

THE GOLDEN WATCH

"KRAWK!"

Arthur groaned and threw the blanket off his face. "Shut up, Mr Rudeboy."

Arthur opened his eyes and squinted at the light pouring into the bedroom through the curtains. Pushing Chuck's arm off him, Arthur struggled out of the mess of blankets and rolled to the side of the bed. He sat up and ran his fingers over his bald, wrinkled head. Fumbling for his glasses on the nightstand, he put them on.

His back ached. He could feel the springs through the old mattress under him. He needed to tell Jimmy, the head day nurse, about it. Reaching over to the nightstand again, he pawed around, searching for his watch. He couldn't find it.

Arthur turned to look and couldn't see it anywhere. His weathered copy of "*The Fabulous Riverboat*" was there, but no watch. He lifted the book up, just in case, but there was no sign of it.

Arthur put his hands on his knees and pushed himself to his feet. He straightened up and stretched out his back, wincing. It always hurt the worst in the mornings. He pulled the nightstand out and peered behind it. He saw plenty of dust bunnies, but no golden glint from his watch. He opened the drawer in the stand and checked there, but there was only the bible that the home insisted on and his bottle of pills.

Seeing the pills reminded him to take one. He shook a tablet out of the bottle and swallowed it dry. There were only a few left. He would have to ask Jimmy for more.

Arthur shuffled around the room, lifting things, pushing them, checking behind them. He needed his watch. It had been a retirement gift. It was the most valuable thing he had left. He strode over to the dreaded parrot's cage and raised the cover.

Mr Rudeboy, the parrot, eyed him. "KRAWK!"

"Stupid bloody parrot," Arthur said.

Returning to the bed, Arthur walked to Chuck's messy side and leaned over him. He shook Chuck's shoulder. "Chuck, have you seen my watch?"

Chuck opened one bloodshot eye and stared at Arthur. "No, Arthur, I haven't seen your damned watch. It's wherever you left it."

"Get up and help me look," Arthur said. "Please."

"Arthur, it's too early to be combing the bedroom for a watch. Go back to sleep." Chuck closed his eye again and pulled the blankets up around his shoulder.

Arthur looked over at the clock on the wall. "It's seven. It's not early. I dunno, I figured if you loved me, you'd help me look."

Chuck opened one eye again and glared. "That's emotional blackmail."

Arthur shrugged. "Come on. You know you're better at finding things than I am."

"And that's a compliment. Mr Rudeboy says that your memory is like a sieve. He says you'd forget where you left your pecker, if it wasn't attached to you."

"Chuck, stop using Mr Rudeboy as an excuse to say what you really mean. The parrot can't talk. Come on, get up and help me."

With a growl that turned into a deep cough, Chuck sat up on the side of the bed. His face flushed red as he coughed. Finishing, he pulled out a handkerchief and spat in it. "If you can't find it, I don't know how I'm meant to do any better."

"You need to quit smoking, Chuckie."

"Don't call me that." Chuck reached for the cigarette packet on his nightstand and put it in the pocket of his pyjamas. "You know, if I'm not careful, these things will kill me before I'm old and grey. Oh wait, too late."

"Maybe it fell under the bed." Arthur lowered himself onto his knees and looked under the bed. More dust bunnies were playing there, but no watch. "That maid is doing a terrible job."

Chuck walked around the room, opening a few drawers in a disinterested way. "Maybe you left it out in the common room?"

"We just need more light to search." Arthur strode to the curtains and threw them open.

Chuck squinted and blinked against the bright morning sun. "Mr Rudeboy says that when you die we'll all get more sleep."

Arthur brushed the crumbs on the breakfast table into a small pile. There was a sticky streak right where his left hand would normally rest. He took a napkin, licked it and tried his best to clean the stain away.

"Stop fussing. He's coming over." Chuck played with his cigarette packet opposite Arthur, trying to appear disinterested. Mr Rudeboy rocked in his cage on the chair beside him.

"Good morning, you two."

Arthur looked up into the rugged, handsome face of Jimmy - the head day nurse in the home.

"What can I get you both for breakfast?" Jimmy asked.

"Just tea and toast. I'm watching my weight," Chuck said.

