

JEEVES AND THE SONG OF SONGS

A play for the stage by Francis Beckett, adapted from the story of the same name by P.G. Wodehouse.

Characters in order of appearance.

Revd "Beefy" Bingham

Mr Cholly, a costermonger

Miss Dolly

Bertie Wooster

Lady Worplesdon, Bertie's Aunty Agatha

Jeeves

Tuppy Glossop

The Hon Miss Cora Bellinger

Mrs Travers, Bertie's Aunt Dahlia

Angela Travers

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THE SETTING IS A STAGE, AND CHARACTERS COME AND GO BOTH FROM THE WINGS ANDS THROUGH THE AUDITORIUM.

THE CURTAIN OPENS ON A BARE STAGE. THE REVD BEEFY BINGHAM IS PLAYING OLD MUSIC HALL SONGS ON THE PIANO.

A VERY LARGE POSTER, RANDOMLY PLACED ON THE STAGE, SAYS:

"GRAND CONCERT TONIGHT. SINGING BY THE NOBILITY. STARRING THE HON MISS CORA BELLINGER AND SOME OTHER TOFFS."

IT HAS A PICTURE OF CORA IN FULL VOICE. A PIANO STANDS AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

BEEFY IS AT THE PIANO. HE PLAYS A TRIUMPHANT INTRO, LOOKS INTO THE WINGS, AND NOTHING HAPPENS. HE PLAYS IT AGAIN, AND NOTHING HAPPENS. HE STANDS UP.

BEEFY Mr Cholly?

HE PLAYS IT A THIRD TIME, THIS TIME VERY LOUDLY, BANGING HIS FINGERS HARD ON THE KEYS, AND CHOLLY, A COSTERMONGER, RUSHES IN THROUGH THE AUDITORIUM AND UP ONTO THE STAGE.

CHOLLY All right, all right, I'm coming.

CHOLLY HOLDS HIS HAND UP TO STOP BEEFY PLAYING. THEN HE COUGHS, AND RECITES SONOROUSLY.

CHOLLY There's a one-eyed yellow idol To the north of Kathmandu; There's a little marble cross below the town;

ENTER DOLLY FROM THE WINGS. SHE STANDS BESIDE CHOLLY.

DOLLY And a brokenhearted woman Tends the grave of 'Mad' Carew, While the yellow god for ever gazes down.

CHOLLY He was known as 'Mad' Carew By the subs at Kathmandu, He was hotter than they felt inclined to tell, But, for all his foolish pranks, He was worshipped in the ranks,

DOLLY (COY SMILE) And the Colonel's daughter smiled on him as well.

BEEFY BINGHAM CLAPS.

BEEFY That's top hole. Couldn't be better.

CHOLLY We ain't finished yet.

BEEFY I know, I know, but that's all we've time for now. I'm expecting a very special visitor.

DOLLY Is it one of them right honourables you was at Oxford with, Mr Bingham, sir?

BEEFY Well, it could be.

DOLLY They gonna sing for us tonight, an' all?

BEEFY Yes, yes, Dolly, well, we'll see.

DOLLY Need a bit o' class, Mr Bingham, sir. Old Cholly 'ere, 'e recites like he's shouting out all the things 'e's got to sell on 'is barrer.

CHOLLY An' what's wrong with that, I'd like to know?

BERTIE (FROM THE BACK OF THE AUDITORIUM) What ho, Beefy.

BEEFY Bertie Wooster! I thought you weren't coming. What changed your mind?

AUNT AGATHA WALKS THROUGH THE AUDITORIUM TO THE STAGE, FOLLOWED BY BERTIE AND THEN JEEVES.

AUNT AGATHA My nephew knows where his duty lies, Mr Bingham. Tonight it lies with sharing such humble entertainment as your parishioners are able to offer. Is that not right, Bertram?

BERTIE Oh, rather, Aunt Agatha. Noblesse oblige and all that.

BEEFY It's – well, you might find some of it a bit primitive. I mean, it's not the Criterion. I hope you won't be bored.

BERTIE Bored? Good heavens, no. Been looking forward to it. Haven't I, Jeeves?

JEEVES Mr Wooster has spoken of little else for the past week, sir.

BEEFY Jolly good. Look, this is Dolly, she sings and recites. She's jolly good. Well, she's all we've got. And this is Cholly. He's a costermonger. He sings and recites too.

CHOLLY Morning, sir.

DOLLY Morning, your ladyship.

AUNT AGATHA I understand you are to sing for us.

CHOLLY Hope it's to your satisfaction, Ma'am.

AUNT AGATHA We are looking forward to the performance, are we not, Bertram?

BERTIE Rather. Jolly good. Absolutely.

DOLLY Very kind and condescending of you to say so, sir.

BERTIE Wonder how you do it. Standing up in front of a million other costermongers, with a sprinkling of whelk stall attendants, purveyors of blood oranges, and minor pugilists. Rather you than me.

BEEFY Yes, well. Why don't you two toddle along to the vestry and rehearse, and I'll have a word with Lady Worplesdon and Mr Wooster.

EXIT CHOLLY AND DOLLY INTO THE WINGS.

