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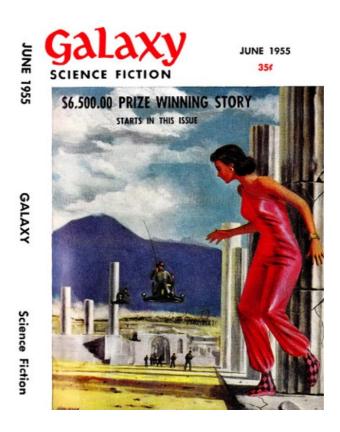
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### **Picture Bride**

By WILLIAM MORRISON

**Illustrated by EMSH** 

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# As pretty as a picture? Yes, because that was all she was ... or would become some day!

My brother, Perry, always was a bit cracked. As a kid, he almost blew up our house doing experiments. When he was eighteen, he wrote poetry, but fortunately that didn't last long and he went back to science.

Now, when he showed me this picture, I figured he'd had a relapse of some kind. "This is the girl I'm in love with," he said.

She wasn't bad. Not bad at all, even if her clothes were crazy. She wasn't my type—too brainy-looking—although I could see how some guys would go for her. "I thought you liked blondes."

"I wouldn't give you two cents for all the blondes in Hollywood," he answered. "This is the only girl for me."

"You sound as if you've got it bad," I said. "You going to marry her?"

His face dropped about a mile. "I can't."

"You mean she's married already?" I was surprised. This wasn't like Perry at all.

He sort of hesitated, as if he was afraid of saying too much. "No, she isn't married. I asked her about that. But I can't marry her because—well, I've never met her. All I've seen of her is this picture and a few more. She doesn't live here."

"You mean she's in Europe?" I've heard of these love affairs by mail, and they never made much sense to me. I said to Perry, "Why can't she come to this country?"

"Oh, there are a lot of things in the way."

It sounded worse and worse. I said, "Look, Perry, this smells like a racket to me. It's the kind of thing a couple of shrewd operators cook up to take some hick for a ride. I'm surprised at you falling for it. How do you know there really is a dame like that in Europe? Anybody can send pictures——"

"You've got it all wrong," he said. "I've spoken to her."

"By phone? How do you know who's on the other end? You hear a dame's voice you never heard before. What makes you think it's hers?"

Again he didn't seem to want to talk, as if he had some secret to hide. But I guess he felt like getting things off his chest, too, or he wouldn't have opened up in the first place. And he had already told me enough so that if he didn't tell me more he'd sound like a dope.

So after hesitating even longer than before, he said, "Let's get this straight, George. This is no racket. I've seen and talked to her at the same time. And the things she talked about, no con man would know."

"You've seen and talked to her at the same time? You mean by TV? I don't believe it. They can't send TV to Europe."

"I didn't say it was TV. And I didn't say she lived in Europe."

"That's exactly what you did say. Or maybe you meant she lived on Mars?"

"No. She's an American."

"This makes less and less sense to me. Where did you meet her?"

He turned red, and squirmed all over the place. Finally he said, "Right here in my own laboratory."

"In your own laboratory! But you said you never met her in the flesh!"

"I didn't. Not really by TV either. The fact is—she isn't born yet."

I backed away from him. When he was a kid and blew up our kitchen, I didn't like it. When he wrote poetry, I was kind of ashamed and didn't want my pals to know he was my brother. Now, I was really scared. Everything he had been saying in the last ten minutes began to make sense, but a screwy kind of sense.

He saw how I felt. "Don't worry, George, I haven't gone crazy. Her time is 2973, more than a thousand years from now. The only way I've seen and talked to her is on a time-contact machine."

"Come again?"

"A kind of time machine. It can't send material objects back and forth across time, as far as I know, but it can send certain waves, especially the kind we use to transmit signals. That's how she and I could talk to each other and see each other."

"Perry, I think you ought to see a good doctor."