"Full Irish with orange juice," Arthur said. "I'll need my energy today. We've lots of things to do."

"Coming right up," Jimmy said and walked away.

"Mr Rudeboy says that Jimmy has a nice arse," Chuck said.

"Stop staring at Jimmy and concentrate," Arthur said.

Chuck held his hands up. "Hey, I wasn't staring. It's Mr Rudeboy who said it."

Arthur studied Chuck's thin, lined face and the uneven grey stubble on his jaw. "Chuck, if I croak, you have my permission to make a pass at Jimmy."

"Really? How long do I have to wait? Is twenty-four hours enough?"

"Estimating your chances, I'd say you can try it over my still warm corpse if you'd like. Now, if you're quite finished, let's get down to business. If my watch wasn't in the room, then someone has stolen it."

"Or you've left it somewhere," Chuck said.

"We need to make a timeline and a list of suspects," Arthur said.

Jimmy returned with a tray of food.

"After breakfast," Chuck said. "No point in trying these things on an empty stomach."

"After breakfast you'll need your smoke," Arthur said. "It's going to be mid-morning by the time we get going."

Chuck shrugged. "You know me too well."

The garden felt warm for March. A few clouds crept in front of the Sun, but it soon pushed them aside. The other residents were outside in force. Everyone appreciated a little sunshine and an excuse for fresh air. Even Mrs Yang, who was almost catatonic, had been wheeled out in her wheelchair.

Arthur ambled along beside Chuck. He longed to stride with purpose, but Chuck never moved beyond a saunter.

Chuck swung Mr Rudeboy's cage in his left hand as he walked. The bird rocked with the motion, seeming to enjoy it.

"Just for once, you could leave that blasted bird behind," Arthur said.

"He'd get lonely. And without me, who would translate for him?" Chuck took a long drag on his cigarette and then waved it at the garden. "Who do you think it is?"

Arthur scanned the residents. "I don't think anyone in a wheelchair or walker could sneak into our room without us noticing."

"Mrs Yang could be faking to put us off-guard," Chuck said.

"That's a pretty long term plan. How long have we been here?"

"Six years, Arthur."

"Someone's been faking for six years to get my gold watch? It's a nice watch, but I don't think it's worth a six year plan." Arthur kept looking. "It could be Bob over there."

"Mr Rudeboy says that Bob stinks and we'd have noticed the smell when we woke up," Chuck said.

"That's just cruel, Chuck. He can't help the smell. Okay, let's rule Bob out. What about Beverly?"

"Mr Rudeboy says she has a crush on you," Chuck said with a twinkle in his eye. "He says that if she came in our room, she wouldn't be able to help jumping on you."

"Don't be silly, Chuck. She knows I have you."

"Mr Rudeboy says that you might want to switch sides, just to try it out," Chuck said.

Arthur scrunched his face up in disgust. "No, I don't think so."

"She does have a crush on you, so she wouldn't steal your watch. Maybe your underwear, but not your watch." Chuck took a last drag of his cigarette and flicked the butt into the pond.

"Finally," Arthur said. "Come on, let's go and commandeer the whiteboard."

"It's all rush-rush and investigations with you. Sometimes I regret marrying a cop," Chuck said.

Someone had doodled a rude drawing on the whiteboard. Chuck wiped it off and rolled the whiteboard out between the

tables. Once he had it where he wanted it, he experimented with a few markers until he found one that worked. He drew two vertical lines on the board and wrote headings over the three columns. "Alright, so we have visitors, residents and staff."

Chuck looked up from his newspaper and grunted.

Arthur drew a horizontal line at the bottom of the board and labelled it *'Timeline'*.

"Now, I know I had my watch last night," Arthur said. "I remember winding it after I put the cat out."

"We don't have a cat, Arthur," Chuck said. "Tomfool died before we moved into the home."

"How long ago was that?"

"Tomfool died eight years ago. We moved in here six years ago. I told you earlier, remember?"

Arthur nodded. "Of course. Even so, I remember winding my watch last night. That rules out the visitors. No-one is allowed here after seven."

Arthur added *'7pm'* to the start of the timeline and put an 'X' through the visitors' column. "What about Peter and Lucy?"

