

IMAGINATION

*Stories
of Science
and Fantasy*

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Jerry vowed no woman would ever entice him into matrimony. But of course, that was before Professor Madigan's invention, the —

MAN-TRAP

By

Hal Annas

JERRY Kerran watched the news analyst fade from the screen to be replaced by a woman who looked directly at him and said, "Listen, girls! Professor Madigan's greatest invention. A new kind of magnetism more powerful than gravity. Works as a supplement to a natural magnetism. Can be controlled—"

Kerran switched off the current. "Women," he growled. "Bah!"

He had three rules concerning woman: a) if she won't stay home and neck on the sofa get rid of her; b) if she will stay home and neck on the sofa suspect her of matrimonial intentions and get rid of her; c) don't monkey with her to begin with and avoid the nuisance of bothering with the first two rules.

He rose to his lanky six feet of height, brushed the unruly red hair out of his eyes, strode to the

door and turned the knob. The door swung wide. He glanced about briefly, then looked down and saw the girl.

She had, he realized, removed her highheels. Ordinarily the top of her platinum hair came an inch above his shoulders. Not that he was in the habit of getting close enough to determine this factor accurately, but he couldn't help seeing her enter and leave the apartment across the way from time to time.

"You knocked?" he said briskly.

Her head was tilted back, her blue eyes wide. "I need a pound of sugar," she said. "My pneumatic is out of order. Can't get deliveries."

"You mean, you cook?" He stared in awe.

"I'm making a cake," she breathed, inching closer.



He backed out of the doorway and she entered. Without giving him another glance, she went to the pneumatic, cut in the phone and ordered a pound of sugar. She turned back to him.

"It shouldn't be a minute I'll wait—if you don't mind."

He had tried to keep himself from studying her. Despite this, his eyes told him that her figure was just about perfect and as both a counteraction and a stimulant to the mounting tension in him, her smile was surprisingly bright and full. There was little danger of the flavor of her warpaint confusing a man. She wore little, if any. Her bright lips and cheeks seemed to need no added color.

"Don't bother to stand," she said considerately. She waited until he had lowered himself to the couch, then dropped down beside him, a trifle too close to allow him to put his mind on other things.

"I hope I haven't troubled you." Her hand brushed his.

"Not at all." He drew his hand away.

"From the looks of your sideboard," she went on cheerily, "you were just getting ready to mix a drink. I'm an expert. Shall I mix a couple?"

He resisted the inclination to rise when she did, and deliberately kept his eyes from following her.

He snatched up the paper, rustled it noisily and tried to concentrate on the headlines.

Two things distracted him. One was the faint scent of perfume and the other was the chinking of ice and glasses. He put the paper aside, tried to put his mind on distant things. This soon palled. He was about to get up and pace the floor when she returned and handed him a cool glass.

"Thanks," he said and leaned back.

She sat down again, so close that her shoulder brushed his. He edged over against the arm of the couch, putting an inch of space between them, glanced sidelong at her, and drank. He rolled his eyes ceilingward, smacked his lips and drank again.

"What did you put in it?"

"About a spoonful of creme de menthe, a couple drops of bitters and about two ounces of rye. Like it?"

He scowled deliberately, armor-ing himself against his feelings. "It's fair—for a woman's mixings. You should have put in more li-quor."

"Of course. I'll learn."

"Not from me," he snapped. "I'm a woman-hater."

She leaned toward him. "Why?"

He tossed off the balance of the drink, set the glass on the table

and made a sweeping gesture. "They're all alike," he said brutally. "Fickle and treacherous. Deceivers. Always flinging their sex around."

"Not all women," she countered. "Take this Professor Madigan who discovered that new adhesion force."

"A woman?"

"Of course. Professor Madigan is a scholarly young woman. Her sex appeal might not win a beauty contest, but she discovered a perfectly wonderful man-catcher."

"What?"

"A new force. Works like gravity—only it's different. Its strength increases in ratio to the square of the distance."

"What are you talking about? Women don't understand things like that."

"No?"

"No! Need I spell it out for you? Your delivery should be in the pneumatic by now. Why don't you pick it up and go home and make your cake?"

"I shall. I had no idea I was living next door to a misogynist, and a brutal one at that."

"I don't like women," Kerran said emphatically. "They're all alike. Fickle. Deceivers. Everything about them artificial. Lips, color, shape."

The girl rose and stood over him.

"I'm not wearing make-up," she asserted. "You flatter yourself in thinking I would put on my face to come across the hall."

"Your shape! Your hips aren't that neat!"

The color rose in her cheeks. She lifted a hand as though to strike him. The hand trembled. She lowered it to her side. "I do not wear a girdle. Want to feel?"

"No," he said, his own color rising. "Go on home."

Ignoring the pneumatic, she crossed to the door, snatched it open, marched into the corridor. Through the open doorway he heard the knob turn on her door. He went to the pneumatic, picked up the sugar, strode across the corridor and knocked. In a moment her head appeared, then the door swung wide.

