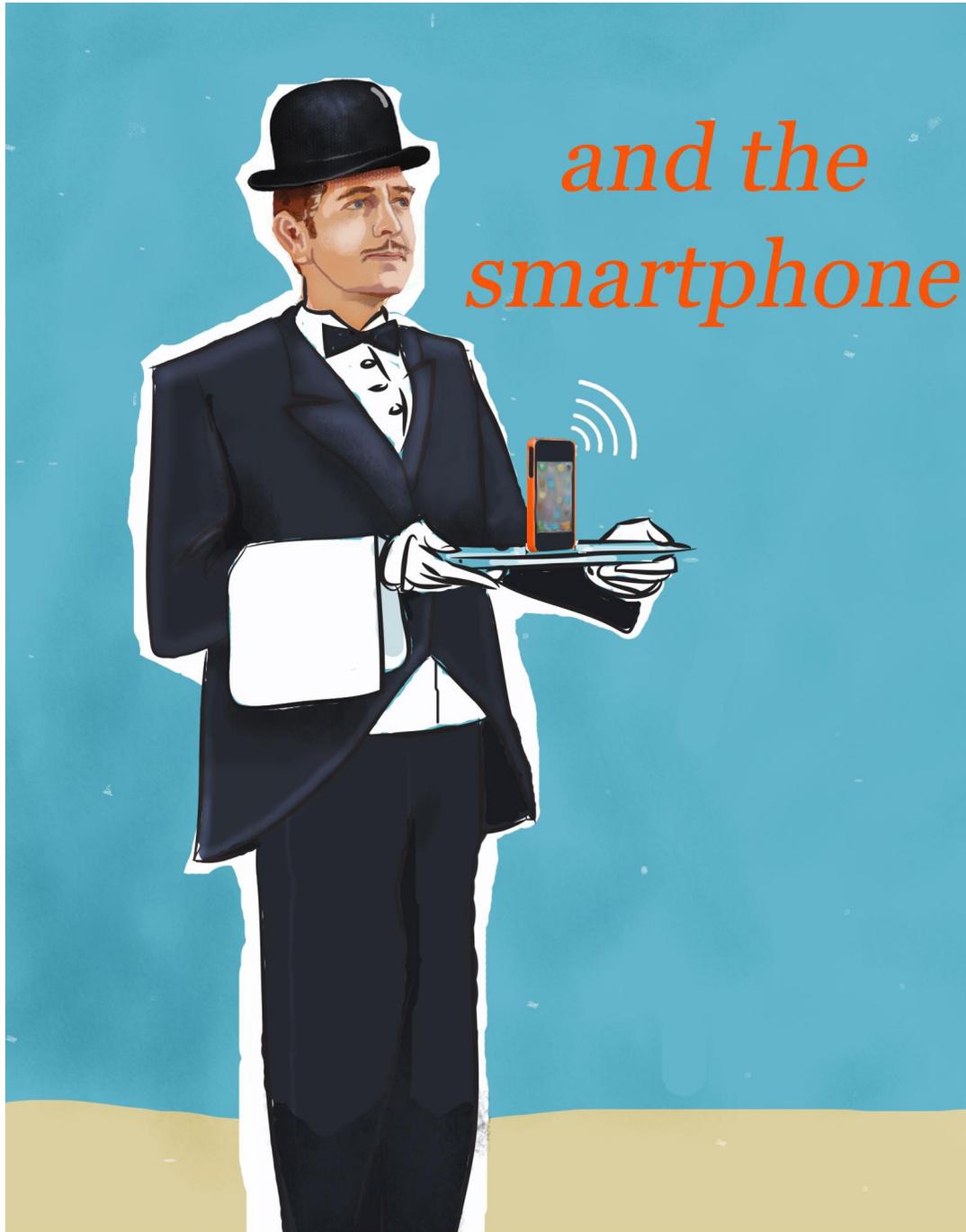


Jeeves



*and the
smartphone*

Greg Krehbiel

Jeeves and the smartphone

“Is the tea to your liking, sir?” Jeeves asked as Bertram Wooster put a sixth spoonful of sugar in the cup and stirred. Bertram was not a man to put sugar in his tea.

“Blast tea, Jeeves,” he said, setting the spoon aside.

“Yes, sir,” said Jeeves, stoically.

“The bird may be chirping, Jeeves, and the sun doing its duty, shining on the fields of barley, but joy has left the world.”

“I am very sorry to hear it, sir.”

“Joy, I say, has left the world entirely, Jeeves, and no amount of tea will make it up.”

“As you say, sir,” Jeeves said with a pained expression on his face as Mr. Wooster was about to set the cup to his lips. “May I recommend a fresh cup, sir?”

It was too late. The sickening sweet liquid had already touched the lips, and Bertram Wooster recoiled in horror.

“What is this stain upon humanity, Jeeves,” he asked, eyeing the porcelain as if it held the vilest beverage known to man.

“A most regrettable accident has occurred, Mr. Wooster. Let me pour you another cup.”

“By all means, Jeeves. And throw that cup away while you are at it. Not only the contents, but the cup itself, lest it train the rest of the set in its loathsome ways.”

“As you say, sir,” Jeeves replied, pouring a fresh cup from the pot and removing the offending vessel in one swift and graceful movement.

Wooster held the cup in his right hand and inhaled the steam for a long moment, then set it back on the saucer.

“Dash it all, Jeeves,” he exclaimed. “No doubt this cup lives up to your sterling reputation. Kings and queens would be honored to sip these healing waters. The restorative powers of your morning offering are matters of legend. But not even your best can steel me for the day’s task.”

“I am very sorry to hear it, sir,” Jeeves replied, gesturing ever-so-slightly towards the liquor cabinet.

“No, you mistake my meaning, Jeeves,” Wooster assured, shaking his head.

“No liquid on earth can overcome the feeling of dread when an aunt, her battle axe at the ready, sets her gimlet eye on a defenseless nephew.”

“It is a problem the philosophers have failed to solve, sir,” Jeeves replied.

“An end to philosophers, Jeeves.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wipe philosophers from your mind.”

“As you say, sir.”

“The shield wall of nephews totters under the assault of axe-wielding aunts, and you give us philosophers.”

“It is poor comfort, sir.”

“Poor? Your wits have left you, Jeeves.”

“As you say, sir.”

“It is no comfort at all.”

“I stand corrected, sir.”

“Indeed you do. Aristotle had nothing whatsoever to say on the subject.”

“Very true, sir.”

“And I defy you to find one of the many titles in your admirable collection that even mention aunts, battle axes and nephews on the same page.”

“It is an unlikely confluence of words, sir.”

“Unlikely? It’s pish, Jeeves. Absolute pish. And posh as well. The world stands on the brink, dark, thunderous clouds threaten, and with the flash of lightning one sees the axe-wielding hoard of aunts crest over the last defenses of civilization. The knees weaken. The will to fight takes flight. The end is upon us.”

“A dark day, sir. Shall I pour you another cup?”

“No, Jeeves,” Wooster said, pushing the cup and saucer away and sitting up a little straighter in his seat. The Nordic references had revived his spirit.

“It is not the way of the Wooster to shirk,” he said.

“No, sir.”