"The twins?" Chuck looked up again. "Why them?"

"They're always huddling together, whispering. I don't trust them," Arthur said. "And they're both mobile when they need to be."

Arthur wrote *'Peter & Lucy'* in the residents' column.

"What about Major Dangandblast?" Chuck asked.

"I wish you wouldn't call him that," Arthur said. "He's a war hero."

"He's off his rocker is what he is. Anyway, that's just what Mr Rudeboy calls him."

Arthur shrugged and wrote *'Major Cartwright'* in the residents' column. "Alright, we can talk to him. What about the staff?"

"Well, Jimmy couldn't do it. He only works the day shift," Chuck said. "Although, I have seen him admiring your watch."

"He might have come back after his shift or stayed late. We shouldn't rule him out." Arthur wrote *'Jimmy'* in the staff column. "I think we should add the maid too."

"You just don't like her," Chuck said.

"She's not even trying to do her job," Arthur said. "I want to question her about that, as well as the watch. What's her name?"

"The Maid."

"That's not a name, Chuck." Without anything better to write, Arthur wrote *'The Maid'* in the staff column.

Chuck shrugged.

"What about the head night nurse, Carol?" Arthur asked.

"Absolutely not," Chuck said. "Carol puts too much postage on her letters because she's scared they'll get rejected. Mr Rudeboy says the thought of stealing something would make her wet herself."

"Alright, so we've got five people to question. Who's first?"

"I saw the Major out in the garden, directing his troops," Chuck said.

Arthur clicked the cap back on the board marker. "Major Cartwright it is. Now, can you please leave that parrot in the room?"

Chuck shook his head.

Major Cartwright was standing at the bottom of the garden with a stick in his hand. He gestured at the field beyond. Arthur couldn't see anything but cows in the field. As they got closer, he heard Cartwright muttering to himself.

"Major," Arthur said.

Cartwright turned and smiled. He had a chubby red face and an enormous white moustache. He was dressed in an army-surplus khaki suit. "Arthur, how are you, my boy?"

Cartwright looked past Arthur to Chuck, his smile fading. "And Chuck. Hello."

"I'm well, Major. I just have a few questions for you," Arthur said.

"An inquest?" Cartwright said. "Fire away. Figuratively speaking, of course."

Arthur heard Chuck groan behind him. "Did you notice anything suspicious happening last night? Anyone moving about after hours?"

Cartwright nodded. "Now that you mention it, I heard a kerfuffle in the corridor. I was getting ready for bed when I heard shouts outside my door. I went out to see what was going on and saw Peter and Lucy stomping into their rooms and

slamming their doors. Jimmy was standing there, watching them go. He told me to go back to bed."

"Did you go to sleep then?" Arthur asked.

"No, of course not. It was my duty to go on patrol. I needed to make sure we weren't at risk of attack. I waited behind my door until I heard Jimmy leave and then slipped out."

"Which way did you go?" Arthur asked.

"In the same direction as young Jimmy. I figured he might get in trouble. I tracked him down to the kitchen. The poor sod was being accosted by an enemy soldier. She began ranting at him about mollicoddling residents. Of course, I knew what I had to do. I picked up a tray and ran into the room, attempting to help Jimmy fight the enemy off."

"Did you defeat the foe?" Chuck asked. "I've always thought she could use a good whack across the head."

"No." Cartwright shook his head. "I'm sorry to say she disarmed me. She twisted my arm behind my back and imprisoned me in my room. My door stayed locked until morning. I considered jumping out the window, but it was too high to be feasible."

"Aren't you on the first floor?" Chuck asked.

"Are you questioning my courage, sir?" Cartwright spluttered.

"Mr Rudeboy says that the enemy was Carol and Major Dangandblast is insane," Chuck said.

"Dang and blast it, sir. You take things too far. I must defend my honour," Cartwright said.

"I didn't say a thing," Chuck said. "My parrot did. He'd like to add that you've gone off the deep end of the walnut plantation."

"Your parrot said that? And this parrot - the one that talks to you - says that *I'm* insane?" Cartwright said.

"Mr Rudeboy wants to know what war you served in?" Chuck asked.

