



# MY MAN JEEVES

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**A master of English prose, born in 1881 became an admired English humorist and wrote novels, short stories and plays. He enjoyed enormous popular success during a career that lasted more than seventy years**

This was the earliest of his short story collections to mention Jeeves in the title, and it is a very early Jeeves/Wooster story. It is brilliant, delightful and charming. In the book he brings Bertie Wooster and Jeeves to life with elegance and charm. His love of the material is evident and he uses prototypical early 20th

century-era phrases, which gives this story its distinct flavour and style. Much of the story is based around Jeeves, who is forever coming to the rescue of the hapless Bertie Wooster. It will delight anyone with a taste for pithy buffoonery and mishaps. Bertie has been banished to New York by his Aunt Agatha and is living the

good life, but is continually getting involved in his friends' dramas in which he needs Jeeves to come up with solutions to resolve them. This is a story that is set at a time when the British aristocracy had man servants and, although perhaps well educated, Bertie Wooster just doesn't have the cunning to work things out.

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## LESSON 2

When I reached my apartment I heard Jeeves moving about in his **lair**. I called him. "Jeeves," I said, "now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. A stiff brandy and soda first of all, and then I've a bit of news for you."

He came back with a tray and a long glass. "Better have one yourself, Jeeves. You'll need it." "Later on, perhaps, thank you, sir." "All right. Please yourself. But you're going to get a shock. You remember my friend, Mr. Corcoran?" "Yes, sir." "And the girl who was to slide gracefully into his uncle's esteem by writing the book on birds?" "Perfectly, sir."

"Well, she's slid. She's married the uncle." He took it without blinking. You can't **rattle** Jeeves. "That was always a development to be feared, sir." "You don't mean to tell me that you were expecting it?" "It crossed my mind as a possibility." "Did it now. Well, I think, you might have warned us." "I hardly liked to take the liberty, sir."

Of course, as I saw after I had had a bite to eat and was in a calmer frame of mind, what had happened wasn't my

fault. I couldn't be expected to **foresee** that the scheme would skid into the ditch as it had done. But all the same I'm bound to admit that I didn't **relish** the idea of meeting Corky again until time had been able to get in a bit of soothing work. I cut Washington Square out for the next few months.

Opening the paper one morning, I read that Mrs. Alexander Worple had presented her husband with a son and heir. I felt so sorry for poor old Corky that I hadn't the heart to touch my breakfast. I told Jeeves to eat it himself. I was **bowled over**. I hardly knew what to do. I wanted, of course, to rush down to Washington Square and grip the poor man silently by the hand.

After a month or so I began to hesitate again. It struck me that avoiding him like this just when he probably wanted his **pals** to surge round him most. I pictured him sitting in his lonely studio with no company but his bitter thoughts, and the pathos of it. So I bounded into a taxi and went to the studio.

I rushed in, and there was Corky, hunched up at the

easel painting away, while a severe-looking female of middle age was holding a baby. "Ah," I said, and started to back out. Corky looked over his shoulder. "Bertie, don't go," he said. "We're just finishing for the day." The nurse got up with the baby and **decanted** it into a **perambulator** which was standing in the fairway.

"At the same hour to-morrow, Mr. Corcoran?" "Yes, please." "Good afternoon," she said and left. Corky stood there looking at the door, and then he turned to me and began to **get it off his chest**. Fortunately, he seemed to take it for granted that I knew all about what had happened, so it wasn't as awkward as it might have been.

"It's my uncle's idea," he said. "Muriel doesn't know about it yet. The portrait's to be a surprise for her on her birthday. The nurse takes the baby out **ostensibly** to **take a breather**, and they come down here. This is the first **commission** I have ever had to paint a portrait, and the sitter has **butted in** and bounced me out of my inheritance. I call it rubbing the thing in to expect me to spend my afternoons gazing

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into the ugly face of a little **brat** who **to all intents and purposes** has hit me behind the ear with an axe and **swiped** all I possess. I can't refuse to paint the portrait because if I did my uncle would stop my allowance, yet every time I look up and catch that child's vacant eye, I suffer agonies.

