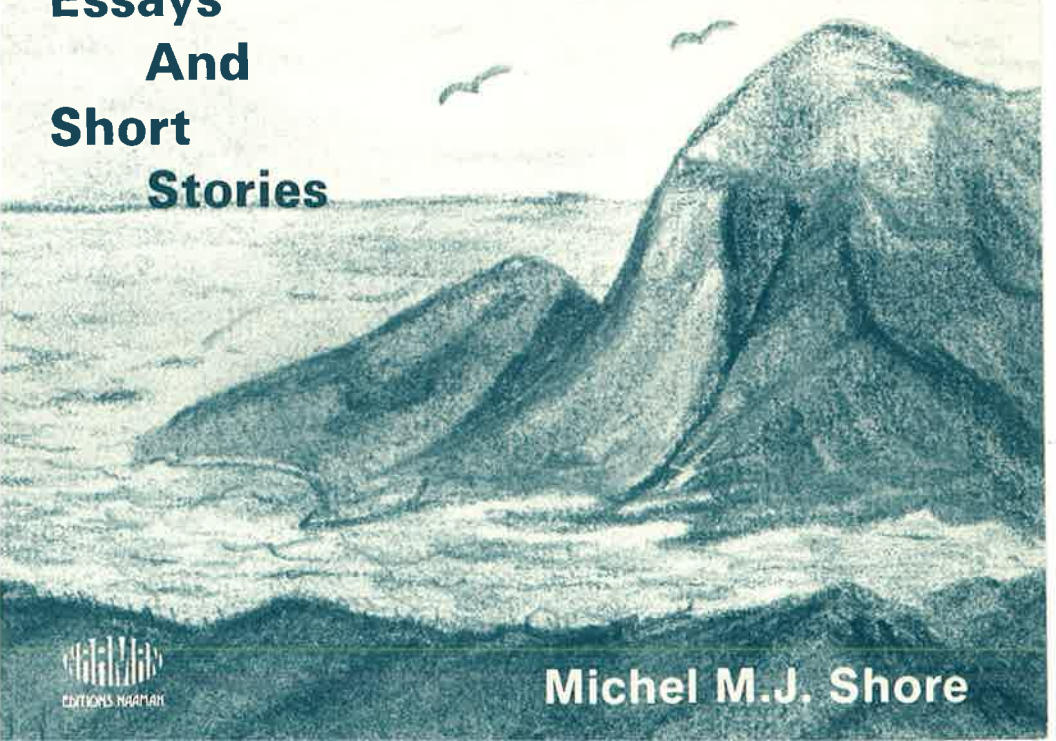
THE TEMPEST

Essays And Short Stories



Michel M.J. Shore

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THE TEMPEST

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Michel M.J. SHORE

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To my mother,
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who in her own unique way
taught us and continues to teach us
how to celebrate life

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— Mark Helprin

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CANADA

PRIME MINISTER • PREMIER MINISTRE

Ottawa, K1A 0A2
May 7, 1984

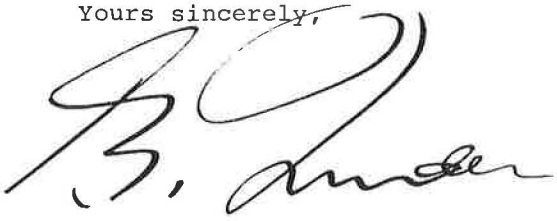
Dear Mr. Shore:

Thank you very much for forwarding the two articles and for your very kind note.

I think you have captured the spirit of Bora Laskin very well. His legacy to the legal community in this country is indeed great, and all Canadians will be touched by his wise and far sighted rulings. I also appreciated your second paper on taking our ethical temperature. You are correct in stating that the question is one for each individual to raise and respond to within himself. It is a thought provoking piece which I am sure will be well-received.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



LET US TAKE OUR ETHICAL TEMPERATURE

As the major Canadian and American political parties are in the process of choosing leaders and as both countries gear up for elections, it may be time to reflect — away from the hustle and bustle — to come to terms with ourselves, with society and the world, to the extent that is possible. Perhaps this is a better time of reckoning than even the New Year is, for we are not constrained to make resolutions nor to examine the balance sheets of our lives, other than those which apply to our income tax statements. Spring is just about to arrive or, at least, has been officially welcomed, and the season of renewal is as good a period as any to renew ourselves.

To begin with, we need a spiritual check-up; we need to take our ethical temperature. The thermometer should be sensitive enough to give us readings on ourselves as individuals, members of families, of communities, as citizens of states, provinces, countries and, on a wider scale, as nation collectivities, and in these contexts to register opportunities missed, responsibilities avoided, privileges and rights abused, and duties fulfilled to less than the best of our abilities.

The year 1984 (despite George Orwell) is an auspicious one for such self-examination, in that our emotions are not unduly heated. No western nation is directly involved in a war; the jury is not out in any major trial of an individual or of a society. The panic atmosphere of an emergency

ward is absent. Therefore the possibility of thought, or clearer-than-usual thought is enhanced, and the chances for an accurate thermometer reading are as good as at any time in history. That is not to say that any reading will not have its variables and margin of error; and who is to say, to someone else, whose reading is accurate? This temperature-taking is, after all, a matter of conscience, to be conducted by each individual person, in his own little corner of contemplative space. And one does not even have to record his findings on a chart for others to see. The relationship is that of doctor and patient, each embodied in one and the same person. However, if a goodly number would engage in this process, who knows but that the test might prove to be a cure for the illnesses and deficiencies suspected, an instrument to serve us not now in the luxury of the moment, but during a future time of burning issues. It might also point to new directions for decision-making in areas of life as widely separated, or as closely fused, as friendship, marriage, family, or, for that matter, local, national and global-level participation.

What are we to watch out for? The one unsuspected factor, which would show itself more predominantly in some cases than in others, would be boredom. Were any choices made because of it, for greater excitement? What were we ready to trade or forego because of it? Thoughtlessness, or desensitization to tragedy and suffering, might render the whole exercise meaningless, and where feeling has been obliterated require the intervention of reason. On the other hand, where emotions have drowned out reason, or where the individual has been hypnotized into a state of blind fanaticism, even the possibility of taking the ethical temperature is put in doubt. This is not meant to spark a philosophical debate about that which is categorically good, truthful, right or just in the Platonic or Aristotelian or other sense, but to sugggest strategies for obtaining the clearest possible readings. Except for oneself, there is no judge, arbiter or physician who will perform the examination or define or delineate the categories, so that even

former lip-service and hypocrisy can be dealt with in the privacy of each individual mind without public embarassment or blushing. And no one need reveal his temperature. As a matter of fact, any public announcement of the results might only serve to prove either one's arrogance or self-effacement and thus render the whole exercise useless.