õThe clan of the Woosters has never failed king and country, no matter the odds.ö

õIndeed, sir.ö

õThe great and noble line of Woosters stand behind me, Jeeves, urging great deeds. Dire deeds, Jeeves. Deeds worthy of song.ö

õAs you say, sir.ö

õIt comes to this. I need you to rally round, Jeeves. Show that feudal spirit. Come to the aid of king and country, and all that.ö

õI endeavor to give satisfaction, sir.ö

õSo you do, Jeeves. None better.ö

õIf you would be so kind as to explain the nature of the dilemma, sir,ö Jeeves said gently, like a lamb whispering calming words to its younger brother.

õPerhaps I could suggest a course of action.ö

õRight ho, Jeeves. Right, as I say, ho. It all comes down to a key for a cottage, which I have to deliver into the appropriate hands.ö

õThe matter seems smallish, in the way of problems. Perhaps there is more to the conundrum that you have not yet mentioned.ö

õYou have touched it with a needle, Jeeves. The problem is that the key and the cottage are in some godforsaken place called Florida, and we, as you can observe from our 8th floor view, are in New York City.ö

õMight I inquire as to how far you are willing to go to fulfill this quest, sir? I am thinking that there is adequate train and plane service between here and Florida.ö

õAs to the former point, Jeeves, this is a command from Aunt Agatha, so there is no question of reserve. No muscle shall be unspent. No brain cell left unrattled. And though it pains me to say it, no expense spared.ö

õI see, sir.ö

õAnd as far as the second point, need I remind you that I have more than one aunt, Jeeves, and that we are already under obligation to host some dratted infestation from the aunt in the second part. They will be coming for dinner before the shadows grow long on the balcony.ö

õThe thought had not escaped me, sir, but perhaps there is still a solution. Might I pursue the specifics of the matter of the key and the cottage.ö

“Specifics, Jeeves? The specifics are that Aunt Agatha has given me an impossible task for the sole reason of hanging another failure around my neck. She knows quite well that I am cooped up in New York City, and she expects me to deliver a key from niece Number One to niece Number Two, both of whom are in the aforementioned Florida, and whose itineraries do not intersect by one hundred miles.”

“It may be possible, sir, that we have a reliable acquaintance in the vicinity who could serve as an intermediary. Do you know a more precise location for this cottage?”

“Some beach or other, Jeeves. I tried to look it up in the atlas and there are at least a thousand places in Florida called something beach. The state seems to be made of beaches. When they were inventing states, Jeeves, someone took all the leftover seashore and knitted it together into one long beach and named it Florida.”

“Indeed, sir, the state has 1,350 miles of coast, second among the states to Alaska, which has 6,640.”

“Good Lord. Do you know everything, Jeeves?” Wooster asked in astonishment.

“I am sure I could not say, sir,” Jeeves replied modestly.

“Well, in any event, I wrote it down somewhere, but I cannot find the blasted slip of paper. It is lost in my trousers or something.”

“It might be this, sir,” Jeeves said, retrieving a slip of yellow note paper from his jacket pocket. “I noticed it in your trousers before they were sent out for some light alterations.”

“You are a marvel, Jeeves. A magician and a scholar rolled into one.”

“I endeavor to give satisfaction, sir.”

“And that is the very paper,” he said, taking it from Jeeves’ outstretched hand. “Cocoa Beach. That is the beach where the Wooster clan meets its end, butchered in the sand by a battalion of axe-wielding aunts.”

“Perhaps not, sir,” Jeeves said, quickly flipping through the notebook he kept in his breast pocket.

“Your niece Abigail has a friend who is stationed at Patrick Air Force Base, just a few miles from Cocoa Beach,” Jeeves continued.

“Abigail has always been a good egg,” Wooster remarked. “You’re thinking she could put in the seasonable word and fetch this friend to serve as my paraclete? Do you think she would do it, Jeeves?”

“I have no doubt, sir. Abigail’s friend is the young Miss Samantha, whom we have entertained several times in the past.”

“Samantha,” Wooster said, frowning the brow. “Ah, yes. Sam. I remember the lass. She was quite accomplished at the Charleston, as I recall.”

“The very one, sir,” Jeeves confirmed.

“Do you think you can make the connections, Jeeves? You know I am not one for technology, but I seem to recall you had some way to communicate with people across state lines and so on.”

“Indeed, sir. I will make the arrangements.”

“In that case, Jeeves, I would like another cup of your excellent tea, and a plate of kippers. If you tossed in a slice of toast, I wouldn’t object.”

“Certainly, sir.”

Jeeves rustled off to the kitchen and returned a minute later with a fresh pot of tea, a slice of perfectly browned toast, and a plate of kippers. With the blanket of despair removed from his shoulders, Bertram dug in with relish.

Jeeves went out on the balcony and paced back and forth, trying to get the best signal. He returned a few minutes later to clean up the breakfast table, and assured Master Wooster that the deed was done, that Miss Samantha would meet Aunt Agatha’s niece within the hour, and that the keys would be delivered the next day to young Arthur Wilsmeet, the fiancé of Aunt Agatha’s second niece, Dorothy Aiken.

“It’s a marvel, Jeeves. How do you do it?”

“I have offered to instruct you in the use of the smart phone, sir, but —”

“None of that, Jeeves,” Bertram interrupted. “It’s not the Wooster way. I shall leave it all in your capable hands.”

“Very good, sir. In that spirit, sir, this might be the appropriate time to point out that it would be far easier for me to make such arrangements in the future if you would allow me to install a wireless router in the apartment —”

“Stop there, Jeeves. I won’t have it,” Wooster replied with vigor. “You know that I have to draw certain lines.”

“Indeed, sir.”

“I know many a bloke who is a practical slave to his valet.”

“A horrible thought, sir.”

“Some of these fellows can hardly dress themselves without permission.”

“Disgusting, sir.”

“Absolutely. And you know quite well that our arrangement works as it does because we have set the appropriate lines.”

“As you say, sir.”

“And furthermore,” Wooster continued, pointing a finger, “you know that I am not a fan of internet this and wireless that. A bloke ought to read a book now and then, meet with his peers for an afternoon snifter, and dance the night away at the club. No, Jeeves, I will not become a slave to my valet, and I will not become a slave to some fiendish wireless network, pumping thoughts and images into my head.”

“It is a worthy goal, sir.”

“Alright then. Let’s have no more about this confounded wireless business.”

“As you say, sir.”

* * *

A few weeks later, Bertram Wooster was just toweling off after his morning bath.

“Shall I lay out the Harris Tweed, sir?”

“As you wish, Jeeves. There will be no conflict today about the drapery. I am not in the mood. If you say Harris Tweed, then Harris Tweed it is.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“You’re welcome, Jeeves. What sort of a day is it?”

“A fine Autumn day with just a hint of a brisk breeze, sir. There is little chance of rain.”

“Excellent. Smashing weather for a walk about town and a lunch at the club, I think.”

“Very good, sir. Will you be dining in this evening, sir?”

“Ah, yes, Jeeves, you remind me of a call from last night while you were out. Do you remember that little gas with the beach? It had something to do with alligators, I think.”

“Are you referring to the matter of the keys to Mrs. Gregson’s cottage in Florida, sir?”

“That’s the one, Jeeves. You have the memory of an elephant.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Where does it come from, Jeeves? Do you have any family connection to Africa, perhaps?”

“None that I am aware of, sir.”

“How about India? They have elephants in India, don’t they?”

“Indeed, sir. The Indian elephant, *Elephas maximus indicus*, tends to be smaller than the African elephant. The species is, I am sad to say, endangered.”

