



MY MAN JEEVES

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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 3

After the paintings had become such a success, Bertie Wooster said to Jeeves, "You know, Jeeves, you're a genius. You ought to be drawing a commission on these things." "I have nothing to complain of in that respect, sir. Mr. Corcoran has been most generous. I am putting out the brown suit, sir."

"No, I think I'll wear the blue one with the faint red stripe." "Not the blue one with the faint red stripe?" "But I rather fancy myself in it." "Not the blue with the faint red stripe, sir, please." "Oh, all right, have it your own way." "Very good, sir. Thank you, sir."

Of course, I know it's as bad as being **henpecked** but then Jeeves is always right. You've got to consider that. I'm not absolutely certain of my facts but I rather fancy it's usually **braced** with things in general that Fate sneaks up behind him. The man sometimes oppresses me and I don't so much mind when he made me give up one of my new suits, because Jeeves' judgement about suits is sound. But when he wouldn't let me wear a pair of boots which I loved, I had to put my foot down and showed him who was who.

I was in the bathroom one morning wondering what there was going to be for breakfast while I massaged my spine with a rough towel and sang slightly, when there was a tap at the door. I stopped singing and opened the door an inch.

"Yes," I said **irritably**. "Lady Malvern wishes to see you, sir," said Jeeves. "Eh?" "Lady Malvern, sir. She is waiting in the sitting-room." "**Pull yourself together**, Jeeves," I said, rather severely, for I **bar** practical jokes before breakfast. "You know perfectly well there's no one waiting for me in the sitting-room. How could there be when it's barely ten o'clock?"

"I **gathered from** her ladyship that she had landed from an ocean liner at an early hour this morning." This made the situation a bit more **plausible**. I remembered when I had arrived in America about a year before, the **proceedings** had begun at some **ghastly** hour like six, and that I had been shot out on to a foreign shore considerably before eight.

"Who is Lady Malvern, Jeeves?" "Her ladyship did not **confide in** me, sir."

"Is she alone?" "Her ladyship is accompanied by a Lord Pershore. I fancy that his lordship would be her ladyship's son." "Oh, well, put out rich **raiment** of sorts, and I'll be dressing."

While I was dressing I kept trying to think who on earth Lady Malvern could be. It wasn't till I had climbed through the top of my shirt and was reaching out for the buttons that I remembered. "I've placed her, Jeeves. She's a pal of my Aunt Agatha." "Indeed, sir?" "Yes. I met her at lunch one Sunday before I left London. A very vicious specimen. She writes books. She wrote one about social conditions in India."

I tied my tie, got into the jacket and waistcoat and went into the sitting-room. "Hello," I said. "Ah, how do you do, Mr. Wooster? You have never met my son, Wilmot, I think? Motty, this is Mr. Wooster." Lady Malvern was a **hearty**, happy, healthy, overpowering sort of female, not so very tall. She had bright, **bulging** eyes and a lot of yellow hair, and when she spoke she showed about fifty-seven front teeth. She was one of those women who kind of numb a man's vital **faculties**.

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She made me feel as if I were ten years old and had been brought into the drawing-room in my Sunday clothes to say how do you do. She was by no means the sort of thing a man would wish to find in his sitting-room before breakfast.

Motty, the son, was about twenty-three, tall and thin and **meek**-looking. He had the same yellow hair as his mother but he wore it **plastered** down and parted in the middle. His eyes bulged, too, but they weren't bright. They were a dull grey with pink **rim**s. He didn't appear to have any eyelashes. A mild, **furtive**, sheepish sort of person, in short.

"Glad to see you," I lied. "So you've popped over, eh? Making a long stay in America?" "In about a month. Your aunt gave me your address and told me to be sure and call on you." I was glad to hear this, as it showed that Aunt Agatha was beginning to warm to me a bit more.

There had been some unpleasantness a year before when she had sent me over to New York to **disentangle** my cousin Gussie from the

clutches of a girl on the music-hall stage. When I tell you that by the time I had finished my operations, Gussie had not only married the girl but had gone on the stage himself, and was doing well.

You'll understand that Aunt Agatha was upset in no small measure. I simply hadn't dared go back and face her, and it was a relief to find that time had healed the wound enough to make her tell her friends to look me up. "Your aunt said that you would do anything that was in your power to be of assistance to us." "Oh absolutely."

"Thank you so much. I want you to **put Motty up** for a little while." I didn't understand this at first. "Put him up?" "Motty is essentially a **home bird**, aren't you, Motty?" Motty, who was sucking the end of his stick, woke up to the conversation. "Yes, mother," he said. "I mean put him up here. Have him to live with you while I am away."

These **frightful** words trickled out of her like honey. The woman simply didn't seem to understand the ghastly nature of her proposal. Motty was sitting with his mouth

nuzzling his stick, blinking at the wall. The thought of having this planted on me for an **indefinite** period **appalled** me. There was something about this woman that sapped my will to live.

