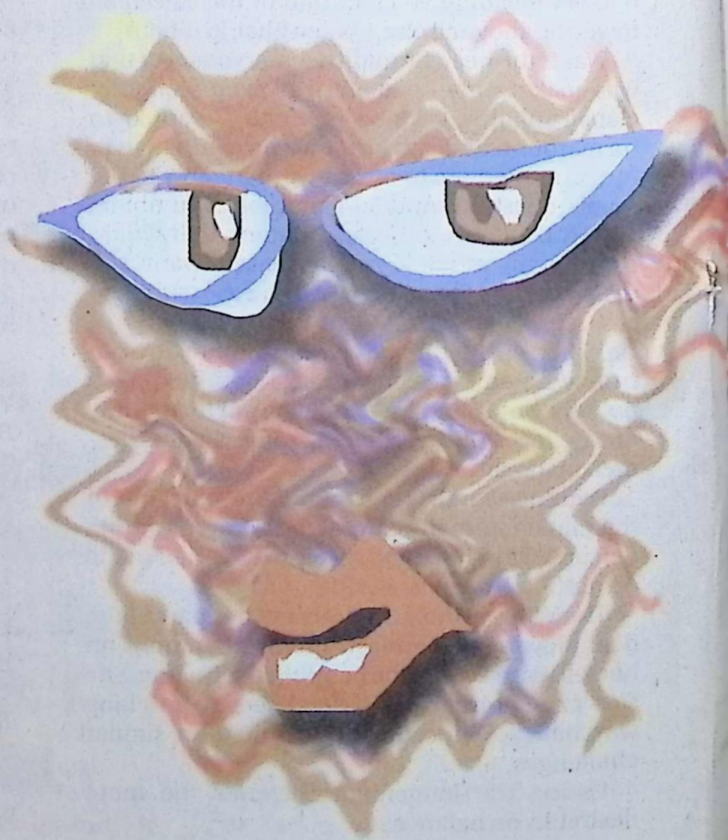
Thinking Out Loud

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Just when you think everything is starting to work out and things are finally going your way, Life exclaims, 'Hah, that's what you think!' and throws you into even more chaos and confusion. As the saying goes, Life isn't always fair but it sure has a sense of humour.

It all started when my Mom's childhood best friend moved back into town along with her daughter, Sarah, the current hate of my life. After much wailing (and bribery) on Mom's part, I selflessly agreed to let Sarah hang around me at school to prevent her from becoming a social outcast.

'What did you do?' Sarah's mother screeched, gaping at her daughter. Gone was her unkempt hair, baggy clothes and oversized men's shoes (oh, the horror!). I had transformed her with a head-to-toe makeover.

'I think it looks fabulous!' Sarah gushed, twirling around and beaming at me.

'Totally,' I replied proudly. Not only did I just single-handedly save Sarah's social life by imparting my vast knowledge and wisdom, I also performed a public service. Think of how many people would have been shocked and traumatised... their eyes violated from seeing Sarah as her old self.

I'm very mindful of the well being of my fellow citizens.

The problem with some people is that you try to help out by inviting them into your life and they just settle down as if they live there.

It was Friday and I was feeling euphoric at the thought of Sarah spending the weekend visiting her Grandparents. Hah hah, freedom!

Mom and I were doing our daily routine, stretched out on our mats, surrounded by scented candles and soothing music. Mom's a very successful therapist / yoga instructor and she insists on cleansing my aura before starting each day. Dad pretends to be in sales but he's actually a special agent working for the government. He usually manages to hurry off in the morning before Mom starts burning incense and distributing prayer beads. In case you're wondering, we're not like other families.

'Sarah called while you were in the shower,' said Mom in between her chanting.

Oh, no. Oh, no. I could feel my earlier euphoria and newly found spiritual enlightenment evaporating fast.

'Her mother and I had so much fun when we were your age. By the way, her trip's been cancelled since... what's wrong?' Mom sat up, alarmed by my dazed expression and frozen smile.

'Nothing, Mom. It's Sarah. She's just so...'

'Oh,' she interrupted, 'Don't you like her?'

No one likes a buttmunch, I thought, but noting the concern in her voice I said, 'Of course I do. She's just great.' Knowing Mom, if she found out how I really felt about Sarah, she would make us chant mantras together to connect on a higher level or insist on hypnosis in order