

DOGGONE!

A Short Short Story

By M. J. BLOCK

It was the cutest little wire-haired terrier puppy that he had ever seen. Martin held the leash gingerly. It seemed to have a personality and a character very distinct and definite. So much so, in fact, that he was half tempted to apologize to it meekly for his rough handling.

The girl looked cool and calm, as she always did, every time he had seen her. His breath almost caught in his throat as he approached her with the dog.

"Had quite a time catching him," Martin reported with a smile. The girl looked at him coolly. He felt terribly awkward and silly. But he noticed something just in back of her eyes. Knew that, curiously enough, she found him not absolutely repulsive.

"That's too bad!" she said, wonderingly. Her voice was as he imagined it would be. A little husky—sweetly soft.

"You better hold him tightly this time," Martin advised. "If he ever gets out in that traffic—"

"I hold him?" she asked, in astonishment. "Why should I hold him?"

"Isn't he your dog?" Martin was visibly startled.

"Why, no. Certainly not. He's a nice looking little dog, but he's not mine."

Martin looked horribly crestfallen. He looked, in fact, as if he were going to cry.

"How," she asked, "did you ever come to the conclusion that he was my dog?"

"Why!" Martin stammered, "isn't he yours? I thought—I would have sworn! What do you suppose ever became of the lady? What on earth will I do with the dog, now that I've caught him for her? Do you suppose she just went on?—Angry maybe, because the dog was causing her so much trouble! How could anyone be so heartless?"

The dog, now, looked up very mournfully and meekly at her. She was touched. Oddly enough, the man's and the dog's expressions were very nearly the same at the moment.

"Perhaps she'll advertise?" the young lady suggested. "Or, if she doesn't you might do so."

"But what shall I do with him in the meantime?"

"Can't you take him home with you?"

"Home—? I haven't such a thing. If I had, I'd have it full of dogs. I live in a hotel. No dogs, babies, snakes, or other disorderly manifestations of nature allowed."

"Well, perhaps if you'd take him to some animal store or hospital, they'd keep him for you until—"

"Goodness! He's such a little thing. And so helpless looking. I even believe he's neurasthenic. He's shaking. His nerves must be terribly upset. I can't imagine leaving him to the brusque professional care of a veterinary with a place full of large, barking dogs— all alone— poor little thing— I'm sure he couldn't stand the brash barking of big dogs. Why, it would be like locking you or me up in a lunatic asylum!"

The girl was touched beyond discretion.

"Suppose," she offered, "I agree to take care of him for you until the owner can be found? I have a quite roomy place—that is, my parents, of course—I live close by. The servants, too, would see that he was well taken care of. I could watch out for him, myself, too,—he seems to be an appealing little fellow.

And so it was arranged. Martin took her address—promised to watch the advertisements, and to advertise, himself, for the owner. He'd let her know, he promised, if the owner were found—send the owner to her.

They parted, after she had called a taxi and been safely installed in it with the dog.

It was nearly a month later that Martin called her, with the information that he had located the owner.

"Oh!" she said, over the phone.

"I'm sending the woman around," Martin informed her. "Many thanks for your kindness."

Martin waited on the corner near the house, until the girl he had sent in for the dog returned without it.

"How much?" he asked.

"Five hundred," she returned, with satisfaction; "Four hundred clear profit for us. A couple of jobs a month like that and we'll be doing fairly well. Funny how society girls get attached to dogs. Must be because they haven't got anything else to think about."