



Mr. Woodgate was enjoying slipper ease, a pound of purring cat on his middle.

# SLIPPER Ease

by Laura Goodman Salverson

**Monica had her own views about men. They may have been a bit involved, but they had the great advantage that they achieved results.**

MONICA STERLING left off nibbling a finger of buttered toast and studied her husband as he devoured his grapefruit with grim determination. Poor Bruce! He certainly had the earmarks of becoming what Professor Elderbalm said all business men, solely engrossed with coarse realities, were bound to become. He had no wings—no artistic urge. As a matter of fact, he had no taste at all!

His necktie, of a bilious shade of green, failed to match his shirt, which resembled a mouldy mushroom in color and should be sent to the Relief Association at the first possible moment. As for the trouble she had taken with the table, he hadn't even noticed the romantic sprig of mignonette by his tumbler! And she might just as well have worn a gunny sack as her lovely new shell-pink negligee, for all he noticed. Conversationally he stood no better. He prodded and pried at his grapefruit and grunted in monosyllables. Even when she tried to talk to him about that tiresome market—stocks and things—he growled unintelligibly, and when she politely inquired if he was ready for coffee—which he always wanted outrageously hot—he burst out crossly: "Yes—yes. But no sugar. I'm not one of your twitter-

ing tea hounds, you must remember." Which only went to show what vital danger he was in, poor thing. Naturally, she meant to exercise patience. When he had spiked the last sliver of fruit with actual ferocity, Monica cleared her throat daintily.

"Bruce, dear; I hope you won't mind. I shan't be home for lunch. Of course, if you'd rather not go to the club, Olga can get you the nicest stew. There's some mutton from last night, and veal from night before, and with a pudding, or something."

"Sorry. Olga had better find another graveyard for the family remains. I've a devilish busy day ahead of me. But what's up your sleeve, old girl—if it's not too much to ask?"

"I was hoping you would," Monica purred, determined to save poor Bruce by sweetness and light. "The Jepsonville Cultural Society is organizing a study group under Professor Elderbalm. You know, the radio Socio-Psychic advisor?"

"Never heard of the beast," Bruce retorted callously.

"But, Bruce, dear. After all, the Professor has devoted practically his entire strength to the study of Life. He must know something about it, surely." Monica's rebuke was ac-

companied by her usual angelic smile.

Bruce squirmed uncomfortably. "Well, what's it all about, anyway?" He grinned sheepishly, thinking for the millionth time how delightfully absurd Monica appeared with that air of deep concentration, so reminiscent of a Persian kitten staring into sunlit space. Her blue eyes were wide as a doll's and although she had evidently made an attempt to subdue her fluffy mop of marigold hair into conformity with her latest idea of intellectual dignity, she couldn't have fooled the dumbest male.

"Well, aren't you overdoing the meditation, old dear? Or does this harmony hokum require silent communion with the dead?"

"Bruce! You ought not to jest about such things. After all, we shall be dead one day, you know. Only last night Professor Elderbalm spoke of it, so ethereally: we ourselves to dust, perchance to roses turned... Isn't it touching?"

"Shouldn't wonder," growled Bruce, swishing his coffee with impolite energy. "Perhaps you'd better tell me just how touching this ethereal business is likely to be—in terms of common vulgar cash. Not that it makes any difference, of course!"

"Oh, I know, that, dear. That's one thing about Bruce, I always tell the girls. He may be typically masculine but he's not mercenary. And it's really so cheap. The course I mean. Fifty dollars for two weeks intensive study. Why you'd hardly believe how much the Professor covers in a single lecture. I've only attended three and already I've grasped the awful injustice of Conjectural Concepts. They're so deceiving. Like a mirage, or some-

thing. Really, Bruce, you can't believe everything you see, and be civilized."

TO avert disaster, Bruce made a frantic search through fathomless pockets for an illusive cigarette lighter. Monica distrusted laughter at any time, and when she was riding the good nag Virtue it was fatal.

"I'm so glad you're impressed, dear." Monica acknowledged his solemnity. "It shows a receptive state of mind. But, Bruce, do you know that actually eighty-seven percent of mankind—I'm not quite sure about savages, of course—eighty-seven percent of mankind in general, anyway, are completely submerged? Utterly, irrevocably submerged!"

"In plain language, the whole shabang is sunk?" Bruce hazarded, imitating a battleship belching a smoke screen. "And the dear Professor collects only fifty dollars for that profound observation?"