AUNT AGATHA The salt of the earth, Mr Bingham.

BEEFY True. Only – well, some of their performance s are somewhat primitive. Cholly is not a natural performer.

AUNT AGATHA Really? He seems to me to be a sterling example of the urban proletariat. Is that not how he struck you, Bertram?

BERTIE Of the what?

AUNT AGATHA The urban proletariat.

BERTIE Oh, that? Absolutely. Sterling example of the urban thing, Jeeves, wouldn't you say?

JEEVES Yes, indeed, sir.

BEEFY The thing is, Lady Worplesdon, so few of my parishioners are comfortable performing in public. In fact, I only have two. Cholly and Dolly.

AUNT AGATHA Just two?

BEEFY You have just been introduced to the entire cast of this evening's entertainment. We are rather up against it. We need more entertainers. People who will sing, for preference.

AUNT AGATHA (POOINTS TO POSTER SHOWING CORA) You seem already to have marshalled support from the ranks of the aristocracy.

BEEFY Ah, Miss Cora Bellinger, yes. Always a wonderful support. But you see...

AUNT AGATHA A splendid young woman, Miss Bellinger. You should get to know her, Bertie. Just the sort of woman you ought to think about marrying. She is a sensible and high-minded woman.

BERTIE Ah. Mm. Well, I don't suppose she'd consider me then, what?

AUNT AGATHA Probably not. You are, after all, entirely worthless.

BERTIE Exactly. I mean – dash it – fine woman like that, throwing herself away...

BEEFY The point is that Miss Bellinger is all we have. You will see that the poster promises more acts from Miss Bellinger's part of society. But alas! There is only Miss Bellinger. No other west end people have volunteered.

AUNT AGATHA Good heavens. Bertie! Something must be done.

BERTIE Absolutely. Shocking state of affairs. Should be rectified at once.

AUNT AGATHA Bertram, you will sing at this evening's performance.

BERTIE What?

BEEFY Oh, I say, would you, Bertie? That would be wonderful.

AUNT AGATHA I am glad you approve of the suggestion, Mr Bingham.

BERTIE No. Absolutely not. Under no circumstances. I won't do it. You can forget the whole idea.

AUNT AGATHA It is your civic duty to sing, Bertie. Furthermore, it will favourably impress Miss Bellinger.

BERTIE I won't do it.

AUNT AGATHA You will.

BERTIE I will not.

AUNT AGATHA I think we may regard that as settled. Mr Bingham, will you be so good as to show me around your church.

BEEFY Certainly, Lady Worplesdon.

BERTIE I won't do it.

BUT BEEFY AND AUNT AGATHA ARE ALREADY ON THEIR WAY OUT THROUGH THE WINGS.

BERTIE I will not sing, Jeeves. I am immovable on this matter. I am constant as the thing, the thing that's as constant as the other thing, what thing is it Jeeves?

JEEVES Constant as the northern star, sir. Of whose true, fixed and resting quality, There is no fellow in the firmament. Shakespeare, sir.

BERTIE Just so. Did Shakespeare ever meet me, Jeeves?

JEEVES I consider it improbable, sir.

BERTIE Well, then, he's a remarkably perceptive chap, he's got me to a tee. I will not sing, Jeeves.

JEEVES No, sir.

BERTIE That is all that is to be said in the matter. Nothing will move me.

JEEVES Precisely so, sir.

BERTIE Rather than sing, I will even incur the displeasure of my Aunt Agatha.

JEEVES Lady Worplesdon will certainly be displeased, sir.

BERTIE I remain unmoved. (HE THINKS FOR A MOMENT.) How displeased do you think she'll be?

JEEVES Extremely displeased, sir.

BERTIE Nonetheless, one has one's principles. (HE THINKS FOR A MOMENT.) Dash it, Jeeves, what on earth am I going to sing?

JEEVES I would advocate Sonny Boy, sir.

BERTIE Sonny Boy? Are you mad? Sonny Boy is what I sing in my bath. It is sacred to the Wooster ablutions. It is not a song to be lightly thrown away on stage in the presence of the many-headed.

JEEVES It has one advantage over every other song ever composed, sir.

BERTIE What's that?

JEEVES You know it, sir.

BERTIE But Jeeves...

TUPPY (FROM BACK OF AUDITORIUM) Hallo, Bertie.

BERTIE Who's that?

JEEVES I fancy it is Mr Glossop, sir.

BERTIE Tuppy Glossop? The very last person I want to see just now is Tuppy Glossop. Do you know what he did to me at the Drones Club?

JEEVES You have appraised me of these events, sir.

BERTIE How often?

JEEVES On five occasions, not counting the evening on which it occurred or this morning over breakfast, sir.

BERTIE It's not enough, I'll tell you again.

JEEVES You may recall, sir, that I suggested a short holiday at the seaside might help you to get over these events.

BERTIE All very well, Jeeves, but I'd miss the Drones Club annual dinner. My chance to get my own back on the viper.

JEEVES I fear, sir, that Mr Glossop might be on his guard against any such attempt.

BERTIE That hound Tuppy...

JEEVES Mr Glossop approaches, sir.