The most-often-asked question, "How are you," would not require a response with regard to one's individual or collective, ethical state of health, although it would be most encouraging if each one would, periodically, ask himself the question and, if need be, repeat taking his "ethical temperature."

So far, the key questions have been avoided. How, in practical application, does one take one's ethical temperature? And, then, once that is determined, what is the actual range, or scale, of such a thermometer? From the doing of "good", wanting to be repaid, to pure altruism? What is its degree of accuracy? Ah, but that is for each individual to decide between himself and his conscience! The reading may establish that both are present, and are one and the same. The aim is to find out.

Michel M.J. Shore
March 25, 1984

AN APPOINTMENT TO YET A HIGHER COURT

(*IN MEMORIAM*
OF MR. JUSTICE BORA LASKIN,
THE LATE CHIEF JUSTICE
OF THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA)

The case-load increases each year; yet decisions are reached, judgments are rendered with perfect justice in this highest of courts, the Heavenly Tribunal. The Rt. Honourable Bora Laskin ascends, and echoes are heard in the ante-chambers and corridors of the Ultimate Final Appelate Court.

His voice is soft yet strengthened by conviction as his words are given to a celestial gathering composed of the great judges of history from recorded antiquity to modern times, among them Solon, the sages of the Sanhedrin, Cardozo and Brandeis, all waiting in a receiving line. "There is something of the loneliness of the long distance runner in every judge of a final appelate court as he reflects on his work and makes decisions...

Quoting the late Lord Reid as he walks up to him and shakes his hand, Mr. Justice Laskin agrees that "the law is not some known and defined entity, secreted in Aladdin's cave and revealed if one uses the right password." An interdisciplinary assembly of philosophers, economists, sociologists and political scientists approaches and their spokesman says, "You did not forget about us in your judgments. Each decision took us into measured account, recognizing that the law embodies the spirit of the society that shaped it. Your decisions proved that law, indeed, is philosophy in operation, not relegated to the courtrooms of the country but belongs to classrooms of everyday living. To understand the law, you were not afraid to look beyond it." Justice Laskin responds by repeating Lord Diplock's statement of which he was so fond: "When for the first time, a court of final instance interprets (a statute) as bearing one of two or more possible meanings... the effect of the exercise of its interpretative role is to make it law."

A chorus of female voices is heard echoing the Chief Justice's decision in the Murdoch case: "The Court is not being asked in this case to declare an interest in the appellant merely because she is a wife and a mother; nor is there here an implicit plea for a community property regime

to be introduced by judicial fiat... In making the substantial contribution of physical labour as well as a financial contribution..., the wife has, in my view, established a right to an interest which it would be inequitable to deny..."

A silence reigns, and then the late Chief Justice humbly responds to his own words: "Each judge puts in his own questions and supplies his own answers, and in yielding ground to institutional considerations, he does so according to his own assessment of what they demand."

* * *

Thus Mr. Justice Laskin's opinions continue to reverberate in the heavenly spheres and will resound as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms unfolds in the courtrooms of Canada, in the classrooms of its every day living.

For the "law", in all its dimensions, Mr. Justice Laskin often stated, citing W.H. Auden, "... is Good Morning and Good Night."

Michel M.J. Shore
March 27, 1984

THE END

An ellipse of silence — nothingness. No sound, no light, no matter — all vanished, evaporated, vaporized, one mushroom cloud that obliterated all the others, consumed the all — and than a void, just endless infinite space — nothing.

* * *

On the other side of nothing, everything... as if everything which had disintegrated — like a Pissarro painting, made up of infinitesimal dots like confetti — had come together, materializing into a world, all at once to form the all — all except for the weapons. There were no weapons — none.

No hospitals, no ambulances, no courtrooms, no prisons, no cemeteries, no tombstones, no memorial parks. There was no history because there was no past — only a present concatenation of all the tenses.

No time: only Spring, growth without decay, no aging, no clouds, no night. All those who had ever lived were felt, all that had ever been asked was answered to those who had posed the questions, and yet without explanation. They just knew. There was no want; no hunger, no thirst, no pain. It was a mirror image of that which each one had ever conceived as the ideal. Light, colour and matter interfused. All melodies, all of nature's instruments, all sound in harmony, without overture or finale — only reverberations that included all echoes. No dissonant voice, no cry of injustice, no sob of tragedy, no haunting screams; only memory remained: individual, collective, universal memory which gave identity to everything and everyone, a unique imprint — a soul. Every soul had escaped complete, as if in invincible armour it had been protected through the cataclysm.

The victims of disease, murder, torture, accident, age were rejuvenated to the fraction of the instant at which they had reached, or would have reached, their peak in the process of becoming. And so it would go on and on —

forever becoming and never having become. The creative act was suspended, to continue forever.

* * *

or

It just happened; the forces were completely balanced. No one could win. Everyone would lose. They disarmed gradually, in stages, agreeing that a balance should remain... not unilaterally, but multilaterally, and everyone for himself.

At that moment, or rather, at the moment before that moment when they decided they just could not go to war. There would be nothing to come back to and no one to come back — and if there was, they would not be content — or able to live with themselves if they knew there was no "other".

It began slowly. Yet once it began it grew with a few individuals in each village, town and city, everywhere. It was not a movement with a program or ideology, but something understood without having to be transmitted. It was communicated from within, from a source not heard before, overwhelmed and drowned out by the noise of millions of other passions and confrontations within each person. But now it became stronger — it was as if a new sense had come into being, like hunger or thirst, only more urgent. It did not happen simultaneously or to everyone in the same way, and it did not produce a frenzied mass cry for change. Rather, it was something felt by each one, without commotion, singly, encountered within himself, requiring no explanation. It just was, and everyone had it within, like hunger and thirst. Yet it was not a craving but a completeness, a satiation, which needed nothing else to fulfill itself.

And then... after this beginning, it was as if everything which had ever been separate — like a Pissarro painting, made up of infinitesimal dots like confetti — came together

materializing into a world, all at once to form the all — all except for the weapons. There were no weapons — none.

