the old bean, it's probably in mid-season form for tacklingproblems. Jeeves, Mr Bassington-Bassington is going on the stage!'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Ah! The thing doesn't hit you! You don't get it properly! Here'sthe point. All his family are most fearfully dead against his going onthe stage. There's going to be no end of trouble if he isn't headedoff. And, what's worse, my Aunt Agatha will blame*me,* you see.'

'I see, sir.'

'Well, can't you think of some way of stopping him?'

'Not, I confess, at the moment, sir.'

'Well, have a stab at it.'

'I will give the matter my best consideration, sir. Will there beanything further tonight?'

'I hope not! I've had all I can stand already.'

'Very good, sir.'

He popped off.

10

Startling Dressiness of a LiftAttendant

The part which old George had written for the chump Cyril tookup about two pages of typescript; but it might have been Hamlet,the way that poor, misguided pinhead worked himself to the boneover it. I suppose, if I heard him read his lines once, I did it a dozentimes in the first couple of days. He seemed to think that my onlyfeeling about the whole affair was one of enthusiastic admiration,and that he could rely on my support and sympathy. What withtrying to imagine how Aunt Agatha was going to take this thing, andbeing woken up out of the dreamless in the small hours every othernight to give my opinion of some new bit of business which Cyril had invented, I became more or less the good old shadow. And allthe time Jeeves remained still pretty cold and distant about thepurple socks. It's this sort of thing that ages a chappie, don't youknow, and makes his youthful*joie-de-vivre* go a bit groggy at theknees.

In the middle of it Aunt Agatha's letter arrived. It took her aboutsix pages to do justice to Cyril's father's feelings in regard to hisgoing on the stage and about six more to give me a kind of sketchof what she would say, think, and do if I didn't keep him clear ofinjurious influences while he was in America. The letter came bythe afternoon mail, and left me with a pretty firm conviction that itwasn't a thing I ought to keep to myself. I didn't even wait to ringthe bell: I whizzed for the kitchen, bleating for Jeeves, and butted into the middle of a regular tea-party of sorts. Seated at the tablewere a depressed-looking cove who might have been a valet orsomething, and a boy in a Norfolk suit. The valet-chappie wasdrinking a whisky and soda, and the boy was being tolerably roughwith some jam and cake.

'Oh, I say, Jeeves!' I said. 'Sorry to interrupt the feast of reasonand flow of soul and so forth, but -'

At this juncture the small boy's eye hit me like a bullet andstopped me in my tracks. It was one of those cold, clammy, accusing sort of eyes - the kind that makes you reach up to see if your tie isstraight: and he looked at me as if I were some sort of unnecessaryproduct which Cuthbert the Cat had brought in after a rambleamong the local ash-cans. He was a stoutish infant with a lot offreckles and a good deal of jam on his face.

'Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!' I said. 'What?' There didn't seem muchelse to say.

The stripling stared at me in a nasty sort of way through the jam.He may have loved me at first sight, but the impression he gave mewas that he didn't think a lot of me and wasn't betting much that Iwould improve a great deal on acquaintance. I had a kind of feelingthat I was about as popular with him as a cold Welsh rarebit.

'What's your name?' he asked.

'My name? Oh, Wooster, don't you know, and what not.'

'My pop's richer than you are!'

That seemed to be all about me. The child having said his say,started in on the jam again. I turned to Jeeves:

'I say, Jeeves, can you spare a moment? I want to show yousomething.'

'Very good, sir.' We toddled into the sitting-room.

'Who is your little friend, Sidney the Sunbeam, Jeeves?'

'The young gentleman, sir?'

'It's a loose way of describing him, but I know what you mean.'

'I trust I was not taking a liberty in entertaining him, sir?'

'Not a bit. If that's your idea of a large afternoon, go ahead.'

'I happened to meet the young gentleman taking a walk with hisfather's valet, sir, whom I used to know somewhat intimately inLondon, and I ventured to invite them both to join me here.'

'Well, never mind about him, Jeeves. Read this letter.'

He gave it the up-and-down.

'Very disturbing, sir!' was all he could find to say.

'What are we going to do about it?'

'Time may provide a solution, sir.'

'On the other hand, it mayn't, what?'

'Extremely true, sir.'

We'd got as far as this, when there was a ring at the door.Jeeves shimmered off, and Cyril blew in, full of good cheer and blitheringness.

'I say, Wooster, old thing,' he said, 'I want your advice. You know

this jolly old part of mine. How ought I to dress it? What I meanis, the first act scene is laid in an hotel of sorts, at about three inthe afternoon. What ought I to wear, do you think?'

I wasn't feeling fit for a discussion of gent's suitings.

'You'd better consult Jeeves,' I said.

'A hot and by no means unripe idea! Where is he?'

'Gone back to the kitchen, I suppose.'

Til smite the good old bell, shall I? Yes. No?'

'Right-o!'

Jeeves poured silently in.

'Oh, I say, Jeeves,' began Cyril, 'I just wanted to have a syllableor two with you. It's this way - Hallo, who's this?'

I then perceived that the stout stripling had trickled into the roomafter Jeeves. He was standing near the door looking at Cyril as ifhis worst fears had been realized. There was a bit of a silence. Thechild remained there, drinking Cyril in for about half a minute; then he gave his verdict:

'Fish-face!'

'Eh? What?' said Cyril.

The child, who had evidently been taught at his mother's knee tospeak the truth, made his meaning a trifle clearer.

'You've a face like a fish!'

He spoke as if Cyril was more to be pitied than censured, whichI am bound to say I thought rather decent and broadminded of him.I don't mind admitting that, whenever I looked at Cyril's face, Ialways had a feeling that he couldn't have got that way without itsbeing mostly his own fault. I found myself warming to this child.Absolutely, don't you know. I liked his conversation.

It seemed to take Cyril a moment or two really to grasp the thing,and then you could hear the blood of the Bassington-Bassingtonsbegin to sizzle.

'Well, I'm dashed!' he said. 'I'm dashed if I'm not!'

'I wouldn't have a face like that,' proceeded the child, with a gooddeal of earnestness, 'not if you gave me a million dollars.' He thoughtfor a moment, then corrected himself. 'Two million dollars!' headded.

Just what occurred then I couldn't exactly say, but the next fewminutes were a bit exciting. I take it that Cyril must have made adive for the infant. Anyway, the air seemed pretty well congestedwith arms and legs and things. Something bumped into the Woosterwaistcoat just around the third button, and I collapsed on to thesettee and rather lost interest in things for the moment. When I hadunscrambled myself, I found that Jeeves and the child had retiredand Cyril was standing in the middle of the room snorting a bit.

'Who's that frightful little brute, Wooster?'

'I don't know. I never saw him before today.'

'I gave him a couple of tolerably juicy buffets before he legged it.I say, Wooster, that kid said a dashed odd thing. He yelled out something about Jeeves promising him a dollar if he called me - er- what he said.'

It sounded pretty unlikely to me.

'What would Jeeves do that for?'

'It struck me as rummy, too.'

'Where would be the sense of it?'

'That's what I can't see.'

'I mean to say, it's nothing to Jeeves what sort of face you have!'

'No!' said Cyril. He spoke a little coldly, I fancied. I don't knowwhy. 'Well, I'll be popping. Toodle-oo!'

'Pip-pip!'

It must have been about a week after this rummy little episodethat George Caffyn called me up and asked me if I would care togo and see a run-through of his show.*Ask Dad,* it seemed, was toopen out of town in Schenectady on the following Monday, and thiswas to be a sort of preliminary dress-rehearsal. A preliminary dress-rehearsal, old George explained, was the same as a regular dress-rehearsal inasmuch as it was apt to look like nothing on earth andlast into the small hours, but more exciting because they wouldn'tbe timing the piece and consequently all the blighters who on theseoccasions let their angry passions rise would have plenty of scope for interruptions, with the result that a pleasant time would be hadby all.

The thing was billed to start at eight o'clock, so I rolled up atten-fifteen, so as not to have too long to wait before they began.The dress-parade was still going on. George was on the stage,talking to a cove in shirt-sleeves and an absolutely round chappiewith big spectacles and a practically hairless dome. I had seenGeorge with the latter merchant once or twice at the club, and I knew that he was Blumenfield, the manager. I waved to George,and slid into a seat at the back of the house, so as to be out of the way when the fighting started. Presently George hopped down offthe stage and came and joined me, and fairly soon after that thecurtain went down. The chappie at the piano whacked out a well-meant bar or two, and the curtain went up again.

I can't quite recall what the plot of*Ask Dad* was about, but I do know that it seemed able to jog along all right without much helpfrom Cyril. I was rather puzzled at first. What I mean is, throughbrooding on Cyril and hearing him in his part and listening to hisviews on what ought and what ought not to be done, I suppose Ihad got a sort of impression rooted in the old bean that he was pretty well the backbone of the show, and that the rest of thecompany didn't do much except go on and fill in when he happenedto be off the stage. I sat there for nearly half an hour, waiting forhim to make his entrance, until I suddenly discovered he had beenon from the start. He was, in fact, the rummy-looking plug-uglywho was now leaning against a potted palm a couple of feet fromthe O.P. side, trying to appear intelligent while the heroine sang asong about Love being like something which for the moment has slipped my memory. After the second refrain he began to dance incompany with a dozen other equally weird birds. A painful spectaclefor one who could see a vision of Aunt Agatha reaching for thehatchet and old Bassington-Bassington senior putting on his strongest pair of hob-nailed boots. Absolutely!

The dance had just finished, and Cyril and his pals had shuffledoff into the wings when a voice spoke from the darkness on myright.

'Pop!'

Old Blumenfield clapped his hands, and the hero, who had justbeen about to get the next line off his diaphragm, cheesed it. I peeredinto the shadows. Who should it be but Jeeves's little playmate withthe freckles! He was now strolling down the aisle with his hands inhis pockets as if the place belonged to him. An air of respectfulattention seemed to pervade the building.

'Pop,' said the stripling, 'that number's no good.' Old Blumenfieldbeamed over his shoulder.

'Don't you like it, darling?'

'It gives me a pain.'

'You're dead right.'

'You want something zippy there. Something with a bit of jazz toit!'

'Quite right my boy. I'll make a note of it. All right. Go on!'

I turned to George, who was muttering to himself in rather anoverwrought way.

'I say, George, old man, who the dickens is that kid?'

Old George groaned a bit hollowly, as if things were a trifle thick.

'I didn't know he had crawled in! It's Blumenfield's son. Nowwe're going to have a Hades of a time!'

'Does he always run things like this?'

'Always!'

'But why does old Blumenfield listen to him?'

'Nobody seems to know. It may be pure fatherly love, or he mayregard him as a mascot. My own idea is that he thinks the kid has exactly the amount of intelligence of the average member of theaudience, and that what makes a hit with him will please the general public. While, conversely, what he doesn't like will be too rotten foranyone. The kid is a pest, a wart, and a pot of poison, and shouldbe strangled!'

The rehearsal went on. The hero got off his line. There was aslight outburst of frightfulness between the stage-manager and aVoice named Bill that came from somewhere near the roof, thesubject under discussion being where the devil Bill's 'ambers' wereat that particular juncture. Then things went on again until themoment arrived for Cyril's big scene.

I was still a trifle hazy about the plot, but I had got on to the factthat Cyril was some sort of an English peer who had come over toAmerica doubtless for the best reasons. So far he had only had two lines to say. One was 'Oh, I say!' and the other was 'Yes, by Jove!';but I seemed to recollect, from hearing him read his part, that prettysoon he was due rather to spread himself. I sat back in my chairand waited for him to bob up.

He bobbed up about five minutes later. Things had got a bitstormy by that time. The Voice and the stage-director had hadanother of their love-feasts - this time something to do with why Bills' 'blues' weren't on the job or something. And, almost as soonas that was over, there was a bit of unpleasantness because a flowerpot fell off a window-ledge and nearly brained the hero. The atmosphere was consequently more or less hotted up when Cyril, who hadbeen hanging about at the back of the stage, breezed down centreand toed the mark for his most substantial chunk of entertainment.The heroine had been saying something - I forget what - and allthe chorus, with Cyril at their head, had begun to surge round herin the restless sort of way those chappies always do when there's anumber coming along.

Cyril's first line was, 'Oh, I say, you know, you mustn't say that,really!' and it seemed to me he passed it over the larynx with agoodish deal of vim and*je-ne-sais-quoi.* But, by Jove, before theheroine had time for the come-back, our little friend with the freckleshad risen to lodge a protest.

'Pop!'

'Yes, darling?'

'That one's no good.'

'Which one, darling?'

'The one with a face like a fish.'

'But they all have faces like fish, darling.'

The child seemed to see the justice of this objection. He becamemore definite.

'The ugly one.'

'Which ugly one? That one?' said old Blumenfield, pointing toCyril.

'Yep! He's rotten!'

'I thought so myself.'

'He's a pill!'

'You're dead right, my boy. I've noticed it for some time.'

Cyril had been gaping a bit while these few remarks were inprogress. He now shot down to the footlights. Even from where Iwas sitting, I could see that these harsh words had hit the old Bassington-Bassington family pride a frightful wallop. He started toget pink in the ears, and then in the nose, and then in the cheeks,till in about a quarter of a minute he looked pretty much like anexplosion in a tomato cannery on a sunset evening.

'What the deuce do you mean?'

'What the deuce do*you* mean?' shouted old Blumenfield. 'Don'tyell at me across the footlights!'

'I've a dashed good mind to come down and spank that littlebrute!'

'What!'

'A dashed good mind!'

Old Blumenfield swelled like a pumped-up tyre. He got rounder than ever.

'See here, mister - I don't know your darn name - !'

'My name's Bassington-Bassington, and the jolly old Bassington-Bassingtons - I mean the

Bassington-Bassingtons aren'taccustomed -'

Old Blumenfield told him in a few brief words pretty much whathe thought of the Bassington-Bassingtons and what they weren'taccustomed to. The whole strength of the company rallied round toenjoy his remarks. You could see them jutting out from the wingsand protruding from behind trees.

'You got to work good for my pop!' said the stout child, wagglinghis head reprovingly at Cyril.

'I don't want any bally cheek from you!' said Cyril, gurgling a bit.

'What's that?' barked old Blumenfield. 'Don't you understand that this boy is my son?'

'Yes, I do,' said Cyril. 'And you both have my sympathy!'

'You're fired!' bellowed old Blumenfield, swelling a good bit more.'Get out of my theatre!'

About half past ten next morning, just after I had finished lubricatingthe good old ulterior with a soothing cup of Oolong, Jeeves filteredinto my bedroom, and said that Cyril was waiting to see me in the sitting-room.

'How does he look, Jeeves?'

'Sir?'

'What does Mr Bassington-Bassington look like?'

'It is hardly my place, sir, to criticize the facial peculiarities ofyour friends.'

'I don't mean that. I mean, does he appear peeved and what not?'

'Not noticeably, sir. His manner is tranquil.'

'That's rum!'

'Sir?'

'Nothing. Show him in, will you?'

I'm bound to say I had expected to see Cyril showing a few moretraces of last night's battle. I was looking for a bit of the overwroughtsoul and the quivering ganglions, if you know what I mean. Heseemed pretty ordinary and quite fairly cheerful.

'Hallo, Wooster, old thing!'

'Cheero!'

'I just looked in to say goodbye.'

'Goodbye?'

'Yes. I'm off to Washington in an hour.' He sat down on the bed. 'You know, Wooster, old top,' he went on, 'I've been thinking it allover, and really it doesn't seem quite fair to the jolly old guv'nor,my going on the stage and so forth. What do you think?'

'I see what you mean.'

'I mean to say, he sent me over here to broaden my jolly old mindand words to that effect, don't you know, and I can't help thinkingit would be a bit of a jar for the old boy if I gave him the bird andwent on the stage instead. I don't know if you understand me, butwhat I mean to say is, it's a sort of question of conscience.'

'Can you leave the show without upsetting everything?'

'Oh, that's all right. I've explained everything to old Blumenfield,and he quite sees my position. Of course, he's sorry to lose me -said he didn't see how he could fill my place and all that sort of thing - but, after all, even if it does land him in a bit of a hole, Ithink I'm right in resigning my part, don't you?'

'Oh, absolutely.'

'I thought you'd agree with me. Well, I ought to be shifting.Awfully glad to have seen something of you, and all that sort of rot.Pip-pip!'

'Toodle-oo!'

He sallied forth, having told all those bally lies with the clear,blue, pop-eyed gaze of a young child. I rang for Jeeves. You know,ever since last night I had been exercising the old bean to some extent, and a good deal of light had dawned upon me.

'Jeeves!'

'Sir?'

'Did you put that pie-faced infant up to bally-ragging Mr Bassington-Bassington?'

'Sir?'

'Oh, you know what I mean. Did you tell him to get Mr Bassington-Bassington sacked from the*Ask Dad* company?'

'I would not take such a liberty, sir.' He started to put out myclothes. 'It is possible that young Master Blumenfield may havegathered from casual remarks of mine that I did not consider thestage altogether a suitable sphere for Mr Bassington-Bassington.'

'I say, Jeeves, you know, you're a bit of a marvel.'

'I endeavour to give satisfaction, sir.'

'And I'm frightfully obliged, if you know what I mean. AuntAgatha would have had sixteen or seventeen fits if you hadn't headedhim off.'

'I fancy there might have been some little friction and unpleasantness, sir. I am laying out the blue suit with the thin red stripe, sir.I fancy the effect will be pleasing.'

It's a rummy thing, but I had finished breakfast and gone out andgot as far as the lift before I remembered what it was that I hadmeant to do to reward Jeeves for his really sporting behaviour inthis matter of the chump Cyril. It cut me to the heart to do it, butI had decided to give him his way and let those purple socks passout of my life. After all, there are times when a cove must makesacrifices. I was just going to nip back and break the glad news to him, when the lift came up, so I thought I would leave it till I gothome.

The coloured chappie in charge of the lift looked at me, as Ihopped in, with a good deal of quiet devotion and what not.

'I wish to thank yo', suh,' he said, 'for yo' kindness.'

'Eh? What?'

'Misto' Jeeves done give them purple socks, as you told him. Thank yo' very much, suh!'

I looked down. The blighter was a blaze of mauve from the ankle-bone southward. I don't know when I've seen anything so dressy.

'Oh, ah! Not at all! Right-o! Glad you like them!' I said.

Well, I mean to say, what? Absolutely!

11

Comrade Bingo

The thing really started in the park - at the Marble Arch end -where weird birds of every description collect on Sunday afternoonsand stand on soap-boxes and make speeches. It isn't often you'llfind me there, but it so happened that on the Sabbath after myreturn to the good old metrop. I had a call to pay in ManchesterSquare, and, taking a stroll round in that direction so as not to arrivetoo early, I found myself right in the middle of it.

Now that the Empire isn't the place it was, I always think the parkon a Sunday is the centre of London, if you know what I mean. Imean to say, that's the spot that makes the returned exile really sure he's back again. After what you might call my enforced sojourn inNew York I'm bound to say that I stood there fairly lapping it all up. It did me good to listen to the lads giving tongue and realizethat all had ended happily and Bertram was home again.

On the edge of the mob farthest away from me a gang of top-hatted chappies were starting an open-air missionary service; nearer at hand an atheist was letting himself go with a good deal of vim, though handicapped a bit by having no roof to his mouth; while infront of me there stood a little group of serious

thinkers with abanner labelled 'Heralds of the Red Dawn'; and as I came up, oneof the heralds, a bearded egg in a slouch hat and a tweed suit, wasslipping it into the Idle Rich with such breadth and vigour that Ipaused for a moment to get an earful. While I was standing there somebody spoke to me.

'Mr Wooster, surely?'

Stout chappie. Couldn't place him for a second. Then I got him.Bingo Little's uncle, the one I had lunch with at the time whenyoung Bingo was in love with that waitress at the Piccadilly bun-shop. No wonder I hadn't recognized him at first. When I had seenhim last he had been a rather sloppy old gentleman - coming downto lunch, I remember, in carpet slippers and a velvet smoking-jacket;whereas now dapper simply wasn't the word. He absolutely gleamedin the sunlight in a silk hat, morning coat, lavender spats and sponge-bag trousers, as now worn. Dressy to a degree.

'Oh, hallo!' I said. 'Going strong?'

'I am in excellent health, I thank you. And you?'

'In the pink. Just been over to America.'

'Ah! Collecting local colour for one of your delightful romances?'

'Eh?' I had to think a bit before I got on to what he meant. 'Oh,no,' I said. 'Just felt I needed a change. Seen anything of Bingolately?' I asked quickly, being desirous of heading the old thing offwhat you might call the literary side of my life.

'Bingo?'

'Your nephew.'

'Oh, Richard? No, not very recently. Since my marriage a littlecoolness seems to have sprung up.'

'Sorry to hear that. So you've married since I saw you, what? MrsLittle all right?'

'My wife is happily robust. But - er -*not* Mrs Little. Since welast met a gracious Sovereign has been pleased to bestow on me a signal mark of his favour in the shape of - ah - a peerage. On thepublication of the last Honours List I became Lord Bittlesham.'

'By Jove! Really? I say, heartiest congratulations. That's the stuffto give the troops, what? Lord Bittlesham?' I said. 'Why, you're theowner of Ocean Breeze.'

'Yes. Marriage has enlarged my horizon in many directions. My wife is interested in horse-racing, and I now maintain a small stable.I understand that Ocean Breeze is fancied, as I am told theexpression is, for a race which will take place at the end of the month at Goodwood, the Duke of Richmond's seat in Sussex.'

'The Goodwood Cup. Rather! I've got my chemise on it for one.'

'Indeed? Well, I trust the animal will justify your confidence. Iknow littie of tiiese matters myself, but my wife tells me that it is regarded in knowledgeable circles as what I believe is termed a snip.'

At this moment I suddenly noticed that the audience was gazingin our direction with a good deal of

interest, and I saw that thebearded chappie was pointing at us.

'Yes, look at them! Drink them in!' he was yelling, his voice risingabove the perpetual-motion fellow's and beating the missionary service all to nodiing. 'There you see two typical members of theclass which has down-trodden the poor for centuries. Idlers! Non-producers! Look at the tall thin one widi the face like a motor-mascot. Has he ever done an honest day's work in his life? No! Aprowler, a trifler, and a blood-sucker! And I bet he still owes his tailor for diose trousers!'

He seemed to me to be verging on the personal, and I didn'tdiink a lot of it. Old Bittlesham, on the other hand, was pleased andamused.

'A great gift of expression these fellows have,' he chuckled. 'Verytrenchant.'

'And the fat one!' proceeded the chappie. 'Don't miss him. Doyou know who that is? That's Lord Bittlesham! One of the worst. What has he ever done except eat four square meals a day? His godis his belly, and he sacrifices burnt-offerings to it. If you openedthat man now you would find enough lunch to support ten working-class families for a week.'

'You know, thal's rather well put,' I said, but the old boy didn'tseem to see it. He had turned a brightish magenta and was bubblinglike a kettle on the boil.

'Come away, Mr Wooster,' he said. 'I am the last man to opposethe right of free speech, but I refuse to listen to diis vulgar abuseany longer.'

We legged it widi quiet dignity, the chappie pursuing us with hisfoul innuendoes to the last. Dashed embarrassing.

Next day I looked in at the club, and found, young Bingo in thesmoking-room.

'Hallo, Bingo,' I said, toddling over to his corner full of*bonhomie,* for I was glad to see the chump. 'How's the boy?'

'Jogging along.'

'I saw your uncle yesterday.'

Young Bingo unleashed a grin that split his face in half.

'I know you did, you trifler. Well, sit down, old tiling, and sucka bit of blood. How's the prowling these days?'

'Good Lord! You weren't there!'

'Yes, I was.'

'I didn't see you.'

'Yes, you did. But perhaps you didn't recognize me in theshrubbery.'

'The shrubbery?'

'The beard, my boy. Worth every penny I paid for it. Defiesdetection. Of course, it's a nuisance having people shouting"Beaver!" at you all the time, but one's got to put up with that.'

I goggled at him.

'I don't understand.'

'It's a long story. Have a martini or a small gore-and-soda, andI'll tell you all about it. Before we start, give me your honest opinion.Isn't she the most wonderful girl you ever saw in your puff?'

He had produced a photograph from somewhere, like a conjurertaking a rabbit out of a hat, and was waving it in front of me. It appeared to be a female of sorts, all eyes and teeth.

'Oh, Great Scott!' I said. 'Don't tell me you're in love again.'

He seemed aggrieved.

'What do you mean - again?'

'Well, to my certain knowledge you've been in love with at leasthalf a dozen girls since the spring, and it's only July now. Therewas that waitress and Honoria Glossop and -'

'Oh, tush! Not to say pish! Those girls? Mere passing fancies.This is the real thing.'

'Where did you meet her?'

'On top of a bus. Her name is Charlotte Corday Rowbotham.'

'My God!'

'It's not her fault, poor child. Her father had her christened thatbecause he's all for the Revolution, and it seems that the originalCharlotte Corday used to go about stabbing oppressors in theirbaths, which entitles her to consideration and respect. You mustmeet old Rowbotham, Bertie. A delightful chap. Wants to massacrethe*bourgeosie,* sack Park Lane and disembowel the hereditary aristocracy. Well, nothing could be fairer than that, what? But about Charlotte. We were on top of the bus, and it started to rain. I offeredher my umbrella, and we chatted of this and that. I fell in love andgot her address, and a couple of days later I bought the beard andtoddled round and met the family.'

'But why the beard?'

