

Ye Olde Plum News

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FALSE BEARDS

FRUITY BIFFEN

Gally was reminded of his old friend Fruity Biffen on the occasion when he had gone into the ring at Hurst Park wearing a long Assyrian beard in order to avoid recognition by the half dozen bookmakers there to whom he owed money, and the beard, insufficiently smeared with fish glue, had come off. The same wan, drawn look. (A Pelican at Blandings, 1969)

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### BILL 'BLISTER' LISTER

His beloved Prudence was quarantined at Blandings. Gally and Freddie brought him to the castle and introduced him to Lord Emsworth as a pig-painter, but his draft annoyed his lordship. They then got him into the castle as a gardener. Gally: 'And now we come to the important matter of disguise.' 'Disguise?' 'Essential, in my opinion. You can't go wrong, adopting a disguise. My old friend, Fruity Biffen, hasn't stirred abroad without one for years. His relations with the bookies are always a bit strained, poor chap.' ... 'I advise a false beard. I have one I can lend you. Fruity Biffen borrowed it the other day, in order to be able to go to Hurst Park, but I can get it back.' ... 'It's a sort of light mustard colour, and extraordinarily becoming. It made Fruity Biffen look like one of those Assyrian monarchs.'

Blister refused, horror-stricken, but Freddy persuaded him: 'Honestly, Blister, I can't see why you have this extraordinary prejudice against the thing. I haven't seen it myself, of course, but if it made old Biffen look like an Assyrian monarch, it must be dignified and striking...

Dressed in the beard he happened to give Veronica Wedge a terrible shock. Peering out from behind Fruity Biffen's beard he presented an appearance that might have caused even Joan of Arc a momentary qualm... The man behind this beard was not so much a man wearing a beard as a pair of eyes staring out of an impenetrable jungle.

Gally proposed a new try as another pig-painter but Bill feared that Lord Emsworth would recognize him. Gally: 'As the chap who made a mess of painting his pig? He might have a vague idea that he had seen you before somewhere, but that would be all.' ... 'Then why,' demanded Bill hotly, quivering with self-pity at the thought of what he had endured, 'did you make me wear that blasted beard?' 'Purely from character-building motives. Every young man starting out in life ought to wear a false beard, if only for a day or two. It stiffens the fibre, teaches him that we were not put into this world for pleasure alone. (Full Moon, 1947)

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FREDDIE THREEPWOOD

There had been a rift in the lute between Freddie and his wife Aggie, and Freddie had asked Lord Emsworth to plead for him. Lord Emsworth and Aggie had never met. His lordship refused to go to her and plead. Freddie then tried to disguise as his father and went to Aggie, impersonating Lord Emsworth, to plead for his case. The figure that entered might have stepped straight into anybody's nightmare and felt perfectly at home right from the start. The figure was that of a tall, thin man with white hair and a long and flowing beard of the same venerable hue. Strange as it seemed that a person of such appearance should not have been shot on sight early in his career, he had obviously reached an extremely advanced age. He was either a man of about a hundred and fifty who was rather young for his years or a man of about hundred and ten who had been aged by trouble. Aggie immediately identified Freddie behind the beard and the rift was mended. (Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best, 1926)

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### GUSSIE FINK-NOTTLE

... as I remembered him, was the sort of shy, shrinking goop who might have been expected to shake like an aspen if invited to so much as a social Saturday afternoon at the vicarage. ... And he was attending that fancy-dress ball, mark you - not, like every other well-bred Englishman, as a Pierrot, but as Mephistopheles - this involving, as I need scarcely stress, not only scarlet tights but a pretty frightful false beard. ... The idea to use this costume came from Jeeves who, based on the psychology of the individual, thought it would make Gussie a more emboldened wooer. (Right Ho, Jeeves, 1927)

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LORD BISKERTON

Lord 'The Bisquit' Biskerton, hid for creditors. When moving among people he used disguise. And now with a dark wig covering that hair and a black beard of imperial cut hiding his chin, he presented a picture so revolting that a father might be excused for making strange noises. ... Lord Biskerton, in his beard, visited a pub, and gave a barmaid a shock. The barmaid found him looking funny. 'Well, do you know what I'd done, if you had come in here a few years ago when everybody was doing it?' 'What?' 'I'd said 'Beaver' and gone like this.' She reached out and gave the beard a hearty tweak. As she did so she chuckled merrily. It was the last chuckle she was to utter for days and days. (Big Money, 1931)

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### RICHARD 'BINGO' LITTLE

Bingo was in love again, this time in a daughter of the revolution, Charlotte Corday Rowbotham. 'Wants to massacre the bourgeoisie, sack Park Lane, and disembowel the hereditary aristocracy. ... I fell in love and got her address, and a couple of days later I bought the beard and toddled round and met the family.' 'But why the beard?' 'Well, she had told me of her father ... I should have to join these Red Dawn blighters; and naturally, if I was to make speeches in the Park, where at any moment I might run into a dozen people I knew, something in the nature of a disguise was indicated. So I bought the beard, and, by Jove, old boy, I've become dashed attached to the thing. It's done me a lot of good with old Rowbotham. He thinks I'm a Bolshevik of sorts who has to go about disguised because of the police. Jeeves happened to disclose Bingo's real identity to the Rowbothams. This was the end of the love affair, of Bingo's career as a Bolshevik and of the beard. (Comrade Bingo, 1923)

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GUSSIE & CATSMEAT

A concert for the church organ fund was given in the Village Hall at King's Deverill. One item on the programme was a knockabout cross-talk act. Pat and Mike, two Irishmen, were played by Augustus 'Gussie' Fink-Nottle and Claude Cattermole 'Catsmeat' Pirbright. When they came on, festooned in green beards, they got a big hand. (The Mating Season, 1949)

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### FREDDIE WIDGEON

Freddie was wanted by a bookie and was disguised in a false beard when he met Oofy Prosser. A weaker man than Oofy would have recoiled at the frightful sight that met his eyes. Freddie, when making his purchase at Clarkson's, had evidently preferred quantity to quality. The salesman, no doubt, had recommended something in neat Vandykes as worn by the better class of ambassadors, but Freddie was a hunted stag, and when hunted stags buy beards, they want something big and bushy as worn by Victorian novelists... 'Why don't you take that damned thing off?' 'I can't.' 'Give it a tug.' 'I have given it a tug, and the agony was excruciating. It's stuck on with spirit gum or something.' (The Fat of the Land, 1958)

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