“Good Lord, Jeeves. When Ma Jeeves took little Jeeves to the zoo, she must have made you read all the signs.”

“Indeed, sir.”

“And the guidebook besides.”

“My mother did stress the value of an education, sir.”

“And you took it to heart, I’d say. But I’m still trying to find the connection to elephants, Jeeves. Something has to explain that amazing memory. Have you a family connection to India?”

“My uncle on my mother’s side served in India for a time, sir.”

“Now Jeeves,” Wooster said, disapproving. “I expected better from a brain like yours. Your uncle on your mother’s side could not possibly influence the blood, Jeeves, and that’s what we’re searching for here. Some í what’s the word, Jeeves? It sounds like hermitage, or something like that.”

“You may be searching for the word ‘heritable,’ sir. It refers to a trait that can be passed on to one’s progeny.”

“Exactly, Jeeves. That’s the very word. ‘Heritable.’ We’re searching for something in your heritage that could link you to elephants, and you know quite well that even if your uncle had served in India all his life, had ridden elephants to the office and fed them out of the palm of his hands, there would be no heritable connection to you.”

“Indeed, sir. If I may, sir, the subject of the heritability of acquired characteristics is one in which I—”

“Now now, Jeeves, none of that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“In matters of the preparation of the tea, the choice of the day’s drapery and the general matters of being a valet, there is none beside you.”

“I endeavor to give satisfaction, sir.”

“And you most certainly do, Jeeves. But in matters of the traits and manners of humanity, I believe I still have the upper hand. I am a keen observer of human nature, Jeeves, and I sense a very elephant-like influence. I am sure of it. Apply your mind to the problem.”

“I will give it all due consideration, sir.”

“Thank you, Jeeves. Report back when you’ve discovered the link. But elephants were a side matter, as I recall. I wanted to tell you something about alligators.”

“Perhaps it was something about the episode with Miss Samantha and the keys to the cottage in Cocoa Beach, sir.”

“Precisely, Jeeves. That was exactly it. You took the matter in your very capable hands and worked your wonders, and Aunt Agatha forsook the war path and sheathed her battle axe. Or I— does one sheathe a battle axe, Jeeves?”

“It is not commonly done, sir.”

“Well, you get my meaning. The analogy scans, does it not? If scan is the word I want.”

“It is a clever, although not ordinary use of the term, sir.”

“Thank you, Jeeves.”

“You were going to tell me something about dinner, sir.”

“Yes, yes, I am coming to that. Sam, who rescued us in the matter of the keys is, as you recall, pals with my niece Abby. We’ll be giving her dinner tonight.”

“Very good, sir. Are any special preparations required?”

“Field rations for four, Jeeves, as Arthur and Dorothy will be dining as well. And no avocados, whatever they are.”

“The fruit of the avocado tree, sir. It is sometimes referred to as the alligator pear. It is a large berry with a single seed. The tree, *Persea americana*, is native to Mexico and Central America. It is a relative of cinnamon, camphor and bay laurel.”

“Well, whatever they are, Arty can’t stand them. It was the one condition he mentioned.”

“I will ensure the absence of avocados, sir.”

“Well done, Jeeves. None within a nautical mile, if it can be managed.”

“Very good, sir. I will gather the essentials.”

“Excellent, Jeeves. After getting on the outside of a pot of tea and a couple of eggs ó poached, if you don’t mind -- I will take a stroll in the park and wend my way to the Drones club. I believe Gussy Finknottle is back from his sojourn in the west, and we have some catching up to do.”

* * *

The New York extension of the Drones club occupied an expensive piece of property next to Central Park. Bertram Wooster often spent his days in long jaunts through the park, stopping at the Drones for refreshment when the mood struck him.

The courtesy of the club was not up to English standards. The doorman didn’t even offer to take his hat.

“And there is the excrescence in the flesh,” said a loud voice as Bertram Wooster entered the hallowed halls of the Drones club. All eyes turned.

“Bertie Wooster. Scourge of human society,” the voice proclaimed again.

Greetings of that sort were not entirely unknown to Mr. Wooster, especially when Aunt Agatha was in town, so he took it in stride.

A balled up piece of paper soared through the air and narrowly missed the hat Bertram was hanging on a hook. Soft laughter rippled through the room, and then two paper airplanes sailed across the bar.

“What ho, Gussy,” Wooster called out as he approached the watering hole.

“Exercising the larynx with a bit of vinegar today?”

“Oh, hi, Bertie,” said Gussy, meekly. Quite contrary to his ordinarily meek manner, it was he who had called out. “I was just practicing. Angela thinks I’m too polite.”

“It’s Angela now, is it?”

“She’s the one, Bertie,” Gussy said in reverent tones. “I adore the air she breathes.”

“Shall I start saving up for the old fish slice, then?”

“Not yet, Bertie. We’re not engaged.”

“What’s clogging up the works? You’re usually engaged to a girl before you write down her name. You’re well set with the needful, as I recall, despite all your effort to waste your fortune on newts.”

“Newts be damned, Bertie,” Gussy said with some heat. “May I never gaze on another newt.”

“You can’t mean it, Gussy. You’ve been a newt-fancier as long as I’ve known you.”

“Angela doesn’t approve, so newts and I have parted ways.”

“Tsch tsch. I have to say, dear Gussy, that I fear trouble brewing. No matter how angelic this Angela may be, you have newts in the blood. It’s not fitting that you would give them up. It’s like a minister forsaking his calling.”

“You’re speaking nonsense, Bertie. Newts are merely a hobby with me. But Angela. She is my calling. She is the fizz in my seltzer.”

“Speaking of which,” Bertie said, gesturing to the bartender, who quickly assembled the standard Wooster libation. A moment later Bertram was sipping gingerly at his whiskey and soda.

“So why don’t you tell her?” Wooster asked.

A devilish smile came across Gussy’s face.

“I think I will,” he said.

Bertram looked about the club. They had, over his objection, admitted women, but he couldn’t recall a bird named Angela.

“She’s not here, silly,” Gussy said as he drew his smart phone from his jacket pocket. “I’ll text her.”

“Ah, so you’ve gone and joined ranks with the barbarian hoards,” Bertram said sadly, shaking the bean.

“It’s essential, Bertie. We don’t all have Jeeves to rescue us all the time.”

“Well, I’ll take Jeeves over an army of those things, any day.”

“And well you might,” Gussy admitted. “Haven’t men tried to steal him away from you?”

“Dukes and Earls have tried.”

“So why does he stay with you?” Gussy asked with a sneer.

“Don’t make it sound like such a distasteful proposition, Gussy. We have a chemistry. An arrangement. There is something in the Wooster soul that calls out to the soul of Jeeves, and vice versa.”

“Well, you’re damned fortunate, that’s all I’ve got to say. And there. I’ve done it,” he said, putting his phone on the bar.

“You’ve done what?”

“I’ve sent a message to Angela. Here, take a look.”

He tapped a few times on the screen and showed it to Wooster.

“You’re the fizz in my soda. Gussie,” Wooster read. “But what’s this other bit of text below? ‘Soak your head in it, you newt-fancier.’”

“That’s her reply,” Gussy admitted, downcast.

“I think you have your work cut out for you,” Bertram replied.