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There are as many stories as to how this happened as there are individuals in the world. It happened to each in a different way — each individual making up an etching — each part of a painting with as many etchings as there are moods and shades of mood in the spectrum — as multifold as that of colour and as filled with sounds as there are scales in the universe.

BARONESS VON HAUPTMAN
(NOT EVEN PARIS)

Through the raindrops of the taxi's windows the world took on a stained-glass appearance. The sleepless night had left Jean weary, and two days of antibiotics had done nothing to relieve his head-cold and his aching throat. Only two hours ago he had been flown by military helicopter from Berlin to Bonn with the eight other members of the negotiating team; he now looked forward to getting to his hotel and sleeping until the next morning, when the week-long session was to begin.

Being in Europe brought back old family memories. As Jean prepared for bed in his hotel room he thought of his father, who had been a resistance fighter in World War II and had lost many of his relatives in Poland to the Nazi terror. Jean's thoughts conspired with his cold to keep him awake. Then, just as he was about to drop off, the telephone rang. It was General Frazer, who said, "Jean, I want you and Joe Brown to accompany me to dinner with Baroness Marlene Von Hauptman. I promise you, you will never forget the Baroness."

Jean never did.

* * *

"Six seventy-eight Baumgasse," General Frazer directed. After which not another word was spoken as the two military men and Jean were driven through the steel-grey streets of Bonn, in which buildings, sky, trees, rain, the Rhine and the occasional pedestrian seemed to blend into a Monet painting. Only the taxi driver muttered something about the weather being unusually cold and wet, even for February.

The drab stone, three-story edifice from which the Baroness emerged, was not unlike the others on the street. Underneath a white umbrella held by General Frazer, a relatively tall figure, in a long, black-velvet coat and cape approached and became distinguishable. Seeming not to mind the rain or the penetrating rawness of the night, Baroness Von Hauptman stood at the open door of the cab and greeted Jean and Joe before she sat down in the back

seat next to them. As she removed her cape, Jean tried to catch a glimpse of her. Shadows and light played hide-and-seek with her full countenance, which appeared to him as if in a *vernissage:* chestnut-brown hair tied in a neat and elegant, but not stern, bun; a high, intelligent forehead; eyes as green as the grass of a damp August; a dignified nose; a long, slender, graceful neck; a pale soft, smooth complexion belonging to a woman many years younger than the one betrayed by the wrinkles on her hands as she removed her gloves. Jean thought he saw a sadness in her eyes for the fractions of seconds in which she did not smile, and a melancholy in the lines etched on her forehead and at the corners of her eyes below the delicately applied make-up.

General Frazer manoeuvered his tall, thin frame into the front seat in an exercise of practiced precision. Then he turned his head and neck in an unconsciously defensive manner to avoid further pain in his back, which, perhaps because of the weather, was giving him greater discomfort than he had learned to endure in the forty-odd years since he had been shot down somewhere near here, less than three hundred kilometers away, during the War.

"Marlene, where would you suggest we go? A special place for Jean and Joe."

The Baroness thought for an instant, and in what seemed to Jean the most non-staccato German he had ever heard, instructed the driver to drive to the Kaiserplatz Restaurant. "Ah, Arthur," (her accent was really more French than German), "I think that Monsieur White and Colonel Brown, we will all very much enjoy the atmosphere, the gypsy music and the food. It is from yesterday, or maybe even before yesterday, a different time..." With a sparkle in her eye, she restrained the flow of sentiment with a touch of humour: "But don't worry, Monsieur White and Colonel Brown, the food, I assure you, is from today."

"Baroness, I hope...," a momentary burst of rain on the roof of the car drowned out the rest of Joe's sentence,

which he repeated, "that the wine at least, is from the day before yesterday."

General Frazer laughed. "You see Marlene, I thought of asking you to play bridge with us. Although Joe is not much of a card player, we could use him as a joker."

Jean had only recently met Joe. But after having spent a long night of work with him on a position paper, he knew as much about him as anyone who closely works with someone past fatigue and beyond giddiness can learn about another. He knew that there were two sides to Joe: a no-nonsense professional side, an extension of his serious, probing philosophical nature, and a jovial side ready to laugh at life. At the age of nineteen, after a year as a lightweight boxer, Joe had enlisted in the army and was placed under the command of Arthur Frazer, who, after a two-year stint in Europe, encouraged him to go to university. There Joe studied philosophy, completed an undergraduate degree with honours, and then won a scholarship to law school. It was no surprise to anyone when he became the youngest director of the International Negotiations Unit. General Frazer may have been his commanding officer, but he was also the only father Joe ever knew.

"Nothing to worry about Colonel Brown," the Baroness said, "I have never learned to play bridge, even though your General once tried to teach me, many years ago."

As rain pelted on the windshield of the taxi, General Frazer could see a grey, dingy, prison-hospital room, in which for the fifth time that night Marlene was changing his bandage and cleaning the wound so that the infection would not spread. The prisoner in the next bed had given the General a deck of cards; when she was done he asked if she would play bridge with him and other patient-prisoners in the room. So that the others would understand, Marlene had answered in French, *"Je m'excuse messieurs, mais je ne joue pas aux cartes."* The General had asked her if she would like to learn. She replied, "Perhaps, one day, but only if you teach me." During his stay in the hospital she

could never sit down long enough, or perhaps she lacked the patience for the game. Later, when she had taught him to walk again, there was so much to see, hear and do that they both forgot about cards.

"No, Marlene, it was not given to us to play bridge, was it?"

"No, Arthur, we never did play bridge."

* * *

"Gnädige Frau, Kaiserplatz!"

"My goodness, gentlemen, we are here and I did not point out to you, Monsieur White and Colonel Brown, some of the famous sites — at least, the Beethoven Home on Bonngasse. Before you leave you must see that and the Drachenfels castle ruins described by Lord Byron, a master of your English language.

"Don't worry Marlene, we'll have time for that."

* * *

"Guten abend, Baronesse, Good evening gentlemen. May I take your coats? The waiter will be with you in a moment. I am certain Baroness Von Hauptman can recommend something you will all be most pleased with."

A violinist approached the table and the Baroness asked the General if there was something in particular he wanted to hear.

"I leave it to you, Marlene."

"Then I will ask him to play something old and something new, so that your guests will not think how old we really are."

"You mean me, Marlene. You do not age."