"World War Two, of course," Cartwright said.

"On which side?" Chuck asked.

Cartwright managed to turn an even deeper shade of red. "Arthur, did just you come over here so that your husband could insult me?"

"Of course not, Major. You've been an enormous help," Arthur said. "Chuck, keep quiet and keep Mr Rudeboy quiet too. Major, the reason I'm asking is that my gold watch has been stolen. It was my retirement present from the force. It's worth a lot of money, but it also has sentimental value for me. Have you seen it around anywhere?"

"I told you before, Arthur. I haven't seen your blasted watch. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have significant strategies to compose for my book," Cartwright said.

"Book?" Arthur asked.

"I told you about it. This field back here was the site of the battle of Bosworth Field," Cartwright said. "I have to watch the action and remember it for the book. It's going to be a bestseller, you know."

"Mr Rudeboy says the only bestseller will be your case-study," Chuck said.

Arthur took Chuck by the arm and ushered him away before Cartwright could explode. He glared down into the parrot's cage. "Mr Rudeboy, you do cause a lot of trouble."

Arthur looked up at Chuck. "There might be some things that the parrot says that could go untranslated."

"That wouldn't be fair. I'd be taking away the one voice Mr Rudeboy has."

"Peter and Lucy next. Where are they likely to be?"

"The television room," Chuck said. "They can't leave that box for a minute."

The television room was the second largest room in the home. It was filled with sunken sofas and ripped chairs from the local charity shops. Half-drunk cups of tea littered the coffee tables. Magazines covered the chairs, the tables and the floor itself. In one corner, an old CRT television with shoddy contrast was showing a quiz.

Peter and Lucy were huddled together in the centre of the best sofa, staring at the flickering screen. They both had black hair, so dark that it had to be bottled. Sharp blue eyes offset their sallow skin. Despite their differing gender, in every way they were twins. Peter had his arm around Lucy as they watched their show.

Chuck stood in the doorway and sighed. Ignoring him, Arthur walked over to the twins. He cleared some magazines from a chair near them and sat down. "Hello, Peter. Hello, Lucy."

Peter glanced away from the screen for a moment and smiled. "Arthur, fancy seeing you here. You aren't in here often."

"He was here yesterday," Lucy said.

Peter clutched her tight. "Shh, Lucy. Be nice."

"I wanted to ask you about the fight last night. Major Cartwright said he saw you both run into your rooms and slam the doors," Arthur said.

Peter blushed. "Yes, that was us. I hope we didn't wake him. Lucy found a joke in her magazine that she wanted to tell me."

"Why did the dog need throat surgery?" Lucy said. "Because his voice was a little ruff."

Arthur managed a weak smile. "That's a good one, alright."

"We were laughing at the joke when Jimmy arrived. He told us to go to sleep. We told him that we're adults and we can do whatever we like. He got angry and shouted that he didn't have time for it. He yelled for us to go to our rooms," Peter said.

"Jimmy came back after hours?" Arthur asked.

"He said he forgot to do something," Peter said.

"Did either of you see my gold watch anywhere?" Arthur asked.

Peter shook his head. "No, but we'll keep an eye out for it. Won't we, Lucy?"

Peter squeezed Lucy's shoulder. She giggled and nodded.

"Mr Rudeboy says you both smell like old toast," Chuck said.

Peter glared at Chuck, but Lucy burst into a fit of giggles.

"I like your bird, Chuck. He's funny," Lucy said.

Arthur walked to the door and pushed Chuck out. "We do have to live with these people you know, Chuckie."

"Don't call me that," Chuck said. "And when was the last time we needed to go into the television room? You've got your books and I have my paper."

"According to them, I was in there just yesterday," Arthur said. "But I can't say that I remember that at all."

"Isn't the maid next?" Chuck asked.

"Yes. I know we won't find her cleaning our room."

"Sometimes she smokes out the back alley."

Arthur frowned. "Have you been bumming cigarettes off her?"

"I might have."

"And you still don't know her name?"

"Marlboro? Maybe?"

"Alright, let's get back there, then," Arthur said.

"It's lunchtime first," Chuck said. "We can ask her after lunch."

"You're all lungs and stomach," Arthur said.

