RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Ring for Jeeves

P.G. Wodehouse

Contents

Chapter 22

Copyright

About the Book

A Jeeves novel

Captain Biggar, big-game hunter and all round tough guy, should make short work of the two bookies who have absconded with his winnings after a freak double made him a fortune. But on this occasion Honest Patch Perkins and his clerk are not as they seem. In fact they’re not bookies at all, but the impoverished Bill Belfry, Ninth Earl of Rowcester and his temporary butler, Jeeves.

Bertie Wooster has gone away to a special school teaching the aristocracy to fend for itself ‘in case the social revolution sets in with even greater severity’. But Jeeves will prove just as resourceful without his young master, and brilliant brainwork may yet square the impossible circle for all concerned.

About the Author

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

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

Also by P.G. Wodehouse

Fiction

Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen
The Adventures of Sally
Bachelors Anonymous
Barmy in Wonderland
Big Money
Bill the Conqueror
Blandings Castle and Elsewhere
Carry On, Jeeves
The Clicking of Cuthbert
Cocktail Time
The Code of the Woosters
The Coming of Bill
Company for Henry
A Damsel in Distress
Do Butlers Burgle Banks
Doctor Sally
Eggs, Beans and Crumpets
A Few Quick Ones
French Leave
Frozen Assets
Full Moon
Galahad at Blandings
A Gentleman of Leisure
The Girl in Blue
The Girl on the Boat
The Gold Bat
The Head of Kay’s
The Heart of a Goof
Heavy Weather
Hot Water
Ice in the Bedroom

If I Were You
Indiscretions of Archie
The Inimitable Jeeves
Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit
Jeeves in the Offing
Jill the Reckless
Joy in the Morning
Laughing Gas
Leave it to Psmith
The Little Nugget
Lord Emsworth and Others
Louder and Funnier
Love Among the Chickens
The Luck of Bodkins
The Man Upstairs
The Man with Two Left Feet
The Mating Season
Meet Mr Mulliner
Mike and Psmith
Mike at Wrykyn
Money for Nothing
Money in the Bank
Mr Mulliner Speaking
Much Obliged, Jeeves
Mulliner Nights
Not George Washington
Nothing Serious
The Old Reliable
Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin
A Pelican at Blandings
Piccadilly Jim
Pigs Have Wings
Plum Pie
The Pothunters
A Prefect’s Uncle
The Prince and Betty

Psmith, Journalist
Psmith in the City
Quick Service
Right Ho, Jeeves
Ring for Jeeves
Sam me Sudden
Service with a Smile
The Small Bachelor
Something Fishy
Something Fresh
Spring Fever
Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves
Summer Lightning
Summer Moonshine
Sunset at Blandings
The Swoop
Tales of St Austin’s
Thank You, Jeeves
Ukridge
Uncle Dynamite
Uncle Fred in the Springtime
Uneasy Money
Very Good, Jeeves
The White Feather
William Tell Told Again
Young Men in Spats

Omnibuses

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

The World of Wodehouse Clergy
The Hollywood Omnibus
Weekend Wodehouse

Paperback Omnibuses

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

Poems

The Parrot and Other Poems

Autobiographical

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

Letters

Yours, Plum

Ring for Jeeves

P.G. Wodehouse

CHAPTER 1

THE WAITER, WHO had slipped out to make a quick telephone call, came back into the coffee room of the Goose and Gherkin wearing the starry-eyed look of a man who has just learned that he has backed a long-priced winner. He yearned to share his happiness with someone, and the only possible confidant was the woman at the table near the door, who was having a small gin and tonic and whiling away the time by reading a book of spiritualistic interest. He decided to tell her the good news.

‘I don’t know if you would care to know, madam,’ he said, in a voice that throbbed with emotion, ‘but Whistler’s Mother won the Oaks.’

The woman looked up, regarding him with large, dark, soulful eyes as if he had been something recently assembled from ectoplasm.

‘The what?’

‘The Oaks, madam.’

‘And what are the Oaks?’

It seemed incredible to the waiter that there should be anyone in England who could ask such a question, but he had already gathered that the lady was an American lady, and American ladies, he knew, are often ignorant of the fundamental facts of life. He had once met one who had wanted to know what a football pool was.

‘It’s an annual horse race, madam, reserved for fillies. By which I mean that it comes off once a year and the male sex isn’t allowed to compete. It’s run at Epsom Downs the day before the Derby, of which you have no doubt heard.’

‘Yes, I have heard of the Derby. It is your big race over here, is it not?’

