

SCIENCE FICTION IMAGINATION

17

MAIL  
TO ORDER!

HAL ANNAS

# **SCIENCE FICTION IMAGINATION**

*A short story*

## **MAID—TO ORDER!**

by Hal Annas

Herb Cornith didn't really mind getting married as long as the girl answered his strict specifications which were simply—a superwoman!

PUBLISHER NOTE: Science Fiction. Short Story. 5,700 words.

# MAID—TO ORDER!

HAL ANNAS



LUMINOSITY  
PUBLISHING

**LUMINOSITY PUBLISHING LLP**

SCIENCE FICTION IMAGINATION 17

MAID—TO ORDER!

AUGUST 2021 HAL ANNAS

This is a work of fiction. All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

## MAID—TO ORDER!

Herb Cornith shook his dark head in disappointment. “Nope,” he said, “she won’t do. Lacks an ounce of being the right weight.”

The willowy blonde behind the desk blinked blue eyes and frowned. “But Mr. Cornith,” she insisted, “you fit Miss Lucy Hollowell’s specifications perfectly. She even specified that the man must be very exacting, meticulous, and choosy. Certainly, you are being all of that when you quibble over an ounce in her weight.”

Cornith picked up the specification sheet in his muscular right hand. He studied it out of thoughtful brown eyes. “This doesn’t look right,” he said. “I’ll admit that I have strong features, but I’m not handsome.”

“To a woman, you are handsome, Mr. Cornith. In fact, magnetically so.”

“I’m only six feet tall, not seventy-three inches.”

“That is a typographical error, Mr. Cornith. It should read seventy-two inches. The corrected copy should be along soon. Something went wrong with the machine.”

“And my eyes are not particularly expressive. I generally conceal my thoughts.”

“That, Mr. Cornith, is merely your own opinion. You don’t know what expression you might put into your eyes when you look into the eyes of your soul-mate.”

“The eyes of my what?”

“Excuse me, Mr. Cornith. I know you’re not the poetic type. You’re the rugged type, but brainy, realistic. Still, you fit the specifications.”

“You said there was another sheet to the specifications?”

“Yes. It won’t be finished until tomorrow. But let me assure you that it fits you. In fact, it describes your every virtue and fault.”

Cornith glanced round the large room. His brown eyes came to rest on a model of an early Martian rocket ship. He studied it for a space, mentally seeing its interior and its outmoded atomic drive. It reminded him that he should get back to the laboratory and check on those ray-collector tests. This business of dickering over specifications for a wife was a nuisance. His requirements had been on file since he had taken the Levet test at the age of eighteen. Because of his exacting nature they had been hard to fill. Now at twenty-seven he was still unmarried. Not that he cared. But by reason of the fact that he was of the higher mental level, and physically fitted to survive in a complex and expanding civilization, he was urged by the Foundation to marry and beget children.

~

This was the accepted procedure. Marriage was seldom discouraged, but it was urged only on those who came up to certain specifications. The purpose was to improve mankind

in order that man might hold his own in a solar system that was even now reaching out toward the stars. The system had long been in effect on Mars, but owing to the colder climate and the thinner atmosphere, Mars had less than a tenth the population of earth. Selective breeding alone had enabled these to survive.

“Sorry,” Cornith said. “This Lucy Hollowell fits everything except she is too skinny. I don’t want a bag of bones for a wife.”

The blonde smiled wryly. “She is only a half-ounce under the specifications, to be exact. Perhaps you have not carefully read your requirements. Let me remind you, Mr. Cornith, the Foundation probed your every thought, conscious and subconscious, your every physical reaction, and they specified merely that the girl must be unusually intelligent, naming the subjects which will fit into your pattern; that she must be beautiful according to your standards; that she must be five-feet four-inches tall and weigh a hundred and twenty-three pounds.

“Now, Mr. Cornith, there is one little thing which the Foundation has decided that you implanted in your thoughts by suggestion before taking the test. They decided that you were being facetious. I am alluding to the specified requirements that your wife must be able to wiggle her ears, throw her voice and perform sleight-of-hand tricks, among other curious things. The Foundation says that these things may not be essentially required. But they do admit the requirement that she must be eager to please you at all times. And since it is Lucy Hollowell’s nature to be eager to please the man she marries, she is even now practicing ventriloquism and learning how to wiggle her ears. She has a brilliant mind and will have no difficulty learning a number of sleight-of-hand tricks.”

