

Audition Passages for Bertie Wooster

Character: Bertie is charismatic, affable, energetic, upbeat and silly. He is known as one of the ‘idle rich’. He spends much of his time trying to help his family and friends, only to become embroiled in awkward situations that are seemingly inescapable...until Jeeves comes along. Bertie plays one role: himself. Bertie is onstage for the entire duration of the play (with one very brief exit), so this role requires stamina and the ability to learn many lines.

First Passage

Context: In this play, Bertie breaks the fourth wall many times to speak directly to the audience. This monologue is from the beginning of the play, when Bertie is beginning to tell his story to the audience.

BERTIE. What-ho! Now, the reason that I’m here, and you’re there, is that I was at my club, the Drones the other night, and I was telling Bingo Little—you know Bingo—I was telling Bingo Little, in some detail, about a perfectly frightful weekend I recently spent at Totleigh Towers. And he said, ‘Bertie, you should be doing this on the stage!’ So, here I am... ‘All on my own’. I mean, I’ve been to the theatre a couple of times, I’ve seen people act and have often thought, ‘Well, how hard can that be?’ So, here goes. Curtain up! Now, that’s just a theatrical expression, of course, because the curtain has already gone up—otherwise you wouldn’t be able to see me.

Second Passage

BERTIE. What happened, Jeeves?

JEEVES. Well, sir, I gather that, alerted by the sound of breaking glass, the constable entered the collection room just in time to catch sight of a dim figure stealing out through the French window. He pursued it into the garden, and was overtaking it and might shortly have succeeded in effecting an arrest, when there sprang from the darkness a dim figure—

BERTIE. The same dim figure?

JEEVES. No, sir. Another one.

BERTIE. A big night for dim figures.

JEEVES. Yes, sir.

BERTIE. Is Constable Oates a dim figure?

JEEVES. Not in this context. No, sir.

BERTIE. Better call these dim figures Pat and Mike, or we shall be getting mixed.

JEEVES. A and B perhaps, sir?

BERTIE. If you prefer it, Jeeves. So Oates had just caught up with dim figure A, you say, when dim figure B sprang from the darkness—

JEEVES. —and struck Constable Oates upon the nose.

BERTIE. Harold Pinker! He was supposed to punch me!

JEEVES. Yes, sir. No doubt Miss Byng inadvertently forgot to apprise him that there had been a change in the evening's arrangements.

BERTIE. What became of Harold?

JEEVES. On becoming aware of the officer's identity, he apologised, sir, and then withdrew.

BERTIE. Well, I don't know what to make of this, Jeeves. This dim figure. I am referring to dim figure A. Who could it have been? Had Oates any views on the subject?

JEEVES. Very definite views, sir. He is convinced that it was you.

BERTIE. Me, Jeeves?

JEEVES. And it is his intention, as soon as he is able to secure Sir Watkyn's cooperation, to proceed here and search your room again.

Additional Passages

You will likely be asked to read the highlighted parts below (for Bertie and other characters) to help those auditioning for Jeeves and Seppings.

SIR WATKYN BASSETT (JEEVES)

BASSETT. Roderick. I want you to meet this fellow. I gave him three months not long ago for snatching bags at railway stations and it is quite evident that his term in jail has had the most excellent effect on him. He has reformed.

SPODE. Oh, yes? What makes you think he has reformed?

BASSETT. Of course he has reformed. It's perfectly obvious that he is no longer stealing bags. What are you doing now, young man?

SPODE. Stealing umbrellas apparently. I notice he's got yours.

[BERTIE suddenly becomes aware that he is holding BASSETT's umbrella.]

BERTIE. I say. I'm most frightfully sorry. I thought that umbrella was mine.

BASSETT. That is the trouble with you, young man. You are totally unable to distinguish between *meum* and *tuum*. Well, I am not going to have you arrested this time, but I advise you to be very careful. Come, Roderick.

STIFFY BYING (JEEVES)

STIFFY. Oh! How dare you!

OATES. Miss Byng. This makes twice that the animal has committed an aggravated assault on my bicycle. I shall be forced to register a complaint with Sir Watkyn.

STIFFY. You leave my uncle out of this. And anyway, you shouldn't ride a bicycle. Bartholomew hates bicycles.

OATES. I ride a bicycle, miss, because if I didn't I should have to cover my beat on foot.

STIFFY. Do you good. Get some fat off you.

OATES. Ooh. I shall have to summons you once more for being in possession of a savage dog, not under proper control.

[OATES exits.]

STIFFY. Gosh. Hallo, Bertie. When did you get here?

BERTIE. Oh, recently... Have you got a small, brown, leather-covered notebook that Gussie Fink-Nottle dropped yesterday?

STIFFY. Yes. I've got it. I must say it does make splendid reading. Really excellent character studies of Roderick Spode and Uncle Watkyn. Though why anyone should waste their time on those two when there's Oates simply crying out to be written about, I can't imagine.

MADELINE BASSETT (JEEVES)

BERTIE. I had a communication from Gussie, more or less indicating that you and he were over.

MADELINE. So that's why you came! You thought there might still be some hope? Oh, Bertie, really there is no hope, none. You must not build dream castles in the air. It can only cause you pain. I love Augustus.

BERTIE. Then what did he mean by saying, 'serious rift Madeline and self.'