‘Yes, madam. What is sometimes termed a classic. The Oaks is run the day before it, though in previous years the day after. By which I mean,’ said the waiter, hoping he was not being too abstruse, ‘it used to be run the day following the Derby, but now they’ve changed it.’

‘And Whistler’s Mother won this race you call the Oaks?’

‘Yes, madam. By a couple of lengths. I was on five bob.’

‘I see. Well, that’s fine, isn’t it? Will you bring me another gin and tonic?’

‘Certainly, madam. Whistler’s Mother!’ said the waiter, in a sort of ecstasy. ‘What a beauty!’

He went out. The woman resumed her reading. Quiet descended on the coffee room.

In its general essentials the coffee room at the Goose and Gherkin differed very little from the coffee rooms of all the other inns that nestle by the wayside in England and keep the island race from dying of thirst. It had the usual dim religious light, the customary pictures of *The Stag at Bay* and *The Huguenot’s Farewell* over the mantelpiece, the same cruets and bottles of sauce, and the traditional ozone-like smell of mixed pickles, gravy soup, boiled potatoes, waiters and old cheese.

What distinguished it on this June afternoon and gave it a certain something that the others had not got was the presence in it of the woman the waiter had been addressing. As a general rule, in the coffee rooms of English wayside inns, all the eye is able to feast on is an occasional farmer eating fried eggs or a couple of commercial travellers telling each other improper stories, but the Goose and Gherkin had drawn this strikingly handsome hand across the sea, and she raised the tone of the place unbelievably.

The thing about her that immediately arrested the attention and drew the startled whistle to the lips was the aura of wealth which she exuded. It showed itself in her

rings, her hat, her stockings, her shoes, her platinum fur cape and the Jacques Fath sports costume that clung lovingly to her undulating figure. Here, you would have said to yourself, beholding her, was a woman who had got the stuff in sackfuls and probably suffered agonies from coupon-clipper's thumb, a woman at the mention of whose name the blood-sucking leeches of the Internal Revenue Department were accustomed to raise their filthy hats with a reverent intake of the breath.

Nor would you have been in error. She was just as rich as she looked. Twice married and each time to a multi-millionaire, she was as nicely fixed financially as any woman could have wished.

Hers had been one of those Horatio Alger careers which are so encouraging to girls who hope to get on in the world, showing as they do that you never know what prizes Fate may be storing up for you around the corner. Born Rosalinda Banks, of the Chilicothe, Ohio, Bankses, with no assets beyond a lovely face, a superb figure and a mild talent for *vers libre,* she had come to Greenwich Village to seek her fortune and had found it first crack out of the box. At a studio party in Macdougall Alley she had met and fascinated Clifton Bessemer, the Pulp Paper Magnate, and in almost no time at all had become his wife.

Widowed owing to Clifton Bessemer trying to drive his car one night through a truck instead of round it, and two years later meeting in Paris and marrying the millionaire sportsman and big game hunter, A.B. Spottsworth, she was almost immediately widowed again.

It was a confusion of ideas between him and one of the lions he was hunting in Kenya that had caused A.B. Spottsworth to make the obituary column. He thought the lion was dead, and the lion thought it wasn't. The result being that when he placed his foot on the animal's neck preparatory to being photographed by Captain Biggar, the White Hunter accompanying the expedition, a rather

unpleasant brawl had ensued, and owing to Captain Biggar having to drop the camera and spend several vital moments looking about for his rifle, his bullet, though unerring, had come too late to be of practical assistance. There was nothing to be done but pick up the pieces and transfer the millionaire sportsman's vast fortune to his widow, adding it to the sixteen million or so which she had inherited from Clifton Bessemer.

Such, then, was Mrs Spottsworth, a woman with a soul and about forty-two million dollars in the old oak chest. And, to clear up such minor points as may require elucidation, she was on her way to Rowcester Abbey, where she was to be the guest of the ninth Earl of Rowcester, and had stopped off at the Goose and Gherkin because she wanted to stretch her legs and air her Pekinese dog Pomona. She was reading a book of spiritualistic interest because she had recently become an enthusiastic devotee of psychical research. She was wearing a Jacques Fath sports costume because she liked Jacques Fath sports costumes. And she was drinking gin and tonic because it was one of those warm evenings when a gin and tonic just hits the spot.

The waiter returned with the elixir, and went on where he had left off.

'Thirty-three to one the price was, madam.'

Mrs Spottsworth raised her lustrous eyes.

'I beg your pardon?'

'That's what she started at.'

'To whom do you refer?'

'This filly I was speaking of that's won the Oaks.'

