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П.Г. Вудхаус
**ФАМИЛЬНАЯ
ЧЕСТЬ ВУСТЕРОВ**

P.G. Wodehouse
**THE CODE
OF THE
WOOSTERS**

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Pelham Grenville Wodehouse
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**THE CODE
OF THE WOOSTERS**
by P.G. Wodehouse

ONE

"I reached out a hand from under the blankets, and rang the bell for Jeeves. "Good evening, **Jeeves**¹."

"Good morning, sir."

This surprised me. "Is it morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure? It seems very dark outside."

"There is a fog, sir. We are now in autumn—season of mists and **mellow fruitfulness**²."

"Season of what?"

"Mists, sir, and mellow fruitfulness."

"Oh? Yes, I see. Well, get me one of those cocktails of yours, will you?"

"I have one in the fridge."

He shimmered out, and I sat up in bed feeling I was going to die in about five minutes. On the previous night, I had given a little dinner to **Gussie Fink-Nottle**³ who was going to marry **Madeline**⁴, only daughter of **Sir Watkyn Bassett**⁵. Indeed, just

¹ **Jeeves** — Дживз

² **mellow fruitfulness** — обильная жатва

³ **Gussie Fink-Nottle** — Гасси Финк-Ноттл

⁴ **Madeline** — Медлин

⁵ **Watkyn Bassett** — Уаткин Бассет

before Jeeves came in, I had been dreaming that some boulder was driving spikes through my head—not just ordinary spikes, but **red-hot**¹ ones.

Jeeves returned with his morning reviver. After drinking it, my skull flew up to the ceiling and the eyes shot out of their sockets and rebounded from the opposite wall like racquet balls. I felt better.

“Ha!” I said, retrieving the eyeballs and replacing them in position. “Well, Jeeves, what goes on in the great world? Is that the paper you have there?”

“No, sir. It is some literature from the Travel Bureau. I thought that you might care to glance at it.”

“Oh?” I said. “You did, did you?”

And there was a brief and—if that’s the word I want—pregnant silence. I suppose that when two men of iron live in close association with one another, there are occasional clashes. Jeeves was trying to get me to go on a Round-The-World cruise, and I would have none of it. But in spite of my firm statements to this effect, scarcely a day passed without him bringing me those illustrated folders which the travel agents usually send out. Jeeves was like some assiduous hound who will persist in laying a dead rat on the drawing-room carpet.

“Jeeves,” I said, “this nuisance must now cease.”

“Travel is highly educational, sir.”

“No more education. I was full up years ago. No, Jeeves, I know what’s the matter with you. That old Viking blood of yours! You yearn for the tang of the salt breezes. You see yourself walking the deck in a yachting cap. Possibly someone has been telling you about the Dancing Girls of Bali. I understand, and I sympathize. But not for me. I refuse.”

¹ **red-hot** — докрасна раскалённый

“**Very good, sir.**¹”

He spoke with a certain what-is-it in his voice, so I tactfully changed the subject.

“Well, Jeeves, it was quite a satisfactory binge last night.”

“Indeed, sir?”

“Oh, most. An excellent time was had by all. Gussie sent his regards.”

“I appreciate the kind thought, sir. I trust Mr. Fink-Nottle was in good spirits?”

“Extraordinarily good, considering that he will shortly have Sir Watkyn Bassett for a father-in-law. **Sooner him than me**², Jeeves, sooner him than me.”

I spoke with strong feeling, and I'll tell you why. A few months before, while celebrating **Boat Race**³ night, I had fallen into the clutches of the Law for trying to separate a policeman from his helmet, and I had been fined. **A fiver**⁴! The magistrate who had inflicted this monstrous sentence was none other than old Bassett, father of Gussie's bride-to-be.

I was one of his last clients, for a couple of weeks later he inherited a pot of money from a distant relative and retired to the country. That, at least, was the story. My own view was that he had got the stuff by sticking like glue to the fines. Five quid here, five quid there—a lot of money, eh?