* * *

As Bertram tickled the ivories with a new arrangement of 700 Ginger-Headed Sailors, Jeeves finished the preparations for the evening meal. Abigail arrived first, and joined in the chorus, accompanying Bertram’s baritone lead.

“I think that about does it, what Jeeves?”

“Every red-headed sailor in hailing distance should be suitably entertained, sir,” Jeeves replied.

“Why thank you, Jeeves. I didn’t think such show tunes were quite your style.”

“As you say, sir. I was assuming that the aforementioned sailors might have different tastes, sir.”

“Ah, putting a good construction on it and all that.”

“Precisely, sir,” said Jeeves with the slightest hint of a smile.

“Well I thought it was jolly fun,” said Abigail, “but I did have something I wanted to speak with you about, Uncle Bertie, if we could set aside the music for a minute before Sam arrives.”

“You have my complete attention, darling niece. How can I be of service?”

“Well, you know about smart phones, don’t you Uncle Bertie? And about text messaging and such?”

“I am well versed,” Wooster said, although Jeeves gave a quick look and betrayed a suspicion of doubt. “No, no, Jeeves, your disapproval is uncalled for in this case. Just today at lunch, Gussy Finknottle filled me in on all the essentials. I am acquainted with the device and its uses.”

“Okay, great,” said Abigail with an undisguised hint of amusement. “So Sam texted me today, and she told me she’d been getting strange messages from that Wilsmeet character.”

“I see,” said Bertram, contemplatively. “Just today Gussie showed me some unpleasant messages. Damned nuisance they can be.”

“Quite,” said Abigail, “and in this case a little disturbing. It’s í ö

“Now now, young niece, let’s leave it at that. No need to delve into the particulars. I take it that Sam no longer wants to hear from Arty. That’s all I need to know. I’ll ask him to remove her from his contact list.”

Jeeves is that sort of English valet who would not express surprise if 700 Ginger-Headed Sailors chose that very moment to waltz into the apartment riding on Asian elephants with bags of avocados. But he had been in Mr. Wooster’s employ for such a long time now, that even the slightest curl of one eyebrow hair was unnoticeable to any but the most astute observer and was enough to clue said Wooster that Jeeves found this remark improbable.

“Yes, Jeeves, I do know about contact lists. You’re going to need to shelve this technological snobbery. It’s quite unbecoming.”

“As you say, sir,” he replied. “Would sir care for a whiskey and soda, perhaps, as he waits for the other guests to arrive?”

“Just the thing, Jeeves. Just the thing. And how about you, Abby? Any nourishment for the sinews?”

“A glass of orange juice, if you have it, please.”

Jeeves nodded politely and escaped to the kitchen.

“I hope it’s as easy as you say, Uncle Bertie. The messages were í not what you would expect from an English gentleman.”

“I’m sure there is some perfectly natural explanation, young Abigail,” Wooster said soothingly. “It is best that you leave such matters in the hands of a man of the world like your dear uncle. We’ve seen it all, here and there, there and here, with what and with not and with so on, and we’ll have it all sewed up and tied in a ribbon in no time. Ah, there’s the door.”

A moment later Jeeves was taking coats and hats, pouring the libations, and generally shimmering from one place to another, always handy when needed and out of the way when not.

The five of them sat to dinner, Wooster at the head of the table, Arthur and Dorothy to his left and Abigail and Samantha to his right.

“No avocados to be seen anywhere, Jeeves,” Wooster said.

“No, sir.”

“And none within a nautical mile.”

“If you say so, sir.”

“Yes, yes, very good. Carve the roast, Jeeves, and let’s pass the bread.”

As the guests arranged napkins and toyed with glasses of wine, Wooster leaned to his left and said softly, as if in Arthur’s ear, “So Arty my lad, a little bird tells me that you’ve been accidentally sending messages to young Samantha, there.”

The normal sounds of dinner hushed, and while everyone pretended not to be paying attention, every ear inclined to listen.

“Let’s delete the connection and put an end to that, shall we?” he continued with a smile, and then winked and grabbed his glass of wine as if the situation was resolved and life could go on.

“But I haven’t been texting Sam,” Arthur objected.

“Oh yes you have,” Abby objected, grabbing Sam’s phone from her purse, expertly tapping Morse code for “show the incriminating texts please,” and then handing the phone across the table so Arthur could see. Jeeves was standing behind Arthur and took it all in with a glance.

Arthur’s jaw dropped. “That’s horrible,” he said. “No English gentleman would speak that way to a young lady. I say, Jeeves,” he continued, offering

the phone as exhibit number one, 'would any English gentleman dream of saying things like this to a young lady?'

'Indeed not, sir,' he said in a stiff voice.

'But Jeeves, you don't think I would have sent something like this, do you?'

'It's not for me to say, sir.'

'Well that hangs it,' Arthur said with some heat. 'I'll prove it to you. Where did you hang my coat, Jeeves?'

'I will retrieve it for you, sir. Shall I also get your hat?'

Arthur missed that second sentence because he'd risen from his chair and was busy looking around the room for the whiskey. Wooster indicated with a nod of the head that he wished to confer with his valet in the next room.

'Excuse me a moment,' he said, rising from the table. 'By all means help yourself to the refreshments,' he added as he strode off. 'There's also sherry and port, if whiskey doesn't suit you.'

Jeeves had shimmered his way into the kitchen, and Wooster joined him a moment later.

'That bad, eh Jeeves?'

'Quite opprobrious, sir.'

'You got a good look?'

'I wish I hadn't, sir.'

'What the devil was it, Jeeves? What did the young blighter say?'

'It was opprobrious, sir.'

'Quite. Quite. You're right, Jeeves, no need to repeat such things. Well, thank you, Jeeves. This really puts me in the soup.'

'How so, sir?'

'I neglected to tell you that Aunt Dahlia is all for it, Jeeves.'

'May I ask what cause Mrs. Travers is advocating, sir?'

'Oh, the whole love-bird thing. You know, Arthur and Dorothy sitting in a tree and whatnot. Holy matrimony. Flowers and bells and a month in the south of France.'

'Surely Mrs. Travers will amend her views when she is apprised of the situation, sir.'

“But how, Jeeves? I can’t go blabbing on about such things. It’s not cricket. I haven’t even seen these texts myself, and you know Aunt Dahlia won’t believe me without evidence. Besides that, there’s another aunt to be reckoned with.”

“Mrs. Gregson is also an advocate of the match, sir?”

“She is. She has taken Arthur under her wing, so to speak, and Aunt Dahlia looks upon young Dorothy as her protégé.”

“There may be another solution, sir,” Jeeves suggested.

“Don’t tell me you’ve solved it already, Jeeves.”

“Perhaps, sir.”

“Great heavens, Jeeves, it must be the fish. I’m sure of it. To get a brain like that your mother must have served fish morning and night.”

“As you say, sir.”

“But stop babbling about fish, Jeeves. What’s this solution? How can you untie this Gordian knot? If that’s the knot I mean.”

“Yes, sir. A famous knot which, it was said, could only be undone by the rightful king. Alexander cut it in two with his sword.”

“Clever chap, that fellow. But now we’ve moved from fish to knots, Jeeves. I’m interested in the solution to this aunt problem.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fish will not come after me with axes, Jeeves.”

“I imagine not, sir.”

“And I have never been called a blight on humanity by a knot, howsoever complex, Jeeves.”

“As you say, sir.”

“So get on with it then. What’s the solution?”

