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Written for "The Listener"
by
J. GIFFORD MALE

THIS is a short short story like the ones I used to see in an American magazine which told you at the top how long it took to read: Like this: Reading time 4 min. 23 sec. I timed myself once and beat it by nearly a minute. These stories were pretty bald, and usually had a crack in the tail like a stockwhip or O. Henry.

One, I remember, was about a very shrewd lawyer who was defending a man who had shot another man in a restaurant, and finally it all boiled down to a question of identification of the man who was charged with the murder. The chief witness for the prosecution was a girl who had been sitting at a table in a restaurant, and who said she recognised the murderer because of a mole on the side of his face.

So the shrewd lawyer asked her how far away from the alleged murdered she had been sitting. Oh, about 30 yards, said the witness. Well, said the lawyer, I don't believe you could see a mole on



a man's face at that distance, and to prove it, I am going to make a pencil mark about the size of that mole on a white card and hold it up 30 yards from you, and I want you to be truthful and tell me whether you can see it. He then made the mark on the card, and to get 30 yards away from where the witness was sitting, he had to stand just outside the courtroom door, which an obliging policeman held open for him. He held up the card, and the witness had to admit she could not see the black mark, and the man was eventually acquitted.

Later in the day, the lawyer was talking over the trial with his assistant, and the assistant said, Thinking over that shooting case I don't feel happy about it. Something tells me that guy did it all right. We were defending him, but don't forget there are two sides to every case. Yes, said the clever lawyer, and there were two sides to the card, too.

MY story hasn't any murders or courtroom scenes; it is what you might call a domestic drama, concerning a young married couple I once knew. They were quite an ordinary young couple, living in a two-roomed flat with very little to come and go on. They had been married two years, but to look at them you would think they had just emerged from a honeymoon. They held hands when they were at the pictures, and it was impossible to talk to them when they were together, because every now and then they would sigh and look in each other's eyes and disappear from circulation.

I remember once they came to my house for dinner, and afterwards we gathered round the fire to discuss the war situation. There was only one chair left, and I offered to draw up another, but she said, No, don't bother, I'll sit on Jimmy's knee. And they disappeared from circulation again. I had a pleasant evening reading a book, and at ten o'clock they said, Well, we must be going. Thanks for a most pleasant evening. And I said, Not at all, I hope you'll come again soon.

IT happened that this young married couple were both animal lovers, very fond of dogs and cats and birds and things like that. It started when two of their wedding presents turned out to be a delicately-painted goldfish bowl and a

small Scotch terrier pup. Isobel (that was Jimmy's wife), promptly fell in love with the goldfish bowl, and decided wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to have half a dozen cute little goldfish swimming round in it. Unfortunately, the sort of goldfish she wanted were too expensive (you must remember they were a young couple, and Jimmy's salary didn't allow them to run to many extravagances), and so the goldfish had to wait. Isobel always had them in the back of her mind, as it were, and often she would say to Jimmy, There's nothing I would like more than some cute little goldfish for my goldfish bowl, darling. And he would then think to himself, even if I have to steal the money, I'm going to buy some goldfish for Isobel.

The Scotch terrier pup took a liking to Jimmy, and it wasn't long before Jimmy became most attached to him, though not, of course, as attached as he was to Isobel. Jimmy took a great pride in him, and fed him on the best food, and allowed him to chew up slippers without complaint. The only thing he wished was that he could afford to buy one of those fancy collars with brass studs and a nice little chain to take him walking with. Often he would say to Isobel, There's nothing I would like more darling, than a nice collar and chain to take Chubs (that was the Scotch terrier), walking with. And she would then think to herself, even if I have to steal the money, I'm going to buy a collar and chain for Jimmy. She meant, of course, for Chubs.

BUT two years passed and still Isobel had no goldfish nor had Jimmy a collar and chain for his Scotch terrier. When Christmas arrived, Jimmy became rather desperate. He thought, I simply must buy Isobel some goldfish for Christmas. The trouble was he had less money to spend this Christmas than ever before, for they were saving every penny for the sort of eventuality that young married couples often have to face up to.

He thought and thought, but he could find no way of raising the money until one day he was passing a shop which sold dogs and parrots and budgerigars and all that sort of thing. He was standing in front of the window gazing long-

(Continued on next page)



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