

PRO

by Lydia Torrance

They were cute, even I had to admit that. Almost cuddly. Portleigh's photograph was in colour and showed them in a flattering light. "Hmmpf," I said, handing the snapshot back.

"Aren't they cute?"

"Yeah, they're cute. But the ain't got nothing to do with me." I settled firmly in my seat.

"But—wouldn't you like to take care of them? I know you'd be good with them. The way you were with Mrs. Norgaard I know you're loving and patient—"

"Are there others?"

"What do you mean? Isn't two enough?"

"I'd say not having any's enough. But if you have two there's probably more."

"Well—"

"I might have known. Do any of them have mothers?"

"No. They were shot when these were captured. I've got some others being boarded at the County Zoo. There's five different kinds."

"Starting your own zoo huh? Let me see that again." I snatched them from his hand and looked at the little kangeroos dressed in Prussian blue velvet rompers with white ruffled blouses. Oh, they were cute alright. But I didn't fancy being a cage cleaner.

"I know you'd be good with them. We could have a wonderful place where children can play with the animals and learn to be one with Nature. Not an alienated creature skulking in a concrete jungle, but roaming the hills with the hartebeest, elan and stoat—"

"You mean—"

"Now don't get worried. The stoat aren't available yet. I'm talking a hypothetical, see? We could restore this land its long lost innocence. Dance back the buffalo. Y'know?"

I had to admit I was getting confused. What did Portleigh want out of life? He could never have written an essay for my English teacher on the subject. His life had no topic sentence. He loved the great books and I could see he was really excited by ideas. But then he spent day after day entertaining the dusty, faded housewives of the prairies. And now he loved animals, even dangerous ones, and wanted some kind of game farm. No, there were too many dangling modifiers.

"You're nice, Portleigh, but a little peculiar. I can see right now I can't afford to tie myself to another man who's following a rising star. I'll just ride with you, that's all."

"You mean—"

"Now stop that! I'm tired of you rolling your eyes at me and being so dramatic."

"But Lyddie, it's you that keeps saying 'you mean'—I never said it before today."

"And don't be so petty! I'll pay for gas if that is what's bothering you, but this trip is too long for accusations. I have a destiny to fulfill too, and if it involves marriage it's not going to be to Noah's Ark."

"I just show you some darling animals and you make like it's a contract! If I'd showed you kittens or collie dogs would you have bristled all over too?"

I composed myself for a calm, reasoning approach. "It's not the same at all so don't be stupid. Baby kangeroos dressed up in sateen or whatever—that's not just a couple of mutts around the barn, buster, and you know it! Now get back in the car. We're losing precious time. If we don't get off these prairies my life isn't ever going to start. What have I accomplished since high school? I've waited on table for a bunch of galoots and gumptionless thugs, and sat on a farm for five years getting calluses from shelling peas. And now—I'm on the Grand Tour!" I thumped my *Godey's Lady's Book* which showed some fancy college girl alighting from a luxury liner at Marseilles. "The Grand Tour! Part of every young lady's education!" I smiled and snorted, and then I howled with laughter, and then was shaken with sobs. I cried and cried.

Portleigh said "There, there, don't cry," and tried to pat my head. But everytime he almost touched me he thought better of it and pulled back his hand. He kept turning back from the windshield to look at me, and then back to the road. He looked like a neon sign blinking on and off. I let him worry.

The same scehery circled past endlessly like we were on a merry-go-round. A house and a silo and out-buildings. Then nothing. Then a little building in the distance—a shack? Then nothing. A house...The moon rose fat and sullen: I knew just how it felt.

Portleigh cleared his throat. "Lyddie?" he said hesitantly. "Want to stop for supper?" I sat up. We were coming to a town: Veedersberg. "It's almost as big as Landfill," he smiled sheepishly. He was trying to be funny and make up.

"I'm sorry, Portleigh. I didn't mean to act so high-strung."

"Oh that's alright. You've been through a lot and all these days on the road. I didn't mean to rile you with that photograph. I've come to really respect you. These other ladies—well, you understand I'm not doing it for myself, I'm doing it for world literacy. You must give a helping hand to the halt and lame. And some of them do buy books."

"I'm sure they do," I smiled at him. We did understand each other and I liked him a lot, except for these animal tendencies.

We pulled into a clean truckstop, and as we parked and got out a funny-looking man came toward us with some clear purpose.

Students want too much

TORONTO (CUP) - Students have overly high job expectations, according to a provincial survey of employers conducted last summer. This summer, the provincial government is spending \$200,000 on an advertising campaign to lower those expectations.

The cost of the campaign, designed to re-direct student expectations to job finding, is equal to about 10 per cent of the increase in provincial funding for summer jobs slated for this year. Besides advising students to apply for jobs early and often, the radio stations across the province, stress that students shouldn't be too picky about what they'll accept.



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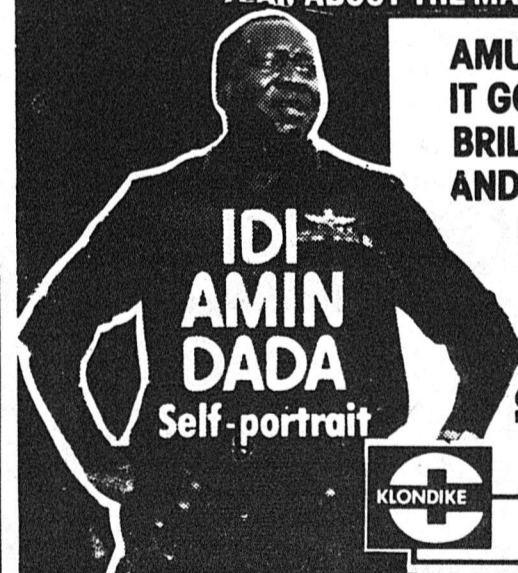
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