

Ye Olde Plum News

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MEETINGS WITH CATS

LANCELOT MULLINER

Young Lancelot enjoyed the artist life in Chelsea when his uncle was appointed Bishop in Bongo-Bongo. He left his cat Webster in the care of Lancelot and wrote: *From both moral and an educative stand-point, I am convinced that Webster's society will prove of inestimable value to you. His advent, indeed, I venture to hope, will be a turning-point in your life. Thrown, as you must be, incessantly among loose and immoral Bohemians, you will find in this cat an example of upright conduct which cannot but act as an antidote to the poison cup of temptation which is, no doubt, hourly pressed to your lips. ...*

'It's something in the beast's eye,' he (Lancelot) said in a shaking voice. 'Something hypnotic. He casts a spell upon me. He gazes at me and disapproves. Little by little, bit by bit, I am degenerating under his influence from a wholesome self-respecting artist into...well, I don't know what you would call it. Suffice it to say that I have given up smoking, that I have ceased to wear carpet slippers and go about without a collar, that I never dream of sitting down to my frugal evening meal without dressing, and' - he choked - 'I have sold my ukulele.

(The Story of Webster, 1932)

The Bishop came to collect Webster and was abhorred to find him totally changed. *'Personally,' Lancelot went on, though speaking dully, for he realized how hopeless it all was, 'if I owned Webster, I would be proud of him. Consider his record,' said Lancelot, warming a little as he proceeded. 'He comes to Bott Street without so much as a single fight under his belt, and despite this inexperience, shows himself possessed of such genuine talent that in two weeks he has every cat for streets around jumping walls and climbing lamp-posts at the mere sight of him.'*

(Cats Will Be Cats, 1932)

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### BERTIE WOOSTER

Bertie had Sir Roderick Glossop for lunch. Bertie's cousins had, with permission from Jeeves, but without Bertie's knowledge, deposited three cats in Bertie's bedroom. Bertie had assured Sir Roderick that his flat was free from cats. *Jeeves,' I said. 'Cats? Are there any cats in the flat?' 'Only the three in your bedroom, sir.' 'What?' 'Cats in his bedroom?' I heard Sir Roderick whisper in a kind of stricken way, and his eyes hit me amidst like a couple of bullets. 'What do you mean?' I said, 'only the three in my bedroom?' 'The black one, the tabby and the small lemon-coloured animal, sir.' ... But just then the most frightful shindy started in the bedroom. It*

*sounded as though all cats in London, assisted by delegates from outlying suburbs, had got together to settle their differences once and for all. ... 'I fancy, sir,' said Jeeves respectfully, 'that the animals may have become somewhat exhilarated as the result of having discovered the fish under Mr. Wooster's bed.'*

(Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch, 1922)

On behalf of Aunt Dahlia Bertie visited an antique shop to sneer at a cow-creamer. He was asked by the proprietor to have a closer look at it outside in the street. *I had only taken a couple of steps when I tripped over the cat, and you can't combine tripping over cats with languid sauntering. Shifting abruptly into high, I shot out of the door like someone wanted by the police making for the car after a smash-and-grab raid.*

(The Code of the Woosters, 1935)

Bertie was invited by Mr Briscoe to Eggesford Hall, but drove to Eggesford Court by mistake. *I had just come abreast of what looked like stables when there appeared from nowhere a cat. ... I chirruped and twiddled my fingers, as is my custom on these occasions, and it advanced with its tail up and rubbed its nose against my leg in a manner that indicated clearly that in Bertram Wooster it was convinced that it had found a kindred soul and one of the boys. ... I scratched this one behind the ear, and it received the attention with obvious gratification, purring like the rumble of distant thunder.*

This cat got a liking for Bertie and sought his company at the most inconvenient occasions.

*I drove on. The song in my heart rose to fortissimo as I got out of the car at the door of Wee Nooke, only to die away in a gurgle as something soft and furry brushed against my leg and looking down I saw the familiar form of the cat.*

*Looking down I saw that the cat had strolled in. And if ever a cat chose the wrong moment for getting the party spirit and wanting to mix with the boys, this cat was that cat.*

(Aunts Aren't Gentlemen, 1979)

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ALGERNON WYNBRACE

Algie found himself in a hall together with the cat Alexander and a green parrot. Algie expected that soon there would be only himself, the cat and some feathers.

Alexander must have thought that he was on to a good thing. His extremely sketchy grasp of the principles of ornithology had long since caused him to classify the parrot as a chicken. It was true that there was a difference in colour, and that the

bird's nose was a trifle more Roman than that of any chicken he had hitherto encountered; but these were small matters. Broadly speaking, this was a chicken, and dealing with chickens was one of the things which Alexander did best. He began to get ready to throw himself into this affair with spirit. Flattening himself on the floor till his chin touched it, he rippled the muscles of his back and switched his tail softly to and fro. This was his way of limbering up. In another instant he would have sprung, but, just as he was about to do so, his intended victim, stepping forward, nodded patronizingly at him and asked him the time.

Alexander executed a backward leap of seven feet and rose in the air like a rocketing pheasant. When the movement was concluded he was on top of the hat stand. From this elevation he surveyed the surprising fowl beneath him with pain and astonishment.

(The Fatal Kink in Algermon, 1916)

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### FREDDIE WIDGEON

*The house, he tells me, was just a frothing maelstrom of dumb chums. As far as the eye could reach, there were dogs scratching themselves and cats scratching the furniture.*

*And Freddie was just going well when, looking round for his shirt, which he had left on the bed, he saw a large tortoiseshell cat standing on it, kneading it with its paws. ... He threw the cat out through the window.*

*He tripped over another cat. And, tottering to a chair, he sank heavily on to a third cat. Well, he was up and about again in a jiffy, of course, but it was too late.*

*I am revealing no secrets when I tell you that Freddie Widgeon is permanently through with cats. From now on, they cross his path at their peril.*

(Good-Bye to All Cats, 1934)

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MADLINE BASSET

'There was a sweet black cat asleep on one of the flower beds. I picked it up and danced with it.' ... If there is one thing Augustus, the cat to whom she referred, hates, it's having his sleep disturbed. He must have cursed freely, though probably in a drowsy undertone. I suppose she thought he was purring.

(Much Obligated, Jeeves, 1971)

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