'Well, she had told me all about her father on the bus, and I sawthat to get any footing at all in the home I should have to join these Red Dawn blighters; and naturally, if I was to make speeches in thepark, where at any moment I might run into a dozen people I knew,something in the nature of a disguise was indicated. So I bought the beard, and, by Jove, old boy, I've become dashed attached tothe thing. When I take it off to come in here, for instance, I feelabsolutely nude. It's done me a lot of good with old Rowbotham.He thinks I'm a Bolshevist of sorts who has to go about disguised because of the police. You really must meet old Rowbotham, Bertie.I tell you what, are you doing anything tomorrow afternoon?'

'Nothing special. Why?'

'Good! Then you can have us all to tea at your flat. I had promisedto take the crowd to Lyons' Popular Cafe after a meeting we'reholding down in Lambeth, but I can save money this way; and,believe me, laddie, nowadays, as far as I'm concerned, a penny savedis a penny earned. My uncle told you he'd got married?'

'Yes. And he said there was a coolness between you.'

'Coolness? I'm down to zero. Ever since he married he's beenlaunching out in every direction and economizing on*me*. I suppose that peerage cost the old devil the deuce of a sum. Even baronetcies have gone up frightfully nowadays, I'm told. And he's started a racing-stable. By the way, put your last collar stud on Ocean Breezefor the Goodwood Cup. It's a cert.'

'I'm going to.'

'It can't lose. I mean to win enough on it to marry Charlotte with.You're going to Goodwood, of course?'

'Rather!'

'So are we. We're holding a meeting on Cup day just outside the paddock.'

'But, I say, aren't you taking frightful risks? Your uncle's sure tobe at Goodwood. Suppose he spots you? He'll be fed to the gills if he finds out that you're the fellow who ragged him in the park.'

'How the deuce is he to find out? Use your intelligence> youprowling inhaler of red corpuscles. If he didn't spot me yesterday,why should he spot me at Goodwood? Well, thanks for your cordialinvitation for tomorrow, old thing. We shall be delighted to accept.Do us well, laddie, and blessings shall reward you. By the way, Imay have misled you by using the word "tea". None of your waferslices of bread-and-butter. We're good trenchermen, we of theRevolution. What we shall require will be something on the orderof scrambled eggs, muffins, jam, ham, cake and sardines. Expect usat five sharp.'

'But, I say, I'm not quite sure -'

'Yes, you are. Silly ass, don't you see that this is going to do youa bit of good when the Revolution breaks loose? When you see oldRowbotham sprinting up Piccadilly with a dripping knife in each hand, you'll be jolly thankful to be able to remind him that he onceate your tea and shrimps. There will be four of us Charlotte, self,the old man, and Comrade Butt. I suppose he will insist on comingalong.'

'Who the devil's Comrade Butt?'

'Did you notice a fellow standing on my left in our little troupeyesterday? Small, shrivelled chap. Looks like a haddock with lung-trouble. That's Butt. My rival, dash him. He's sort of semi-engagedto Charlotte at the moment. Till I came along he was the blue-eyedboy. He's got a voice like a foghorn, and old Rowbotham thinks a lot of him. But, hang it, if I can't thoroughly encompass this Buttand cut him out and put him where he belongs among the discards- well, I'm not the man I was, that's all. He may have a big voice, but he hasn't my gift of expression. Thank heaven I was once coxof my college boat. Well, I must be pushing now. I say, you don't know how I could raise fifty quid somehow, do you?'

'Why don't you work?'

'Work?' said young Bingo, surprised. 'What, me? No, I shall haveto think of some way. I must put at least fifty on Ocean Breeze.Well, see you tomorrow. God bless you, old sort, and don't forgetthe muffins.'

I don't know why, ever since I first knew him at school, I shouldhave felt a rummy feeling of responsibility for young Bingo. I meanto say, he's not my son (thank goodness) or my brother or anything like that. He's got absolutely no claim on me at all, and yet a large-sized chunk of my existence seems to be spent in fussing over himlike a bally old hen and hauling him out of the soup. I suppose itmust be some rare beauty in my nature or something. At any rate, this latest affair of his worried me. He seemed to be doing his bestto marry into a family of pronounced loonies, and how the deuce he thought he was going to support even a mentally afflicted wifeon nothing a year beat me. Old Bittlesham was bound to knock offhis allowance if he did anything of the sort and, with a fellow like young Bingo, if you knocked off his allowance, you might just aswell hit him on the head with an axe and make a clean job of it.

'Jeeves,' I said, when I got home, 'I'm worried.'

'Sir?'

'About Mr Little. I won't tell you about it now, because he'sbringing some friends of his to tea tomorrow, and then you will beable to judge for yourself. I want you to observe closely, Jeeves, andform your decision.'

'Very good, sir.'

'And about the tea. Get in some muffins.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And some jam, ham, cake, scrambled eggs, and five or six wagon-loads of sardines.'

'Sardines, sir?' said Jeeves, with a shudder.

'Sardines.'

There was an awkward pause.

'Don't blame me, Jeeves,' I said. 'It isn't my fault.'

'No, sir.'

'Well, that's that.'

'Yes, sir.'

I could see the man was brooding tensely.

I've found, as a general rule in life, that the things you think aregoing to be the scaliest nearly always turn out not so bad after all;but it wasn't that way with Bingo's tea-party. From the moment he invited himself I felt that the thing was going to be blue round theedges, and it was. And I think the most gruesome part of the whole affair was the fact that, for the first time since I'd known him, I sawJeeves come very near to being rattled. I suppose there's a chink ineveryone's armour, and young Bingo found Jeeves's right at the drop of the flag when he breezed in with six inches or so of brown beardhanging on to his chin. I had forgotten to warn Jeeves about the beard, and it came on him absolutely out of a blue sky. I saw the man's jaw drop, and he clutched at the table for support. I don'tblame him, mind you. Few people have ever looked fouler thanyoung Bingo in the fungus. Jeeves paled a little; then the weakness passed and he was himself again. But I could see that he had beenshaken.

Young Bingo was too busy introducing the mob to take muchnotice. They were a very C3 collection. Comrade Butt looked like one of the tilings that come out of dead trees after the rain; moth-eaten was the word I should have used to describe old Rowbotham;and as for Charlotte, she seemed to take me straight into anotherand a dreadful world. It wasn't that she was exactly bad-looking. Infact, if she had knocked off starchy foods and done Swedish exercisesfor a bit, she might have been quite tolerable. But there was toomuch of her. Billowy curves. Well-nourished, perhaps, expresses itbest. And, while she may have had a heart of gold, the thing younoticed about her first was that she had a tooth of gold. I know thatyoung Bingo, when in form, could fall in love with practically anything of the other sex; but this time I couldn't see any excuse forhim at all.

'My friend, Mr Wooster,' said Bingo, completing the ceremonial.

Old Rowbotham looked at me and then he looked round theroom, and I could see he wasn't particularly braced. There's nothing of absolutely Oriental luxury about the old flat, but I have managedto make myself fairly comfortable, and I suppose the surroundingsjarred him a bit.

'Mr Wooster?' said old Rowbotham. 'May I say ComradeWooster?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Are you of the movement?'

'Well-er-'

'Do you yearn for the Revolution?'

'Well, I don't know that I exactly yearn. I mean to say, as far asI can make out, the whole hub of the scheme seems to be to massacrecoves like me; and I don't mind owning I'm not frightfully keen onthe idea.'

'But I'm talking him round,' said Bingo. 'I'm wrestling with him.A few more treatments ought to do the trick.'

Old Rowbotham looked at me a bit doubtfully.

'Comrade Little has great eloquence,' he admitted.

'I think he talks something wonderful,' said the girl, and youngBingo shot a glance of such succulent devotion at her that I reeled in my tracks. It seemed to depress Comrade Butt a good deal too.He scowled at the carpet and said something about dancing onvolcanoes.

'Tea is served, sir,' said Jeeves.

'Tea, Pa!' said Charlotte, starting at the word like the old war-horse who hears the bugle; and we got down to it.

Funny how one changes as the years roll on. At school, I remember, I would cheerfully have sold my soul for scrambled eggs andsardines at five in the afternoon; but somehow, since reaching man'sestate, I had rather dropped out of the habit; and I'm bound to admit I was appalled to a goodish extent at the way the sons anddaughter of the Revolution shoved their heads down and went for the foodstuffs. Even Comrade Butt cast off his gloom for a space and immersed his whole being in scrambled eggs, only coming tothe surface at intervals to grab another cup of tea. Presently the hotwater gave out, and I turned to Jeeves.

'More hot water.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Hev! What's this? What's this?' Old Rowbotham had lowered hiscup and was eyeing us sternly. He tapped Jeeves on the shoulder.'No servility, my lad; no servility!'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Don't call me "sir." Call me Comrade. Do you know what youare, my lad? You're an absolute relic of an exploded feudal system.'

'Very good, sir.'

'If there's one thing that makes my blood boil in my veins -'

'Have another sardine,' chipped in young Bingo - the first sensiblething he'd done since I had known him. Old Rowbotham took three and dropped the subject, and Jeeves drifted away. I could see by thelook of his back what he felt.

At last, just as I was beginning to feel that it was going on forever, the thing finished. I woke up to find the party getting ready toleave.

Sardines and about three quarters of tea had mellowed old Rowbotham. There was quite a genial look in his eye as he shook myhand.

'I must thank you for your hospitality, Comrade Wooster,' he said.

'Oh, not at all! Only too glad -'

'Hospitality?' snorted the man Butt, going off in my ear like adepth-charge. He was scowling in a morose sort of manner at young Bingo and the girl, who were giggling together by the window. 'Iwonder the food didn't turn to ashes in our mouths! Eggs! Muffins!Sardines! All wrung from the bleeding lips of the starving poor!'

'Oh, I say! What a beastly idea!'

'I will send you some literature on the subject of the Cause,' said old Rowbotham. 'And soon, I hope, we shall see you at one of our little meetings.'

Jeeves came in to clear away, and found me sitting among theruins. It was all very well for Comrade Butt to knock the food, but he had pretty well finished the ham; and if you had shoved the remainder of the jam into the bleeding lips of the starving poor itwould hardly have made them sticky.

'Well, Jeeves,' I said, 'how about it?'

'I would prefer to express no opinion, sir.'

'Jeeves, Mr Little is in love with that female.'

'So I gathered, sir. She was slapping him in the passage.'

I clutched my brow.

'Slapping him?'

'Yes, sir. Roguishly.'

'Great Scott! I didn't know it had got as far as that. How didComrade Butt seem to be taking it? Or perhaps he didn't see?'

'Yes, sir, he observed the entire proceedings. He struck me asextremely jealous.'

'I don't blame him. Jeeves, what are we to do?'

'I could not say, sir.'

'It's a bit thick.'

'Very much so, sir.'

And that was all the consolation I got from Jeeves.

12

Bingo has a Bad Goodwood

I had promised to meet young Bingo next day, to tell him what Ithought of his infernal Charlotte, and I was mooching slowly up StJames's Street, trying to think how the dickens I could explain tohim, without hurting his feelings, that I considered her one of the world's foulest, when who should come toddling out of the Devonshire Club but old Bittlesham and Bingo himself. I hurried on andovertook them.

'What ho!' I said.

The result of this simple greeting was a bit of a shock. OldBittlesham quivered from head to foot like a poleaxed blancmange.His eyes were popping and his face had gone sort of greenish.

'Mr Wooster!' He seemed to recover somewhat, as if I wasn't theworst thing that could have happened to him. 'You gave me a severestart.'

'Oh, sorry.'

'My uncle,' said young Bingo in a hushed, bedside sort of voice,'isn't feeling quite himself this morning. He's had a threateningletter.'

'I go in fear of my life,' said old Bittlesham.

'Threatening letter?'

'Written,' said old Bittlesham, 'in an uneducated hand andcouched in terms of uncompromising menaces. Mr Wooster, do yourecall a sinister, bearded man who assailed me in no measured termsin Hyde Park last Sunday?'

I jumped, and shot a look at young Bingo. The only expressionon his face was one of grave, kindly concern.

'Why - ah - yes,' I said. 'Bearded man. Chap with a beard.'

'Could you identify him, if necessary?'

'Well, I - er - how do you mean?'

'The fact is, Bertie,' said Bingo, 'we think this man with the beardis at the bottom of all this business. I happened to be walking latelast night through Pounceby Gardens, where Uncle Mortimer lives,and as I was passing the house a fellow came hurrying down thesteps in a furtive sort of way. Probably he had just been shoving theletter in at the front door. I noticed that he had a beard. I didn'tthink any more of it, however, until this morning, when Uncle Mortimer showed me the letter he had received and told me aboutthe chap in the park. I'm going to make inquiries.'

'The police should be informed,' said Lord Bittlesham.

'No,' said young Bingo firmly, 'not at this stage of the proceedings.It would hamper me. Don't you worry, Uncle; I think I can trackthis fellow down. You leave it all to me. I'll pop you into a taxi now,and go and talk it over with Bertie.'

'You're a good boy, Richard,' said old Bittlesham, and we puthim in a passing cab and pushed off. I turned and looked youngBingo squarely in the eyeball.

'Did you send that letter?' I said.

'Rather! You ought to have seen it, Bertie! One of the best gent'sordinary threatening letters I ever wrote.'

'But where's the sense of it?'

'Bertie, my lad,' said Bingo, taking me earnestly by the coat-sleeve, 'I had an excellent reason. Posterity may say of me what it will, but one thing it can never say - that I have not a good solid business head. Look here!' He waved a bit of paper in front of myeyes.

'Great Scott!' It was a cheque - an absolute, dashed cheque forfifty of the best, signed Bittlesham, and made out to the order of R.Little.

'What's that for?'

'Expenses,' said Bingo, pouching it. 'You don't suppose an investigation like this can be carried on for nothing, do you! I now proceedto the bank and startle them into a fit with it. Later I edge roundto my bookie and put the entire sum on Ocean Breeze. What you want in situations of this kind, Bertie, is tact. If I had gone to myuncle and asked him for fifty quid, would I have got it? No! But by exercising tact - Oh! by the way, what do you think of Charlotte?'

'Well-er-'

Young Bingo massaged my sleeve affectionately.

'I know, old man, I know. Don't try to find words. She bowledyou over, eh? Left you speechless, what? / know! That's the effectshe has on everybody. Well, I leave you here, laddie. Oh, before wepart - Butt! What of Butt? Nature's worst blunder, don't you think?'

'I must say I've seen cheerier souls.'

'I think I've got him licked, Bertie. Charlotte is coming to theZoo with me this afternoon. Alone. And later on to the pictures.That looks like the beginning of the end, what? Well, toodle-oo,friend of my youth. If you've nothing better to do this morning, you might take a stroll along Bond Street and be picking out a weddingpresent.'

I lost sight of Bingo after that. I left messages a couple of timesat the club, asking him to ring me up, but they didn't have anyeffect. I took it that he was too busy to respond. The Sons of theRed Dawn also passed out of my life, though Jeeves told me he hadmet Comrade Butt one evening and had a brief chat with him. Hereported Butt as gloomier than ever. In the competition for thebulging Charlotte, Butt had apparently gone right back in the betting.

'Mr Little would appear to have eclipsed him entirely, sir,' saidJeeves.

'Bad news, Jeeves; bad news.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose what it amounts to, Jeeves, is that, when young Bingoreally takes his coat off and starts in, there is no power of God orman that can prevent him making a chump of himself.'

'It would seem so, sir,' said Jeeves.

Then Goodwood came along, and I dug out the best suit andpopped down.

I never know, when I'm telling a story, whether to cut the thingdown to plain facts or whether to drool on and shove in a lot of atmosphere, and all that. I mean, many a cove would no doubt edgeinto the final

spasm of this narrative with a long description ofGoodwood, featuring the blue sky, the rolling prospect, the joyouscrowds of pickpockets, and the parties of the second part who werehaving the pockets picked, and - in a word, what not. But bettergive it a miss, I think. Even if I wanted to go into details about thebally meeting I don't think I'd have the heart to. The thing's toorecent. The anguish hasn't had time to pass. You see, what happened was that Ocean Breeze (curse him!) finished absolutely nowhere forthe Cup. Believe me, nowhere.

These are the times that try men's souls. It's never pleasant to becaught in the machinery when a favourite comes unstitched, and inthe case of this particular dashed animal, one had come to look onthe running of the race as a pure formality, a sort of quaint, old-world ceremony to be gone through before one sauntered up to the bookie and collected. I had wandered out of the paddock to try andforget, when I bumped into old Bittlesham: and he looked so rattledand purple, and his eyes were standing out of his head at such anangle, that I simply pushed my hand out and shook his in silence.

'Me, too,' I said. 'Me, too. How much did*you* drop?'

'Drop?'

'On Ocean Breeze.'

'I did not bet on Ocean Breeze.'

'What! You owned, the favourite for the Cup, and didn't back it!'

'I never bet on horse-racing. It is against my principles. I am toldthat the animal failed to win the contest.'

'Failed to win! Why, he was so far behind that he nearly came infirst in the next race.'

'Tut!' said old Bittlesham.

'Tut is right,' I agreed. Then the rumminess of the thing struckme. 'But if you haven't dropped a parcel over the race,' I said, 'whyare you looking so rattled?'

'That fellow is here!'

'What fellow?'

'That bearded man.'

It will show you to what an extent the iron had entered into mysoul when I say that this was the first time I had given a thought toyoung Bingo. I suddenly remembered now that he had told me hewould be at Goodwood.

'He is making an inflammatory speech at this very moment,specifically directed at me. Come! Where that crowd is.' He luggedme along and, by using his weight scientifically, got us into the frontrank. 'Look! Listen!'

Young Bingo was certainly tearing off some ripe stuff. Inspired bythe agony of having put his little all on a stumer that hadn't finishedin the first six, he was fairly letting himself go on the subject of the blackness of

the hearts of plutocratic owners who allowed a trustingpublic to imagine a horse was the real goods when it couldn't trotthe length of its stable without getting its legs crossed and sittingdown to rest. He then went on to draw what I'm bound to say wasa most moving picture of a working man's home, due to this dishonesty. He showed us the working man, all optimism and simpletrust, believing every word he read in the papers about OceanBreeze's form; depriving his wife and children of food in order toback the brute; going without beer so as to be able to cram an extrabob on; robbing the baby's money-box with a hatpin on the eve ofthe race; and finally getting let down with a thud. Dashed impressiveit was. I could see old Rowbotham nodding his head gently, whilepoor old Butt glowered at the speaker with ill-concealed jealousy.The audience ate it.

'But what does Lord Bittlesham care,' shouted Bingo, 'if the poorworking man loses his hard-earned savings? I tell you, friends andcomrades, you may talk, and you may argue and you may cheer, andyou may pass resolutions, but what you need is Action! Action! Theworld won't be a fit place for honest men to live in till the blood of Lord Bittlesham and his kind flows down the gutters of Park Lane!'

Roars of approval from the populace, most of whom, I suppose,had had their little bit on blighted Ocean Breeze, and were feelingit deeply. Old Bittlesham bounded over to a large, sad policeman who was watching the proceedings, and appeared to be urging himto rally round. The policeman pulled at his moustache, and smiledgently, but that was as far as he seemed inclined to go; and old Bittlesham came back to me, puffing not a little.

'It's monstrous! The man definitely threatens my personal safety, and that policeman declines to interfere. Said it was just talk! Talk!It's monstrous!'

'Absolutely,' I said, but I can't say it seemed to cheer him upmuch.

Comrade Butt had taken the centre of the stage now. He had avoice like the Last Trump, and you could hear every word he said,but somehow he didn't seem to be clicking. I suppose the fact washe was too impersonal, if that's the word I want. After Bingo'sspeech the audience was in the mood for something a good dealsnappier than just general remarks abut the Cause. They had startedto heckle the poor blighter pretty freely, when he stopped in themiddle of a sentence, and I saw that he was staring at old Bittlesham.

The crowd thought he had dried up.

'Suck a lozenge,' shouted someone.

Comrade Butt pulled himself together with a jerk, and even fromwhere I stood I could see the nasty gleam in his eye.

'Ah,' he yelled, 'you may mock, comrades; you may jeer and sneer;and you may scoff; but let me tell you that the movement is spreadingevery day and every hour. Yes, even amongst the so-called upper classes it's spreading. Perhaps you'll believe me when I tell you that here, today, on this very spot, we have in our little band one of ourmost earnest workers, the nephew of that very Lord Bittleshamwhose name you were hooting but a moment ago.'

And before old Bingo had a notion of what was up, he had reachedout a hand and grabbed the beard. It came off all in once piece,and, well as Bingo's speech had gone, it was simply nothing com pared with the hit made by this bit of business. I heard old Bittleshamgive one short, sharp snort of amazement at my side, and then anyremarks he may have made were drowned in thunders of applause.

I'm bound to say that in this crisis young Bingo acted with a gooddeal of decision and character. To grab Comrade Butt by the neckand try to twist his head off was with him the work of a moment.But before he could get any results the sad policeman, brighteningup like magic, had charged in, and the next minute he was shovinghis way back through the crowd, with Bingo in his right hand andComrade Butt in his left.

'Let me pass, sir, please,' he said, civilly, as he came up againstold Bittlesham, who was blocking the gangway.

'Eh?' said old Bittlesham, still dazed.

At the sound of his voice young Bingo looked up quickly fromunder the shadow of the policeman's right hand, and as he did soall the stuffing seemed to go out of him with a rush. For an instanthe drooped like a bally lily, and then shuffled brokenly on. His airwas the air of a man who has got it in the neck properly.

Sometimes when Jeeves has brought in my morning tea andshoved it on the table beside my bed, he drifts silently from theroom and leaves me to go to it: at other times he sort of shimmiesrespectfully in the middle of the carpet, and then I know that hewants a word or two. On the day after I had got back from GoodwoodI was lying on my back, staring at the ceiling, when I noticed thathe was still in my midst.

'Oh, hallo,' I said. 'Yes?'

'Mr Little called earlier in the morning, sir.'

'Oh, by Jove, what? Did he tell you about what happened?'

'Yes, sir. It was in connection with that that he wished to see you.He proposes to retire to the country and remain there for some littlewhile.'

'Dashed sensible.'

'That was my opinion, also, sir. There was, however, a slightfinancial difficulty to be overcome. I took the liberty of advancinghim ten pounds on your behalf to meet current expenses. I trustthat meets with your approval, sir?'

'Oh, of course. Take a tenner off the dressing-table.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Jeeves,' I said.

'Sir?'

'What beats me is how the dickens the thing happened. I mean, how did the chappie Butt ever get to know who he was?'

Jeeves coughed.

'There, sir, I fear I may have been somewhat to blame.'

'You? How?'

'I fear 1 may carelessly have disclosed Mr Little's identity to MrButt on the occasion when I had that conversation with him.'

I sat up.

'What?'

'Indeed, now that I recall the incident, sir, I distinctly remember saying that Mr Little's work for the Cause really seemed to me todeserve something in the nature of public recognition. I greatly regrethaving been the means of bringing about a temporary estrangement between Mr Little and his lordship. And I am afraid there is another aspect to the matter. I am also responsible for the breaking off ofrelations between Mr Little and the young lady who came to teahere.'

I sat up again. It's a rummy thing, but the silver lining hadabsolutely escaped my notice till then.

'Do you mean to say it's off?'

'Completely, sir. I gathered from Mr Little's remarks that hishopes in that direction may now be looked on as definitely quenched.If there were no other obstacle, the young lady's father, I am informed by Mr Little, now regards him as a spy and a deceiver.'

'Well, I'm dashed.'

'I appear inadvertently to have caused much trouble, sir.'

'Jeeves!' I said.

'Sir?'

'How much money is there on the dressing-table?'

'In addition to the ten-pound note which you instructed me totake, sir, there are two five-pound notes, three one-pounds, a tenshillings, two half-crowns, a florin, four shillings, a sixpence, and ahalfpenny, sir.'

'Collar it all,' I said. 'You've earned it.'

13

The Great Sermon Handicap

After Goodwood's over, I generally find that I get a bit restless. I'mnot much of a lad for the birds and the trees and the great open spaces as a rule, but there's no doubt that London's not at its bestin August, and rather tends to give me the pip and make me thinkof popping down into the country till things have bucked up a trifle.London, about a couple of weeks after that spectacular finish ofyoung Bingo's which I've just been telling you about, was empty andsmelled of burning asphalt. All my pals were away, most of the theatres were shut, and they were taking up Piccadilly in large spadefuls.

It was most infernally hot. As I sat in the old flat one night tryingto muster up energy enough to go to bed, I felt I couldn't stand it much longer: and when Jeeves came in with the tissue-restorers ona tray I put the thing to him squarely.

'Jeeves,' I said, wiping the brow and gasping like a strandedgoldfish, 'it's beastly hot.'

'The weather*is* oppressive, sir.'

'Not all the soda, Jeeves.'

'No, sir.'

'I think we've had about enough of the metrop. for the time being,and require a change. Shift-ho, I think, Jeeves, what?'

'Just as you say, sir. There is a letter on the tray, sir.'

'By Jove, Jeeves, that was practically poetry. Rhymed, did younotice?' I opened the letter. 'I say, this is rather extraordinary.'

'Sir?'

'You know Twing Hall?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, Mr Little is there.'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Absolutely in the flesh. He's had to take another of those tutoringjobs.'

After that fearful mix-up at Goodwood, when young Bingo Little,a broken man, had touched me for a tenner and whizzed silently offinto the unknown, I had been all over the place, asking mutualfriends if they had heard anything of him, but nobody had. And allthe time he had been at Twing Hall. Rummy. And I'll tell you whyit was rummy. Twing Hall belongs to old Lord Wickhammersley, agreat pal of my guv'nor's when he was alive, and I have a standinginvitation to pop down there when I like. I generally put in a weekor two some time in the summer, and I was thinking of going therebefore I read the letter.

