

BY JEEVES



The Characters

BERTIE WOOSTER

John Scherer

JEEVES, his manservant

Richard Kline

HONORIA GLOSSOP, his ex-fiance

Donna Lynne Champlin

BINGO LITTLE, his friend, in love with Honoria

Randy Redd

GUSSIE FINK-NOTTLE, another friend, in love with Madeline

James Kall

SIR WATKIN BASSETT, a magistrate

Merwin Goldsmith

MADELINE BASSETT, his daughter

Nancy Anderson

STIFFY BYNG, his ward

Emily Loesser

HAROLD "STINKER"

PINKER, a clergyman, in love with Stiffy

Ian Knauer

CYRUS BUDGE III (JR.),

an American guest

Nicolas Colicos

OZZIE NUTLEDGE

Robert Berman

OTHER PERSONAGES

Tom Ford,

Molly Renfroe,

Court Whisman

The Story

THE SCENE: A church hall, later to represent a London flat and the house and grounds of Totleigh Towers.

THE TIME: This very evening.

Eager to contribute to the festivities of a charity benefit performance in an English village hall, dim-but-affable Bertie Wooster bursts on stage strumming a frying pan. To his confusion and chagrin, he realizes that the pan has been substituted for his stolen banjo. While his resourceful manservant Jeeves supervises a search for the missing instrument, Bertie tells anecdotes about muddled adventures he has had with some of his aristocratic friends. Jeeves locates makeshift costumes, props, and scenery that allow Bertie and friends to re-enact a recent and chaotic weekend house party given at Totleigh Hall.

When the mistaken identities, misunderstood intentions, and general folderol of the story have been resolved, Bertie's banjo is found, and, in a conclusion of village hall spectacle, the entire company performs "The Wizard Rainbow Finale."



Jeeves and Bertie

Forever joined at the comic hip, Reginald Jeeves and Bertram Wilberforce Wooster are in the front rank of droll characters invented in the 20th century.

Jeeves is the perfect manservant. Bertie ("Bertram Wilberforce" is reserved for the rarest of occasions) is the far-from-perfect master. Through the imagination of P.G. Wodehouse they have found a happy symbiosis, not unlike that of naughty child and protective parent.

Given Bertie's propensity for foolish capers and his limited vocabulary, it is a bit difficult to understand how he managed to graduate such prestigious institutions of learning as Eton and Oxford. "However did he do it?" seems a reasonable question.

Bertie's Aunt Dahlia refers to him as "the Abysmal Chump." (He observes that he is sure she eats broken glass and turns into a werewolf when the moon is full.)

Jeeves—ever dignified, loyal, resourceful—solves Bertie's problems on the basis of knowing, as he puts it, "the psychology of the individual." He reads Latin literature in the original, is fond of epigrams, studies Spinoza, and is practiced in an array of ways useful to his dimwitted employer. He concocts a hang-over cure-all, he apparently remembers everything he reads, hears, and sees, and his problem-solving skills are profound.

To save the day as many times as he does, it is necessary for Jeeves to call upon his darker side. He lies, cheats, blackmails, bribes, and, in one memorable instance, fells a policeman with a blackjack.

P.G. Wodehouse insisted that he did not take his characters from real life, but, like other authors, he must surely have used characteristics of real people in his work. Bertie may have been inspired by the British character actor George Grossmith, the originator of "dude comedy." William Amos, a student of Wodehouse's work, believes that some aspects of Bertie were inspired by Wodehouse's son-in-law Anthony Bingham Mildmay, the second Baron Mildmay of Flete.

Jeeves' character may have been sparked by a butler at a London hotel and a mix of others, including one of Wodehouse's own. Jeeves' name is probably derived from Percy Jeeves, a well-known cricketer, but according to Amos it may also be a variation on "Jeames," 19th-century slang for "flunkey."

In celebration of Wodehouse's accomplishment in creating so indelible a character as Jeeves, C. Northcote Parkinson wrote a "biography" of the paragon of manservants, *Jeeves: A Gentleman's Personal Gentleman* (1979).

"The Fairy Tale World of P.G. Wodehouse"

Wodehouse biographer Richard Voorhees* points out that Wodehouse's fiction belongs "spiritually to the world of Victoria and Edward VII," a world "roughly limited on one side by the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria [1897] and on the other by the introduction of the cross-word puzzle [1925]."

It is, as another observer puts it, the "fairy tale world of P.G. Wodehouse." In that world, rich, idle young scions of aristocratic families are "a perpetual twenty-five. Their girls are a perpetual twenty. But their behavior-ages are less. They act like fifteen-year-olds ... a rather rowdy fifteen," according to Richard Usborne.**

The young people have names like the characters in *By Jeeves*: Gussie Fink-Nottle, Stiffy Byng, Honoria Glossop, Harold "Stinker" Pinker, and Bingo Little.

They live in or visit places such as Woolam Chersey, Chuffnell Hall, Totleigh Towers, Maiden Eggesford, and Steeple Bumbleigh.

They use expressions such as "Right-ho!," "dashed difficult," "chappie," "By Jove!," "Tally-ho!," "rannygazoo," and "oojum-cum-spiff."

Many of the males are, like Bertie Wooster, members of the Drones Club, where they drink martinis, scotch and lemon, and lemon sours.

Arrested in comic adolescence, they require the services of their servants, or other hired hands, to get them out of the messes they make as they bumble through life.

Enter Jeeves.

*Richard Voorhees, *P.G. Wodehouse*

**Richard Usborne, *Wodehouse at Work*