"It is remarkable, isn't it? But, of course, as he says himself, someone must dedicate his life to unselfish service. You see, the Professor caught the vision on a cattle boat. The noise and the way the poor things were goring one another and really getting nowhere reminded him of the Stock Exchange. Bulls and bears, or something. The terrible way men behave in the throes of unleashed instincts. It made us shudder just to hear him tell about it. The Professor has analysed all the causes and effects and devised the nicest exercises for mental alertness and classic poise."

"Well, that's fine." Bruce eased himself back from the treacherous tentacles of the gateleg table, with its baptismal fall of lace, and rose with less buoyancy than usual, although



Illustrated by C. R. WILCOX

smiling. "Any kind of poise may come in handy, old dear, if I don't nail that chain store order mighty fast."

"But I thought that was settled last week. Why, Bruce, I remember distinctly we were finishing a strawberry trifle when you said: with that Chain Store order in the sack, or bag—something queer anyway—I should have the seal jacket I wanted."

Bruce gave an inarticulate growl, bestowing an ineffectual peck on his wife's left ear, and would have bolted for the hall hadn't the lady caught him firmly by the coat tail.

"Bruce, you're negative! That's terrible. Why, ninety percent of the Submerged got that way being negative. The others were born queer. Professor Elderbalm says no matter how things look we must deny everything. Be positive—see the cloud behind the lining. After all, dear, you do manufacture the nicest saucepans, so there's really no sensible reason why you shouldn't get the order."

"Only Old Tut himself, the mule-headed gab-gab!"

"Why, Bruce, that's no way to talk about the poor man. Especially the owner of a whole collection of stores."

"For heaven's sake, Monica, I'm late now! Amuse yourself with that mental hop-scotch, but don't expect me to join. I've fleas of my own to chase."

MONICA drew back with the offended air of a cat arching its back. "I never heard of such a thing—except in a circus. And if you're being funny it's in very bad taste. After all, I am your wife. It's my duty to put my shoulder to the load if the wheel won't turn. Really I think it's most unfair not to tell me what sort of man that Chain person is. If he's human he must be a type, and once you understand his type you'll know how to sack his order. Don't you see?"

"All right. All right." Bruce had escaped to the hall and was poking about for his cane amongst a contingent of multi-colored sunshades and umbrellas tightly sheathed within the iron hoop of the hall tree. "I take it all back. I should have said our poor millionaire appears to be a man stricken with some mortal ailment, such as the hives or the hebe-jebes, and even the charms of a stuffed duck couldn't lighten his gloom."

"Poor man! That's the saddest type of all, Bruce. He has everything and nothing. The savor hasn't any salt—and most likely he suffers from complexes. That's the tragedy of being rich—unless one has cultivated the art—it's so terribly easy to develop illusions. Blackmail and being murdered under the bed, all those frightful things one reads in society papers. No wonder the poor thing trusts no one. Don't rush, dear, you've loads of time. Your bus left five minutes ago and, anyway, it's half an hour till the next one."

"Why didn't you say so? Why didn't you—Oh, well . . ." the exasperated man sank down on the hall seat and gloomily regarded the pink

and gold vision that ruled his days. She was like a cloud that teased the grey horizon. With a delicate flutter of winged sleeves she nestled against him. Soft and fragrant, and foolish as a child's dream, reflected poor Bruce as his arm slid about her, and as always, the tension of worry miraculously faded.

"Darling," cooed Monica, "you work too hard," and ran a cool finger along the groove that crossed his tanned forehead. "Now tell me, is that poor gentleman really staying at the Hotel Montrose?"

Bruce kissed her. "It's the bitter truth, Ma'am. I shudder to think what he must put up with."

"Now, Bruce, you don't sound sincere. After all, a hotel like that offers you nothing except what money can buy. Marble bathtubs aren't everything—besides they're dangerous. And those ever-lasting bell hops popping up like potato bugs must get tiresome. But, there! You better go now. I was only interested because I have a prospect myself at the Montrose."

"Monica, for heaven's sakes. What do you mean, prospect?" Bruce felt his skin creep uncomfortably; remembering that Monica had a fatal gift for ludicrous entanglements, out of which no one but herself escaped quite free.

Monica danced him to the door, smiling coyly. "Oh, I shan't tell you. Not quite, anyway. You see, Professor Elderbalm insists we put our psychology to work." She had assumed her air of gravity again. "It's a most important step in the class instruction. That's why I can't very well be home for lunch. I've got to find some one I'd ordinarily be scared to death of, and thoroughly subdue him. By realizing how nice and human he is inside, don't you see?"

