

Canada, Canada O Canada, Canada
Short Stories

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Michel M.J. Shore



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Pour tous les pays

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O CANADA, CANADA
SHORT STORIES

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Michel M.J. SHORE

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By The Same Author

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For Barbara

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents: Sigmond Shore and Dr. Thérèse Lena Allen-Shore, who taught me to cherish Canada.

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Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall
meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment
Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed nor
Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come
from the ends of the earth!

Rudyard Kipling

OVERTURE

A background of images, conversations, melodies and reflections blended and collided, childhood, high school, and university days all into one prior to Michel Sigmond's stories unfolding.

In the large, gilded mirror of the old, high ceilinged Westmount apartment into which his grandparents had moved recently with their Louis XVI salon furniture and paintings, Michel Sigmond studied the reflections of the pudgy little boy and the white haired man whose penetrating brown eyes behind wire-framed spectacles seemed to him so very wise.

"The person who is given the Nobel Peace Prize is simply someone who wants to help people, even when it is very difficult to do so. When he meets someone who is crying he tries to make him smile. When he finds that someone is treated cruelly he does all he can so that kindness will return. This good person, my little grandson, tries to stop fights and prevent them from growing bigger. He does all this to keep people from hurting themselves. You see, dear child, he believes in a dream of a better tomorrow, but this is important — he works to make the dream come true. It is not easy. But my big little boy, nothing is easy. I believe that it is harder not to do anything than try to do absolutely everything, when you believe deep in your heart that you have no choice but to care."

After his grandfather finished telling him about the prize, Michel sat still in the large Aubisson armchair with its colossal pastoral tapestry, watching his grandfather. Then he got up and walked to the large middle bay window. He saw flaming red and glittering yellow leaves on the tree branches, which he thought he could touch were the glass pane to vanish.

* * *

Michel thought of the principal, who had called him into his office. He was a tall grey haired man with a large frame dressed in a heavy tweed jacket and wool tie. His eyes seemed sympathetic until he began to speak, and then they darted out the window.

"I understand that you have been reading books which are not part of the curriculum," he said. "And it has been brought to my attention that some of these books are soft cover books. I believe that what we teach you, or I should say attempt to teach you, is all that you should be concerned with. And I am going to state this in no uncertain terms. I forbid you to read or talk about books or things in books that are not taught in school. They are neither important nor relevant to your education."

"But that's not true, sir."

"What's not true? What are you saying?"

"Well, for instance, the English language history book used here says that Napoleon was a tyrant comparable to Hitler. But I have read elsewhere that he was a liberator, a hero. The truth is perhaps neither of these. But the only way I can learn it is by seeing Napoleon from as many points of view as possible. I do know that Napoleon did not create a Holocaust. Therefore he was not a Hitler. He may have been despotic, but in some ways he was a hero."

"That is irrelevant and unimportant. What is important is that battles were fought at certain dates, the leadership of

countries changed hands, political systems were transformed."

"Yes, but it's also important to know what happened to the people of those countries, how they lived, what they thought, whether they had more or less food and more or less freedom."

"This is a high school and we teach what we consider important. Now, from today on, you will not speak of anything that is not in our textbooks."

"But, there is a whole world of so many things not in them," Michel said.

"If you want to remain here then you will do as I say. Perhaps this school is not the place for you. Not everyone has to have a higher education. The facts are comprised of what is taught in your textbooks. And that is how it will be in university. Perhaps you shouldn't go on. . ."

Michel felt crushed. He fought back tears. He said nothing further. He believed that it would not be as the principal said in university. He would be encouraged to read every book he could find on subjects in which he was interested; and he would be encouraged to do research. Images and ideas from Michel's reading spun about in his mind: the Plains of Abraham, where both Wolfe and Montcalm were killed, neither knowing what history would make of them, the Indians, Napoleon, Jews, Christians, Protestants, Catholics, the English and the French. All these had to be seen from their own perspective but understood from ours, so that no other person would be a stranger to us — especially if he or she lived in our own city and country. The colour and excitement which Michel found in Canadian history was absent from the grade ten text he had studied the year before. And there had been no excerpts from the French diaries or journals in a French language text on the same subject which he had happened to find. It did not so much as mention these materials. Neither did it explain the difficult conditions and loneliness of the new land, nor the challenges which the explorers, missionaries, soldiers of fortune and pio-

neers had felt confronted them. Why had that book not tried to convey the exuberance with which names were given to mountains, lakes and rivers? Why was François-Xavier Garneau's Histoire du Canada not cited after the discussion on Lord Durham's Report? Garneau had responded to Durham's stinging allegation that the French in the New World had neither culture nor history. Michel could not understand why the spirit of a people could not be transmitted; why the history of Canada as a whole had been ignored, why so little was known about the West; why regionalism was permitted to prevail. He knew that education was left to the provinces, but citizenship was in the sphere of the federal government, and he did not understand why the two could not be brought together.

Why could one not be taught in both French and English from the early grades? Just because a student was Jewish or Protestant, why should he be excluded from a French education? And why did a Catholic boy or girl have to pay if he wanted to go to a school that was English but for Protestants? Just as the books were divided, Michel thought, the schools were divided, the people were divided. He thought the situation would change; it had to change. In his home, Michel always heard both languages. His mother even wrote novels, poetry and composed songs in both languages. And besides, what was so unusual about speaking two languages? Michel had spoken Polish for as long as he could remember, and he had heard his parents speak German, and he attended Hebrew school after classes.

Michel's father, a former diplomat, always spoke of his past travels, of the excitement of meeting people in their surroundings. He loved Canada. "What a blessed country Canada is," he would say, "a country of strength, of plenty and of freedom." Michel thought that if people really cared enough to go beyond what they knew and reached to what they didn't know, to whom they didn't know, they would rediscover Canada. The age of exploration was not over, so much remained uncharted,

waiting to be discovered. He must go to university, he would not permit the principal to sabotage his hopes.

As he sat in the principal's office, Michel did not know whether it was evidence of strength or weakness that he could block out what the man was saying while nodding at what would seem the most appropriate places. After his discourse on secondary education was finished, the principal stopped. Michel said, "Don't worry sir, I will never again mention in class what I have read or learned outside this school." And until his grade eleven sentence was served, he never did.

* * *

In 1966, as a Canadian representative to the University of Peace, speaking to the 1958 Nobel Prize Laureate, Père Dominique Pire, during the summer session in Tihange-Lez-Huy, Belgium, Michel recalled his first hearing about the prize Père Pire had won while a collage of leaves in the Canadian autumn drifted past his grandparents' window.

It was against this backdrop that Père Pire delivered his first lecture. "To listen well before we speak well, and then to relate well; this is to understand that the other also has a message to give; and we also have a message to be given. There are no magic formulae, the road to peace is not short, simple or without obstacles. A long and difficult path lies ahead. The destination of peace can only be reached if men will be ready to lay aside their preconceived mistrust. . ."

". . . And the Anne Frank village in Wuppertal, mon cher Michel, is my sixth. It was founded in May 1959. I built it with the help of the Allies in memory of the little Jewish girl who died at the age of fourteen in a village of hell called Bergen Belsen. Each village, each stone, each house may have been difficult to realize, but that did not compare with the opposition with which I was personally confronted. Neighbouring towns would send

me anonymous messages in the name of the collectivity. These would be relayed to me via an obliging mayor, who would apologetically tell me it was the will of the people whom he represented. Could I guarantee that the new arrivals would not take his townsmen's jobs, or that they would be cared for when ill? Who would attend to them? And, who would cover the costs for their care? Moreover, who would pay for their coffins? And, even if this were all done, the mayors would say, their villages did not want an influx of hardcore useless, stateless vagabonds, not even a fraction of the one hundred and sixty-one thousand displaced persons, the human surplus of Europe, to disturb its peaceful way of life. People wanted to forget the war and I was forcing reminders on them. O, there were exceptions; at times, the exceptions were overwhelming. Volunteers came forth — volunteers who wanted to give their hands, hearts and a part of what little fortunes they had to assist the homeless to rediscover life and human dignity. Imagine, Michel, what sort of commotion approximately twenty families, or one hundred and fifty people, can bring about. But it was those exceptions, cher Michel, who were able to win over the xenophobes. Slowly the despairing, rusted souls were polished to resume the lustre of life."

Michel would long remember this afternoon, one of several occasions on which he was asked to join Père Pire in private discussion.

The grey day could not decide whether to rain or shine. It was as if the clouds were playing dice with the sun and neither could sustain a streak of luck. Strong winds moved the large, stained clouds each time the sun found a small but welcome opening. Although the long range forecast for the south of Belgium was for sunshine and warmer temperatures, clearly patience was needed to see an improvement in the weather after almost a week of cold, dull, windy days. The internal serenity of the University of Peace contrasted sharply with external physical

forces.