“You have not forgotten that man of wrath, Jeeves? Eh?”

“Possibly Sir Watkyn is less formidable in private life, sir.”

¹ **Very good, sir** — Слушаюсь, сэръ.

² **Sooner him than me.** — Слава богу, что он, а не я.

³ **Boat Race** — лодочные гонки

⁴ **fiver** — пятёрка, банкнота в пять фунтов

“I doubt it. A hellhound is always a hellhound. But enough of this Bassett. Any letters today?”

“No, sir.”

“Telephone communications?”

“One, sir. From **Mrs Travers**¹.”

“**Aunt Dahlia**²? She’s back in town, then?”

“Yes, sir. She expressed a desire that you would ring her up at your earliest convenience.”

“I will do even better,” I said cordially. “I will call in person.”³”

And half an hour later I was near the steps of her residence. I did not know that I was to become involved in an imbroglio that would test the Wooster soul as it had seldom been tested before. The story was connected with Gussie Fink-Nottle, Madeline Bassett, old Pop Bassett, **Stiffy Byng**⁴, the **Rev. H. P. (“Stinker”) Pinker**⁵, the eighteenth-century **cow-creamer**⁶ and the small, brown, leather-covered notebook.

But I was looking forward with bright anticipation to the coming reunion with Dahlia—she, being my good and deserving aunt, not to be confused with **Aunt Agatha**⁷, who eats broken bottles and wears **barbed wire**⁸ next to the skin. Apart from the mere intellectual pleasure of talking to her, there was the

¹ **Travers** — Трэверс

² **Dahlia** — Далия

³ **I will call in person.** — Лично навещу.

⁴ **Stiffy Byng** — Стиффи Бинг

⁵ **Rev. H. P. (“Stinker”) Pinker** — Преподобный Г. П. («Мерзавец, Вонючка») Пинкер

⁶ **cow-creamer** — кувшинчик для сливок

⁷ **Agatha** — Агата

⁸ **barbed wire** — колючая проволока

prospect that I might be able to get an invitation to lunch. **Anatole**¹, her French cook, was outstanding!

The door of the morning room was open. Aunt Dahlia greeted me:

“Hallo, ugly,” she said. “What brings you here?”

“I understood, that you wished to talk to me.”

“I didn’t want you to come in, interrupting my work. A few words on the telephone would’ve been enough. But I suppose some instinct told you that this was my busy day.”

“If you were wondering if I could come to lunch, have no anxiety. By the way, what will Anatole be giving us?”

“He won’t be giving you anything, my young tapeworm. I am entertaining **Pomona Grindle**², the novelist, to the midday meal.”

“I should be charmed to meet her.”

“Well, you’re not going to. It is to be a strictly **tête-à-tête**³ affair. All I wanted was to tell you to go to an antique shop in the **Brompton Road**⁴—it’s just past the Oratory—you can’t miss it—and sneer at a cow-creamer.”

I was surprised. The impression I received was that my dear aunt was a little crazy.

“Do what to a what?”

“They’ve got an eighteenth-century cow-creamer there that your uncle Tom’s going to buy this afternoon.”

“Oh, it’s silver, isn’t it?”

¹ **Anatole** — Анато́ль

² **Pomona Grindle** — Помона Гриндл

³ **tête-à-tête** — тет-а-тет (*франц.*)

⁴ **Brompton Road** — Бромптон-роуд

“Yes. A sort of cream jug. Go there and ask them to show it to you, and when they do, show your scorn.”

“What for?”

“To sow doubts and misgivings in their mind and make them lower the price a bit, chump. The cheaper Tom gets the thing, the better he will be pleased. And I want him to be in cheery mood, because if I succeed in signing the Grindle up for my serial, I shall be compelled to get some money from him. These women novelists want millions for their novels. So run away and shake your head at the thing.”