Bruce did not, but the rumble of the bus approaching his corner precluded argument. Rather vainly hoping for the best, he bolted. Monica, singing, proceeded leisurely to the telephone and dialed the Hotel Montrose.

THE much envied, highly successful Joshua Arlington Woodgate, perched on a satin-covered curlicued bed, and over the pleasant hill of a considerable paunch, regarded his stocking feet ruefully. Heaven help him! They were certainly swelling. There wasn't the slightest doubt about it. That high-toned chiropodist's fandangled cushions and pads notwithstanding, his right foot had an actually belligerent aspect, and his left resembled a half-hearted rose!

Yet here it was only three o'clock in the afternoon. He had all of a dozen tentative appointments, and to justify his reputation for business rectitude, he ought, at least, to see that Sterling person, whose infant industry turned out excellent kitchenware. But so did Bobbs & Mitchell, and all he'd have to do in their case was wire for a duplicate of last year's order. No one in the scores of towns

\* Please turn to page 48 \*

which supported his chain stores would be particularly affected. Women could still cook in good grey enamel and aluminum pots, he supposed. That Sterling outfit was specializing in what they called Art Ware. Introducing charm into the kitchen — making housewives color conscious!

On the bed table, a foot or two behind him, under a hastily bestowed fedora hat, the telephone drummed out angrily. Mr. Woodgate jumped, knocking his foot on a leering cupid that adorned the bed leg, swore, yanked off the receiver, and roared like the king of beasts: "Yes! Yes—Mr. Woodgate speaking. What? Who . . . Mr. Sterling? Yes, yes, yes. I heard all that from your salesman. Unfortunately I'm not interested. No! My time's all taken up, Mr. Sterling . . . That's final."

The explosion over, Mr. Joshua Woodgate mopped his brow, feeling a shade foolish and faintly ashamed. But what was conscience at a time like this? Very cautiously he wriggled a toe and in consequence moaned like a tea-kettle.

"What a life," mused the great man, remembering with a pang the luncheon that was the ostensible reason for being at the Montrose at that particular moment.

FOR forty minutes he had stood on his poor, wracked feet. Judging from the applause which punctuated his inanities at the proper breathing intervals, he had more than distinguished himself. But, so far as he was concerned, from the president's pompous introduction, to his own fatuous, concluding flourish, it had all been one long metatarsal ache!

Now he wished to heaven he could escape. Anywhere. Any place where telephones and aggressive salesmen and bleating politicians couldn't disturb his misery. Limping to the balcony which gave out on the floral decked driveway of the Montrose Hotel, Joshua Woodgate gloomily observed that the weather was fine, and that the greyish ribbon of road winding eastward lost itself in a stand of beautiful trees.

It was years since just that combination of winding road, rich greens, and mellow summer sunshine had met his tired gaze. All at once he was heartsick. Homesick for what it represented: for a passionless day of blissfully monotonous animal content such as he had shared with Elaine those first few years in Carston, before he had made a fortune and a fool of himself.

He drew up a chair to the metal railing, and still following his intimate train of thoughts, watched with indifference a small green car buzzing out from the dim intriguing shadows of the leafy road. A very modest but modish little car, with at its wheel a fluffy individual, who even at this distance roused the elderly gentleman to a reviving sense of interest, and the idiotic feeling of somehow sharing in a summer festival.

Joshua Arlington Woodgate epitomized the stern Puritan virtues, but for all that he had never overlooked a pretty woman. The softer, more come-hither and futile they were, the better he liked them. A most happy compensation since his only daughter, Clarissa, was by some freak of heretical fate a spectacled female who successfully practiced medicine. The mere thought of her terrible efficiency chilled his bones. In contrast, he realized how little he had really appreciated her dead mother's pretty nonsense, her fads and flut-

terings, and consequently astonishing interludes of good sense.

THE little green car, drumming along gaily, was turning into the hotel driveway. Despite the twinges in his feet, Joshua was mildly pleased, for the fluffy individual was distinctly pretty. His kind of pretty. She wore a wispy sort of dress that swished out in a naughty swirl as she hopped down from the car. Her trim little legs were delightful, and her slippers the silly sort he had used to scold Elaine for wearing, and loathed his daughter for not wearing. But the way she came towards the imposing steps, not walking, but darting airily like a swallow, her small oval face smiling artlessly from under a fantastic scrap of hat and a ripple of marigold hair, was certainly best of all.