'And what's more, Jeeves, my cousin Claude, and my cousinEustace - you remember them?'

'Very vividly, sir.'

'Well, they're down there, too, reading for some exam or otherwith the vicar. I used to read with him myself at one time. He'sknown far and wide as a pretty hot coach for those of fairly feebleintellect. Well, when I tell you he got*me* through Smalls, you'll gather that he's a bit of a hummer. I call this most extraordinary.'

I read the letter again. It was from Eustace. Claude and Eustaceare twins, and more or less generally admitted to be the curse ofthe human race.

The Vicarage,

Twing, Glos.

Dear Bertie,

Do you want to make a bit of money? I hear you had a badGoodwood, so you probably do. Well, come down here quick and getin on the biggest sporting event of the season. I'll explain when I seeyou, but you can take it from me it's all right.

Claude and I are with a reading-party at old Heppenstall's. Thereare nine of us, not counting your pal Bingo Little, who is tutoringthe kid up at the Hall.

Don't miss this golden opportunity, which may never occur again.Come and join us.

Yours,

EUSTACE.

I handed this to Jeeves. He studied it thoughtfully.'What do you make of it? A rummy communication, what?'

'Very high-spirited young gentlemen, sir, Mr Claude and MrEustace. Up to some game, I should be disposed to imagine.'

'Yes. But what game, do you think?'

'It is impossible to say, sir. Did you observe that the letter continues over the page?'

'Eh, what?' I grabbed the thing. This was what was on the other side of the last page:

SERMON HANDICAP

RUNNERS AND BETTING

PROBABLE STARTERS

Rev. Joseph Tucker (Badgwick), scratch.

Rev. Leonard Starkie (Stapleton), scratch.

Rev. Alexander Jones (Upper Bingley), receives three minutes.

Rev. W. Dix (Litde Clickton-on-the-Wold), receives five minutes.

Rev. Francis Heppenstall (Twing), receives eight minutes.

Rev. Cuthbert Dibble (Boustead Parva), receives nine minutes.

Rev. Orlo Hough (Boustead Magna), receives nine minutes.

Rev. J. J. Roberts (Fale-by-the-Water), receives ten minutes.

Rev. G. Hayward (Lower Bingley), receives twelve minutes.

Rev. James Bates (Gandle-by-the-Hill), receives fifteen minutes.

(The above have arrived.)

Prices: 5-2, Tucker, Starkie; 3-1, Jones; 9-2,

Dix; 6-1, Heppenstall, Dibble, Hough; 100-8 any other.

It baffled me.

'Do you understand it, Jeeves?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, I think we ought to have a look into it, anyway, what?'

'Undoubtedly, sir.'

'Right-o, then. Pack our spare dickey and a toothbrush*in* a neat brown-paper parcel, send a wire to Lord Wickhammersley to saywe're coming, and buy two tickets on the five-ten at Paddingtontomorrow.'

The five-ten was late as usual, and everybody was dressing fordinner when I arrived at the Hall. It was only by getting into myevening things in record time and taking the stairs to the dining-room in a couple of bounds that I managed to dead-heat with thesoup. I slid into the vacant chair, and found that I was sitting nextto old Wickhammersley's youngest daughter, Cynthia.

'Oh, hallo, old thing,' I said.

Great pals we've always been. In fact, there was a time when Ihad an idea I was in love with Cynthia. However, it blew over. Adashed pretty and lively and attractive girl, mind you, but full ofideals and all that. I may be wronging her, but I have an idea thatshe's the sort of girl who would want a fellow to carve out a career and what not. I know I've heard her speak favourably of Napoleon.So what with one thing and another the jolly old frenzy sort ofpetered out, and now we're just pals. I think she's a topper, and she thinks me next door to a loony, so everything's nice and matey.

'Well, Bertie, so you've arrived?'

'Oh, yes, I've arrived. Yes, here I am. I say, I seem to have plungedinto the middle of quite a young dinner-party. Who are all thesecoves?'

'Oh, just people from round about. You know most of them. Youremember Colonel Willis, and the Spencers -'

'Of course, yes. And there's old Heppenstall. Who's the otherclergyman next to Mrs Spencer?'

'Mr Hayward, from Lower Bingley.'

'What an amazing lot of clergymen there are round here. Why,there's another, next to Mrs Willis.'

'That's Mr Bates, Mr Heppenstall's nephew. He's an assistant-master at Eton. He's down here during the summer holidays, actingas locum tenens for Mr Spettigue, the rector of Gandle-by-the-Hill.'

'I thought I knew his face. He was in his fourth year at Oxfordwhen I was a fresher. Rather a blood. Got his rowing-blue and allthat.' I took another look round the table, and spotted young Bingo.'Ah, there he is,' I said. 'There's the old egg.'

'There's who?'

'Young Bingo Little. Great pal of mine. He's tutoring yourbrother, you know.'

'Good gracious! Is he a friend of yours?'

'Rather! Known him all my life.'

'Then tell me, Bertie, is he at all weak in the head?'

'Weak in the head?'

'I don't mean simply because he's a friend of yours. But he's sostrange in his manner.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, he keeps looking at me so oddly.'

'Oddly? How? Give me an imitation.'

'I can't in front of all these people.'

'Yes, you can. I'll hold my napkin up.'

'All right, then. Quick. There!'

Considering that she had only about a second and a half to do itin, I must say it was a jolly fine exhibition. She opened her mouthand eyes pretty wide and let her jaw drop sideways, and managedto look so like a dyspeptic calf that I recognized the symptomsimmediately.

'Oh, that's all right,' I said. 'No need to be alarmed. He's simplyin love with you.'

'In love with me. Don't be absurd.'

'My dear old thing, you don't know young Bingo. He can fall inlove with*anybody.'*

'Thank you!'

'Oh, I didn't mean it that way, you know. I don't wonder at histaking to you. Why, I was in love with you myself once.'

'Once? Ah! And all that remains now are the cold ashes? Thisisn't one of your tactful evenings, Bertie.'

'Well, my dear sweet thing, dash it all, considering that you gave me the bird and nearly laughed yourself into a permanent state ofhiccoughs when I asked you -'

'Oh, I'm not reproaching you. No doubt there were faults on bothsides. He's very good-looking, isn't he?'

'Good-looking? Bingo? Bingo good-looking? No, I say, come now, really!'

'I mean, compared with some people,' said Cynthia.

Some time after this, Lady Wickhammersley gave the signal forthe females of the species to leg it, and they duly stampeded. I didn't get a chance of talking to young Bingo when they'd gone, and later,in the drawing-room, he didn't show up. I found him eventually inhis room, lying on the bed with his feet on the rail, smoking a toofah.There was a notebook on the counterpane beside him.

'Hallo, old scream,' I said.

'Hallo, Bertie,' he replied, in what seemed to me rather a moody,distrait sort of manner.

'Rummy finding you down here. I take it your uncle cut off yourallowance after that Goodwood binge and you had to take thistutoring job to keep the wolf from the door?'

'Correct,' said young Bingo tersely.

'Well, you might have let your pals know where you were.'

He frowned darkly.

'I didn't want them to know where I was. I wanted to creep awayand hide myself. I've been through a bad time, Bertie, these lastweeks. The sun ceased to shine -'

'That's curious. We've had gorgeous weather in London.'

'The birds ceased to sing -'

'What birds?'

'What the devil does it matter what birds?' said young Bingo, withsome asperity. 'Any birds. The birds round about here. You don't expect me to specify them by their pet names, do you? I tell you,Bertie, it hit me hard at first, very hard.'

'What hit you?' I simply couldn't follow the blighter.

'Charlotte's calculated callousness.'

'Oh, ah!' I've seen poor old Bingo through so many unsuccessful love-affairs that I'd almost forgotten there was a girl mixed up with that Goodwood business. Of course! Charlotte Corday Rowbotham.And she had given him the raspberry, I remembered, and gone offwith Comrade Butt.

'I went through torments. Recently, however, I've - er - buckedup a bit. Tell me, Bertie, what are you doing down here? I didn'tknow you knew these people.'

'Me? Why, I've known them since I was a kid.'

Young Bingo put his feet down with a thud.

'Do you mean to say you've known Lady Cynthia all that time?'

'Rather! She can't have been seven when I met her first.'

'Good Lord!' said young Bingo. He looked at me for the firsttime as though I amounted to something, and swallowed a mouthful of smoke the wrong way. 'I love that girl, Bertie,' he went on, whenhe'd finished coughing.

'Yes. Nice girl, of course.'

He eyed me with pretty deep loathing.

'Don't speak of her in that horrible casual way. She's an angel.An angel! Was she talking about me at all at dinner, Bertie?'

'Oh, yes.'

'What did she say?'

'I remember one thing. She said she thought you good-looking.'

Young Bingo closed his eyes in a sort of ecstasy. Then he pickedup the notebook.

'Pop off now, old man, there's a good chap,' he said in a hushed,far-away voice. 'I've got a bit of writing to do.'

'Writing?'

'Poetry, if you must know. I wish the dickens,' said young Bingo,not without some bitterness, 'she had been christened somethingexcept Cynthia. There isn't a dam' word in the language it rhymeswith. Ye gods, how I could have spread myself if she had only beencalled Jane!'

Bright and early next morning, as I lay in bed blinking at the sunlighton the dressing-table and wondering when Jeeves was going to show up with a cup of tea, a heavy weight descended on my toes, and the voice of young Bingo polluted the air. The blighter had apparentlyrisen with the lark.

'Leave me,' I said, 'I would be alone. I can't see anybody till I'vehad my tea.'

'When Cynthia smiles,' said young Bingo, 'the skies are blue; theworld takes on a roseate hue; birds in the garden trill and sing, andJoy is king of everything, when Cynthia smiles.' He coughed, changing gears. 'When Cynthia frowns -'

'What the devil are you talking about?'

'I'm reading you my poem. The one I wrote to Cynthia last night.I'll go on, shall I?'

'No!'. 'No?'

'No. I haven't had my tea.'

At this moment Jeeves came in with the good old beverage, and I sprang on it with a glad cry. After a couple of sips things lookeda bit brighter. Even young Bingo didn't offend the eye to quite suchan extent. By the time I'd finished the first cup I was a new man,so much so that I not only permitted but encouraged the poor fishto read the rest of the bally thing, and even went so far as to criticizethe scansion of the fourth line of the fifth verse. We were stillarguing the point when the door burst open and in blew Claude andEustace. One of the things which discourages me about rural life isthe frightful earliness with which events begin to break loose. I've stayed at places in the country where they've jerked me out of thedreamless at about six-thirty to go for a jolly swim in the lake. AtTwing, thank heaven, they know me, and let me breakfast in bed.The twins seemed pleased to see me.'Good old Bertie!' said Claude.

'Stout fellow!' said Eustace. 'The Rev. told us you had arrived. I thought that letter of mine would fetch you.'

'You can always bank on Bertie,' said Claude. 'A sportsman tothe finger-tips. Well, has Bingo told you about it?'

'Not a word. He's been - '

'We've been talking,' said Bingo hastily, 'of other matters.'

Claude pinched the last slice of thin bread-and-butter, andEustace poured himself out a cup of tea.

'It's like this, Bertie,' said Eustace, settling down cosily. 'As I toldyou in my letter, there are nine of us marooned in this desert spot,reading with old Heppenstall. Well, of course, nothing is jollier thansweating up the Classics when it's a hundred in the shade, but theredoes come a time when you begin to feel the need of a little relaxation; and, by Jove, there are absolutely no facilities for relaxation in this place whatever. And then Steggles got this idea. Steggles is oneof our reading-party, and, between ourselves, rather a worm as ageneral thing. Still, you have to give him credit for getting this idea.'

'What idea?'

'Well, you know how many parsons there are round about here.There are about a dozen hamlets within a radius of six miles, andeach hamlet has a church and each church has a parson and eachparson preaches a sermon every Sunday. Tomorrow week - Sundaythe twenty-third - we're running off the great Sermon Handicap.Steggles is making the book. Each parson is to be clocked by areliable steward of the course, and the one that preaches the longestsermon wins. Did you study the race-card I sent

you?'

'I couldn't understand what it was all about.'

'Why, you chump, it gives the handicaps and the current odds oneach starter. I've got another one here, in case you've lost yours.Take a careful look at it. It gives you the thing in a nutshell. Jeeves,old son, do you want a sporting flutter?'

'Sir?' said Jeeves, who had just meandered in with my breakfast.

Claude explained the scheme. Amazing the way Jeeves grasped itright off. But he merely smiled in a paternal sort of way.

'Thank you, sir, I think not.'

'Well, you're with us, Bertie, aren't you?' said Claude, sneakinga roll and a slice of bacon. 'Have you studied that card? Well, tellme, does anything strike you about it?'

Of course it did. It had struck me the moment I looked at it.

'Why, it's a sitter for old Heppenstall,' I said. 'He's got the eventsewed up in a parcel. There isn't a parson in the land who couldgive him eight minutes. Your pal Steggles must be an ass, givinghim a handicap like that. Why, in the days when I was with him,old Heppenstall never used to preach under half an hour, and therewas one sermon of his on Brotherly Love which lasted forty-fiveminutes if it lasted a second. Has he lost his vim lately, or what isit?'

'Not a bit of it,' said Eustace. 'Tell him what happened, Claude.'

'Why,' said Claude, 'the first Sunday we were here, we all wentto Twing church, and old Heppenstall preached a sermon that was well under twenty minutes. This is what happened. Steggles didn'tnotice it, and the Rev. didn't notice it himself, but Eustace and Iboth spotted that he had dropped a chunk of at least half a dozenpages out of his sermon-case as he was walking up to the pulpit.He sort of flickered when he got to the gap in the manuscript, butcarried on all right, and Steggles went away with the impression thattwenty minutes or a bit under was his usual form. The next Sundaywe heard Tucker and Starkie, and they both went well over the thirty-five minutes, so Steggles arranged the handicapping as yousee on the card. You must come into this, Bertie. You see, thetrouble is that I haven't a bean, and Eustace hasn't a bean, andBingo Little hasn't a bean, so you'll have to finance the syndicate. Don't weaken! It's just putting money in all our pockets. Well, we'llhave to be getting back now. Think the thing over, and phone melater in the day. And, if you let us down, Bertie, may a cousin'scurse - Come on, Claude, old thing.'

The more I studied the scheme, the better it looked.

'How about it, Jeeves?' I said.

Jeeves smiled gently, and drifted out.

'Jeeves has no sporting blood,' said Bingo.

'Well, I have. I'm coming into this. Claude's quite right. It's likefinding, money by the wayside.'

'Good man!' said Bingo. 'Now I can see daylight. Say I have atenner on Heppenstall, and cop; that'll give me a bit in hand to back Pink Pill with in the two o'clock at Gatwick the week after next; copon that, put the pile on Musk-Rat for the one-thirty at Lewes, andthere I am with a nice little sum to take to Alexandra Park on September the tenth, when I've got a tip straight from the stable.'

It sounded like a bit out*of Smiles's Self-Help.*

'And then,' said young Bingo, Til be in a position to go to myuncle and beard him in his lair somewhat. He's quite a bit of a snob,you know, and when he hears that I'm going to marry the daughterof an earl -'

'I say, old man,' I couldn't help saying, 'aren't you looking aheadrather far?'

'Oh, that's all right. It's true nothing's actually settled yet, but shepractically told me the other day she was fond of me.'

'What!'

'Well, she said that the sort of man she liked was the self-reliant,manly man with strength, good looks, character, ambition, andinitiative.'

'Leave me, laddie,' I said. 'Leave me to my fried egg.'

Directly I'd got up I went to the phone, snatched Eustace away fromhis morning's work, and instructed him to put a tenner on the Twingflier at current odds for each of the syndicate; and after lunchEustace rang me up to say that he had done business at a snappy seven-to-one, the odds having lengthened owing to a rumour inknowledgeable circles that the Rev. was subject to hay-fever, andwas taking big chances strolling in the paddock behind the Vicarage in the early mornings. And it was dashed lucky, I thought next day, that we had managed to get the money on in time, for on the Sundaymorning old Heppenstall fairly took the bit between his teeth, andgave us thirty-six solid minutes on Certain Popular Superstitions. Iwas sitting next to Steggles in the pew, and I saw him blench visibly.He was a little rat-faced fellow, with shifty eyes and a suspiciousnature. The first thing he did when he emerged into the open airwas to announce, formally, that anyone who fancied the Rev. couldnow be accommodated at fifteen-to-eight on, and he added, in arather nasty manner, that if he had his way, this sort of in-and-out running would be brought to the attention of the Jockey Club, but that he supposed that there was nothing to be done about it. Thisruinous price checked the punters at once, and there was littlemoney in sight. And so matters stood till just after lunch on Tuesdayafternoon, when, as I was strolling up and down in front of thehouse with a cigarette, Claude and Eustace came bursting up thedrive on bicycles, dripping with momentous news.

'Bertie,' said Claude, deeply agitated, 'unless we take immediateaction and do a bit of quick thinking, we're in the cart.'

'What's the matter?'

'G. Hayward's the matter,' said Eustace morosely. 'The LowerBingley starter.'

'We never even considered him,' said Claude. 'Somehow or other,he got overlooked. It's always the way. Steggles overlooked him. Weall overlooked him. But Eustace and I happened by the merest fluke to be riding through Lower Bingley this morning, and there was awedding on at the church, and it

suddenly struck us that it wouldn't be a bad move to get a line on G. Hayward's form, in case he mightbe a dark horse.'

'And it was jolly lucky we did,' said Eustace. 'He delivered anaddress of twenty-six minutes by Claude's stop-watch. At a village wedding, mark you! What'll we do when he really extends himself!'

'There's only one thing to be done, Bertie,' said Claude. 'Youmust spring some more funds, so that we can hedge on Haywardand save ourselves.'

'But-'

'Well, it's the only way out.'

'But I say, you know, I hate the idea of all that money we put onHeppenstaU being chucked away.'

'What else can you suggest? You don't suppose the Rev. can givethis absolute marvel a handicap and win, do you?'

'I've got it!' I said.

'What?'

'I see a way by which we can make it safe for our nominee. I'llpop over this afternoon, and ask him as a personal favour to preachthat sermon of his on Brotherly Love on Sunday.'

Claude and Eustace looked at each other, like those chappies inthe poem, with a wild surmise.

'It's a scheme,' said Claude.

'A jolly brainy scheme,' said Eustace. 'I didn't think you had it inyou, Bertie.'

'But even so,' said Claude, 'fizzer as that sermon no doubt is, willit be good enough in the face of a four-minute handicap?'

'Rather!* I said. 'When I told you it lasted forty-five minutes, Iwas probably understating it. I should call it - from my recollectionof the thing - nearer fifty.'

'Then carry on,' said Claude.

I toddled over in the evening and fixed the thing up. Old Heppen-stall was most decent about the whole affair. He seemed pleasedand touched that I should have remembered the sermon all theseyears, and said he had once or twice had an idea of preaching itagain, only it had seemed to him, on reflection, that it was perhapsa trifle long for a rustic congregation.

'And in these restless times, my dear Wooster,' he said, 'I fear that brevity in the pulpit is becoming more and more desideratedby even the bucolic churchgoer, who one might have supposed wouldbe less afflicted with the spirit of hurry and impatience than hismetropolitan brother. I have had many arguments on the subjectwith my nephew, young Bates, who is taking my old friend Spetti-gue's cure over at Gandle-by-the-Hill. His view is that a sermonnowadays should be a bright, brisk, straight-from-the shoulderaddress, never lasting more than ten or twelve minutes.'

'Long?' I said. 'Why, my goodness! You don't call that BrotherlyLove sermon of yours*long,* do you?'

'It takes fully fifty minutes to deliver.'

'Surely not?'

'Your incredulity, my dear Wooster, is extremely flattering - farmore flattering, of course, than I deserve. Nevertheless, the factsare as I have stated. You are sure that I would not be well advised to make certain excisions and eliminations? You do not think itwould be a good thing to cut, to prune? I might, for example,delete the rather exhaustive excursus into the family life of the earlyAssyrians?'

'Don't touch a word of it, or you'll spoil the whole thing,' I saidearnestly.

'I am delighted to hear you say so, and I shall preach the sermonwithout fail next Sunday morning.'

What I have always said, and what I always shall say, is, that thisante-post betting is a mistake, an error, and a mug's game. You can never tell what's going to happen. If fellows would only stick to thegood old SP there would be fewer young men go wrong. I'd hardlyfinished my breakfast on the Saturday morning, when Jeeves cameto my bedside to say that Eustace wanted me on the telephone.

'Good Lord, Jeeves, what's the matter, do you think?'

I'm bound to say I was beginning to get a bit jumpy by this time.

'Mr Eustace did not confide in me, sir.'

'Has he got the wind up?'

'Somewhat vertically, sir, to judge by his voice.'

'Do you know what I think, Jeeves? Something's gone wrong withthe favourite.'

'Which is the favourite, sir?'

'Mr Heppenstall. He's gone to odds on. He was intending topreach a sermon on Brotherly Love which would have brought himhome by lengths. I wonder if anything's happened to him.'

'You could ascertain, sir, by speaking to Mr Eustace on the telephone. He is holding the wire.'

'By Jove, yes!'

I shoved on a dressing gown, and flew downstairs like a mighty,rushing wind. The moment I heard Eustace's voice I knew we werefor it. It had a croak of agony in it.

'Bertie?'

'Here I am.'

'Deuce of a time you've been. Bertie, we're sunk. The favourite's blown up.'

'No!'

'Yes. Coughing in his stable all last night.'

'What!'

'Absolutely! Hay-fever.'

'Oh, my sainted aunt!'

'The doctor is with him now, and it's only a question of minutes before he's officially scratched. That means the curate will show upat the post instead, and he's no good at all. He is being offered ata hundred-to-six, but no takers. What shall we do?'

I had to grapple with the thing for a moment in silence.

'Eustace.'

'Hallo?'

'What can you get on G. Hayward?'

'Only four to one now. I think there's been a leak, and Steggles hasheard something. The odds shortened late last night in a significantmanner.'

'Well, four to one will clear us. Put another fiver all round on G.Hayward for the syndicate. That'll bring us out on the right side of the ledger.'

'If he wins.'

'What do you mean? I thought you considered him a cert, barHeppenstall.'

'I'm beginning to wonder,' said Eustace gloomily, 'if there's sucha thing as a cert, in this world. I'm told the Rev. Joseph Tucker did an extraordinarily fine trial gallop at a mothers' meeting over atBadgwick yesterday. However, it seems our only chance. So-long.'

Not being one of the official stewards, I had my choice of churchesnext morning, and naturally I didn't hesitate. The only drawback togoing to Lower Bingley was that it was ten miles away, which meantan early start, but I borrowed a bicycle from one of the grooms andtooled off. I had only Eustace's word for it that G. Hayward wassuch a stayer, and it might have been that he had showed tooflattering form at that wedding where the twins had heard himpreach; but any misgivings I may have had disappeared the momenthe got into the pulpit. Eustace had been right. The man was a trier.He was a tall, rangy-looking greybeard, and he went off from the start with a nice, easy action, pausing and clearing his throat at the end of each sentence, and it wasn't five minutes before I realizedthat here was the winner. His habit of stopping dead and looking round the church at intervals was worth minutes to us, and in thehome stretch we gained no little advantage owing to his droppinghis pince-nez and having to grope for them. At the twenty-minutemark he had merely settled down. Twenty-five minutes saw himgoing strong. And when he finally finished with a good burst, theclock showed thirty-five minutes fourteen seconds. With the handicap which he had been given, this seemed to me to make the eventeasy for him, and it was with much*bonhomie* and goodwill to all menthat I hopped on to the old bike and started back to the Hall for

lunch.

Bingo was talking on the phone when I arrived.

'Fine! Splendid! Topping!' he was saying. 'Eh? Oh, we needn't worry about him. Right-o, I'll tell Bertie.' He hung up the receiverand caught sight of me. 'Oh, hallo, Bertie; I was just talking toEustace. It's all right, old man. The report from Lower Bingley hasjust got in. G. Hayward romps home.'

'I knew he would. I've just come from there.'

'Oh, were you there? I went to Badgwick. Tucker ran a splendidrace, but the handicap was too much for him. Starkie had a sorethroat and was nowhere. Roberts, of Fale-by-the-Water, ran third.Good old G. Hayward!' said Bingo affectionately, and we strolledout on to the terrace.

'Are all the returns hi, then?' I asked.

'All except Gandle-by-the-Hill. But we needn't worry aboutBates. He never had a chance. By the way, poor old Jeeves loses histenner. Silly ass!'

'Jeeves? How do you mean?'

'He came to me this morning, just after you had left, and askedme to put a tenner on Bates for him. I told him he was a chump,and begged him not to throw his money away, but he would do it.'

'I beg your pardon, sir. This note arrived for you just after youhad left the house this morning.'

Jeeves had materialized from nowhere, and was standing at myelbow.

'Eh? What? Note?'

'The Reverend Mr HeppenstalPs butler brought it over from theVicarage, sir. It came too late to be delivered to you at the moment.'

Young Bingo was talking to Jeeves like a father on the subject ofbetting against the form-book. The yell I gave made him bite histongue in the middle of a sentence.

'What the dickens is the matter?' he asked, not a little peeved.

'We're dished! Listen to this!'

I read him the note:

The Vicarage,.

Twing, Glos.

