

Hot Water

By P. G. Wodehouse

The Story Thus Far:

SENATOR OPAL, sojourning in London with his daughter Jane, is in trouble. The old fire-eater has a million dry followers in America; also, he has a bootlegger. And a letter he has written to the bootlegger is in the possession of Mrs. J. Wellington Gedge, who is using it to blackmail him into making her husband ambassador to France! Desperate, the senator makes Jane a rash promise: if she can retrieve that letter she can marry any suitor she may pick. Jane is delighted. Already she is engaged (secretly) to an impecunious author—one Blair Eggleston—who, acting on his beloved's advice, has become the senator's valet. She makes her plans accordingly.

Mrs. Gedge (rich) is living with her husband (poor) at the Château Blissac, in France. The Gedges are expecting visitors: the Opals, and the Vicomte de Blissac (a grand drinker, known to his intimates as "Veek"). Veek arrives. He does not, however, rush to the château. Instead, he takes a hotel room, in order to enjoy a carnival, just starting. . . . "Packy" Franklyn—American, young, rich, attractive—also arrives. Admiring Jane (while engaged to Lady Beatrice Bracken), he hopes to help her get that letter. He and Veek are old friends. They meet—celebrate. At a bar, they encounter two interesting gentlemen: Mr. J. Wellington Gedge and Mr. "Soup" Slattery. Mr. Slattery is a safe-cracker. With the aid of one "Oily" Carlisle, he is plotting (unknown to Mr. Gedge) to relieve Mrs. Gedge of her jewels. . . . Drama ensues. Packy saves Mr. Slattery from the police. As evidence of his appreciation, Mr. Slattery offers to crack a safe for Mr. Franklyn any time Mr. Franklyn wishes a safe cracked. The episode gives Packy an inspiration. He rushes to the vicomte. "Veek," he exclaims, "you were boiled last night, so you don't remember—but you almost killed Mr. Gedge in a fight. The cops are after you. The Gedges don't know you. They don't know me. You stay right here, in your room—safe. I'll go to the château—as you!" The vicomte emits a loud groan. "Hop to it, Packy," he whispers—and Packy prepares to go into action.

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MR. GEDGE, as he lay on the sofa in the drawing-room of the Château Blissac at two o'clock on the following afternoon, was not at the peak of his form. He was conscious of a dark sepia taste in his mouth and a general disinclination for any kind of thought or action. Outside, the birds were singing merrily, and he wished they wouldn't.

His recollections of the previous night were hazy in the extreme. He could remember broadly passing through an experience such as he had not had since the Shriners met in Los Angeles, but as regards the details he was shaky. His only outstanding recollection was of having had a fight with someone.

And then suddenly the picture grew clearer, and he sat up with an anguished start. He had just remembered that his adversary in that combat had been a young man brightly dressed as a lizard, and as the only celebrant at the festivities so cos-

tumed had been the Vicomte de Blissac the battler consequently must have been he. Mr. Gedge was not at his most nimble-witted this afternoon, but he could reason out a simple thing like that.

He was appalled. The vicomte was due to arrive at the château today for an indeterminate visit, and the problem of what is the correct attitude for a host to adopt toward a guest of honor whom on the previous night he has earnestly endeavored to throttle was more than he could solve.

He was still wrestling with it when the door opened and the butler's voice, announcing the Vicomte de Blissac, brought him to his feet as if the sofa had exploded under him.

A moment later, in walked Packy with outstretched hand.

"Good afternoon, good afternoon, good afternoon!" said Packy. "What a

day, what a day! The lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn; God's in his heaven; all's right with the world; and how are you, Mr. Gedge?"

MR. GEDGE regarded him with a cold, shuddering hostility. To a man who disliked snails and was not any too sold on larks, such jovial effusiveness at such a moment, even if exhibited by a personal friend, must inevitably have proved distasteful. And Packy was not a personal friend. Mr. Gedge could not remember exactly why, but he knew that he objected to him strongly.

And, in addition to reciting poetry at him at a time when even the lightest prose would scarcely have been endurable, this offensive young fellow was frivolously claiming to be the Vicomte de Blissac. Foggy though Mr. Gedge might be about some of the minutiae of the proceedings of the previous night,

he did know who had been the Vicomte de Blissac and who hadn't. He decided to take a very short way with this sort of thing.

"What the devil are you doing here?" "I've come to stay."

Mr. Gedge gave him one look and moved to the bell.

"I'm going to ring for my butler and have you thrown out."

"I wouldn't."

