



# 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 1

Jeeves really is a most extraordinary man. So capable. Honestly, I shouldn't know what to do without him. On **broader lines**, Jeeves gives you just the impression of **omniscience**. As an instance of what I mean, I remember meeting Monty Bing in **Bond Street** one morning, looking very smartly dressed in a grey check suit, and I felt I should never be happy till I had one like it.

I **dug the address** of the tailors out of him, and had them working on it inside the hour. "Jeeves," I said that evening. "I'm getting a check suit like Mr. Bing's." "**Injudicious**, sir," he said firmly. "It will **not become you**."

"What absolute nonsense! It's the soundest thing I've bought for years." "Unsuitable for you, sir." Well, the **long and the short of it** was that the **confounded** thing came home, I put it on and when I caught sight of myself in the mirror I nearly **swoned**. Jeeves was perfectly right.

I looked like a **cross between** a music-hall comedian and a cheap **bookie**. Yet Monty had looked fine in absolutely the same suit. These things are

just life's mysteries, and that's all there is to it.

But it isn't only that Jeeves's judgement about clothes is **infallible**, though that's really the main issue, the man knows everything. There was the matter of that **tip** on the Lincolnshire race course. I forget now how I got it, but it had the **aspect** of being the real, **red-hot favourite**.

"Jeeves," I said, for I'm fond of the man and like to do him a **good turn** when I can, "if you want to make a bit of money have something on Wonderchild at the Lincolnshire." He shook his head. "I'd rather not, sir." "But it's the best and I'm going to put my money on him." "I do not recommend it, sir. The animal is not intended to win. Second place is what the **stable** is after."

Perfect **piffle**, I thought. How could Jeeves know anything about it? Still, you know what happened? Wonderchild led till he was in the **final straight** and then Banana Fritter came along and **nosed him out**. I went straight home and rang for Jeeves.

"After this," I said, "not another step for me without

your advice. From now on consider yourself the brains of the establishment." "Very good, sir. I shall **endeavour** to give you satisfaction." And he has. I'm a bit short on brain power myself and while he would appear to have been constructed more for **ornamental** use, give me five minutes to talk the thing over with Jeeves, and I'm sure he will give me good advice on anything I ask him.

And that's why, when Bruce Corcoran (Corky) came to me with his troubles, my first act was to **ring the bell**. "Leave it to Jeeves," I said. Corky was an artist, a portrait painter he called himself, but he hadn't painted any portraits. You see, **the catch** about portrait painting is that you can't start painting portraits until people come along and ask you to, and they won't come and ask you to until you've painted a lot first.

Now, many people think that having a rich uncle makes for an easy life but, according to Corky, this is not the case. Corky's uncle was a **robust** sort of man. What **irked** Corky was the way he used to harass him. Corky's uncle didn't want him to be an artist as he didn't think he had any talent.

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He was always urging him to quit art and go into the textile business and start at the bottom and **work his way up**. Textiles had become a sort of **obsession**. He seemed to attach an almost spiritual importance to it. What Corky said was that, while he didn't know what they did at the bottom and that it was probably something deeply unpleasant.

Meanwhile, by using the utmost tact and persuasiveness, he was **inducing** his uncle to **cough up** a small quarterly allowance. One afternoon, when Corky walked into my apartment one afternoon, shooing a girl in front of him and said, "Bertie, I want you to meet my fiancée, Miss Singer." The very first words I spoke were, "Corky, how about your uncle?"

The poor man gave one of those **mirthless** laughs. He was looking anxious and worried, like a man who had committed a murder but couldn't think what to do with the body. "We're so scared, Mr. Wooster," said the girl. "We were hoping that you might find a way to suggest a **novel way** of **breaking it** to him."

Muriel Singer was one of those very quiet, appealing girls who have a way of looking at you with their big eyes as if they thought you were the greatest thing on earth and wondered why you hadn't realised it. She sat there in a sort of **shrinking way**, looking at me as if she were saying to herself, "Oh, I do hope this man isn't going to hurt me."

She made me feel that there was nothing I wouldn't do for her. She was rather like one of those innocent-tasting American drinks which creep **imperceptibly** into your system so that, before you know what you're doing, you're starting out to **reform** the world, by force if necessary.

"I don't see why your uncle shouldn't be happy with the arrangement," I said to Corky. "He will think Miss Singer an ideal wife for you." Corky **declined** to cheer up. "You don't know him," he said. "Even if he did like Muriel he wouldn't admit it. It would be a matter of principle with him to object to it. All he would consider would be that I had taken another important step in my life without asking his advice."

"You want to work it so that he **makes Miss Singer's acquaintance** without knowing that you know her. Then you come along." "But how can I work it that way?" he said. I saw his point. "There's only one thing to do," I said. "What's that?" "Leave it to Jeeves." And I rang the bell.

"Sir?" said Jeeves. One of the awful things about Jeeves is that, unless you **watch him like a hawk**, you very seldom see him come into a room. He's like one of those weird **sadhu's** in India who **dissolve** themselves **into thin air** and fly through space in a sort of **disembodied** way and assemble the parts again just where they want them.

