

## THE COOK'S CATASTROPHE

\*A Tribute to P.G. Wodehouse\*

It was mid July when trouble rolled up the old shirtsleeves and got down to business. It came in the form of a chappy who clattered into my flat at some ungodly hour in the morning (probably eight or so) and started yelling something about a cook and an old manor. Since I can't think until I have my morning tea, I rang the bell for Berkley, my man, who flickered in toting the life-giving substance in a beige teacup. The chappy seemed impatient, so, armed with my tea I gave a whack at conversation with the boiled egg I now recognized as my pal Bungo.

"Hello-hello-hello old top! How are you?" I said.

"I got you a job old thing!" he said. I was horrified.

"I don't want a job!" I ejaculated.

He pooh-poohed all my arguments and clattered out the way he'd come in. A cook! He'd signed me on to be a cook!

"Bally rum business this, eh what?"

"Most disturbing, Sir. Would you like the brown suit with the red tie today, Sir?"

That was all Berkley had to say about it when he delivered the ol' eggs and B. You see six months ago I would have been happy for a job, but my great-grandfather had died and left me a packet meaning I'd never have to work the rest of my bally life! Until Bungo toddled in with this dismal job of a cook at some old eyesore of a manor house! The worst thing about it was that I couldn't say no because the old eyesore and its rich

occupants actually *needed* a cook! I have a big heart and when someone is in the soup I say, “Right ho,” and get to business! So I ran the hand across the sweaty brow and told Berkley to start packing.

I arrived at the old eyesore and went to the cook’s quarters. This bally place must have been thrown together in medieval times because every room had an oppressive air to it. Like being in a dungeon. It almost seemed like an old Wodehouse novel. I half expected Bertie Wooster to toddle in and start caterwauling about something Jeeves had done! I passed a sleepless night and woke up yowling for my morning tea. Berkley flickered in toting the needed restorative. Berkley is amazing in the respect that he sort of appears. You don’t see him, then he flickers in and he’s there, then he flickers out and he’s gone! Just like that!

I was to start the bally cooking business that evening. The occupants of the manor were hosting another couple who owned some other manor house someplace else. (I don’t remember where.) Luckily the manor I was staying at had a quite competent kitchen staff or I would have been even more in the bally soup than I already was. As you can probably guess I was shocked when a freckled kitchen lad came up to me and started lispng his way through a short but potent sentence. My heart sank. I was stricken with fear. The lad could probably see the dread in my face and he scampered off. He had told me that I had to make four spotless steak and kidney pies. I had no idea how to make a steak and kidney pie.

One of the skills that my family possesses is the ability to improvise in tight spots. I did this with gusto. But, sadly, my complete lack of knowledge in the field of cooking

showed in my pies. I slowly entered the dining room toting the pies, and noted the look of mingled shock and horror that one of the old occupants flashed in my direction. As I lay the pies upon the table, I will admit that they didn't exactly look like pies, they were more like blobs of... of... So they were abominable, but as some chappy said some time or another "do your best", and I bally well had done my very absolute best.

Both the guests and the occupants tasted the pies and there was a wide range of reactions, none of them good. The old occupants' expression told me it would be wise to make my getaway stage left and all that rot. I did this heartily and hightailed it for the kitchen. It occurred to me that I could have used a recipe.

After dinner, one of the occupants of the old manor came and gave me a severe talking to. In short, he chucked me out. I could've hugged him. On the train home I mused to Berkley that I could have used a recipe in the making of the steak and kidney pie. Berkley put on a knowing face and said that he had hidden the recipes just in case I had remembered I could have used them. As he put it, "I thought it would be in the interest of all parties concerned if you were fired, Sir."

"Berkley ol' fruit -"

"Yes sir?"

"I say, did you return the recipes what?"

"Yes sir."

"Berkley, you're quite an astonishment."