"I tell you, Bertie, sometimes when he gives me a **patronising** glance and then turns away and is sick, as if it **revolted** him to look at me. I come within an inch of occupying the entire front page of the evening papers as the latest murder sensation. There are moments when I can almost see the headlines: 'Promising Young Artist Kills Baby With Axe'."

I patted his shoulder silently. My sympathy for him was too deep for words. I kept away from the studio for some time after that, because it didn't seem right to me to intrude on the poor man's sorrow. Besides, I'm bound to say that the nurse **intimidated** me. She reminded me **infernally** of my Aunt Agatha.

But one afternoon Corky called me on the phone.

"Bertie, are you doing anything this afternoon?" "Nothing special." "You couldn't come down here, could you?" "What's the trouble? Anything up?" "I've finished the portrait." His voice sounded rather doubtful. "The fact is, Bertie, it doesn't look quite right to me. There's something wrong about it. My uncle's coming in half an hour to inspect it and, I don't know why it is, but I kind of feel I'd like your **moral support**."

"But only if I may bring Jeeves." "Why Jeeves? What's Jeeves got to do with it? Jeeves is the fool who suggested the scheme that has led..." "Listen, Corky, if you think I am going to face that uncle of yours without Jeeves's support you're mistaken. I'd sooner go into a den of wild beasts and bite a lion on the back of the neck."

"Oh, all right," said Corky. Not **cordially** but he said it, so I rang for Jeeves, and explained the situation. "Very good, sir," said Jeeves. That's the sort of man he is. You can't rattle him.

We found Corky near the door, looking at the picture, with one hand up in a

defensive sort of way, as if he thought it might swing on him. "Stand right where you are, Bertie," he said, without moving. "Now, tell me honestly, **how does it strike you?**"

The light from the big window fell right on the picture. I took a good look at it. Then I shifted a bit nearer and took another look. Then I went back to where I had been at first, because it hadn't seemed quite so bad from there. "Well?" said Corky, anxiously. I hesitated a bit. I looked again, and honesty **compelled** me to be frank. "I only saw the kid once, and then only for a moment, but it was an ugly sort of kid." "As ugly as that?"

"You're right quite, Bertie. Something's gone wrong it. My private impression is that, without knowing it, I've painted the soul of the sitter. I've got through the outward appearance and have put the child's soul on canvas."

"But could a child of that age have a soul like that? I don't see how he could have. What do you think, Jeeves?" "I doubt it, sir. It sort of leers at you, doesn't it?" "You've noticed that, too?" said Corky.

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"All I tried to do was to give the little brute a cheerful expression. But, as it worked out, he looks positively **dissipated**." "Just what I was going to suggest. He looks as if he were in the middle of a **colossal spree**, and enjoying every minute of it. Don't you think so, Jeeves?" "He has a decidedly **inebriated** air, sir."

Corky was starting to say something when the door opened and the uncle came in. For about three seconds all was joy, jollity, and goodwill. The old man shook hands with me, slapped Corky on the back, said that he didn't think he had ever seen such a fine day, and hit his leg with his stick. Jeeves had **projected himself** into the background and he didn't notice him.

"Well, Bruce, so the portrait is really finished. Well, bring it out, let's have a look at it. This will be a wonderful surprise for your aunt. Where is it?" And then he got it, suddenly, when he wasn't set for the punch and he rocked back on his heels. "Oosh," he exclaimed. And for perhaps a minute there was one of the most **ominous** silences I've ever run up against. "Is this a practical joke?" he said at last.

I thought it was up to me to **rally round** old Corky. "You want to stand a bit farther away from it," I said. "You're perfectly right," he **snorted**. "I do. I want to stand so far away from it that I can't see the thing with a telescope." He **turned on** Corky like an untamed tiger of the jungle who has just located a chunk of meat.