"You see, Monsieur White and Colonel Brown, our generation lives in illusions, or if we do not live in them,

we try to believe in them. And you are polite enough not to dispel them."

* * *

The large blue candle on the table and a gently bristling fire in a fireplace at the opposite end of the room augmented the light of a single, dim, overhead chandelier. There were perhaps ten tables, covered with white tablecloths and set with silver and crystal. Only one other table was occupied, by a young couple who frequently held hands and gave the impression that they were barely eating. The incessant, thumping rain on the roof, together with the violin music, cacooned the red-papered walls, the burgundy oak door and its occupants. The street lamps, irradiating the perpetually descending rain on the window panes; and the choreography of the reverberating azure and crimson hues, ignited the cutlery, the glasses and the sifters; and combined with the ingredients of the now-empty bottles to kindle the faces of the guests with a glow alternating between the rose of the Whlener Sonnenuhr wine and the amber of the Courvoisier cognac.

"On our way from the airport, I noticed swastikas and the number fifty," he said.

"Yes, Monsieur White, it is strange and frighteningly familiar to see the swastika on banners again. They are commemorating the fifty years since the rise of Hitler to power."

"What exactly does that mean?" Joe asked.

"Colonel Brown, I suppose it depends on the person. Among the activities scheduled are films, lectures, plays, public meetings, readings, television and radio programs, debates and publications. Germany, officially as a nation, will analyze that period of history, but perhaps, Colonel — your General told me you studied philosophy — perhaps, history will analyze us, not only us, but also the analyzers. The line between the two is finer than we acknowledge.

You know Colonel, even half a century is not enough to see the difference, and yet we are running out of time."

"Marlene, maybe it is better not to analyze so much. Where does it bring us?" the General said.

With a laugh, the Baroness looked at Jean and Joe. "Gentlemen, is he always so practical?" Then she turned to the General. "In my fashion, Arthur, I have become as practical as you. For instance, I have been asked to speak at the universities and on the radio to appear on panels, and I have declined each time."

"That's not like you, Marlene."

"I am tired, very tired, physically tired of the apathy. Even I, Arthur, after forty years, am drained, historically exhausted."

"I can't believe..."

But the Baroness went on. "After the War I felt I was not only in a hospital ward, often on-call twenty-four hours a day, but perpetually on duty as a witness. There were other witnesses, but so many didn't see, didn't really see. I felt I had to tell everything that had happened to a new generation, to the generation growing up, after the war — in the universities and elsewhere, so that they would know and never let it happen again. It was not for the generation who had lived through it. Either they knew or they didn't want to be reminded. It was only for the young, whose consciousness needed to be awakened."

"We face in the future what you have witnessed in the past," Joe said after she had finished. "But the peril is even greater. Only a new consciousness will allow us to escape nuclear disaster. Each person listening to himself, not mass movements from without. They are dangerous; they hypnotize with simple solutions, either teach us to kill in the name of peace, or to disarm ourselves so that our enemies won't feel threatened. I ask you, did it help Hirochima and Nagasaki that Japan had no nuclear

weapons? No. What I'm talking about would have to be felt by both sides, by all sides, from within, like hunger or thirst. Einstein said that 'the splitting of the atom has changed everything, save our mode of thinking, and that is why we are proceeding towards unparalleled catastrophe.' We are either confronted by scientific geniuses who are moral midgets or naive humanitarians who are ignorant of technology. I often wonder whether science and conscience can ever merge, whether nuclear technology and ethics can speak with one voice, whether people can be awakened to a new consciouness in this lifetime. Still I believe it must come. Only then can we progress beyond known modes of thought."

"You are an idealist, Colonel Brown, like me. But I no longer know if it will happen, and I am too tired to wait."

General Frazer tried to change the drift of the conversation, which seemed to have deepened the Baroness's mood.

"You see, Baroness, we even have an in-house, Einstein-quoting philosopher in our military."

Joe laughed. "It's not often, General, that I have such an audience."

"Colonel Brown, it is not often the public hears such thoughts from military men," the Baroness said graciously.

"Marlene, are you planning to take a trip to Paris, as you do each Spring?"

"Not each Spring, Arthur."

"I know you did not go last Spring, but that was because of inadvertance."

To answer your question, Arthur, I am making no plans. Plans now make me."

Somehow, no matter what was said, the Baroness's

weariness was felt by everyone, and the evening ended before eleven.

* * *

On their visit the following evening with Professor Helmut Schroeder, whom General Frazer sought out after he received a message that the Baroness had suffered a stroke, Jean learned that the inadvertance of the previous Spring had been a heart attack. General Frazer knew about it only because the student who boarded with his friend had found a slip of paper with the General's name and telephone number specifying dinner at eight, and had called the General to tell him that the Baroness had been taken by ambulance to the university hospital.

Just as some men need silence to endure their pain, Professor Schroeder needed conversation; and all he could, or would, talk about was the Baroness. "Baron Fritz Von Hauptman was my closest friend," he said. He made only one request of me before his death, four years ago, and that was to take care of Marlene.

From the way Schroeder spoke about her, Jean thought that the professor had been in love with her —perhaps from the moment he had met her thirty-five years ago. Perhaps everyone fell in love with her a little.

His grey, rumpled demeanor and exaggerated, drooping mustache made him resemble a walrus. The Baroness had married Fritz Von Hauptman, Shroeder said, because he was kind, gentle... but mostly because he had been in Sweden with his parents during the War, far away from the disease of Nazism. Therefore he was uncontaminated in her eyes. And, yes, he was dashing with his curly black hair and aristocratic bearing; he epitomized a quality which was also apparent in Marlene's manner and determination.

... But she never forgot David, Dr. David Bergman, for whom and with whom she would have died. Destiny had robbed her not only of him, but of the sacrifice she was so willing to make.

David was a medical student, her professor father's favorite. She met him for the first time in 1936, and he was filled with ideals, even more so than she. His dream was to found an orphan home in Bonn, just like Dr. Janusz Korczak's two in Warsaw, where his parents lived.

The Baroness had often spoken to Schroeder of the Krochmalna Street orphanage and its founder, whom she visited with David for three consecutive summers before the outbreak of the War. This balding, spectacled physician, with wisdom, patience, love and devotion, created a "children's republic" in which the children made the laws in a children's parliament, and judged their peers in a children's court, knowing that they, too, might be judged one day by those to whom they meted out justice. To encourage their desire for truth and to develop their literary skills, Korczak established a newspaper in which the children wrote all the articles. "Kindness, fairness, creativity and knowledge flourished everywhere," Schroeder said. "The brave doctor, as you may know, won a Peace Prize posthumously."