'Back to her, are we?' said Mrs Spottsworth with a sigh. She had been reading about some interesting manifestations from the spirit world, and this earthy stuff jarred upon her.

The waiter sensed the lack of enthusiasm. It hurt him a little. On this day of days he would have preferred to have to do only with those in whose veins sporting blood ran.

‘You’re not fond of racing, madam?’

Mrs Spottsworth considered.

‘Not particularly. My first husband used to be crazy about it, but it always seemed to me so unspiritual. All that stuff about booting them home and goats and beetles and fast tracks and mudders and something he referred to as a boat race. Not at all the sort of thing to develop a person’s higher self. I’d bet a grand now and then, just for the fun of it, but that’s as far as I would go. It never touched the deeps in me.’

‘A grand, madam?’

‘A thousand dollars.’

‘Coo!’ said the waiter, awed. ‘That’s what I’d call putting your shirt on. Though for me it’d be not only my shirt but my stockings and pantie-girdle as well. Lucky for the bookies you weren’t at Epsom today, backing Whistler’s Mother.’

He moved off, and Mrs Spottsworth resumed her book.

For perhaps ten minutes after that nothing of major importance happened in the coffee room of the Goose and Gherkin except that the waiter killed a fly with his napkin and Mrs Spottsworth finished her gin and tonic. Then the door was flung open by a powerful hand, and a tough, square, chunky, weather-beaten-looking man in the middle forties strode in. He had keen blue eyes, a very red face, a round head inclined to baldness and one of those small, bristly moustaches which abound in such profusion in the outposts of Empire. Indeed, these sprout in so widespread a way on the upper lips of those who bear the white man’s burden that it is a tenable theory that the latter hold some sort of patent rights. One recalls the nostalgic words of the poet Kipling, when he sang ‘Put me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst, where there ain’t no ten commandments and a man can raise a small bristly moustache.’

It was probably this moustache that gave the newcomer the exotic look he had. It made him seem out of place in the coffee room of an English inn. You felt, eyeing him, that his natural setting was Black Mike's bar in Pago-Pago, where he would be the life and soul of the party, though of course most of the time he would be out on safari, getting rough with such fauna as happened to come his way. Here, you would have said, was a man who many a time had looked his rhinoceros in the eye and made it wilt.

And again, just as when you were making that penetrating analysis of Mrs Spottsworth, you would have been perfectly right. This bristly moustached he-man of the wilds was none other than the Captain Biggar whom we mentioned a moment ago in connection with the regrettable fracas which had culminated in A.B. Spottsworth going to reside with the morning stars, and any of the crowd out along Bubbling Well Road or in the Long Bar at Shanghai could have told you that Bwana Biggar had made more rhinoceri wilt than you could shake a stick at.

At the moment, he was thinking less of our dumb chums than of something cool in a tankard. The evening, as we have said, was warm, and he had driven many miles – from Epsom Downs, where he had started immediately after the conclusion of the race known as The Oaks, to this quiet inn in Southmoltonshire.

'Beer!' he thundered, and at the sound of his voice Mrs Spottsworth dropped her book with a startled cry, her eyes leaping from the parent sockets.

And in the circumstances it was quite understandable that her eyes should have leaped, for her first impression had been that this was one of those interesting manifestations from the spirit world, of which she had been reading. Enough to make any woman's eyes leap.

The whole point about a hunter like Captain Biggar, if you face it squarely, is that he hunts. And, this being so, you expect him to stay put in and around his chosen hunting

grounds. Meet him in Kenya or Malaya or Borneo or India, and you feel no surprise. ‘Hullo there, Captain Biggar,’ you say. ‘How’s the spooring?’ And he replies that the spooring is tophole. Everything perfectly in order.

But when you see him in the coffee room of an English country inn, thousands of miles from his natural habitat, you may be excused for harbouring a momentary suspicion that this is not the man in the flesh but rather his wraith or phantasm looking in, as wraiths and phantasms will, to pass the time of day.

‘Eek!’ Mrs Spottsworth exclaimed, visibly shaken. Since interesting herself in psychical research, she had often wished to see a ghost, but one likes to pick one’s time and place for that sort of thing. One does not want spectres muscling in when one is enjoying a refreshing gin and tonic.

To the captain, owing to the dimness of the light in the Goose and Gherkin’s coffee room, Mrs Spottsworth, until she spoke, had been simply a vague female figure having one for the road. On catching sight of her, he had automatically twirled his moustache, his invariable practice when he observed anything female in the offing, but he had in no sense drunk her in. Bending his gaze upon her now, he quivered all over like a nervous young hippopotamus finding itself face to face with its first White Hunter.

