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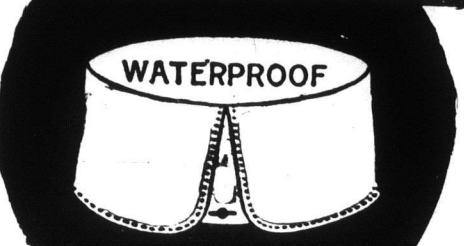
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you. Winnie'll be back soon—she'd be disappointed not to see you. Why don't you ask her to go for a walk sometimes?"

"Me?"

"Yes. Why not? Ask 'er to-night. I'd sooner it was you than anybody else. I'm only thinkin' of my gal, o' course; and I reckon a chap wot 'ud marry 'er for 'erself alone would be more likely to make 'er 'appy."

"But I've never been out with a girl before," confessed Ralph. "I shouldn't know what to say to her."

"You wouldn't know what to say to her!" exclaimed Mr. Gudge, in tones of



An unusual incident of animal affection.
A retriever dog rearing two little pigs

pitiful contempt. "Ah, when I was your age, Ralph—Well, it don't signify. It'll come easy enough, my boy. You don't know what you can do till you try. A little nervousness at first ain't amiss; it flatters 'em. They think it's a sign of respect. It looks like it, but it ain't always. Yes; a little timidity as a push orf don't do no harm; but it mustn't be overdone on no account. You have to startle 'em with somethink a bit darin', then look 'umble like, as though you've gone too far, and tone it down. See 'ow they take that; and nine times out of ten you can be more darin' still, and forgit to apologise. Sweep 'em orf their little feet, my boy! That's the trick; you take it from me. In a word—bluff! That's wot goes down with the wimmen."

It certainly looked easy enough. Ralph modestly concluded he might try; but he was not dressed for the part. That, however, was a matter Mr. Gudge could soon remedy. As a matter of fact, he had bought some new collars, cuffs, and other accessories that afternoon. He produced a brown-paper parcel, and, cutting the string, held up a gaudy waistcoat of the fancy variety.

"A man can be smartly dressed without looking a dandy, eh?" he remarked. "There's a collar for you—latest style, the Dragoon; thought they'd suit me. Pity there's only one weskit; but you can 'ave your choice of the ties. Er—'adn't you better 'ave a wash first? You'll find the sink in the kitchen."

Ralph was not absent many moments from the room, and on returning he observed a corner of the waistcoat peeping beneath a chair-cushion.

"Ulloa!" exclaimed Mr. Gudge from the interior of a stiff new shirt he was endeavouring to struggle into. "Who's that?"

"Me," replied Ralph, hastily donning the waistcoat.

"You ain't bin long over that splash."

"I thought it would be cleaner not to wash, after all," said Ralph, buttoning up his jacket. "What about a hair-brush?"

"I gen'rally use the palm of my 'ands," said Mr. Gudge. "But if you'll help me through this, I'll go and fetch one for you." With Ralph's assistance he quickly emerged, blinking in the gas-light, his ears crimson with friction. "Quarter to eight!" he remarked. "We must 'urry. I'll fetch that brush."

"Well, 'ow does the collar go?" he asked cheerfully on his return.

"A treat, thanks," said Ralph, taking the brush and crossing to the overmantel-mirror.

"Ow does my trousers look?" queried Mr. Gudge, strutting up and down the room.

"Your trousers?" murmured Ralph, preoccupied.

"Yes. Does they show the crease?"

"Only a spot or two."

"Ulloa!" exclaimed Mr. Gudge. "Where's that weskit? I left it on the table—"

"So you did," agreed Ralph. "I found one under the chair-cushion."

"Come now, no larks! Orf with it at once—"

"Hush!" said Ralph. "Someone coming up the path—quick!"

He hurried the silently protesting man into his old coat and waistcoat as a rat-tat sounded on the door.

"Only Winnie's knock," said Mr. Gudge. But it was too late for reprisals, and he opened the door to his daughter. To her astonished inquiry, Mr. Gudge replied with considerable dignity that it was not a party. He and his friend Mr. Porter were merely discussing a little bit of business.

"Oh! Is that all?" said Winnie.

"Well, no, my dear, it ain't all—quite," said her father. "The fact is, Mr. Porter—er—with feelin's of respect wot does 'im credit, 'as bin asking me—askin' my permission to take you out for an hour to-night. Said somethink about a blow on ore o' them electric trams, didn't you, Ralph?"

"It's very kind, I'm sure," said Winnie gravely; "but I shouldn't think of goin' out and leavin' you all alone, dad. You go with Mr. Porter, while I get supper ready."

"I shan't be lonely, my dear," urged the perplexed Mr. Gudge, becoming suddenly interested in an anaemic geranium in the window. "As a matter o' fact, I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Maple was to come round to ask my advice about a little deal she's thinkin' of. Us old folks 'll keep each other company."

"Do come!" pleaded Mr. Porter, nudged into action by the desperate Mr. Gudge. "It would be awfully jolly."

Winnie met his eyes, and smiled wickedly.

"What would be awfully jolly?" she asked. "Going for a tram-ride with another man's girl?"

Ralph turned in bewilderment to Mr. Mr. Gudge, and Mr. Gudge stared blankly back at him.

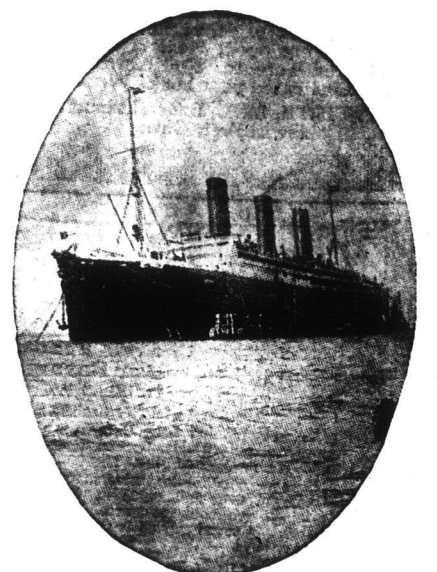
"Another man's girl?" he exclaimed. "Why, wot do you mean, Winnie?"

"I mean," said his daughter carelessly, "that I've been thinking over what you said to me (it's all right. I don't mind Mr. Porter hearing), and I've been out to give Teddy Walters an answer to somethin' he asked me last Sunday. He's coming to see you about it to-night, at eight o'clock."

"Teddy Walters!" exclaimed her father. "Eight o'clock! Well, I'm jiggered!"

Having delivered himself of which sage remark, Mr. Gudge became lost in complicated reflection. A neighbouring clock striking the doubly appointed hour brought him to his senses.

"You'd better see about gettin' a bit o' supper, then," he said, striving to control his voice. "O' course, I shall be 'appy to welcome Teddy Walters. Well, Ralph," he added, extending his hand, when his daughter had gone, "it was very kind o' you to drop in and see us. Any time you're passin' I shall be pleased—"



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"All right," said Mr. Porter, picking up his hat. "I ain't anxious to s.o.p and be made a fool of no ger! We'll 'ave another quiet little talk about this afore long."

He strode angrily to the door, and, opening it, nearly fell into the arms of Mrs. Maple, who was about to raise the knocker.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said.