Joshua Woodgate, forswearing dignity, leaned over the railing to observe the vision better and, consequently, almost lost his balance when he heard her inquire, with flattering eagerness of the doorman whom she evidently knew: "Oh, Roberts, you're so marvelous at such things. Tell me, has Mr. Woodgate, the great Mr. Woodgate, come in yet?"

on the inlaid bed table, and the operator politely informed Mr. Woodgate that a lady wanted to see him in the third floor parlor, the victim was ready for the sacrifice.

In the huge overfurnished parlor, with its multiplicity of period pieces, antique clocks, frustrated statues, and portraits of celebrities, obsolete as Dodos, Monica Sterling billowed over the red plush carpet to meet him.

"Mr. Woodgate, you must forgive me," she said, holding out her little hand with the air of a kitten arching its soft back against a chosen leg. "I know it's presumptuous, but then, what's the use of intuition if one doesn't use it? I had a feeling you'd be just like this! Distinguished, but homey just the same."

"My dear lady, you flatter me." Joshua, not without suspicion, was nonetheless sincere. "May I ask to what I owe this good opinion, and this pleasant visit?"

Monica had a very pretty laugh. It rang through the museum stillness of the parlor with the spontaneous merriment of a child. "Oh, you must think me idiotic! I'm Monica Sterling, Mr. Woodgate. Not that that

it was silly to worry when everyone knew he manufactured the nicest things. But poor Bruce is so antique in his thinking! He'd be furious if he knew I was here, Mr. Woodgate. He has the funniest idea successful people don't want to be bothered with little friendly things—like this visit, for example."

The great Joshua's formidable brows arched slightly and something bordering a twinkle lightened his eyes. "So this is just a friendly visit, Mrs. Sterling? It has nothing to do with business—Mr. Sterling's business in particular?"

"Oh, dear no." Monica swung a dainty foot and teased an arabesque handkerchief. "I don't know a thing about business, Mr. Woodgate. Besides, Bruce is doing very well, as it is."

"Indeed." Mr. Woodgate had some difficulty with his throat, a slight spasm which made speech impossible for the moment.

"Indeed—" Mr. Woodgate choked a bit, fought off the spasm heroically. "I'm very glad, Mrs. Sterling. Your husband must be an enterprising young man."

"Dear, yes! That's the trouble. Poor Bruce is almost completely submerged in saucepans. But I haven't told you why I came, have I, Mr. Woodgate?"

"No," smiled the gentleman, "but I'm very glad you did."

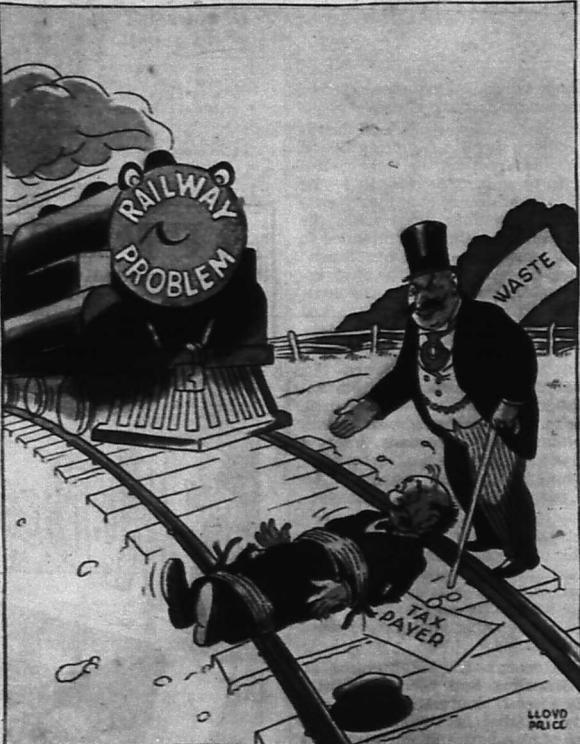
**M**ONICA nodded sagely. "I thought you would. You see, Mr. Woodgate, I'm studying life. It's so important to understand it, isn't it? And, of course, as the professor says, what's the good of theories unless you put them into practice? That's why I'm here—to try out my human theory."

"I don't wonder you're surprised," she bubbled on, "but really, it's too cruel how many people can't understand a man like you is human like the rest of us. Why, only this morning Bruce was so worked up because the owner of a string of chain stores wasn't being very agreeable. He said the poor old thing was a perfect pill and hard as an iron horse! Which goes to show he doesn't understand how suspicious rich people get—always being treated as though they were the Sphinx or Niagara Falls, or something. Of course, it was no use arguing. But I thought to myself I'd find someone quite as important as that chain store pill and show Bruce how wrong he is about life. So I called up the manager and asked who was the most distinguished and difficult guest at the Montrose. Then I rushed through the marketing and came straight on here. And now, dear Mr. Woodgate, don't tell me you wouldn't enjoy home fried chicken, angel cake, and strawberries!"