"You muscle in here, pretending to be the Vicomte de Blissac. . . ."

"I have a very good reason for pretending to be the late Vicomte de Blissac. Ah, Gedge, Gedge," said Packy, "you don't know your own strength."

Mr. Gedge stared.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Surely you have not forgotten the fight you had with the vicomte?"

Mr. Gedge seemed to be trying to swallow his Adam's apple. He did not succeed, for it was still plainly to be seen bobbing up and down.

"But I never touched the fellow."

"That is not the view the police take. They have put out a dragnet and are combing the countryside for a small but burly assassin last seen wearing a sort of Oriental costume with a scarf turban round his head."

Mr. Gedge quivered.

"I mean, I hardly laid a hand on him."

"You are speaking now of the first encounter—what I might call the preliminary skirmish?"

"First?"

"Then you have forgotten the second one?"

"Holy mackerel!" said Mr. Gedge. "You don't mean we had another battle?"

"And how!"

"AND you say this bird is in bad shape?"

"You could hardly say he was in any shape. And I thought the only thing to do was to come here in his place. Of course, looking at it in a narrow, technical way, I am not the Vicomte de Blissac. But I think you will be making a great mistake if you don't accept me as such. If Mrs. Gedge returns and finds no vicomte at the château, don't you think she will start making inquiries?"

Mr. Gedge had sunk into a chair and was kneading his forehead. To believe, or not to believe?

One portion of his mind was telling him that it was simply absurd to suppose that a man could have a desperate fight round about supper-time and not remember anything about it on the following afternoon. And then, stealing back, there came the unnerving thought that Packy might be speaking the truth. In which case, to expel him from the château would be disaster.

"Well, it beats me," he groaned. "I don't see how

Mr. Gedge clutched feverishly at Packy's coat. "Don't you dream of going," he cried



Illustrated by
Floyd M. Davis

I could have forgotten. Why, the time the Shriners met at Los Angeles I remembered everything the next day. I distinctly recalled having socked a fellow of the name of Weinstein. Red-haired man in the real estate business. He made a crack about the California climate. It all came back to me."

"I hadn't the pleasure of being with you when the Shriners met at Los Angeles, but I don't think you could have been quite so boiled then as you were last night. I don't know when I've seen a man so boiled. I dare say you've forgotten socking me?"

Mr. Gedge's eyes bulged.

"Did I?"

"You certainly did. Just one dirty look and then—zingo!"

MR. GEDGE was convinced at last. If he could have forgotten committing assault and battery on a man of Packy's physique, he could have forgotten, he argued, anything.

"So where do we go from here?" asked Packy. "All I am trying to do is to save you unpleasantness. If you wish me to leave, of course I'll leave at once. But in that case how about Mrs. Gedge? Won't she write to the vicomtesse asking what has become of her son? Of course she will. The whole story will then come out, and I don't see how the police can fail to track you down. And after that . . . Well, you can say what you like about the guillotine—the only cure for dandruff and so on—but nobody's going to persuade me that you will enjoy it. So how about it? Do I stay or go?"

Mr. Gedge shot from his chair. He clutched feverishly at Packy's coat.

"Don't you dream of going!" he cried.

"On reflection, you wish me to remain?"

"You're dern tooting I wish you to remain!"

"I think you're wise."

Mr. Gedge mopped his forehead. He looked at Packy adoringly. It amazed him to think that there could ever have been a time when he had not liked—nay, worshipped—this sterling young man.

"I don't know how to thank you, honestly I don't."

"Quite all right. A pleasure."

"It's white of you. That's what it is. White."

"No, no, really. The merest trifle."

A belated memory of the night before returned to Mr. Gedge.

"Say, listen," he said. "I seem to recall saying something at that festival about Yale couldn't play football."

"Oh, never mind that."

"But I do mind that," said Mr. Gedge earnestly. "I admire Yale football. I think it's swell." He hesitated a moment, then, as if feeling that the supreme sacrifice must be made, went on: "Ask me, I should say Yale was better than University of Southern California by around three touchdowns."

"Not three?"

"Yessir. Three."

"One at the most."

"Well, call it two," said Mr. Gedge, making a concession.

IN EVERY chronicle of the rather intricate nature of the one which is here being related, there occurs a point where the conscientious historian finds it expedient to hold a sort of parade or inspection of the various actors in the drama which he is unfolding. It serves

to keep the records straight, and is a convenience to a public to whom he wants to do the square thing—affording as it does a bird's-eye view of the position of affairs to those of his readers who, through no fault of their own, are not birds.