"And this is what you've been wasting your time and my money for all these years. A painter! I wouldn't let you paint a house of mine. I gave you this commission, thinking that you were a competent worker, and this **extract** from a comic coloured **supplement** is the result.

"This ends it. If you wish to continue this foolery of pretending to be an artist because you want an excuse for idleness, please yourself. But let me tell you this, unless you report at my office on Monday morning prepared to abandon all this idiocy and start in at the bottom of the business to work your way up, as you should have done years ago, then not another cent."

Then the door closed, and he was no longer with us. And I

crawled out of the **bombproof** shelter. "Corky," I whispered faintly. Corky was standing staring at the picture with his face set. There was a hunted look in his eye. "Well, that finishes it," he muttered brokenly.

"What are you going to do?" "Do? What can I do? I can't carry on here if he cuts off my supplies. You heard what he said. I shall have to go to the office on Monday." I couldn't think of a thing to say. I knew exactly how he felt about the office. I don't know when I've been so uncomfortable. It was like hanging round trying to make conversation to someone who's just been sentenced to twenty years in jail. And then a soothing voice broke the silence.

"If I might make a suggestion, sir." It was Jeeves. He had slid from the shadows and was gazing **gravely** at the picture. Upon my word, I can't give you a better idea of the shattering effect of Corky's uncle when in action than by saying that he had absolutely made me forget for the moment that Jeeves was there. "I wonder if I have ever happened to mention to you, sir, a gentleman called Digby Thistleton.

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"Perhaps you have met him? He was a financier and is now Lord Bridgnorth. It was a favourite saying of his that there is always a way. The first time I heard him use the expression was after the failure of a patent **depilatory** which he promoted." "Jeeves," I said, "what on earth are you talking about?"

"I mentioned Mr. Thistleton, sir, because his was in some respects a **parallel** case to the present one. His depilatory failed, but he did not despair. He put it on the market again under the name of Hair-o, guaranteed to produce a full crop of hair in a few months. It was advertised, if you remember, by a humorous picture of a snooker-ball, before taking it.

"He made such a substantial fortune that he was soon afterwards **elevated** to the **peerage** for services. It seems to me that, if Mr. Corcoran looks into the matter, he will find that there is always a way. In the heat of the moment he compared the portrait to an extract from a coloured comic supplement.

Mr. Corcoran's portrait may not have pleased Mr. Worples as a likeness of his only child,

but I have no doubt that editors would gladly consider it as a foundation for a series of humorous drawings. If Mr. Corcoran will allow me to make the suggestion, his talent has always been for the humorous. There is something about this picture that is bold and vigorous. I feel sure it would be popular."

Corky was glaring at the picture, and making a sort of dry, sucking noise with his mouth. He seemed completely **overwrought**. And then suddenly he began to laugh in a wild way. "Corky," I said, massaging him tenderly. I feared the poor **blighter** was hysterical. He began to stagger about all over the floor.

"He's right, the man's absolutely right. Jeeves, you're a life-saver, you've hit on the greatest idea of the age. I know the man who runs the comic section of the Sunday Star. He was only telling me the other day how hard it was to get a good new series. He'll give me anything I ask for a real winner like this. I've got a gold-mine.

"Where's my hat? I've got an income for life. Where's that confounded hat? Lend me a

**fiver**, Bertie. I want to take a taxi." Jeeves smiled **paternally**. Or, rather, he had a kind of paternal muscular spasm about his mouth, which is the nearest he ever gets to smiling.

"If I might make another suggestion, Mr. Corcoran. For a title of the series which you have in mind you may consider *The Adventures of Baby Blobbs*." Corky and I looked at the picture, then at each other in an awed way. Jeeves was right. There could be no other title.

"Jeeves," I said. It was a few weeks later and I had just finished looking at the comic section of the Sunday Star. "I'm an **optimist**. I always have been. The older I get, the more I agree with Shakespeare about it always being darkest before the dawn and there's always a **silver lining**."

