

PRO

by Lydia Torrance

That last year on Olaf's farm I finally achieved peace of mind so that I could accept the final break. "Why?" I had asked myself night after night: in those smouldering, humid nights of August, when the sheet stuck to my skin and it was so still I could hear the cars on the highway two miles away. And in the coldest winter evenings when the draft from the windowframes made me hug my blankets ever closer, "Why?" I would ask.

It was because I saw myself as a victim that I asked such a question. Olaf and his mother were doing this to me, was how I saw it, and there was nothing I could do about it. Why, I might have been there still today, with his mother hanging on 106 years old, and Olaf and me in our 80s, and me thinking "maybe she'll die next year," and doing all the chores for nothing but the sad privilege of hoping for something hopeless.

Then Olaf got a new hired man. He'd been a college professor once, so folks called him "Doc." His real name was Alister Gormless, but I think people tended to call him Alice for short was why he always said "Call me Doc."

I was shelling peas on the back stoop one sultry July morning about two months after he'd joined the farm, and he came out from fixing a loose hinge on a kitchen cupboard. We made a few comments on the weather, and Mrs. Norgaard's huge, bright zinnias (which I had to tend), and he looked off across the fields for a minute. I took a sip of my ice tea and wiped my brow.

Suddenly he looked at me. "When you going to do something about it Lyddie?"

"What do you mean?" I said feeling myself get irritated without even being sure what he was talking about. "Your situation with Olaf," he said gently. "Are you going to wait for him to do something? It'll be a wait." "What can I do?" I snapped, like a pod of peas. "That's what I thought," he said, clenching his pipe more tightly in his tobacco-stained teeth. "You think it's *their* fault and that you're helpless. That's the way so many people are, Lyddie — people aren't seaweed. You don't have to drift. That's what makes us humans — our moral sense, our ability to act."

"To act?" I asked puzzled. "Like down at the Orpheum? 'Double, double, toil and —'" "You see?" he said glaring. "You're trying to laugh it off. I know it's hard to be brave, but being brave avails you nought. Taking action is even harder, but until you realize you have only yourself to blame for this predicament you'll never get out of it. If you didn't let it happen, if you had a real sense of yourself you wouldn't be sitting

here at 22 being a hired girl in a pointless farce." And he walked away without looking back.

It was as if someone had poured my ice tea down my back. Suddenly I saw with the clarity of haruspex or scry. What were my high-school friends doing right now? They were married, or having careers or dead. In other words they were in charge of themselves. They weren't playing bit parts in other people's lives. How could I have held myself so cheaply? Act like a maid and you get treated like a maid. I tore off my apron and took the peas into the kitchen. My brain teemed with plans, with declarations, with refusals. I thought and thought.

That afternoon Olaf and his ma came home from the market. As soon as I could get him alone I whispered "Olaf, I've had enough. Either you tell your mother you want to marry me, or it's over." He looked at me startled. "What do you mean?" "Just that! I am not skulking around while your mother thinks she's got a hired girl. You either want to marry me or you don't. I'm a human with morals, and I can act!" He looked calmer. "What's that from then?" "That's not what I mean. Are you going to tell your ma or do I leave?" He could tell I was serious. "Don't leave, Lyddie! But — I don't know how to do it." "Then I'll tell But it ought to come from you! She'll think I'm making it up. Well? Which is it?" "O.K. I'll tell her."

He went up to her room. After a few minutes I followed to listen. It was pitiful. He couldn't bring himself to say anything, he was talking about marrying some nice girl some day and Mrs. Norgaard was hardly listening, as she checked gingham patterns in the Eatons catalogue. "Yes dear," she was saying absently. "That'll be real nice, and I'm sure you'll pick a fine girl." I burst into the room. "He's talking about me!" I said. She looked at me and the pins fell out of her opened mouth, her finger frozen on a pattern of pink entwined roses with yellow butterflies. It would have looked ridiculous on her. "He wants to marry me, Mrs. Norgaard. That's why I'm out here. Olaf and I are in love. We want to get married. He's afraid to tell you, when you'd obviously be pleased to have your son married and living normal." I couldn't go on. "She's crazy!" she whispered, clutching her throat. "No — no, ma. It's true. We do want to get married if you'd like it."

"Like it! How could I like such a stupid idea. You consider yourself ready for marriage? Why you're a boy! This was her idea wasn't it?" She turned on him and I could feel him backing down. I had to fight for him, had to show both of them I was strong as her.



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U.S. develops war satellites

WASHINGTON D.C. (ENS-UP) - The U.S. Pentagon has begun developing space war satellites in response to reports that the Soviet Union has resumed testing of "hunter-killer" satellites, a remote-controlled spacecraft which blows itself up, destroying its opponent in the process.

The defense department is presently working on a satellite which could sound an alarm if approached by an enemy satellite and could trigger a second alarm if attacked. The satellite could also fire a powerful blast at an adversary satellite if it came too close.

According to the Washington Post the Pentagon claims the Soviet "hunter-killer" satellite could wipe out the entire space communications system within a week.

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