My Dear Wooster,

As you may have heard, circumstances over which I have no controlmil prevent my preaching the

sermon on Brotherly Love for whichyou made such a flattering request. I am unwilling, however, thatyou shall be disappointed, so, if you will attend divine service at Gandle-by-the-Hill this morning, you will hear my sermon preachedby young Bates, my nephew. I have lent him the manuscript at hisurgent desire, for, between ourselves, there are wheels within wheels.My nephew is one of the candidates for the headmastership of a well-known public school, and the choice has narrowed down between himand one rival.

Late yesterday evening James received private information that thehead of the Board of Governors of the school proposed to sit underhim this Sunday in order to judge of the merits of his preaching, amost important item in swaying the Board's choice. I acceded to hisplea that I lend him my sermon on Brotherly Love, of which, like you, he apparently retains a vivid recollection. It would have been too late for him to compose a sermon of suitable length in place ofthis brief address which - mistakenly, in my opinion - he haddesigned to deliver to his rustic flock, and I wished to help the boy.

Trusting that his preaching of the sermon will supply you with aspleasant memories as you say you have of mine, I remain,

Cordially yours,

F.Heppenstall.

PS - The hay-fever has rendered my eyes unpleasantly weak for thetime being, so I am dictating this letter to my butler, Brookfield, who will convey it to you.

I don't know when I've experienced a more massive silence than the one that followed my reading of this cheery epistle. Young Bingogulped once or twice, and practically every known emotion cameand went on his face. Jeeves coughed one soft, low, gentle coughlike a sheep with a blade of grass stuck in its throat, and then stoodgazing serenely at the landscape. Finally young Bingo spoke.

'Great Scott!' he whispered hoarsely. 'An SP job!'

'I believe that is the technical term, sir,' said Jeeves.

'So you had inside information, dash it!' said young Bingo.

'Why, yes, sir,' said Jeeves. 'Brookfield happened to mention thecontents of the note to me when he brought it. We are old friends.'

Bingo registered grief, anguish, rage, despair and resentment.

'Well, all I can say,' he cried, 'is that it's a bit thick! Preachinganother man's sermon! Do you call that honest? Do you call thatplaying the game?'

'Well, my dear old thing,' I said, 'be fair. It's quite within therules. Clergymen do it all the time. They aren't expected always tomake up the sermons they preach.'

Jeeves coughed again, and fixed me with an expressionless eye.

'And in the present case, sir, if I may be permitted to take theliberty of making the observation, I think

we should make allowances.We should remember that the securing of this headmastership meant everything to the young couple.'

'Young couple? What young couple?'

The Reverend James Bates, sir, and Lady Cynthia. I am informedby her ladyship's maid that they have been engaged to be marriedfor some weeks - provisionally, so to speak; and his lordship madehis consent conditional on Mr Bates securing a really important andremunerative position.'

Young Bingo turned a light green.

'Engaged to be married!'

'Yes, sir.'

There was a silence.

'I think I'll go for a walk,' said Bingo.

'But, my dear old thing,' I said, 'it's just lunch-time. The gongwill be going any minute now.'

'I don't want any lunch!' said Bingo.

14

The Purity of the Turf

After that, life at Twing jogged along pretty peacefully for a bit. Twing is one of those places where there isn't a frightful lot to donor any very hectic excitement to look forward to. In fact, the onlyevent of any importance on the horizon, as far as I could ascertain,was the annual village school-treat. One simply filled in the time byloafing about the grounds, playing a bit of tennis, and avoiding youngBingo as far as was humanly possible.

This last was a very necessary move if you wanted a happy life,for the Cynthia affair had jarred the unfortunate mutt to such anextent that he was always waylaying one and decanting his anguishedsoul. And when, one morning, he blew into my bedroom while Iwas toying with a bit of breakfast, I decided to take a firm line from the start. I could stand having him moaning all over me after dinner,and even after lunch; but at breakfast, no. We Woosters are amiability itself, but there is a limit.

'Now look here, old friend,' I said. 'I know your bally heart isbroken and all that, and at some future time I shall be delighted tohear all about it, but -'

'I didn't come to talk about that.'

'No? Good egg!'

'The past,' said young Bingo, 'is dead. Let us say no more aboutit.'

'Right-o!'

'I have been wounded to the very depths of my soul, but don'tspeak about it.'

'I won't.'

'Ignore it. Forget it.'

'Absolutely!'

I hadn't seen him so dashed reasonable for days.

'What I came to see you about this morning, Bertie,' he said,fishing a sheet of paper out of his pocket, 'was to ask if you wouldcare to come in on another little flutter.'

If there is one thing we Woosters are simply dripping with, it is sporting blood. I bolted the rest of my sausage, and sat up and tooknotice.

'Proceed,' I said. 'You interest me strangely, old bird.'

Bingo laid the paper on the bed.

'On Monday week,' he said, 'you may or may not know, the annualvillage school-treat takes place. Lord Wickhammersley lends theHall grounds for the purpose. There will be games and a conjurer,and coco-nut shies, and tea in a tent. And also sports.'

'I know. Cynthia was telling me.'

Young Bingo winced.

'Would you mind not mentioning that name? I am not made of marble.'

'Sorry!'

'Well, as I was saying, this jamboree is slated for Monday week.The question is, Are we on?'

'How do you mean, "Are we on?"?'

'I am referring to the sports. Steggles did so well out of theSermon Handicap that he has decided to make a book on thesesports. Punters can be accommodated at ante-post odds or startingprice, according to their preference. I think we ought to look intoit,' said young Bingo.

I pressed the bell.

'I'll consult Jeeves. I don't touch any sporting proposition withouthis advice. Jeeves,' I said, as he drifted in,"rally round.'

'Sir?'

'Stand by. We want your advice.'

'Very good, sir.'

'State your case, Bingo.'

Bingo stated his case.

'What about it, Jeeves?' I said. 'Do we go in?'

Jeeves pondered to some extent.

'I am inclined to favour the idea, sir.'

That was good enough for me. 'Right,' I said. 'Then we will forma syndicate and bust the Ring. I supply the money, you supply thebrains, and Bingo - what do you supply, Bingo?'

'If you will carry me, and let me settle up later,' said young Bingo, 'I think I can put you in the way of winning a parcel on the Mothers'Sack Race.'

'All right. We will put you down as Inside Information. Now whatare the events?'

Bingo reached for his paper and consulted it.

'Girls' Under Fourteen Fifty-Yard Dash seems to open the proceedings.'

'Anything to say about that, Jeeves?'

'No, sir. I have no information.'

'What's the next?'

'Boys' and Girls' Mixed Animal Potato Race, All Ages.'

This was a new one to me. I had never heard of it at any of thebig meetings.

'What's that?'

'Rather sporting,' said young Bingo. 'The competitors enter incouples, each couple being assigned an animal cry and a potato. Forinstance, let's suppose that you and Jeeves entered. Jeeves would stand at a fixed point holding a potato. You would have your headin a sack, and you would grope about trying to find Jeeves andmaking a noise like a cat; Jeeves also making a noise like a cat.Other competitors would be making noises like cows and pigs and dogs, and so on, and groping about for*their* potato-holders, who would also be making noises like cows and pigs and dogs and soon-'

I stopped the poor fish.

'Jolly if you're fond of animals,' I said, 'but on the whole -'

'Precisely, sir,' said Jeeves. 'I wouldn't touch it.'

'Too open, what?'

'Exactly, sir. Very hard to estimate form.'

'Carry on, Bingo. Where do we go from there?'

'Mothers' Sack Race.'

'Ah! That's better. This is where you know something.'

'A gift for Mrs Penworthy, the tobacconist's wife,' said Bingoconfidently. 'I was in at her shop yesterday, buying cigarettes, andshe told me she had won three times at fairs in Worcestershire. Sheonly moved to these parts a short time ago, so nobody knows abouther. She promised me she would keep herself dark, and I think wecould get a good price.'

'Risk a tenner each way, Jeeves, what?'

'I think so, sir.'

'Girls' Open Egg and Spoon Race,' read Bingo.

'How about that?'

'I doubt if it would be worthwhile to invest, sir,' said Jeeves. 'Iam told it is a certainty for last year's winner, Sarah Mills, who willdoubtless start an odds-on favourite.'

'Good, is she?'

'They tell me in the village that she carries a beautiful egg, sir.'

'Then there's the Obstacle Race,' said Bingo. 'Risky, in myopinion. Like betting on the Grand National. Fathers' Hat-Trimming Contest - another speculative event. That's all except for the Choir-Boys' Hundred Yards Handicap, for a pewter mug presentedby the vicar - open to all whose voices have not broken before thesecond Sunday in Epiphany. Willie Chambers won last year, in a canter, receiving fifteen yards. This time he will probably be handicapped out of the race. I don't know what to advise.'

'If I might make a suggestion, sir.'

I eyed Jeeves with interest. I don't know that I'd ever seen himlook so nearly excited.

'You've got something up your sleeve?'

'I have, sir.'

'Red-hot?'

'That precisely describes it, sir. I think I may confidently assertthat we have the winner of the Choir-Boys' Handicap under this very roof, sir. Harold, the page-boy.'

'Page-boy? Do you mean the tubby little chap in buttons one seesbobbing about here and there? Why, dash it, Jeeves, nobody has agreater respect for your knowledge of form than I have, but I'mhanged if I can see Harold catching the judge's eye. He's practically circular, and every time I've seen him he's been

leaning up againstsomething, half asleep.'

'He receives thirty yards, sir, and could win from scratch. Theboy is a flier.'

'How do you know?'

Jeeves coughed, and there was a dreamy look in his eye.

'I was as much astonished as yourself, sir, when I first becameaware of the lad's capabilities. I happened to pursue him one morning with the intention of fetching him a clip on the side of thehead -'

'Great Scott, Jeeves! You?'

'Yes, sir. The boy is of an outspoken disposition, and had madean opprobrious remark respecting my personal appearance.'

'What did he say about your appearance?'

'I have forgotten, sir,' said Jeeves, with a touch of austerity. 'Butit was opprobrious. I endeavoured to correct him, but he outdistanced me by yards and made good his escape.'

'But, I say, Jeeves, this is sensational. And yet - if he's such asprinter, why hasn't anybody in the village found it out? Surely heplays with the other boys?'

'No, sir. As his lordship's page-boy, Harold does not mix withthe village lads.'

'Bit of a snob, what?'

'He is somewhat acutely alive to the existence of class distinctions,sir.'

'You're absolutely certain he's such a wonder?' said Bingo. 'I mean, it wouldn't do to plunge unless you're sure.'

'If you desire to ascertain the boy's form by personal inspection,sir, it will be a simple matter to arrange a secret trial.'

'I'm bound to say I should feel easier in my mind,' I said.

'Then if I may take a shilling from the money on your dressing-table -'

'What for?'

'I propose to bribe the lad to speak slightingly of the secondfootman's quint, sir. Charles is somewhat sensitive on the point, andshould undoubtedly make the lad extend himself. If you will be atthe first-floor passage-window, overlooking the back door, in halfan hour's time - '

I don't know when I've dressed in such a hurry. As a rule, I'mwhat you might call a slow and careful dresser: I like to linger overthe tie and see that the trousers are just so; but this morning I wasall worked up. I just shoved on my things anyhow, and joined Bingoat the window with a quarter of an hour to spare.

The passage-window looked down on to a broad sort of pavedcourtyard, which ended after about twenty yards in an archwaythrough a high wall. Beyond this archway you got to a strip of thedrive, which curved round for another thirty yards or so, till it waslost behind a thick shrubbery. I put myself in the stripling's place and thought what steps I would take with a second footman after me. There was only one thing to do - leg it for the shrubbery andtake cover; which meant that at least fifty yards would have to becovered - an excellent test. If good old Harold could fight off the second footman's challenge long enough to allow him to reach thebushes, there wasn't a choir-boy in England who could give himthirty yards in the hundred. I waited, all of a twitter, for what seemedlike hours, and then suddenly there was a confused noise without, and something round and blue and buttony shot through the backdoor and buzzed for the archway like a mustang. And about twoseconds later out came the second footman, going his hardest.

There was nothing to it. Absolutely nothing. The field never hada chance. Long before the footman reached the half-way mark,Harold was in the bushes, throwing stones. I came away from thewindow thrilled to the marrow; and when I met Jeeves on the stairs I was so moved that I nearly grasped his hand.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'no discussion! The Wooster shirt goes on thisboy!'

'Very good, sir,' said Jeeves.

The worst of these country meetings is that you can't plunge asheavily as you would like when you get a good thing, because italarms the Ring. Steggles, though pimpled, was, as I have indicated,no chump, and if I had invested all I wanted to he would have puttwo and two together. I managed to get a good solid bet down forthe syndicate, however, though it did make him look thoughtful. Iheard in the next few days that he had been making searchinginquiries in the village concerning Harold; but nobody could tellhim anything, and eventually he came to the conclusion, I suppose,that I must be having a long shot on the strength of that thirty-yards start. Public opinion wavered between Jimmy Goode, receiving tenyards, at seven-to-two, and Alexander Bartlett, with six yards start,at eleven-to-four. Willie Chambers, scratch, was offered to thepublic at two-to-one but found no takers.

We were taking no chances on the big event, and directly we hadgot our money on at a nice hundred-to-twelve, Harold was put intostrict training. It was a wearing business, and I can understand nowwhy most of the big trainers are grim, silent men, who look as thoughthey had suffered. The kid wanted constant watching. It was nogood talking to him about honour and glory and how proud his mother would be when he wrote and told her he had won a realcup - the moment blighted Harold discovered that training meantknocking off pastry, taking exercise, and keeping away from thecigarettes, he was all against it, and it was only by unceasing vigilancethat we managed to keep him in any shape at all. It was the dietthat was the stumbling-block. As far as exercise went, we couldgenerally arrange for a sharp dash every morning with the assistance of the second footman. It ran into money, of course, but that couldn'tbe helped. Still, when a kid has simply to wait till the butler's backis turned to have the run of the pantry, and has only to nip into thesmoking-room to collect a handful of the best Turkish, training becomes a rocky job. We could only hope that on the day his naturalstamina would pull him through.

And then one evening young Bingo came back from the links witha disturbing story. He had been in the habit of giving Harold mildexercise in the afternoons by taking him out as a caddie.

At first he seemed to think it humorous, the poor chump! Hebubbled over with merry mirth as he began his tale.

'I say, rather funny this afternoon,' he said. 'You ought to have seen Steggles's face.'

'Seen Steggles's face? What for?'

'When he saw young Harold sprint, I mean.'

I was filled with a grim foreboding of an awful doom.

'Good heavens! You didn't let Harold sprint in front of Steggles?'

Young Bingo's jaw dropped.

'I never thought of that,' he said, gloomily. 'It wasn't my fault. Iwas playing a round with Steggles, and after we'd finished we wentinto the club-house for a drink, leaving Harold with the clubs outside. In about five minutes we came out, and there was the kid onthe gravel practising swings with Steggle's driver and a stone. Whenhe saw us coming, the kid dropped the club and was over the horizonlike a streak. Steggles was absolutely dumbfounded. And I must sayit was a revelation to me. The kid certainly gave of his best. Ofcourse, it's a nuisance in a way; but I don't see, on second thoughts,'said Bingo, brightening up, 'what it matters. We're in at a goodprice. We've nothing to lose by the kid's form becoming known. I take it he will start odds-on, but that doesn't affect us.'

I looked at Jeeves. Jeeves looked at me.

'It affects us all right if he doesn't start at all.'

'Precisely, sir.'

'What do you mean?' asked Bingo.

'If you ask me,' I said, 'I think Steggles will try to nobble him before the race.'

'Good Lord! I never thought of that!' Bingo blenched. 'You don'tthink he would really do it?'

'I think he would have a jolly good try. Steggles is a bad man. From now on, Jeeves, we must watch Harold like hawks.'

'Undoubtedly, sir.'

'Ceaseless vigilance, what?'

'Precisely, sir.'

'You wouldn't care to sleep in his room, Jeeves?'

'No, sir, I should not.'

'No, nor would I, if it comes to that. But dash it all,' I said, 'we'reletting ourselves get rattled! We're losing our nerve. This won't do.How can Steggles possibly get at Harold, even if he wants to?'

There was no cheering young Bingo up. He's one of those birdswho simply leap at the morbid view, if

you give them half a chance.

'There are all sorts of ways of nobbling favourites,' he said, in asort of death-bed voice. 'You ought to read some of the racingnovels. In*Pipped on the Post* Lord Jasper Maulevereras near as atoucher outed Bonny Betsy by bribing the head lad to slip a cobrainto her saddle the night before the Derby!'

'What are the chances of a cobra biting Harold, Jeeves?'

'Slight, I should imagine, sir. And in such an event, knowing theboy as intimately as I do, my anxiety would be entirely for the snake.'

'Still, unceasing vigilance, Jeeves.'

'Most certainly, sir.'

I must say I got a bit fed up with young Bingo in the next few days.It's all very well for a fellow with a big winner in his stable to exerciseproper care, but in my opinion Bingo overdid it. The blighter's mind appeared to be absolutely saturated with racing fiction; and in storiesof that kind, as far as I could make out, no horse is ever allowed tostart in a race without at least a dozen attempts to put it out ofaction. He stuck to Harold like a plaster. Never let the unfortunatekid out of his sight. Of course, it meant a lot to the poor old egg if he could collect on this race, because it would give him enoughmoney to chuck his tutoring job and get back to London; but all thesame, he needn't have woken me up at three in the morning twice running - once to tell me we ought to cook Harold's food ourselvesto prevent doping: the other time to say that he had heard mysteriousnoises in the shrubbery. But he reached the limit, in my opinion,when he insisted on my going to evening service on Sunday, the daybefore the sports.

'Why on earth?' I said, never being much of a lad for evensong.

'Well, I can't go myself. I shan't be here. I've got to go to London today with young Egbert.' Egbert was Lord Wickhammersley's son,the one Bingo was tutoring. 'He's going for a visit down in Kent,and I've got to see him off at Charing Cross. It's an infernal nuisance.I shan't be back till Monday afternoon. In fact, I shall miss most of the sports, I expect. Everything, therefore, depends on you, Bertie.'

'But why should either of us go to evening service?'

'Ass! Harold sings in the choir, doesn't he?'

'What about it? I can't stop him dislocating his neck over a highnote, if that's what you're afraid of.'

'Fool! Steggles sings in the choir too. There may be dirty work after the service.'

'What absolute rot!'

'Is it?' said young Bingo. 'Well, let me tell you that in*Jenny, the*Girl Jockey,the villain kidnapped the boy who was to ride the favourite the night before the big race, and he was the only one whounderstood and could control the horse, and if the heroine hadn'tdressed up in riding things and -'

'Oh, all right, all right. But, if there's any danger, it seems to methe simplest thing would be for Harold not to turn out on Sundayevening.'

'He must turn out. You seem to think the infernal kid is a monument of rectitude, beloved by all. He's got the shakiest reputationof any kid in the village. He's played hookey from the choir so oftenthat the vicar told him, if one more thing happened, he would firehim out. Nice chumps we should look if he was scratched the nightbefore the race!'

Well, of course, that being so, there was nothing for it but totoddle along.

There's something about evening service in a country church thatmakes a fellow feel drowsy and peaceful. Sort of end-of-a-perfect-day feeling. Old Heppenstall was up in the pulpit, and he has a kindof regular, bleating delivery that assists thought. They had left thedoor open, and the air was full of a mixed scent of trees andhoneysuckle and mildew and villagers' Sunday clothes. As far as theeye could reach, you could see farmers propped up in restful attitudes, breathing heavily; and the children in the congregation whohad fidgeted during the earlier part of the proceedings were now lying back in a surfeited sort of coma. The last rays of the settingsun shone through the stained-glass windows, birds were twitteringin the trees, the women's dresses crackled gently in the stillness.Peaceful. That's what I'm driving at. I felt peaceful. Everybody feltpeaceful. And that is why the explosion, when it came, sounded likethe end of all things.

I call it an explosion, because that was what it seemed like whenit broke loose. One moment a dreamy hush was all over the place,broken only by old Heppenstall talking about our duty to our neighbours; and then, suddenly, a sort of piercing, shrieking squeal thatgot you right between the eyes and ran all the way down your spineand out at the soles of your feet.

'EE-ee-ee-ee-ee! Oo-ee! Ee-ee-ee-ee!'

It sounded like about six hundred pigs having their tails twistedsimultaneously, but it was simply the kid Harold, who appeared tobe having some species of fit. He was jumping up and down and slapping at the back of his neck. And about every other second hewould take a deep breath and give out another of the squeals.

Well, I mean, you can't do that sort of thing in the middle ofthe sermon during evening service without exciting remark. Thecongregation came out of its trance with a jerk, and climbed on thepews to get a better view. Old Heppenstall stopped in the middleof a sentence and spun round. And a couple of vergers with greatpresence of mind bounded up the aisle like leopards, collectedHarold, still squealing, and marched him out. They disappeared intothe vestry, and I grabbed my hat and legged it round to the stage-door, full of apprehension and what not. I couldn't think whatthe deuce could have happened, but somewhere dimly behind theproceedings there seemed to me to lurk the hand of the blighterSteggles.

By the time I got there and managed to get someone to open thedoor, which was locked, the service seemed to be over. Old Heppenstall was standing in the middle of a crowd of choir-boys and vergersand sextons and what not, putting the wretched Harold through itwith no little vim. I had come in at the tail-end of what must have been a fairly fruity oration.

'Wretched boy! How dare you -'

'I got a sensitive skin!'

'This is no time to talk about your skin -'

'Somebody put a beetle down my back!'

'Absurd!'

'I felt it wriggling -'

'Nonsense!'

'Sounds pretty thin, doesn't it?' said someone at my side.

It was Steggles, dash him. Clad in a snowy surplice or cassock,or whatever they call it, and wearing an expression of grave concern,the blighter had the cold, cynical crust to look me in the eyeballwithout a blink.

'Did you put a beetle down his neck?' I cried.

'Me!' said Steggles. 'Me!'

Old Heppenstall was putting on the black cap.

'I do not credit a word of your story, wretched boy! I have warnedyou before, and now the time has come to act. You cease from thismoment to be a member of my choir. Go, miserable child!'

Steggles plucked at my sleeve.

'In that case,' he said, 'those bets, you know - I'm afraid you loseyour money, dear old boy. It's a pity you didn't put it on SP. I alwaysthink SP's the only safe way.'

I gave him one look. Not a bit of good, of course.

'And they talk about the Purity of the Turf!' I said. And I meantit to sting, by Jove!

Jeeves received the news bravely, but I think the man was a bitrattled beneath the surface.

'An ingenious young gentleman, Mr Steggles, sir.'

'A bally swindler, you mean.'

'Perhaps that would be a more exact description. However, thesethings will happen on the Turf, and it is useless to complain.'

'I wish I had your sunny disposition, Jeeves!'

Jeeves bowed.

'We now rely, then, it would seem, sir, almost entirely on MrsPenworthy. Should she justify Mr Little's

encomiums and show realclass in the Mothers' Sack Race, our gains will just balance ourlosses.'

'Yes; but that's not much consolation when you've been lookingforward to a big win.'

'It is just possible that we may still find ourselves on the right sideof the ledger after all, sir. Before Mr Little left, I persuaded him toinvest a small sum for the syndicate of which you were kind enoughto make me a member, sir, on the Girls' Egg and Spoon Race.'

'On Sarah Mills?'

'No, sir. On a long-priced outsider. Little Prudence Baxter, sir,the child of his lordship's head gardener. Her father assures me shehas a very steady hand. She is accustomed to bring him a mug ofbeer from the cottage each afternoon, and he informs me she has never spilled a drop.'

Well, that sounded as though young Prudence's control was good. But how about speed? With seasoned performers like Sarah Millsentered, the thing practically amounted to a classic race, and in thesebig events you must have speed.

'I am aware that it is what is termed a long shot,' sir. Still, Ithought it judicious.'

'You backed here for a place, too, of course?'

'Yes, sir. Each way.'

'Well, I suppose it's all right. I've never known you make a bloomeryet.'

'Thank you very much, sir.'

I'm bound to say that, as a general rule, my idea of a large afternoon would be to keep as far away from a village school-treat as possible.A sticky business. But with such grave issues toward, if you knowwhat I mean, I sank my prejudices on this occasion and rolled up.I found the proceedings about as scaly as I had expected. It was awarm day, and the hall grounds were a dense, practically liquid massof peasantry. Kids seethed to and fro. One of them, a small girl ofsorts, grabbed my hand and hung on to it as I clove my way throughthe jam to where the Mothers' Sack Race was to finish. We hadn'tbeen introduced, but she seemed to think I would do as well asanyone else to talk to about the rag-doll she had won in the LuckyDip, and she rather spread herself on the topic.

'I'm going to call it Gertrude,' she said. 'And I shall undress it every night and put it to bed, and wake it up in the morning anddress it, and put it to bed at night, and wake it up next morning anddress it -'

'I say, old thing,' I said, 'I don't want to hurry you and all that,but you couldn't condense it a bit, could you? I'm rather anxious tosee the finish of this race. The Wooster fortunes are by way ofhanging on it.'

'I'm going to run in a race soon,' she said, shelving the doll forthe nonce and descending to ordinary chit-chat.

'Yes?' I said. Distrait, if you know what I mean, and trying to peerthrough the chinks in the crowd. 'What race is that?'

'Egg 'n' Spoon.'

'No really? Are you Sarah Mills?'

'Na-ow!' Registering scorn. 'I'm Prudence Baxter.'

Naturally this put our relations on a different footing. I gazed ather with considerable interest. One of the stable. I must say shedidn't look much of a flier. She was short and round. Bit out of condition, I thought.

