

Jevons and the Country Club

In the style of P.G. Wodehouse

“What ho, what ho, what ho,” I said, swinging my feet off my desk as I considered the email that had just come in.

It was from a promising new startup that I was keen to invest in.

“I say, Jevons,” I called to my assistant.

“Yes, sir?” he said, materializing in the doorway.

“I’ve just heard from Byron, of Byron’s Baseballs,” I said, dropping the news on him. He wasn’t yet properly enthused by the company, but I was certain he would come around.

“Have you, sir?” he said. Though he no doubt took pains to conceal it, with my keen ear I could detect a hint of a grumble behind his polite words. Jevons was interested in our investing in some new fangled form of goggles for severely near-sighted people, and though I had dismissed the matter in no uncertain terms, he had yet to let the matter go.

“Yes,” I said firmly. “They’re asking for the million, as expected.”

“Are, they, sir?”

And, to make the matter plain and clear as crystal, as it were, I cut right to it. No sense in beating around the bush on these types of occasions, says I. On the occasions when there is nothing to be gained by waiting, then waiting is not an action I’ll be taking. I mean to say, I cut right to the chase, if you catch my drift.

“I intend to reply in the affirmative, Jevons,” I said. “Go and prepare the necessary documents.”

“Yes, sir,” he said.

Jevons, though not the type to voice his disagreement with my decisions, had an irritating habit of making his disagreement clear nonetheless. However, all in all, I thought the exchange had gone rather well. Perhaps he had come around to the understanding that there weren't enough severely near-sighted people for that company to require an investment as large as ours.

I turned back to my computer to fire off the news to Byron that the paperwork was being filled out with all vigor and speed. That accomplished, I felt the day quite productive. In fact, I was feeling so delighted with the day that I decided to step out to the country club a bit early.

“Jevons,” I said, popping out of my office, “I've decided to step out to the country club a bit early today. Let me know when the paperwork for Byron's is all set, will you?”

“Certainly, sir,” he said. “Might I remind you of the investors dinner tonight at five o'clock at The Golden Goat?”

“Blast it, Jevons, I'm already stretched as far as I can go with this new Byron's investment,” I said, “I don't have anything remaining to invest in whatever might show up at an investors dinner at a place named after a goat, golden or otherwise.”

“Nevertheless, sir, it would provide a good networking opportunity, and there is always the possibility that one of the new companies you learn about there might be worth keeping an eye on for the future.”

“Oh, dash it.” As much as I disliked such events, Jevons had a point. Furthermore, I

did have a hunch that attending this dinner might ameliorate any lingering discomfort Jevons was feeling at the recent scratching of any possibility of investing in new-fangled goggles.

“Yes, alright, I’ll be there. Five o’clock, you said?”

“Five o’clock, sir.”

“Fine. I’m off to the country club.”

An hour at the country club, and I was feeling much better. The sun was high, the birds chirped in the air, and I was enthusiastic about my new investment. Even the impending dreariness of an investors dinner couldn’t hamper my mood. I daresay I might have whistled hiking after my golf ball.

The only negative of the outing was that for some reason I kept either falling short of the hole or vastly surpassing it. Nevertheless, I tromped after the ball where it went in good spirits.

On my way back from the greens, I ran into my old pal Siggie Bishop in the country club. He and I went to Princeton together, and had many a grand time letting turtles loose in the dorm rooms, that sort of thing.

Eager to share in my enthusiasm, I readily told him about my upcoming investment with Byron’s Baseballs. I was rather set back by his response that he had heard of the company, but couldn’t remember anything exciting about it. However, we Wheelers aren’t the type to be set back for long, and as I pushed open the office door, I was back to my old cheery self.

“Ah, Jevons,” I said, ready to put aside old differences now that our investment plan

was settled. “Nice day at the country club, today.”

“Indeed, sir?”

“The old directing arm was in good form today.”

“I’m delighted to hear that, sir.”

“For some reason my distance wasn’t calibrated right, though. Kept being too short or too long...” I trailed off, considering. “Still, nothing but a temporary setback, I’m sure.”

“Perhaps, sir, with respect to distances, you might consider Gary’s Goggles - “

I cut him off with a “hah!” I could not believe he had brought this up again, when it was so clearly kaput. And while I was struggling to maintain composure through my waning sporting skills, no less.

