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## THE GOLDFISH MAN

(continued from previous page)

man really didn't believe in gambling, but he didn't like to feel that he wasn't a good sport).

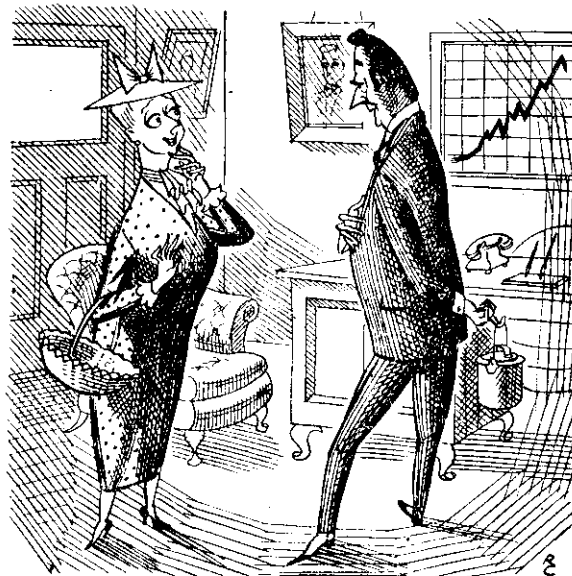
THE Office junior squealed with delight, why, look at the goldfish, aren't they just too cute for words (you can use slang when you're grown up, girls and boys, so don't worry), she said, but you can't put goldfish in a bowl covered with sawdust. So she wiped it around with the man's best tweed scarf, but the man was too shy to tell her so, and poured the fish in with a plop and a splash. The bowl really wasn't quite big enough for the two of them, but Jimmy and Oscar were very well-behaved goldfish, so they swam round and round, in the way goldfish have to do in round bowls, except, of course, up and down. When the man saw that they were quite happy he sat down to eat his sandwiches and to read his library book, that is, of course, after he had asked the Office junior, in a joking sort of way, to please not tell anyone about the fish, else they might want to eat them, fish is so scarce these days, you know.

But you couldn't keep a secret in a building like that, let alone the Office junior. So when the intermediate typist came in after lunch for a report the first thing she said was, why, look at the goldfish and went over to tap the bowl. (The Office junior said she couldn't possibly keep them in the cupboard, they would die of suffocation). The man blushed and laughed, so silly to keep goldfish in an office, but by the time the senior typist, the junior typist, the five lady clerks, the accountant, the private secretary, the office boy, the manager, and the caretaker's wife had all walked in, said, why, look at the goldfish and tapped the bowl, the man felt rather tired of blushing and laughing, so silly to keep goldfish in an office, so he didn't.

FROM then on the goldfish bowl sat on the window-sill and Oscar and Jimmy swam round contentedly looking down at the traffic in the street below or listening to the clatter of the typewriters in the Office. Everyone became very interested in them. Sometimes the men made rude remarks about the fish, but most times they asked kindly how they were getting on, and sent their best wishes. The man was so glad that he hadn't been nick-named Fishy or Trout, as they called the Boss Tweet-tweet behind his back, because his wife kept budgies; the caretaker's little girl, who often came to see them, called him the Goldfish man, but the man didn't really mind that. Somebody once cruelly told him that Jimmy wasn't a goldfish at all but just a plain, ordinary carp. However, the man, as usual,

didn't like to hurt Jimmy's feelings, so he still called him a goldfish, which shows what a really sympathetic nature the man had.

But! One day something happened. Can you guess? No? Well, Oscar died. On a cold winter's morning just before eight o'clock, the man was never late, the man found little gold Oscar stretched out on the rubber floor, lifeless. It was a terrible shock to him, somehow the man couldn't believe it, but there it was. Oscar was no more. The man picked him up tenderly, put him in a clean official envelope and dropped Oscar into the waste-paper basket. All the office girls were terribly



"He gradually became so sure of himself that one day..."

sorry. Poor old Oscar, he must have just flipped out accidentally. But somehow the man felt it was his fault, that he was the cause of Oscar's death, and he was. Oscar had flipped out of his bowl, not accidentally, but on purpose!

YOU see, it was this way. The man always liked to read at lunch-time, at morning tea he would two-up or Find the Lady with the other chaps just to show he really wasn't a snob. But he looked forward to lunch-time, when he could shut his door and have a real, good read. When the clock struck twelve the man would put down his pen, get out his grease-proof paper parcel of sandwiches that his landlady had cut for him, from his little brown attache case, sort out his book from under the pile of papers on his desk, then read and eat until the clock struck one.

You say, what about feeding the goldfish? Well, at first the man didn't know what to feed them on, so one of the chaps at the office lent him a magazine on the Care of Goldfish, which said to give them ant's eggs and worms, that had been dried and salted. But as it seemed such a very messy business treating worms like that, also think how it would hurt their feelings, and as the man didn't know where to get ant's eggs from, he apologised to the goldfish and asked them would they mind being fed on egg sandwich? Of course they didn't.