"It's a remarkable device," he said, paying no attention to how I was trying to help him. "She's the

one who first constructed it and contacted me. It's based on an extension of Einstein's equations

"You think you can explain so much," I said. "Okay, then, explain this. This dame isn't going to be born for a thousand years. And yet you tell me you're in love with her. What's the difference between you and somebody that's nuts?" I asked, as if anybody knew the answer.

He certainly didn't. In fact, he went ahead and proved to me that they were the same thing. Because for the next couple of weeks, the only thing he'd talk about, outside of equations I couldn't understand, was this dame. How smart she was, and how beautiful she was, and how wonderful she was in every way that a dame can be wonderful, and how she loved him. For a time he had me convinced that she actually existed.

"Compared with you," I said, "Romeo had a mild case."

"There are some quantities so great that you can't measure them," he said. "That will give you some idea of our love for each other."

There it went, the old poetry, cropping out in him just like before. And all the time I'd been thinking it was like measles, something that you get once and it builds up your resistance so you don't get it again, at least not bad. It just goes to show how wrong I could be.

"I don't think that's funny," he said.

"You're telling me. Look, Perry, you're smart enough to know what I'm thinking——"

"You still think I'm crazy."

"I got an open mind on the subject. Now, if you won't see a doctor—then how about letting me take a look at this dame, so I can convince myself?"

"No," he said. "I've considered doing that, and decided against it. Her voice and image come through for only about five minutes a day, sometimes less. And those minutes are very precious to us. We don't want any one else present, any one at all."

"Not even to convince me she actually exists?"

"You wouldn't be convinced anyway," he said very shrewdly. "No matter what I showed you, you'd still find a reason to call it a fraud."

He was right at that. It would take a lot of convincing to make me believe that a babe who wasn't going to get born for a thousand years was in love with him.

By this time, though, I was sure of one thing—there was something screwy going on in that laboratory of his. For five minutes a day he was watching some dame's picture, listening to her voice. If I had an idea what she was like, I might figure out where to go from there.

I began keeping an eye on Perry, dropping in at the laboratory to pay him visits. There was what looked like a ten-inch TV tube in one corner of his place, not housed in a cabinet, but lying on the table among dozens of other tubes and rheostats and meters and other things I didn't know about. Along the wall that led from this corner was a lot of stuff which Perry said was high voltage, and warned me not to touch.

I kept away. I wasn't trying to figure out how to get myself killed. All I wanted to know was when he saw this girl.

Finally I managed to pin the time down to between three and four in the afternoon. For five minutes every day, during that hour, he locked the door and didn't answer phone calls. I figured that if I dropped in then I might get a glimpse of her.

And that's what I did.

At first, when I knocked on the door, there was no answer. In a minute, though, I heard Perry's voice, but he wasn't talking to me. He was saying, "Darling," and he sounded kind of sick, which I figured was due to love. Come to think of it, he might have been scared a little. I heard him say, "Don't be afraid," and it was quiet for about fifteen seconds.

Then I heard a terrific crash, like lightning striking. The door shook, and I smelled something sharp, and the first thing I wanted to do was get out of that place. But I couldn't leave my brother in there.

I put my shoulder to the door and had no trouble at all. The explosion, or whatever it was, must have weakened the hinges. As the door crashed in, I looked for Perry.

There was no sign of him. But I could see his shoes, on the floor in front of that TV tube, where he must have been standing. No feet in them, though, just his socks. All the high-voltage stuff was smoking. The TV screen was all lit up, and on it I could see a girl's face, the same girl whose picture Perry had shown me. She was wearing one of those funny costumes, and she looked scared. It was a clear picture, and I could even see the way she gulped.



Then she broke out into a happy smile and, for about half a second, before the second explosion, I could see Perry on the screen. After that second explosion—even though it wasn't near as big as the first—that TV set was nothing but a mess of twisted junk, and there was no screen left to see anything on.

Perry liked to have everything just so, and he'd never think of going anyplace without his tie being knotted just right, and his socks matching, and so on. And here he'd traveled a thousand years into the future in bare feet. I felt kind of embarrassed for him.

Anyway, they were engaged, and now they must be married, so I guess she had slippers waiting for him. I'm just sorry I missed the wedding.

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