“I believe, sir, that your niece intends to pay a visit to Mrs. Traversø American abode on the morrow. It so happens that Mrs. Gregson will also be visiting. If Miss Abigail could be induced to bring young Samantha with her, I’m certain matters would resolve themselves.”

“Did you train with Alexander, Jeeves?”

“No, sir. The general passed before my time.”

“But you’ve adopted his methods, I see. When life presents an Alexander, or a Jeeves, with a knot, said Alexander and said Jeeves simply pull out the trusty sword and have done with it.”

“It is a time-tested strategy, sir.”

“And you would know, Jeeves. So you’re thinking that one of the aunts will surely bring up the young couple, Samantha will let things slip, and that, as they say, will be that.”

“Precisely, sir.”

“Aunts can’t help it, Jeeves.”

“No, sir.”

“Talk of young couples in love is, to Aunts, the stuff of life.”

“So I have heard, sir.”

“They’d pass up the port and go right to the latest news.”

“It is quite likely, sir.”

“Yes, Jeeves, I believe you have it. I’ll put in a word with young Abby and set the wheels in motion.”

“Very good, sir. And may I suggest that the meal may be getting cold.”

“Good heavens, Jeeves. You think of everything.”

“I endeavor to give satisfaction, sir.”

As they turned to re-enter the dining room there was a gentle knock on the kitchen door. Jeeves answered it, and Abigail peered in cautiously.

“May I have a word with you in private, Uncle Bertie?” she asked.

Wooster looked around to ask Jeeves if they could have the room, but he had already disappeared. Wooster was never quite sure how he did that. Jeeves could vanish without a trace, or appear unexpectedly. He was always exactly where he needed to be at the moment.

“I am at your disposal, niece of mine,” Wooster said once he saw they had the room to themselves.

“It’s about Arthur and Dorothy.”

“Yes, we’ve just been having a chat about them. What news?”

“They’ve gone.”

“We’ve hardly started dinner,” Wooster objected.

“Arthur said that he wouldn’t stay in a place where people doubted his good character, and he insisted that Dorothy leave with him.”

“I see. And your concern is í ?”

“I’m concerned for Dorothy. Should she be keeping company with a man like that?”

“Ah. And on that point, dear Abigail, I think there is much that you can do.”

“What can I do? Dorothy doesn’t listen to me.”

“No, but she listens to Aunt Dahlia.”

“I’m to visit Aunt Dahlia tomorrow.”

“So Jeeves tells me. He knows everything, you see. No one’s schedule is private when Jeeves is around, unless it needs to be private, and then you can be sure that it is. It’s one of those wonders he performs on a daily basis.”

Abigail looked confused for a moment, but then she recovered and exercised the tongue.

“I’m not sure Aunt Dahlia will listen to me either, Uncle Bertie. She’s awfully fond of Dorothy, and she thinks they are the perfect couple. I think she’s been planning the wedding for months.”

“But she won’t if she sees those messages on Samantha’s whatsadoodle.”

“Oh. Well, I could invite her along. I hear Aunt Dahlia is renting a place in the Hamptons. Sam has always wanted to go there.”

“That’s the ticket, young thing. Let’s get back to the roast before it’s stone cold, and perhaps we can entertain Sam with stories of revelries and adventures in the Hamptons. Then it’ll be a piece of cake for you to whisk her off with you tomorrow.”

* * *

The next morning, Wooster was just toweling off after his bath when Jeeves came in with the phone in his hand.

“Pardon me, Mr. Wooster, but Abigail is on the line and would like to have a word.”

“This early, Jeeves? Has she already accomplished the labor we set for her. Cleaned the stables and í what were those other labors, Jeeves?”

“Perhaps you are referring to the labors of Hercules, sir, which included the cleaning of the Augean stables. I would be delighted to give you a précis on the hero’s other labors, sir, but perhaps after you speak with Abigail.”

“Ah, yes. Damned nuisance, these things are, Jeeves. I miss the days of the telegram. That was a leisurely thing, Jeeves, invented by a gentleman, no doubt. You didn’t imagine an impatient niece tapping her fingers and filing her nails waiting for you to pick up the receiver. Is receiver the right word, Jeeves? Or is it headset? I’m not quite sure I have that sorted out.”

“Receiver would be more appropriate in this case, sir. A headset might imply an ear piece with an extended microphone. I would be happy to explain further, sir, but I believe Miss Abigail is still waiting.”

“So she is, Jeeves, as you rightly say. Waiting like patience on a monument, if that’s the right expression in this case.”

“We’ll say that it is, sir. Shall I tell her that you’ll return her call, sir?”

“No, Jeeves, I don’t believe I have her number. I can just take it now, can’t I? No reason for you to delay things.”

“I’m sorry, sir.”

“It’s the old English spirit, Jeeves. The well-bred Englishman has an aversion to rushing in, and that’s why you’re such an excellent valet. Nothing is too soon, nor is it too late.”

“Thank you, sir. Would you like to take the phone now, sir?”

Wooster took the phone.

“What ho, young niece? What news from the front lines?”

“Are you quite done chit-chatting with Jeeves, Uncle Bertie?” Abigail replied in a voice that fairly oozed with girlish sincerity. “I can always call back, in case you’d like to have another cup of tea, or hear about some story from Greek mythology.”

“No, Abigail, no. Jeeves has me well-supplied in tea, and this is as good a time as any, although I was looking forward to the new marmalade Jeeves was talking about.”

“Well heavens, Uncle Bertie. Perhaps I should call back. We can’t let Aunt Dahlia’s screaming fit, or her threat to write you out of her will, interfere with your breakfast. Never mind, dear Uncle Bertie. I’ll call back tomorrow. What would be a good time?”

“Now now, then, young thing, there’s no need for all that. Screaming did you say? The dear old aunt does have a voice that can carry across fields of mown grass, but I’ve never thought of it as screaming.”

“It’s certainly screaming. And she’s been calling the lawyer to rewrite the will.”

“You may think that’s the shocking part,” said Wooster, in a soothing voice, “but you don’t have my years of experience with the aged relation. Dear Aunt Dahlia threatens to write me out of her will every other month or so. Take it from me, the truly shocking part is the screaming.”

“Shocking hardly explains it. Her voice would wake the dead even when she’s trying to whisper.”

“When they were building aunts, they picked only the sternest stuff before they started on Mrs. Travers. But that reminds me, have you been to the drawing room recently?” Wooster asked. “There used to be two large, Norman axes above the fireplace. I’m curious if they’re still there.”

“I’m down the street at the coffee shop right now. If you like I can walk back to the drawing room to check. I might be back by lunch.”

“It would be a quest worthy of your noble heritage, but I think this situation calls for sterner remedies. Please tell Aunt Dahlia to expect me for dinner.”

“Tell her yourself. She has a phone, you know.”

“Young one,” Wooster said, taking a stern tone, “you speak out of turn. These are not matters of technology, to be solved with wires and í however phone calls are transmitted these days. I’ll have to ask Jeeves. No, young Abigail, the issue here is the psychology of the individual. This is a matter for deep counsel with Jeeves as we make the pilgrimage to the Hamptons.”

“Okay, Uncle Bertie. I’m willing to say that you know best. At least until dinner tonight. But if you don’t show up with some magical remedy for Aunt Dahlia’s distress, I may have to think of something myself.”

Wooster signed off and set the phone on the kitchen counter. He was about to call for Jeeves, but it was unnecessary. He was standing just out of sight, and stepped forward quietly.