Mr. Woodgate had, probably, never been quite so astonished in his life. Yet to doubt Monica's sincerity, despite the ridiculous justification she offered for her visit, was, obviously, a total waste of moral energy. And to rebuff such an outburst of angelic nonsense would be as monstrous as slapping a child for masquerading in grown plumage. Seldom, of late, had the great man smiled as he now smiled.

"My dear Mrs. Sterling, are you inviting me to such a feast? Or am I dreaming?"

"But of course!" Monica tinkled gaily. "I've come to take you into the country for a nice old-fashioned evening. We've only a tiny house, but there's a garden with sweet peas and phlox and verbena, and an oak that looks like a Druid—or whatever



The Villain: "Ha, ha—You are in my power!!!"

"In a manner of speaking, Ma'am," said the obsequious Roberts. "That is to say, Ma'am, the gentleman has not been out. There was a luncheon for Mr. Woodgate in the Palm Room."

"Well, well! The great Joshua experienced the rising tide of a most agreeable sensation which, alas, quickly soured as he thought of his feet. Now he'd have to squeeze into those d—d corrective boots again, although instinct told him all that pretty female wanted, of course, was a donation towards some fool thing—

Nevertheless, by the time the nerve-wracking telephone jolted crankily

means anything. Although, of course, you may have heard of Bruce, my husband. He manufactures saucepans and things. But that has nothing to do with my visit."

"Indeed." Joshua Woodgate had lost his smile and recovered scepticism. "If not to your husband's excellent saucepans, to what is it owing?"

Monica, beaming satisfaction, settled like a frivulous moth on the arms of a monstrous ebony chair, whose gold claws dug into the red pile destructively. "There! I knew it. Only this morning I told Bruce

it was that had a beard in the old poem. And there's a brook cuts through the back lot. Bruce calls it his waters of Lethe—because to listen to it makes him forget about worry, and what kind of colors to put on the new pants. And there's Olga—but you'll have to eat her angel food to know what I mean."

Joshua Woodgate thought of his tentative engagements with a Puritan twinge of conscience, which quickly subsided, however, as a particularly nasty pain shot through his tormented feet. What was the good of money and prestige, anyway, if he couldn't enjoy an innocent lark once in a lifetime? To the devil with interviews and sacrosanct investments! He'd have a look at that little house with its bearded tree, singing brook, and high-priestess of angel food.

Said he, unconsciously lapsing into the homely speech of his youth: "Mrs. Sterling, to be honest, I was hankering to run away when you came. I hadn't got so far as strawberries but those trees down yonder, hedging the open road, made me homesick. For how long am I to consider myself lost? There may be one or two calls for the—the solid old Sphinx, you know. But I shall be delighted to come—shall we say for a couple of hours?"

"Oh dear no! Tell them you'll be gone the rest of the day. Really, I can see you need a rest from these marble halls and things." Monica hopped down from the chair and smiled adorably. "Some people enjoy big hotels, but to me they're frightfully like depots. Cold and mechanical and full of strangers. I'm sure you've felt it. You've not the face of a Babbit, nor a submerged materialist either . . . but I'll tell you about that on the drive."

"But these clothes?" queried the gentleman, not entirely wooed from his acquired proprieties.

"Oh, that's the best of it," Monica responded emphatically. "You won't have to dress. That would spoil everything. You see, Mr. Woodgate, when you're studying life—why, we are what we are or become something disagreeable—it's frightfully important to begin with basic principles. It's practically the starting point. So, of course, if we want to have a simple evening, like our savage ancestor, we can't very well dress. Besides, you're so distinguished in flannels. Mr. Woodgate. Well, I'll run along and wait in the car while you make your arrangements."

ONCE in the car, Joshua noted with a thrill of contentment that his little hostess manifested exactly the same astonishing mixture of idiocy and common sense as had been true of his lost Elaine. She drove quite expertly. Not grimly and ferociously, like his daughter, who, he suspected, must deeply regret a doctor's car was not equipped with an arrogant siren.

The dainty lady beside him slipped through the traffic with efficient grace, and out on the open road zoomed along freely without hysterical speed. She had, too, a charming appreciation of natural scenery.