'I say,' I said, 'that being so, you mustn't dash about in the hotsun and take the edge off yourself. You must conserve your energies,old friend. Sit down here in the shade.'

'Don't want to sit down.'

'Well, take it easy, anyhow.'

The kid flitted to another topic like a butterfly hovering fromflower to flower.

'I'm a good girl,' she said.

'I bet you are. I hope you're a good egg-and-spoon racer, too.'

'Harold's a bad boy. Harold squealed in church and isn't allowedto come to the treat. I'm glad,' continued this ornament of her sex,wrinkling her nose virtuously, 'because he's a bad boy. He pulledmy hair, Friday. Harold isn't coming to the treat! Harold isn't comingto the treat! Harold isn't coming to the treat!' she chanted, makinga regular song of it.

'Don't rub it in, my dear old gardener's daughter,' I pleaded. 'Youdon't know it, but you've hit on a rather painful subject.'

'Ah Wooster, my dear fellow! So you have made friends with thislittle lady?'

It was old Heppenstall, beaming pretty profusely. Life and soulof the party.

'I am delighted, my dear Wooster,' he went on, 'quite delightedat the way you young men are throwing yourselves into the spirit ofthis little festivity of ours.'

'Oh, yes?' I said.

'Oh, yes! Even Rupert Steggles. I must confess that my opinion ofRupert Steggles has materially altered for the better this afternoon.'

Mine hadn't. But I didn't say so.

'I have always considered Rupert Steggles, between ourselves, arather self-centred youth, by no means the kind who would puthimself out to further the enjoyment of his fellows. And yet twicewithin the last half-hour I have observed him escorting Mrs Penwor-thy, our worthy tobacconist's wife, to the refreshment.'

I left him standing. I shook off the clutching hand of the Baxter kid and hared it rapidly to the spot where the Mothers' Sack Racewas just finishing. I had a horrid presentiment that there had been more dirty

work at the crossroads. The first person I ran into wasyoung Bingo. I grabbed him by the arm.'Who won?'

'I don't know. I didn't notice.' There was bitterness in the chappie's voice. 'It wasn't Mrs Penworthy, dash her! Bertie, that houndSteggles is nothing more nor less than one of our leading snakes. Idon't know how he heard about her, but he must have got on to itthat she was dangerous. Do you know what he did? He lured thatmiserable woman into the refreshment-tent five minutes before therace and brought her out so weighed down with cake and tea thatshe blew up in the first twenty yards. Just rolled over and lay there!Well, thank goodness, we still have Harold!'I gaped at the poor chump. 'Harold! Haven't you heard?'

'Heard?' Bingo turned a delicate green. 'Heard what? I haven'theard anything. I only arrived five minutes ago. Came here straightfrom the station. What has happened? Tell me!'

I slipped him the information. He stared at me for a moment ina ghastly sort of way, then with a hollow groan, tottered away andwas lost in the crowd. A nasty knock, poor chap. I didn't blame himfor being upset.

They were clearing the decks now for the Egg and Spoon Race,and I thought I might as well stay where I was and watch thefinish. Not that I had much hope. Young Prudence was a goodconversationalist, but she didn't seem to me to be the build for awinner.

As far as I could see through the mob, they got off to a goodstart. A short, red-haired child was making the running with afreckled blonde second, and Sarah Mills lying up an easy third. Our nominee was straggling along with the field, well behind the leaders.It was not hard even as early as this to spot the winner. There wasa grace, a practised precision, in the way Sarah Mills held her spoonthat told its own story. She was cutting out a good pace, but heregg didn't even wobble. A natural egg-and-spooner, if ever therewas one.

Class will tell. Thirty yards from the tape, the red-haired kidtripped over her feet and shot her egg on to the turf. The freckledblonde fought gamely, but she had run herself out half-way downthe straight, and Sarah Mills came past and home on a tight rein byseveral lengths, a popular winner. The blonde was second. A sniffingfemale in blue gingham beat a pie-faced kid in pink for the place-money, and Prudence Baxter, Jeeves's long shot, was either fifth orsixth, I couldn't see which.

And then I was carried along with the crowd to where old Heppenstall was going to present the prizes. I found myself standing nextto the man Steggles.

'Hallo, old chap!' he said, very bright and cheery. 'You've had abad day, I'm afraid.'

I looked at him with silent scorn. Lost on the blighter, of course.

'It's not been a good meeting for any of the big punters,' he wenton. 'Poor old Bingo Little went down badly over that Egg and SpoonRace.'

I hadn't been meaning to chat with the fellow, but I was startled.

'How do you mean badly?' I said. 'We - he only had a small beton.'

'I don't know what you call small. He had thirty quid each wayon the Baxter kid.'

The landscape reeled before me.

'What!'

'Thirty quid at ten to one. I thought he must have heard something, but apparently not. The race went by the form-book all right.'

I was trying to do sums in my head. I was just in the middle ofworking out the syndicate's losses, when old Heppenstall's voicecame sort of faintly to me out of the distance. He had been prettyfatherly and debonair when ladling out the prizes for the otherevents, but now he had suddenly grown all pained and grieved. Hepeered sorrowfully at the multitude.

'With regard to the Girls' Egg and Spoon Race, which has justconcluded,' he said, 'I have a painful duty to perform. Circumstanceshave arisen which it is impossible to ignore. It is not too much to say that I am stunned.'

He gave the populace about five seconds to wonder why he wasstunned, then went on.

'Three years ago, as you are aware, I was compelled to expungefrom the list of events at this annual festival the Fathers' Quarter-Mile, owing to reports coming to my ears of wagers taken and given on the result at the village inn and a strong suspicion that on at least one occasion the race had actually been sold by the speediest runner.That unfortunate occurrence shook my faith in human nature, Iadmit - but still there was one event at least which I confidentlyexpected to remain untainted by the miasma of professionalism. Iallude to the Girls' Egg and Spoon Race. It seems, alas, that I wastoo sanguine.'

He stopped again, and wrestled with his feelings.

'I will not weary you with the unpleasant details. I will merely saythat before the race was run a stranger in our midst, the manservantof one of the guests at the Hall - I will not specify with moreparticularity - approached several of the competitors and presentedeach of them with five shillings on condition that they - er - finished.A belated sense of remorse has led him to confess to me what hedid but it is too late. The evil is accomplished, and retribution musttake its course. It is no time for half-measures. I must be firm. Irule that Sarah Mills, Jane Parker, Bessie Clay, and Rosie Jukes,the first four to pass the winning-post, have forfeited their amateurstatus and are disqualified, and this handsome work-bag, presentedby Lord Wickhammersley, goes, in consequence, to PrudenceBaxter. Prudence, step forward!'

15

The Metropolitan Touch

Nobody is more alive than I am to the fact that young Bingo Littleis in many respects a sound old egg. In one way and another he hasmade life pretty interesting for me at intervals ever since we wereat school. As a companion for a cheery hour I think I would choose him before anybody. On the other hand, I'm bound to say that there are things about him that could be improved. His habit of falling inlove with every second girl he sees is one of them; and another ishis way of letting the world in on the secrets of his heart.

If youwant shrinking reticence, don't go to Bingo, because he's got about as much of it as a soap advertisement.

I mean to say - well, here's the telegram I got from him oneevening in November, about a month after I'd got back to town frommy visit to Twing Hall:

I*say Bertie old man I am in love at last. She is the most wonderful*girl Bertie old man. This is the real thing at last Bertie. Come hereat once and bring Jeeves. Oh I say you know that tobacco shop inBond Street on the left side as you go up. Will you get me a hundredof their special cigarettes and send them to me here. I have run out. I know when you see her you will think she is the most wonderfulgirl. Mind you bring Jeeves. Don't forget the cigarettes.

BINGO

It had been handed in at Twing Post Office. In other words, he had submitted that frightful rot to the goggling eye of a village postmistress who was probably the mainspring of local gossip and wouldhave the place ringing with the news before nightfall. He couldn'thave given himself away more completely if he had hired the towncrier. When I was a kid, I used to read stories about knights andvikings and that species of chappie who would get up without ablush in the middle of a crowded banquet and loose off a song abouthow perfectly priceless they thought their best girl. I've often feltthat those days would have suited young Bingo down to the ground.

Jeeves had brought the thing in with the evening drink, and Islung it over to him.

'It's about due, of course,' I said. 'Young Bingo hasn't been inlove for at least a couple of months. I wonder who it is this time?'

'Miss Mary Burgess, sir,' said Jeeves, 'the niece of the ReverendMr Heppenstall. She is staying at Twing Vicarage.'

'Great Scott!' I knew that Jeeves knew practically everything inthe world, but this sounded like second-sight. 'How do you knowthat?'

'When we were visiting Twing Hall in the summer, sir, I formeda somewhat close friendship with Mr Heppenstall's butler. He isgood enough to keep me abreast of the local news from time totime. From his account, sir, the young lady appears to be a veryestimable young lady. Of a somewhat serious nature, I understand.Mr Little is very*epris,* sir. Brookfield, my correspondent, writes thatlast week he observed him in the moonlight at an advanced hourgazing up at his window.'

'Whose window! Brookfield's?'

'Yes, sir. Presumably under the impression that it was the younglady's.'

'But what the deuce is he doing at Twing at all?'

'Mr Little was compelled to resume his old position as tutor to Lord Wickhammersley's son at Twing Hall, sir. Owing to havingbeen unsuccessful in some speculations at Hurst Park at the end ofOctober.'

'Good Lord, Jeeves! Is there anything you don't know?'

'I couldn't say, sir.'

I picked up the telegram.

'I suppose he wants us to go down and help him out a bit?'

'That would appear to be his motive in dispatching the message,sir.'

'Well, what shall we do? Go?'

'I would advocate it, sir. If I may say so, I think that Mr Littleshould be encouraged in this particular matter.'

'You think he's picked a winner this time?'

'I hear nothing but excellent reports of the young lady, sir. I thinkit is beyond question that she would be an admirable influence forMr Little, should the affair come to a happy conclusion. Such aunion would also, I fancy, go far to restore Mr Little to the goodgraces of his uncle, the young lady being well connected and possessing private means. In short, sir, I think that if there is anything thatwe can do we should do it.'

'Well, with you behind him,' I said, 'I don't see how he can failto click.'

'You are very good, sir,' said Jeeves. 'The tribute is muchappreciated.'

Bingo met us at Twing station next day, and insisted on mysending Jeeves on in the car with the bags while he and I walked.He started in about the female the moment we had begun to hoofit.

'She is very wonderful, Bertie. She is not one of these flippant,shallow-minded modern girls. She is sweetly grave and beautifullyearnest. She reminds me of - what is the name I want?'

'Marie Lloyd?'

'Saint Cecilia,' said young Bingo, eyeing me with a good deal ofloathing. 'She reminds me of Saint Cecilia. She makes me yearn tobe a better, nobler, deeper, broader man.'

'What beats me,' I said, following up a train of thought, 'is whatprinciple you pick them on. The girls you fall in love with, I mean.I mean to say, what's your system? As far as I can see, no two of themare alike. First it was Mabel the waitress, then Honoria Glossop, thenthat fearful blister Charlotte Corday Rowbotham -'

I own that Bingo had the decency to shudder. Thinking of Charlotte always made me shudder, too.

'You don't seriously mean, Bertie, that you are intending to compare the feeling I have for Mary Burgess, the holy devotion, thespiritual -'

'Oh, all right, let it go,' I said. 'I say, old lad, aren't we goingrather a long way round?'

Considering that we were supposed to be heading for Twing Hall,it seemed to me that we were making a longish job of it. The Hall is about two miles from the station by the main road, and we hadcut off down a lane, gone across country for a bit, climbed a stileor two, and were now working our way across a field that ended inanother lane.

'She sometimes takes her little brother for a walk round this way,'explained Bingo. 'I thought we would meet her and bow, and youcould see her, you know, and then we would walk on.'

'Of course,' I said, 'that's enough excitement for anyone, and undoubtedly a corking reward for tramping three miles out of one'sway over ploughed fields with tight boots, but don't we do anythingelse? Don't we tack on to the girl and buzz along with her?'

'Good Lord!' said Bingo, honestly amazed. 'You don't supposeI've got nerve enough for that, do you? I just look at her from afaroff and all that sort of thing. Quick! Here she comes! No, I'mwrong!'

It was like that song of Harry Lauder's where he's waiting for thegirl and says 'This is her-r-r. No, it's a rabbut.' Young Bingo made me stand there in the teeth of a nor'-east half-gale for ten minutes,keeping me on my toes with a series of false alarms, and I was justthinking of suggesting that we should lay off and give the rest of theproceedings a miss, when round the corner there came a fox-terrier, and Bingo quivered like an aspen. Then there hove in sight a smallboy, and he shook like a jelly. Finally, like a star whose entrancehas been worked up by the*personnel* of the*ensemble,* a girl appeared,and his emotion was painful to witness. His face got so red that,what with his white collar and the fact that the wind had turned his nose blue, he looked more like a French flag than anything else. He sagged from the waist upwards, as if he had been filleted.

He was just raising his fingers limply to his cap when he suddenlysaw that the girl wasn't alone. A chappie in clerical costume wasalso among those present, and the sight of him didn't seem to doBingo a bit of good. His face got redder and his nose bluer, and itwasn't till they had nearly passed that he managed to get hold of hiscap.

The girl bowed, the curate said, 'Ah, Little. Rough weather,' thedog barked, and then they toddled on and the entertainment wasover.

The curate was a new factor in the situation to me. I reported hismovements to Jeeves when I got to the Hall. Of course, Jeeves knewall about it already.

'That is the Reverend Mr Wingham, Mr Heppenstall's newcurate,*sir.* I gathered from Brookfield that he is Mr Little's rival,and at the moment the young lady appears to favour him. MrWingham has the advantage of being on the premises. He and theyoung lady play duets after dinner, which acts as a bond. Mr Littleon these occasions, I understand, prowls about in the road, chafingvisibly.'

'That seems to be all the poor fish is able to do, dash it. He canchafe all right, but there he stops. He's lost his pep. He's got nodash. Why, when we met her just now, he hadn't even the commonmanly courage to say "Good evening"!'

'I gather that Mr Little's affection is not unmingled with awe, sir.'

'Well, how are we to help a man when he's such a rabbit as that?Have you anything to suggest? I shall be seeing him after dinner,and he's sure to ask first thing what you advise.'

'In my opinion, sir, the most judicious course for Mr Little to pursue would be to concentrate on the young gentleman.'

'The small brother? How do you mean?'

'Make a friend of him, sir - take him for walks and so forth.'

'It doesn't sound one of your red-hottest ideas. I must say Iexpected something fruitier than that.'

'It would be a beginning, sir, and might lead to better things.'

'Well, I'll tell him. I liked the look of her, Jeeves.'

'A thoroughly estimable young lady, sir.'

I slipped Bingo the tip from the stable that night, and was gladto observe that it seemed to cheer him up.

'Jeeves is always right,' he said. 'I ought to have thought of itmyself. I'll start in tomorrow.'

It was amazing how the chappie bucked up. Long before I left for town it had become a mere commonplace for him to speak tothe girl. I mean he didn't simply look stuffed when they met. Thebrother was forming a bond that was a dashed sight stronger than thecurate's duets. She and Bingo used to take him for walks together. Iasked Bingo what they talked about on these occasions, and he saidWilfred's future. The girl hoped that Wilfred would one day become a curate, but Bingo said no, there was something about curates hedidn't quite like.

The day we left, Bingo came to see us off with Wilfred friskingabout him like an old college chum. The last I saw of them, Bingowas standing him chocolates out of the slot-machine. A scene ofpeace and cheery goodwill. Dashed promising, I thought.

Which made it all the more of a jar, about a fortnight later, whenhis telegram arrived. As follows:

Bertie old man

I say Bertie could you possibly come down here atonce.

Everything gone wrong hang it all.

Dash it Bertie you simplymust come.

I am in a state of absolute despair and heart-broken.

Would you mind sending another hundred of those cigarettes.

BringJeeves when you come Bertie.

You simply must come Bertie.

I relyon you.

Don't forget to bring Jeeves.

BINGO.

For a chap who's perpetually hard-up, I must say that youngBingo is the most wasteful telegraphist I ever struck. He's got nonotion of condensing. The silly ass simply pours out his wounded soul at twopence a word, or whatever it is, without a thought.

'How about it, Jeeves?' I said. Tm getting a bit fed. I can't go chucking all my engagements every second week in order to biffdown to Twing and rally round young Bingo. Send him a wire tellinghim to end it all in the village pond.'

'If you could spare me for the night, sir, I should be glad to rundown and investigate.'

'Oh, dash it! Well, I suppose there's nothing else to be done.After all, you're the fellow he wants. All right, carry on.'

Jeeves got back late the next day.

'Well?' I said.

Jeeves appeared perturbed. He allowed his left eyebrow to flickerupwards in a concerned sort of manner.

'I have done what I could, sir,' he said, 'but I fear Mr Little'schances do not appear bright. Since our last visit, sir, there has beena decidedly sinister and disquieting development.'

'Oh, what's that?'

'You may remember Mr Steggles, sir - the young gentlemanwho was studying for an examination with Mr Heppenstall at theVicarage?'

'What's Steggles got to do with it?' I asked.

'I gather from Brookfield, sir, who chanced to overhear a conversation, that Mr Steggles is interesting himself in the affair.'

'Good Lord! What, making a book on it?'

'I understand that he is accepting wagers from those in hisimmediate circle, sir. Against Mr Little, whose chances he does notseem to fancy.'

'I don't like that, Jeeves.'

'No, sir. It is sinister.'

'From what I know of Steggles there will be dirty work.'

'It has already occurred, sir.'

'Already?'

'Yes, sir. It seems that, in pursuance of the policy which he hasbeen good enough to allow me to suggest to him, Mr Little escortedMaster Burgess to the church*bazaar,* and there met Mr Steggles,who was in the company of young Master Heppenstall, the ReverendMr HeppenstalPs second son, who is home from Rugby just now, having recently recovered from an attack of mumps. The encountertook place in the refreshment-room, where Mr Steggles was at that moment entertaining Master Heppenstall. To cut a long story short,sir, the two gentlemen became extremely interested in the hearty manner in which the lads were fortifying themselves; and Mr Steggles offered to back his nominee in a weight-for-age eating contestagainst Master Burgess for a pound a side. Mr Little admitted tome that he was conscious of a certain hesitation as to what theupshot might be, should Miss Burgess get to hear of the matter, buthis sporting blood was too much for him and he agreed to thecontest. This was duly carried out, both lads exhibiting the utmostwillingness and enthusiasm, and eventually Master Burgess justifiedMr Little's confidence by winning, but only after a bitter struggle.Next day both contestants were in considerable pain; inquiries were made and confessions extorted, and Mr Little -1 learn from Brook-field, who happened to be near the door of the drawing-room at themoment - had an extremely unpleasant interview with the younglady, which ended in her desiring him never to speak to her again.'There's no getting away from the fact that, if ever a man requiredwatching, it's Steggles. Machiavelli could have taken his correspondence course.

'It was a put-up job, Jeeves!' I said. 'I mean, Steggles worked thewhole thing on purpose. It's his old nobbling game.'

'There would seem to be no doubt about that, sir.'

'Well, he seems to have dished poor old Bingo all right.'

'That is the prevalent opinion, sir. Brookfield tells me that downin the village at the Cow and Horses seven to one is being freelyoffered on Mr Wingham and finding no takers.'

'Good Lord! Are they betting about it down in the village, too?'

'Yes, sir. And in adjoining hamlets also. The affair has causedwidespread interest. I am told that there is a certain sporting reactionin even so distant a spot as Lower Bingley.'

'Well, I don't see what there is to do. If Bingo is such a chump -'

'One is fighting a losing battle, I fear, sir, but I did venture toindicate to Mr Little a course of action which might prove of advantage. I recommended him to busy himself with good works.'

'Good works?'

'About the village, sir. Reading to the bedridden - chatting withthe sick - that sort of thing, sir. We can but trust that good resultswill ensue.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' I said doubtfully. 'But, by gosh, if I was a sickman I'd hate to have a loony like

young Bingo coming and gibberingat my bedside.'

There*is* that aspect of the matter, sir,' said Jeeves.

I didn't hear a word from Bingo for a couple of weeks, and I tookit after while that he had found the going too hard and had chuckedin the towel. And then, one night not long before Christmas, I cameback to the flat pretty latish, having been out dancing at the Embassy.I was fairly tired, having swung a practically non-stop shoe fromshortly after dinner till twoam, and bed seemed to be indicated. Judge of my chagrin and all that sort of thing, therefore, when,tottering to my room and switching on the light, I observed the foulfeatures of young Bingo all over the pillow. The blighter hadappeared from nowhere and was in my bed, sleeping like an infantwith a sort of happy, dreamy smile on his map.

A bit thick I mean to say! We Woosters are all for the good oldmedieval hosp. and all that, but when it comes to finding chappies collaring your bed, the thing becomes a trifle too mouldy. I hove ashoe, and Bingo sat up, gurgling.

"s matter? 's matter?' said young Bingo.

'What the deuce are you doing in my bed?' I said.

'Oh, hallo, Bertie! So there you are!'

'Yes, here I am. What are you doing in my bed?'

'I came up to town for the night on business.'

'Yes, but what are you doing in my bed?'

'Dash it all, Bertie,' said young Bingo querulously, 'don't keepharping on your beastly bed. There's another made up in the spareroom. I saw Jeeves make it with my own eyes. I believe he meant itfor me, but I knew what a perfect host you were, so I just turnedin here. I say, Bertie, old man,' said Bingo, apparently fed up with the discussion about sleeping-quarters, 'I see daylight.'

'Well, it's getting on for three in the morning.'

'I was speaking figuratively, you ass. I meant that hope has begun to dawn. About Mary Burgess, you know. Sit down and I'll tell youall about it.'

'I won't. I'm going to sleep.'

'To begin with,' said young Bingo, settling himself comfortablyagainst the pillows and helping himself to a cigarette from my privatebox, 'I must once again pay a marked tribute to good old Jeeves. Amodern Solomon. I was badly up against it when I came to him foradvice, but he rolled up with a tip which has put me - I use theterm advisedly and in a conservative spirit - on velvet. He may havetold you that he recommended me to win back the lost ground bybusying myself with good works? Bertie, old man,' said young Bingoearnestly, 'for the last two weeks I've been comforting the sick tosuch an extent that, if I had a brother and you brought him to me on a sick-bed at this moment, by Jove, old man, I'd heave a brickat him. However, though it took it out of me like the deuce, the scheme worked splendidly. She softened visibly before I'd been atit a week. Started to bow again when we met in the street, and soforth. About a

couple of days ago she distinctly smiled - in a sortof faint, saint-like kind of way, you know - when I ran into heroutside the Vicarage. And yesterday - I say, you remember thatcurate chap, Wingham? Fellow with a long nose.'

'Of course I remember him. Your rival.'

'Rival?' Bingo raised his eyebrows. 'Oh, well, I suppose you couldhave called him that at one time. Though it sounds a little farfetched.'

'Does it?' I said, stung by the sickening complacency of thechump's manner. 'Well, let me tell you that the last I heard was thatat the Cow and Horses in Twing village and all over the place asfar as Lower Bingley they were offering seven to one on the curateand finding no takers.'

Bingo started violently and sprayed cigarette-ash all over my bed.

'Betting!' he gargled. 'Betting! You don't mean that they're bettingon this holy, sacred ... Oh, I say, dash it all! Haven't people anysense of decency and reverence? Is nothing safe from their beastly, sordid graspingness? I wonder,' said young Bingo thoughtfully, 'ifthere's a chance of my getting any of that seven-to-one money?Seven to one! What a price! Who's offering it, do you know? Oh,well, I suppose it wouldn't do. No, I suppose it wouldn't be quitethe thing.'

'You seem, dashed confident,' I said. 'I'd always thought thatWingham -'

'Oh, I'm not worried about him,' said Bingo. 'I was just going totell you. Wingham's got the mumps, and won't be out and about for weeks. And, jolly as that is in itself, it's not all. You see, he wasproducing the Village School Christmas Entertainment, and nowI've taken over the job. I went to old Heppenstall last night andclinched the contract. Well, you see what that means. It means that I shall be absolutely the centre of the village life and thought forthree solid weeks, with a terrific triumph to wind up with. Everybodylooking up to me and fawning on me, don't you see, and all that.It's bound to have a powerful effect on Mary's mind. It will show her that I am capable of serious effort; that there is a solid foundation of worth in me; that, mere butterfly as she may once have thoughtme, I am in reality -'

'Oh, all right, let it go!'

'It's a big thing, you know, this Christmas Entertainment. OldHeppenstall is very much wrapped up in it. Nibs from all over thecountryside rolling up. The Squire present, with family. A big chancefor me, Bertie, my boy, and I mean to make the most of it. Ofcourse, I'm handicapped a bit by not having been in on the thingfrom the start. Will you credit it that that uninspired doughnut of acurate wanted to give the public some rotten little fairy play out of a book for children published about fifty years ago without one good laugh or the semblance of a gag in it? It's too late to alter the thingentirely, but at least I can jazz it up. I'm going to write them insomething zippy to brighten the thing up a bit.'

'You can't write.'

'Well, when I say write, I mean pinch. That's why I've poppedup to town. I've been to see that revue, *Cuddle Up!* at the Palladium,tonight. Full of good stuff. Of course, it's rather hard to get anything inthe nature of a big spectacular effect in the Twing Village Hall,with no scenery to speak of and a chorus of practically imbecile kidsof ages ranging from nine to fourteen, but I think I see my way.Have you seen *Cuddle UpF*

'Yes. Twice.'