“Shall I collect the two-seater, sir? Or shall I engage a cab?”

“How do you do that, Jeeves?” Wooster asked. Even after all these years his valet’s ability to appear at will surprised him. You might say it spooked him, although Wooster would never admit to such superstitious concerns.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, sir.”

“Never mind. Trade secrets of the guild, I suppose. But I believe the two-seater is the better bet. We shall spend the miles in deep meditation, peering into the intersection of Aunt-ish moodiness and the wiles of the young human heart.”

“Very good, sir. I shall make the arrangements.”

“Any chance those arrangements could include kippers and toast?”

“It would be my pleasure, sir.”

Bertram fussed over ties and jackets while Jeeves did his magic with the preparations. It gave Bertram some time to reflect. Aunt Dahlia should be thanking him for exposing the sinister side of Arthur Wilsmeet’s character before the minister started with all the “dearly beloved, we are gathered here today” business. So then, why on Earth was the aged relation so upset?

The phone rang again.

“Hello, this is Bertram Wooster speaking.”

“Ah, Mr. Wooster,” said a familiar voice that Bertie couldn’t quite place.

“I’m glad I caught you.”

“I am well caught,” he said. “The hook is firmly engaged, my young friend, and I am at your service. But the gray matter is slow to respond this morning. I haven’t breakfasted yet. So I wonder if I might impose upon you for a hint or two as to your identity.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Wooster, this is Dorothy Aiken. I’ve called to offer you an apology, because I fear I’ve put you in a bit of a pickle.”

“Pickles are í what’s the word? An icon, I think. Yes, probably an icon. I’d have to ask Jeeves to be sure, but I think that’s the word I want. We’ll proceed as if it is. Pickles, young Dorothy, are an icon of life, so there’s no need to get too worked up about your troubles. Speak your mind and let your soul abide in peace.”

“You’re too kind, Mr. Wooster, but I’m afraid you won’t be once I tell you my tale. You see, I’m the one who sent those messages to Samantha.”

At this point you might be wondering how these sorts of things happen so naturally in the life of Bertram Wooster. If there is a case of mistaken identity, or a confusion between two lovers, or if some marriageable young woman needs to be engaged to the wrong man, or if any sort of embarrassing wheeze of that kind was going to happen within the city limits of New York,

it is likely to snag Bertram Wooster in its clutches. The simple fact is that among those born of women, few could rival Wooster for time spent in the soup. The fates, when they saw young Bertram lying in swaddling clothes in the hospital, had decided that this was one upon whom they could pour soup with liberality.

“Perhaps I didn’t hear you correctly,” Wooster replied cautiously, knowing that sometimes he was actually in the soup, but other times it was only threatening, like a dark cloud on the horizon. There was no need to prejudge things.

“I think you just told me,” he continued, “that you sent Sam some messages, which you have every right to do, of course. There’s no blame in that, as far as I can see.”

“I should have been clearer, Mr. Wooster,” she continued. “I sent the offensive messages to Sam as if they were from Arthur. I used his phone.”

“Was your phone broken?” Wooster asked.

“No, it’s not like that. I thought there was something going on between the two of them and I was trying to find out.”

“This is a man you intend to marry, as I recall,” Wooster said, still trying to put all the pieces together in a way that didn’t involve some calamity.

“Yes. I had borrowed his phone, you see, and I saw these messages from a number I didn’t recognize, and I shouldn’t have done it, but I looked, and I saw they were from some good-looking girl. Her picture was attached to the images.”

“And that roused your suspicions,” Wooster continued. “You couldn’t have just asked?”

“That’s what I should have done, but I was afraid he’d lie to me.”

“I hate to go back over plowed ground, but this is a man you intend to marry?” Wooster asked again. “To love, honor and obey, and all that other stuff? Forsaking all others. In sickness and in health? Is that the fellow we’re talking about? I have never been married myself, young Dorothy, but it seems to me there are two sorts of men. There are those you can trust, and perhaps marry, and there are those you can’t trust, and shouldn’t marry. Jeeves would know better, I’m sure, but that is the Wooster approach to these issues. Generations of Wooster women have held to that general scheme, and the Wooster name is still here to tell the tale.”

“You’re right, of course,” she said, apologetically. “I should have trusted him. But now Mrs. Travers has heard about these messages and she’s stomping around the house in a rage. And since Mrs. Gregson will surely take Arthur’s side when she arrives, there’s bound to be a row this evening.”

“Is Arthur a good judge of distance?” Wooster asked.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean,” Dorothy replied.

“If, say, a woman is standing some distance from him, do you think he could tell if she were nearer to eight feet or ten?”

“I should think so,” Dorothy replied. “He’s done his share of construction work, so I think he could make a good estimate.”

“I hope you’re right. Tell Arty to give Aunt Dahlia at least ten feet of space. His life may depend on it.”

“I don’t understand. What does ten feet have to do with it?”

“I believe the axes in the drawing room are only eight feet long, so accounting for the dear Aunt’s arm length and such, I think ten feet would be safe, so long as he is quick on his feet. Is he?”

“Is he what?”

“Quick on his feet. In the thrust and parry of axes, do you think he’s quick enough? Aunt Dahlia is well smitten with age, but she is surprisingly robust. When Uncle Tom threatened to fire their chef, Anatole, Aunt Dahlia chased him around Brinkley Court with a broom. If it had been an axe, only a fool would have valued Uncle Tom’s above a penny or two.”

“Dear God. I hope it won’t come to that,” Dorothy said.

“It may all be in your power, young thing. Just speak with her and clear the matter up. The aged relation has a rough side to her from all that fox hunting and outdoor life, but she can be reasonable.”

“But Mr. Wooster, I simply can’t. You may not have heard, but she’s hired me to be the social media manager for her publication. *Milady’s Boudoir*, it’s called. I’ll have access to all her accounts, and if she finds out that I looked into Arthur’s phone – she’ll think I’m not trustworthy and she’ll sack me in a blink.”

“She certainly will,” Wooster agreed. “And it won’t be with a still, small voice.”

“I don’t think I could stand the shame of it, Mr. Wooster, but even worse, Arthur and I need the money if we’re to be married.”

“It’s a sticky wicket,” Wooster said. “I’ll have to submit it to my man. If anyone can navigate these waters, it’s Jeeves. In the meanwhile, try to keep Aunt Dahlia and Arthur at least ten feet apart. Farther if you can manage it.”

“I’ll do my best. Goodbye.”

Wooster had hardly set down the phone when Jeeves shimmered into visual range with a tall w & s. Bertram latched onto the tumbler as if his life depended on it.

“I have arranged transportation to the Hamptons, sir.”

“So you’re apprised of the situation, eh? I thought you might be. And you think it requires our presence?”

“It would be advisable, sir. Telephonic communication leaves much to be desired. If we had Wi-Fi, we might be able to Skype with Mrs. Travers, sir.”

“Blast Wi-Fi, Jeeves.”

“Yes, sir.”

“This is an emergency.”

“So I gather, sir.”

“It’s one thing to have Aunt Agatha always sharpening her axe while she’s thinking of nephews, but there has always been a touch of something í . . . something not entirely unlike affection toward little Bertram on the part of Aunt Dahlia. That smoldering wick can’t be extinguished, Jeeves, whatever the cost. A man with as little auntish affection as Bertram Wooster must be sure to preserve what small amount still exists in the world. We must repair the breach.”