"I am leaving New York on the midday train, as I have to pay a visit to Sing-Sing prison. I am extremely interested in prison conditions in America. After that I work my way gradually across to the coast, visiting the points of interest on the journey. You see, Mr. Wooster, I am in America principally on business.

"No doubt you read my book, *India and the Indians*? My publishers are anxious for me to write a another volume on the United States. I shall not be able to spend more than a month in the country, as I have to get back, but a month should be **ample**. I was less than a month in India, and my dear friend Sir Roger Cremorne wrote his *America from Within* after a stay of only two weeks.

"I should love to take Motty with me, but the poor boy gets so sick when he travels. I will have to pick him up when I return." There must be a way around this, I thought..

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From where I sat I could see Jeeves in the dining-room, laying the breakfast table. I wished I could have had a minute with him alone. I felt certain that he would have been able to think of some way of putting a stop to this **wretched** woman.

"It will be such a relief to know that Motty is safe with you, Mr. Wooster. I know what the temptations of a great city are and Motty has been sheltered from them. He has lived quietly with me in the country. I know that you will look after him carefully, Mr. Wooster. He will give very little trouble.

"He is a vegetarian and a teetotaller and is devoted to reading. Give him a nice book and he will be quite contented." She got up to leave. "Thank you so much, Mr. Wooster. I don't know what I should have done without your help. Goodbye, Mr. Wooster. I will send Motty back early in the afternoon." They went out, and I howled for Jeeves.

"Jeeves! What about it?" "Sir?" "What's to be done? You heard it all, didn't you? You were in the dining room most of the time." I looked at

Jeeves sharply. This sort of thing wasn't like him. It was as if he were deliberately trying to irritate me. Then I understood. The man was really upset about that tie. He was trying to get his own back.

"Lord Pershore will be staying here from tonight, Jeeves," I said coldly. "Very good, sir. Breakfast is ready." I could have sobbed into the bacon and eggs. That there wasn't any sympathy to be got out of Jeeves was what saddened me. For a moment I almost weakened and told him to destroy the hat and tie if he didn't like them, but I pulled myself together again.

About midday Motty's luggage arrived, and soon after a large parcel of what I took to be books. Later, I dined at my club and looked in at a show, and it wasn't till fairly late that I got back to the apartment. There were no signs of Motty, and I took it that he had gone to bed.

Jeeves came in with the nightly whisky and soda but I could tell by the his manner that he was still upset. "Has Lord Pershore gone to bed, Jeeves?" I asked, with reserved **hauteur**.

"No, sir. His lordship has not yet returned." "Not returned? What do you mean?" "His lordship came in shortly after six-thirty, and, having dressed, went out again."

At this moment there was a noise outside the front door, a sort of **scrabbling** noise, as if somebody were trying to paw his way through the woodwork. Then a sort of thud. "Better go and see what that is, Jeeves." "Very good, sir." He went out and came back again. "If you would not mind stepping this way, I think we might be able to carry him in." "Carry him in?" "His lordship is lying on the mat, sir."

I went to the front door. The man was right, there was Motty **huddled** up outside on the floor. He was moaning a bit. "He's had some sort of fit," I said. I took another look. "Jeeves, someone's been feeding him meat. He's a vegetarian but he must have been digging into a steak or something. Call up a doctor."

"I hardly think it will be necessary. If you would take his lordship's legs..." So we **lugged** him in, and Jeeves put him to bed. I lit a cigarette to think the thing over.

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The next morning, after I had sucked down a thoughtful cup of tea, I went into Motty's room to investigate. I expected to find him a **wreck**, but there he was, sitting up in bed, quite **chirpy**, reading a few stories.

"How are you feeling this morning?" I asked.

"Excellent," replied Motty, **blithely** and **with abandon**.

"That valet of yours, Jeeves, is wonderful. I had an awful headache when I woke up, and he brought me a sort of dark drink and it put me right again at once. He said it was his own invention. I must see more of him.

I couldn't believe that this was the same man who had sat and sucked his stick the day before. "You ate something that disagreed with you last night, didn't you?" I said, by way of giving him a chance to **slide out of it** if he wanted to. But he wouldn't have it. "No," he replied firmly. "I didn't do anything of the kind. I drank too much. Much too much.

"And, what's more, I'm going to do it again. I'm going to do it every night. If ever you see me sober," he said, with a kind of holy **exaltation**, "tap me on the shoulder and say,

'what do you think you're doing' and I'll apologise and **remedy** the defect." "But what about me?" "What about you?" "Well, I'm responsible for you. If you go on doing this sort of thing I'm the one who will get in trouble."

