Out of Hours

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The Code of the Woosters

A PERFECT ESCAPE

The Code of the Woosters

PG Wodehouse

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If Bertie Wooster was an academic GP, and was found gloomily contemplating the depredations of QOF and REF over the antemeridian eggs and crumpets, you can be certain that a certain urbane chap of prodigious intellect, imperturbable in any calamity or crises, would shimmer into the breakfast room and prompt him into constructive reflection with an apt literary aphorism. *"When sorrows come, they come not single spies. But in battalions"* as the bard would have had it, sir. Jeeves would say. A prelude to ensuing pages of supreme literary comic joy, in which Jeeves would exert his capacious cerebrum to lift his master out of the soup.

And so you see, when they think they are assailing my tranquillity with their latest KPI or SMART objective, in a psychic sense, my unflappable genius of a gentleman's gentleman has long ago stowed my formal wear and golf clubs in the boot of the Lagonda, and we are motoring together, across the Surrey downs, towards some stately pile or another, for a weekend of hilarious misadventure.

First published in 1938, *The Code of the Woosters* opens with our hero Bertie recovering from a rather cheery evening in honour of the upcoming nuptials of his chum Gussie Fink-Nottle. He is summoned to an interview with his beloved Aunt Dahlia, an interview at which he is tasked with visiting a certain antique shop to sneer at a cow-creamer, thereby driving down the price for Uncle Tom, avid collector of antique silver. That, at least, is the plan. At the shop he encounters rival argento-phile Sir Watkyn Bassett, and his boorish side-kick

Spode, arguably the most notable fascist to be caught designing ladies underwear in the pages of British comic fiction.

I should hope by now you are fast forming the impression that this is rather an amusing volume! These villains employ considerable skulduggery to secure said cow-creamer for Sir Watkyn's collection, actions which set in motion a cavalcade of deliciously rendered merriment. The fun plays out amidst the environs of Totleigh Towers, as stately a pile as ever ennobled a fine deer park. The fine rooms, policies and surrounding countryside of said pile providing the backdrop to a series of comic escapades that rank amongst the finest ever crafted by Wodehouse. Which is saying something since he is a sublime comic writer.

I won't spoil it for you, but it is sufficient to say that you will chortle, and occasionally guffaw, your way through the ensuing 220 or so pages, entertained by a technicolour cast of comic characters. You will see a dopey

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young toff's equanimity sorely challenged by the schemes of a simpering soppy damsel and her counterpart, a boisterous rascally hoyden. Explosive leather notebooks, policemen's helmets and belligerent vicars, capped for England, are weaved together in a masterful plot, with the guiding hand of Jeeves returning young Wooster, after all, to the untroubled world of an Edwardian gadabout. Until the next story, that is, which you will avidly seek-out.

The book is a fine introduction to the Wodehouse canon, to which I return time and again. It has helped me inestimably as a doctor and GP over the years precisely because, to me, it is absolutely silent on those worlds. Wodehouse has nothing whatsoever to teach me about the world of medicine, which is why he glints at me from the bookshelf, to be picked up when I return world-weary to my fireside after another difficult day. He provides a perfect escape. A paragraph in, and I'm stealing a policeman's helmet on boat race night, or playing cricket with my chums using nothing but a loafah and an orange, or maybe just sipping a cocktail in a Manhattan speakeasy agog to the stunning virtuosity of Ben Bloom and his ukulele orchestra.

I urge you to escape too.

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