“At what cost, sir?”

“What was that, Jeeves? I don’t believe this should cost us more than a ride to the Hamptons.”

“I’m sorry sir, I should have been more precise. I mean, at what potential cost to the young couple? It would be a simple matter to inform Mrs. Travers of the í . . . deception with the phone.”

“But that would be as good as standing up and objecting when the minister asks for cause, Jeeves. No, we have to protect the young lovebirds. We need a strategy that sets all to right. I need your best effort here, Jeeves. At the

end of the day, dear old Aunt Dahlia has to be reconciled to Arthur. She must return to her tittering and fawning over the wedding. And, what's more, Aunt Agatha can't find a way to blame the situation on me. You know she is an expert at that, Jeeves.

It is a tall order, sir.

Not for you, Jeeves. Not for you. You've solved worse puzzles than this. I have complete confidence in your abilities.

Thank you, sir. I shall meditate on the problem.

Meditate away, Jeeves. I assume you have arranged an itinerary. What time shall we vacate the current premises?

We should leave within the half hour, sir.

Splendid. Just enough time for a relaxing jaunt at the piano, then. It won't disturb your meditations, will it, Jeeves?

No, sir. Despite my aversion to show tunes, your playing has an oddly soothing effect.

That's very good of you, Jeeves. Reminds you of the beloved master and all that, eh?

Precisely, sir.

* * *

Wooster enjoyed the ride from the city into the more rarefied environs of the Hamptons, but as they approached the manor house that Aunt Dahlia had taken as her temporary abode, he pulled the car to the side and stopped.

You don't mind driving the rest of the way and seeing to the luggage, do you Jeeves? I'd like to take a stroll in the grounds and work my way gently up to the house. Get the lay of the land, so to speak.

Not at all, sir.

Besides, it will give you a chance to warn me if you see Aunt Dahlia eyeing the Norman axes.

Indeed, sir.

It's a bad omen, Jeeves.

Pardon me, sir?

“Of all the family heirlooms that Aunt Dahlia thought to transport from Brinkley Court to her American residence, she decided on the Norman axes.”

“It is a matter to be pondered, sir.”

“Indeed. And ponder I shall. What time is Aunt Agatha expected?”

“Mrs. Gregson is to arrive before six o’clock, sir.”

Wooster consulted his watch and sighed.

“Very well then, Jeeves. Tinkety tonk, and I’ll be along in about an hour.”

Wooster was a man whose brain, unremarkable in so many other ways, made light of compass headings and maps. He’d glanced at a map of the area surrounding the Traversø temporary residence, and with a simple look at the scenery he could recognize the topography of the estate and know the precise heading to any of the noteworthy features of the surrounding parkland. He wandered for an hour or more with a light heart, knowing that Jeeves was on the job, preparing the way for the coming of his master.

He was a mile from the house, walking on the gravel shoulder of the road, when a large vehicle slowed and pulled up beside him.

“Bertie, get in,” said a commanding voice from the back seat of the car.

“What ho, Aunt Agatha,” Wooster said with as much cheer and enthusiasm as he could muster, which wasn’t much.

“Get in Bertie. I need to speak with you.”

“Couldn’t we speak at the house, aged relation? I haven’t finished stretching the legs.”

“Will you stop blabbering and get in, Bertie,” she insisted.

“Nice set of wheels, what?” he said hopefully as he took a perch in the back seat next to Aunt Agatha.

“Stop talking nonsense, Bertie. I haven’t come all this way to talk about the quality of rented cars. I hear that you’ve gone and messed things up again.”

“You have been misinformed, Aunt,” he replied seriously. “You wound me. I have behaved precisely as an English gentleman should.”

“I doubt that very much,” she said. “I’m speaking of the matter of the betrothal of Arthur and Dorothy. Wasn’t it you who introduced Arthur to this Samantha person?”

“While on your orders, yes I did. You set me an impossible task of arranging the itineraries of two people a thousand miles away, and despite the difficulties, I managed it. Samantha was the very helpful instrument of that success. A good egg, she is. And dances a fine Charleston, I might add.”

“Didn’t I tell you to stop talking nonsense? It is precisely this Samantha who has become a barrier to Arthur and Dorothy’s marriage. He’s quite taken with her, Bertie.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Bertie with a light laugh. “I’m sure you’re exaggerating the situation. Last I saw of Dorothy and Arthur they were the perfect couple. Love birds getting ready to make a nest and all that. I’m sure good old Sam is just being kind. You know these young people today. Always chummy.”

“It’s nothing of the sort, you blight upon humanity,” she insisted. “It’s become a serious problem, and since it’s all your fault, you’re going to have to fix it.”

“My fault?” Bertram said, with offended dignity. “The ways of the human heart are beyond my control, aged relation, and even if Arthur’s eye has been turned, I can hardly be blamed for it.”

“Wasn’t it you who hosted them all to dinner at your place? First you introduced them in Florida, where she was no doubt immodestly dressed, and then you invited them both to your house for drinks.”

“The young lady is an officer in this country’s Air Force, so Uncle Sam might take umbrage at your characterization of Miss Samantha’s attire. And while I did invite them over for dinner, it was hardly a love feast. In fact, I believe Arthur was quite peeved at Samantha.”

“Over the phone messages. Yes, I know all about them. You should never have brought them into proximity, you careless blighter. It’s like playing with dynamite. Put together a man and a woman who hate each other, and pretty soon they’ll be reciting love sonnets on moonlit strolls.”

“I’m sure you’ve overstated the matter. But, ah, look. That’s Dorothy over there.”

“Where?”

“Off the road a piece, staring into the bushes. Probably watching birds or something. Let me off here and I’ll have the seasonable word. Make sure the love light is still shining and all that, what?”

“Very well, Bertie. But don’t mess things up. It’s your responsibility to make sure this marriage takes place.”

Wooster got out of the car eagerly and stepped gingerly through a break in the hedge. He waited a moment for that familiar calming sensation he felt whenever he left the presence of Aunt Agatha. Once it settled upon him he sniffed the breeze, raised his head and proceeded across the meadow with a smile on his face.

He could see Dorothy among the foliage, but before he had a chance to call out, she crouched down and peered intently at a patch of bushes. Wooster wondered what sort of woodland creature might be hiding just out of his sight, but then the object of Dorothy’s interest became plain. It wasn’t something in the bushes that Dorothy was waiting for, but something a good distance beyond, across the road. Arthur and Samantha were emerging from a coffee shop, laughing and clearly enjoying one another’s company.

Dorothy’s face turned red and she stomped off in the direction of Aunt Dahlia’s house. Wooster hailed Arthur in hopes that he would catch sight of her and run off, like a fiancé eager to clear up a confusion – assuming, as he did, that this was all an innocent misunderstanding.

“What ho, Arty,” Wooster called.

Arthur bid a very friendly farewell to Samantha, who turned towards the parking lot, and Arthur walked towards Wooster in no great hurry. By the time he arrived, Dorothy was out of sight.

“You just missed Dorothy,” Wooster said.

“Oh, was she spying on me?” he asked with surprising venom.

“That might be one way to interpret things,” Wooster tried to soothe. “You seem a bit ruffled.”

“Do I?” asked Arthur with some heat. “Any why do you suppose that might be? The woman who claims that she intends to love, honor and obey me until death do us part has recently shown that she doesn’t trust me with my own phone.”

