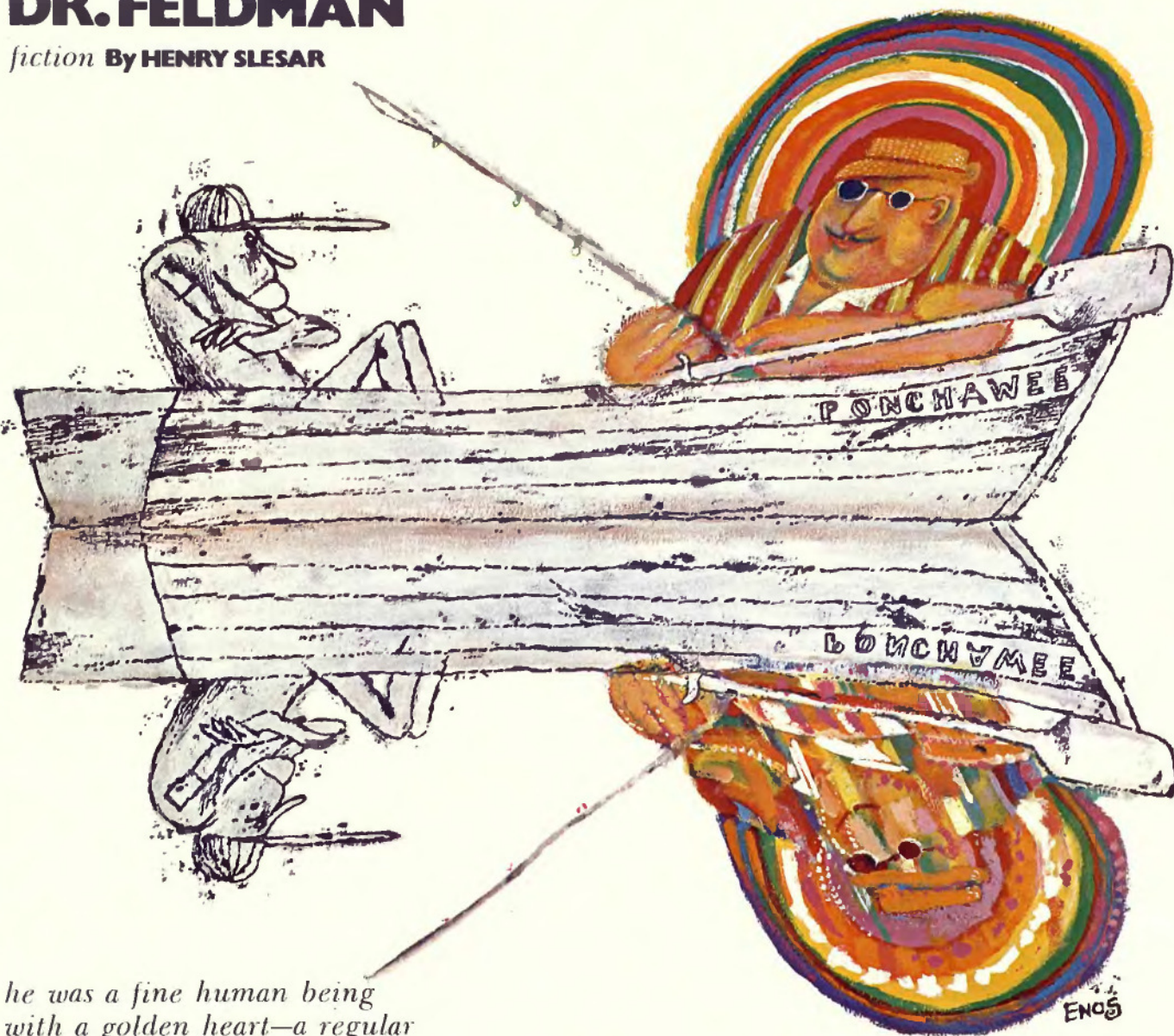


DR. HORACE FELDMAN arrived at Ponchawee Manor with every expectation of being liked. The boy who handled his luggage liked him and admired the Feldman Mercedes. The lady in Registration beamed the moment the Feldman paunch touched the front desk. The resort manager, Mr. Glassmacher, shook the Feldman hand, but gently, gently, in consideration of those surgeon fingers. A gratifying entrance, but no surprise to Dr. Feldman, a man accustomed to admiration, liking and respect.

There were two married couples and a widow lady at his assigned table in the dining room. Her name was Mrs. Shear, and 60 isn't so old when an unmarried 50-ish doctor with a healthy round face and a cute mustache breaks bread beside you. "So you're a surgeon, Dr. Feldman?" she said coyly and nudged Stanley, the bus boy, in the ribs. "Stanley, tell the cook he don't have to carve the roast beef tonight, we got an expert." Dr. Feldman chuckled and

## I DO NOT LIKE THEE, DR. FELDMAN

*fiction* By HENRY SLESAR



*he was a fine human being  
with a golden heart—a regular  
albert schweitzer—so  
who would want to kill him?*

ingested his soup. Before the coffee, he admitted to being a specialist, performing the only operation of its kind on the iliolumbar artery, on cases that would otherwise prove fatal.

