

# PRO

by Lydia Torrance

"That your ma?" said the salesman, giving me a closer look. Since I wasn't the lady of the house or the daughter from college, who could I be? And now Mrs. Norgaard's voice from the fruit cellar — and getting closer.

"That's the — lady of the house," I answered. Why was I whispering? "I doubt she'll wany any of your books. Maybe you should go."

"Do you work here? You act scared," he said, searching my face.

"I'm not working here much longer," I said. "But I'm not sure what I want to do next."

Mrs. Norgaard entered the living room. "Who's this?" she barked. "He's a book-salesman," I said. "Lessen you want some classical books, he's leaving now. I already told him I didn't want any."

"What are they?" she glared, peering in his case. "Just stories?"

"Ma'am, the greatest thoughts of western man. Plato, Aristotle, Ruskin, General Lew Wallace. *The Republic, The Prince, Sartor Resartus, Ben-Hur* —"

"Just like I figures, stories! The only reading I need is the Farmers' Alamanc, my daily devotions, and the Holy Word, my Bible. What you've got is words, pure words. Lyddie, you can show him the door." And she turned, and went upstairs shaking her head.

"Whew!" he whispered. "She's a fierce one! I see why you're leaving."

"And I can't leave too soon to suit me."

He turned back from doing up his satchel. "Want to go now?" His eyes were crinkling again.

"What do you mean — now?"

He grabbed me by the arms and I suddenly felt a rush of warmth. "Come with me now! Go on and pack. How much stuff have you got? Heck, I've got a big car, and I'm travelin' everywhere. There's a lot of choosin' for you — anywhere you want."

I stared at him, and then I wasn't even seeing him anymore. He had come to my rescue. He didn't even know my plight and yet he was offering a real solution, not just a new philosophy of life. Suddenly all was clear. "Why thank you very much, you're most kind."

Who said that? Why it was me. I had never been so clam.

"I'll be just a minute."

He smiled broadly, as if to say 'Isn't life the darndest thing?' I strode out of the room and mounted the stairs.

What should I pack? Now all my objects seemed tainted with the years of disillusion and hopelessness. That pretty little pin dish of carnival glass: my mother had given me that when I was sixteen. But in times to come I knew that whenever I looked at it I'd think only of this ugly little dresser, those months of fetching and carrying, the hot exhausting summers, the sun rising and setting incessantly, and for no purpose. Olaf's sweet words, his tenderness which now I saw as a crippling weakness came back to me, and I felt the sweat and dust on my neck.

I had to take something. I got out my blouses and skirts, my dresses. My Elinor Glyn — I couldn't leave her behind for Mrs. Norgaard to discover. All were flung into my maroon valise, and then I was through.

"Lyddie? What's all that slamming of drawers? Spring cleaning was some time ago."

"I know Mrs. Norgaard. I'm leaving."

"Leaving?" I guess you don't remember the carrots haven't been dug up today yet. And the eiderdowns have to be aired. You'll have to put off visiting for another day."

I gazed at her for a moment. She would never understand why I had come here, how could she understand why I was leaving? I turned away and went downstairs.

The salesman was fingering the antique paperweight on the desk.

"I'm ready now," I said. He straightened. "You're a fast packer. Women usually can't saddle up that fast, have to ponder every little thing."

I tried to smile and nodded and went out to the porch.

"Olaf, Olaf," I heard her calling. She sounded irritated to me, but in the usual way, like she was at the leave inconvenience. Not as if something unusual was happening.

The car seat burned but I pressed myself against it. Somehow the pain was cleansing. The salesman hopped in behind the steering wheel. "Now before we go any farther let's learn each other's names. I'm Portleigh Williston Torrance, and I'm mighty pleased to be having such fine company." He stuck out his hand. It was covered with fine blond hairs.

"I'm Lydia —" was all I could get out. My throat was so parched. He shook my hand like a preacher, then busily started the car.

"Here we go for a ride!" he yelled. We drove away. The farm receded through the dust like harmless toy building blocks. No one came out of it. "Well now! Where to you want to be set down?"

"I don't know yet. I just want to ride awhile. You said you'd be going lots of different places."

"That's true, that's very true. You just sit back and admire the scenery. Now the first big town we'll come to is Virago. Ever been there?"

"No. Well maybe once as a child."

"Hasn't changed a bit. There's a lot going on there. You ever been to college?"

"No." "They have a secretary college there and a regular kind too. You look like a college girl. I mean you don't want to be a maid or sling hash all your life, I reckon. All those books I carry around — now I went to college but it was a business type. I've been reading all these books and there's a lot to them you never hear about. These older writers — like Callimachus and Eumenides. Now I'm an optimist myself, but you're lying in a hotel by yourself one night and you suddenly come up against their tragic vision of life — well there's really something to it. I don't mean to upset you though, I can talk about something else."

"No, that's O.K. I like to read a lot too. You read Elinor Glyn?"

"Let's see ... Was she a Greek poetess?"

"No, she's still alive."

"Haven't read anything modern in a while. I'm reading Marcus Aurelius right now."

I settled back in my seat and admired the grain elevators. This Portleigh was really bright, and he was doing something with his brightness. I'd never talked to anyone like that before. This trip was going to be fun. "Marcus who? Tell me about him."



## CINEMA

information after hours: 432-4764

Fri, Sat, Sun, Feb. 25, 26, 27

Paramount Pictures presents  
a ROBERT EVANS -  
SIDNEY BECKERMAN production  
a JOHN SCHLESINGER film  
**LAURENCE OLIVIER**  
**WILLIAM DEVANE**  
**DUSTIN HOFFMAN**  
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Adult Not Suitable For Children  
WARNING Violence and coarse language

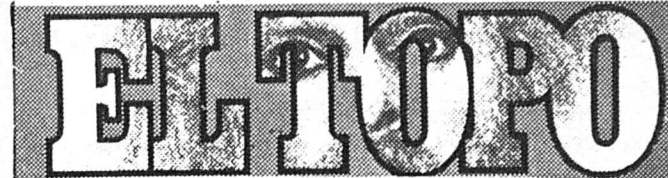
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JAZZ

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SUB Theatre

Friday, Feb. 25 12 Noon

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DR. CLIFFORD WILSON, noted Australian archaeologist, speaks out on Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*, and the accuracy of the Old Testament.

SUB Theatre.

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For further information check the Co-Rec Office located in Men's Intramural office.

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