“But she’s too skinny!”

“Half an ounce, Mr. Cornith. She weighs a hundred and twenty-two pounds, fifteen ounces. She could very easily gain that ounce by making an effort, but you specified that there should be no conscious effort to meet physical measurements and weight requirements. She was to be weighed, dripping wet, as she came from under the shower, just before breakfast. We assume that the wetness weighed half an ounce.”

“I don’t like skinny females.”

“We have another one, less brilliant, but who meets all physical requirements other than weighing a hundred and twenty-three pounds and four ounces.”

“Too fat. Can’t stand fat women.”

“Would you permit Lucy Hollowell to gain half an ounce consciously? She can do it in a few hours. Has a brilliant mind. Can regulate her own glandular flow.”

“No. I don’t want to marry a woman who is always thinking about her weight, and if she starts now—”

“You’re very exacting, Mr. Cornith!”

“Naturally. The requirements of Lucy Hollowell demand an exacting man. At least that’s what the Foundation reports.”

“Then you are giving her serious thought?”

~

“None whatever! She’s too skinny. If she just had an ounce more meat on her bones, I’d marry her and not even ask her name. But I don’t want to live the balance of my days with a female who looks like an animated skeleton, who has to stand twice in the same spot to cast a shadow, who has to drink tomato juice to keep you from looking through her.”

“How about the woman of the same height who weighs a hundred and twenty-three pounds, four ounces.”

“A beef-trust like that! Count me out. She’d cast her shadow twice. It would take a week to hug her, a little at a time. She’d shake the house down every time she walked across the floor. Impossible to keep her in clothes. I’d need a nylon and linen factory to supply the material for one outfit. No! I’d rather have a skeleton than a whale.”

“Then you’ll consider Lucy Hollowell?”

“I didn’t say that. I wouldn’t mind taking a look at her from a distance, because if she does fit the other specifications, she must be something out of a dream. Too bad she has to be built like a rail.”

“Not like a rail, Mr. Cornith.”

“A skeleton then.”

“Not like a skeleton, either. She is Miss Venus of 2190.”

“What? You mean, this gawky Lucy Hollowell is the same as that gorgeous bundle of curves and pulchritude?”

“Exactly. And now you’re interested, huh?”

“No. She doesn’t meet the specifications.”

“But you’ll let her come over to the laboratory and watch you work, won’t you? After all, you meet her requirements.”

“No! I don’t want any walking bean-poles around the laboratory.”

“But maybe she wouldn’t appear just that.”

“She’s underweight.”

“According to your requirements—only. Thousands of men think she is perfect. And she’s going to be mighty disappointed if her dream man—”

“Her what?”

“Sorry. I forgot you’re not the poetic type. She doesn’t think of you as her dream man, but she does think of you as being everything she wants in a man. You’ll let her come to the laboratory, won’t you?”

“No.”

“But she does at least want to see you. Do you know you are the only man out of thousands who exactly meets her requirements? Even to those crinkles in your forehead when you frown. And even to being stubborn about things.”

“I’ve got to get back and check those ray-collectors—”

“And you’ll let her go along with you?”

“No.”

“But she’s waiting in the next office, and your requirements call for a woman who has a mind of her own. I think she’s—”

“Not a mind of her own that makes her determined to have her own way in everything.”

“Of course not. But I think she’s—”

“I specified a woman who would not try to wear the pants.”

“She won’t. That is, not yours, anyway. Though you’re too big for them. But I think she’s going with you to the laboratory.”

~

“That’s what you think,” Cornith said with finality and stood up. “No long, lean, gawky drink-of-water is going to tag along after Herb Cornith. Especially a female bag of bones. Uh! Excuse me. Who is the lady who just entered without knocking?”

“Oh! Just a second. Miss Hollowell, Mr. Cornith was just getting ready to come by for you. Miss Hollowell, Mr. Cornith.”