‘Well, fry me in butter!’ he ejaculated. He stood staring at her. ‘Mrs Spottsworth! Well, simmer me in prune juice! Last person in the world I’d have dreamed of seeing. I thought you were in America.’

Mrs Spottsworth had recovered her poise.

‘I flew over for a visit a week ago,’ she said.

‘Oh, I see. That explains it. What made it seem odd, finding you here, was that I remember you told me you lived in California or one of those places.’

‘Yes, I have a home in Pasadena. In Carmel, too, and one in New York and another in Florida and another up in Maine.’

‘Making five in all?’

‘Six. I was forgetting the one in Oregon.’

‘Six?’ The captain seemed thoughtful. ‘Oh, well,’ he said, ‘it’s nice to have a roof over your head, of course.’

‘Yes. But one gets tired of places after a while. One yearns for something new. I’m thinking of buying this house I’m on my way to now, Rowcester Abbey. I met Lord Rowcester’s sister in New York on her way back from Jamaica, and she said her brother might be willing to sell. But what are you doing in England, Captain? I couldn’t believe my eyes at first.’

‘Oh, I thought I’d take a look at the old country, dear lady. Long time since I had a holiday, and you know the old proverb – all work and no play makes Jack a *peh-bah pom bahoo*. Amazing the way things have changed since I was here last. No idle rich, if you know what I mean. Everybody working. Everybody got a job of some kind.’

‘Yes, it’s extraordinary, isn’t it? Lord Rowcester’s sister, Lady Carmoyle, tells me her husband, Sir Roderick Carmoyle, is a floorwalker at Harrige’s. And he’s a tenth baronet or something.’

‘Amazing, what? Tubby Frobisher and the Subahdar won’t believe me when I tell them.’

‘Who?’

‘Couple of pals of mine out in Kuala Lumpur. They’ll be astounded. But I like it,’ said the captain stoutly. ‘It’s the right spirit. The straight bat.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘A cricket term, dear lady. At cricket you’ve got to play with a straight bat, or . . . or, let’s face it, you don’t play with a straight bat, if you see what I mean.’

‘I suppose so. But do sit down, won’t you?’

‘Thanks, if I may, but only for a minute. I’m chasing a foe of the human species.’

In Captain Biggar’s manner, as he sat down, a shrewd observer would have noted a trace of embarrassment, and might have attributed this to the fact that the last time he

and Mrs Spottsworth had seen each other he had been sorting out what was left of her husband with a view to shipping it to Nairobi. But it was not the memory of that awkward moment that was causing his diffidence. Its roots lay deeper than that.

He loved this woman. He had loved her from the very moment she had come into his life. How well he remembered that moment. The camp among the acacia trees. The boulder-strewn cliff. The boulder-filled stream. Old Simba the lion roaring in the distance, old Tembo the elephant doing this and that in the *bimbo* or tall grass, and A.B. Spottsworth driving up in the car with a vision in jodhpurs at his side. 'My wife,' A.B. Spottsworth had said, indicating the combination of Cleopatra and Helen of Troy by whom he was accompanied, and as he replied 'Ah, the memsahib' and greeted her with a civil '*Krai yu ti ny ma pay*', it was as if a powerful electric shock had passed through Captain Biggar. This, he felt, was It.

Naturally, being a white man, he had not told his love, but it had burned steadily within him ever since, a strong, silent passion of such a calibre that sometimes, as he sat listening to the hyaenas and gazing at the snows of Kilimanjaro, it had brought him within an ace of writing poetry.

And here she was again, looking lovelier than ever. It seemed to Captain Biggar that somebody in the vicinity was beating a bass drum. But it was only the thumping of his heart.

His last words had left Mrs Spottsworth fogged.

'Chasing a foe of the human species?' she queried.

'A blighter of a bookie. A cad of the lowest order with a soul as black as his fingernails. I've been after him for hours. And I'd have caught him,' said the captain, moodily sipping beer, 'if something hadn't gone wrong with my bally car. They're fixing it now at that garage down the road.'

'But why were you chasing this bookmaker?' asked Mrs Spottsworth. It seemed to her a frivolous way for a strong

man to be passing his time.

Captain Biggar's face darkened. Her question had touched an exposed nerve.

'The low hound did the dirty on me. Seemed straight enough, too. Chap with a walrus moustache and a patch over his left eye. Honest Patch Perkins, he called himself. "Back your fancy and fear nothing, my noble sportsman," he said. "If you don't speculate, you can't accumulate," he said. "Walk up, walk up. Roll, bowl or pitch. Ladies half-way and no bad nuts returned," he said. So I put my double on with him.'