"I have never heard of him," Joe said.

"Not many people have," Schroeder answered.

"Yet the Baroness spoke of Dr. Korczak at every lecture she gave for that very reason, so that his death in 1942, together with the deaths of his beloved children and his loyal assistant Stefania Wilcznska would not be forgotten. The S.S. offered Korczak his life if he would leave his children and build similar orphanages in Germany. The S.S. soon had their answer. Dr. Korczak led a procession of children into a cattlecar, holding the two smallest by their hands. During that final train-ride, he made the hungry children believe they were going to take part in the most sumptuous picnic, with food they had not tasted since the beginning of the War. The story of the good doctor, who believed it was just as important to teach children the grammar of ethics as it was to teach them the alphabet, ends in the showers of the Treblinka Concentration Camp.

Or maybe it begins there, for him and for others like him..."

"What became of David Bergman?"

"David finished his medical studies, winning every prize, but he never practiced. He was not allowed to. In the early summer of 1941, he was rounded up with the rest of the Jewish Community of Bonn and imprisoned in a monastery. In 1942 the group of several hundred was deported. Marlene smuggled food, letters, clothing and hope to the dwindling number who survived. On the day he heard the rumor that they were to be sent to their deaths, her father gave Marlene an injection of morphine, telling her it was an anti-typhus shot. She could never forgive her Father for that until he himself was sent to Dachau six months later for harbouring and feeding Jews in the basement of the university hospital, where he taught.

"With her father gone, there was no one to turn to. Marlene had lost her mother at the age of four and her father had never remarried. Left alone, she vowed to dedicate her life to what David believed in. After the War, she met Fritz. Fritz fell in love with her, understood her, was willing to do anything to make her life as easy as possible. He lavished every gift on her. And she was a good wife. She helped him in his legal practice, even as she carried on her own work. They could not have children, but her self-imposed task totally preoccupied her world, together with making a home for Fritz, and I suppose, to some extent for me. The two or three evenings a week I had dinner with them, were the highlight of my life..."

Professor Schroeder stopped, picked up and lit his pipe. "I am sorry gentlemen, I am getting carried away."

"Not at all," the General said.

Jean asked, "Professor Schroeder what do you teach?"

"Medical ethics."

"Are you a physician, too?"

"Yes, a physician who decided that the various degrees

of ethics had to be understood. From the primal, basic one of obedience to authority to that of ethical behaviour for its own sake; from motives ranging from fear to the highest moral motives that do not acknowledge fear. I call it a moral thermometer by which to measure the ethical temperature of people's actions. The highest ethical degree can be exemplified by Janusz Korczak, whose desire to act right was unshaken even in a sea of moral chaos." The professor paused, then asked: "Monsieur White, and you, Colonel Brown, as lawyers, do you think law and morality must be synonomous?"

"As long as people like you, Professor Schroeder, and Baroness Von Hauptman, exist, we can catch a glimpse of that ideal," said Jean.

General Frazer asked Professor Schroeder: "What prognosis do the doctors give Marlene?"

"They do not know if she will live. She has stopped fighting. Apathy — Germany's, Europe's has beaten her as even the War could not. The doctors say she will be paralyzed from the neck down if she regains consciousness. Her paralysis is the apathy which she sees around her."

Schroeder excused himself, said he was tired. General Frazer thanked him for his hospitality, bade him good night and then we left. Outside, he hailed a cab which took us to a café that he had often frequented.

* * *

After he had ordered a round of cognacs, the General said: "No one knows Paris like Marlene does. Boulevard St. Germain, Monmartre, the Louvre, the cafés. She went to Lycée and the Conservatory of Music in Paris where she studied to be a concert pianist."

"She never mentioned that," said Jean.

"She vowed never to touch a keyboard after David's death."

A long silence enveloped Frazer's private thoughts.

Then he said: "I can still feel her warm, gentle hand in mine as it felt when we walked and walked through the streets of Paris. The Palais de Chaillot, the Rive Gauche, L'arc du Triomphe... we listened to France awaken from War. Each day pastel-coloured Paris sailed into the Spring sunset to prepare for yet another day. For Marlene, Paris was an ever-rotating Monet exhibition — a perpetual movement of river, sky, bridges and buildings to the background music of Debussy. At moments during that two-week visit, she was fifteen again — a newly-arrived, school-girl on a Sunday off from private school, not wanting to think of Friday or Monday. Every so often, a street corner, a park, a theater, a bistro we passed would elicit a giggle, a story. Chantal, Françoise, Amelia, her former room-mates and closest friends during her eight years of study in Paris became almost as familiar to me as my old football buddies. It was an escape for both of us, a denial of the War, even if only for a while.

"And every year after the War she returned to Paris?" Jean asked.

"Yes. I gave her Paris back, and every Spring she returned with Fritz. Somehow only Paris could revive the early happiness she once knew." The General seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Jean and Joe: "Not even Paris can help now."

* * *

As the cab sped to the hotel through the clear, crisp, star-filled night, Jean looked at the General, who had fallen asleep. He thought of the last words the General had spoken in the cafe, and wondered if he had meant them to apply to the Baroness, himself, or the world after the Second World War.

THE TEMPEST

To the little girl from Jaslo —
July-August 1984

The child is now a man. The little girl is now a grandmother (to the child's children). The child's father is gone; he now hovers over them with blessings. The little girl's father (the child's grandfather), who from somewhere in the Upper Spheres, now guides their footsteps, presented the book many years ago to the little girl. Axel Munthe is now a legend.

It all began in the little girl's room in Jaslo, where the little girl climbed Anacapri reading *The Story of San Michele* — long ago, before the War (but for a child nothing is far in space and time).

* * *

I did not want to leave Capri. I did not want to lose sight of San Michele on its mountain-top crescent. But the ferry to Naples pushed the Island further and further into the distance, behind a shimmering, translucent tablecloth of blue-green Mediterranean Sea, gently shaking its embroidered surface so as to remove its crystals and diamonds for yet another setting, try as it may, the diamonds and crystals would remain for another day.

