

Weights and Measures · *Robley Wilson, Jr.*

ONCE AFTER SHE had gone to bed early, because the day was unusually warm and she was exhausted by it, she dreamed a dream that disturbed her deeply. She dreamed she weighed the same number of pounds as the number of her lover's post office box. The number was 388.

"You all right?" her husband said. She was sitting glumly at the breakfast table, picking at a grapefruit half with the fluted spoon from her grandmother's silver service. "You want me to get you something?"

"No, no," she said. "I think I'm being pensive."

Her husband turned a page and snapped the morning paper, a gesture she imagined might be effective for breaking the neck of a small animal.

"Why do you do that?"

He studied her over the top of the page. "Get the creases out," he said. "It bother you?"

"No." But 388 pounds—that would get the creases out. Pop your buttons, too.

"You working today?"

"Not until afternoon. I have a shoot in Central Park."

"That's reassuring news."

"Don't spend the money," she said. "I've gained two pounds this week." Two-hundred-eighty to go.

Her husband smiled. "You always do what's necessary to get what you want," he said. "I count on that."

He finished his breakfast coffee, laid the paper beside the empty toast basket, and leaned across the corner of the table to kiss her goodbye.

"It's a scorcher," she said to him at the door. "The weather. Not the kiss."

"Just when I thought the heat wave would never break, it didn't," she wrote her lover. "So many fans are turning in this apartment, I'm sure one day it will simply take off like a 727 and fly to Brooklyn.

"Anyway, life is desperate here. 98 degrees—and that's at ground level—four days in a row. I live in a Turkish bath. Why don't I lose weight?"

"I have a shoot today—a rare event for me. Maybe I'll start saying

No, I'd rather not. Maybe I'll forget Yes. Who knows? I'm tired of modeling, and I'm no spring chicken; besides, I'll be too fat by then. Plump. I gain weight in my sleep.

"This afternoon I'll come home and force myself not to eat chocolate or marzipan or those little white jelly beans that look like mini-eggs. You must encourage me to starve myself.

"Maybe I'm an English bicycle that dreams of being an omnibus."

Saturday morning she woke up in an empty bed and was for a few confused moments alarmed by solitude. She sat up and stared at the television on the tall dresser; the set was on—she must have fallen asleep during the movie—but she couldn't hear it above the hum of the window fan. Atlantic City, she thought. He's gone to Atlantic City for the weekend.

She got up, switched off the television, made coffee, did her exercises, showered, phoned her mother. Over a second cup of coffee she sat at the dining room table and pondered doing her nails. The telephone rang once.

"It's me," said her lover's voice.

"Listen," she said into the phone, "if you hadn't appeared in the next ten minutes, I was going out to a movie."

She pressed the buzzer to unlock the lobby entrance. Then she opened the hall door and waited until she heard the elevator arrive.

"What kept you?" she said. "Did you stop at every floor and ask directions?"

She told him about her dream.

"That's plenty of pounds," he said, "three-eighty-eight. You could model tents for L.L. Bean."

"I've sworn off chocolate for good," she told him. "Nothing in excess. Nothing in moderation. Just nothing."

"What are you making for breakfast?"

"It's lunch."

"Brunch, then."

"I thought I'd try a soufflé. The last time you were here I offered you an omelet and then discovered I didn't have any eggs. You recall?"

"I do. Except I was the one who offered to make the omelet."

"The best promises are the ones we don't have to keep," she said. "What you don't know is that Mother called the next afternoon, and I told her about your visit. That is, I told her about not having eggs. She was shocked. Horrified. 'I didn't bring you up to be a poor hostess,' she said. 'How could you not have something so basic as eggs?'"

"I wasn't offended."

"I told her you weren't. 'Men. What do men know?' That's what she said to that."

She began separating the eggs for the soufflé. This was the difficult part; she had always thought so. She broke the first egg and let the yolk wobble in her hand, the white slip through her fingers into a measuring cup. She flopped the yolk into a bowl.

"I've never seen anybody do it that way," her lover said.

"It's the only way I know." She broke the second egg.

"There's something about it that's—I don't know—erotic."

She looked at him; he seemed hypnotized by the bright yolk she balanced in her hand. "Is it obscene?"

"No, no," he said.

She did the third egg. Now that he had obliged her to notice, the yolk warming in her palm and the white dribbling over and through her fingers seemed nearly sexual. She felt her cheeks hot. My goodness, she said to herself, am I actually blushing? A moment later her lover had circled in back of her to embrace her.

"You don't feel like three-hundred-eighty-eight pounds," he said. "Why not forget the eggs for a little while?"

"Have it your way."

She squirmed around for a kiss, holding her hands high to keep from getting him sticky. He kissed her a second time.

"Don't let me forget the recipe calls for four," she said.

Monday she slept late. Her husband shaved with the bathroom door open and sang tuneless songs over the hum of the electric razor. When he came back into the bedroom he sat heavily on the bed to put on his shoes and socks; she heard the shoehorn fall to the parquet floor twice. Before he left the apartment for the day he paused to turn on the dresser television—loud—and listened to the weather forecast. Heat. She hauled the pillow over her head and sighed.

"You all right?" he asked. "Want me to get you something?"

"I'm fine," she told him. "I'm too heavy to crawl out of bed." I don't mean that, she reminded herself; it isn't a joking matter.

When her husband had gone she got up for a cup of coffee, then came back to the bedroom to do her exercises. The telephone rang three different times. Once it was her mother. Once it was her closest friend. Finally it was her lover.

"You're lucky I answered," she said. "The phone's rung constantly; this time I said to myself: 'Am I never going to get through this morning?'"

"I miss you," he said. "What are we hatching for the weekend?"

"Oh, very clever," she said. "But I don't have to stand for humor; I know my rights."

"By the way," he said, "I persuaded the post office to change my box number."

"To what?" she said.

"A hundred-six."

She shrieked. "Did you say six or sixty?"

"Six."

"Oh, you darling," she said. "Do you have any idea how much I love you?"