Cornith drew a deep breath and ran a finger beneath his collar. He stared, drinking in the beauty of the symmetrical figure beneath the rose-colored dress, the radiance of the smooth features. He had seen her before, but only in a vague dream in which she was far more lovely than the telecast views of Miss Venus, but in the dream, she had not done to him what she was doing now. She acted upon him much as a single-pole magnet does to a magnet of opposite polarity. More, she seemed stunned herself. Her lips parted slightly, revealing white teeth, and her deep azure eyes seemed to be saying things that only eyes can say.

“A pleasure,” Cornith said, enclosing her small warm hand in his. “I was just telling Miss—” He gestured toward the girl behind the desk. “I was just telling her that I—er, I, uh.”

“You’re going to the laboratory,” Lucy Hollowell said, more as a direct reading of his thoughts than as a question.

Cornith smiled, nodded. “Care to come along?”

Lucy Hollowell withdrew her hand and a deck of cards materialized from nowhere and spread out fanwise between her small thumb and forefinger. Cornith gaped. In the next instant his attention was attracted to her ears which peeked from beneath silken platinum hair. The ears were wiggling enchantingly.



Flushed and hot, Cornith reached to his breast pocket for a handkerchief. He was astonished to find a large Spanish rose protruding from the pocket. He held it in his hand and stared at it in stunned silence. Lucy Hollowell extended a small white hand and took the rose from him. She held it against her cheek until he saw that her lips and the rose were the same color. Then she fastened it in her platinum hair where its warm red petals contrasted brilliantly.

“Er, uh. I was saying—” Cornith began lamely.

“That she’s a bag of bones,” a voice behind him finished.

Cornith whirled, and the same voice in a distant part of the room said, “Over here!” Cornith jumped. He puzzled for a moment and then it dawned over him that those small voices had the same deep huskiness that Lucy Hollowell’s voice had. He turned back to her and smiled weakly.

“You were inviting me to go to the laboratory with you?” Lucy said.

Cornith nodded. “Thought it might interest—” He broke off abruptly, his mouth hanging open. He could not believe his ears. He was hearing his own voice, or a fair imitation of it, repeating his earlier words, “Gawky ... beanpole ... tagging...”

“Stop that!” he said abruptly.

~

Silence reigned and Lucy Hollowell remained in rigid immobility. And while Cornith stared, her peachblown cheeks became pink, then red. The veins in her lovely neck swelled and throbbed. She turned slowly on tottering legs and gently collapsed into Cornith’s arms.

“What th—?” He twisted his neck and looked at the blonde in frantic appeal. “What’s the matter with her? Can’t you do something?”

“Your requirements demand,” the blonde replied unemotionally, “a woman who is very obedient. When you told her to ‘stop that!’ she stopped everything, including breathing.”

“Oh!” Cornith sighed in relief. “So that’s it!”

“Better tell her to begin breathing again,” the blonde said casually.

“But the requirements shouldn’t be taken that literally,” Cornith argued.

“She won’t take everything literally. An understanding between you will straighten that out. But meanwhile, you’d better tell her to breathe again.”

Cornith looked down at the lovely face which had now regained its normal peachblown color. He was astonished to see a tiny bit of deep azure beneath an eyelid that wasn’t quite closed. Instantly the lid closed tightly, quivered a trifle, and remained shut. Cornith’s mind worked swiftly, reconstructing events from the beginning, and he recalled the swelling veins, the careful turning to fall into his arms, the flushed cheeks which were

not the color that normally precedes fainting. He noticed now the shallow, controlled breathing, and he felt a slight tremor in the soft warm body he held in his arms.

Drawing her close, Cornith said, "This ought to make her snap out of it," and pressed his lips firmly against hers.

"No, no, Mr. Cornith!" the blonde exclaimed. "The requirements say that she is supposed to swoon when you do that."

It was true. Lucy Hollowell seemed to revive and then swoon in ecstasy. She slumped limply in Cornith's arms while a faint tremor ran through her warm body. To make certain the results were mathematically precise, Cornith tried again, kissing her a little more firmly this time. The response was the same. In the interest of science, he tested the matter a third time, and then turned raptly to the blonde.

