

Ye Olde Plum News

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WODEHOUSE AND SNAKES

SNAKES WERE NOT THE PROBLEM

Leila York's husband Joe's mother was Herpina, the Snake Queen in a vaudeville. She owned a menagerie of snakes. Coming home from work one day, Leila found her in the favourite chair, swiggling tea and fondling her snakes. They dug themselves into the woodwork of Leila's and Joe's home. Joe was unable to say 'No' to his mother, so Leila went to Amerika for 6 years. Joe stayed with his mother and her snakes. Returning to England, Leila came home and found Joe and the snakes in her living room. His mother had passed away. The old love was still burning in both of them. They, and the snakes, went on tour to the continent, for a second honeymoon. (*Ice in the bedroom, 1961*)

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### MALEVOLENT USE OF REPTILE

Roland has fallen in love with Bobbie Wickham and is also an unwilling caretaker of a (harmless) snake. Bobbie is delighted by the snake and wants to use it. She thinks some people are in need of a good scare but Roland refuses to lend her the snake. She thinks Sir Claude needs a chock, steals the snake and puts it in Sir Claude's bed. The uproar wakes the whole house. Roland is chivalrous, takes the blame and doesn't give Bobbie away, but the infatuation is gone. (*Something squishy, 1924*)

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NOT ONLY SNAKES CAN BITE

"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." (*Proverbs 23, King James Bible*)

Battling Billson has got it right: "Sinful, that's what beer is. It stingeth like a serpent and biteth like a ruddy adder." (*The Exit of Battling Billson, 1923*)

Bertie warns for Stiffy Byngs terrier Bartholomew: "you would do well to watch closely if he gets anywhere near your ankles for he biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." (*Stiff upper lip, Jeeves, 1963*)

Bertie had frequently stood in the Upjohn study awaiting the receipt of six of the juiciest with a cane that bit like a serpent and stung like an adder (*Jeeves in the Offing, 1960*)

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### TWO IDIOMS ABOUT SNAKES

- "Nurse a viper at one's bosom," from a medieval fable, and

- "A snake in the grass," from Virgil.

Plum used them many times:

Freddie Threepwood: "I don't want to talk to you," he said. "You're a serpent in the bosom. I mean a snake in the grass." (*Lord E acts for the best, 1926*)

An Othellian Stilton says to Bertie: "I'll tell you what you wanted to do, young blasted Wooster. A bit of snake-in-the-grassing."

(*Joy in the morning, 1946*)

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HANDLING SNAKES IN THE GRASS

"I looked in to buy a pair of spiked boots. I want to trample on a snake." "An odd coincidence. I came here to buy a horsewhip to horsewhip a snake." "A bad week-end for snakes." (*The ordeal of Osbert Mulliner, 1928*)

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### SNAKE IN A MURDER STORY

Sir Geoffrey wronged the plumber's aunt in the year '96, so the latter fastened a snake in the nozzle of the shower-bath with glue. When Sir Geoffrey turned on the hot water the glue melted, released the snake which dropped through one of the holes, bit the Baronet in the leg, and disappeared down the waste-pipe. (*Strychnine in the soup, 1931*)

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SNAKE IN DANGER

Jeeves, Bertie, Bingo have placed their bets on the Harold to win the Choir Boys Hundred Yards Handicap. Steggles, the bookie, has now also discovered the hidden talents of the boy and they fear that he will intervene in some way. "There are all sorts of ways of nobbling favourites" Bingo said, in a sort of dead-bed voice. "You ought to read some of these racing novels. In 'Pipped on the Post' Lord Jasper Mauleverer as near as a toucher outed Bonny Betsy by bribing the head lad to slip a cobra into her stable the night before the Derby!" "What are the chances of a cobra biting Harold, Jeeves?" "Slight, I should imagine, sir. And in such an event, knowing the boy intimate as I do, my anxiety would be entirely for the snake." (*The Purity of the Turf, 1922*)

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### SNACKS FOR SERPENT

Lady Weatherby's pet snake, Clarence, "has the cutest way of climbing up the leg of the table and looking pleadingly in the hope that you will give him soft-boiled egg, which he adores." (*Uneasy Money, 1916*)

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DEAF ADDERS

"Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." (*Psalms 58, King James Bible*)

- "But Stilton isn't the easiest person to persuade, once the trend of his mind has set in any direction. You remember the deaf adder?" "What deaf adder?" "The one that stopped its ear, and would not listen to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. That's Stilton." (*Joy in the morning, 1946*)

- She's like the deaf adder in Holy Scripture. I don't know if you're familiar with the deaf adder. It comes in a bit in the Bible I used to learn at Sunday school. Like the deaf adder, it says, what don't pay a ruddy bit of attention to the charmer, though he charms till his eyes bubble. (*Galahad at Blandings, 1965*)

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### SNAKE FOR SOBRIETY

Mme Brudowzka has a long green pet snake named Peter. "You'll never be lonely with Peter around. He's a great scout. Always merry and bright." Peter is snake-napped by her press agent to give headlines and Archie accepts to keep him for a while in his room at the same hotel. However, Archie is accused for the theft. Before the room is searched Peter escapes into the adjacent room. Squiffy, the man who lives there is (as often) loaded. He thinks the long green snake is a hallucination and immediately decides to give up drinking alcohol. (*Indiscretions of Archie, 1921*)

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