

PRO

by Lydia Torrance

"That's not true!" I shouted. Olaf and his mama stared at me. The Eaton catalogue slid slowly off her lap. Olaf started to pick it up. "Don't do everything for her!" I hissed. "Mrs. Norgaard — Olaf loves me. It's not just my funny idea. He loves me! You can stop bullying him. He's plenty grown up to marry."

The shears were on the bed. I picked them up and waved them in her face. "It's time you stopped ruining people's lives. We're human beings who can act!" I stopped. I couldn't remember the other things Doc told me.

She leaped up and shoved Olaf out the door. "Run!" she cried. "She's a maniac! I should have known when she insisted on taking the skins off of potatoes. Maniac! And you wanted to marry her?" I head Olaf's big boots galumphing down the stairs, then her feet pitty-pattying behind. I heard them go down another flight, and then the fruit cellar door creaked open. The door bolted. They were hiding in the fruit cellar. Power surged through me. This was one battle I was going to win.

Slowly I started down the stairs. Doc came in from the yard. "What's going on? I heard all this screechin'."

"Oh Doc. Thank you," I said. "You don't know what you've done for me. I'm taking my life in my own hands. I'm acting!" I waved the shears at him.

He backed away. "You're acting a little peculiar, Lyddie, near as I can figger. Why don't you put down those scissors?"

"Oh, these? I forgot I even had them. Honest, Doc, aren't you pleased I'm not being walked on any more?"

"As long as you're not walking on others. You've got to strike a happy balance. Where's the Norgaards?" He peered around me to the stairs, as if they might be lying there, struck down.

"What do you think I am, an axe murderer? They're hiding in the fruit cellar. That mama of his — I just talked back to her and she's trying to convince him I'm crazy. I haven't done anything! You told me to talk back."

"Now Lyddie, I said you've got to stand up to folks. But if Olaf's too scared to stand up — well, then you've got to decide whether to put up with it or leave. You can't bully him too — that's being the same as his mama. You've got to strike a happy balance."

"What is this happy balance stuff? I feel so free now that I know how to deal with life, and you're telling me I have to strike a balance. You either tramp or get tromped on, there's no middle ground."

"Lyddie — I told you these things to help you form a positive philosophy of life. It — and many other aspects — must be carefully weighed, churned in the cauldron of your mind, sifted, then slowly acted upon. You can't just swallow it down like it's cod liver oil, and come out punching. It's not a cure-all, it's a thoughtfully arrived at stance."

"Stance! Now look here Doc — I know you've been to college but don't go long hair on me. I don't want no philosophy of life, just reasons for doing what I'm doing. And I've got one. Olaf loves me and if he don't stand up I'll make him stand up!" My shears started twitching again. Doc took another step back. "How do I get 'em out of the fruit cellar?"

"Don't you see you're in a cul de sac? Olaf is hopeless! He'll just keep vacillating, trying to appease you and Mama, placating one, then —"

"I don't know the half of what you're saying. You made good sense this morning, maybe you been in the sun too long. Olaf's got to realize he's got to break from his mama and have a mature relationship with a real woman."

"But you're dealing with a complex range of human frailties, a man's psyche is —"

"Baloney!" I yelled, waving the shears, and went toward the fruit cellar door. I'd had about enough of this fol-de-rol. Slowly I turned the cellar doorknob. Still bolted tight! I could hear her jabbering away at him in the far corner. Suddenly I felt very strange — like I was a big cat listening to two mice squeaking away. I was going to catch them anyway, so what were they fussing for? They couldn't get away. They were laughable.

Did I really love Olaf anymore? Or did I just long to triumph over Mrs. Norgaard? Had Olaf been swallowed up by my frustrations these past years? What was I really fighting for?

What had brought me, of all places, to a fruit cellar miles from anyone I really know, intent on someone else's conversation, my hand nervously longing to make use of these shears?