"Look! She swoons every time I kiss her."

"Naturally, Mr. Cornith," the blonde commented a trifle bitterly. "Your requirements demand that, even though it is thought by some members of the Foundation that you were in a facetious mood when you took the Levet examination. They suspect that you implanted a large number of suggestions prior to the event, to bias your responses in a manner not in keeping with the seriousness of the occasion. That is not a problem for this department. We have provided you with a woman who fulfills every requirement stated—"

"She's underweight," Cornith insisted.

"Does she look too thin?"

"No! She's perfect. But she lacks an ounce—"

~

Smack! A small white hand struck Cornith's cheek resoundingly and brought the blood stinging to the surface. He almost dropped the girl. She got her long, slender legs under her and supported her own weight. Smack! Another small hand caught Cornith stingingly on the other cheek. He drew a deep breath, felt his muscles contracting.

"Now, now, Mr. Cornith!" the blonde warned. "The specifications demand that your wife shall have plenty of fire."

"That doesn't give her a right to knock my head off," Cornith blustered. "Besides, she's not my wife!"

"Are you hurt, darling?" Lucy Hollowell said sympathetically. "I'm sorry! Here! Let me kiss your cheeks and make them well."

"What th—?"

"Now, now, Mr. Cornith! She's supposed to be sympathetic and understanding and very tender when you need her."

"I don't need that sort of sympathy and understanding."

“Look!” Lucy Hollowell cupped his chin in one soft hand and forced him to look at her. “My ears!” They were wiggling again in rhythm with the soft strains of a waltz coming from some hidden source.

“Stop that! No, no, no! Don’t stop breathing. Just stop wiggling your ears. Don’t faint. Stand still. And stop plucking coins out of the air. And if that’s you making that music, stop that, too.”

Silence reigned. Lucy Hollowell remained perfectly still. The expression on her lovely features was one of interest and concern. Her ripe lips quivered slightly. “You don’t like me?” she said.

“I do, too.”

Instantly the girl was all over Cornith, hugging him and kissing him at the same time and murmuring endearments.

“Hey!”

“Now, now, Mr. Cornith. She’s supposed to be very responsive to words of love.”

“I didn’t say anything about love.”

“You said you liked her.”

“I merely said, ‘I do, too’.”

“But she’s supposed to understand even when you don’t put everything in words.”

“When is she supposed to stop this—this necking?”

“She will let you alone when you want to be let alone.”

Lucy Hollowell stepped back, patted her platinum hair, and glanced at her image in a small mirror. Then she smiled sweetly at Cornith and returned to his side. “Shall we go?” she said.

This sudden change in mood and recovery of self-possession, after her demonstration of a moment before, was more than Cornith could readily grasp. The blonde supplied the answer.

“Her moods change with the situation and needs of the moment.”

~

Cornith scratched his dark head. “I don’t know,” he commented reflectively. “I didn’t think any woman in the world would fit the requirements I put in. At eighteen I thought the whole idea was stupid. I didn’t want to get married.”

“Of course,” Lucy said understandingly. “You still think those examinations and tests and specifications are stupid. I understand. And you put in a lot of things you didn’t want. But I had to meet the requirements, and my reactions and responses had to be some actual part of me, not ad lib. I can change them in time.”

“She’s very understanding, Mr. Cornith, and eager to please.”

“But it’s all nonsense,” Cornith insisted.

“Of course, it is,” Lucy said sympathetically. “It isn’t right for you to have to marry a girl who meets all of the requirements you didn’t want. I know just how you feel, and after we’re married, we’ll work together to amend the Foundation regulations.”

“I didn’t say I’d marry you.”

“Of course, you didn’t. And it isn’t fair for you to have to do it. I know just how you feel. And I’ll comfort you all I can. Here you have a woman on your hands whose reactions are everything you thought was silly. Because you’re a scientist and don’t like nonsense. At least, not too much of it. And you put all those things in, thinking that everybody would see how silly they were. You didn’t think anybody would be stupid enough actually to be like that. I feel so sorry for you, having to marry a woman with all those silly things ingrained in her reactions.”

“We’re not married yet.”