They found the maid in the alley behind the home, through the rear fire-escape. One end of the alley was piled high with old furniture and overflowing bins. It reeked. Arthur recoiled a little before settling his stomach. He wished he hadn't just eaten lunch.

The maid took a long drag on her cigarette and blew the smoke up into the air above her. She glanced at them as they walked out and clucked her tongue. "What do you want?"

Arthur strode over to her and looked her up and down. Both sides of her head were shaved. Metalwork covered her face. He even caught a glimpse of a stud through her tongue.

"Hello... you," Arthur said.

"Stacy," the maid said. "Every bloody time. My name is Stacy."

"Sorry, Stacy," Arthur said. "I'm afraid I'm useless with names. I wanted to talk to you about our room. It's getting a little dusty under the bed and behind my nightstand."

"Whatever," Stacy said.

"It's just that I have allergies," Arthur lied. "I need the room to be extra clean, or I'll be up all night sneezing."

"I'll do it if I get time," Stacy said.

Arthur looked around the alley.

"What?" Stacy asked.

"You've got time to skive off for a smoke, but not to do your job?" Arthur asked.

"Do you know what I get paid?" Stacy asked. "It's not much. It's certainly not enough for me to go moving your bed and Hoovering under it."

Chuck put his hand on Arthur's arm. "Arthur, leave this one to me."

Chuck took out his packet of cigarettes and shook one out for Stacy.

Stacy threw her cigarette butt down and took the fresh one. She pulled out a lighter and lit the tip. Taking a deep draw, she exhaled in Arthur's direction.

"Now, Stacy," Chuck said. "Arthur is getting a little side-tracked here. We came to ask you about his gold watch."

"I guess it's gone missing?" Stacy asked.

"What makes you say that?" Arthur asked.

"Seriously, Arthur, leave this to me," Chuck said. "Yes, Stacy. His watch is missing and we wondered if you'd seen it on your rounds."

"I haven't seen a gold watch," Stacy said. "I wouldn't blame someone for nicking it, though. This place doesn't pay for crap. Jimmy can't even afford to help his granny out with her heating bill."

"Jimmy's having financial trouble?" Chuck asked.

"He told me that his granny is having trouble with her gas bill." Stacy shrugged. "I don't know if he'd go stealing watches. Although they do always say it's the quiet ones..."

"Not always," Arthur said. "Usually criminals already have a history of crime. There's the occasional odd duck, but not as often as the news portrays."

"Alright, Professor," Stacy said.

"Finish your cigarette and then go and clean our room, Stacy," Arthur said.

"Or what?"

"Or I'll call your mother," Arthur said.

"You're going to call my mum? Why would you do that? She's got nothing to do with this," Stacy said.

"I learnt something as a cop, Stacy," Arthur said. "Huge brutes don't care about the police, or their manager, or their wife. One mention of their mothers and they'll do anything you ask. Most of the time, at least. Sometimes, the mother is worse than the child. I'm betting your mother is a sweet lady. Am I right?"

"Don't call my mum. I'll Hoover under your bed. Alright?" Stacy said.

"Thank you." Arthur spun on his heel and walked back through the fire-escape door with a smile of triumph on his face.

"Mr Rudeboy wonders if you like bullying children," Chuck said from behind him.

"Tell Mr Rudeboy I might call his mother," Arthur said.

They found Jimmy in the common room, putting pills into small paper cups. "Dinner isn't for hours yet, guys."

"Jimmy, were you here after hours last night?" Arthur asked.

Jimmy nodded. "I forgot something, so I had to come back to get it."

"Why were you in such a rush?" Arthur asked.

"I was late for a date with Jane, my girlfriend," Jimmy said.

"Aww," Chuck said disappointedly.

"What?" Jimmy asked.

"Don't mind him," Arthur said. "What did you forget?"

"It was just something I had to do for a resident," Jimmy said. "Jane was furious when I got to the restaurant."

"Have you seen my watch anywhere?" Arthur asked.

Jimmy shook his head. "No, what kind of watch is it?"

"A gold one," Arthur said. "I left it on my nightstand and when I woke up, it was gone."