MADELINE. Oh, that? That was nothing. It was all too silly and ridiculous. Just the teeniest, weeniest little misunderstanding. I thought I found him flirting with my cousin Stephanie, and I was silly and jealous. But he explained everything this morning. He was only taking a fly out of her eye.

BERTIE. So everything's all right between you two now?

MADELINE. Everything. I have never loved Augustus more than I do now. I wonder if you've noticed any difference in him? An improvement, if such a thing were possible. Have you not felt in the past, Bertie, that, if Augustus had a fault, it was a tendency to be a little timid?

GUSSIE FINK-NOTTLE (JEEVES)

BERTIE. Gussie, what's happened to you? You've changed. I mean, telling Spode not to talk rot. I wouldn't have the nerve to tell Spode not to talk rot.

GUSSIE. Well, to tell you the truth, Bertie, neither would I a week ago.

BERTIE. What happened a week ago?

GUSSIE. A week ago, Bertie, I discovered that I would have to make a speech at the wedding breakfast. The mere idea appals me. The thought of having to get up in front of hundreds of people with Roderick Spode on one side and Sir Watkyn Bassett on the other...

[They break off to check that the coast is clear.]

Do you know Sir Watkyn intimately?

BERTIE. Not very. He once fined me five quid for pinching a policeman's helmet on Boat Race night.

GUSSIE. Well, you can take it from me, he's a hard nut and he strongly objects to having me as a son-in-law. For one thing, he would have liked Madeline to marry Spode – who I may mention, has loved her since she was so high. But apart from the fact that she wanted to marry me, Spode didn't want to marry her. He looks upon himself as a Man of Destiny, you see, and feels that marriage would interfere with his mission.

SEPPINGS

SEPPINGS. Good evening, sir.

BERTIE. What are you doing here, Seppings?

SEPPINGS. I came to lend a hand, sir.

JEEVES. I was also going to suggest that we might call upon Seppings to play a number of the other protagonists in this re-enactment. He does have a particular aptitude for impersonations.

BERTIE. Do you, Seppings?

SEPPINGS. I don't think I'm in a position to judge, sir.

BERTIE. Is Mrs Travers at home, Seppings?

SEPPINGS. Yes, sir. She has requested that she is not to be disturbed this morning. But I do know that she wishes to speak with you.

BERTIE. Yes, she does.

SEPPINGS. You will find her in the library shortly, sir.

AUNT DAHLIA (SEPPINGS)

DAHLIA. So you were out on the tiles again last night.

BERTIE. What? Who told you that?

DAHLIA. It's an extraordinary thing – every time I see you, you appear to be recovering from some debauch. Don't you ever stop drinking? How about when you are asleep?

BERTIE. You wrong me, relative. Except at times of special revelry, I am exceedingly moderate in my potations. A brace of cocktails, a glass of wine at dinner and possibly a...

DAHLIA. Enough, Bertie, sit and listen. All I wanted was to tell you to go to an antique shop in the Brompton Road and sneer at a cow-creamer.

BERTIE. Do what to a what?

DAHLIA. They've got an eighteenth-century cow-creamer there that your Uncle Tom's going to buy this afternoon. It's a sort of cream jug, Bertie. It looks exactly like a cow, but smaller, of course, and made of silver. Go there and ask them to show it to you, and then sow doubts and misgivings in their mind and make them clip the price a bit. And tell them you think it's modern Dutch, which is apparently something a cow-creamer ought not to be... Understood? Good, because I've got work to do. Seppings, show Mr Wooster the door!

RODERICK SPODE (SEPPINGS)

SPODE. Good evening, Wooster. I should like a word with you.

BERTIE. Oh, yes.

SPODE. I have been talking to Sir Watkyn Bassett and he has told me the whole story of the cow-creamer.

BERTIE. Oh, yes?

SPODE. And we know why you are here.

BERTIE. Oh, yes.

SPODE. Stop saying ‘Oh, yes?’, you miserable worm, and listen to me. Oh, yes. It is perfectly plain to us why you are here. You have been sent by your Uncle Tom to steal this cow-creamer for him. You needn’t trouble to deny it. I found you with the thing in your hands this afternoon. And now, we learn, your Aunt Dahlia is arriving. The muster of the vultures, ha!

BERTIE. What! Is she? Are you sure?

SPODE. Let me warn you, Wooster. If the thing disappears, I shall know where it has gone, and I shall immediately beat you to a jelly. To a jelly. Have you got that clear?

BERTIE. Oh, quite. To a jelly.

SPODE. Splendid.

[SPODE suddenly becomes aware that JEEVES is approaching and abruptly changes his tone.]

What a lovely evening, is it not? Extraordinarily mild for the time of year. Well, I mustn’t keep you any longer. You will be wanting to go and dress for dinner.

BUTTERFIELD (SEPPINGS)

BUTTERFIELD. Excuse me, sir, but on her way out, Miss Byng gave me this notebook to give to you, sir.

BERTIE. Oh, thank you, Butterfield.

BUTTERFIELD. No, thank you, sir.

BERTIE. Have you seen Mr Fink-Nottle?

BUTTERFIELD. Yes, sir, he is in the drawing room with Miss Bassett.

BERTIE. That couldn't be more perfect. Would you be so kind as to present this to him?

BUTTERFIELD. Certainly, sir.

BERTIE. Thank you, Butterfield.

BUTTERFIELD. No, thank you, sir.