“That’s the worst part. It’s that anxiety before an event of doubtful outcome. I’m so sorry, darling! Put your head here on my breast and let me comfort you.”

“Dash it!”

“Now, now, Mr. Cornith. The specifications ... a woman of deep feeling ... ready to comfort.”

“Dash it! Dash it! Dash it!”

“Now, now, Mr. Cornith! If you give way to your feelings, no telling what might happen. That’s one of the things you didn’t anticipate. There’s nothing in the specifications—”

“Here!” Lucy opened her handbag and drew out a flask. “You need a drink. Brace up. There are worse things than being married.”

“I don’t drink.” Cornith seized the flask and tossed off a swallow. “Ah! Martian Vinth! Never touch the stuff.” He took another swallow. “Now I don’t have to marry you. I deliberately specified that my wife should not be a Vinth sot.”

“Herb darling, you’re so clever! I detest the stuff. But I happened to know that scientists drink it to strengthen their minds and to keep their health up. I brought it along to prove how thoughtful I am. I also have in my handbag a length of chewing rope.”

Cornith shook his head. “I don’t chew, but you go right ahead.”

~

Lucy shook her head. “Too bad. I chew, drink, smoke, brawl, swear, lie, steal, eat with my knife, and throw things. All in the specifications. I do everything except drink Vinth. Too bad you don’t. We could have so much fun together, chewing and drinking and lying and stealing and fighting and throwing things.”

“But I didn’t mean all those things.”

“Of course, you didn’t, darling! And I’m so sorry you put them in. But what’s done is done, and there’s no use worrying about it. Take another drink and brace up.”

Cornith took another drink and returned the flask. He felt better now. The Martian Vinth had both a soothing and exhilarating effect. The things that had seemed so stupid a moment before now seemed reasonable.

“All right,” he said. “If you do all of those things, you qualify. Let’s have a specimen lie to see how good you are.”

“I hate you!”

“Now wait! Don’t fly off the handle.”

“But darling! I was merely giving you a sample lie.”

“You mean, you love me?”

“No.”

“Then why do you want to marry me?”

“I don’t.”

“Oh! I see. You’re lying.”

“Of course.”

“Tell the truth. Do you love me?”

“Now, now, Mr. Cornith! There’s nothing in the specifications about telling the truth about anything at any time whatever.”

“Oh, my Gawd!” The full realization of the awful truth shook Cornith, froze the mellow glow the Martian Vinth had instilled. “I didn’t include any good qualities at all in the specifications!”

“And I’m so sorry,” Lucy said tenderly. “Because I could very easily have trained myself to be good, to be all of the things you wanted. But I had to follow the specifications. It was the only way I could qualify. Maybe I can change—in five or ten years.”

Cornith shook his head sadly. “In five or ten years it won’t matter one way or another.”

“Then you’re going to marry me and get used to me?”

“No.”

“But Herb, darling! I’ve worked so hard making myself all of the silly things your specifications demanded. Nobody else will want a woman like that. Besides, I’ve been in love with you ever since you worked out the formula for canning cosmic rays.”

“You remember that?”

“Of course. Saw you for the first time then, in televue. You reminded me of something I’d been dreaming.”

“What?”

“Tell you after we’re married.”

“I’m not going to marry you.”

“You’ll have to. I can pass all the requirements. Here’s your wallet I stole out of your pocket ten minutes ago. And the law says—”

“But you’re an ounce underweight.”

“Are you going to let a little thing like that—?”

~

Lucy halted abruptly and Cornith smiled serenely. “Sure,” he said. “The specifications require the female to weigh a hundred and twenty-three pounds, dripping wet, and she may not change her weight consciously by eating or drinking. Now, I’ll give you a sporting chance. You weigh a hundred and twenty-two pounds and fifteen ounces, or maybe a little less. You can weigh yourself and see. If you gain an ounce, or enough to make you weigh one twenty-three, within an hour, and without eating or drinking, or thinking about your body, I’ll marry you and not even ask your name.”

“There are certain absorptions—”

“Nope. That’s out. You’d have to think about your body.”

Lucy’s smooth brow puckered. She stepped quickly to the desk and spun the globe resting there.