"Look at Mr. Corcoran, for instance. There was a man one would have said was **up to his neck in the soup**. Have you seen these pictures?" "I took the liberty of glancing at them before bringing them to you, sir. Extremely **diverting**." "They will become a very big hit."

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## VOCABULARY

**Lair:** Secret retreat, a resting place for a wild animal.

**Rattle:** To make someone agitated or annoyed.

**Foresee:** To know in advance.

**Relish:** To take pleasure in, enjoy.

**Bowled over:** Delighted, affected with great wonder and surprise, astonished.

**Pal:** A friend.

**Decant:** Usually to pour wine from a bottle into a container but in this case to transfer.

**Perambulator:** More commonly known as a pram, carriage for a baby.

**Get it off your chest:** Idiom meaning something you have wanted to say for a long time but didn't, a relief in saying something held back in the past.

**Ostensibly:** Appearing to be true but not necessarily so.

**Take a breather:** To rest for a while to catch one's breath.

**Commission:** An order from someone to do something, especially a work of art.

**Butted in:** To rudely interrupt into a conversation.

**Brat:** A spoiled, ill-mannered child who frequently throws tantrums.

**To all intents and purposes:** Idiom meaning for all practical purposes, in all important ways.

**Swipe:** Slang for steal.

**Patronising:** Treat with apparent kindness but betraying a feeling of superiority.

**Revolt:** Cause to feel disgust about something.

**Intimidate:** Frighten someone in order to make them do what you want.

**Infernal:** Relating to hell, someone or something highly unpleasant.

**Moral support:** To encourage someone, showing that you approve of what they're doing.

**Cordial:** To be warm and friendly.

**How does it strike you?:** How you think about an unexpected idea.

**Compel:** To force or oblige someone to do something.

**Dissipate:** To lose of energy or interest.

**Colossal spree:** Extremely large and sustained period of unrestricted activity.

**Inebriated:** Intoxicated, drunk.

**Project oneself:** To present yourself in a particular manner.

**Ominous:** A worrying feeling that something bad is going to happen.

**Rally round:** To come to the aid of someone.

**Snorted:** Expressing indignation or disgust.

**Turn on:** To suddenly attack verbally.

**Extract:** A passage of text in a book.

**Supplement:** Something written to enhance the original.

**Bombproof:** Strong enough to resist the effects of a blast from a bomb.

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## VOCABULARY

**Gravely:** To a degree that gives cause for alarm, serious.

**Depilatory:** Remove hair from.

**Parallel:** Existing at the same time or in a similar way.

**Elevated:** Raised to a higher position.

**Peerage:** Hereditary title and rank in British nobility.

**Overwrought:** In a state of nervous excitement or anxiety.

**Blighter:** Someone that is held in low esteem.

**Fiver:** Slang for a British five pound note.

**Paternally:** In a fatherly way.

**Optimist:** Someone with a tendency to always look on the bright side of events or conditions.

**Silver lining:** Every sad situation has a more hopeful aspect to it.

**Up to his neck in the soup:** This phrase wouldn't be commonly be used together nowadays but to be up to your neck in something is to

be seriously involved in and the soup means to be in trouble.

**Diverting:** Draw the attention of someone away from tedious concerns to something entertaining or amusing.

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## Q&A

**Question 1:** Why did Jeeves' scheme for Corky "skid into the ditch"?

**Question 5:** How did Jeeves try to make this a parallel case to Mr. Thistleton's and what sort of money did he make?

**Overview:** Write in your own words what you thought of the story so far and your interpretation of its meaning.

**Question 2:** Why did Bertie Wooster all of a sudden decide that he would visit Corky's studio?

**Question 6:** Why was the man who ran the comic section of the Sunday Star so important to Corky?

**Question 3:** What was wrong with the portrait and what did it signify to the viewer?

**Question 7:** Why did they all imagine that the painting would be so comical?

**Question 4:** What did Corky's uncle think about the painting and what did he do to punish him for it?

**Question 8:** When the portraits were published, what do you think would make them such a big hit?