'Well, there's some good stuff in the first act, and I can liftpractically all the numbers. Then there's that show at the Palace. Ican see the*matinee* of that tomorrow before I leave. There's sure tobe some decent bits in that. Don't you worry about my not beingable to write a hit. Leave it to me, laddie, leave it to me. And now,my dear old chap,' said young Bingo, snuggling down cosily, 'youmustn't keep me up talking all night. It's all right for you fellowswho have nothing to do, but I'm a busy man. Good night, old thing. Close the door quietly after you and switch out the light. Breakfast,about ten tomorrow, I suppose, what? Right-o. Good night.'

For the next three weeks I didn't see Bingo. He became a sort ofVoice Heard Off, developing a habit of ringing me up on longdistance and consulting me on various points arising at rehearsal, until the day when he got me out of bed at eight in the morning toask whether I thought*Merry Christmas!* was a good tide. I told himthen that this nuisance must now cease, and after that he cheesedit, and practically passed out of my life, till one afternoon when I got back to the flat to dress for dinner and found Jeeves inspectinga whacking big poster sort of thing which he had draped over the back of an armchair.

'Good Lord, Jeeves!' I said. I was feeling rather weak that day,and the thing shook me. 'What on earth's that?'

'Mr Little sent it to me, sir, and desired me to bring it to yournotice.'

'Well, you've certainly done it!'

I took another look at the object. There was no doubt about it,he caught the eye. It was about seven feet long, and most of thelettering in about as bright red ink as I ever struck.

This was how it ran:

Twing Village Hall,

Friday, December 23rd,

Richard Little

presentsA New and Original Revue

EntitledWhat Ho, Twing!!

Book byRichard Little

Lyrics byRichard Little

Music byRichard Little

With the Full Twing Juvenile

Company and Chorus.

Scenic Effects by

Richard Little

Produced by

Richard Little

'What do you make of it, Jeeves?' I said.

'I confess I am a little doubtful, sir. I think Mr Little would havedone better to follow my advice and confine himself to good worksabout the village.'

'You think the thing will be a frost?'

'I could not hazard a conjecture, sir. But my experience has beenthat what pleases the London public is not always so acceptable tothe rural mind. The metropolitan touch sometimes proves a trifletoo exotic for the provinces.'

'I suppose I ought to go down and see the dashed thing?'

'I think Mr Little would be wounded were you not present, sir.'

The Village Hall at Twing is a smallish building, smelling of apples.It was full when I turned up on the evening of the twenty-third, forI had purposely timed myself to arrive not long before the kick-off.I had had experience of one or two of these binges, and didn't wantto run any risk of coming early and finding myself shoved into a seatin one of the front rows where I wouldn't be able to execute a quietsneak into the open air half-way through the proceedings, if theoccasion seemed to demand it. I secured a nice strategic positionnear the door at the back of the hall.

From where I stood I had a good view of the audience. As always on these occasions, the first few rows were occupied by the Nibs -consisting of the Squire, a fairly mauve old sportsman with white whiskers, his family, a platoon of local parsons and perhaps a coupleof dozen of prominent pew-holders. Then came a dense squash ofwhat you might call the lower middle classes. And at the back, whereI was, we came down with a jerk in the social scale, this end of thehall being given up almost entirely to a collection of frankly Tough Eggs, who had rolled up not so much for any love of the drama asbecause there was a free tea after the show. Take it for all in all, a representative gathering of Twing life and thought. The Nibs werewhispering in a pleased manner to each other, the Lower Middleswere sitting up very straight, as if they'd been bleached, and theTough Eggs whiled away the time by cracking nuts and exchanging low rustic wheezes. The girl, Mary Burgess, was at the piano playinga waltz. Beside her stood the curate, Wingham, apparently recovered.The temperature, I should think, was about a hundred and twenty-seven.

Somebody jabbed me heartily in the lower ribs, and I perceived the man Steggles.

'Hallo!' he said. 'I didn't know you were coming down.'

I didn't like the chap, but we Woosters can wear the mask. Ibeamed a bit.

'Oh, yes,' I said. 'Bingo wanted me to roll up and see his show.'

'I hear he's giving us something pretty ambitious,' said the manSteggles. 'Big effects and all that sort of thing.'

'I believe so.'

'Of course, it means a lot to him, doesn't it? He's told you aboutthe girl, of course?'

'Yes. And I hear you're laying seven to one against him,' I said,eyeing the blighter a trifle austerely.

He didn't even quiver.

'Just a little flutter to relieve the monotony of country life,' hesaid. 'But you've got the facts a bit wrong. It's down in the villagethat they're laying seven to one. I can do you better than that, if youfeel in a speculative mood. How about a tenner at a hundred toeight?'

'Good Lord! Are you giving that?'

'Yes. Somehow,' said Steggles meditatively, 'I have a sort of feeling, a kind of premonition that something's going to go wrongtonight. You know what Little is. A bungler, if ever there was one. Something tells me that this show of his is going to be a frost. And if it is, of course, I should think it would prejudice the girl against him pretty badly. His standing always was rather shaky.'

'Are you going to try and smash up the show?' I said sternly.

'Me!' said Steggles. 'Why, what could I do? Half a minute, I wantto go and speak to a man.'

He buzzed off, leaving me distinctly disturbed. I could see fromthe fellow's eye that he was meditating some of his customary roughstuff, and I thought Bingo ought to be warned. But there wasn'ttime and I couldn't get at him. Almost immediately after Steggleshad left me the curtain went up.

Except as a prompter, Bingo wasn't much in evidence in the earlypart of the performance. The thing at the outset was merely one ofthose weird dramas which you dig out of books published aroundChristmas time and entitled*Twelve Little Plays for the Tots,* or something like that. The kids drooled on in the usual manner, the booming voice of Bingo ringing out from time to time behind the scenes when the fatheads forgot their lines; and the audience was settling down into the sort of torpor usual on these occasions, when the first of Bingo's interpolated bits occurred. It was that number which What's-her-name sings in that revue at the Palace - you wouldrecognize the tune if I hummed it, but I can never get hold of thedashed thing. It always got three encores at the Palace, and it wentwell now, even with a squeaky-voiced child jumping on and off thekey like a chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag. Even theTough Eggs liked it. At the end of the second refrain the entirehouse was shouting for an encore, and the kid with the voice like aslate-pencil took a deep breath and started to let it go once more. At this point all the lights went out.

I don't know when I've had anything so sudden and devastatinghappen to me before. They didn't flicker. They just went out. Thehall was in complete darkness.

Well, of course, that sort of broke the spell, as you might put it.People started to shout directions, and the Tough Eggs stampedtheir feet and settled down for a pleasant time. And, of course,young Bingo had to make an ass of himself. His voice suddenly shotat us out of the darkness.

'Ladies and gentlemen, something has gone wrong with thelights -'

The Tough Eggs were tickled by this bit of information straightfrom the stable. They took it up as a sort of battle-cry. Then, after about five minutes, the lights went up again, and the show wasresumed.

It took ten minutes after that to get the audience back into its stateof coma, but eventually they began to settle down, and everything wasgoing nicely when a small boy with a face like a turbot edged out infront of the curtain, which had been lowered after a pretty painfulscene about a wishing-ring or a fairy's curse or somediing of that sort, and started to sing that song of George Thingummy's out ofCuddle Up!You know the one I mean. 'Always Listen to Mother,Girls!' it's called, and he gets the audience to join in and sing therefrain. Quite a ripeish ballad, and one which I myself have frequently sung in my badi with not a little vim; but by no means - as anyone but a perfect sapheaded prune like young Bingo would have known - by no means the sort of thing for a children's Christmasentertainment in the old village hall. Right from the start of the firstrefrain the bulk of the audience had begun to stiffen in their seatsand fan themselves, and the Burgess girl at the piano was accompanying in a stunned, mechanical sort of way, while the curate at herside averted his gaze in a pained manner. The Tough Eggs, however,were all for it.

At the end of the second refrain the kid stopped and began tosidle towards the wings. Upon which the following brief duologuetook place:

YOUNG BINGO(Voice heard, off, ringing against the rafters):'Go on!'

THE KID(coyly):'I don't like to.'

YOUNG BINGO(still louder):'Go on, you little blighter, or I'll slayyou!'

I suppose the kid thought it over swiftly and realized that Bingo,being in a position to get at him, had better be conciliated, whatever the harvest might be; for he shuffled down to the front and, havingshut his eyes and giggled hysterically, said: 'Ladies and gentlemen,I will now call upon Squire Tressidder to oblige by singing therefrain!'

You know, with the most charitable feelings towards him, thereare moments when you can't help thinking that young Bingo ought to be in some sort of a home. I suppose, poor fish, he had picturedthis as the big punch of the evening. He had imagined, I take it,that the Squire would spring jovially to his feet, rip the song off his chest, and all would be gaiety and mirth. Well, what happened was simply that old Tressidder - and, mark you, I'm not blaming him -just sat where he was, swelling and turning a brighter purple everysecond. The lower middle classes remained in frozen silence, waitingfor the roof to fall. The only section of the audience'that reallyseemed to enjoy the idea was the Tough Eggs, who yelled with enthusiasm. It was jam for the Tough Eggs.

And then the lights went out again.

When they went up, some minutes later, they disclosed the Squiremarching stiffly out at the head of his

family, fed up to the eyebrows;the Burgess girl at the piano with a pale, set look; and the curategazing at her with something in his expression that seemed to suggestthat, although all this was no doubt deplorable, he had spotted thesilver lining.

The show went on once more. There were great chunks of Plays-for-the-Tots dialogue, and then the girl at the piano struck up the prelude to that Orange-Girl number that's the big hit of the Palacerevue. I took it that this was to be Bingo's smashing act one finale.The entire company was on the stage, and a clutching hand had appeared round the edge of the curtain, ready to pull at the right moment. It looked like the finale all right. It wasn't long before I realized that it was something more. It was the finish.

I take it you know that Orange number at the Palace? It goes:

Oh, won't you something something oranges,

My something oranges,

My something oranges;

Oh, won't you something something something I forget,

Something something something tumty tumty yet:Oh-

or words to that effect. It's a dashed clever lyric, and the tune'sgood, too; but the thing that made the number was the businesswhere the girls take oranges out of their baskets, you know, and tossthem lightly to the audience. I don't know if you've ever noticed it,but it always seems to tickle an audience to bits when they get thingsthrown at them from the stage. Every time I've been to the Palacethe customers have simply gone wild over this number.

But at the Palace, of course, the oranges are made of yellow wool,and the girls don't so much chuck them as drop them limply intothe first and second rows. I began to gather that the business wasgoing to be treated rather differently tonight when a dashed greatchunk of pips and mildew sailed past my ear and burst on the wallbehind me. Another landed with a squelch on the neck of one of the Nibs in the third row. And then a third took me right on the tipof the nose, and I kind of lost interest in the proceedings for a while.

When I had scrubbed my face and got my eye to stop wateringfor a moment, I saw that the evening's entertainment had begun toresemble one of Belfast's livelier nights. The air was thick withshrieks and fruit. The kids on the stage, with Bingo buzzing distractedly to and fro in their midst, were having the time of their lives. Isuppose they realized that this couldn't go on for ever, and weremaking the most of their chances. The Tough Eggs had begun to pick up all the oranges that hadn't burst and were shooting them back, so that the audience got it both coming and going. In fact,take it all round, there was a certain amount of confusion; and, justas things had begun really to hot up, out went the lights again.

It seemed to me about my time for leaving, so I slid for the door.I was hardly outside when the audience began to stream out. Theysurged about me in twos and threes, and I've never seen a publicbody so dashed unanimous on any point. To a man - and to a woman - they were cursing poor old Bingo; and there was a largeand rapidly growing school of thought which held that the best thingto do would be to

waylay him as he emerged and splash him aboutin the village pond a bit.

There were such a dickens of a lot of these enthusiasts and theylooked so jolly determined that it seemed to me that the only matey thing to do was to go behind and warn young Bingo to turn his coat-collar up and breeze off snakily by some side exit. I went behind,and found him sitting on a box in the wings, perspiring pretty freelyand looking more or less like the spot marked with a cross wherethe accident happened. His hair was standing up and his ears were hanging down, and one harsh word would undoubtedly have madehim burst into tears.

'Bertie,' he said hollowly, as he saw me, 'it was that blighterSteggles! I caught one of the kids before he could get away and gotit all out of him. Steggles substituted real oranges for the balls ofwool which with infinite sweat and at a cost of nearly a quid I hadspecially prepared. Well, I will now proceed to tear him limb fromlimb. It'll be something to do.'

I hated to spoil his day-dreams, but it had to be.

'Good heavens, man,' I said, 'you haven't time for frivolous amusements now. You've got to get out. And quick!'

'Bertie,' said Bingo in a dull voice, 'she was here just now. Shesaid it was all my fault and that she would never speak to me again.She said she had always suspected me of being a heartless practicaljoker, and now she knew. She said - Oh, well, she ticked me offproperly.'

'That's the least of your troubles,' I said. It seemed impossible torouse the poor zib to a sense of his position. 'Do you realize that about two hundred of Twing's heftiest are waiting for you outsideto chuck you into the pond?'

'No!'

'Absolutely!'

For a moment the poor chap seemed crushed. But only for amoment. There has always been something of the good old Englishbulldog breed about Bingo. A strange, sweet smile flickered for aninstant over his face.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I can sneak out through the cellar andclimb over the wall at the back. They can't intimidate*me*\'

It couldn't have been more than a week later when Jeeves, after hehad brought me my tea, gently steered me away from the sportingpage of the*Morning Post* and directed my attention to an announce ment in the engagements and marriages column.

It was a brief statement that a marriage had been arranged andwould shortly take place between the Hon. and Rev. HubertWingham, third son of the Right Hon. the Earl of Sturridge, and Mary, only daughter of the late Matthew Burgess, of Weatherly Court, Hants.

'Of course,' I said, after I had given it the east-to-west, 'I expected this, Jeeves.'

'Yes, sir.'

'She would never forgive him what happened that night.'

'No, sir.'

'Well,' I said, as I took a sip of the fragrant and steaming, 'I don'tsuppose it will take old Bingo long to get over it. It's about thehundred and eleventh time this sort of thing has happened to him.You're the man I'm sorry for.'

'Me, sir?'

'Well, dash it all, you can't have forgotten what a deuce of a lotof trouble you took to bring the thing off for Bingo. It's too bad thatall your work should have been wasted.'

'Not entirely wasted, sir.'

'Eh?'

'It is true that my efforts to bring about the match between MrLittle and the young lady were not successful, but I still look backupon the matter with a certain satisfaction.'"

'Because you did your best, you mean?'

'Not entirely, sir, though of course that thought also gives mepleasure. I was alluding more particularly to the fact that I foundthe affair financially remunerative.'

'Financially remunerative? What do you mean?'

'When I learned that Mr Steggles had interested himself in thecontest, sir, I went shares with my friend Brookfield and bought thebook which had been made on the issue by the landlord of the Cowand Horses. It has proved a highly profitable investment. Yourbreakfast will be ready almost immediately, sir. Kidneys on toast andmushrooms. I will bring it when you ring.'

16

The Delayed Exit of Claude andEustace

The feeling I had when Aunt Agatha trapped me in my lair that morning and spilled the bad news was that my luck had broken atlast. As a rule, you see, I'm not lugged into Family Rows. On theoccasions when Aunt is calling to Aunt like mastodons bellowingacross primeval swamps and Uncle James's letter about CousinMabel's peculiar behaviour is being shot round the family circle('Please read this carefully and send it on to Jane'), the clan has atendency to ignore me. It's one of the advantages I get from beinga bachelor - and, according to my nearest and dearest, practically ahalf-witted bachelor at that. 'It's no good trying to get Bertie to takethe slightest interest' is more or less the slogan, and I'm bound tosay I'm all for it. A quiet life is what I like. And that's why I feltthat the Curse had come upon me, so to speak, when Aunt Agathasailed into my sitting-room while I was having a placid cigarette andstarted to tell me about Claude and Eustace.

'Thank goodness,' said Aunt Agatha, 'arrangements have at lastbeen made about Eustace and Claude.'

'Arrangements?' I said, not having the foggiest.

'They sail on Friday for South Africa. Mr Van Alstyne, a friendof poor Emily's, has given them berths in his firm at Johannesburg,and we are hoping that they will settle down there and do well.'

I didn't get the thing at all.

'Friday? The day after tomorrow, do you mean?'

'Yes.'

'For South Africa?'

'Yes. They leave on the*Edinburgh Castle'*

'But what's the idea? I mean, aren't they in the middle of theirterm at Oxford?'

Aunt Agatha looked at me coldly.

'Do you positively mean to tell me, Bertie, that you take so littleinterest in the affairs of your nearest relatives that you are not aware that Claude and Eustace were expelled from Oxford over a fortnight ago?'

'No, really?'

'You are hopeless, Bertie. I should have thought that even you -'

'Why were they sent down?'

'They poured lemonade on the Junior Dean of their college ...I see nothing amusing in the outrage, Bertie.'

'No, no, rather not,' I said hurriedly. 'I wasn't laughing. Choking.Got something stuck in my throat, you know.'

'Poor Emily,' went on Aunt Agatha, 'being one of those dotingmothers who are the ruin of their children, wished to keep the boysin London. She suggested that they might cram for the Army. ButI was firm. The Colonies are the only place for wild youths likeEustace and Claude. So they sail on Friday. They have been stayingfor the last two weeks with your Uncle Clive in Worcestershire.They will spend tomorrow night in London and catch the boat-train on Friday morning.'

'Bit risky, isn't it? I mean, aren't they apt to cut loose a bittomorrow night if they're left all alone in London?'

'They will not be left alone. They will be in your charge.'

'Mine!'

'Yes. I wish you to put them up in your flat for the night, and seethat they do not miss the train in the morning.'

'Oh, I say, no!'

'Bertie!'

'Well, I mean, quite jolly coves both of them, but I don't know.They're rather nuts, you know... Always glad to see them, ofcourse, but when it comes to putting them up for the night -'

'Bertie, if you are so sunk in callous self-indulgence that youcannot even put yourself to this trifling inconvenience for the sakeof-'

'Oh, all right,' I said. 'All right.'

It was no good arguing, of course. Aunt Agatha always makes mefeel as if I had gelatine where my spine ought to be. She's one ofthose forceful females. I should think Queen Elizabeth I must have been something like her. When she holds me with her glittering eye and says, 'Jump to it, my lad', or words to that effect, I make it so without further discussion.

When she had gone, I rang for Jeeves to break the news to him.

'Oh, Jeeves,' I said, 'Mr Claude and Mr Eustace will be stayinghere tomorrow night.'

'Very good, sir.'

'I'm glad you think so. To me the outlook seems black and scaly. You know what those two lads are!'

'Very high-spirited young gentlemen, sir.'

'Blisters, Jeeves. Undeniable blisters. It's a bit thick!'

'Would there by anything further, sir?'

At that, I'm bound to say, I drew myself up a trifle haughtily. We Woosters freeze like the dickens when we seek sympathy and meetwith cold reserve. I knew what was up, of course. For the last dayor so there had been a certain amount of coolness in the home overa pair of jazzy spats which I had dug up while exploring in theBurlington Arcade. Some dashed brainy cove, probably the chapwho invented those coloured cigarette-cases, had recently had the rather topping idea of putting out a line of spats on the same system.I mean to say, instead of the ordinary grey and white, you can nowget them in your regimental or school colours. And, believe me, it would have taken a chappie of stronger fibre than I am to resist thepair of Old Etonian spats which had smiled up at me from insidethe window. I was inside the shop, opening negotiations, before ithad even occurred to me that Jeeves might not approve. And I must say he had taken the thing a bit hardly. The fact of the matter is,Jeeves, though in many ways the best valet in London, is too conservative. Hide-bound, if you know what I mean, and an enemy toProgress.

'Nothing further, Jeeves,' I said, with quiet dignity.

'Very good, sir.'

He gave one frosty look at the spats and biffed off. Dash him!

Anything merrier and brighter than the Twins, when they curvettedinto the old flat while I was dressing for dinner the next night, Ihave never struck in my whole puff. I'm only about half a dozen years older than Claude and Eustace, but in some rummy manner they always make me feel as if I were well on in the grandfatherclass and just waiting for the end. Almost before I realized they werein the place, they had collared the best chairs, pinched a couple of my special cigarettes, poured themselves out a whisky-and-sodaapiece, and started to prattle with the gaiety and abandon of twobirds who had achieved their life's ambition instead of having comea most frightful purler and being under sentence of exile.

'Hallo, Bertie, old thing,' said Claude. 'Jolly decent of you to putus up.'

'Oh, no,' I said. 'Only wish you were staying a good long time.'

'Hear that, Eustace? He wishes we were staying a good long time.'

'I expect it will seem a good long time,' said Eustace, philosophically.

'You heard about the binge, Bertie? Our little bit of trouble, Imean?'

'Oh, yes. Aunt Agatha was telling me.'

'We leave our country for our country's good,' said Eustace.

'And let there be no moaning at the bar,' said Claude, 'when Iput out to sea. What did Aunt Agatha tell you?'

'She said you poured lemonade on the Junior Dean.'

'I wish the deuce,' said Claude, annoyed, 'that people would getthese things right. It wasn't the Junior Dean. It was the SeniorTutor.'

'And it wasn't lemonade,' said Eustace. 'It was soda-water. Thedear old thing happened to be standing just under our window whileI was leaning out with a siphon in my hand. He looked up, and -well, it would have been chucking away the opportunity of a lifetime if I hadn't let him have it in the eyeball.'

'Simply chucking it away,' agreed Claude.

'Might never have occurred again,' said Eustace.

'Hundred to one against it,' said Claude.

'Now, what,' said Eustace, 'do you propose to do, Bertie, in theway of entertaining the handsome guests tonight?'

'My idea was to have a bit of dinner in the flat,' I said. 'Jeeves isgetting it ready now.'

'And afterwards?'

'Well, I thought we might chat of this and that, and then it struckme that you would probably like to turn in early, as your train goesabout ten or something, doesn't it?'

The twins looked at each other in a pitying sort of way.

'Bertie,' said Eustace, 'you've got the programme nearly right, butnot quite. I envisage the evening's events thus: We will toddle alongto Giro's after dinner. It's an extension night, isn't it? Well, that willsee us through till about two-thirty or three.'

'After which, no doubt,' said Claude, 'the Lord will provide.'

'But I thought you would want to get a good night's rest.'

'Good night's rest!' said Eustace. 'My dear old chap, you don'tfor a moment imagine that we are dreaming of going to*bed* tonight,do you?'

I suppose the fact of the matter is, I'm not the man I was. I mean,those all-night vigils don't seem to fascinate me as they used to afew years ago. I can remember the time, when I was up at Oxford,when a Covent Garden ball till six in the morning, with breakfastat the Hammams and probably a free fight with a few selectedcostermongers to follow, seemed to me what the doctor ordered.But nowadays two o'clock is about my limit; and by two o'clock thetwins were just settling down and beginning to go nicely.

As far as I can remember, we went on from Giro's to play chemmywith some fellows I don't recall having met before, and it must havebeen about nine in the morning when we fetched up again at theflat. By which time, I'm bound to admit, as far as I was concernedthe first careless freshness was beginning to wear off a bit. In fact,I'd just got enough strength to say goodbye to the twins, wish them a pleasant voyage and a happy and successful career in South Africa,and stagger into bed. The last I remember was hearing the blighterschanting like larks under the cold shower, breaking off from time to time to shout to Jeeves to rush along the eggs and bacon.

It must have been about one in the afternoon when I woke. I wasfeeling more or less like something the Pure Food Committee hadrejected, but there was one bright thought which cheered me up,and that was that about now the twins would be leaning on the railof the liner, taking their last glimpse of the dear old homeland.Which made it all the more of a shock when the door opened and Claude walked in.

'Hallo, Bertie!' said Claude. 'Had a nice refreshing sleep? Now,what about a good old bite of lunch?'

I'd been having so many distorted nightmares since I had droppedoff to sleep that for half a minute I thought this was simply onemore of them, and the worst of the lot. It was only when Claude satdown on my feet that I got on to the fact that this was stern reality.

'Great Scott! What on earth are you doing here?' I gurgled.

Claude looked at me reproachfully.

'Hardly the tone I like to hear in a host, Bertie,' he said reprovingly. 'Why, it was only last night that you were saying you wishedI was stopping a good long time. Your dream has come true. I am.'

'But why aren't you on your way to South Africa?'

'Now that,' said Claude, 'is a point I rather thought you wouldwant to have explained. It's like this, old

man. You remember thatgirl you introduced me to at Giro's last night?'

'Which girl?'

'There was only one,' said Claude coldly. 'Only one that counted,that is to say. Her name was Marion Wardour. I danced with her agood deal, if you remember.'

I began to recollect in a hazy sort of way. Marion Wardour hasbeen a pal of mine for some time. A very good sort. She's playing in that show at the Apollo at the moment. I remembered now thatshe had been at Giro's with a party the night before, and the twinshad insisted on being introduced.

'We are soul-mates, Bertie,' said Claude. 'I found it out quiteearly in thepm, and the more thought I've given to the matter themore convinced I've become. It happens like that now and then, youknow. Two hearts that beat as one, I mean, and all that sort of thing.So the long and the short of it is that I gave old Eustace the slip atWaterloo and slid back here. The idea of going to South Africa andleaving a girl like that in England doesn't appeal to me a bit. I'mfor all thinking imperially and giving the Colonies a leg-up and allthat sort of thing; but it can't be done. After all,' said Claudereasonably, 'South Africa has got along all right without me up to now, so why shouldn't it stick it?'