The moment I saw the man standing there, registering respectful attention, a weight seemed to roll off my mind. There was something about him that gave me confidence. Jeeves is a tallish man, with one of those dark, **shrewd** faces. His eye gleams with the light of pure intelligence.

"Jeeves, we want your advice." "Very good, sir." I **boiled down** Corky's painful case into a few well-chosen words about his situation.

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"So you see what it amount to, Jeeves. We want you to suggest some way by which Corky's uncle, Mr. Worple, can make Miss Singer's acquaintance without getting on to the fact that Mr. Corcoran already knows her. Understand?"

"Perfectly, sir." "Well, try to think of something," I said. "I have thought of something, sir." "You have?" "The scheme I would suggest cannot fail, but it has what may seem to you a **drawback**, sir, in that it requires a certain financial outlay." "He means," I translated to Corky, "that he has got a great idea but it's going to cost a bit."

Naturally the poor man's face dropped, for this seemed to scrap the whole idea. But I was still under the influence of the girl's melting gaze, and I saw that this was where I started. "You can count on me for all that sort of thing, Corky," I said. "Only too glad. **Carry on**, Jeeves."

"I would suggest, sir, that Mr. Corcoran take advantage of Mr. Worple's attachment to **ornithology**." "How on earth did you know he was fond of birds?" I asked. "It is the way these New York apartments

are constructed, sir. Quite unlike our London houses, the **partitions** between the rooms are of the **flimsiest** nature. With no wish to overhear, I have sometimes heard Mr. Corcoran expressing himself on the subject I have just mentioned."

"Why should the young lady not write a small volume, to be entitled, let's say, *The Children's Book of American Birds*, and dedicate it to Mr. Worple. A **limited edition** could be published at your expense, sir, and a great deal of the book would, of course, be **given over to eulogistic remarks** concerning Mr. Worple's own larger writings on the same subject.

I recommend the dispatching of a presentation copy to Mr. Worple immediately on publication, accompanied by a letter in which the young lady asks to be allowed to make the acquaintance of one to whom she admires so much. This would, **I fancy**, produce the desired result, but as I say the expense involved would be considerable."

"Jeeves," I said, "that is an absolutely brilliant idea. One of your very best efforts."

"Thank you, sir." The girl then made an objection. "But I'm sure I couldn't write a book about anything. I can't even write good letters."

"Muriel's talents," said Corky, with a little cough, "lie more in the direction of drama, Bertie. I didn't mention it before, but one of our reasons for being a bit nervous as to how my uncle will receive the news is that Muriel is in the **chorus** of the show *Choose Your Exit*."

I saw what he meant. There was enough fuss in our family when I tried to marry into musical comedy a few years ago and the **vaudeville** girl was still fresh in my mind. I don't know why it is, one of these psychology types could explain it, I suppose, but uncles and aunts are always **dead against** drama, legitimate or otherwise.

But Jeeves had a solution, of course. "I fancy it would be a simple matter, sir, to find some **impecunious** author who would be glad to do the actual **composition** for a small fee. It is only necessary that the young lady's name should appear on the title page." "That's true, Sam Patterson would do it for a hundred dollars," said Corky. "He

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writes **novelettes**. I'll get after him right away." "Will that be all, sir?" said Jeeves. "Very good, sir. Thank you, sir."

I always used to think that publishers had to be intelligent chaps, loaded with the **grey matter**, but I've **got their number** now. All a publisher has to do is to write cheques at intervals, while a lot of deserving and industrious people rally round and do the real work. I know, because I've been one myself.

I happened to be down at Corky's place when the first copies of *The Children's Book of American Birds* was delivered. Muriel Singer was there and we were talking of things in general when there was a bang at the door and the parcel was delivered.

The more I read, the more I admired the man who had written it and Jeeves' genius in putting us on to it. You can't call a man the world's greatest authority on the yellow-billed cuckoo without rousing a certain disposition towards friendliness in him. "It's a **cert!**" I said. "An absolute **cinch**," said Corky.

And a day or two later Corky was meandering up towards

my apartment to tell me that all was well. The uncle had written Muriel a letter so dripping with the milk of human kindness that if he hadn't known Mr. Worple's handwriting Corky would have refused to believe him the author of it.

Shortly after this I had to go out of town, and on my first evening in New York I happening to **pop into** a quiet sort of little restaurant which I go to when I don't feel inclined for the bright lights. I found Muriel Singer there, sitting by herself at a table near the door. Corky was out telephoning.

I went up to her and **passed the time of day**. "Well, well," I said. "Why, Mr. Wooster. How do you do?" "**Is Corky around?**" "I beg your pardon?" "You are waiting for Corky, aren't you?" "Oh, I didn't understand. No, I'm not waiting for him." "You haven't had a row with Corky, have you? A row, a **spat**, a little misunderstanding on both sides."

"Why, whatever makes you think that?" "What I mean is, I thought you usually dined with him before you went to the theatre." "I've left the

stage now." Suddenly the whole thing dawned on me. I had forgotten what a long time I had been away. "Why, of course, I see now. You're married." "Yes." "How perfectly wonderful. I wish you all kinds of happiness."