"Fortunately," he said, "not many people need the operation; but when they do, they come to me."

Mrs. Shear clapped her hands and crowed: "A monopoly!" But money, the monopolist said, didn't matter; half his patients were charity cases. At this assurance, everyone liked Dr. Feldman even more. Not only was he a life-giving surgeon with golden fingers, he was a human being with a golden heart. And a fine gin-rummy player. Later that evening, he won \$14 from Mrs. Shear, her friend Mrs. Elkins and two men, both named Harry. Everybody liked him. It looked like a good week at Ponchawee Manor.

The next day, another new arrival was placed at the table (it quickly became known (continued on page 216)



DR. FELDMAN *(continued from page 127)*

as the Feldman table) and the doctor was surprised to get a grunt instead of a how-do-you-do when he introduced himself. The man's name was Moritzer. He was in his late 40s, sallow, thin and unhappy-looking. A bad choice for the Feldman table, the others agreed, sitting on the porch after lunch.

Dr. Feldman submitted a defense. "Don't judge so quick," he said. "Moritzer may not be feeling so well. Moritzer may have business troubles. Give Moritzer a chance."

He gave Moritzer a chance at the rec hall. "Well, what's your pleasure?" he asked. "Gin rummy I'm tired of. Like to shoot some pinochle? You play ping-pong? How about pool?"

"No, thanks," Moritzer said coldly. "I came here to rest, not play games."

"You live in the city?" Dr. Feldman said.

"Yeah, so what?"

"Nothing, nothing," the doctor said. "I don't think I heard your first name. Mine is Horace. I always hated that name. They used to call me Horse. That wasn't so bad when I was a little runt, but then I put on a few pounds," he chuckled and patted his solid midsection. "What's yours?"

"My name is Moritzer," the man said.

Later that evening, Dr. Feldman was playing checkers, and winning. Then he looked up and saw Moritzer in a rocker, regarding him with eyes that could curdle sour cream. The Feldman hand shook and he lost the game.

He was going into his room (the Feldman suite) when he saw Moritzer coming down the hall, slapping his thigh with a rolled-up evening newspaper.

"Good night, Mr. Moritzer," he said.

Moritzer didn't answer. Didn't even answer.

Dr. Feldman had a little trouble getting to sleep that night and he blamed the newcomer. Moritzer meant nothing to him, of course; just a sourpuss; but Dr. Feldman was troubled. Could it be that Moritzer actually didn't like him?

That possibility, remote as it seemed, persisted at dinner the next day. Moritzer was not merely surly; he was selectively surly. He actually spoke a few words to the married couples. He actually answered Mrs. Shear's questions about his marital status (he was married, but his wife didn't like the country). But to Dr. Feldman: not a word.

A lesser man might have been comforted by indignation or contented with indifference. Not Dr. Feldman. To the Feldman psyche, Moritzer's attitude was a challenge.

After dinner, the doctor said: "Come for a walk, Moritzer."

"I hate walks," Moritzer said.

"Good for digestion. Doctor's orders."

To his surprise, Moritzer grunted and

agreed. They walked down the main road and into the narrow wooded road that circled Ponchawee like a lasso. By mutual assent, they were silent. Here and there, the path narrowed and grew rocky. Now and then, one or the other would lose his footing.

"Careful, careful," Dr. Feldman said when Moritzer stumbled against him.

"Careful yourself," Moritzer said unpleasantly. A few steps later, he tripped and almost knocked the doctor over. The Feldman temper was held, but then it happened a third and a fourth time.

"Hey, careless," he said, with a forced smile. "Watch where you're showing."

When they got back to the Manor, the doctor was taking pine needles out of his sleeve, looking ruffled. Mrs. Shear asked him how the walk was. Fine, he said.

The next day, only moderately daunted, he invited Moritzer to mixed doubles on the badminton court. The team of Moritzer-Elkins vs. Feldman-Shear. A top attraction. Actually, Moritzer turned out to be a gloomy but quick-moving opponent, and Mrs. Elkins wasn't bad, either. Feldman-Shear lost badly. Then the ladies suggested a variation: the boys against the girls. That would have been all right, but twice, twice Moritzer struck the doctor on the back of the head with his racket. Once was an accident, Dr. Feldman told himself. But twice?

That afternoon, Dr. Feldman went for his first dip in the Ponchawee pool, setting an example for the timid. An hour later, one of the married couples, Mrs. Elkins, Mrs. Shear and even Moritzer turned up in swimsuits. It developed that Moritzer was a nifty swimmer. Unlike the doctor, who required water wings, he wore swim fins and a face mask and spent a lot of time under the water. The result was a lot of giggling from the women and some naughty remarks. Then a funny thing happened. The surgeon was doing the Feldman crawl, a dignified movement, slow but effective, when he felt a hand close about his ankle. It *had* to be a hand, he reasoned; there wasn't any aquatic life in the Ponchawee swimming pool. And the hand seemed intent upon pulling Dr. Feldman beneath the surface. At first, he reacted good-naturedly, calling out merrily, "Hey, cut it out down there!"; but when his nose filled up with chlorinated water, he wasn't so amused. "Blub, glub!" Dr. Feldman cried and kicked out with his other foot to strike a shoulder bone or something equally hard—a face mask, maybe? The hand let go and the doctor, panting, paddled to the pool's edge.