Against a background of greens, as breezes kissed the Belgian countryside Père Pire sat outdoors in a beige canvas chair. He was tall for a European; if he was not six feet, he seemed so, even sitting with his head slightly bent. His pale face and white collar were in sharp contrast to his black shirt and suit. The tired, penetrating eyes, which had fought insomnia for years, bore witness to the procession they had seen of people everywhere crying out for help. The humility with which he spoke to Michel of his impressions was clearly different from the audacity with which he was known to confront political leaders, bureaucratic mandarins and wealthy benefactors on behalf of those he found it imperative to shelter and restore to dignity. When representatives of the world's leading refugee organizations and states told him that it was impossible to do anything with the lists of refugees in the D.P. Camps, he said in that case he would do everything. He went to the heaps and hovels of the camps to give encouragement to those who needed the "will to live" in order to be eligible for life. After all, the rules of contemporary selection are most precise.

"Michel, the apathy of the refugees is not inherent; it is acquired," he said. "It can melt with human warmth. It is true, Michel, that an iron curtain exists in the East but we too have a curtain, a transparent new nylon barrier of regulatory mania and national egoism. We have created a hodge-podge of rules which the world, by and large, hopes will not evaporate."

"But Père Pire, what about the aimlessness of the refugees?"

"In the world of the camps, I met vagabonds by the thousands, sitting, turning in circles, prisoners of discouragement and uselessness. They were free but the world was hostile to them. Rootlessness leads to the worst of miseries that can touch a human being: no longer is he able to believe in fraternal love. For this reason, so many refugees are bitter. They drink to drown their sorrow, even become filthy and unkempt. It is not

laziness; it is the tarnishing of the spirit. They lose sight of reality, dream of a lost homeland or a future impossible to reach. Someone once said they are like people who sit at a station with their suitcases and wait for a train which will never arrive. They have memories they hold on to, like their luggage. They live in the past instead of using the present to rebuild their lives. But they cannot rebuild their lives alone. They need self-confidence. A lodging and a salary are not enough. It is only when they feel human devotion."

The case histories of one hundred refugees had been told to the participants, cases of people with tuberculosis, fathers, mothers with helpless children. But these were only a small part of the multitudes Père Pire tried to help. The actual numbers seemed to evade him and the contributions from donors, organizations and states, and from old age pensioners who gave of their savings, and from children who brought their allowances to the Père Pire Organization Centers of "Hearts Open to Europe" were never sufficient.

"Père, what is it that gave you such courage against such odds?"

"Not such odds, Michel. The one common denominator is man. I believe Pasteur expressed it best. 'One does not ask someone engulfed in sadness: what is your nationality, or what is your religion? One simply acknowledges you are suffering and that is enough; that is enough for me and I would comfort you.' My dear Michel, religion is a principle of love and not of caste. What gives me courage, Michel, is that the world is inhabited by men. I remember a discussion I had with your mother in Montreal in which I asked her what was the central theme in her writing. She answered, 'I want to find man in man.' Michel, we need an army, a world of men who want to discover, no, rediscover, man in man. There is a picture on my desk, in my small office in Huy, of Anne Frank. Behind her, I see all those who suffered and those who still suffer. Her face

her courage, her life inspire me, allow me to continue in difficult moments."

Thick logs crackled and sparked with heat. Michel Sigmond's glasses reflected the contrasting shadows and flickering light in the red brick fireplace which occupied one wall of the wood-panelled, book-lined den. An occasional burst of flame illuminated the icy-coloured, metal-framed Ted Harrison poster in which a blizzard's strength swept Eskimos trekking in a snowbound wilderness.

The heat of the burning wood permeated the room and the warmth of the glowing embers irradiated Michel's skin. Canadian December winds caused the fan above the oven in the kitchen to turn. Its propeller-like whirr harmonized rhythmically with the creaking of the window frames responding to the Arctic blasts outside. A faint scent of charcoal wafted up the stairs to the bedrooms of two small children sleeping in Ottawa while Soviet tanks kept Poland and other parts of the world awake.

Through the window to the left of the armchair in which he was sitting, Michel gazed at the white expanse which provided a backdrop for a lone, bare, buffeted maple and a Russian olive tree whose forebearing seeds were no strangers to deserts of snow and ice. His companion, friend, lover and wife sat in the armchair next to him. Michel's thoughts drifted from the symphonic melodies of André Gagnon's Neige to Nanette and the University of Peace, his story which he was concluding. He was weighing alternative endings when, suddenly, the final scene appeared to him.

It was August, the last day of the University of Peace session. Nanette was saying, "Michel, will I ever see you again?" Michel took out two of her letters from his University of Peace envelope and read "Will the peace of which we dream ever come? Will the ideas of Père Pire, in which we so ardently

believe, ever become an actual part of this world?"

Nanette was tall for a woman and dark with long black hair. Her dreamy brown eyes which suggested the alluring Portuguese beaches where she often sat and thought belied the quickness of her outward movements. Michel admired her, the sense of harmony she projected, as if she had come to terms with her life and reality. Although she and her family had been persecuted under the Salazar regime, she had never lost faith in the possibility of a better world. The University of Peace represented a Shangri-la for her; it nourished, satiated, and even intoxicated her starved inner being. For the first time her mere existence became a whole life. The metamorphosis was as complete as it was sudden.

While on a university exchange program, several months after the session, she had written:

"Dear Michel, I have come to the conclusion that dreamers are practical. They allow me and others like me to survive. After the structures and stratagems of repression have disintegrated with time, the storm of history produces a miraculous rainbow. A chapter concludes, a new chapter begins. The dreams live on. They cannot be shot, bombed or gassed. They are beyond the dimensions of time and space; and no weapon has yet neutralized them.

"Michel, 'they' can chain, imprison and exile men but not their dreams. That does not mean that 'they' will not try; but the dreams will live on, spark the thoughts of others in a continuous cycle. I believe that dreams such as ours can never be stamped out for as long as one breath remains in this universe; but even if they could be, the Divine Breath would bring them back into being. So you see, dear Michel, what we hope for is more practical, more concrete, more plausible than any fortress or arsenal. Nothing can destroy our dreams except our own disillusionment and cynicism, which must not be allowed to take root in moments of pain and mental exhaustion. Enemies of

dreams try to make them seem intangible. They would have us believe only in the number and strength of their physical weapons. At times their logic is difficult to withstand, but living with ourselves, our true selves, would be more difficult if we gave in.

"You know, Michel, I ask God each day that He help me fight disillusionment and cynicism. As long as I am given the strength to hope, I will never lose my love of life and joy in living; and I also pray for these.

I fear so much for you, you are so sensitive. Do not be sad, do not allow yourself to be hurt. Our hopes and ideals may take time to be realized but the victory is inevitable."

The Canadian winds howled and whistled through Michel's thoughts as he recalled a session of the University of Peace.

* * *

Ten years had passed. Michel walked along the long, wide corridors beamed with oak across the ceilings. As he toured the library and the classrooms in which he had become drunk on classical learning, he thought of how he had been begrudged its intoxicating effect in high school. Collège Notre-Dame occupied a special place in his mind, and his return to it in the spring of 1979 brought back four years of glowing memories.

After having completed the "conventum" tour of former students who had joined the alumni a decade ago, he asked the Directeur des Études if he could visit the classrooms a while longer. Frère Berthiaume, of course, complied. He seemed to sense that Michel had some private needs. Michel walked towards the room where Frère Roy had taught, opened the door. The lights were on. He sat down and closed his eyes.

Frère Roy had never stopped teaching. His lectures seemed still to be going on in the empty hall. Although fourteen years had gone by since Michel had attended his first year belles-lettres class in French literature, Michel could see the short,

slight, balding, energetic, nimble monk gesturing on the platform. He was exploding with enthusiasm. "Voilà vous voyez. . . Julien's character is a study in contrasts, in moods, in stages. These blend together and become one and indivisible. Stendhal does not merely create scenes in Le Rouge et le Noir, they come into being by force of necessity. Julien's sensuality, ambition, lust for power and wealth provide the impetus, the colour and the props with which Stendhal cannot do otherwise but comply with the inexorable. He gives free reign to the strength of emotions which shape events. The whirlwind of youth is never arrested; it is never hobbled by the chains of language but is allowed to whirl free in words which leap off the pages. They only seem earthbound at the end of the book, where the verdict is laid down and reflection replaces spontaneity. Stendhal, however, does not condemn, he merely presents a collage of life's images, the procession of Julien's emotions, concretized by his memories of indifference to love, searing hatred, vengeance, depression, serenity in the alternating thoughts of Mme de Rénal and Mathilde, which are terminated by the conclusive movement, the final visual take, of the guillotine. Ah, but art goes on, Stendhal has only borrowed for his protagonist feelings which will be used in varying shades of intensity by other authors exploiting the same timeless themes again and again; sometimes even more effectively, as in Flaubert.

"Flaubert is a Leonardo da Vinci; he dissects the scene and puts it together again, charting the spiritual anatomy of Madame Bovary and regulating each of her emotions as if on a thermostat. Madame Bovary can be analyzed in a series of stills, in slow motion; yet every single frame, even if it is stopped, leads to the next, because of its inner momentum, its particular change."