"I can't help your troubles," said Motty firmly. "Listen to me: this is the first time in my life that I've had a real chance to yield to the temptations of a great city. What's the use of a big city having temptations if people can't **yield** to them? Besides, mother told me to keep my eyes open and collect impressions." I sat on the edge of the bed. I felt dizzy.

"I know just how you feel," said Motty **consolingly**. "And, if my principles would permit it, I would **simmer down** for your sake. But this is the first time I've ever been let out alone and I mean to make the most of it. We're only young once. Put like that, it did seem fairly reasonable.

I had a vague idea that if I stuck close to Motty and went about the place with him, I might act as a bit of a **dampener** on the **gaiety**. What I mean is, when he was being the life and soul of the party, if he

were to catch my **reproving** eye he might ease up a little on the **revelry**. So the next night I took him along to supper with me.

It was the last time. I'm a quiet, peaceful sort of person who has lived all his life in London. I'm all for rational enjoyment but I think someone makes themselves overly **conspicuous** when he throws soft-boiled eggs at the electric fan. Decent **mirth** are all very well, but I do detest dancing on tables and having to dash all over the place dodging waiters, managers, and **bouncers**, just when you want to sit and **digest** it all.

In a way, I couldn't help **sympathising** with him. He had about four weeks to have the good time that ought to have been spread over about ten years, and I didn't wonder at his wanting to be busy. I should have been just the same in his place.

Still, there was no denying it was a bit much. If it hadn't been for the thought of Aunt Agatha in the background, I should have regarded Motty's **antics** with an indulgent smile. But I couldn't get rid of the feeling that I was the one who would get the blame.

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VOCABULARY

Henpecked: Bullied or intimidated by one's girlfriend or wife.

Braced: Stiff posture, ready for.

Irritable: Easily annoyed, impatient.

Pull oneself together: To become calm and behave normally.

To bar someone: To ban someone from doing something.

Gathered from: Collected information from.

Plausible: Having the appearance of reason, credible.

Proceedings: A series of activities or events.

Ghastly: Shocking, frightful, dreadful, terrible.

Confide in: Tell someone about a secret or private matter.

Raiment: Clothing, apparel, attire.

Hearty: Warm-hearted, affectionate, cordial, jovial.

Bulging: Bend or protrude, hump.

Faculties: Powers of the mind, memory, reason or speech.

Meek: Humble, patient or docile, compliant, submissive.

Plastered: Thick or excessive.

Rim: The outer edge, border.

Furtive: Secretive, sly, done by stealth.

Disentangle: To become free from, extricate.

Clutches: To grip tightly and firmly, to be in someone's control.

Put someone up: To allow someone to stay with you for a while.

Home bird: Someone who likes to stay at home.

Frightful: Dreadful, terrible, alarming.

Nuzzle: To lie very close to someone, cuddle up.

Indefinite: Without a fixed time limit, not defined.

Appal: Alarm, daunt, frighten, intimidate.

Ample: Adequate for one's need, plentiful, enough.

Wretched: Miserable, pitiful, sorrowful.

Hauteur: French word for arrogant.

Scrabble: To Struggle with, dig about with claws, grab.

Huddle: To gather together in a close mass.

Lug: To pull or carry with force or effort.

Wreck: Reduced to the state of ruin

Chirpy: Cheerful or lively.

Blithe: Joyous, merry, without regard for anything.

With abandon: Without care, cease to be interested in.

Slide out of: Cause to retreat from, leave without anyone knowing.

Exaltation: Elation of mind and feeling, rapturous.

Remedy: Something that cures or corrects.

Yield: To give up, surrender, give way.

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VOCABULARY

Console: To help lessen the grief or sorrow of someone.

Simmer down: Become calmer and quieter.

Damper: To deaden energy or enthusiasm.

Gaiety: Cheerful, merriment, cheerful.

Reprove: Scold, reprimand.

Revelry: Boisterous festivity, merrymaking, celebration.

Conspicuous: Easily seen or noticed, visible.

Mirth: Gaiety, jollity, laughter.

Bouncer: Person employed at a bar to eject undesirable people.

Digest: To assimilate ideas.

Sympathy: Sharing feeling with someone, especially sorrow or grief.

Antics: Playful trick or prank, caper.

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Q&A

Question 1: Why do you think Bertie feels oppressed when Jeeves makes him give up one of his new suits?

Question 5: Do you agree that Motty getting extremely drunk was acceptable given his circumstances?

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

Question 2: What do you think about Motty's character and how he lives his life?

Question 6: Do you think it natural if you've only lived with your mother, under her control for years, to get very drunk when she's not there?

Question 3: Why did Bertie agree to put Motty up when he knew that such an arrangement could only end in disaster?

Question 7: What did Motty do to embarrass Bertie so much when he took him out one evening?

Question 4: What was Lady Malvern doing in America and what did she hope to achieve?

Question 8: Why you think Bertie should have thought he should have taken the blame for Motty's outrageous antics?