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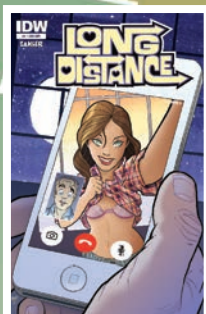
Carter and Lee have settled into a comfortable pattern. Text, travel, date, repeat. Everything's going great...



...except Lee just found out she won't be getting the new job she was planning on for next year.



REGULAR COVER
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--so Stephanie *doesn't* have the fellowship to offer anymore.

It was *never* a sure thing, but we really thought it was. And now it's *vapor*.

I'm *so* sorry, dear. I know you were looking to get out from Dr. Clark's thumb.

That job was my *lifeline*, Gram.



Nok Nok!

Who could *that* be?

Oh, when I got your text, I ordered us a *Bacornipion Fit* pizza from Pizza Booyah. I figured you might need it.



You're the *best*.

Well, you've got *more* than *one* lifeline, you know.



Oh, Lee--

LONG DISTANCE

by thom zahler

I think it's another one.

"Not all my trips involved flights, though."

chicago



Oh my God, Carter---! What are you doing here?



You said Stephanie lost the fellowship. You were *devastated*. There were *sniffles* in your text.

When I'm upset, I use *emoji*.

I *hate* those things. I never know how to read them. You have a *doctorate*, just use *your words*.



Anyway, I *had* to be here for you. So I got in the car and *drove*.

I didn't really have a plan past that. I guess I figured, I don't know, maybe you need *ice cream* or a *drink* or *long walk* or something?



You're a *rock star*, you know that? And, yes, a *walk* would be *great*.



Let me get my *coat*.

You should get an *umbrella*, too.

Yeah, I *picked up* on that.



Sorry to drop by *unnannounced* like this. I haven't had time to get a *hotel* yet, but I will--



You can stay *here*, Carter.

Thank you, Mrs. Smith.

Call me *Gram*.



--so her *funding* was cut?

It's one of the joys of working in a *government contract-related world*.

And by "joy," I mean the *opposite* of that.



I *should* be able to work for Dr. Clark again, but unfortunately, that means working for Dr. Clark again. Which is *soul-crushing*.

I *love* science. It's *fun* to me. And he's just an *event horizon* for fun.



You see, because fun can't escape a *black hole*, like light--

I understood the *science* part. Your *simile* skills could use some work, though. *Tim* could give you a hand.

I'll keep that *in mind*.



So, do you *have* to work for him? I know they've cut the space program, but he *can't* be the only *science-y job* in the country.

No, he's *not*. But I looked around on the posting boards today. There's not much in *this* area except for Clark.



And *outside* the area? You know, *Nasa Glenn* is in Cleveland, which I gently mention because it's in *Ohio*.

That's an interesting thought--



--but there are some reasons I'd like to stay *here* for now.