

Ye Olde Plum News

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OMENS AND SIGNS

BINGO LITTLE

Bingo had ten pounds, but wanted more and looked for a safe investment. Surely twenty would be far more suitable. And he could pick that up by slapping his ten on Hot Potato in the two-thirty at Haydock Park. At dinner on the previous night he had burned his mouth by incautiously placing in it a fried spud about ninety degrees Fahrenheit warmer than he had supposed it to be, and he is always inclined to accept omens like this as stable information. He made the investment, accordingly, and at two-forty-five was informed by the club tape that he was now penniless. (The Word in Season, 1959)

'I promised to meet a man I know at one of these private gambling places.' These words stirred Bingo like a bugle... 'Gosh!' he said. 'You couldn't take me along, could you?' 'Why, of course, if you want to come. It's out in the wilds of St. John's Wood somewhere. Really? Then it's on my way home. I live in St. John's Wood.' 'I've got the address written down. Forty-three Magnolia road.' Bingo, always on the lookout for omens and portents, leaped in his seat. Any lingering doubts he may have entertained as to the advisability of arranging that loan with Algernon Aubrey vanished. Obviously this was going to be his lucky night, and he would be vastly surprised if on the morrow he would not be able to pay twenty or thirty pounds into the other's wee little deposit account. 'Of all the coincidences!' he exclaimed. 'That's next door but one to my little nest.' (The Word in Season, 1959)

'Put your shirt on Whistler's Mother for the two o'clock at Hurst Park tomorrow,' whispered Wilberforce... His wife tells him, on the phone: 'I'm fine.' ... 'And Algy?' 'He's fine.' 'And your mother?' 'Only pretty good. She swallowed some water at the brine baths this morning. She's better now, but she still makes a funny whistling sound when she breathes.' The receiver shook in Bingo's hand... He had always been a great believer in signs and omens, and if this wasn't a sign and omen he didn't know a sign and omen when he saw one. (Stylish Stouts, 1966)

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### CRISPIN SCROPE

He had placed one hundred pounds of his brother Bill's ... on the nose of the horse Brotherly Love in the coming two-thirty race at Newmarket. He had told Barney that he did not bet nowadays, but this could scarcely be

described as a bet, so certain was the outcome. Consider the facts. Not only had Willoughby (his brother, called Bill) just given a notable example of brotherly love, but the animal was owned by a man he had been at school with and was to be ridden by a jockey whose name was Bill. What redblooded punter could have been expected to ignore a combination of omens so obviously proceeding from heaven? (The Girl in Blue, 1970)

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LOONEY COOTE

He was popularly known as Looney on account of the vain and foolish superstitions which seemed to rule his every action. Boys are hard-headed, practical persons, and they have small tolerance for the view-point of one who declines to join in a quit smoke behind the gymnasium not through any moral scruples – which, to do him justice, he would have scorned – but purely on the ground that he had seen a magpie that morning. ...

'I had a tenner on My Valet.' 'On My Valet!' I cried, aghast at this inexplicable patronage of an animal which, even in the preliminary saunter round the paddock, had shown symptoms of lethargy and fatigue, not to mention a disposition to trip over his feet. 'Whatever made you do that?' 'Yes, I suppose he never had a chance,' agreed Coote, 'but a week ago my man Spencer broke a leg, and I thought it might be an omen.' ... 'Well, you'd be surprised how often it works. The day my aunt was shut up in a private asylum I collected five hundred quid by backing Crazy Jane for the Jubilee Cup. (The Long Arm of Looney Coote, 1923)

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### REGGIE PEPPER

'Why don't you consult a palmist?' I said. 'That's not a bad idea,' said Percy. 'Go and see Dorotea in Bond Street. She's a wonder. She'll see from your lines that you are thinking of making a journey, and she'll either tell you to fizz ahead, which will mean that Roderick will be there, or else to keep away because she sees disaster.' (Disentangling Old Percy, 1912)

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BERTIE WOOSTER

Bertie had a premonition which very soon was fulfilled. Aunt Agatha told Bertie: 'I am sure you will like Miss Hemmingway. A nice, quiet girl, so different from so many of the bold girls one meet in London nowadays. Her brother is curate at Chipley-in-the-Glen in Dorsetshire. He tells me they are connected with the Kent Hemmingways. A very good family. She is a charming girl.'

I had a grim foreboding of an awful doom. All this boosting was so unlike Aunt Agatha, who normally is one of the most celebrated right-and-left-hand knockers in London society. I felt a clammy suspicion. And by Jove, I was right. 'Aline Hemmingway,' said Aunt Agatha, 'is just the girl I should like to see you marry, Bertie.' (Aunt Agatha Speaks her Mind, 1922)

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### MONTY BODKIN

The wall seemed not so much a wall with writing on it as a mass of writing with a wall somewhere in the background. In actual fact, the complete opus, if one may so call it, consisted of two phrases... The first ran: 'Hi, baby!' The second: Hello, there, sweetie!' ... In the other historic case of writing on the wall, that which occurred during the celebrated Feast of Belshazzar, and, as Belshazzar said at the time, spoiled a good party, it will be remembered that what caused all the unpleasantness and upset the Babylonian monarch so much was the legend 'Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.' (The Luck of the Bodkins, 1935)

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TOM TRAVERS

Berties uncle is upset about the income-tax. Aunt Dahlia talked to Bertie: 'Upset is right. He says that Civilization is in the melting-pot and that all thinking men can read the writing on the wall. What wall?' 'Old Testament, ass.' Belshazzar's feast.' (Right Ho, Jeeves, 1934)

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