"Maybe it fell down behind the nightstand?" Jimmy said. "Can you tell the others in the garden that their medications are ready?"

"We'll get right on it," Chuck said. "Come on, Arthur."

Arthur frowned at Chuck as they walked out to the garden. "Why did you interrupt me? He obviously did it. He pretended not to know what my watch looks like, but you've seen him admiring it."

"Is he going to break down and tell you? You're the one that tells me that only happens on television. We need to find some evidence," Chuck said. "We should go and look around the garden first. A long look around the garden path. Then we should investigate the dining room."

"You want to go for a smoke and then eat dinner?" Arthur asked.

Chuck shrugged. "You can see right through me."

Chuck finished his dinner and let out a loud burp. "That was Mr Rudeboy."

"I don't think you can blame the parrot for your burps," Arthur said.

They were sitting at their table, on the edge of the dining room. The other residents were in their usual places. The clinking and scraping of cutlery on plates filled the room. The nurses were at the top table, helping the residents who had problems eating on their own.

"Where can we check for evidence?" Arthur asked.

"The staff room," Chuck said. "If Jimmy couldn't take the watch with him last night, he would have stashed it in his locker."

"He'd be pretty stupid to leave it in the one place that would lead right back to him."

"Residents aren't allowed in there. He wouldn't think we'd check there. He wouldn't expect anyone to guess his combination, either." Chuck wiped his mouth on a napkin and stood up, picking up Mr Rudeboy's cage.

Arthur stood. "Alright, but I think you should leave Mr Rudeboy behind."

"What are you talking about? He's going to be our lookout."

Arthur sighed and shook his head.

They strode through the dining room and up two sets of stairs to the third floor. The staff room at the far end of the corridor was closed and quiet.

Arthur padded to the door and knocked. There was no reply. "We need to make this quick. One of the staff could come at any time."

Chuck set Mr Rudeboy's cage down in the corridor. "Let us know if anyone's coming, Mr Rudeboy."

Arthur opened the door and they slipped inside.

The staff room was small, with lockers on one wall and a bench in the middle. At the back, a door led to a shower room and toilet. The room smelled of old socks and ammonia.

"Which is Jimmy's locker?" Arthur asked.

Chuck shrugged. He walked over to a fire-extinguisher attached to the wall and took it down. Walking to the nearest locker, he raised the extinguisher and slammed it down on the lock. The lock fell to the ground with a tinkle, snapped in two.

"Chuck, you can't just go breaking people's lockers open. What's Jimmy going to say when he sees that?" Arthur asked.

Chuck set the extinguisher down and opened the locker. "Not much. I don't think this is his."

Arthur looked into the locker and saw a woman's blouse and skirt hanging inside. A bag of pink toiletries sat at the bottom.

"Unless Jimmy cross-dresses, you've got the wrong locker," Arthur said.

Chuck picked up the blouse and checked the label. "Too small. Pity."

He threw the blouse back into the locker and lifted the extinguisher. Walking to the next locker, he brought the extinguisher down on another lock, smashing it open.

"This is illegal, Chuck," Arthur said.

"We're not taking anything," Chuck said.

"At the very least it's vandalism."

Chuck opened the next locker and glanced inside. "Bingo."

Arthur looked in and saw a leather jacket and jeans. "It's a man's locker at least."

Chuck pulled a wallet from the jacket and checked it. "It's his. It has his name on the credit cards. I wonder if I could use these online."

"Put them back and hand me the jacket," Arthur said.

Chuck pushed the wallet back into the jacket pocket and took it out for Arthur.

Arthur patted the pockets and found something hard in one. Reaching inside, he pulled out a gold watch. His gold watch. "My watch. Jimmy really did take it."

Arthur slipped it into his waistcoat pocket and looped the chain across.

"No, you should hide it," Chuck said. "You should surprise him with it."

Arthur couldn't fault Chuck's logic. He took the watch off and dropped it into his trouser pocket.

They found Jimmy in the common room. He didn't seem nervous. He smiled and chatted to people as he walked around the room. He stopped by Mrs Yang and talked to her. Then he wheeled her from the room.

"Be patient." Chuck put his hand on Arthur's arm. "He'll be back in a few minutes."