Whose emotions was he talking about? Were they only Madame Bovary's, or were Frère Roy's intertwined with them? He

taught with passion, and when two years later Michel took his course in existentialist literature, he found himself wholly entering, rather than merely analyzing, the works in the curriculum.

Another of Frère Roy's former students had come into the room and joined Michel.

"Oui, François, je viens. Tu sais François," Michel turned to him: "I can see him as clearly as when he taught us the first day. He will always go on teaching me. The cancer which ravaged his body and took him away could not take away his lectures. He will continue giving them for as long as anyone who has taken his class lives."

"Tu as bien raison, Michel. I knew him also as president of the Cercle Littéraire. He left his mark on the Province of Quebec, by presenting French Canadian literature in the same way. Every novel became a play to the senses, every poem an encounter with the poet."

"We had better go and join the others, François." François had become his closest friend during their student days at Notre-Dame, and he knew Michel well. "I suspect you also want to see Frère Drouin's room," he said.

They passed Frère Lataille's office. "How strange that he too fell victim to the same disease," François said. "He must have meant a lot to you, Michel. His decision really changed your life. Not since its establishment one hundred years ago had any Jew been permitted to enter this college as a student. It was Frère Roy who told me that Frère Lataille accepted your application only after seeking the consent of the Archbishop of Montreal. Life is strange. I would probably never have known this, had I not sat next to Frère Roy when you were awarded first prize in religious philosophy. Michel, J'irai avec toi; I would like to join you if I may."

They sat down in Frère Drouin's classroom. He had left to teach in a university in Moncton, but this fact did not diminish

his continuing presence for them. He was a tall, amiable man with jolly, slightly bulging eyes, who looked not a little like the actor Fernandel. He seemed to inhabit a world of his own or, rather, the world of the writer he was discussing. We just happened to be there. He just happened not to be there. He was in a trance, a trance out of which Michel and François and all the others never saw him awake, like someone living on the moon.

"François, do you remember when he discussed Mauriac's Thérèse Desqueyroux, how the depression of the work affected him? He inhabited the book while teaching it."

"Oui, I remember it so well, Michel. It's as if he penetrated Mauriac's identity, felt the struggle which took place in Mauriac between his love for his main character and his simultaneous disappointment in her. Her tragedy somehow represented what he believed was a fall from grace and yet she could not bring herself to repent. And Mauriac, devout believer that he was, felt compelled as an artist, as a storyteller who reproduced true feelings, not to bring her to repentance. No matter how close she came to it, it was not in her character to take that final leap. . .

At midnight, Michel bade his few remaining classmates goodbye. He walked out into the still cold late April air. Across the street were the lights of St. Joseph's oratory, with its now empty ninety-nine stairs on the slope of Mount Royal, its Renaissance-style green basilica visible on the screen of night. Michel crossed Queen Mary Road to hail a taxi to his Westmount home. On the hill facing him, he could see Côte des Neiges and the law faculty of the Université de Montréal, from which he had graduated. This neat steel, brick and cement structure was as far away from the college, in time and space, as the era in which they were built.

So much had changed in ten years. Collège Notre-Dame was no longer an arts faculty of the Université de Montréal. It was

simply a private high school for the children of wealthy parents. Classical colleges in general were probably a thing of the past. The Ministry of Education in Quebec seemed to take the position that they had outlined their usefulness. It made no particular provision for them. On the other hand, it was now promoting a proliferation of M.B.A. programs, "practical courses". Could the new Quebec not come into being by encouraging the humanities, which made it unique, while fostering the more pragmatic disciplines? Was a harmony between the two impossible? Was it an either-or proposition, one having to exclude the other? How better to preserve the special character of Quebec than by a blending of the two? Could not Frère Roy and Frère Drouin have a place in this balance? Once Quebec created its new society, what, then, would it want to enhance? Was it not precisely the things taught at Collège Notre-Dame, which by then might be forgotten? For if Quebec became different from what it had been before, in order to regain what it thought it had lost, would it not be like every other place on the North American continent — exactly what its politicians said they wanted to avoid? The values would be the same; only the language would be different. French would be the medium of the "innovative, progressive" awakening for Quebec. The "new drive for prosperity" had left behind the language of culture. Succès, mes amis, in the nouveau Québec, for what? So that a few signs would not have to be bilingual? Michel felt sad.

He recalled a classroom scene at the Université de Montréal, the tumult of law students refusing to read cases only in the English language, demanding French translations. But even there, ideology had its limits. The "practical courses" for the "making of lawyers" were well attended. The numbers dwindled for those in history and philosophy of law. "No one is interested in the origins", was the battlecry. They had had enough of the past. The interest was in now, and only now, a

now which rejected the old order of things, whether it was worthwhile or not. Forget it, mes amis, the new era has been announced and let us throw out all that preceded it. All that remains of Collège Notre-Dame are grey rocks and the ivy which continues to grow over them.

A cold wind forced Michel to do up the top button of his coat, as he walked back and forth waiting for a cab. He thanked God for having been able to attend classes in philosophy at McGill, at the same time he was taking law courses at the Université de Montréal. His afternoons at the one made his mornings at the other bearable. Both universities were in the same city, but they were worlds apart. On the Roddick Gates of McGill were inscribed these words:

*“O, East is East and West is West
And, never the twain shall meet.”*

But Michel thought that the next lines of Kipling’s poem were more apropos:

*“But there is neither East nor West, border
Nor breed nor birth
When two strong men stand face to face
Though they come from the ends of the earth.”*

A tall, bespectacled, Oxford-educated, English-speaking counterpart of Frère Drouin lectured there in medieval philosophy. He might have been on a shore of the Thames; it was only by chance that he was beside the St. Lawrence. He dreamt out loud, and if you happened to be listening you learned something, if it is possible to learn from another man’s dream. Will the two worlds ever acknowledge their coexistence in Quebec? One day — now that one of these worlds has been erased in the collège classique, it may not be found by those who would have been closest to it.

Québec, où vas-tu?

PLEASE PAPA, TAKE US HOME

“The motion for custody is denied.”

“But *Votre Seigneurie*, Arthur pleaded, “you are not denying them a Father but an entire world, the possibility of being complete, rather than fragmented entities — to be whole. They will lead a part-time life, a recess existence. Allow them to retain their identity; otherwise they will be lost to themselves. *Monsieur le juge*, you must understand that. . .”

“There will be no change in custody arrangements. The children, Fernande, nine, Louise, seven, and Georges, five, are to remain with their mother. Monsieur Turgeon, that will be all. You had fine counsel, which represented the situation ably. You had your chance to speak. Your lawyer, Maître Sigmond, called you to the stand, asked you to explain your side, you did. I asked you further questions, which you answered. There is nothing more to be said. *Monsieur*, my judgment is rendered. If you do not agree with my decision you can always appeal it. That is your choice. Now *Monsieur*, I must ask you to leave. Next case!”

The *greffier* reads from the roll, “Vaillancourt *contre* Vaillancourt.”

Arthur had lost control. He had never lost control before. Or had he lost control a long time ago and not known it? His head was spinning, hurling images around the courtroom. His lawyer tried to usher him out, supporting his heavy frame as he shambled towards the door, but Maître Sigmond knew his client

could not make it. Arthur's physical and mental strength and inner confidence, which had been apparent on every other occasion, had been shattered by little Georges' large, brown, anxious eyes and extended hand as the child had cried out at the end of the hearing: "*S'il vous plaît Papa*, take us home." It was then that Arthur had spoken without his usual logic. How unlike Arthur, who prided himself on being logical!

Elizabeth could not believe what had happened. Arthur always played by the rules of the game. And the courtroom and the law were his game, as were business and government. Before she had married Arthur he had had to prove his logic; he was more logical than any man she had ever met, as if to demonstrate that not all French Canadians were emotional, that he could clearly separate reason from feeling. A wave of sympathy, rather pity for him passed through her, as she no longer felt anything for him. How sad to see Arthur so lose his composure. True, privately at times, when he criticized her, he would give vent to anger, but it was a calculated anger to lend just the right force to his words. At such times he might wish her to be more presentable, or more refined, or more sophisticated or, perhaps, just more distant. She was of English descent and she knew that had been her attraction for Arthur, but she was not sufficiently "aristocratic" to serve his ambitions. Her father had been a conductor on the Canadian Pacific; his forebears had all worked for the railroad, which they had built as common labourers. Arthur, who came from one of the finest French Canadian families, had, without admitting it to anyone, acquired a corporate mentality which stifled his heritage with a bland correctness.

In view of this, his arguments for a change in custody were as unlikely as the outburst itself. They had been for the children to continue their French schooling, their French way of life and church education. Although the children spoke English at home, he staunchly maintained that the expression of their

being required a French Canadian upbringing and essence. Just as children needed a *rapport continuel* with both parents and a home base with at least one of them, he had argued, they needed a *rapport continuel* with their education and culture in the formative years. And his children's mother could not be expected to maintain this nurturing connection. They would be sent to English schools and go to a Presbyterian Church after having attended French schools and mass every Sunday.

