

So every day for the first few weeks the man crumbled a piece of egg sandwich into the bowl and Jimmy and Oscar came racing and sucked in the food with their elastic-sided mouths. But alas, and alas, as the days went by the man forgot. Soon the fish were fed thrice a week, twice a week, once a week, and then, never.

However, every afternoon at half-past four the man would remember that he hadn't fed the goldfish, but by then the Office junior had locked all the tea things away and as the man was so terribly shy he just didn't like to ask her to open it again for a biscuit. He did not want to trouble her.

He would worry about not having fed the fish all night, all morning, after half-past four every afternoon, but he always forgot at lunch-time. Jimmy and Oscar would gaze goggle-eyed out of their watery world but would turn away as they saw the man throw the grease-proof paper into the basket without raising his eyes from the book. This went on day after day, the man remembering and forgetting. Why didn't he ask the Office junior or the caretaker's little girl to feed them? Well, you see, of course he didn't like to, people will think I am incompetent, thought the man, if I can't even remember to feed my own goldfish. But this kept going

on for days and days and weeks and weeks until the man could hardly bear to look into the goldfish's eyes. The man became worried and worrieder and shyer and shyer till he even forgot to feel shy about wearing plus-fours when he was trying to play golf with the boys, or eating an ice-cream in the street, he was so busy worrying about the goldfish.

JIMMY and Oscar saw what was going on and it worried them too, at least it did Oscar. One day Oscar said to Jimmy, this is a man. We cannot make him sacrifice his life for ours, we are but fish, the time has come for us to go! To tell the truth Jimmy and Oscar weren't hungry at all, as they were being fed all the time by the Caretaker's wife when she came in to do the cleaning at night, but the man didn't know, of course. However, Oscar was really sorry to see the man so worried so he said to Jimmy, Let us jump out and end it all! Jimmy didn't take any notice, being a carp and not having the noble nature of a goldfish. He couldn't see why he should have to leave his nice, cold, watery world for the sake of a selfish man, so when Oscar said it again Jimmy flicked his tail and went off to sleep. If people want to have goldfish, they should be prepared to look after them, thought Jim.

This made Oscar feel quite sad, as it is far harder to die by yourself for a good cause than with someone else. But he felt it was his duty. So one dark night, when the typewriters were shrouded in their dust covers and the moonlight slid up and down on the desk, he flipped out of the bowl on to the hard floor.

POOR Oscar, he died a hero's death, but he did not sacrifice himself in vain. The man felt so mortified and distraught, for he thought that maybe Oscar had killed himself because he couldn't bear to starve any longer, that one great day he plucked up all the courage he possessed, blushed long and loud, and asked the Office junior would she please, if it wasn't too much trouble, just say if it was, buy a packet of ant's eggs at the grocer's shop for the goldfish. To the man's surprise the Office junior didn't mind at all, said that's what my uncle feeds his on, took the shilling and went off down the corridor in a rush. So now, Jimmy swims around the bowl, which is very big for one, and is fed on ant's eggs twice a day by the Office junior. The man suddenly realised that perhaps people didn't really mind doing things for him. He asked the senior typist for a rubber.

She gave it to him. He asked the junior typist for neater typing. She gave it to him. He asked the five lady clerks for better writing. They gave it to him. He asked the accountant for more correct balances. He gave it to him. He asked the private secretary for more privacy. She gave it to him. He asked the Office boy for a bulls-eye. He gave it to him. He asked the manager for a rise. He gave it to him. He asked the caretaker's wife to sweep under his desk. She did. So you see the man found that people are really awfully obliging if only you pluck up enough courage to ask, provided you do it politely. The man became a very big man, and quite wealthy, because he asked cheaper prices than other people, and for a bigger income from his board of directors. He gradually became so sure of himself that one day when Bertie's mother came to collect her billie, it had been in the cloakroom cupboard all this time years and years, the man said . . . Well, they did, and now Jimmy, the man and Bertie's mother live happily ever after on Bertie's mother's husband's insurance.

By the way children, if you find a moral in this story like one swallow doesn't make a Spring, etc., don't worry. It isn't important.

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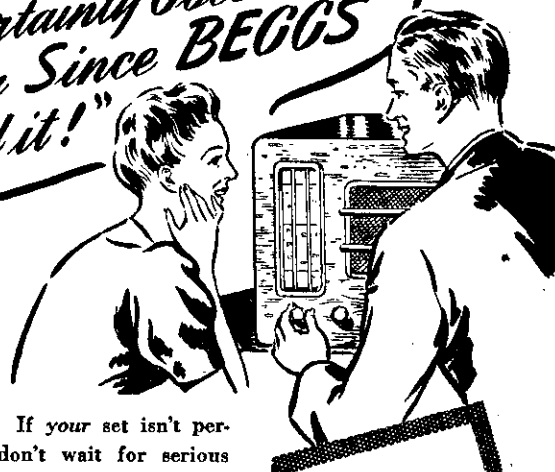


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