Mr. Woodgate sank back in ecstatic comfort. Or what would have been perfect comfort save for his feet. The countryside was a marvel of variegated greens, the road ahead a fascinating mystery, and the little lady bubbling beside him a reincarnation of the delicious creatures of his youthful fancy. She had called him a sweet old thing and he felt a sweet old thing, although mentally he was at least a decade younger than before her miraculous arrival.

"You haven't quite explained why you took the trouble to try out your charming theories on an old man. There are distinguished mortals who are younger, you know," Joshua managed to interject. "There is always a reason, my dear lady, even if it isn't saucerpans," he added, suppressing a chuckle at the thought of his unflattering remarks over the telephone to the poor young man unscrupulous Fate had picked for his future host.

"But I tried to." Monica's blue eyes turned on him in astonishment. "I explained about Bruce. How sunk he is in hardware, and wrong about people. Why, Mr. Woodgate, he doesn't even see me as I am. He thinks I'm frivolous. And he can't understand why I'm interested in movements. But where would we get if no one thought about anything but business?"

"True. True. Where indeed?" Mr. Woodgate lit a cigar, and somehow its familiar fragrance was vastly enhanced. "I suspect we'd get nowhere except into international tangles."

"Well, there you are," Monica exulted, slowing down for a bevy of cyclists. "Of course, I appreciate dear Bruce is so ambitious for my sake. But Professor Elderbalm says it's positively shocking how many homes are ruined by ambition. So it was really for the best when I took up gardening last year, for, naturally, I had to have a house in the country. And, in a way, it was like Providence darling Papa died that spring. The insurance exactly paid for the house and my car and Bruce's shower. But dear me, it was so difficult. What with Papa going like that—we were having tea in our suite and he turned blue and just dropped. Of course, he was very old, Mr. Woodgate. Seventy-two, poor darling! But Bruce was so sarcastic—about the house, I mean. As though I intended raising chickens! He just couldn't see that I was saving him from himself."

"But I mustn't talk all the time. I'm afraid Bruce is right about my talking too much. Besides, you haven't told me a thing about yourself."

"Unfortunately there isn't much to tell, my dear," Joshua replied indulgently. "I'm just a plain old fellow, homeless except for clubs and hotels and a shack in the mountains. My wife died ten years ago. My only daughter practices medicine."

"That's not so nice, is it? I mean, a doctor must be frightfully busy. I don't suppose she could manage your house—those little things even expensive servants never think of—your rubbers, and little surprises for tea."

JOSHUA WOODGATE, by now convinced to that Monica, as to his Elaine, the most pointed humor was merely sober gospel, replied with a twinkle, "Oh, Clarissa sends me a diet list, now and then, and includes a tonic."

"That is thoughtful! Still, it would be nicer to have her home, wouldn't it? But here we are! There's the little house, Mr. Woodgate. I do hope you will like it."

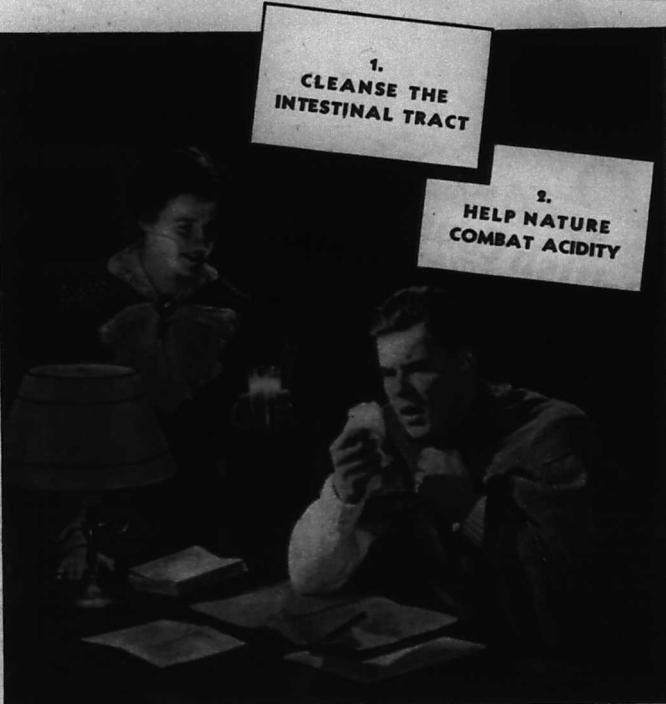
Joshua Woodgate had no difficulty in that quarter. The little house was quite perfect in its setting of quaint garden and trees. A modest house, faintly Elizabethan, its soft indefiniteness the secret of its peculiar charm, for it merged with the landscape as naturally as though it had roots like the trees that topped the slate shingles.