They went over to a comfortable sofa and sat down. Arthur leaned across and rested his head on Chuck's shoulder. "Thanks for helping me find my watch, Chuck."

"I'd do it a thousand times over for you, Arthur," Chuck said.

Arthur closed his eyes for a moment and tried to calm himself. He'd confronted hundreds of men on the job. It shouldn't affect him. He liked Jimmy, though. Somehow, he hadn't thought Jimmy had a mean bone in his body.

Chuck shifted, and Arthur opened his eyes. Jimmy walked into the room, his eyes wide. He made straight for the two of them.

"Arthur, do you know what's happened to the staff lockers?" Jimmy asked. "Two of them have been smashed open."

"That was me and Chuck. We only took one thing." Arthur stood, pulled his watch out and showed it to Jimmy. "We found this in your jacket pocket."

"That's..." Jimmy glanced at Chuck and sighed. "I'm sorry, Arthur. I stole your watch. I needed money to pay my grandmother's gas bill. They're about to cut off her heat."

"This watch means a lot to me, Jimmy. I got it from the force after forty years there. It's not just a lump of gold, it has sentimental value for me," Arthur said.

"I'm sorry, Arthur. I won't steal anything again. Please forgive me," Jimmy said.

"Was it really for your grandmother?" Arthur asked.

"Yes. The gas company put the rates up and she didn't realise. The bill is more than I make in a month," Jimmy said. "Please forgive me, Arthur."

Arthur reached out and squeezed Jimmy's arm. "Of course I do, Jimmy. You know what? We're going to tell our kids to give you a bonus. We can't have your grandmother going cold. Won't we, Chuck?"

"You're too kind," Chuck said. "But yeah, we will."

The room burst into a round of applause. Arthur glanced around and realised that everyone was staring at them. In his years on the force, no-one had ever applauded for him solving a crime before. After a brief round of applause, the other residents seemed to lose interest and went back to their puzzles and games.

"It's almost time for bed, isn't it, Arthur?" Chuck said.

Arthur yawned. "I think so. I'd like just go and curl up in bed with my book. It's been a long day."

"Can you take Mr Rudeboy and wait over there for me?" Chuck asked. "I just want to talk to Jimmy for a moment."

Arthur took the parrot's cage and walked to the doorway to wait.

Chuck and Jimmy huddled together, talking. Arthur struggled to try and hear. He managed to make out a few words.

"Can't... every day..." Jimmy said.

"You know... anterograde... appreciate it," Chuck replied.

"No more damage to staff property," Jimmy said loudly. "Or this is the last time."

Chuck nodded and whispered something back, taking Jimmy's hand. Jimmy nodded to Chuck. Chuck turned away, walked over to Arthur and took Mr Rudeboy's cage.

"Don't think I didn't see you flirting," Arthur said.

Chuck grinned. "Come on. Let's go to bed. How's your book going?"

"It's falling apart. They don't make them like they used to."

Arthur took Chuck's hand, and they walked up to bed.

"K**W**ARK!"

"Shut up, Mr Rudeboy," Arthur said. He blinked himself awake and stared up at the bright sunlight throwing patterns on the ceiling above him. Sitting up, Arthur threw his legs over the side of the bed. He patted his nightstand for his glasses, found them and put them on.

Reaching for his watch, Arthur couldn't find it. He glanced over, but it wasn't there. Arthur raised his book, but it wasn't under that either. Standing up, Arthur pulled out his nightstand and peered behind it. He only found dust bunnies.

"That maid is useless. I'll have to have a word with her."

Arthur got down on his knees and looked under the bed. The watch wasn't there either. Getting back up, he crawled across the bed and shook Chuck's shoulder. "Chuck, my watch is missing."

Chuck didn't stir.

Arthur reached up and held Chuck's nose. He waited for the gasp and growl that would wake Chuck up. It didn't come. Chuck's nose felt cold.

Arthur put his hand on Chuck's cheek, but it was stone cold too. Arthur pulled Chuck over onto his back and looked down at him. Chuck stared lifelessly up at the sunbeams on the ceiling.

"Chuck, please don't do this to me," Arthur said. "I can't find my watch without you."

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