That night, the Feldman sleep was disturbed by a dream of drowning. It was no wonder, then, that he hesitated at Moritzer's very first overture of friendship at breakfast.

"Come for a row," he said.

"A row," Dr. Feldman said, thoughts of water.

"On the lake."

"The lake," Dr. Feldman said and then decided he was being silly. "Fine idea! Look, let's invite the women."

"Poocy," Moritzer said. "I'm a married man. Enough is enough. You want to go for a row. OK. If not, OK."

"OK," Dr. Feldman said.

They went down to the boathouse and took out the soundest-looking rowboat. It was a beautiful day. The lake was glassy, except for a ripple here and there that indicated the presence of a fish warming itself near the surface. When Dr. Feldman learned that tackle was also available, he was suddenly enthused. Moritzer didn't fish, but he liked to row. The labors were divided. Feldman: fishing. Moritzer: rowing.

The boat skimmed the water smoothly under Moritzer's easy oar stroke. The doctor was willing to fish in the middle of the lake, but Moritzer wanted to round the bend and head for a more distant shore. After a while, they couldn't see the pink roof of Ponchawee Manor anymore.

For half an hour, Moritzer napped in the rowboat and Dr. Feldman fished. But nothing nibbled on the Feldman line and Moritzer started getting restless. He sat up on the other side of the craft and regarded the doctor with folded arms and baleful eyes. Then he began a slow rocking from side to side.

"Shush," Dr. Feldman said. "You'll scare the fish."

"What fish?" Moritzer said.

Soon the rocking became more violent.

"Moritzer," the doctor said, "what are you doing?" Moritzer didn't answer. He just stared and rocked. "Moritzer, are you crazy? You keep this up, you'll turn the boat over."

"So?"

"So what do you want us to do, drown?"

"What's the matter, Feldman?" Moritzer said nastily. "You didn't bring your water wings?"

"A joke is a joke," the doctor said frostily. "Let's go back already."

Unbelievably, Moritzer stood up. He planted his feet on both sides of the vessel and rocked so hard that the boat began shipping water.

Dr. Feldman looked incredulously at the water stains on his white-duck trousers and cried out: "Moritzer, I believe you're a crazy man!"

"Yeah, so learn how to swim, Feldman," Moritzer said, and the doctor began to realize that maybe Moritzer, sullen Moritzer, didn't just *dislike* him, maybe Moritzer really *hated* him, maybe Moritzer wanted him *dead*.

"Moritzer!" the doctor screamed, as he felt himself losing his balance. He grabbed the side of the boat for support and found himself clutching one of the



oars. He slipped it out of the lock and tried to use it as a balancing pole. This made Moritzer laugh. He sounded like one of those fiends in the old movies, and Dr. Feldman was terrified. He didn't have to *think* about hitting Moritzer with the oar, he just did it. He caught Moritzer broadside on his left ear, and Moritzer went sleepy-looking and toppled over the side and into the water with a mighty splash. The boat was capsized a moment later and, for a grim five seconds, Dr. Feldman thought he was underneath it. But, no—there was daylight and, gasping, sputtering, making all kinds of heaving noises, he managed to cling to the bottom. He didn't worry about looking for Moritzer; he was too busy holding on and yelling. It wouldn't have mattered, anyway, because Moritzer was already drowned and dead.

The rest of Dr. Feldman's visit to Ponchawee Manor was less enjoyable. There were policemen and a local reporter and plenty of clucking tongues in the dining room, and the doctor was content with the official version of the story that soon circulated around the resort and found its way onto the police blotter. It was an accident, of course

(and maybe, Dr. Feldman thought wishfully, maybe that's all it was), and Moritzer's drowning was explained by the blow on the head he sustained when the boat capsized. Dr. Feldman thought it was permissible not to mention the business with the oar, just as he didn't mention Moritzer's deliberate rocking. Fair was fair. But he wasn't sorry to climb behind the wheel of his Mercedes and put Ponchawee Manor behind him. In fact, he was actually happy to return to the office Monday morning and see the unlovely but not unwelcome face of Hilda, his nurse.

"Well, doctor?" she said. "Did you have a good time?"

"Not bad, not bad," Dr. Feldman said. "Only, there was a little accident—"

"You weren't hurt?" Hilda asked with quick concern.

"No, no," Dr. Feldman said. "But some poor man got drowned. Otherwise, I had a wonderful time. Now," he said, rubbing his surgeon's hands together in anticipation of saving yet another life, "who's our first patient this week?"

"It's a Mrs. Moritzer," Hilda said.



"What I'm trying to tell you, Miss Jackson, is that to me, you're not just another cog in a great big machine."