"It's home. That's the right word for it," said Joshua Arlington Woodgate sincerely.

Monica glowed with pleasure. "How

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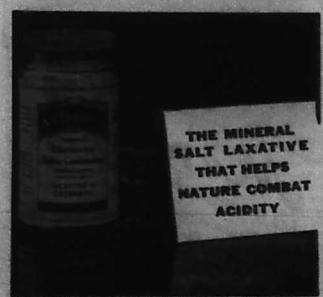
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sweet! Well, you must live up to it, Mr. Woodgate. You must behave as though it were home. But, mind, I shall boss you terribly. I'm going to send you upstairs to Bruce's room for a nice refreshing shower, and his slippers. Then you'll come down to the porch and smoke your pipe and listen to the brook."

To say that Mr. Woodgate combed like a lamb beggars the cheerful truth. The mention of slippers exercised an exquisite and irresistible spell. Also, quite as he expected, Bruce was a man to be envied. The profusion of his towels, man-sized soaps, dressing robes and jackets—not to mention five pairs of slippers!—seven pipe racks, and three humidor, was sufficient proof the fluffy angel of his heart took her wifehood seriously. Indeed, as he quickly perceived on his descent after a delightful half hour in the toy-bathroom, everything about the little house was amusingly perfect.

The sun porch, to which Monica, decked in a wisp of apron that clung to her pretty dress like a white rose petal, escorted her slippered visitor proudly, was the sort of porch Elaine might have chosen. The window drapes harmonized with the wicker furniture, flowers bloomed in a dozen stands, a canary sang to the setting sun, and a cat, indolently graceful, dozed in the most comfortable chair.

"Why, Michael! You naughty boy, that's Daddy's chair." Monica whisked up the interior to make room for the dignified Joshua, deftly adjusted a pillow, and replacing the cat on her visitor's knees, darted away with a word about seeing to the table; leaving the gentleman to his pleasant musings and sheer animal comfort.

HOW much later it was when a step in the hall and Monica's shriek of delight proclaimed the arrival of her husband, he could not have said. A matter of moments or an hour, it had been the pleasantest interlude he remembered in years. Joshua grinned into the gathering dusk. Judging by the subdued whispers that drifted in from the treacherous hall, his pretty benefactress was having a difficult time making Bruce see behind the ghastly realities!

The young man's gruff: "Good Heavens!" lost in a smothered growl gave the chuckling visitor a remarkably correct impression of Mr. Sterling's scrupulous character. The ominous silence out there reminded him of his own consternation when Elaine had dragged home a notoriously crabby bank president to dine hilariously on sweet potatoes and baked beans. Joshua Woodgate tweaked Michael's soft ear and smiled to himself. Oh, he could imagine well enough how that young fellow was feeling! But just how far had the little lady got in her disastrous revelation he wondered? He was not long left in doubt.

Bruce Sterling entered his cheerful sunroom with the dazed air of a sleep walker abruptly saved from a precipice. It was clear he hadn't the slightest idea what fatalistic fate had in store, but had made up his mind to brave the worst. It was equally clear that this sober, rather stocky young man had scant training in the social hypocrisies. For at the sight of his visitor he stopped short: "Good lord! Mr. Woodgate, I—good heavens! I hope you don't think . . . that is, I hardly know what to say, sir—" the astonished host blurted helplessly. Then, conscious at last that the amiable gentleman, enjoying slipper ease, a pound of purring cat on his stomach, had nothing in common

with the lion of industry who had roared in his ear earlier in the day, Bruce Sterling made a flying step forward, brown paw extended heartily: "Mr. Woodgate, I'm still at sea. But you're no end welcome!" A slow grin spread like a lazy sunrise over his deeply tanned face. "To which I can only add that I trust you're not irrevocably submerged!"

Joshua Woodgate gripped the strong, warm hand firmly. "On the contrary, young man, I'm in the process of emerging!" the great man chuckled. "Sit down, my boy. Sit down—it's impossible for me to disturb the cat. Besides I'm too dashed comfortable."

They were laughing like bosom cronies when Monica breezed in with something cool tinkling in small, green glasses. "There, I knew you'd like each other." She beamed on them impartially. "It's really just a matter of getting down to raw humanity, isn't it? We're all alike when we're stripped—of things, I mean."