I remembered the Tempest which rages beyond the Island, away from its serene presence, while still close enough to pacify its radius as the eye of a calm sea. Ah,

> the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs that give delight
> and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime
> voices
> That, if I then had wak'd after long
> sleep,
> Will make me sleep again; and then, in
> dreaming,

The clouds methought would open and
show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I
wak'd,
I cried to dream again.*

* * *

The little girl with dancing, intelligent eyes, round face and brown pigtails, now a small, young grandmother, with dancing, intelligent, thoughtful eyes, round face and greying strands of brown hair gathered in a bun, was giving a class in her meaning-in-life philosophy. A hand was raised, and a voice from the back asked her to read from her book, *Ten Steps in the Land of Life,* any passage which told how both man and nature together had affected her being.

She read the passage in park-surrounded Philadelphia, with its trees ablaze with autumn, just as she had related it to me many years ago, on a cold, blustery, Montreal February day, with arctic winds hurling cascades of sun-streamed snow like that in a child's glass ball filled with water that catches the light shining on the miniature house in the woods.

"*The Story of San Michele* by Axel Munthe I read when I was fourteen. Axel Munthe was a Swedish medical doctor who moved from city to country, from the rich to the poor, from Sweden to France and Italy. I saw the people and the Mediterranean through the eyes of Axel Munthe. What shows most in this book is his love for life, deep sincere love, even in the midst of death and tragedy. Dr. Munthe treats cholera patients in Naples; he never gives up. He talks of his love for dogs and birds. The determination of this one man, a person often left to himself, shines through — a man striving to fulfil his

* Shakspeare, *The Tempest,* Act III, Sc. 2.

dreams and longings. I discovered Capri and Anacapri (at the top of Capri) where Axel Munthe built a villa overlooking island and sea.

"He lived from 1857 to 1949. I heard that at the end of his life he became blind. When I heard that, I suffered. I, the stranger, the reader of his book, was sorry that Axel Munthe was unable to see his beloved folk of Capri, his birds, his dogs. In one of his stories, Dr. Munthe describes how he tried to save the life of a boy who had contracted diptheria. In his fight with the disease there was something frantic, something that emanated from the pages of the book as the strength of man challenging death because of his love for life.

"Many times during the War, I thought of this love for life in spite of danger, recalled this author who became my friend and mentor. A few years ago I visited Axel Munthe's villa. Anacapri is beautiful, millions of flowers, colors, the sun, the sea. Standing on the balcony of the villa, a Mediterranean breeze caressing my cheek, I understood that Axel Munthe enjoyed life to the last moment. I closed my eyes, waiting to imagine the Axel Munthe who could not see but who could still feel the breeze. I thought of the love of life felt even by someone who is blind."*

* * *

I returned to the Island which I had only known through my ears, to behold it with my eyes; and was guided by the little girl, the child from Jaslo, the small grandmother, the philosopher from Philadelphia.

Perpetual explosions of light ricocheted in every direction to the background voice of the Sea, accompanied by a choir of bass winds and shrill treble breezes, in a choreography which turned the Island into a continuous sound and light performance.

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* *Ten Steps in the Land of Life,* Dr. Lena Allen-Shore, Shengold Publishers, 1983.

The light embraced, pervaded and slithered through every aperture, in a sensual motion that oozed through every pore with eroticism. Inexhaustible potions of liquid gold were splattered everywhere and gold powder was sprinkled like confetti at a wedding. Radiant water-colour reds, whites and pinks painted the flowers afresh each moment, with strokes so quick the brush was never seen.

On one side of the road, a chalk-white cliff-drop and the endless, glistening, living Sea, on the other, candy-cane mint and sugar-cube houses, for every Hansel and Gretel to eat, surrounded by large bouquets planted in the irradiated earth. As we approached the villa of San Michele, a lonely plain, strewn with broken masonry, offered us a Gregorian chant. Imprisoned blocks of travertine and marble, under ivy-rosemary and wild honeysuckle and thyme, not yet sculpted, beckoned that they be shaped. Gently lifted by ocean breezes, we skimmed the road towards Axel Munthe's residence.

A stately honour guard of cypresses waited to welcome us. I thought of Axel Munthe's words, "My house is open to the sun and the wind and the voice of the Sea, like a Greek temple and light, light, light, everywhere." Only to those whose malevolence is capable of suppressing the light, suffocating the truth are barred from entering. (Axel Munthe may have gone blind but he never lost sight of the truth).

The house is an offering to the air, the clouds, the flowers, the trees and the sea. For the body needs little place in which to move but the soul needs infinity in which to roam. The structure is small, the rooms few, but terraces, loggias and pergolas pay homage to the sun and its Creator.

The woman spoke neither French nor English, nor any other language we had in common. We improvised. We spoke without language. She understood us, we understood her. The flowers needed care and she offered them water. Thus the little girl from Jaslo met the little girl from

Capri, a favourite of Munthe, now a greying grandmother, who with her father had tended the flowers the little girl from Jaslo had read about. In the intervening years the little girl from Capri's face had become windblown and sun-baked and her hands calloused on the San Michele hill-top, perhaps waiting for this reunion, where the story no longer ended but where San Michele only began. The two children's eyes met and they again explored San Michele, only this time together. Tears streamed down their cheeks as they conveyed their common attachment to Munthe and his humanity.

Perhaps the little girl from Jaslo, somewhere in the kingdom of the night of the Holocaust, thought of some child who had not known gentleness such as Munthe's, and the Italian child of some epidemic the good physician had wrestled with. I, looking back to that July episode on a frost-bitten November day, see a child of famine-ridden Kom in Ethiopia who may not live until sunset, in spite of all the light, because he does not know the care of an Axel Munthe.

* * *

I followed them and caught the dialogue, spoken mostly with eyes and gestures. Here, at the entrance of San Michele, Dr. Munthe often greeted her and brought her apple cider and cookies, which he kept especially for her. He would tell the little girl about children who had made him laugh and whom he had made laugh, and his personality, would seem to fill the house, which did not have much furniture. Indeed, there were no trinkets, no bric brac here; only a few primitive pictures, a Greek bas relief and a Dürer etching decorated the whitewashed walls. On the mosaic floors there were scattered carpets. A few tables with books and flowers in colourful vases from Urbino and Firenza emphasized the sparseness.