“We have already discussed severe near-sightedness, Jevons,” I said sternly. “While it’s a worthy cause and all that, the production of goggles for such people is simply not a good match for our investments.”

“I’m sure you’re right, sir,”

It was a placating statement, but I wasn’t going to let him off the hook that easily. There is a place for assistants to speak their mind, so to speak, and this wasn’t it.

“I had thought that the decision would be clear enough at this point, now that you’re working on the paperwork to give to Byron’s Baseballs. Have you finished with that yet, by the way?”

“Not quite, sir.”

“Well see to it that you do. I, meanwhile, will attempt to survive the boredom of an investors dinner without any funding to invest. Ta.” And it wasn’t so much the words, if you catch my drift, but the way I said them.

The investor's dinner started out well enough; immediately upon taking my first gander around the place I spotted none other than Siggie milling about the crowd. I sidled up next to him at the hors d'oeuvre table.

"Siggie, old chap," I said. "You're here too, are you?"

"Bernie! I am indeed. It's your man Jevons' doing. I called up your office to ask if you wanted to get dinner, and he said you would be here tonight, suggested I join you."

"Ah, did he then." I couldn't quite get myself to add 'good man,' due to Jevons' irritating way of handling the whole affair with the goggles, however the news that he had arranged Siggie's presence did raise him in my current standings. The dinner would be much more bearable in the company of Siggie.

"Any idea which companies are at this dinner?" he asked, looking around.

Having barely glanced at the invitation before tossing it aside, I only knew what Jevons had mentioned of it.

"We can only hope there are some companies worth keeping an eye on in the future," I said wisely, and scanned the crowd, looking among the attendees.

I gasped as a nametag flashed by: *Gary's Gog...*

It was gone before I saw the rest, but I had seen enough.

"What is it?" Siggie asked, looking in the direction I was gaping.

"Someone I have no interest in meeting," I said. "I must be off."

I left Siggie saying, "But the dinner's not even started," and was out the door in a shot.

It's no exaggeration to say that I was outraged. That Jevons had no doubt

purposefully set me up to interact with Gary's Goggles took the cake. After I had been clearer than clear about not investing with them. It was too much.

"Jevons!" I said, immediately upon returning to the office. "Did you or did you not know that Gary of Gary's Goggles was going to be at that dinner?"

"I confess that I did have an inkling - "

"Dispense with the business, Jevons! There will be no more talk of goggles."

"Very good, sir."

"From now on, you are to focus on the tasks at hand."

"Of course, sir."

"The severe near-sighted will have plenty of investors in their goggles without our help."

"I'm certain you're right, sir."

"Right."

I shuffled around trying to think of where to take the topic next.

"How is the paperwork for Byron's coming along?"

"I have completed and submitted the paperwork for your investment in Byron's Baseballs, sir. It will be fully processed and the transaction complete by ten a.m. tomorrow."

Well there wasn't much of a comeback to make to that. What more could be asked for, if you see what I mean. But that didn't mean he was back in my good graces just like that.

"Good," I said. I considered possible strong endings to the conversation and selected the juiciest I could think of.

“I am going home. When we return here tomorrow, there will be no talk of goggles.”

“Certainly not, sir.”

I awoke the next morning still a tad peeved about the whole goggles business with Jevons, I must admit. Checking my email and seeing no response from Byron of Byron's Baseballs didn't help; not only had I been looking forward to his enthusiastic reply, but it was uncharacteristic of him not to respond promptly.

I decided to call up Siggie and ask if he wanted to meet up for a round of golf before work. Not only would it help smooth out my abandoning him at that blasted dinner, but it would help let my mind fully clear from all these matters clouding it.

Siggie agreed in good form, and not only that, was downright understanding about me abandoning him at the dinner. Evidently he had met up with some company that had piqued his interest, so the evening had not been a total wash.

That settled, I threw a couple of eggs down the hatch and hastened over to the country club.

As is so often the case, after just a few minutes on the green in the fresh, crisp air, I was feeling the good old Wheeler spirits again. We may be put down, us Wheelers, yet we never fail to bounce back again against all adversity.

The only blight on my mood was that Siggie was doing far better on the old scorecard.

“Well within putting range, that one is,” he said, looking after his latest shot.

“How can you even tell from here?” I asked, squinting in that direction. As far as I could see, his ball had disappeared into a sea of green, and might be anywhere from

putting distance to in the nearby sandpit.