Elizabeth just could not understand. Her conversion had been a mechanical ceremony for the benefit of her French Canadian parents-in-law, certainly not for her or for Arthur, and the children's French upbringing had hardly been an article of passionate conviction to him. Nor had Arthur ever been an actor. He played the one role he believed in, and that was to be successful and join the mainstream of society, in which his family had no place. Certainly his family was well known in provincial politics, even to a degree in federal politics as well as in the church and law, but not in the corporate boardrooms of the nation, and therefore not in federal government circles where the important decisions were made. Provincial politics did not count for him, it was too local, too parochial. Arthur once described a group of provincial officials as "a home and school association for whom the school board in Ottawa decided just how much authority they could have."

During the last few years how all had changed for Arthur, for the province, for her! He had taught her so much in their eleven years of marriage, and yet he had lost her. She waited for James to come, to help her out with his strong hand on her arm. It had taken all her strength to leave Arthur, to move from Ottawa to the mansion on the outskirts of Sherbrooke which James had built. She felt she could not depart from the courtroom until James returned, as he had promised he would do, when he had dropped her off at the Palais de Justice. She had always needed someone to pick her up. Only then could she function in the

operation of a household, calling the right agencies for the procession of nurses, governesses and maids who had brought order to her domestic life. She could then attend to the personal routine of hairdresser appointments, shopping, going for manicures, electrolysis treatments and massages. Her work, she believed, consisted of making herself beautiful, and in this she had succeeded. In her mind she inventoried her features: long jet black hair, high, intriguing cheekbones, blue-green provocative eyes set like gems in a satin complexion, finely shaped lips, a graceful neck that lent itself well to the hugging turtle-necks she wore in winter and the décolleté blouses and dresses she wore in summer, the gentle curves which seemed both soft and firm, well-proportioned legs which hinted at sensuality.

James was still not here; he had asked her to wait in the courtroom so that she would not have to confront Arthur in the open marble atrium. Both James and she knew that Arthur was too proud to approach her here but that he would not hesitate to do so outside the public chamber. From here, James could whisk her and the children into the car and away without Arthur interfering. But neither of them had counted on the change of situation caused by Arthur's outbreak. She wished she could turn her eyes away from Arthur as she moved her face, at least to give an appearance of indifference in his presence, but he was only a few seats away from her.

The autumn wind, which still had summer in its breath, was being joined by its slowly approaching northern brother. Rain began to pelt the Gothic building; its sliding drops gave the large windows a stained-glass look, the interior light touching them with a yellowish hue. In the large high-ceilinged, wood-panelled room dull hanging lamps threw shadows on the people in the scattered assembly seated in long rows, waiting for their cases to be called. Men scurried along the aisles, giving information in hushed voices to small groups huddled together. Elizabeth could not make out the proceedings in the front of the

room. The judge spoke in a monotone as if only to himself. His clerk and court stenographers were reporting for the record that on this day, September 21, 1975, certain verdicts were rendered, certain fates were sealed, that is, if further appeals would not be taken. The clerk yawned every few minutes to extricate himself from drowning in boredom, and Elizabeth had to restrain herself from yawning in sympathy. At last she saw James come in, his blond, balding head wet.

James was a man of average height, lean, with the agile movements of a sportsman. He had intended to take Elizabeth out of the court as soon as possible, but his car had stalled and he had had to leave it across the wet street while waiting for a mechanic. He knew the car could be repaired, but he was not so sure how he would fare having to continue to face two children each day after school until their bedtime. Thank God he saw the third only on the weekends she spent with them; Fernande had been sent away to school. It was on this condition that James had agreed to marry Elizabeth. He had told her that all the children must go to the only boarding school in the vicinity as soon as they were of age to be enrolled. At the moment only Fernande qualified and Georges and Louise attended English Protestant schools.

James would not have the children taught in a French Catholic school "to believe in all the superstition they were fed". Besides that, their being so educated would upset his mother's Sunday dinner. Every Sunday afternoon, James would drive Elizabeth and the children to see her in the Aberdeen Avenue Westmount house in which he had grown up.

Assured by Elizabeth that she would be just fine, that she would stay as long as necessary, James left the courtroom to continue waiting for the mechanic. As she watched him go out, Elizabeth glanced past Arthur, but then her eyes settled on him, as if drawn by some force. How strange and different he seemed to be.

He had always looked determined, as if he was about to carry out a great intention. Even in his sleep, he never relaxed. The muscles of his face flexed, his square jaw was tight, his body seemed ready to spring forward to a new task. Elizabeth knew it was a task in his predetermined plan, the blueprint from which he made his moves in chronological order.

Now, something had happened that was not in that plan. Even when he had divorced her, the details were arranged in business-like fashion. It was a shock to his system only in the respect that it altered his schedule for the two days he could not report for work. But he had simply to call the minister, whom he served as special advisor, and say that an urgent family matter prevented him from coming into the office and that he would not be in until after the weekend. Arthur had needed the weekend to inform his parents. Although there had never been a divorce in his family that he could remember, they had not been difficult, because Elizabeth was someone from outside his religion and class. Elizabeth knew his encounter that weekend must, nevertheless, have been painful, but he kept that fact to himself, just as he kept nearly everything else to himself, except the time he spent with the children in the mornings and evenings before they went to bed and on weekends.

Arthur always had breakfast with the children, talked with them about what they would be doing in school and at play that day; and then at night, he examined them exactly on these plans. Arthur made it a point never to be away for supper unless it was essential; sometimes he would come home and leave when the children were ready for bed. He was an exemplary father. He sang songs he had learned in *primaire* and *lycée* with them, told them jokes and riddles in French, and at bedtime chanted a *berceuse*, a lullaby, in an audible French whisper. It told of fair maidens and handsome princes at a Versailles ball and had been handed down in his family from generation to generation, ever since his great-great-grandfather, a duke, had come to Quebec to organize the Parisian school system as he

had done for the French government which had sent him on this New World mission.

Arthur had felt that it was best not to pull the children's lives apart. They were happy children, and everything should be done to minimize any emotional damage. They must spend Christmas vacations and summers with him in addition to one weekend a month, for which he would hire a nanny. He had worked out the arrangement with Elizabeth, or rather by himself and given her the instructions. However, it seemed that after three months, the arrangement had become intolerable for him. He had not anticipated that James would send the children to English schools and that they would not hear a word of French, not even a refrain from the lullaby, upon their departure.

She supposed Arthur would resent anything done by James who had taken her away from him, though at the time her relationship with Arthur was barely discernable. For months Elizabeth had seen James, who was the architect for one of the most lavish embassies to be built in Rockcliffe. She had met him at a party given by a neighbour. Arthur had been unable to attend. It was one of those evenings when he left the house at nine and signed out of his office in the Confederation Building at midnight. It was one of those things that happened. James asked her to marry him, or rather told her she would be marrying him, and Arthur did not seem to be an obstacle.

Now Arthur stroked his hair, which was greying at the temples, back. His intense brown eyes seemed drained of purpose. It was as if the searing laser beam gaze he had turned on Elizabeth at the beginning of the hearing had suffered a short circuit. Arthur was a big, though not heavy man, muscular and large boned, with square arms, shoulders and hands. He had lifted weights at six o'clock each morning since his Collège Brébeuf days. Whereas some men, no matter how strong they appear, have moments when they slouch like boys, Arthur

never had such moments. Except here and now. For the first time she had seen him reach for something he could not grasp, and the failure had made him seem helpless, deflated in his strong body. But then again, Elizabeth knew so little about Arthur. She had married him when he was articling. On graduating from Brébeuf, he had studied law at McGill and completed an M.B.A. at Harvard. Her mother had been his secretary, or rather secretary to all the articling students, at his St. James Street law firm. One day, she met her mother for lunch during a break from the two-week Cover Girl classes she was taking; Arthur saw her then and nearly every day for three months until they got married.

At that time Arthur had been full of fun. He had told her that he didn't want to discuss his work, that he had always worked hard, graduated *magna cum laude* from every school he had attended, and it was now time to relax. From the beginning Arthur knew he would be made a partner in his staunch Anglo law firm, which represented "the Bank." Therefore why not enjoy life with a beautiful girl he had just met. But he was so determined to relax that he resolved to catch up on all the fun he felt he had missed before. When Fernande was born, and then Louise and Georges, the fun gradually turned to a new object: his children. Arthur had realized he would have to work harder, harder than ever before, in order not just to be accepted but to excel so that he might become privy to the innermost secrets of interlocking corporate directorships, organizing commercial ventures, merging them, and thus at last enter the corridors of power. It was exciting; he was welcomed everywhere, or so it seemed from Elizabeth's perspective. His dark three-piece pinstriped suits and subdued ties were his uniform, and from a corporate soldier he advanced to a general. They had few friends they called on regularly. Arthur was just too busy. Every outing was a social obligation. Only with the children was he relaxed, or relaxed until he knew he had to rush out

again. It was like that until they moved to Ottawa, where his law firm loaned him out as a special advisor to the minister. Then he requested an indefinite leave of absence, which was readily granted. His most frequent telephone calls came from the minister, who wherever he went must have had a hot line to their house. She knew that Arthur was going places, but where?