"Thank you, so much. Oh Alexander," she said, looking past me, "this is a friend of mine, Mr. Wooster." I spun round. A man with a lot of stiff grey hair and a red sort of healthy face was standing there. Rather **formidable** he looked too, though quite peaceful at the moment.

"I want you to meet my husband, Mr. Wooster. Mr. Wooster is a friend of Bruce's, Alexander." The old man grasped my hand warmly. "So you know my nephew, Mr. Wooster," I heard him say. "I wish you would try to knock a little sense into him and make him quit this playing at painting."

He seemed quieter and more serious. Something seemed to have sobered him up. "Perhaps you will give us the pleasure of your company at dinner to-night, Mr. Wooster? Or have you dined?" I said I had. What I needed then was air, not dinner.

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## VOCABULARY

**Broader lines:** Wider in extent or scope.

**Omniscience:** Infinite knowledge, foreknowledge.

**Bond Street:** Street in London known for fashionable shopping.

**Dig out the address:** Pester someone into giving you information.

**Injudicious:** Showing lack of judgement, unwise.

**Does not become you:** Something that is not fitting or worthy of you.

**Long and the short of it:** The substance of something, conclusion, sum total, upshot.

**Confounded:** Damned, used euphemistically.

**Swoon:** To faint, lose consciousness.

**Cross between:** x.

**Bookie:** Short for bookmaker, someone who takes bets.

**Infallible:** Absolutely trustworthy, unailing.

**Tip:** Advice on a horse race.

**Aspect:** Way in which something is viewed.

**Red-hot favourite:** The favourite to win a horse race.

**Stable:** Where racehorses are kept and trained, in this case the owner.

**Piffle:** Nonsense, senseless.

**Final straight:** The final part of a racecourse to determine the winner.

**Nose him out:** Push the leading horse out and win the race by a horse's nose.

**Endeavour:** To make an effort, strive.

**Ornamental:** Decorative, an adornment.

**Ring the bell:** Used to summon a servant or valet.

**The catch:** To become hooked or entangled.

**Robust:** Strong and healthy, strong, hardy.

**Irk:** To irritate, annoy.

**Work your way up:** Gain a better position at work.

**Obsession:** Domination of one's thoughts by a persistent idea.

**Induce:** To lead someone by persuasion.

**Cough up:** Paid what's owed.

**Mirthless:** Without humour or amusement.

**Novel way:** A new way of doing something.

**Break it to someone:** To tell someone something hurtful.

**Shrinking:** Retreat in avoidance.

**Imperceptible:** Very slight or subtle, not perceived easily.

**Reform:** Make improvements to, especially social and political systems.

**Decline:** To fail in strength, dwindle, fade away.

**Make someone's acquaintance:** To meet someone for the first time.

**Watch someone like a hawk:** Watch someone very carefully, like a bird of prey.

**Sadhu:** Indian holy man.

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## VOCABULARY

**Dissolve:** To melt, or break up, bring an end to.

**Into thin air:** Vanish into nothing.

**Disembody:** To divest of a body.

**Shrewd:** Astute or sharp in practical matters.

**Boiled down:** Get to the main reason for something.

**Drawback:** A hindrance or disadvantage.

**Carry on:** Continue doing what you were doing.

**Ornithology:** The study of birds.

**Partition:** An interior wall dividing a room.

**Flimsiest:** The weakest, most ineffective.

**Limited edition:** A limited number of books published.

**Given over to eulogistic remarks:** Prone to continually making laudatory comments.

**To fancy:** To rather think this way.

**Chorus:** A company of dancers or singers.

**Vaudeville:** Theatrical entertainment by a mix of performances, such as comedians, singers and magicians.

**Dead against:** To be strongly against something.

**Impecunious:** Having little or no money.

**Composition:** Piece of writing or music, etc.

**Novelette:** Brief novel (book) or short story.

**Grey matter:** Brains.

**Get their number:** Understand who they really are.

**A cert/cinch:** Short for certainty. Something sure and easy.

**Pop into:** To go somewhere very briefly.

**Passed the time of day:** To have a short conversation with.

**Is Corky around?:** Is Corky there?

**Spat:** A petty quarrel.

**Formidable:** Causing fear, apprehension or dread.

# MY MAN JEEVES

## Q&A

**Question 1:** When Bertie Wooster put on his check suit, what did Jeeves think about it and why did Bertie change his mind?

**Question 5:** What did Corky's uncle think about his art and what did he want him to do instead?

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

**Question 2:** What did Bertie Wooster think of his valet Jeeves?

**Question 6:** Why were Corky and Muriel so reluctant to tell his uncle that they were together?

**Question 3:** What happened at the races and why do you think the race was "fixed" between the owners?

**Question 7:** What was Jeeves' fanciful idea to help Corky introduce Miss Singer with his uncle?

**Question 4:** What was the first thing Gregor wanted to do and why could he not think clearly in bed?

**Question 8:** What was Bertie Wooster's reaction when he bumped into Muriel in a New York restaurant?