“Got these new glasses, haven’t I?” Siggie said, taking them off and showing them to me. Until that moment, I hadn’t noticed them.

“I got them last night, at the investor’s dinner,” Siggie continued, as I tried them on. “A prototype. There’s some sort of camera in them. Takes a picture of stuff in the distance and projects it into your eyes. I thought I’d try them out on the green. Quite good for distance sort of stuff.”

They were indeed. Now I could plainly make out the hole we were shooting for, and Siggie’s ball a few feet away from it.

“I say, Siggie,” I said, waving the golfing glasses in his direction. “These are remarkable. I must tell Jevons to free up some funding to invest in them. They’re bound to take off.”

“I thought so as well,” he said. “I invested right then and there last night. You’ll have to act quick if you want in, too, Bernie. They’ve almost reached their target investment.”

A flutter of panic rushed up in me. That these glasses, no doubt bound to be a hit for all sorts of activities involving far distances, might slip out of my grasp before proper investment in said company could be assured left me flustered. Yes indeed, flustered.

To get my spirits back up, I reminded myself that I still had Byron’s Baseballs on lock. However, no sooner had the cheery thought occurred to me than the nagging concerns about old Byron’s lack of responsiveness came back.

“I say,” I said. “On the subject of investments. You haven’t heard more about Byron’s Baseballs, have you?”

“Oh yes, I’ve been meaning to tell you, Bernie,” Siggie said. “I wouldn’t invest in

them.”

He took a swing and paused to stare after the ball.

“Yes, yes, nice shot and all that,” I said. I could tell it was, with the help of the glasses, but that was far from important now. “But what’s wrong with Byron’s?”

“It turns out they’re a scam,” Siggie said, still looking after his ball. “A darn good one, too, based on all the people they’ve fooled. Bernie?”

But I was gone, running back toward my car with my phone already to my ear. Busy signal. I tried again as I started the car to the same effect. What could Jevons possible be doing?

I zoomed out of the parking lot and headed for the office at top speed.

“Jevons!” I said, blasting into the room.

“Sir?”

“Byron’s Baseballs! I’ve just learned we must drop them immediately!”

I glanced at the wall and saw it was a quarter past ten: the paperwork had already gone through. I nearly dropped the glasses from my hand as I saw the million dollars fizzle and disappear from our reaches.

“I’ve already arranged to it, sir,” Jevons said.

“You... you have?”

“Yes, sir. Upon ascertaining that Byron’s Baseballs, while otherwise a seemingly suitable candidate for your investment, had surpassed the funding they were seeking and did not have a satisfactory plan enacted for your further million, I investigated further, at which point I observed the rate at which they were using other investor’s funding to no

great effect.”

I gaped at him. He continued on.

“That, combined with their lack of responsiveness when I called many of their numbers today, led me to conclude it was a scam. I therefore released your investment from their company before the ten a.m. deadline, and have begun preliminary paperwork to invest it instead in Gary’s Goggles for Great Distances, a prototype of which, sir, you have there in your hand.”

I stared from Jevons to the glasses.

“These…” I spluttered. “These are Gary’s…Goggles?”

“Yes, sir. They recently expanded their focus beyond severely near-sighted people, no doubt partially upon the idea you yourself pointed out, that the number of severely near-sighted people is limited, as well as upon the realization that the desire to see far distances is not limited to the severely-nearsighted.”

I sank into a chair and let this settle in for a moment.

“Well thank goodness, Jevons,” I said. “I had already begun considering that million a lost cause. Your intellect and fast actions have likely saved it.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“What an extraordinary coincidence, Jevons,” I said, regaining my composure, “that Siggie happened to have these glasses on the green today. On any prior occasion, as you are no doubt aware, I would not have condoned investing with Gary’s Goggles under any circumstances. But having seen them in action I’m feeling dashed more friendly toward them. In fact, I had a mind to ask you to find some funds to liberate so we could invest in them.”

“I’m delighted to hear it, sir. If I may, it was not entirely a coincidence that Siggie had those goggles today. When I suggested he join you at the dinner, I confess I suggested he keep an eye out for that particular company and the possibility that the goggles could be applied to golfing. As you two are regulars at the club, it was only a matter of time before you were able to assess for yourself whether they were useful for the sport.”

“Indeed they are, Jevons. Indeed they are. Very well, invest away, and with all due speed.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Jevons,” I added. “You are a marvel.”

“Thank you, sir.”