

Ye Olde Plum News

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PINCHING POLICEMEN'S HELMETS

THE SEEKERS

Claude and Eustace are twins and sons of Bertie Wooster's aunt Agatha. A common friend told Bertie about their plan to join the Seekers Club: *Rather a blood club, you know, up at Oxford, which your cousins and I are rather keen on getting into. You have to pinch something, you know, to get elected. Some sort of souvenir, you know. A policeman's helmet, you know, or a door-knocker or something, you know. The room's decorated with the things at the annual dinner, and everybody makes speeches and all that sort of things. Rather jolly!* (The Inimitable Jeeves, 1923)

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### OLIVER "SIPPY" SIPPERLEY

It was the night of the Boat-Race. Sippy was depressed and Bertie tried to cheer him up. *It was then I got one of those bright ideas one does get round about 11.30 on the Boat-Race night. "What you want, old man," I said, "is a policeman's helmet." The pinching was a failure. Bertie and Sippy were apprehended and next morning they appeared in Boshier Street Police Court. Bertie was fined £5. "The case of the prisoner Leon Trotsky – which," he (the judge) said, giving Sippy the eye again, "I am strongly inclined to think an assumed and fictitious name – is more serious, He has been convicted of a wanton and violent assault upon the police... I am aware that on the night following the annual aquatic contest between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge a certain licence is traditionally granted by the authorities, but aggravated acts of ruffianly hooliganism like that of prisoner Trotsky cannot be overlooked or palliated. He will serve a sentence of thirty days in the Second Division without the option of a fine." (Without the Option, 1925)*

*Everybody who had a gentle upbringing gets a bit sizzled on Boat-Race night, and the better element nearly always have trouble with the gendarmes. (Inferiority Complex of Old Sippy, 1926)*

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BERTIE WOOSTER

A few months before, while celebrating Boat Race night, I had fallen into the clutches of the law for trying to separate a policeman from his helmet, and after sleeping fitfully on a plank bed had been hauled up at Boshier Street next morning and fined five of the best. (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)

Dame Daphne Winkworth told: *"It is not long ago that he was arrested and fined for stealing a policeman's helmet in Piccadilly." I could put her straight there and did so. "That," I explained, "was due to an unfortunate oversight. In pinching a policeman's helmet, as of course I don't need to tell you, it is essential before lifting to give a forward shove in order to detach the strap from the officer's chin. This Wooster omitted to do, with the results you have described. But I think you ought to take into consideration the fact that the incident occurred pretty late on Boat Race night, when the best of men are not quite themselves." (The Mating Season, 1949)*

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### RODERICK SPODE

Sir Watkyn Basset accused Bertie of stealing bags, which he denied. *"I certainly sentenced you for something at Boshier Street. I remember it vividly." "I pinched a policeman's helmet." "That's just as bad as snatching bags." Roderick Spode intervened unexpectedly. Throughout this – well, dash it, this absolute Trial of Mary Dugan – he had been standing by, thoughtfully sucking the muzzle of his gun, and listening to my statement as if he thought it all pretty thin; but now a flicker of human feelings came into his granite face. "No," he said, "I don't think you could go so far as that. When I was at Oxford, I once stole a policeman's helmet myself." I was astounded. Nothing in my relation with this man had given me the idea that he, too, had, so to speak, once lived in Arcady. It just showed, as I often say, that there is good in the worst of us. (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)*

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HAROLD "STINKER" PINKER

Stephany Byng was displeased with officer Oates. She asked Harold to pinch his helmet for her. *"So I have told Harold to do it, He has often said he would do anything for me, bless him... What a man!" she said. "We are engaged, you know." Bertie was appalled: "But, Stiffy, you can't ask a curate to go about pinching policemen's helmets." As Harold would not hear about pinching the helmet Stiffy broke their engagement. This made him change his mind. He told how he got it: "The helmet was not on his head. He had taken it off and put it on the ground. And I just crept up and grabbed it." I started, pursing the lips a bit. "Not quite playing the game, Stinker." "Yes, it was," said Stiffy, with a good deal of warmth. "... I could not recede from my position. At the Drones, we hold strong views on these things. "There is a right way and a wrong way of pinching policemen's helmets," I said firmly. The engagement was of course on again. (The Code of the Woosters, 1938)*

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### JEEVES

Bertie Wooster had a mission to perform at a fancy dress ball, but had no dress. Jeeves provided him with a policeman's uniform, including a helmet. *"I found it, sir." "Found it? Just lying around, do you mean?" "Yes, sir. On the bank of the river." "... It has occurred to me since that it may possibly have been the property of Mr. Cheesewright, sir. I observed him disporting himself in the water not far away." "... "Has it occurred to you that this Cheesewright is about forty inches more round the chest and eight inches more round the head than me? Clad in his uniform, and especially wearing his helmet, I shall look like a Keystone Kop." (Joy in the Morning, 1947)*

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