Arthur was a participant in what he referred to once to his father as the “boardrooms of the nation”. It seemed he had brought these “boardrooms” or the experience derived therein to Ottawa. But she did not know what it all meant. Just as he never shared any aspect of his work with her when he was articling, he did not do so later. The children, and that included her, only knew that papa was a government advisor and that was that.

Maitre Sigmond, Arthur’s lawyer, returned to the courtroom with a glass of water. Seeing him, Arthur got up and met him at the door. He thanked him for the water but refused it, saying that he was fine. His look of determination had returned by habit but there was something unconvincing in it. He moved brusquely until he reached the marble atrium, where he found his children, all, except Fernande, in tears. Arthur rushed towards them, hugged them in his powerful arms. He noted Georges’ missing teeth, Louise’s blond hair, which had come out of her pigtails, and Fernande’s determination not to cry, so like his own. Arthur was ready to sit down on a bench with them, when James walked in, bringing with him the raw outside dampness. Arthur changed his mind, kissed the children quickly, told them that he would take them to their grandparents’ home this weekend and walked out.

Without a word Arthur opened his car door, beckoned his lawyer inside, then told Maitre Sigmond he would take him to his office in downtown Montreal, where he had picked him up in the morning. He said he was going directly to Ottawa, where he had promised the minister to attend an evening meeting on a

cabinet document to be presented the following day. He had also promised to write an introductory speech for the minister.

The rain pounded the car relentlessly. It was hard to see anything. Arthur was pleased that he would have to concentrate on the drive. He was only sorry that he could not be at his desk sooner so as to be able to immerse himself in his work. Maître Sigmond asked if Arthur preferred that he drive. Arthur declined, thanking him. Then neither spoke. Arthur was looking for his way through fog and rain.

Maître Sigmond summed up the court proceedings in his mind. Although this was the first custody motion he had ever handled, as he practiced international law, he was asked to plead the case because it involved an aspect of private international law, requiring a knowledge of Quebec and Ontario laws, and he was the most junior member in his firm. Sigmond felt he had said everything he could have said. The judge, from the start, had expressed the opinion that children, no matter how difficult the circumstances, should be with their mother. As he termed it, the biological maternal link was the most important element to children. He was clearly of the old school, but who was to say that he was wrong, except that circumstances sometimes altered matters. Maître Sigmond's inclination was to appeal the judgment, but he knew that Arthur would never put his children through what he had called "a trial by ordeal — the ordeal of not being heard, of not being allowed to tell the judge that they loved their father and wanted to be with him, that James was not only their father but had never been their friend".

Maître Sigmond got to know Arthur, or as much of Arthur as anyone did, when he was preparing the case. He had travelled to Ottawa on two occasions and had once travelled with Arthur to the public primary school and the boarding school where they found the children well taken care of but miserable. Commenting on this, the judge had said that the schools were new for the children, with different surroundings, culture and language,

but that the children, like all children, would quickly adapt to the changes in their life. On the road to Sherbrooke, when they had talked about the presentation of the motion, Arthur had made it very well understood that it was in Sherbrooke where he would gain custody of the children, and if he failed that was that. There would be no appeal.

They drove towards Montreal, seeing only the road ahead of them, not noticing the Jacques Cartier Bridge. River and sky had blended into a single greyness. Then they were in the commercial district, passing the Banque Canadienne Nationale Building, heading towards the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce Building, Victoria Square, up Beaver Hall Hill to C.I.L. House, and the inner city churches, dwarfed by the larger edifices. They were so close to Outremont that Arthur thought he could easily stop to see his family, but he quickly dismissed the idea. Why make it more difficult for them, for him? Perhaps this day would vanish with distance and time. . . When they arrived at Maître Sigmond's building on Phillips Square, Arthur thanked Maître Sigmond, told him he realized nothing more could have been done, and wished him good luck.

Now alone, Arthur pictured in his mind the offices of his own firm on St. James Street: the brass doors, the large panelled offices with their understated furnishings and elegant airy look, his own large, neat mahogany desk, the boardroom with oil paintings of two of the Group of Seven, the pin striped army of men in starched collars smoking cigars, marching as if on parade. And he heard voices: *Turgeon is an Anglo who happens to have a French name. He knows how to keep his mouth shut.* The faces he saw belonged to men from Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver who controlled the purse strings of the nation. What did he know about such men except their business affairs, details of which were kept in locked files in his office on St. James Street. They were so cordial with him on the golf course or in the dining room at the club (the one to which his firm had

given him a membership) but this cordiality rarely rose above the trivial and the banal. Arthur knew that they needed his legal and business expertise and, particularly, his knowledge of the French language. They used it to confuse provincial officials when they were playing some game of emperor's new clothes. They trusted him as if he were one of themselves, English, but all the while Arthur remained French. On the surface, however, he seemed more Anglo than the Anglos, and there were times when he was uncertain as to what he was.

This charade had continued even in Ottawa. Only yesterday afternoon, when asked how he was by an executive assistant, one in the colourless mass of the bureaucracy, he responded automatically, "Fine thank you, and you?" The young assistant had replied with due politeness, "Much better now," and Arthur found himself shocked. Was the fellow actually going to tell him something personal, something of the sort those who are marked for success never do? His reaction, he realized in that instant, was entirely British — there was nothing French in it — and he wondered what he might say next. Was he riding for a fall? Had his career taken a downswing? "Indeed, I feel much better now that it has stopped raining." The fellow smiled.

Arthur was more confused than ever. He did not know how to interpret the remark. There was a secret club into which one was born and in which one died, and if one did not belong to it he was always an outsider. Arthur realized that he had not a single friendship among all the truly successful men with whom he had worked. What he had hoped for, worked for, was to enter the lives of these people, and all he had been permitted to relate to was their professional and business affairs. He was of the wrong religion, nationality and upbringing to be invited into their homes. It was true that "they were aloof together". He had taught himself to be aloof alone. As a result, he was objective, impassive, distant, neutral: a wall.

That evening, Arthur sat in his office in the stately Victorian

Gothic building next to the West block of the Parliament Buildings. He closed the door, observed the lights of Wellington Street reflected on the glass-structured Bank of Canada Building and the Sparks Street Mall off Bank Street. The air was clear and crisp with autumn. In the darkness, at the back of the building, the Ottawa River was carrying flaming maple and golden birch leaves downstream, and smoke billowed from the Eddy plant. Arthur began to prepare his minister's introductory presentation, wrote a few lines, got up and walked to the window, and realized that in order not to appear naive or incompetent he had locked the door on his private life. But even more, he had locked himself out of it. That was why he had exploded in the courtroom. The appeal had been his last, desperate attempt to get back into his life again, and it had failed. He leaned his head against the window and wept.

The telephone rang. It rang several times before Arthur heard it and picked up the receiver. The minister's voice demanded, "Hello, Arthur, Arthur, are you there?"

**CAUTION: CAUSES DROWSINESS
AND DULLS THE SENSES**

“Hela, a young mother, gave the last morsel of bread she had in her pocket to the little boy who had been packed next to her in the cattle car. It was dark. She could not see the child but could only feel and hear his small presence next to her. He could not look at her, his head was bent by the mass of people behind him, but he chewed the crumbs which she put into his mouth as she caressed his face. Hela hoped that Zev, about the same age as the child she was feeding, would also receive some food to ease his hunger. Zev was her son. He had been torn out of her arms at the station where people had been assembled after their pre-dawn arrest and hurled into another car, which the S.S. officer said had room ‘for one more little Jew’.”

“On May 13, 1939 the *Saint Louis* sailed from Hamburg, bound for Havana. Of nine hundred and thirty-six passengers aboard, nine hundred and thirty were Jews, who were sent back to Europe, where most ended their lives in concentration camps. For a while the floating liner-turned freight vessel looked for a place to deposit its human cargo after Cuba barred its entry on numerous pretexts. At one point it came near the coast of Florida. The United States Coast Guard was given orders to prevent the passengers from reaching shore, should they attempt to jump ship.”

As Michel Sigmond watched himself relating these tales on a

segment of the late night news show that had been taped in his office a few days earlier, he could still feel the instruments his dentist had used that morning to extract his four impacted wisdom teeth. The dentist had given him a bottle of codeine tablets. On the label, in large red letters, were the words CAUTION: CAUSES DROWSINESS AND DULLS THE SENSES. As his swollen jaw throbbed, he realized that, although the medication had knocked him out for most of the day, it had failed to ease the pain. Only the injection which he had received to freeze the areas operated upon had been effective. But how long could one remain frozen without feeling?

"If there were no legal fees, why did you try to help them?" the television reporter asked.

