

Ye Olde Plum News

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PLUM AND TWO FAVOURITE WOMEN in the Old Testament

↗ JAEEL ↖

(Judges 4:18-21): *And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.*

Sisera was the commander of the enemy army.

In The Clicking of Cuthbert, 1922, Celia Tennant feared that she had killed her fiancé George Macintosh by hitting him with her niblick. Something had snapped inside her when he kept talking during her eleventh attempt to get out of a ravine. The Oldest Member comforted her: *A rather similar action, under far less provocation, once made Jael the wife of Heber the most popular woman in Israel.*

Monica Carmoyle found inspiration in Jael. She is talking to Jeeves in Ring for Jeeves, 1953:

'What was the name of the woman who drove a spike into her husband's head? It's in the Bible somewhere.'

'I fancy your ladyship is thinking of the story of Jael. But she and the gentleman into whose head she drove the spike were not married, merely good friends.'

'Still, her ideas were basically sound.'

'It was generally considered so in her circle of acquaintances, m'lady.'

'Have you a medium-sized spike, Jeeves?'

Bertie was familiar with the story of Jael, but didn't share the positive opinion of her. In Right Ho, Jeeves, 1935, he rebukes his cousin Angela: *You pull out the rawest stuff without a pang. ... Well, as I say, look at Jael, the wife of Heber. Dug spikes into the guest's coco-nut while he was asleep, and then went swanking about the place like a Girl Guide. No wonder they say 'Oh woman, woman!'*

In Much Obliged, Jeeves, 1971, Bertie compares some terrifying women: his own aunt Agatha, Jael, Dickens' Madame Defarges and his landlord, Mrs McCorcadale. He says about the latter: *Not so grim as my Aunt Agatha, perhaps, for that could hardly be expected, but certainly well up in the class of Jael the wife of Heber and the Madame Who-ever-it-was who used to sit and knit at the foot of the guillotine during the French revolution.*

In The Code of the Woosters, 1938, Bertie wakes up after celebrating of Gussie Fink-Nottle's approaching nuptials with Madeline Basset. He compared his feeling with Siseras: *I had been dreaming that some bounder was driving spikes through my head — not just ordinary spikes, as used by Jael the wife of Heber, but redhot ones.*

The American Mr. Tipton Plimsoll also was familiar with Jael and had a similar experience as Bertie in Galahad at Blandings: *There are times when shaking the head creates the illusion that one has met Jael the wife of Heber, incurred her displeasure and started her going into her celebrated routine.*

Wodehouse seems to admire Jael's dedication:

- In Uncle Dynamite, 1948, Sally is firmly determined to push an annoying policeman into a pond: *She could now have been mistaken in a dim light for Jael, the wife of Heber.*

- In The Mating Season, 1949: *She smiled in a steady sort of way, like one of those women in the Old Testament who used to go about driving spikes into people's heads.*

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### ♠ JEZEBEL ♠

Jezebel was Queen of Israel, married to King Ahab. She was despotic and demanded the people of Israel to worship idols. Her ending was horrible: (2 Kings 9:35-36): *And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he [Jehu] said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jizreel shall dogs*

*eat the flesh of Jezebel.*

In Jeeves in the Offing, 1960, Bertie tells Jeeves that "Kipper" Herring had rebuked Roberta Wickham and called her 'a carrot-topped Jezebel'. Their engagement was off and Bertie feared for his freedom. He didn't question the need for rebuke, but meant:

*'This cannot be done by calling them carrot-topped Jezebels.'*

*'No, sir.'*

*'I know if anyone called me a carrot-topped Jezebel, umbrage is the first thing I'd take. Who was Jezebel, by the way? The name seems familiar, but I can't place her.'*

*'A character in the Old Testament, sir. A queen of Israel.'*

*'Of course, yes. Be forgetting my own name next. Eaten by dogs, wasn't she?'*

*'Yes, sir.'*

*'Can't have been pleasant for her.'*

*'No, sir.'*

In Full Moon, 1947, Tipton Plimsoll complains about Veronica Wedge and Gally corrects his references:

*'Well, what price her playing fast and loose with me' he cried. 'Leading me on and then starting the old army game, the two-timing Jezebel.'*

*'Don't you mean Delilah?'*

*'Do I?' said Tipton, dubious.*

*'I think so', said Gally, none too sure himself. 'Jezebel was the one who got eaten by dogs.'*

*'What a beastly idea.'*

*'Not pleasant', agreed Gally. 'Must have hurt like the dickens.'*

In Nothing Serious, 1950, the focus is on her deeds, not her ending, but the same two females are mixed up: *She reminds me of... who was that woman in the Bible whose work was always so raw?... Delilah?... No... It's on the tip of my tongue... Ah yes, Jezebel. She's a modern streamlined Jezebel, dash her insides.*

Plum repeated this in Spring Fever, 1972: *'Who was that female in the Bible whose work was always so raw?'*

*'Delilah?'*

*'Jezebel', said Stanwood, remembering. 'I've heard Augustus Robb mention her. That's how I shall begin. 'Jezebel!' I shall begin. That'll make her sit up.'*

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