

THE GOLDFISH MAN

A Children's Story for Adults

THERE was, once upon a time, a man who had some goldfish. As a matter of fact, he had only two goldfish, but at times they seemed so different he would call them some. Their names were Jimmy and Oscar. They were given to the man by a little boy called Bertie, or Bertram for long, who lived next door to the Boarding House where the man stayed. The man wasn't a very old man, but as Bertie was quite little, he thought the man had been at the Boarding House for years and years and years. Bertie's mother, she thought the man was quite good-looking; but Bertie didn't really care. Now Bertie was very fond of goldfish; his mother had a great big pond, full of them, so on the man's birthday Bertie brought along his mother's tin billy with two goldfish in it, as a surprise.

Of course, the man was very surprised, and thanked Bertie nicely by letting him have a look at his stamp collection. Bertie liked the pink and green stamps. But, you see, as the man had never been given any goldfish before, he didn't quite know what to do with them. Before he went to work next day, he put them in the bathroom wash-basin, the billy seemed so small, where they looked very happy playing chasing round the plug. However, when the man came home at five o'clock, his landlady, although she was very sympathetic when the man told her he was going to get a bowl for the fish, said she really didn't like to have live animals around the house, and that Mr. Jackson, who took a drop or two for his lumbago, got such a shock this morning when he went to wash, so would the man please mind. . . . The man felt rather worried about this. It would be so cruel to give them to the cat, and it would hurt Bertie's feeling so much if he gave Oscar and Jimmy away. The man hated to hurt people's feelings: everyone kept hurting his, so he knew how it felt. So, it seemed the only thing he could do was to take them to the Office.

The man's Office was in a tall building, eight or nine stories high, up in the lift, along the rubber corridor and through the glass doors. It was really quite a nice Office, but although the man had been working there for two or three years now, he wasn't quite used to it and it wasn't quite used to him.

The man caught the goldfish carefully without splashing too much water on the floor. The landlady didn't like people who put water all over the bathroom, but it is very hard to catch goldfish without splashing a little water as they are so slippery, you know. Then the man put them back into Bertie's

Written for "The Listener"
by MARJORIE WILLIAMS

mother's billy and took Jimmy and Oscar down to the Office the next morning.

* * *

THE man felt very shy about the fish, although he tried not to show it. In fact the man really felt shy a lot of the time, but not many people realised this as he would laugh and joke to make everyone believe he wasn't. But this morning he really felt very, very shy and he said "Good morning" rather impolitely to the Office girls as he hurried across the Main Office. They were

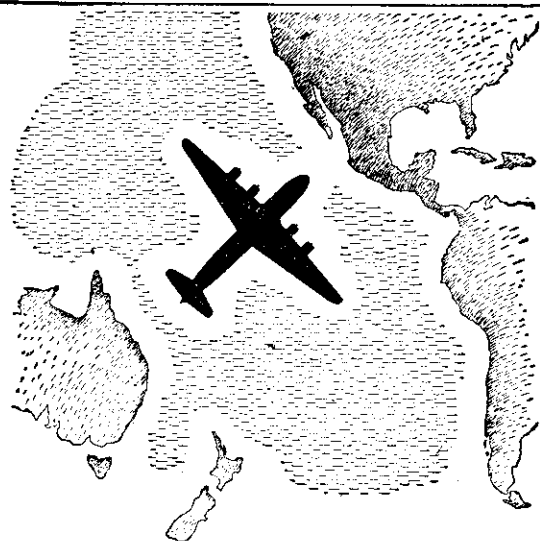
laughing, he thought, at Bertie's mother's billy that the man was trying to hide under his coat, but it wasn't that, it was Little Audrey. However, the man soon shut the door of his room, put Bertie's mother's billy in the cupboard and set to work. So, you see, no one guessed that in the building that morning, besides five thousand files,

ninety offices, and three hundred people were two little goldfish named Jimmy and Oscar.

At lunch-time, when everybody went off to get pies and cakes, the man put on his hat, buttoned up his brown overcoat, it was winter time, and walked quickly down the corridor to get a goldfish bowl from the fish Supply Shop. I suppose you wonder why the man didn't ask one of the Office girls to get a fish bowl for him with her pie and cakes? Well, you see, the man hated to ask people to do things for him. He felt he just couldn't trouble people, so he went most places and did most things himself.

About half-an-hour later he returned carrying a large brown box. The man waited until the two switchboard girls began to talk about knitting patterns again and walked determinedly into his room. He felt rather hot and flustered as he had to chase all over town for the goldfish bowl, everything is so expensive and so hard to get these days, you know, but he was very relieved that no one knew about the fish. What would everyone think? It was so silly to keep goldfish in an office, he thought. When they were in the bowl he would put them in the cupboard and no one would ever know. But, just as he had picked up Bertie's mother's billy, in walked the Office junior wanting her share of the sweepstake ticket. (The

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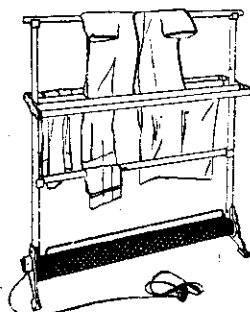
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