'Your double?'

'A double, dear lady, is when you back a horse in one race and if it wins, put the proceeds on another horse in another race.'

'Oh, what we call a parlay in America.'

'Well, you can readily see that if both bounders pull it off, you pouch a princely sum. I've got in with a pretty knowledgeable crowd since I came to London, and they recommended as a good double for today Lucy Glitters and Whistler's Mother.'

The name struck a chord.

'The waiter was telling me that Whistler's Mother won.'

'So did Lucy Glitters in the previous race. I had a fiver on her at a hundred to six and all to come on Whistler's Mother for the Oaks. She ambled past the winning post at –'

'Thirty-three to one, the waiter was saying. My goodness! You certainly cleaned up, didn't you!'

Captain Biggar finished his beer. If it is possible to drink beer like an overwrought soul, he did so.

'I certainly ought to have cleaned up,' he said, with a heavy frown. 'There was the colossal sum of three thousand pounds two shillings and sixpence owing to me, plus my original fiver which I had handed to the fellow's clerk, a chap in a check suit and another walrus moustache. And what happened? This inky-hearted bookie welshed on me.

He legged it in his car with me after him. I've been pursuing him, winding and twisting through the country roads, for what seems an eternity. And just as I was on the point of grappling with him, my car broke down. But I'll have the scoundrel! I'll catch the louse! And when I do, I propose to scoop out his insides with my bare hands and twist his head off and make him swallow it. After which –'

Captain Biggar broke off. It had suddenly come to him that he was monopolizing the conversation. After all, of what interest could these daydreams of his be to this woman?

'But let's not talk about me any more,' he said. 'Dull subject. How have you been all these years, dear lady? Pretty fit, I hope? You look right in the pink. And how's your husband? Oh, sorry!'

'Not at all. You mean, have I married again? No, I have not married again, though Clifton and Alexis keep advising me to. They are sweet about it. So broadminded and considerate.'

'Clifton? Alexis?'

'Mr Bessemer and Mr Spottsworth, my two previous husbands. I get them on the ouija board from time to time. I suppose,' said Mrs Spottsworth, laughing a little self-consciously, 'you think it's odd of me to believe in things like the ouija board?'

'Odd?'

'So many of my friends in America call all that sort of thing poppycock.'

Captain Biggar snorted militantly.

'I'd like to be there to talk to them! I'd astonish their weak intellects. No, dear lady, I've seen too many strange things in my time, living as I have done in the shadow-lands of mystery, to think anything odd. I have seen barefooted pilgrims treading the path of Ahura-Mazda over burning coals. I've seen ropes tossed in the air and small boys shinning up them in swarms. I've met fakirs who slept on beds of spikes.'

‘Really?’

‘I assure you. And think of it, insomnia practically unknown. So you don’t catch me laughing at people because they believe in ouija boards.’

Mrs Spottsworth gazed at him tenderly. She was thinking how sympathetic and understanding he was.

‘I am intensely interested in psychical research. I am proud to be one of the little band of devoted seekers who are striving to pierce the veil. I am hoping to be vouchsafed some enthralling spiritual manifestation at this Rowcester Abbey where I’m going. It is one of the oldest houses in England, they tell me.’

‘Then you ought to flush a spectre or two,’ agreed Captain Biggar. ‘They collect in gangs in these old English country houses. How about another gin and tonic?’

‘No, I must be getting along. Pomona’s in the car, and she hates being left alone.’

‘You couldn’t stay and have one more quick one?’

‘I fear not. I must be on my way. I can’t tell you how delightful it has been, meeting you again, Captain.’

‘Just made my day, meeting you, dear lady,’ said Captain Biggar, speaking hoarsely, for he was deeply moved. They were out in the open now, and he was able to get a clearer view of her as she stood beside her car bathed in the sunset glow. How lovely she was, he felt, how wonderful, how . . . Come, come, Biggar, he said to himself gruffly, this won’t do, old chap. Play the game, Biggar, play the game, old boy!

‘Won’t you come and see me when I get back to London, Captain? I shall be at the Savoy.’

‘Charmed, dear lady, charmed,’ said Captain Biggar. But he did not mean it.

For what would be the use? What would it profit him to renew their acquaintance? Just twisting the knife in the wound, that’s what he would be doing. Better, far better, to bite the bullet and wash the whole thing out here and now. A humble hunter with scarcely a bob to his name couldn’t