"You forgot something," he said contritely. "Sorry I was rude. I'm a natural woman-hater, and a moment before you came in some wench on television triggered my feelings on the subject . . . Just keep on your own side of the fence and I'll stay on mine. I'll even speak to you occasionally, if you wish, but that's as far as I'll go in neighborliness."

"Thanks," she said. "You're more than kind. But I shan't trouble you. I've just become a man-hater."

Kerran turned to go. Halfway across the corridor he felt something tug at him. It was a steady and increasingly powerful pull, forcing him into the girl's apartment. He lost his balance, reeled through the doorway, came to a halt against the table, noticed that the force still drew him toward the girl on the far side of the table.

"Well?" she said.

"Er-uh, just dropped in. Going right back out."

He got halfway to the door before it again took effect. He leaned against it, dug his feet into the carpet, pushed. He almost reached the door. He could go no farther, knew he was going to be snatched back to the table.

He turned, dug in his heels, braced himself, and then the girl came flying over the table and directly into his arms. Instantly the force released him and he fell with the girl on top.

The platinum hair was in his eyes, against his face, the scent of perfume all about, the full weight of the soft warm flesh pressing him down. Then she struggled up, stood erect.

Getting his feet under him, he said, "I want to apologize. Your shape is natural. You don't wear a girdle. And now I'll be going."

He had scarcely turned before he felt it again. He swung back

quickly, saw that the girl was hanging on the sofa. He lost his balance, went staggering toward her, flung out his arms, and the next thing he knew she was pressing against him, standing on her toes, and her lips were brushing his cheek, and they were moist and warm and soft.

She drew back and said, belligerently, "I wish you'd get out of here."

He started again, hesitated when he felt the force, turned back. "I've heard of magnetic women," he said with restraint. "I never believed in it. But now—" He gestured vaguely. "Please turn off your charms."

She lowered her eyes. "I thought it was you. I've been drawn to you from the first and I thought you'd suddenly become irresistible. Do you mean you feel it too?"

He nodded. "I've read about magnetic women in the best books. Now, dash it, turn it off! I'm getting tired of hanging around here."

"It's you," she insisted. "You turn it off."

He shook his head. "I'm plain as an old shoe. Everybody knows. But you! One look at you and anybody'd know you've got this magnetism. That's why I had to be so brutal. It was the only way I could resist and keep my woman-

hating integrity. I can feel your magnetism now. It's getting stronger."

"And I feel yours. It's pulling me right into your arms."

"Stay back. I can't stand much more. I'm a confirmed misogynist, and if you keep on I'll have to go against my principles, and that wouldn't be honest."

"I can't help it," she murmured from two feet away. "I can't resist you."

Kerran puzzled briefly. "Maybe that's it. I remember when I was overseas. But no! All they wanted was chewing gum and cigarettes. Still, you never can tell. Maybe it came on me suddenly. Maybe looking at you sort of triggered my magnetism."

She smiled. "If you'll quit looking at me maybe we can stop it. Look the other way and I'll try to stop thinking about you because you do something to me."

Kerran nodded. "That's it. Beat it! I'll put my mind on something else."

Visualizing a horse race in which he had his money on the bang-tail just ready to break the tape he didn't feel the tug for several seconds. He struggled mightily but futilely to resist. He wound up in the kitchen where the girl was holding onto the electric range.

"You didn't play fair," he said

accusingly. "Treacherous. Just like all your sex. You thought about me."

She lowered her eyes. "I—I just couldn't help it."

Kerran felt his chest expand involuntarily. "One of us is irresistible," he said. "It isn't you because I positively was not thinking about you. So it must be me." His chest expanded another inch. "I guess a girl who can't resist me would be true. And since we can't beat this force, the only solution is to get married."

She nodded. "That's the only solution. But maybe I don't want to solve the problem. You'll have to persuade me."

The voice from the television in the living room was barely audible in the kitchen: "The new force was originally developed for the purpose of drawing troops into a compact group so they could be atom-bombed. Professor Madigan refused to disclose its secret to be used for that purpose. She pointed out that it had a far more useful potential. A field of it, built into a woman's garments, enables her to attract at a distance the man of her choice. She can control this with a switch conveniently located in a pocket. Her own charms do the rest."

Kerran ignored the telecast. She was in his arms and he had his

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face half-buried in her silken hair. "I don't even know your name . . ." he laughed embarrassedly.

Her voice was low and soft as she murmured, "Madigan—Joyce Madigan."

He stiffened suddenly. "You mean you're *Professor* Madigan —"

She snuggled closer against him and somehow it didn't really seem to matter now what her name was. "Let's say I *was* Professor Madigan—a woman's place is in the home, don't you agree?"

After a few emphatic kisses he did.

THE END