Michael, disturbed by the sudden volcanic rocking of the pleasant hill on which he reclined, leaped to the floor and streaked away rudely.

"Now isn't that wonderful," cried his mistress proudly, happily oblivious of the mirth she had occasioned. "Cats are so psychic. Michael knows it's time for dinner. Now, Bruce, don't you see how wrong you

were this morning? Mr. Woodgate is frightfully important, but he's just as nice as anybody. So why shouldn't that chain store man be human, too. I'm quite sure he isn't half as bad as you imagine. Really, you should give him another chance."

HAPPILY for poor Bruce, the din-say violence by the busy cook, saved the situation. Monica glowed on her visitor: "I do hope you're ravenous, Mr. Woodgate . . . Olga gets so huffed if we don't eat like Tartars."

"I've not been so hungry for years," Joshua Arlington Woodgate responded, rising briskly.

"Isn't he a sweet old thing?" Monica laughed, delightedly. "I think I shall have to adopt him in dear Papa's stead."

"Hear! Hear!" The great man boomed heartily, following the pretty vision with pleasant eagerness. "That's the nicest thing you have said, my dear. But not the wisest." Then, as Monica skinned ahead through the softly lighted hall towards the attractive dining room, the formidable Joshua gave his abashed host a sharp jab in the ribs. "No, on the whole, the wisest observation concerns that chain store bird. Really, Bruce, your wife is quite right about that. You ought to give the old pill another chance!"

## • THE FACE READER •

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glyphics. At the table itself sprawled an obese man.

The stout man had an infantile pink face. He wore an old-fashioned black broadcloth frock-suit, with a black string tie and a Gladstone collar. Between his huge fingers he twiddled a black wide-awake slouch hat. His gaze was wandering in boyish delight over an assortment of jewelry which strewed the table. In the centre of the assortment pulsed milkily a graduated string of pearls with a diamond-and-emerald clasp. It was to this necklace the fat man's delighted gaze was ever returning.

Gil Mallon knew the necklace well. So did all the jewel trade. It was valued at \$360,000. And it had been sent to one firm after another, during the past two years, to sell on commission. It was one of the assets of an ancient estate. Because of its old-time arrangement and its out-of-date clasp, and because the executors would not let it be sold except intact, there had been difficulty in disposing of it.

"Mallon," said Rhys, as his subordinate stood awaiting his orders. "Colonel Heskins has just bought the historic Berthelet necklace—and at a price which I consider more than a bargain—a sacrifice."

THERE was a tinge of impatience in Rhys's tone. For his clerk was not looking at him. As a connoisseur might sample some rare wine, he was scanning Colonel Herkirk's placid face. Rhys knew that look. So, with a sinking of spirits, did Lois. It was thus that Mallon had applied his craze for face reading to the visages of Mrs. Vanorken and the clergyman and to a half-score other customers.

As his employer paused, clearing his throat vexedly, Mallon snapped back to attention. He had paid scant heed to Rhys's preamble; recognizing it as along the line of oft-heard

speeches designed to impress a customer.

"Yep," spoke up Colonel Heskins in a strangely high voice for so large a man, "that's right, young feller. We bargained and bantered right sharp, till I could get him down to what I wanted to pay for this gewgaw. We're still haggling over this other truck. That'll have to wait till another day, though. I got an appointment with a passel of oil men, in less'n an hour. But the necklace is mine."

"Colonel Heskins wishes to take this around to the St. Hospice Hotel, Mallon," continued Rhys, "and to show it there to Mrs. Heskins; who, I'm sorry to learn, is confined to her room with a sick headache. If she likes it, he will send me, by you, a certified cheque for—"

"Whether she likes it or whether she don't!" corrected the colonel. "I'm telling you this necklace is mine. I've taken a shine to it like I didn't ever take to any other jewelry I every saw. I'm asking the Old Lady's advice. Like I always do. But I'm not taking it, if it don't jibe with mine. Like I always don't. I'm carting the neck piece around there for her to look at. I know she'll like it, as much as a kid likes his first pistol. But she's due to like it a heap more if she thinks I'm taking it on her say-so."

"I'm sending one of the detectives around to the St. Hospice, with Colonel Heskins, at his own request," went on Rhys, again addressing Gil. "The colonel is just in from the southern oil fields, he says, and he has read a good deal about holdup men. So he wants a guard for such a valuable article. Mallon, I want you to go around there with them, to show the necklace to Mrs. Heskin. You will know how to display it and how to point out its perfections, far better than a detective. I was going to send McNab, but he has gone home ill. And Fell is still on vaca-