I am always anxious to help my aunt, but I was compelled to refuse. Morning mixtures of Jeeves are practically magical in their effect, but ...

“I can’t shake my head. Not today.”

She gazed at me.

“Oh, so that’s how it is? Well, if your loathsome excesses have left you incapable of headshaking, you can at least **curl your lip**¹.”

“Oh, rather.”

“Then carry on. And try clicking the tongue. Oh, yes, and tell them you think it’s Modern Dutch.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Apparently it’s something a cow-creamer ought not to be.” She paused, and allowed her eye to roam thoughtfully over my face. “So you were completely drunk last night, my chicken? It’s an extraordinary thing—every time I see you, you appear to be recovering from some debauch. Don’t you ever stop drinking? How about when you are asleep?”

¹ **curl your lip** — поджать губы

“**You wrong me**¹, aunt. I am exceedingly moderate. A couple of cocktails, a glass of wine at dinner and possibly a liqueur with the coffee—that is Bertram Wooster. But last night I gave a small bachelor binge for Gussie Fink-Nottle.”

“You did, did you?” She laughed—a bit louder than I could endure. “Spink-Bottle, eh? Bless his heart! How was the old newt-fancier?”

“Pretty roguish.”

“Did he make a speech at this orgy of yours?”

“Yes. I was astounded. I was all prepared for a refusal. But no. We drank his health, and he rose to his feet as cool as some cucumbers, as Anatole would say, and held us spellbound.”

“Tight as a skunk, I suppose?”

“On the contrary. Absolutely sober.”

“Well, nice to hear.”

This Gussie was a fish-faced pal of mine, who had buried himself in the country and devoted himself entirely to the study of newts, keeping the little chaps in a glass tank and observing their habits with a sedulous eye. A confirmed recluse you would have called him, if you had happened to know the word, and you would have been right. But Love will find a way. Meeting Madeline Bassett one day, he had emerged from his retirement and started to woo, and after numerous vicissitudes had been successful. Now he was going to marry that ghastly girl.

I call her a ghastly girl because she was a ghastly girl. The Woosters are chivalrous, but they can tell the truth. Droopy, soupy, sentimental, with melting eyes and a cooing voice and the most extraordinary views on such things as stars and rabbits. I remem-

¹ **you wrong me** — ты клеветашь на меня

ber her telling me once that rabbits were gnomes in attendance on the Fairy Queen and that the stars were God's daisy chain. Perfect nonsense, of course. They're nothing of the sort.

Aunt Dahlia emitted a low, rumbling chuckle.

"Good old **Spink-Bottle**¹! Where is he now?"

"Staying at the Bassett's place—**Totleigh Towers, Glos**². He went back there this morning. They're having the wedding at the local church."

"Are you going to it?"

"Definitely no."

"No, I suppose it would be too painful for you. You were in love with the girl."

I stared.

"In love? With a female who thinks that every time a fairy sneezes a baby is born?"

"Well, you were certainly engaged to her once."

"For about five minutes, yes, and there was no fault of my own. My dear old relative," I said, "you are perfectly well aware of the inside facts of that frightful affair."

I winced. It was an incident in my career which I don't like to remember. Briefly, what had occurred was this. Gussie had asked me to talk to Madeline Bassett for him. And when I did so, the **fat-headed**³ girl thought I was pleading mine. With the result that she had refused Gussie and attached herself to me, and I had no option but **to take the rap**⁴. Mercifully, things went well and there was a reconciliation

¹ **Spink-Bottle** — Пенёк-Бутылёк

² **Totleigh Towers, Glos** — Тотлей-тауэрс в Глостере

³ **fat-headed** — тупоголовая

⁴ **to take the rap** — смириться с неизбежным

between them, but the thought of my peril was one at which I still shuddered.

“Well, if it is of any interest to you,” said Aunt Dahlia, “I am not proposing to attend that wedding myself. I disapprove of Sir Watkyn Bassett, and don’t think he ought to be encouraged.”

