

# FOOLISH OLD WOMAN

By BARBARA DENT

SHE woke up feeling rather queer—a little light-headed. As usual, Samuel had stirred when she had, uncurled, arched his back luxuriously, then bounded lightly on to the floor and strutted with dignity over to the windowsill, on to which he leapt to survey the day with great, golden, sleepy-seeming eyes—somnolent yet alert, as only a cat's eyes can be.

She turned, as usual, on her side, to watch him.

Well, Samuel, she said, what's your judgment? Is it to be a fine day or a horrible one?

At her voice the cat arched again, stretched his legs delicately, miaowed faintly, leapt from his perch on to the floor and came over to her bed. Up on his hind legs, he placed two paws on the quilt and began to purr. Rather tremulously, she reached out a hand to fondle his head as he nuzzled it ingratiatingly into her palm, first his ears and

hard cheek, and then his wet nose and lips and his brisk, alert whiskers.

You know, don't you, boy? she whispered. You know. You know.

She didn't want to get up, but she knew that the mornings when she didn't want to get up were the dangerous ones. It was then that the large, silent house seemed to be closing round her with a menacing grip, till in her terror her mind would become quite vague and lost, and, indecisively, she would wander from room to room, lifting an ornament, replacing it, shifting a cushion, opening a window only to shut it again, playing a bar or two of an old waltz on the piano and then trailing off into a half-muted discord. Yes—the mornings when she didn't want to get up were the dangerous ones. She knew there was only one remedy—to leap briskly out of bed, telling herself with firmness that there was so much to be done that she must commence immediately, hurrying through her breakfast and turning with a feverish

abandonment to sorting the linen cupboard, or dusting all the books in father's study. There were various tasks that she kept for these dangerous days—each was in itself meaningless and futile, but laborious, painstaking, and time-consuming.

ON this particular morning, she sat up in bed, saying firmly to Samuel, to-day, Samuel, we will clean all the silver and go through the china cabinet.

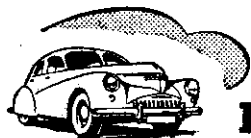
As if anxious to begin, the cat leapt gracefully to the floor and trotted out the door with an air of concentrated self-absorption excelling that of any human.

I won't even do my hair, Samuel, she announced (for he had re-appeared, to

sit fastidiously in the middle of her dressing table) until I've had my tea. And what about you, lad? Some toast? A nice, crusty piece with plenty of butter? Eh, boy? Eh?

Samuel arched, purred, assented, leapt, and trotted off down the passage to the kitchen.

(continued on next page)



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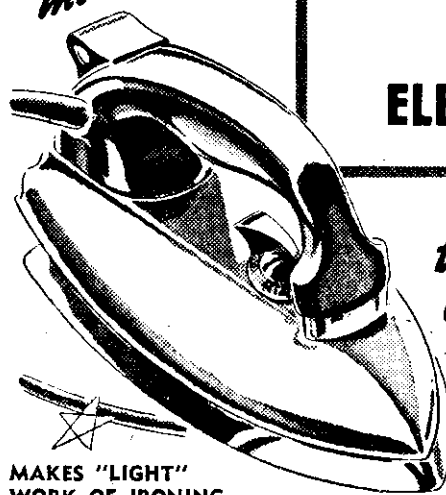
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