“Nope. No luck there. We’re almost at sea level. You can’t get any lower than that. And if you went to higher altitude you’d weigh less.”

Suddenly Lucy smiled, snatched up a pencil and began figuring on a pad, and Cornith mused reflectively: “She’s a good sport. And a beauty. By George! I hope she figures it out.” Then he frowned. “But it’s impossible.”

Lucy dropped the pencil and clapped her hands. “I have it,” she exclaimed. “Time me now.”

“I’ll have to weigh you first,” Cornith said. “Dripping wet.”

Lucy’s cheeks became a shade pinker. “Won’t you take my word for it?”

Cornith shook his head. “You’re an accomplished liar.”

“I’ll weigh her,” the blonde offered.

Cornith shrugged. “It’s okay with me. But when you claim you weigh a hundred and twenty-three pounds, with no ounces lacking, I’m going to do the weighing.”

Lucy’s cheeks took on a rosy shade. Apparently preoccupied with her own thoughts, she made no reply. She followed the blonde girl out of the room and Cornith sat on the edge of the desk to wait. He wished now that he had not posed the problem. He could think of a thousand reasons why it would be interesting to be married to such an intensely alive creature. And he wasn’t deceived about what were termed her bad qualities. They were the result of a training pattern. They were not her basic personality, and they were not deeply ingrained. In fact, she could be, and was, everything he wanted in a woman. He had made up his mind to ask her to marry him even if she failed to solve the problem, when she and the blonde returned.

~

There were faint beads of moisture on the lobes of Lucy's ears, and the rose-colored dress hung awry. "Didn't have time to dry thoroughly, and had to jump into my clothes. Hurry! We're going to be married. Right now!"

"How much do you weigh?"

"One twenty-two, fourteen and three-quarter ounces. But I'll weigh one twenty-three within twenty minutes."

Cornith shook his head. "Stubborn," he told himself. "Bluffing. Lying. I ought to teach her a lesson."

"I'm going to put a clause in the ceremony," he said aloud, "that if you don't weigh exactly a hundred and twenty-three pounds, we're not legally married."

"You're so clever," she smiled. "I was going to do that myself."

"Game, anyway," Cornith mused, as he followed her hurriedly out to the chute and up to the roof.

"We'll get married and then you can weigh me," she said. "And if I don't weigh one twenty-three—" Her brow puckered. "Gee! I hope I've got it figured right."

"If you don't weigh a hundred and twenty-three, it won't be legal," Cornith insisted. "I'm going to put in that clause."

A look of pain showed in her features for an instant, then it was gone, and she led the way to a sky-taxi.

"There's a hurry-up marrying place ten minutes away," she said. "Same altitude. Near sea level. We can get married in a hurry there."

Cornith shrugged. "Tell the driver."

Thirty minutes later they were married, with the cancelling clause included. Cornith thought now that he had carried the joke too far. Lucy seemed on the verge of tears. Besides, they would not be legally and finally married until after he had weighed her. And he knew now that she meant to abide strictly by the words of the ceremony, that if the scales showed less than a hundred and twenty-three pounds, she would not consider herself married. He thought of finagling the scales. But she went along with him to buy them, and insisted that they be checked and sealed to the hundredth of an ounce. Cornith knew now that she was not only a liar, but the most sincere and conscientious person he had ever known.

~

He felt cheap and mean and low as he accompanied her into the bridal suite he had engaged via pocket-communicator. He placed the scales on the floor and felt as though he had deliberately cheated and tricked an innocent child. He could see that Lucy was uncertain of herself. He could feel the tremors of fear that shook her, the doubts, the questions of right and wrong, the wondering what all this was going to do to her happiness. He would have traded his hunting lodge on Mars just for the privilege of going

back and changing it all and telling her that she was perfect at a hundred and twenty-two pounds, fifteen ounces, and need never change an iota to please him.

She turned slowly to face him, and two crystal tears formed in the corners of her azure eyes. “Just one kiss,” she begged. “Because I might fail, and that means the end.”

Cornith held her close. He wished there was something he could do to comfort her, to change it all, but he knew the depth of her sincerity, and he knew that she would offer no excuse, would accept no failure even from herself. Indeed, her whole happiness, it seemed, depended upon her promise that she would fill the specifications even to that final ounce.