"Because of the stories I have told you, and because I didn't forget. I hope the world hasn't forgotten, either. I just did it. If not me, someone else would have helped, as others did. I wanted the six hundred and thirteen passengers on the *Hai Hong* to come to Canada. They simply needed a home."

Film clips were shown of the weary oriental people who had been windblown and drenched in perpetual storms in the South China Sea. Michel had told the president of the Canadian Vietnamese Association that his dental surgery would prevent his being present when the refugees arrived by airplane at the St. Hubert Airforce Base, but he had promised to watch the proceedings on television. Now he saw the welcoming ceremony, spotted by the hollow faces of old and young, some smiling tentatively. The next film sequence showed a few of the children tasting ice cream with maple syrup for the first time. A little boy, sitting next to a woman who appeared to be his mother, had not yet received the treat. The woman placed her portion of ice cream before the child and she started feeding him. He seemed too weak to hold the spoon himself. Michel later inquired about this boy, and found out that his mother had

died at sea and the woman next to him in the picture had not left his side for a moment.

Michel turned off the set, his mouth still aching, but consoled that the trauma of the *Hai Hong* had ended on this day, December 25, 1978. After weeks of discussion during which the question of the refugees' entry was ceaselessly debated on hot-line shows, the ordeal was over. The wanderers had found a home.

After station identification, the program continued as Michel prepared for bed.

"Further to our interview with Mr. Sigmond, our research staff has come up with three newspaper commentaries on the voyage of the *Saint Louis* which my producers have asked me to read."

From the June 9, 1939, edition of the *New York Times*: "It is hard to imagine the bitterness of exile when it takes place over a faraway frontier. Helpless families driven from their homes to a barren island in the Danube, thrust over the Polish frontier, escaping in terror of their lives to Switzerland or France, are hard for us in a free country to visualize. But these exiles floated by our shores. Some of them are on the American quota list and can later be admitted here. What is to happen in the interval has remained uncertain from hour to hour. We can only hope that some hearts will soften somewhere and some refuge be found. The cruise of the *Saint Louis* cries to high heaven of man's inhumanity to man."

The London *Daily Express* of the day, after describing the position of Sir Osbert Peake, Undersecretary in the British Home Office, who on behalf of Britain accepted a portion of the passengers, as did Belgium, Holland, and France, stated: "This example must not set a precedent. There is no room for any more refugees in this country. . . They become a burden and a grievance."

The August, 1939, issue of *Der Weltkampf*: “We are saying openly that we do not want Jews while the democracies keep on claiming that they are willing to receive them — and then leave the guests out in the cold! Aren’t we savages better men after all.”

Michel tried to sleep, but the pain would not subside. He turned on the television set again. A Christmas-New Year message filled the screen prior to the late night movie. It announced “Peace on Earth, Good Will Towards Men.”

DIE WELT VON GESTERN

"Hors d'œuvre, mein herr?"

"No, thank you."

"Indeed, *monsieur*, if Canada did not exist it would have to be created."

"May I offer you, perhaps a Dumsteiner wine from the Wachau area of the Danube? It is very dry. I think you will find it most agreeable."

The host delegate picked up two glasses from the long silver tray and asked the waiter to wait with a third.

"No thank you, I have already had the pleasure, but perhaps my colleagues. . ."

"Yes, thank you so much."

"Certainly, I find this and your Kremser wine delightful."

"Please do not let me disturb you."

"Not at all," said the ambassador from a state in the Orient. "I was telling my fine Canadian friend that his country is admired for what it is and what it offers. In my country, we think of Canada as the home not only of two cultures and languages but of immigrants from all over the world. A nation that has bestowed on them its dynamism of challenge and encouraged them to grow within their own cultural bounds. I suppose this is so because you were all immigrants except for your Indian population, which thousands of years ago came from my part of the world."

"Yes, my good friend," a European ambassador agreed. "I

was fortunate to visit Canada in 1967 during the World Fair Exhibition, and travelled across the country. Canada is a country which revitalizes one. We look to Canada as to successful grown-up children who understand their parents, yet have developed their own ideas, which perhaps will serve us in the future. Sometimes, I feel that where others have grown exhausted historically, you give us a rejuvenating tonic, a sort of vitamin which we need in times of illness or when we have grown too complacent. When we drift apart your country can bring us all together as a family by the sheer force of its achievements. Just this morning. . .”

The previous conversation replayed itself in Michel Sigmond's ears. After five weeks the delegates were tired. They had spent just about half of spring at the conference and they were still waiting. The document which would become an international treaty was being retyped again. The final changes, reflecting this session's compromises, showed themselves in the red, stained eyes and hoarse voices of the delegates, who had assembled from all sections of the globe.

In the vast rococo Imperial ballroom of the baroque Hofburg, eyes closed. Pictures from the bygone era as portrayed by Stefan Zweig in the *Die Welt Von Gestern* (The World of Yesterday) floated before Michel and he drifted into them. The Central Palace of Emperor Franz Josef and Empress Elizabeth hosted now not a conference but a white tie and *grande robe de gala soirée*. The wooden floor vibrated in three-quarter time.

Michel heard the orchestra as if from inside a seashell which echoed the music of the past. Then suddenly the mirrored elegance was shattered as the waltz became the scream of millions dying in the gas chambers of concentration camps. It was a phenomenon like light from a distant planet travelling through the universe for millenia after its source has been extinguished. Michel's eyes opened and he thankfully returned

to the present. He forced himself to think of pleasant things. Ah, the glitter of Vienna, in its chandeliers and crystals and the diamond studded ripples of the Danube in sunlight! From the most majestic ball, the Imperial, to the most coveted, the Opernball, all of Vienna is swept off her feet to the waltzes of Strauss throughout the fall, winter and spring, then into summer's Salzburg retreat and its Mozart Festival. It is here that the shade of Wolfgang Amadeus smiles down on the audiences he so longed for in life.

Scheduled to leave Vienna as soon as the conference ended, Michel recalled images he had assembled in his mind during the past weeks. From the Innere Stadt (Inner City), bounded by the Ringstrasse, where his father had simultaneously received his engineering degree from the University of Vienna and his graduate economics diploma from the Welt Schule fur die Welt Handel, he strolled past the Opera House, the Art Gallery, the Museum of National History, the Parliament, the Burgtheater and the Votivkirche, massive, grey, pillared emblems surrounded by trees and elegant gardens and a scattering of coffee houses.

Only fifty years separated the footsteps of father and son; yet the distance was more than that. His father's world was gone, obliterated. Only the stage, the props, the setting of the Vienna of yesterday, the background music of *Wien Wien nur du Allein* sung by Marlene Dietrich remained. The "void behind the glitter" had caused Stefan Zweig and his wife to commit suicide after the war when they reflected on the "barbarian recess from civilization," from which they felt they could not return.

An African colleague tapped Michel on the shoulder. "I understand that we have at least an hour's wait, if not more. May I invite you for a piece of *Sachertorte* in the adjoining room? It is said that one cannot leave Vienna without tasting

this famous chocolate cake, baked in the hotel from which it takes its name. I am told that it is coated with marmalade and iced with more chocolate. Can you resist?"

O CANADA, CANADA

"Constitutions do not speak. Seasons do not speak. Mountains, plains, oceans, lakes, rivers, forests, sunsets do not ask questions."

"You told your daughter a bedtime story last night after the Constitution of Canada with its Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into being. In your tale, you said that every being has the right to express himself. Well, Michel, that includes us; the Charter guarantees that right even to itself. Inasmuch as you have had the chance to tell your story, allow us to tell ours."

"This is ridiculous."

"Dreams are not ridiculous. States have been founded and built on them, and nations have been recreated by them. Michel, you know the law, but you are also a dreamer. So you should know that constitutions and charters of human rights are made of dreams. When dreams die, they vanish and lose their voices. Our dream is neither a vision of power nor of conquest, but simply tells Canadians as a people not to take for granted what they have."

"Why are you all speaking at the same time? Why doesn't each of you express his own opinion?"

"We speak with one voice, without regional differences."

"But who is to judge whether what you say is true?"

The Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans calmly murmured: "We were appointed to our task long before you were summoned to hear us. We visit shores far, far from Canada, and we

base our observations on precedents of states at both their high and low tides.”

As the seasons are the strongest forces, theirs was the first question. In every shade of cloud and sunlight, and out of a whirlwind of summer storms, autumn rains, winter blizzards, and spring showers, they came down from the mountains to ask: “O Canada, Canada, the Master Designer has left the choice of destiny in your hands. What will you be, a footnote or a model for the rest of the world?”

“But why am I to answer?”

“You are just as responsible for us and for other Canadians as anyone else. Why is it that in every other free country its citizens feel as a part of the collectivity, but here everyone asks, ‘Why me?’”

“Very well. But will you at least ask the laws and the Constitution of Canada to respond first?” Michel asked.

