

Ye Olde Plum News

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FRETFUL PORPENTINES

WHAT'S A PORPENTINE?

"It's no good saying 'Sir?' You know perfectly well what I mean. Entirely through your instrumentality, I shall shortly be telling Uncle Percy things about himself which will do something to his knotted and combined locks which at the moment has slipped my memory." "Make his knotted and combined locks to part and each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine, sir." "Porpentine?" "Yes, sir." "That can't be right. There isn't such a thing." ...

"I am not a weak man, Jeeves, but when I think of what will happen if Stilton cops me while I am draped in that uniform, it makes my knotted and combined locks . . . what was that gag of yours?" "Part, sir, and each particular hair —" "Stand on end, wasn't it?" "Yes, sir. Like quills upon the fretful porpentine." "That's right. And that brings me back to it. What the dickens is a porpentine?" "A porcupine, sir." "Oh, a porcupine? Why didn't you say that at first? It's been worrying me all day."

(Joy in the Morning, 1947)

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SHAKESPEARE QUOTED BY JEEVES

Shakespeare created a very catchy parable in Hamlet Act I Scene 5 to illustrate that a person's hair stood on the end by horror. Jeeves of course quotes Shakespeare verbatim:

"Do you recall telling me once about someone who told somebody he could tell him something which would make him think a bit? Knitted socks and porcupines entered into it, I remember."

"I think you may be referring to the ghost of the father of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, sir. Addressing his son, he said "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres, thy knotted and combined locks to part and each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine." "That's right. Locks, of course, not socks. Odd that he should have said porpentine when he meant porcupine. Slip of the tongue, no doubt, as so often happens with

ghosts. Well, he had nothing on me, Jeeves. It's a tale of that precise nature that I am about to unfold. Are you listening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then hold on to your hat and don't miss a word." When I had finished unfolding, he said, "I can readily appreciate your concern, sir."

(Joy in the morning, 1947)

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MONTY BODKIN APPALLED

Miss Blossom had written with lipstick on the mirror in the bathroom of Monty's state-room onboard a steamer. Monty expected a visit from his fiancée, and was appalled. *There was a sharp agony in Monty's voice which caused the steward to look quickly at him. He observed that the young man's knotted and combined locks had parted and that each particular hair now stood on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine.*

(The Luck of the Bodkins, 1938)

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ALMOST BALD PORPENTINE

Gally paused. He was very fond of Lord Emsworth and hated to upset him, and he knew that what he was about to say would make his eyes, like stars, start from their spheres and also cause his knotted and combined locks, if you could call them that, to part and each particular hair – there were about twenty of them – to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine. ...

Gally to Lord Emsworth: "Has Hermione brought Dame Daphne Winkworth to Blandings because they're old friends? No... I received the direct impression that she's planning to marry you off this season."

(Galahad at Blandings, 1965)

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BRILLIANTINE HELPFUL

Pongo, whose air now was that of a man who has had it drawn to his attention that there is a ticking bomb attached to his coattails, repeated his stricken-duck impersonation, putting even more feeling into it. Only the fact that he had brilliantined them while making his toilet that morning kept his knotted and combined locks from parting and each particular hair standing on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

(Cocktail Time, 1958)

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JEEVES IS RECILIENT

Bertie to Jeeves: "I shall a tale unfold which will make you jump as if you'd sat on a fretful porpentine."

I was quite wrong, of course. I doubt if he would do much more than raise an eyebrow if, when entering his pantry, he found one of those peculiar fauna from the Book of Revelations in the sink... I unfolded my tale, he listened attentively, but gave no indication that he recognised that what he was listening to was front page stuff.

Bertie seems to think about the fretful porpentine as one of the beasts in the Book of Revelations.

(Aunts aren't Gentlemen, 1974)

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SEEING A DEAD SNIP

His (Spode's) face was flushed, his eyes were bulging, and one had the odd illusion that his hair was standing on end – like quills upon the fretful porpentine, as Jeeves once put it when describing to me the reactions of Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps on seeing a dead snip, on which he had invested largely, come in sixth in the procession at the Newmarket Spring Meeting.

(The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

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