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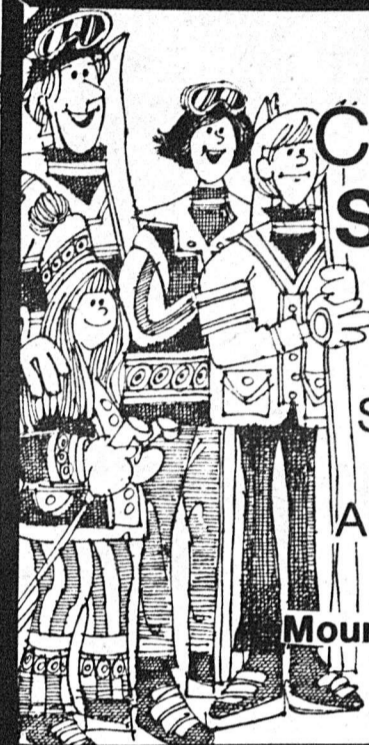
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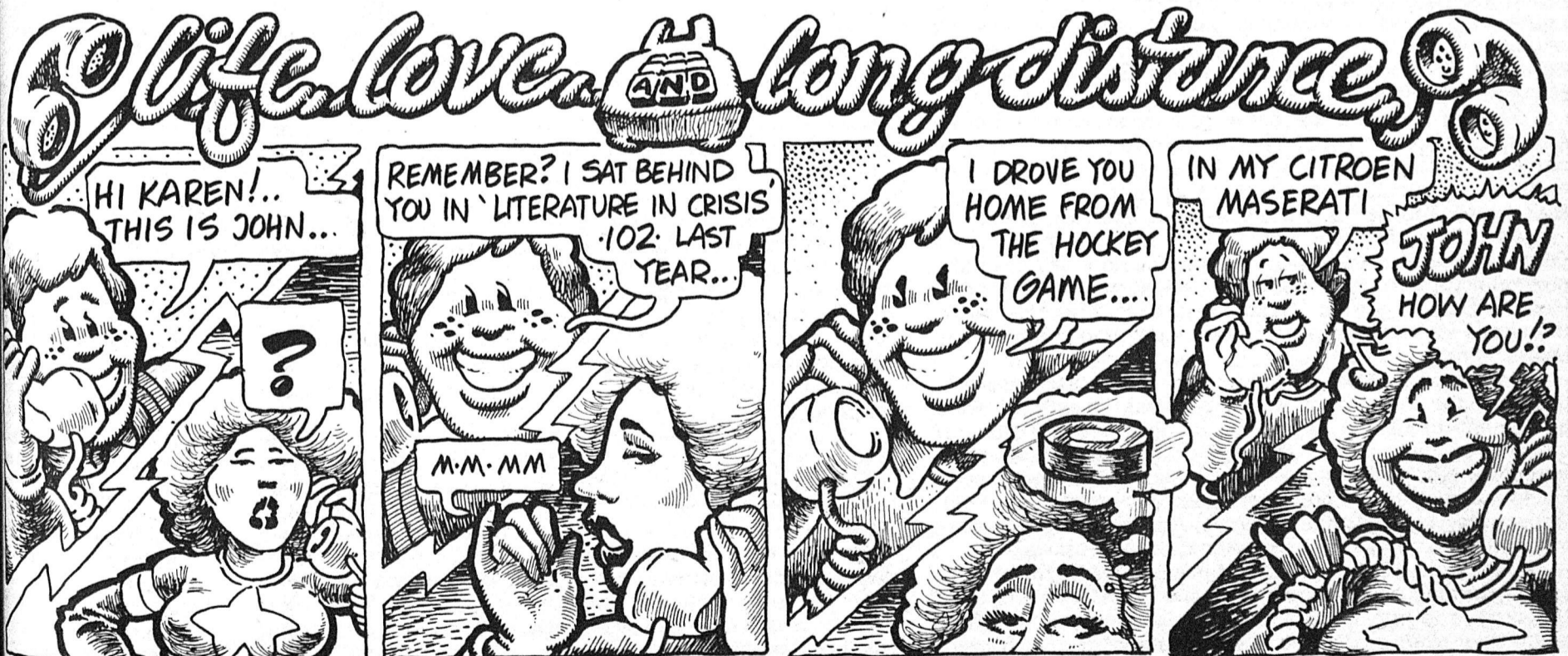
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