The Constitution stepped forward: “But, Michel, it is neither the laws behind the Constitution nor the Constitution behind the laws, but rather the will of the nation that determines our position in history. I will be what your judges make of me. And they can only make of me that which is reflected in you. Only in this way can the Constitution flourish. Some states have ideal constitutions but no collective will behind them, in others the people’s aspirations are suppressed. Here, Michel, we simply ask you and others, what do you want, what would you be?”

Michel interposed, “But how would you define Canada?”

“That is not important. Definitions are for dictionaries and for introductory sections of legal statutes. You may have to be logical during the day, but don’t be so in your dreams. No, Michel, the question is: How can you and other Canadians contribute to what Canada is, whatever it is? Don’t ask yourselves who you are and create a national dilemma, but rather ask yourselves where you are going.”

The Canadian sunset came forward in a golden aura: “Be fair

to Michel. Don't penalize him on account of his training. Michel, Canada is what it is and to be Canadian, if there is a definition, is to be yourself, and that is unique. By being yourself you are Canadian. But because Canadians take both themselves and their Canadianism for granted, they do not see that both are the same. But that is only the first step. Once you are permitted to be who you are, you have the obligation to develop to your highest potential. That, Michel, is to be Canadian, a luxury, by the way, enjoyed in few other countries. Yes, Canadians take for granted something that is unique. To be Canadian is simply to be, or rather to be allowed to be."

The rushing rivers impatiently added: "We are a fortunate country. We have our problems but everything is relative. What we take seriously others would consider lightly or welcome in place of their graver problems: national vendettas, poverty, starvation, disease, totalitarian oppression and the haunting cries of millions of perished souls against the injustices wrought upon them."

The Charter unfurled itself and seemed to listen attentively as the rivers continued:

"The Charter will be what we will make of it. No, rather the Charter will be what you educate yourselves towards, by eliminating prejudice."

The mountains, plains, lakes, rivers and forests asked through the wind: "Can you be large enough for our geographic expanse? Can your imagination, your intellect, your sentiments stretch as far as the railroad tracks from east to west? And can you match the air routes to the deserts of ice and snow with a desire to soar above the rugged, wholesome terrain without any thought of destroying it?"

"Wait, wait," Michel called. "How do we bring together what seems to be our far-flung Canadian universe, that each provincial star may move in harmony with all the rest?"

Michel had barely got out this question when a bell sounded in his ears. The alarm clock.

* * *

In an April sun chastened by a saucy spring breeze, Michel was riding a few hours later across the glittering Ottawa River, past the boat studded Rideau Canal, in the direction of the Parliament on Wellington Street. When he reached the building in which he worked, he hesitated before going to his office at the end of the hall and knocked on a nearby door.

“Come in.”

The man who welcomed him had the bright blue eyes of youth. Their only concession to age were the glasses, which nevertheless could not hide their sparkle. The owner of these eyes looked like a retired navy captain, with short cropped greying hair and a face chiseled by wind and weather for more than sixty years. Even behind his desk he looked lean and muscular. He stood up in the book-lined office to offer Michel coffee to take the sleep out of his eyes. Without pouring a cup for himself, he handed the beverage to Michel in a habitual gesture that bespoke hospitality. He had been up for hours, he said, had attended the earliest Church service as he did every-day. Of average height, he stood ramrod straight when he talked about his principles, but tended to hunch over when he talked about himself. His clothes were the very wardrobe of simplicity and humility: a white shirt, a blue wool V-neck sweater, a tie of the same colour and texture, grey flannel pants. His tweed jacket was always perched on the back of his chair when he worked in the office.

There was nothing imposing about him; everything was in his eyes. They held a magical Irish mist, the “soft Irish weather” which is passed on by Irishmen from generation to generation, no matter what side of the ocean they’re on. They cast a spell of

reverence for life, a sense of awe, a fascination with learning new things, and a subtle excitement wherever they gaze. Dr. Gerald FitzGerald had been born and bred in Nova Scotia, with its tree-lined streets, its salty scent of the sea. The same sea which stretched to Ireland's high and rocky coast, from which loomed the great castles encircled by azaleas and rhododendrons described by Yeats.

It was such images, from the Ireland he had only visited and the Canada which was always at the forefront of his vision, that contributed to his dedication, his determination to give the best of himself to this country for which he worked and which he nobly represented in both official languages in world fora. Even though many occasions had presented themselves for him to make himself well known, he insisted on staying in the background. Weekly he commuted to another city to give evening university classes. Generations of students and specialists from the world over admired him, regarding him as honorary dean of his subject. They recognized that they became experts in their field because he had shared his knowledge with them. In recent years he had taken to writing his articles to the accompaniment of classical music from an F.M. radio station. He would not allow himself the "extravagance of a stereo", just as he denied himself so many other luxuries, except for an occasional opera or concert. He felt they were simply not necessary. So he continued to give his money away as he had always done to those who needed it, often without even the recipients knowing from whom it came.

He was better known outside Canada than within the building in which he worked. He was simply there and, although respected, taken for granted. Somehow the bureaucratic organization which he served had not been programmed to recognize and honour such exemplary service as this quiet, gentle man rendered daily. He was a motivating force capable of bringing out the finest qualities in others without himself being scarcely noticed.

How like Canada he was!

It was not what was said during his conversations with Dr. FitzGerald so much as the man's presence which gave Michel the serenity and confidence to meet a new day. Now Dr. FitzGerald walked toward the window and said, "Look, Michel. What a magnificent day! This evening I'll be able to cycle and work in my garden before resuming writing the next article I promised. I won't have time to play the piano or finish a drawing I've been working on, but perhaps on the weekend. Guess what. The piano was just tuned and the sound is delightful." He said such hopeful things even in winter, except that then the cycling and gardening were replaced by skating on the canal and cross-country skiing outside his house.

"By the way, Michel, did you see last night's sunset? It gave off a golden aura and. . ."

The telephone rang. The day's activities had begun. Michel waved goodbye and closed the door. He would visit his friend again.

**RUNNING A MARATHON,
CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN**

It was unlike that cold, wet, blustery April in 1980. Here Terry Fox was running with Michel and every other runner. There, in St. Johns, Newfoundland, where he had begun his 5,300 mile race, he had run alone. In Ottawa, as in villages, towns and cities across Canada, the rhythm of his feet was like a mantra, repeated in the pounding of heels along the length of forests, mountains, streams, lakes, plains and rivers. *Somewhere the hurting must stop. Somewhere the hurting must stop.*

In the first half hour, for those watching on the other side of the Rideau Canal, the unevenly clustered runners resembled polkadot patch-like kites being blown horizontally. As the miles drifted by the kites were shredded into thinner and thinner strands and then became threads. The individual runners leapt, glided and soared, against the azure sky, their shadows skipping over the ripples of the canal on one side and playing hide-and-seek in the grass on the other. Running up Parliament Hill, Michel recalled watching Terry's strong and graceful climb. Terry never had a problem going uphill. His artificial leg only gave him trouble on the downslope. Descending was unnatural to him, as if foreign to his constitution.

Terry pulled up the stragglers one by one; no one gave up on that incline. Shiny, dripping faces bobbed up and down. From the now even-paced line, in which every runner kept his place as if assigned to it in some natural order, one man broke loose in

a sprint that brought him next to Michel. It was Costas. Costas smiled confidently at the runners surprised by his speed, as if such surprises were in his nature.

Costas' form was dark, strong, thin and sleek. He had run in marathons in Greece and elsewhere. Now he was racing past the canal and the Victorian-Gothic Parliament Buildings. During his student days on the Island of Crete, he had run under an almost perpetual blue sky, past cypress groves, oleander and olive trees, gleaming white houses set against the wide green sea. At dusk in Iraklion, when the sun would set aflame the palace of Festos, he would glide alongside the Venetian ramparts which had withstood a Turkish siege for twenty-four years. As he heard a Gregorian chant coming from a nearby monastery, his soles tapped on layers of buried civilizations. As a gift he had once given Michel a piece of a Minoan vase some four thousand years old.

After seven miles their steps were one. They ran together, united in their determination to finish the remaining six. Michel, after several exchanges with Costas, who said he had driven from Montreal with his wife and three children for the Marathon of Hope, was now out of breath. On a screen of moving, blurred bodies he watched a scene from his past. Costas had jumped a merchant marine ship to escape the military junta. After many years at sea, like a weather-beaten Ulysses he had wandered into Michel's office and stated simply, "I want to stop my journey. Could you help me become a free man? I want to remain in Canada." Michel requested and was granted political asylum for Costas, who was now a Canadian citizen, with a Canadian wife and children. Costas had had many difficult moments. He. . .

"Mr. Sigmond, I forgot to tell you, I now have a small store and I employ five people. Please, maybe you can come and visit me." A few minutes later, Costas turned his face and his big brown eyes to Michel and said, "I guess you never thought we

would run together one day. You know, Mr. Sigmond, I never doubted it." To make Costas laugh, Michel was about to say, "That was like a question addressed to the Oracle at Delphi; the answer could have gone either way." But another incline prevented any response from him, except for a smile and a nod. Michel and Costas ran up the hill in unison.