'But what about Van Alstyne, or whatever his name is? He'll beexpecting you to turn up.'

'Oh, he'll have Eustace. That'll satisfy him. Very sound fellow,Eustace. Probably end up by being a magnate of some kind. I shallwatch his future progress with considerable interest. And now youmust excuse me for a moment, Bertie. I want to go and hunt upJeeves and get him to mix me one of those pick-me-ups of his. Forsome reason which I can't explain, I've got a slight headache this morning.'

And, believe me or believe me not, the door had hardly closedbehind him when in blew Eustace with a shining morning face thatmade me ill to look at.

'Oh, my aunt!' I said.

Eustace started to giggle pretty freely.

'Smooth work, Bertie, smooth work!' he said. 'I'm sorry for poorold Claude, but there was no alternative. I eluded his vigilance atWaterloo and snaked off in a taxi. I suppose the poor old ass is wondering where the deuce I've got to. But it couldn't be helped.If you really seriously expected me to go slogging off to South Africa,you shouldn't have introduced me to Miss Wardour last night. Iwant to tell you all about that, Bertie. I'm not a man,' said Eustace,sitting down on the bed, 'who falls in love with every girl he sees. Isuppose "strong, silent", would be the best description you couldfind for me. But when I do meet my affinity I don't waste time. I -'

'Oh, heaven! Are you in love with Marion Wardour, too?'

'Too? What do you mean, "too"?'

I was going to tell him about Claude, when the blighter came inin person, looking like a giant refreshed. There's no doubt thatJeeves's pick-me-ups will produce immediate results in anythingshort of an Egyptian mummy. It's something he puts in them - theWorcester sauce or something. Claude had revived like a wateredflower, but he nearly had a relapse when he saw his bally brothergoggling at him over the bed-rail.

'What on earth are you doing here?' he said.

'What on earth are*you* doing here?' said Eustace.

'Have you come back to inflict your beastly society upon MissWardour?'

'Is that why you've come back?'

They thrashed the subject out a bit further.

'Well,' said Claude at last. 'I suppose it can't be helped. If you'rehere, you're here. May the best man win!'

'Yes, but dash it all!' I managed to put in at this point. 'What'sthe idea? Where do you think you're going to stay if you stick on inLondon?'

'Why, here,' said Eustace, surprised.

'Where else?' said Claude, raising his eyebrows.

'You won't object to putting us up, Bertie?' said Eustace.

'Not a sportsman like you,' said Claude.

'But, you silly asses, suppose Aunt Agatha finds out that I'mhiding you when you ought to be in South Africa? Where do I getoff?'

'Where*does* he get off?' Claude asked Eustace.

'Oh, I expect he'll manage somehow,' said Eustace to Claude.

'Of course,' said Claude, quite cheered up.* *He'll* manage.'

'Rather!' said Eustace. 'A resourceful chap like Bertie! Of coursehe will.'

'And now,' said Claude, shelving the subject, 'what about thatbite of lunch we were discussing a moment ago, Bertie? That stuffgood old Jeeves slipped into me just now has given me what youmight call an appetite. Something in the nature of six chops and abatter pudding would about meet the case, I think.'

I suppose every chappie in the world has black periods in his lifeto which he can't look back without the smouldering eye and thesilent shudder. Some coves, if you can judge by the novels you readnowadays, have them practically all the time; but, what with enjoyinga sizeable private income and a topping digestion, I'm bound to sayit isn't very often I find my own existence getting a flat tyre. That'swhy this particular epoch is one that I don't think about moreoften than I can help. For the days that followed the unexpectedresurrection of the blighted twins were so absolutely foul that theold nerves began to stick out of my body a foot long and curling atthe ends. All of a twitter, believe me. I imagine the fact of the matter is that we Woosters are so frightfully honest and open and all that,that it gives us the pip to have to deceive.

All was quiet along the Potomac for about twenty-four hours, andthen Aunt Agatha trickled in to have a chat. Twenty minutes earlierand she would have found the twins gaily shoving themselves outsidea couple

of rashers and an egg. She sank into a chair, and I could see that she was not in her usual sunny spirits.

'Bertie,' she said, 'I am uneasy.'

So was I. I didn't know how long she intended to stop, or whenthe twins were coming back.

'I wonder,' she said, 'if I took too harsh a view towards Claude and Eustace.'

'You couldn't.'

'What do you mean?'

'I - er - mean it would be so unlike you to be harsh to anybody,Aunt Agatha.' And not bad, either. I mean, quick - like that -without thinking. It pleased the old relative, and she looked at mewith slightly less loathing than she usually does.

'It is nice of you to say that, Bertie, but what I was thinking was,are they*safer*

'Are they*what?*

It seemed such a rummy adjective to apply to the twins, they beingabout as innocuous as a couple of sprightly young tarantulas.

'Do you think all is well with them?'

'How do you mean?'

Aunt Agatha eyed me almost wistfully.

'Has it ever occurred to you, Bertie,' she said, 'that your UncleGeorge may be psychic?'

She seemed to me to be changing the subject.'Psychic?'

'Do you think it is possible that he could*see* things not visible tothe normal eye?'

I thought it dashed possible, if not probable. I don't know if you'veever met my Uncle George. He's a festive old egg who wandersfrom club to club continually having a couple with other festive oldeggs. When he heaves in sight, waiters brace themselves up and the wine-steward toys with his corkscrew. It was my Uncle George whodiscovered that alcohol was a food well in advance of modern medical thought.

'Your Uncle George was dining with me last night, and he wasquite shaken. He declares that, while on his way from the DevonshireClub to Boodle's he suddenly saw the phantasm of Eustace.'

'The what of Eustace?'

'The phantasm. The wraith. It was so clear that he thought foran instant that it was Eustace himself. The figure vanished round acorner, and when Uncle George got there nothing was to be seen.It is all very queer and disturbing. It had a marked effect on poorGeorge. All through dinner he touched nothing but barley-water,and his manner was quite disturbed. You do think those poor,dear boys are safe, Bertie? They have not met with some horribleaccident?'

It made my mouth water to think of it, but I said no, I didn'tthink they had met with any horrible accident. I thought Eustacewasa horrible accident, and Claude about the same, but I didn't sayso. And presently she biffed off, still worried.

When the twins came in, I put it squarely to the blighters. Jollyas it was to give Uncle George shocks, they must not wander atlarge about the metrop.

'But, my dear old soul,' said Claude. 'Be reasonable. We can'thave our movements hampered.'

'Out of the question,' said Eustace.

'The whole essence of the thing, if you understand me,' saidClaude, 'is that we should be at liberty to flit hither and thither.'

'Exactly,' said Eustace. 'Now hither, now thither.'

'But, damn it -'

'Bertie!' said Eustace reprovingly. 'Not before the boy!'

'Of course, in a way I see his point,' said Claude. 'I suppose thesolution of the problem would be to buy a couple of disguises.'

'My dear old chap!' said Eustace, looking at him with admiration.'The brightest idea on record. Not your own, surely?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, it was Bertie who put it into my head.'

'Me!'

'You were telling me the other day about old Bingo Little and thebeard he bought when he didn't want his uncle to recognize him.'

'If you think I'm going to have you two excrescences popping inand out of my flat in beards -'

'Something in that,' agreed Eustace. 'We'll make it whiskers,then.'

'And false noses,' said Claude.

'And, as you say, false noses. Right-o, then, Bertie, old chap,that's a load off your mind. We don't want to be any trouble to you while we're paying you this little visit.'

And, when I went buzzing round to Jeeves for consolation, all hewould say was something about Young Blood. No sympathy.

'Very good, Jeeves,' I said. 'I shall go for a walk in the park. Kindly put me out the Old Etonion spats.'

'Very good, sir.'

It must have been a couple of days after that that Marion Wardourrolled in at about the hour of tea. She looked warily round the roombefore sitting down.

'Your cousins not at home, Bertie?' she said.

'No, thank goodness!'

'Then I'll tell you where they are. They're in my sitting-room,glaring at each other from opposite corners, waiting for me to comein. Bertie, this has got to stop.'

'You're seeing a good deal of them, are you?'

Jeeves came in with the tea, but the poor girl was so worked upthat she didn't wait for him to pop off before going on with hercomplaint. She had an absolutely hunted air, poor thing.

'I can't move a step without tripping over one or both of them,'she said. 'Generally both. They've taken to calling together, andthey just settle down grimly and try to sit each other out. It's wearingme to a shadow.'

'I know,' I said sympathetically. 'I know.'

'Well, what's to be done?'

'It beats me. Couldn't you tell your maid to say you are not athome?'

She shuddered slightly.

'I tried that once. They camped on the stairs, and I couldn't getout all the afternoon. And I had a lot of particularly importantengagements. I wish you would persuade them to go to South Africa,where they seem to be wanted.'

'You must have made the dickens of an impression on them.'

'I should say I have. They've started giving me presents now. Atleast Claude has. He insisted on my accepting this cigarette-case last night. Came round to the theatre and wouldn't go away till I took it. It's not a.bad one, I must say.'

It wasn't. It was a distinctly fruity concern in gold with a diamondstuck in the middle. And the rummy thing was that I had a notionI'd seen something very like it before somewhere. How the deuceClaude had been able to dig up the cash to buy a thing like thatwas more than I could imagine.

Next day was a Wednesday, and as the object of their devotionhad a*matinee,* the twins were, so to speak, off duty. Claude hadgone with his whiskers on to Hurst Park, and Eustace and I werein the flat, talking. At least, he was talking and I was wishing hewould go.

'The love of a good woman, Bertie,' he was saying, 'must be awonderful thing. Sometimes ... Good Lord! What's that?'

The front door had opened, and from out in the hall there came the sound of Aunt Agatha's voice asking if I was in. Aunt Agathahas one of those high, penetrating voices, but this was the first timeI'd ever been

thankful for it. There was just about two seconds to clear the way for her, but it was long enough for Eustace to diveunder the sofa. His last shoe had just disappeared when she camein.

She had a worried look. It seemed to me about this time thateverybody had.

'Bertie,' she said, 'what are your immediate plans?'

'How do you mean? I'm dining tonight with -'

'No, no, I don't mean tonight. Are you busy for the next few days?But, of course you are not,' she went on, not waiting for me toanswer. 'You never have anything to do. Your whole life is spent inidle - but we can go into that later. What I came for this afternoonwas to tell you that I wish you to go with your poor Uncle Georgeto Harrogate for a few weeks. The sooner you can start, the better.'

This appeared to me to approximate so closely to the frozen limitthat I uttered a yelp of protest. Uncle George is all right, but hewon't do. I was trying to say as much when she waved me down.

'If you are not entirely heartless, Bertie, you will do as I ask you.Your poor Uncle George has had a severe shock.'

'What, another?'

'He feels that only complete rest and careful medical attendance can restore his nervous system to its normal poise. It seems that inthe past he has derived benefit from taking the waters at Harrogate,and he wishes to go there now. We do not think he ought to bealone, so I wish you to accompany him.'

'But, I say!'

'Bertie!'

There was a lull in the conversation.

'What shock has he had?' I asked.

'Between ourselves,' said Aunt Agatha, lowering her voice in an impressive manner, 'I incline to think that the whole affair was the outcome of an over-excited imagination. You are one of the family, Bertie, and I can speak freely to you. You know as well as I do thatyour poor Uncle George has for many years *not* been a - he has -er - developed a bit of a habit - how shall I put it?'

'Shifting it a bit?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Mopping up the stuff to some extent?'

'I dislike your way of putting it exceedingly, but I must confess that he has not been, perhaps, as temperate as he should. He ishighly-strung, and ... Well, the fact is, that he has had a shock.'

'Yes, but what?'

'That is what it is so hard to induce him to explain with any precision. With all his good points, your poor

Uncle George is aptto become incoherent when strongly moved. As far as I could gather,he appears to have been the victim of a burglary.'

'Burglary!'

'He says that a strange man with whiskers and a peculiar noseentered his rooms in Jermyn Street during his absence and stolesome of his property. He says that he came back and found the manin his sitting-room. He immediately rushed out of the room and disappeared.'

'Uncle George?'

'No, the man. And, according to your Uncle George, he hadstolen a valuable cigarette-case. But, as I say, I am inclined to think that the whole thing was imagination. He has not been himself sincethe day when he fancied that he saw Eustace in the street. So Ishould like you, Bertie, to be prepared to start for Harrogate withhim not later than Saturday.'

She popped off, and Eustace crawled out from under the sofa.The blighter was strongly moved. So was I, for the matter of that. The idea of several weeks with Uncle George at Harrogate seemedto make everything go black.

'So that's where he got that cigarette-case, dash him!' said Eustacebitterly. 'Of all the dirty tricks! Robbing his own flesh and blood!That fellow ought to be in chokey.'

'He ought to be in South Africa,' I said. 'And so ought you.'

And with an eloquence which rather surprised me, I hauled upmy slacks for perhaps ten minutes on the subject of his duty to his family and what not. I appealed to his sense of decency. I boostedSouth Africa with vim. I said everything I could think of, much ofit twice over. But all the blighter did was to babble about his dashedbrother's baseness in putting one over on him in the matter of the cigarette-case. He seemed to think that Claude, by slinging in thehandsome gift, had got right ahead of him: and there was a painfulscene when the latter came back from Hurst Park. I could hearthem talking half the night, long after I had tottered off to bed. Idon't know when I've met fellows who could do with less sleep thanthose two.

After this, things became a bit strained at the flat owing to Claudeand Eustace not being on speaking terms. I'm all for a certainchumminess in the home, and it was wearing to have to live with two fellows who wouldn't admit that the other one was on the mapat all.

One felt the thing couldn't go on like that for long, and, by Jove,it didn't. But, if anyone had come to me the day before and told me what was going to happen, I should simply have smiled wanly. I mean, I'd got so accustomed to thinking mat nothing short of adynamite explosion could ever dislodge those two nestlers from mymidst that, when Claude sidled up to me on the Friday morningand told me his bit of news, I could hardly believe I was hearingright.

'Bertie,' he said, 'I've been thinking it over.'

'What over?' I said.

'The whole thing. This business of staying in London when Iought to be in South Africa. It isn't fair,' said

Claude warmly. 'Itisn't right. And the long and the short of it is, Bertie, old man, I'mleaving tomorrow.'

I reeled in my tracks.

'You are?' I gasped.

'Yes. If,' said Claude, 'you won't mind sending old Jeeves out tobuy a ticket for me. I'm afraid I'll have to stick you for the passagemoney, old man. You don't mind?'

'Mind!' I said, clutching his hand fervently.

That's all right, then. Oh, I say, you won't say a word to Eustaceabout this, will you?'

'But isn't he going, too?'

Claude shuddered.

'No, thank heaven! The idea of being cooped up on board a shipwith that blighter gives me the pip just to think of it. No, not a word to Eustace. I say, I suppose you can get me a berth all right at such short notice?'

'Rather!' I said. Sooner than let this opportunity slip, I wouldhave bought the bally boat.

'Jeeves,' I said, breezing into the kitchen. 'Go out on first speed to the Union-Castle offices and book a berth on tomorrow's boatfor Mr Claude. He is leaving us, Jeeves.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Mr Claude does not wish any mention of this to be made to Mr Eustace.'

'No, sir. Mr Eustace made the same proviso when he desired meto obtain a berth on tomorrow's boat for himself.'

I gaped at the man.

'Is he going, too?'

'Yes, sir.'

'This is rummy.'

'Yes, sir.'

Had circumstances been other than they were, I would at this juncture have unbent considerably towards Jeeves. Frisked roundhim a bit and whooped to a certain extent, and what not. But thosespats still formed a barrier, and I regret to say that I took theopportunity of rather rubbing it in a bit on the man. I mean, he'd been so dashed aloof and unsympathetic, though perfectly awarethat the young master was in the soup and that it was up to him to rally round, that I couldn't help pointing out how the happy ending had been snaffled without any help from him.

'So that's that, Jeeves,' I said. The episode is concluded. I knewthings would sort themselves out if one

gave them time and didn'tget rattled. Many chaps in my place would have got rattled, Jeeves.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Gone rushing about, I mean, asking people for help and adviceand so forth.'

'Very possibly, sir.'

'But not me, Jeeves.'

'No, sir.'

I left him to brood on it.

Even the thought that I'd got to go to Harrogate with Uncle Georgecouldn't depress me that Saturday when I gazed about the old flat and realized that Claude and Estace weren't in it. They had slunkoff stealthily and separately immediately after breakfast, Eustace tocatch the boat-train at Waterloo, Claude to go round to the garagewhere I kept my car. I didn't want any chance of the two meetingat Waterloo and changing their minds, so I had suggested to Claudethat he might find it pleasanter to drive down to Southampton.

I was lying back on the old settee, gazing peacefully up at the flieson the ceiling and feeling what a wonderful world this was, whenJeeves came in with a letter.

'A messenger-boy has brought this, sir.'

I opened the envelope, and the first thing that fell out was a five-pound note.

'Great Scott!' I said. 'What's all this?'

The letter was scribbled in pencil, and was quite brief;

Dear Bertie,

Will you give enclosed to your man, and tell him I wish I couldmake it more. He has saved my life. This is the first happy day I've had for a week.

Yours,

M.W.

Jeeves was standing holding out the fiver, which had fluttered tothe floor.

'You'd better stick to it,' I said. 'It seems to be for you.'

'Sir?'

'I say that fiver is for you, apparently. Miss Wardour sent it.'

'That was extremely kind of her, sir.'

'What the dickens is she sending you fivers for? She says yousaved her life.'

Jeeves smiled gently.

'She over-estimates my services, sir.'

'But what*were* your services, dash it?'

'It was in the matter of Mr Claude and Mr Eustace, sir. I washoping that she would not refer to the matter, as I did not wish youto think that I had been taking a liberty.'

'What do you mean?'

'I chanced to be in the room while Miss Wardour was complainingwith some warmth of the manner in which Mr Claude and MrEustace were thrusting their society upon her. I felt that in thecircumstances it might be excusable if I suggested a slight ruse toenable her to dispense with their attentions.'

'Good Lord! You don't mean to say you were at the bottom oftheir popping off, after all!'

Silly ass it made me feel. I mean, after rubbing it in to him likethat about having clicked without his assistance.

'It occurred to me that, were Miss Wardour to inform Mr Claudeand Mr Eustace independently that she proposed sailing for South Africa to take up a theatrical engagement, the desired effect mightbe produced. It appears that my anticipations were correct, sir. The young gentlemen ate it, if I may use the expression.'

'Jeeves,' I said - we Woosters may make bloomers, but we arenever too proud to admit it - 'you stand alone!'

'Thank you very much, sir.'

'Oh, but I say!' A ghastly thought had struck me. 'When they get on the boat and find she isn't there, won't they come buzzing back?'

'I anticipated that possibility, sir. At my suggestion, Miss Wardourinformed the young gentlemen that she proposed to travel overlandto Madeira and join the vessel there.'

'And where do they touch after Madeira?'

'Nowhere, sir.'

For a moment I just lay back, letting the idea of the thing soak in. There seemed to me to be only one flaw.

'The only pity is,' I said, 'that on a large boat like that they willbe able to avoid each other. I mean, I should have liked to feel thatClaude was having a good deal of Eustace's society and vice versa.'

'I fancy that that will be so, sir. I secured a two-berth state-room.Mr Claude will occupy one berth, Mr Eustace the other.'

I sighed with pure ecstasy. It seemed a dashed shame that on thisjoyful occasion I should have to go off to Harrogate with my UncleGeorge.

'Have you started packing yet, Jeeves?' I asked.

'Packing, sir?'

'For Harrogate. I've got to go there today with Sir George.'

'Of course, yes, sir. I forgot to mention it. Sir George rang up onthe telephone this morning while you were still asleep, and said thathe had changed his plans. He does not intend to go to Harrogate.'

'Oh, I say, how absolutely topping!'

'I thought you might be pleased, sir.'

'What made him change his plans? Did he say?'

'No, sir. But I gather from his man, Stevens, that he is feelingmuch better and does not now require a rest-cure. I took the liberty of giving Stevens the recipe for that pick-me-up of mine, of whichyou have always approved so much. Stevens tells me that Sir Georgeinformed him this morning that he is feeling a new man.'

Well, there was only one thing to do, and I did it. I'm not sayingit didn't hurt, but there was no alternative.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'those spats.'

'Yes, sir?'

'You really dislike them?'

'Intensely, sir.'

'You don't think time might induce you to change your views?'

'No, sir.'

'All right, then. Very well. Say no more. You may burn them.'

'Thank you very much, sir. I have already done so. Before breakfast this morning. A quiet grey is far more suitable, sir. Thank you,sir.'

17

Bingo and The Little Woman

It must have been a week or so after the departure of Claude and Eustace that I ran into young Bingo Little in the smoking-room ofthe Senior Liberal Club. He was lying back in an armchair with hismouth open and a sort of goofy expression in his eyes, while a grey-bearded cove in the middle distance watched him with so muchdislike that I concluded that Bingo had pinched his favourite seat. That's the worst of being in a strange club - absolutely withoutintending it, you find yourself constantly trampling upon the vestedinterests of the Oldest Inhabitants.

'Hallo, face,' I said.

'Cheerio, ugly,' said young Bingo, and we settled down to have asmall one before lunch.

Once a year the committee of the Drones decides that the oldclub could do with a wash and brush-up, so they shoo us out anddump us down for a few weeks at some other institution. This timewe were roosting at the Senior Liberal, and personally I had foundthe strain pretty fearful. I mean, when you've got used to a clubwhere everything's nice and cheery, and where, if you want to attracta chappie's attention, you heave a piece of bread at him, it kind of damps you to come to a place where the youngest member is abouteighty-seven and it isn't considered good form to talk to anyoneunless you and he were through the Peninsular War together. It was a relief to come across Bingo. We started to talk in hushed voices.

'This club,' I said, 'is the limit.'

'It is the eel's eyebrows,' agreed young Bingo. 'I believe that oldboy over by the window has been dead three days, but I don't like to mention it to anyone.'

'Have you lunched here yet?'

'No. Why?'

'They have waitresses instead of waiters.'

'Good Lord! I thought that went out with the armistice.' Bingomused a moment, straightening his tie absently. 'Er - pretty girls?'he said.

'No.'

He seemed disappointed, but pulled round.

'Well, I've heard that the cooking's the best in London.'

'So they say. Shall we be going in?'

'All right. I expect,' said young Bingo, 'that at the end of the meal-or possibly at the beginning - the waitress will say, "Both together,sir?" Reply the affirmative. I haven't a bean.'

'Hasn't your uncle forgiven you yet?'

'Not yet, confound him!'

I was sorry to hear the row was still on. I resolved to do the poorold thing well at the festive board, and I scanned the menu withsome intentness when the girl rolled up with it.

'How would this do you, Bingo?' I said at length. 'A few plovers'eggs to weigh in with, a cup of soup, a touch of cold salmon, some cold curry, and a splash of gooseberry tart and cream with a bite of cheese to finish?'

I don't know that I had expected the man actually to scream withdelight, though I had picked the items from my knowledge of his pet dishes, but I had expected him to say something. I looked up,and found that his attention was elsewhere. He was gazing at thewaitress with the look of a dog that's just remembered where itsbone was buried.

She was a tallish girl with sort of soft, soulful brown eyes. Nicefigure and all that. Rather decent hands, too. I didn't rememberhaving seen her about before, and I must say she raised the standardof the place quite a bit.

'How about it, laddie?' I said, being all for getting the orderbooked and going on to the serious knife-and-fork work.

'Eh?' said young Bingo absently.

I recited the programme once more.

'Oh, yes, fine!' said Bingo. 'Anything, anything.' The girl pushedoff, and he turned to me with protruding eyes. 'I thought you saidthey weren't pretty, Bertie!' he said reproachfully.

'Oh, my heavens!' I said. 'You surely haven't fallen in love again-and with a girl you've only just seen?'

'There are times, Bertie,' said young Bingo, 'when a look isenough - when, passing through a crowd, we meet somebody's eyeand something seems to whisper -'

At this point the plovers' eggs arrived, and he suspended hisremarks in order to swoop on them with some vigour.

'Jeeves,' I said that night when I got home, 'stand by.'

'Sir?'

'Burnish the old brain and be alert and vigilant. I suspect that MrLittle will be calling round shortly for sympathy and assistance.'

'Is Mr Little in trouble, sir?'

'Well you might call it that. He's in love. For about the fifty-thirdtime. I ask you, Jeeves, as man to man, did you ever see such achap?'

'Mr Little is certainly warm-hearted, sir.'

'Warm-hearted! I should think he has to wear asbestos vests.Well, stand by, Jeeves.'

'Very good, sir.'

And sure enough, it wasn't ten days before in rolled the old ass,bleating for volunteers to step one pace forward and come to theaid of the party.

'Bertie,' he said, 'if you are a pal of mine, now is the time to showit.'

'Proceed, old gargoyle,' I replied. 'You have our ear.'

'You remember giving me lunch at the Senior Liberal some daysago. We were waited on by a -'

'I remember. Tall, lissom, female.'

He shuddered somewhat.

'I wish you wouldn't talk of her like that, dash it all. She's anangel.'

'All right. Carry on.'

'I love her.'

'Right-o! Push along.'

'For goodness' sake don't bustle me. Let me tell you the story inmy own way. I love her, as I was saying, and I want you, Bertie, oldboy, to pop round to my uncle and do a bit of diplomatic work. That allowance of mine must be restored, and dashed quick, too. What'smore, it must be increased.'

'But look here,' I said, being far from keen on the bally business, 'why not wait a while?'

'Wait? What's the good of waiting?'