Here, then, is where everybody was at the moment of Packy Franklyn's arrival at the Château Blissac. And this is what, being there, they were doing:

Mrs. Gedge was in the office of her lawyer in London. His operations on her behalf in the matter of evasion of the English income tax had dissatisfied her, and she was talking pretty straight to him.

Lady Beatrice Bracken was in the garden of her father's seat, Worbles, in Dorsetshire. She was reading for the third time Packy's letter announcing his departure for St. Rocque. Well knowing that resort to be a hotbed of gambling and full of the most undesir-

able characters, notably the Vicomte de Blissac, she thoroughly disapproved of his choice of destination. As she read, she frowned. As she frowned, she tapped her foot. And as she tapped she said "H'm!" And she meant it, too. At lunch that day her Aunt Gwendolyn had once more expressed the opinion that Packy was a flippertygibbet, and Beatrice found herself in complete agreement with the old fossil.

MR. GORDON CARLISLE, looking more gentlemanly than ever in a new hat, new shoes, a new suit, and a gardenia, was standing on the deck of the steam-packet Antelope, watching the red roofs of St. Rocque grow more and more distinct as the vessel approached them in the afternoon sunlight. The new suitcase which lay beside him bore a label on which a keen-sighted bystander might have read the legend "M. le Duc de Pont-Andemer."



They walked in silence, each a little pensive

Soup Slattery was at the casino. His overnight experiences had made his head a little heavy first thing in the morning, but a pick-me-up of his own invention had soon put that right and he was now feeling fine. He was punting cautiously at one of the chemin-de-fer tables and, if the matter is of any interest, was slightly ahead of the game.

The Vicomte de Blissac was not in quite such good shape. As he lay in bed in his room at the Hôtel des Étrangers, staring at the ceiling and starting convulsively whenever a footstep approached his door, he was suffering a good deal of discomfort through the activities of some unseen person who would persist in running white-hot skewers through his eyeballs. This, taken in conjunction with the fact that at any moment he was expecting the door to burst open and the Arm of the Law to reach in and haul him off to prison on a capital charge, was having rather a depressing effect on the unfortunate young man.

MR. GEDGE had returned to the drawing-room sofa. He was groaning a little.

Senator Opal was taking a brisk walk in the grounds.

Blair Eggleston was in the servants' quarters of the château, broodingly brushing the spacious seat of the senator's dress trousers. But he was not happy. But then Senator Opal's valets never were. The first thing a valet in the employment of the senator had to learn was that life is stern and earnest and that we are not sent into this world merely to enjoy ourselves.

Miss Putnam, Mrs. Gedge's social secretary, was in the library doing a cross-word puzzle, a form of mental exercise to which she was much addicted.

The cook was asleep. The butler was writing to his mother.

Medway, Mrs. Gedge's maid, was busy about her duties. When these were concluded, she proposed to go and relax down by the lake with the mystery novel which she had begun reading on the previous evening.

Packy was looking for Jane.

And Jane was standing on the rustic path which wound its way along the hillside on which the château was situated, gazing thoughtfully down at the harbor.

It was not, as has already been hinted, a big day for larks and snails. The fact that the former were on the wing and the latter on the thorn had brought little

comfort to Mr. Gedge. Equally small was the solace it conveyed to Jane Opal. As she stood scanning the view beneath her, her heart was troubled. Today, for the first time since sudden love had thrown them into each other's arms, she had found herself beginning to wonder if her Blair was quite the godlike superman she had supposed. There even flashed through her mind a sinister speculation as to whether, when you came right down to it, he wasn't something of a pill.

The thought did no more than pop out of her subconsciousness and back again in an instant, but it had been there and it left her vaguely uneasy.

In these last few days, Blair Eggleston had undoubtedly not been showing himself at his best. Constant association with Senator Opal had induced in him a rather unattractive peevishness. Querulousness and self-pity had marked him for their own.

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Classical sports clothes that have won their place in the sun: seersucker golf dress, normal-waisted swimming suit and tennis dress with striped blazer

Anton Bruehl

Summer Brightening

THE newest thing in fashion is the way women are feeling about it. The first big feel concerns Paris. The second centers on price.

Women are wondering whether the French really have a corner on chic, especially the kind needed three thousand miles away for a different life, a different climate and different financial arrangements. American designers are having a look-in. Some even prophesy a showdown. The market is full of crisp new things that pay no taxes abroad.