“I see. Well, it might not be as bad as all that.”

“If only Dorothy were as understanding as Samantha,” Arthur sighed.

“Samantha?”

“Yes. An absolute angel, Mr. Wooster. After Dorothy confessed to her trickery, I explained the situation to Sam and she brightened right up. All is

forgiven. She would have gone for a walk with me, but she has some sort of nature thing scheduled for this afternoon. She studied some sort of biology in school, I think.ö

öDo you think that wise?ö

öWhat, studying biology? It's not my thing, but I suppose someone's got to do it.ö

öNo, I mean going for an afternoon walk with Samantha while you are engaged to Dorothy.ö

öOh,ö he said. öI'm not sure I care.ö And with that he turned and walked away.

Wooster wondered about chasing after him, but he heard that familiar cough. That gentle, quiet sound Jeeves made to announce his presence.

öAh, Jeeves. So there you are.ö

öYes, sir. Most disappointing news, sir.ö

öSo you heard.ö

öI happened to be in the vicinity, sir. I was looking for you. Mrs. Travers would like a word.ö

öWell, Jeeves, the plot thickens.ö

öIndeed, sir.ö

öIt is a time to adjust our stratagems, I believe.ö

öYes, sir. I have already made a few adjustments on my own. While the latest developments do seem dark, I believe there is a way out.ö

öA light at the end of the tunnel, what?ö

öPrecisely, sir.ö

öYou have always been more far-sighted than I in such matters, Jeeves. I'll leave it in your capable hands and take my chances with Aunt Dahlia. Did you check on the axes, Jeeves?ö

öI did, sir. They are both mounted above the fireplace.ö

öNo evidence that she'd taken them down and done a few practice swipes with them?ö

öNone that I could see, sir.ö

öVery good.ö

“If you don’t mind, sir, I will step across the street to the coffee shop. There is a small matter I must attend to.”

“Step away, Jeeves. I’ll see you back at the mansion.”

* * *

The first sound Wooster heard upon entering the Traversø temporary residence was the bellowing voice of Dahlia Travers.

“There’s our idiot nephew now.”

“What ho, aunts,” Bertie said after setting his hat on the rack.

“Did you have a chance to speak with Dorothy?” Aunt Agatha said, kicking off the argument for the prosecution.

“Actually, no. She slipped away before I got to her.”

“Then perhaps you haven’t heard,” put in the assistant prosecutor, “that she is now crying in her room and wants nothing to do with Arthur.”

“Oh, I’m sure it’s just a temporary thing,” Wooster soothed. “You know these young hearts, turning this way and that.”

“She’s called off the engagement,” summarized Aunt Agatha. “Dahlia and I both have an interest in this wedding going forward, Bertram, and you will see that it happens.”

“Or, rather, Jeeves will,” added Aunt Dahlia. “He’s the brains behind any good thing this plague ever manages to accomplish.”

“Now see here, aged relation,” objected Bertie, “it’s not my fault if I . . .”

“It most certainly is,” the sisters cried in unison, although it was hard to hear Aunt Agatha’s normally pitched voice above the bellowing roar from Aunt Dahlia.

“And one more thing, you contemptible nephew,” added Dahlia. “What gives you the right to inflict this Spink-Bottle person on me?”

“I beg your pardon. Is Gussie here?”

“He most certainly is, and at your invitation. So Jeeves tells me anyway.”

Bertie knew better than to interfere in the workings of Jeevesø plans, so he simply asked where he might be found.

“Out in the garden looking for newts. Where else would the wretched creature be?”

Bertram took his leave by the patio door that led to the garden. The path was sturdy enough, but he had that familiar feeling that he was sinking ever deeper into the slough of despond.

“Oh Mr. Wooster,” a voice called.

“What ho, Miss Dorothy,” he replied, now so fully in that state of Aunt-ish terror that he expected some other shoe to drop. Or perhaps an axe.

“Do you know anything about wireless routers?” she asked in a conspiratorial whisper.

“I make it a policy not to,” he said. “But my man Jeeves is always on about them. You might check with him.”

“Oh, I hope he can help me. It’s a matter of life or death.”

“How so?” Bertram asked.

“It’s only my first day on the job, Mr. Wooster, and I seem to have fouled up the connection. Mrs. Travers likes to check the horse races at about seven o’clock, and if she can’t get online she’ll be furious.”

“The old thing indulges in those electronic menaces, does she?”

“Only for the horse races,” Dorothy explained. “Otherwise she’s entirely uninterested in anything electronic, but when Anatole showed her how he could call up the race results on his tablet, she just had to learn how.”

“I see. Jeeves is your man, then. You can probably find him in the kitchen, conferring with Anatole about wines and such.”

She shuffled off, and Bertram stood for a moment to wonder how his aunts would manage to blame this on him as well.

When a half hour’s search yielded no trace of Gussie, Bertram retired to his room to dress for dinner. Jeeves was waiting.

“Ah, Jeeves. There you are at the wheel, keeping the ship between Scylla and Charibdis like a skilled mariner.”

“It is my fervent hope, sir.”

“Miss Dorothy was looking for you earlier. Were you able to clear up her troubles with the Wi-Fi?”

“I did not, sir.”

“I don’t take your meaning, Jeeves. Do you mean that you could, but that you chose not to?”

“Precisely, sir.”

“And why the devil did you do that? You know that I have two aunts sharpening not only their tongues but every bladed instrument in a country mile, meditating on the best way to carve a nephew.”

“I told Miss Dorothy that Arthur is an expert on wireless networking, sir.”

“Ah. And he is, I hope.”

“He is quite knowledgeable on the subject, sir.”

“And you’re hoping that a little time together fixing the dratted gizmo might rekindle the love?”

“It might help, sir, but the location of the problem with the wireless is the key to success.”

“A romantic spot, perhaps?”

“Not unless you find newts romantic, sir.”

“I believe I am starting to see the plan here, Jeeves. Don’t tell me that Samantha is also a newt fancier.”

“She did her senior research project on the eastern newt, sir.”

“And if young Samantha and Gussie learn of one another’s fondness for newts, í ö

“The love light is bound to burn brightly, sir.”

“I’d say so. Gussie’s been hoping for a gal who can even tolerate the things. If Sam actually likes them, love can’t be far behind. All that’s needed is a chance to let Dorothy see Gussie making goo goo eyes at Sam, and vice versa. Have you found such a place, Jeeves, where there’s a problem with the confounded machinery and there are newts in abundance?”

“I have directed both couples to just such a location, sir.”

“Amazing luck that the Wi-Fi would fail right next to a vacation spot for newts, what Jeeves?”

“Not entirely, sir.”

“You cut the wire.”

Jeeves opened a desk drawer to display a pair of clippers.

“You’re a wonder, Jeeves.”

“It is kind of you to say so, sir.”

“Anatole’s cooking is not something to be missed lightly, Jeeves, but in this case I believe our best strategy might be to depart the premises and allow nature to take her course.”

“The luggage is already in the car, sir.”

Wooster took a moment to look at Jeeves in wonder. This faithful servant, with whom he’d been through so many adventures, never failed him.

“Jeeves, this is really some of your best work. That wireless whatsit you wanted. Have it installed at the apartment at your earliest convenience.”

“It was installed this afternoon, sir.”

“Very good, Jeeves.”

END