“You know **the old crumb**¹, then?” I said, rather surprised. **It’s a small world.**²

“Yes, I know him. He’s a friend of Tom’s. They both collect old silver and snarl at one another like wolves about it all the time. We had him staying at **Brinkley**³ last month. And would you care to hear how he repaid me for all the loving care I lavished on him while he was my guest? Behind my back he tried to steal Anatole!”

“No!”

“That’s what he did. Fortunately, Anatole proved staunch—after I had doubled his wages.”

“Double them again,” I said earnestly. “Keep on doubling them. Pour out money like water rather than lose that superb master of the roasts and hashes.”

I was visibly affected.

“Yes,” said Aunt Dahlia, “Sir Watkyn Bassett is a swindler. You had better warn Spink-Bottle to watch out on the wedding day. The slightest relaxation of vigilance, and the old man will probably steal his wedding ring. And now push off. Oh, and give this to Jeeves, when you see him. It’s the “Husbands’ Corner” article. It’s about men’s trousers, and I’d like him to read it. For all I know, it may be Red propaganda. And I can rely on you not to bungle that

¹ **old crumb** — старый крохобор

² **It’s a small world.** — Мир тесен.

³ **Brinkley** — Бринкли

job? Tell me in your own words what it is you're supposed to do."

"Go to antique shop—"

"—in the Brompton Road—"

"—in, as you say, the Brompton Road. Ask to see cow-creamer—"

"—and sneer. Right. Go away. The door is behind you."

It was with a light heart that I went out into the street and caught a cab. I was conscious only of pleasure at the thought that I had it in my power to perform this little act of kindness. Scratch **Bertram Wooster**¹, I often say, and you find a **Boy Scout**².

The antique shop in the Brompton Road proved to be an antique shop in the Brompton Road and, like all antique shops, dingy outside and dark and smelly within. I don't know why it is, but the proprietors of these establishments always seem to be cooking some food in the back room.

"I say," I began, entering; then paused as I perceived that the man was attending to two other customers.

"Oh, sorry," I was about to add, when the words froze on my lips.

In spite of the poor light I was able to note that the smaller and elder of these two customers was no stranger to me. It was old Pop Bassett in person. Himself. Not a picture. But I stood firm. After all, I had paid my debt to Society and had nothing to fear from this swindler. So I remained where I was.

He turned and shot a quick look at me, and then he had been peering at me sideways. It was only a

¹ **Bertram Wooster** — Бертрам Вустер

² **Boy Scout** — бой-скаут

question of time, I felt, before he would realize that the figure leaning on its umbrella was an old acquaintance. And he came across to where I stood.

“Hallo, hallo,” he said. “I know you, young man. I never forget a face. You came up before me once.” I bowed slightly. “But not twice. Good! Learned your lesson, eh? Going straight now? Good. Now, let me see, what was it? Don’t tell me. Of course, yes. **Bag-snatching**¹.”

“No, no. It was—”

“Bag-snatching,” he repeated firmly. “I remember it distinctly. Still, it’s all past, eh? We live a new life, don’t we? Splendid. **Roderick**², come over here. This is most interesting.”

His friends, who had been examining a salver, put it down and joined us. He was about seven feet in height, and about six feet across, he caught the eye and arrested it. It was as if Nature had intended to make a gorilla, and had changed its mind at the last moment.

His gaze was keen and piercing. I don’t know if you have even seen those pictures in the papers of Dictators with blazing eyes, inflaming the populace with fiery words, but that was what he reminded me of.

“Roderick,” said old Bassett, “I want you to meet this fellow. Here is a case which illustrates exactly what I have so often said—that prison life does not degrade, that it does not warp the character and prevent a man rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.”

I recognized the gag—one of Jeeves’s—and wondered where he could have heard it.

¹ **bag-snatching** — воровство сумок

² **Roderick** — Родерик