From the large crowd gathered on a steep terrace at the last-mile mark, a little girl with blue eyes, brown pigtails and red ribbons parachuted down from her mother and brother's side towards Michel and said, "Papa, I came to run with you for the last mile." Michel turned to Costas and introduced his five-year-old daughter.

"Papa, I did not know you were going to run with someone."

"I didn't know either, but Mr. Costas did."

Somewhere Terry is running a marathon, climbing a mountain with ease. He is ascending higher and higher. From his mountain there is no descent.

LIKE AFTER THE FLOOD

The four were cocooned by the Laurentian Mountains, amid the lakes and forests of St. Donat. Perched on a large, flat rock beside a rushing stream, the blue-eyed, pig-tailed little girl, who had a peach-tanned, oval face, asked, "Papa, tell us an Indian story." The younger, brown-eyed, curly-haired boy with scraped knees and a cherubic, olive-coloured face, who sat beside the little girl said, "Yes Papa, an Indian story!"

The man could not be mistaken for anyone other than the little girl's father. Except for the fact that his eyes were brown and he had a mustache, his face was hers some twenty-five years older. The young woman could have been none other than the small boy's mother; even her hair, which had been wavy, had become curlier with time.

It was evening, just before bedtime, the end of a long summer day, which for parents always seems to stretch on and on, but for children never seems long enough. However, a promise is a promise, and today the children had been promised that their father would tell them a story in their very special place. Right here, with the water dashing past rocks of all shapes and colours, and where a dark, forbidding forest admitted just enough light for them to see each other. Under a sheltering arch of tree leaves, the children cuddled against their parents. While their father thought for a moment, they listened to a stream, the chirping of a bird, and the whistling of a breeze passing through pines.

At last their father said: "Before I tell you the story, I will tell you why stories are not only fun but important. You asked me for an Indian story. Such a story should be able to help you understand something about the Indians. By listening to their stories and stories about them, you enter their world. Do you remember the story I told you of Marco Polo? How no one in his own city believed him when he returned from his travels in the Orient? They listened to his stories but they only believed the things in them they already knew. Even Marco Polo's friends rejected the idea that people could live differently from themselves and could still live well, or even better than people did in the Italian city states, and in peace. If they had believed Marco's stories about Kublai Khan's court, they would themselves have discovered the Orient and its people. True, it is not exactly like being there, but if you listen attentively and let yourself enter the world of a story, it is almost as good. Now, the story I'm going to tell you was told to me by an Indian princess with skin as soft as satin and hair as black as night."

"Are you sure she was a princess?" the little girl asked.

"Well, she was as beautiful as one, and so are you. I simply decided she was one."

The boy exclaimed, "You know an Indian princess!"

"Almost everyone does. All you have to do is want to meet her. You will know her too, after I tell you the story. It was told to her by a robin. And it seems that every robin from generation to generation is told this story, and repeats it every day."

"But Papa," the boy interrupted, "how come so few other people know it?" The girl never asked such questions; by now she was old enough to know that her father just knew.

"People always see robins but how often do they listen to them?" the father answered and then continued:

"More than four hundred years ago, the Great Spirit, as He is called by the Indians, spoke to all the animals and told them to

send Him one of each animal whom they trusted.”

“Papa,” the girl said, “it was like the time of the Flood.”

“Exactly, there had not been such a gathering of animals since Noah brought pairs of animals into his Ark. But here, only one of each animal came; and only from this part of the world, from lands between the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans. They walked, crawled, swam and flew. The wind and water currents helped to take them in the right direction, and they all met at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River.”

By now, the children were perfectly still, their eyes transfixed, their mouths slightly open.

“The Great Spirit said, ‘I have summoned you all here because you have understood that there must be peace between the sky, the earth, and the water; and that each of you must live in harmony with the world I have created, or you could not survive. You have lived on this land for millions of years in one form or another. I spoke to you once before, about ten thousand years ago, when the land mass of Asia was connected to North America. At that time you agreed with me that it was wise to invite the first inhabitants so that they could sing your praises, add to the music of nature, and through you worship me, your Creator. I now come to you again, to ask your permission to bring white people to this land from the Continent of Europe. On that land mass, an ocean away, there has been much fighting between countries, much hatred between men who don’t try to understand each other. Terrible wars have led to the killing of My white children. The most foolish of these wars they have called crusades and inquisitions. They have waged them in the name of religion, but that is not religion. True religion brings people together; it does not separate them. I have decided to give the white man one more chance, to give him a New World, like after the Flood, a world where he will not see so much pain and sorrow.

“Before calling all of you here, so as not to frighten my red

children, the Indians, I appeared in a dream to their most righteous leaders, and told them of my plan to assemble you. I asked them what they thought I should do. Their answer was: 'Guide the white man over the sea. This land belongs to everyone, as it truly belongs only to you, Great Spirit.' Others said: 'Yes, invite them. Our wealth is not in what we have ourselves, but in what we can share with others.'"

Looking into the forest, the father continued: "As the Great Spirit did not bring his angels, a grey-white loon sang a hymn to all of creation, accompanied by a choir of all the other birds. From the assembly, composed of a squirrel, a muskrat, a beaver raised himself up and said: 'Now everyone is free. How bird stepped out. It was the eagle, who boldly asked: 'But how will we know if these men will live in harmony and not fight with each other as they have done in the Old World?' Then the beaver raised himself up and said: 'Not everyone is free. How do we know the white man will not try to enslave his brothers?' The Great Spirit answered: 'We don't know.' 'But Great Spirit,' the animals said, 'You know everything.' 'I have given man choice. I know what he can do, but not whether he will do it. If I knew, then man would not be free.'

"Although the forests, the mountains, the plains, the rivers, and the lakes, were not formally invited, as they were in place, the Great Spirit asked them to participate in the discussion. They said, 'Yes there is enough room here for whomever you want to send to us, as long as they will work the land and and share it. But will they take care of us?'

"At last the righteous loon spoke up: 'Nothing will be known until the event. Great Spirit, if you wish, let the white men come to these shores. You did not have to ask us. The land belongs to You. You can do this thing without our permission.'

"The Great Spirit answered: 'Yes, but you have kept the land as beautiful and as serene as when I gave it to you. You have destroyed nothing. And the Indians respect you and the land,

and thus they glorify Me. I would never consider so important a matter without consulting you.”

As the children tried to keep their eyes open, the setting sun filled the skylight in the trees with rays of gold. The father stopped speaking in the voice of the Great Spirit and said, “Children, the Indian princess has told me that the day is soon to come when the Great Spirit will return to the Indians in their dreams. And He will bring together the descendants of all the animals to whom He spoke to decide whether it was good to have invited white people to this country, or whether maybe it would have been better just to tell them this story.”

The little girl asked her father, “What will happen? What do you think they will decide?”

The mother answered, “It depends on every one of us. On whether we take care of the land and of each other. Even the Great Spirit is waiting to find out.”

NOTE ON THE SHORT STORIES

O Canada, Canada is a collection of vignettes and short stories which represent a depressing lament and an exuberant hope for Canada all at the same time.

The collection is written from the point of view of Michel Sigmond, the unifying character to the theme. A gallery of Canadian portraits, a studio of images, is depicted in six episodes.

"Please Papa, Take Us Home" demonstrates that the two solitudes have as yet not met, though they seem to be blending into one. "Caution: Causes Drowsiness and Dulls the Senses" manifests the possibility of racial prejudice and indifference to refugees and immigrants that is just below the surface, waiting to spread or be cured by Canadian strength. "Die Welt Von Gestern" paints a picture of the glitter of Vienna during a palatial United Nations conference which evokes memories of the holocaust in the midst of a torrent of words which explode in a treaty. "O Canada, Canada" is a prosaic ballad wherein the Canadian Constitution and its Charter defend themselves in a court of witnesses composed of the Canadian seasons, sunsets, mountains, lakes, and rivers. "Running a Marathon, Climbing a Mountain" traces the spiritual Canadian landscape through the footsteps of Terry Fox accompanied by a collage of runners. "Like After the Flood" is a legend about the arrival of the Indians. It is woven as a tale told to children in the Laurentians.

THE AUTHOR

Born in 1948 in Paris, Michel M.J. Shore holds a baccalaureat ès art from Collège Notre-Dame, an Arts Faculty of the Université de Montréal, a Master of Arts in Philosophy from McGill University, and a law degree from the Université de Montréal. His master's thesis, entitled *Cultural Dialogue*, attempted to show that translations are not enough to understand the cultures of others, but that an interpretation of thought is necessary for an intimate and valid understanding. This principle underlies the esthetic of *O Canada, Canada*, as it did *Jerusalem Breezes, A Human Panorama of Jerusalem and a Hope for Peace*, Shengold Publishers, Inc., New York, 1981.

A member of the Bar of the Province of Quebec, Michel Shore resides in Ottawa, where he practices international law and writes. He and his wife Barbara have three children, Betty, Sigmond, and Loren.

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