She pushed him away and smiled through her tears. “I’m losing weight by crying,” she said. “Gee, golly! I hope I’ve figured it right.”

“Dripping wet,” he said. “Leave the suds on if you wish.”

She shook her head. “That wouldn’t be honest.” She broke away, ran to the bathroom. She stepped inside the bathroom and drew the door shut. Cornith stood there alone, and suddenly he felt as though his own weight had increased. Something was gone, locked away from him, something that had been vitally alive and warm and colorful. He walked over to the window and stood looking down at the street below. It was filled with life, but its life seemed alien, remote. His ears picked up the faint sound of the shower, and he knew that his thoughts would always hereafter be filled with the memory of how close he had come to happiness.

He heard the bathroom door open softly, but he didn’t dare look. His heart was too heavy. Then he heard the soft, tremulous voice. “I’ve got soap in my eyes. Come look at the scales. Don’t look at me. I’m dripping wet.”

Cornith turned slowly, caught his breath. The vision that met his eyes was a loveliness transcending his wildest dreams. The coruscating beads of water were like flashing jewels adorning a soft pink and white body, vitally alive and yet trembling in fear. He stepped quickly to the scales and looked.

~

A warm glow started at his feet and rushed upward, making him giddy as it swept over his neck and face and on into his brain. The scales showed a hundred and twenty-three pounds and four one-hundredths of an ounce. He glanced up. She had wiped the soap out of her eyes and those azure orbs were flashing a surge of joy unparalleled.

Cornith sprang to take her in his arms, but she leaped away, raced to the bathroom, slammed the door, and locked it.

“Come on out,” he said. “You saw the scales.”

“I’m not coming out,” she called back, “until you figure out how I did it.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“I’m a determined woman, Herb darling!”



And Cornith knew that it was true. There was nothing left but to get to work and figure out how she had accomplished the seeming miracle. He drew out a chair at the writing desk, found paper and felt for his pen. He stated the problem, cancelling out eating and drinking, for he had been with her all of the time, and she had not taken anything. He thought that perhaps she and the blonde had lied about her original weight. But that didn't fit. She had been sincerely worried about whether she would succeed. Ah! There it was.

He went to work and in three minutes he had two pages filled with figures, ciphers and symbols. He smiled grimly to himself and worked on. Ten minutes passed. He heard her call from the bathroom, but did not answer. He was engrossed with the problem. He worked on and on, eliminating variables, restating the problem, beginning anew with a different theory, working on and on. An hour passed.



As the equations sped through his mind her image was always among them.

With the desk and floor littered, Cornith paused reflectively. He heard a soft movement behind him, then Lucy's voice said, "I couldn't wait any longer. I've come to help you."

"Don't bother me now," Cornith said. He jotted down another row of numerals, then leaned back and sighed.

Two warm arms went around his neck. "Was it so difficult?" she asked. "I figured it out in no time. It's just that gravity differs at the poles and the equator. It is slightly more at the poles. About one in fifty, I think. I didn't know for certain. But on that basis, I figured there would be a change in specific gravity of about an ounce every hundred miles or so. I had to guess at it. That's why I was so frightened. Anyway, we flew over two hundred miles north to this hurry-up place. Do you understand it, darling?"

"You mean, about your weight and the difference in gravity between the equator and the poles?"

"Yes, darling."

"I figured that out in the first three seconds after I sat down. I've been computing your basic personality, trying to figure out how long you would remain in the bathroom before coming out to help me. I missed it somewhere. I figured you'd be in there another two hours. I'll have to check my figures. Go away."

"Oh, no, you won't recheck them." She placed a hand over the paper. "On this one I'm going to help. The error is right there. You didn't allow enough for the volume and strength of my love to cancel out the volume and strength of my determination and resistance. Square resistance and raise love to the power of ten. And now if you don't give me a big kiss, I'll revert to the specifications and steal one."

In the next instant she was crushed in his strong arms. And her ears were wiggling ecstatically.

**THE END**

HAL ANNAS



LUMINOSITY  
PUBLISHING