The next big feel, the price affair, is even more important. When incomes were first reduced, we knew we'd have to buy for less, but we didn't know how much. We left our usual standards at home, forsook the stores that had served us before—and came back with armfuls

The ladies are getting very literal. Cleanable clothes must clean. Washable clothes must wash. A good golf dress has to be a good dress to play golf in. But they're being serious in a gay way

By Aimee Larkin

of trash. The first week we boasted. The next, we began to have doubts. The cleaner, the laundress or a nice quick shower finished our gloating. We hadn't bought clothes but experience.

Today we know that the most extravagant thing is to follow the lure of the price tag too far down. We're wary of "sales" and "events." We're back in the shops where prices have dropped in the only sane way, along with everything else.

Cleanable clothes must clean. Wash-

able clothes must wash. They must be fast to sun, rain and perspiration. They shouldn't be skimped in the cutting. They've got to be properly seamed. A bias that isn't a bias, a straight that isn't true means somebody saved on the making—but passed no saving on.

In a season of freaks and fads, good workmanship mightn't have meant so much. But this is a summer when the best clothes are simple, almost classic—sports clothes, town clothes, even the lovely filmy things we wear for evening.

Beginning with life in the sun outdoors—separate skirts and sweaters are back. A couple of skirts in first-class wool—try making one yourself, for this is always easy when blouses go over, not under. As many sweaters as the lazy can buy and the thrifty can knit.

Guimpe dresses in silk, linen, light wool, with a flock of blouses you can run up or buy for almost nothing, and little coats or capes to turn them into suits.

For tennis, the sleeveless dress in cotton or washable silk, shoulder-tied or with shoulders built out, is more practical with a little jacket. For golf the ideal costume—convertible neck, pleat in the blouse at center back, pocketed skirt and pleats for a stance, seersucker leading the cottons, wool jersey and flannel, washable silk. For bathing, a one-piece swimming suit of the new wide-wale novelty knit or classical jersey; or a suit with detachable skirt, adjustable at the waist for the older women, worn as a shoulder cape by the young and jaunty. Trouser pajamas, often cotton or flannel slacks, slipped over the suit or over the skin, worn with a white tailored mannish shirt or with a St. Tropez handkerchief split and tied for a bodice. Robes that have rubberized panels in back to save the car.

The Clothes Calendar

For general all-round country wear—cottons from morning till night, if you feel in tune with the new informality. Some look like wool or silk, but the rest are just themselves. Candy stripes are clean and giddy, checks and dots are seen, plain colors are good, to be picked at will—white and off-white in quantity, all shades of blue, red-white-and-blue schemes still in high favor, orange and purple as novelties. Lines slim but easy. Waist natural or high. White corduroy in the coat line-up, seven eighths a newer length than coverall. Linens, of course, are aristocratic and silks are always smart.

For all-day wear in town, the printed silk with the short jacket will start the season nobly, but watch out for capes to give the coats a run. "Shirred sheers," shirred from shoulder to knee, topped with shirred jackets, make sheer fabrics a contender, sometimes printed but more often plain. Cotton and linen tailored suits will also walk the avenue, lightening in color to the good men's wear crash as the season mounts.

Afternoon cottons are fine printed lawns, fine crêpes both printed and plain, but silk is a force to be reckoned with here, provided designs are neat.

When dinner is over, cotton goes on—organdies, eyelet and plain, lacy sheers, cotton nets and laces, with the promised piqué dance frock as the youngest of them all. Skirts hit the ankle-bone squarely or rise an inch or two above. White and pastels outnumber the rest, but dark sheers are new. Chiffons, of course, are always with us—we'd as soon stage an iceless summer. Velvet makes the tiny capes and jackets.

If clothes are simple, hats are more so—fabric hats for sport and street, straws rough and smooth, the panama as ever but in lighter weight, ribbons or bands for informality, a flower here and there for dressed-up versions, a hint of width for fair-and-warmer. The beret is still with us. But the bulk of the fabric entries have 1½- to 3-inch brims. All crowns are shallow. White is topping the rainbow. Hat, bag, shoes of white will go with anything. The perforated unlined shoe is promising hot-weather comfort we've never known before.

Are we excited? Yes, we are. We're out to play in the sun when we can, and be pleased with ourselves when we can't. We aren't tied to colors that mayn't be becoming or lines that suggest the past. We're cool. We're gay. We're young. We're smart. We know what value-per-dollar is and we're getting it, now if ever. If our men were half as clever with clothes... just give the poor dears time.