In the atrium with the Roman well, we climbed the steps which led to the loggia and the upper floor. The sound of the sea mingled with that of the wind which

descended from the open roof of sky. Here, Dr. Munthe nursed his beloved birds when they were ill or too weak to fly. The bird sanctuary atop Capri (which he had fought for years to acquire so that the sparrows he so loved would not be sold as delicacies in France) was completely natural, and the little girl from Capri had never known it to be otherwise. The fourth century marble mask of Medusa on the wall over the writing table jealously guarded her domain of the studio, separated by a single marble column from the Venetian salon. The child from Capri had whispered to her often while watching Munthe speaking to village folk or guests from far away, seeking donations and volunteers for hospitals and clinics, repeating his dictum — *Oser, vouloir, savoir, se taire* (to dare, to want, to know, to be silent). She would ask Medusa to cast a spell and Medusa always performed her magic. But was the magic that of Munthe which brought ships to Capri, bearing those who sought to pay homage to the good doctor?

From there to the sculpture gallery, covered with young vines, red passionate roses and honeysuckle and with a view of the pergola, where a marble Tiberius (or was it Germanicus?) seized the visitors and held them hostage to air, the clouds, the moving sea. In that panorama millions of transparent turquoise kerchiefs leaped rhythmically in unison, floating above the ocean floor, heaving and sighing. At the edge of the pergola, the woman told us how years ago, Munthe would often hold her hand, next to the huge granite sphinx, and looking out towards the east, across the port of Marina Grande, he would tell her stories of the world beyond the Island and beyond the Sea, of his native northern Sweden, with its deep-blue winter sky, of the strong, courageous Lapps trudging through the snow and deer-track covered forests, of mountains he had climbed as a boy, of Parisians on the Champs Elysées, the bistros and the opera. She said if only the wise sphinx who had heard it all, could tell us, we would know much that she had forgotten. Below the stairs she pointed out the remains

of a wall, *capus reticulatum,* from Tiberius' villa, then took us to a very special room. Here, she said, only she could observe Munthe as he thought and wrote, in the ancient chapel which he had converted into a library. For her, it was a sanctuary in which his thoughts, although never expressed, lived on for her. Were these thoughts never written down? She did not know. What she knew was that he cared for every living being — and everything on God's earth — and that was more than could ever have been written.

As we left the library she pointed to a funeral relief, showing a mother and child, who she said were never, and never would be, separated. The girl from Capri and we parted.

The call of the sea and of a goatherd in the distance playing Pan-like on his flute announced the setting of the sun. We went down to the garden and sat there in silence, no, in true dialogue, until evening encompassed the day and the stars in the heavens and in the sea became one.

Later, in an outdoor cafe, a piano played the theme song from *Casablanca,* and the little girl from Jaslo sang *les feuilles mortes* — in Capri, that had lived long and known much, and yet had scarcely aged, showing few of the ravages of time to be seen beyond the Island and its Sea, in a tempest that did not know of this peace.

TRANSIT IN VENICE

The memory is a living thing — it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives — the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.

Eudora Welty

Thirty-four years had passed since the ordeal ended. Mother and son were having tea on the terrace of the Hôtel des Bains overlooking the Adriatic Sea. The tea helped dissipate the heat of the early August afternoon. A stillness enveloped Lido, punctuated by waiters putting down drinks, clanking occasional forks and spoons for cakes or spumoni, for idle guests who were loath to disturb the siesta atmosphere. A murmur of conversation from the few widely dispersed tables blended with the gentle breeze, which wafted scents of roses and jasmine from the surrounding garden. Blue sea merged into sky, and but for the rhythmic movement of waves caressing the sand, the two seemed to be one.

"First, there was the waiting, indeterminate waiting, without knowing where he was. After six weeks, the first letter came, smuggled from a cell somewhere in Warsaw, where he was kept."

She knew the letters from memory, she had read them so many times.

April 5, 1948
11:30 p.m.

My dearest Helen and little Joseph,

I am well. Have courage. It will take time — but I will return to both of you and we will get on with our lives where we left off.

Your ever loving

Conrad

P.S. Please keep showing the baby my picture so that he won't forget me.

"Nothing more came for six weeks. What was I to do? Where was I to go? Whom was I to speak to? I just believed. I read and reread that first letter, and it gave me hope that he would return. It was all I had and that, together with you, Joseph, and the comfort of my parents and brother, was everything. As I walked the streets of London, pushing you in your carriage, playing with you in the park, or more often than not, in our small apartment, because you were sick, often with high fevers, I would show you your father's picture. Even before you began to speak, you kissed the picture and, then, when you said "Papa" for the first time, you pointed to it. Yet when you saw him after his absence of one and a half years you asked, "Who is that man? What is he doing in our apartment?"

Joseph did not interrupt, for fear of disturbing the flow of the story, which was important to him. There were pieces from the beginning of his life, parts of which he had heard, but never in this detail, nor in this very significant setting; for it was here, in Lido, and in Venice, that his father had had to wait, after his assisted escape from confinement, before he could board a ship for London.

Joseph only knew what he had overheard in a conversation which he could neither place in time nor space: his father was to have gone to a two-day diplomatic meeting in Poland and was held by a regime hostile to his beliefs. The event was rarely mentioned during his father's lifetime and Joseph had never discussed it with his mother — until now.

"Your father's letters from Venice were filled with hope, for a new beginning. The War had only been over for four years."

The war, Joseph knew, had taken his father's first

wife, child and entire aristocratic family. During it his father, as a partisan, had been wounded while mining a bridge Nazi troops were to have crossed. And then his father had returned to Poland, to a new personal war. Yet he survived this war, too, started a new life, with a new family, and did not despair, at least not in the presence of others. Neither Joseph nor his brother who would eventually be born in the United States, had any sense of what it was. His physical health was restored, or was it? Had there been some internal toll? For only eighteen years later, at a relatively young age, his father died suddenly, without warning, as was the case with so many events in his life.

His father's hair, once black, was a distinguished grey as far back as Joseph could remember; but, then, he had heard his father had turned grey at twenty-nine. His father's eyes were as blue-grey as the Adriatic at twilight. He was a fair and handsome man with a smooth complexion and strong build; yet there was something delicate in his finely-shaped hands. He was tall, taller than Joseph, and much taller than his small, round-faced wife, with her short, brown hair and twinkling eyes of the same colour, who now sat opposite Joseph. As mother and son sipped their tea, from an oriental shore, which had probably followed a similar route to that taken by Marco Polo, of whom Joseph often thought when he was a child. No longer a child, he told stories of Marco Polo to his children, who, together with his wife, were now nestled for the night, in a summer cottage in the Green Mountains of Vermont.