'Well, you know what generally happens when you fall in love.Something goes wrong with the works and you get left. Much bettertackle your uncle after the whole thing's fixed and settled.'

'It*is* fixed and settled. She accepted me this morning.'

'Good Lord! That's quick work. You haven't known her twoweeks.'

'Not in this life, no,' said young Bingo. 'But she has a sort of ideathat we must have met in some previous existence. She thinks Imust have been a king in Babylon when she was a Christian slave.I can't say I remember it myself, but there may be something in it.'

'Great Scott!' I said. 'Do waitresses really talk like that?'

'How should / know how waitresses talk?'

'Well, you ought to by now. The first time I ever met your unclewas when you hounded me on to ask him if he would rally roundto help you marry that girl Mabel in the Piccadilly bun-shop.'

Bingo started violently. A wild gleam came into his eyes. Andbefore I knew what he was up to he had brought down his handwith a most frightful whack on my summer trousering, causing meto leap like a young ram.

'Here!' I said.

'Sorry,' said Bingo. 'Excited. Carried away. You've given me anidea, Bertie.' He waited till I had finished massaging the limb, andresumed his remarks. 'Can you throw your mind back to thatoccasion, Bertie? Do you remember the frightfully subtle scheme Iworked? Telling him you were What's-her-name, the woman whowrote those books, I mean?'

It wasn't likely I'd forget. The ghastly thing was absolutely seared into my memory.

'That is the line of attack,' said Bingo. 'That is the scheme. RosieM. Banks forward once more.'

'It can't be done, old thing. Sorry, but it's out of the question. Icouldn't go through all that again.'

'Not for me?'

'Not for a dozen more like you.'

'I never thought,' said Bingo sorrowfully, 'to hear those wordsfrom Bertie Wooster!'

'Well, you've heard them now,' I said. 'Paste them in your hat.'

'Bertie, we were at school together.'

'It wasn't my fault.'

'We've been pals for fifteen years.'

'I know. It's going to take me the rest of my life to live it down.'

'Bertie, old man,' said Bingo, drawing up his chair closer and starting to knead my shoulder-blade, 'listen! Be reasonable!'

And of course, dash it, at the end of ten minutes I'd allowed theblighter to talk me round. It's always the way. Anyone can talk meround. If I were in a Trappist monastery, the first thing that would happen would be that some smooth performer would lure me intosome frightful idiocy against my better judgement by means of thedeaf-and-dumb language.

'Well, what do you want me to do?' I said, realizing that it washopeless to struggle.

'Start off by sending the old boy an autographed copy of yourlatest effort with a flattering inscription. That will tickle him todeath. Then you pop round and put it across.'

'What*is* my latest?'

"The Woman who Braved All!said young Bingo. 'I've seen it all over the place. The shop windows and bookstalls are full of nothingbut it. It looks to me from the picture on the jacket the sort of bookany chappie would be proud to have written. Of course, he will wantto discuss it with you.'

'Ah!' I said, cheering up. 'That dishes the scheme, doesn't it? Idon't know what the bally thing is about.'

'You will have to read it, naturally.'

'Read it! No, I say-'

'Bertie, we were at school together.'

'Oh, right-o! Right-o!' I said.

'I knew I could rely on you. You have a heart of gold. Jeeves,'said young Bingo, as the faithful servitor rolled in, 'Mr Wooster hasa heart of gold.'

'Very good, sir,' said Jeeves.

Bar a weekly wrestle with the*Pink 'Un* and an occasional dip intothe form-book I'm not much of a lad for reading, and my sufferingsas I tackled*The Woman* (curse her!)*who Braved All* were pretty fearful. But I managed to get through it, and only just in time, as ithappened, for I'd hardly reached the bit where their lips met in onelong, slow kiss and everything was still but for the gentle sighing ofthe breeze in the laburnum, when a messenger-boy brought a note from old Bittlesham asking me to trickle round to lunch.

I found the old boy in a mood you could only describe as melting.He had a copy of the book on the table beside him and kept turningthe pages in the intervals of dealing with things in aspic and whatnot.

'Mr Wooster,' he said, swallowing a chunk of trout, 'I wish tocongratulate you. I wish to thank you. You go from strength to strength. I have read*All for Love;* and I have read*Only a Factory*Girl;I know *Madcap Myrtle* by heart. But this - this is your bravestand best. It tears the heartstrings.'

'Yes?'

'Indeed yes! I have read it three times since you most kindly sentme the volume - I wish to thank you once more for the charming inscription - and I think I may say that I am a better, sweeter, deeperman. I am full of human charity and kindliness towards my species.'

'No, really?'

'Indeed, indeed I am.'

'Towards the whole species?'

'Towards the whole species.'

'Even young Bingo?' I said, trying him pretty high.

'My nephew? Richard?' He looked a bit thoughtful, but stuck itlike a man and refused to hedge. 'Yes, even towards Richard.Well... that is to say... perhaps ... yes, even towards Richard.'

'That's good, because I wanted to talk about him. He's prettyhard up, you know.'

'In straitened circumstances?'

'Stony. And he could use a bit of the right stuff paid every quarter,if you felt like unbelting.'

He mused a while and got through a slab of cold guinea henbefore replying. He toyed with the book, and it fell open at page two hundred and fifteen. I couldn't remember what was on pagetwo hundred and fifteen, but it must have been something tolerablyzippy, for his expression changed and he gazed up at me with mistyeyes, as if he'd taken a shade too much mustard with his last biteof ham.

'Very well, Mr Wooster,' he said. 'Fresh from a perusal of thisnoble work of yours, I cannot harden my heart. Richard shall havehis allowance.'

'Stout fellow!' I said. Then it occurred to me that the expressionmight strike a chappie who weighed seventeen stone as a bit personal.'Good egg, I mean. That'll take a weight off his mind. He wants to get married, you know.'

'I did not know. And I am not sure that I altogether approve.Who is the lady?'

'Well, as matter of fact, she's a waitress.'

He leaped in his seat.

'You don't say so, Mr Wooster! This is remarkable. This is mostcheering. I had not given the boy credit for such tenacity of purpose.An excellent trait in him which I had not hitherto suspected! Irecollect clearly that, on the occasion when I first had the pleasureof making your acquaintance, nearly eighteen months ago, Richardwas desirous of marrying this same waitress.'

I had to break it to him.

'Well, not absolutely this same waitress. In fact, quite a differentwaitress. Still, a waitress, you know.'

The light of avuncular affection died out of the old boy's eyes.

'H'm!' he said a bit dubiously. 'I had supposed that Richard was displaying the quality of constancy which is so rare in the modernyoung man. I - I must think it over.'

So we left it at that, and I came away and told Bingo the positionof affairs.

'Allowance OK,' I said. 'Uncle's blessing a trifle wobbly.'

'Doesn't he seem to want the wedding bells to ring out?'

'I left him thinking it over. If I were a bookie, I should feeljustified in offering a hundred to eight against.'

'You can't have approached him properly. I might have knownyou would muck it up,' said young Bingo. Which, considering whatI had been through for his sake, struck me as a good bit sharperthan a serpent's tooth.

'It's awkward,' said young Bingo. 'It's infernally awkward. I can'ttell you all the details at the moment, but... yes, it's awkward.'

He helped himself absently to a handful of my cigars and pushedoff.

I didn't see him again for three days. Early in the afternoon ofthe third day he blew in with a flower in his buttonhole and a lookon his face as if someone had hit him behind the ear with a stuffedeel skin.

'Hallo, Bertie.'

'Hallo, old turnip. Where have you been all this while?'

'Oh, here and there! Ripping weather we're having, Bertie.'

'Not bad.'

'I see the Bank Rate is down again.'

'No, really?'

'Disturbing news from Lower Silesia, what?'

'Oh, dashed!'

He pottered about the room for a bit, babbling at intervals. Theboy seemed cuckoo.

'Oh, I say, Bertie!' he said suddenly, dropping a vase which hehad picked off the mantelpiece and was fiddling with. 'I know whatit was I wanted to tell you. I'm married.'

18

All's Well

I stared at him. That flower in his buttonhole ... That dazedlook... Yes, he had all the symptoms: and yet the thing seemedincredible. The fact is, I suppose, I'd seen so many of young Bingo'slove-affairs start off with a whoop and a rattle and poof themselvesout half-way down the straight that I couldn't believe he had actuallybrought it off at last.

'Married!'

'Yes. This morning at a registrar's in Holborn. I've just comefrom the wedding breakfast.'

I sat up in my chair. Alert. The man of affairs. It seemed to methat this thing wanted threshing out in all its aspects.

'Let's get this straight,' I said. 'You're really married?'

'Yes.'

'The same girl you were in love with the day before yesterday?'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, you know what you're like. Tell me, what made you committhis rash act?'

'I wish the deuce you wouldn't talk like that. I married her becauseI love her, dash it. The best little woman,' said young Bingo, 'in theworld.'

'That's all right, and deuced creditable, I'm sure. But have you reflected what your uncle's going to say? The last I saw of him, hewas by no means in a confetti-scattering mood.'

'Bertie,' said Bingo, Til be frank with you. The little womanrather put it up to me, if you know what I mean. I told her how myuncle felt about it, and she said that we must part unless I loved herenough to brave the old boy's wrath and marry her right away. SoI had no alternative. I bought a buttonhole and went to it.'

'And what do you propose to do now?'

'Oh, I've got it all planned out! After you've seen my uncle andbroken the news -'

'What!'

'After you've -'

'You don't mean to say you think you're going to lug*me* into it?'

He looked at me like Lillian Gish coming out of a swoon.

'Is this Bertie Wooster talking?' he said, pained.

'Yes, it jolly well is.'

'Bertie, old man,' said Bingo, patting me gently here and there,'reflect! We were at school -'

'Oh, all right!'

'Good man! I knew I could rely on you. She's waiting down belowin the hall. We'll pick her up and dash round to Pounceby Gardensright away.'

I had only seen the bride before in her waitress kit, and I wasrather expecting that on her wedding day she would have launchedout into something fairly zippy in the way of upholstery. The firstgleam of hope I had felt since the start of this black business came to me when I saw that, instead of being all velvet and scent andflowery hat, she was dressed in dashed good taste. Quiet. Nothingloud. So far as looks went, she might have stepped straight out of Berkeley Square.

'This is my old pal, Bertie Wooster, darling,' said Bingo. 'Wewere at school together, weren't we, Bertie?'

'We were!' I said. 'How do you do? I think we - er - met at lunchthe other day, didn't we?'

'Oh yes! How do you do?'

'My uncle eats out of Bertie's hand,' explained Bingo. 'So he's coming round with us to start things off and kind of pave the way.Hi, taxi!'

We didn't talk much on the journey. Kind of tense feeling. I was glad when the cab stopped at old Bittlesham's wigwam and we allhopped out. I left Bingo and wife in the hall while I went upstairsto the drawing-room, and the butler toddled off to dig out the bigchief.

While I was prowling about the room waiting for him to show up,I suddenly caught sight of the bally *Woman who Braved All* lying onone of the tables. It was open at page two hundred and fifteen, and a passage heavily marked in pencil caught my eye. And directly Iread it I saw that it was all to the mustard and was going to helpme in my business.

This was the passage:

'What can prevail' - Millicent's eyes flashed as she faced thestern old man - 'What can prevail against a pure and all-consuming love? Neither principalities nor powers, my lord, nor all the puny prohibitions of guardians and parents. I love your son, LordMindermere, and nothing can keep us apart. Since time first began this love of ours was fated, and who are you to put yourselfagainst the decrees of Fate?'

The earl looked at her keenly from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

'Humph!' he said.

Before I had time to refresh my memory as to what Millicent'scome-back had been to that remark, the door opened and old Bittle-sham rolled in. All over me, as usual.

'My dear Mr Wooster, this is an unexpected pleasure. Pray take a seat. What can I do for you?'

'Well, the fact is, I'm more or less in the capacity of a jolly oldambassador at the moment. Representing young Bingo, you know.'

His geniality sagged a trifle, I thought, but he didn't heave me out, so I pushed on.

'The way I always look at it,' I said, 'is that it's dashed difficultfor anything to prevail against what you might call a pure and all-consuming love. I mean, can it be done? I doubt it.'

My eyes didn't exactly flash as I faced the stern old man, but Isort of waggled my eyebrows. He puffed a bit and looked doubtful.

'We discussed this matter at our last meeting, Mr Wooster. Andon that occasion -'

'Yes. But there have been developments, as it were, since then.The fact of the matter is,' I said, coming to the point, 'this morning young Bingo went and jumped off the dock.'

'Good heavens!' He jerked himself to his feet with his mouthopen. 'Why? Where? Which dock?'

I saw that he wasn't quite on.

'I was speaking metaphorically,' I explained, 'if that's the word Iwant. I mean he got married.'

'Married!'

'Absolutely hitched up. I hope you aren't ratty about it, what? Young blood, you know. Two loving hearts, and all that.'

He panted in a rather overwrought way.

'I am greatly disturbed by your news. I - I consider that I havebeen - er - defied. Yes, defied.'

'But who are you to pit yourself against the decrees of Fate?' Isaid, taking a look at the prompt book out of the corner of my eye.

'Eh?'

'You see, this love of theirs was fated. Since time began, youknow.'

I'm bound to admit that if he'd said 'Humph!' at this juncture,he would have had me stymied. Luckily it didn't occur to him. Therewas a silence, during which he appeared to brood a bit. Then hiseye fell on the book and he gave a sort of start.

'Why, bless my soul, Mr Wooster, you have been quoting!'

'More or less.'

'I thought your words sounded familiar.' His whole appearance changed and he gave a sort of gurgling chuckle. 'Dear me, dear me, you know my weak spot!' He picked up the book and buried himself in it for quite a while. I began to think he had forgotten I was there.After a bit, however, he put it down again, and wiped his eyes. 'Ah,well!' he said.

I shuffled my feet and hoped for the best.

'Ah, well,' he said again. 'I must not be like Lord Windermere,must I, Mr Wooster? Tell me, did you draw that haughty old manfrom a living model?'

'Oh, no! Just thought of him and bunged him down, you know.'

'Genius!' murmured old Bittlesham. 'Genius! Well, Mr Wooster,you have won me over. Who, as you say, am I to put myself againstthe decrees of Fate? I will write to Richard tonight and inform himof my consent to his marriage.'

'You can slip him the glad news in person,' I said. 'He's waiting downstairs, with wife complete. I'll pop down and send them up.Cheerio, and thanks very much. Bingo will be most awfully bucked.'

I shot out and went downstairs. Bingo and Mrs were sitting on acouple of chairs like patients in a dentist's waiting-room.

'Well?' said Bingo eagerly.

'All over except the hand-clasping,' I replied, slapping the oldcrumpet on the back. 'Charge up and get matey. Toodle-oo, oldthings. You know where to find me, if wanted. A thousand congratulations, and all that sort of rot.'

And I pipped, not wishing to be fawned upon.

You never can tell in this world. If ever I felt that somethingattempted, something done had earned a night's repose, it was when I got back to the flat and shoved my feet up on the mantelpiece andstarted to absorb the cup of tea which Jeeves had brought in. Usedas I am to seeing Life's sitters blow up in the home stretch andfinish nowhere, I couldn't see any cause for alarm in this affair ofyoung Bingo's. All he had to do when I left him in PouncebyGardens was to walk upstairs with the little missus and collect the blessing. I was so convinced of this that when, about half an hour later, he came galloping into my sitting-room, all I thought was thathe wanted to thank me in broken accents and tell me what a good chap I had been. I merely beamed benevolently on the old creature as he entered, and was just going to offer him a cigarette when I observed that he seemed to have something on his mind. In fact, helooked as if something solid had hit him in the solar plexus.

'My dear old soul,' I said, 'what's up?'

Bingo plunged about the room.

'I*will* be calm!' he said, knocking over an occasional table. 'Calm,dammit!' He upset a chair.

'Surely nothing has gone wrong?'

Bingo uttered one of those hollow, mirthless yelps.

'Only every bally thing that could go wrong. What do you think happened after you left us? You know that beastly book you insistedon sending my uncle?'

It wasn't the way I should have put it myself, but I saw the poorold bean was upset for some reason or other, so I didn't correcthim.

'"The Woman who Braved All?'I said. 'It came in dashed useful. Itwas by quoting bits out of it that I managed to talk him round.'

'Well, it didn't come in useful when we got into the room. It waslying on the table, and after we had started to chat a bit and everything was going along nicely the little woman spotted it. "Oh, haveyou read this, Lord Bittlesham?" she said. "Three times already,"said my uncle. "I'm so glad," said the little woman. "Why, are youalso an admirer of Rosie M. Banks?" asked the old boy, beaming. "I*am* Rosie M. Banks!" said the little woman.'

'Oh, my aunt! Not really?'

'Yes.'

'But how could she be? I mean, dash it, she was slinging thefoodstuffs at the Senior Liberal Club.'

Bingo gave the settee a moody kick.

'She took the job to collect material for a book she's writing calledMervyn Keene, Clubman?

'She might have told you.'

'It made such a hit with her when she found that I loved her for herself alone, despite her humble station, that she kept it under herhat. She meant to spring it on me later on, she said.'

'Well, what happened then?'

'There was the dickens of a painful scene. The old boy nearly gotapoplexy. Called her an imposter. They both started talking at once at the top of their voices, and the thing ended with the little womanbuzzing off to her publishers to collect proofs as a preliminary to getting a written apology from the old boy. What's going to happen now, I don't know. Apart from the fact that my uncle will be as madas a wet hen when he finds out that he has been fooled, there'sgoing to be a lot of trouble when the little woman discovers that we worked the Rosie M. Banks wheeze with a view to trying to get memarried to somebody else. You see, one of the things that firstattracted her to me was the fact that I had never been in love before.'

'Did you tell her that?'

'Yes.'

'Great Scott!'

'Well, I hadn't been...not really in love. There's all the difference in the world between... Well, never mind that. What am Igoing to do? That's the point.'

'I don't know.'

'Thanks,' said young Bingo. 'That's a lot of help.'

Next morning he rang me up on the phone just after I'd got thebacon and eggs into my system - the one moment of the day, inshort, when a chappie wishes to muse on life absolutely undisturbed.

'Bertie!'

'Hallo?'

'Things are hotting up.'

'What's happened now?'

'My uncle has given the little woman's proofs the once-over andadmits her claim. I've just been having five snappy minutes with himon the telephone. He says that you and I made a fool of him, andhe could hardly speak, he was so shirty. Still, he made it clear all right that my allowance has gone phut again.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't waste time being sorry for me,' said young Bingo grimly.'He's coming to call on you today to

demand a personal explanation.'

'Great Scott!'

'And the little woman is coming to call on you to demand apersonal explanation.'

'Good Lord!'

'I shall watch your future career with some considerable interest,'said young Bingo.

I bellowed for Jeeves.

'Jeeves!'

'Sir?'

'I'm in the soup.'

'Indeed, sir?'

I sketched out the scenario for him.

'What would you advise?'

'I think if I were you, sir, I would accept Mr Pitt-Waley's invitationimmediately. If you remember, sir, he invited you to shoot with himin Norfolk this week.'

'So he did! By Jove, Jeeves, you're always right. Meet me at thestation with my things the first train after lunch. I'll go and lie lowat the club for the rest of the morning.'

'Would you require my company on this visit, sir?'

'Do you want to come?'

'If I might suggest it, sir, I think it would be better if I remainedhere and kept in touch with Mr Little. I might possibly hit uponsome method of pacifying the various parties, sir.'

'Right-o! But, if you do, you're a marvel.'

I didn't enjoy myself much in Norfolk. It rained most of the time,and when it wasn't raining I was so dashed jumpy that I couldn'thit a thing. By the end of the week I couldn't stand it any longer.Too bally absurd, I mean, being marooned miles away in the countryjust because young Bingo's uncle and wife wanted to have a fewwords with me. I made up my mind that I would pop back and dothe strong, manly thing by lying low in my flat and telling Jeeves toinform everybody who called that I wasn't at home.

I sent Jeeves a telegram saying I was coming, and drove straightto Bingo's place when I reached town. I wanted to find out thegeneral posish of affairs. But apparently the man was out. I rang acouple of times but nothing happened, and I was just going to legit when I heard the sound of footsteps inside and the door opened.It wasn't one of the cheeriest moments of my career when I found myself peering into the

globular face of Lord Bittlesham.

'Oh, er, hallo!' I said. And there was a bit of a pause.

I don't quite know what I had been expecting the old boy to doif, by bad luck, we should ever meet again, but I had a sort of generalidea that he would turn fairly purple and start almost immediatelyto let me have it in the gizzard. It struck me as somewhat rummy,therefore, when he simply smiled weakly. A sort of frozen smile itwas. His eyes kind of bulged and he swallowed once or twice.

'Er ...' he said.

I waited for him to continue, but apparently that was all therewas.

'Bingo in?' I said, after a rather embarrassing pause.

He shook his head and smiled again. And then, suddenly, just asthe flow of conversation had begun to slacken once more, I'm dashedif he didn't make a sort of lumbering leap back into the flat andbang the door.

I couldn't understand it. But, as it seemed that the interview, suchas it was, was over, I thought I might as well be shifting. I had juststarted down the steps when I met young Bingo, charging up threesteps at a time.

'Hallo, Bertie!' he said. 'Where did you spring from? I thoughtyou were out of town?'

'I've just got back. I looked in on you to see how the land lay.'

'How do you mean?'

'Why, all that business, you know.'

'Oh, that!' said young Bingo airily. 'That was all settled days ago.The dove of peace is flapping its wings all over the place. Everything's as right as it can be. Jeeves fixed it all up. He's a marvel,that man, Bertie, I've always said so. Put the whole thing straight inhalf a minute with one of those brilliant ideas of his.'

'This is topping!'

'I knew you'd be pleased.'

'Congratulate you.'

Thanks.'

'What did Jeeves do? I couldn't think of any solution of the bally thing myself.'

'Oh, he took the matter in hand and smoothed it all out in asecond! My uncle and the little woman are tremendous pals now.They gas away by the hour together about literature and all that. He's always dropping in for a chat.'

This reminded me.

'He's in there now,' I said. 'I say, Bingo, how*is* your uncle thesedays?'

'Much as usual. How do you mean?'

'I mean he hasn't been feeling the strain of things a bit, has he?He seemed rather strange in his manner just now.'

'Why, have you met him?'

'He opened the door when I rang. And then, after he had stood goggling at me for a bit, he suddenly banged the door in my face. Puzzled me, you know. I mean, I could have understood it if he'dticked me off and all that, but dash it, the man seemed absolutely scared.'

Young Bingo laughed a care-free laugh.

'Oh, that's all right!' he said. 'I forgot to tell you about that. Meantto write, but kept putting it off. He thinks you're a loony.'

'He - what!'

'Yes. That was Jeeves's idea, you know. It's solved the wholeproblem splendidly. He suggested that I should tell my uncle that Ihad acted in perfectly good faith in introducing you to him as RosieM. Banks; that I had repeatedly had it from your own lips that youwere, and that I didn't see any reason why you shouldn't be. Theidea being that you were subject to hallucinations and generally potty.And then we got hold of Sir Roderick Glossop - you remember, theold boy whose kid you pushed into the lake that day down atDitteredge Hall - and he rallied round with his story of how he hadcome to lunch with you and found your bedroom full up with catsand fish, and how you had pinched his hat while you were driving past his car in a taxi, and all that, you know. It just rounded thewhole thing off nicely. I always say, and I always shall say, thatyou've only got to stand on Jeeves, and Fate can't touch you.'

I can stand a good deal, but there are limits.

'Well, of all the dashed bits of nerve I ever -'

Bingo looked at me astonished.

'You aren't*annoyed?* he said.

'Annoyed! At having half London going about under theimpression that I'm off my chump? Dash it all -'

'Bertie,' said Bingo, 'you amaze and wound me. If I had dreamed that you would object to doing a trifling good turn to a fellow who'sbeen a pal or yours for fifteen years -'

'Yes, but, look here -'

'Have you forgotten,' said young Bingo, 'that we were at school together?'

I pushed on to the old flat, seething like the dickens. One thing Iwas jolly certain of, and that was that this was where Jeeves and I parted company. A topping valet, of course, none better in London, but I

wasn't going to allow that to weaken me. I buzzed into the flat like an east wind ... and there was the box of cigarettes on the smalltable and the illustrated weekly papers on the big table and myslippers on the floor, and every dashed thing so bally*right,* if youknow what I mean, that I started to calm down in the first two seconds. It was like one of those moments in a play where thechappie, about to steep himself in crime, suddenly hears the soft, appealing strains of the old melody he learned at his mother's knee. Softened, I mean to say. That's the word I want. I was softened.

And then through the doorway there shimmered good old Jeevesin the wake of a tray full of the necessary ingredients, and there wassomething about the mere look of the man -

However, I steeled the old heart and had a stab at it.

'I have just met Mr Little, Jeeves,' I said.

'Indeed, sir?'

'He - er - he told me you had been helping him.'

'I did my best, sir. And I am happy to say that matters now appearto be proceeding smoothly. Whisky, sir?'

Thanks. Er-Jeeves.'

'Sir?'

'Another time -'

'Sir?'

'Oh, nothing... Not all the soda, Jeeves.'

'Very good, sir.'

He started to drift out.

'Oh, Jeeves!'

'Sir?'

'I wish ... that is...I think...I mean ... Oh, nothing!'

'Very good, sir. The cigarettes are at your elbow, sir. Dinner willbe ready at a quarter to eight precisely, unless you desire to dineout?'

'No. I'll dine in.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Jeeves!'

'Sir?'

'Oh, nothing!' I said.

'Very good, sir,' said Jeeves.