Circumstance had brought Helen and Joseph to Venice, to share the story which Helen had lived consciously and Joseph had felt subconsciously almost three and a half decades ago.

* * *

For forty-two days, Conrad waited for his transit papers. They finally arrived. The waters surrounding

Venice and Lido subsided, for him, two days later than it took for the waters surrounding the Ark to subside.

Day after day, one day merging into the next, Conrad walked the squares, bridges and labyrinthine alleys, plied lagoons and canals. He would take a *vaporetta* through Canale di San Marco, passing the Doge's Palace and the Bridge of Sighs; columns of saints and lions watched him as they had watched a perpetual flotilla of visitors from the four corners of the earth live out part of their tales here, where the zenith and nadir meet, in a confluence of sky and sea. The warm lazy air, breathed by the Sirocco, combined with the heaving and sighing of the water as he swept by projecting flanks of temples, with lions and guardian angels, petrified in an instant of time, forever doomed from departing, to act as the protectors of Venice.

Time and again, he passed the scene which he envisioned as stage props, a background for his family: the public gardens, sparkling fountains, the Piazetta with its vendors of antiquities, lace-makers, glass-blowers, artists painting endless canvases of hands extended, feeding corn to waves of pigeons; or, it was yet another watercolour of Venice against the Sea, where the translucent paint, itself reflected the scene as if covered by water, to be discovered by some distant mermaid. Only to her would the swelling sea speak of its mysteries. It was like the Menagazzi watercolour in Joseph's livingroom, a mirage, in space and time. The now familiar curves of the canal would lead to the majestic, marble arches of the Rialto. Approaching the landing-stages, waves lapping the tiled sides of the canal and the slippery corners of the walls, he would see dull grey rocks, descending into the bright-stained, rocking water. As he mounted the ladder-like steps, the dry land would greet him with the perfume of unrecognizable clusters of purple and white flowers, as well as of roses and lilacs, and a hint of almond.

Night after night, Conrad would sit by the window of his room, in his Lido pension, awaiting the sunrise. He

watched fiery sunsets consume Lido, self-conflagrate and extinguish themselves. With his window wide open to catch any fleeting breeze, under the dome of the starlit sky, he observed constellations and listened to the slow breathing of the slumbering sea, an all-encompassing, sighing presence, like that of a sleeping child, guarding its secrets. Moonbeams and lantern-lamps illuminated the arched, tree-lined avenue, casting hues on marble traceries, moorish lattices, a distant vaulted-bridge — and beyond, far off, on a baby sleeping peacefully, unaware that his father's prayers hovered over him.

After the first few days, knowing that it was only a matter of time, his preserved sanity allowed him to be lulled in gondolas, gently swaying like the cradle of an infant in a lullabye of waves. As his eyes gazed toward the open sea, he imagined himself walking through the door of his apartment, embracing Helen and Joseph. He watched Helen as she played the piano and sang songs she had composed. Sometimes these merged into the background music of Italian opera arias and ballads sung by passing, dark moustached gondoliers in festive straw hats, blue and white horizontally-striped T-shirts and navy pants. The irony of his being here without Helen — what bliss it would have been if they were together! — was almost more than he could bear.

At a little white table, adorned with a glass of fragrant pastel flowers, in a white-washed room lit by an overhead light-bulb, Conrad sat and wrote:

August 18, 1949
11: 30 p.m.

My dearest Helen and little Joseph,

Today, to help me while away the hours my friend, the poet Schiller, joined me as I recalled three of my favorite poems. I don't know whether Schiller was ever in Venice during his lifetime, but he certainly became acquainted

with the city today, while his words accompanied me everywhere.

The first time I heard "Der Ring von Polycrates," I was seven years old, in an old red brick schoolhouse, in Switzerland. (The doctor had convinced my father that the Swiss mountain air might help relieve my mother's symptoms; and as I did not want to remain in Poland without her, my father, occupied with his business affairs, agreed to let me go with her.) My teacher had read it to an older boy she tutored in German, explaining it to him in French. I was waiting in class, after school hours, since no one had come to pick me up that afternoon, and my teacher had promised to walk with me to the house we rented in Vevey that last year of my mother's illness. In fact, my mother was too weak that afternoon to attempt the few blocks distance, and the nurse, who often went for her, did not want to leave my mother alone. When I got home I ran to my mother's bedside to share with her the poem, which, although I could not understand it, had sounded so beautiful. My mother was very pale and the nurse tried to remove me from the room. But my mother came to my defence and said that I could stay. I sat down next to her and watched as she breathed the irregular, shallow breaths, I had become accustomed to. I described the poem, repeating only the words I could remember: "Polycrates — my friend — true friend." My mother looked at me and said, "My son, I hope you have such friends when you grow up — many such friends." It was as if she was giving me a blessing. Then from memory she recited the last few lines.

Years later, as a student in Vienna and Brussels, for a complete change from the economics and engineering I was studying, alone or with a few literary friends, I would return to poetry. I particularly read and reread that poem, and it always brought back Vevey and my mother to me. But, Helen, I could not really understand the poem until I had survived the War because of friends who cared, through experiences you already know. The poem tells a simple

story of a king who is about to have a subject of his realm killed; and shortly before the execution, a friend of the condemned man appears before the monarch and begs him to take his life instead. The king, moved by the noble deed, stays the execution, telling the condemned man's friend that he wishes he too had such a true friend. Somehow, my love, it has been my good fortune to know men and women who, in moments of crisis, would risk their lives to save mine. How I wish that I could bestow that good fortune upon you and Joseph. After the War, my dearest, I often wondered if it would ever again be needed. It was. Will it be needed in the future?

I wait for each day to pass; it brings me closer; it is one day less without you and Joseph.

Love,
always
your Conrad

August 19, 1949
10: 30 p.m.

My dearest Helen and little Joseph,

I fell asleep shortly after writing last night's letter, which you probably have read by now, without realizing that I had not finished sharing yesterday's thoughts with you. Since I wanted you to receive it, at the same interval as always, I mailed it immediately this morning. I spent the rest of the day trying to find out about my papers, only to be told that as yet none had arrived from London, but that it would not be long. I asked how long, and I was told that this could not be determined exactly. So, my love, I write and wait, planning our future, again and again, which I pray will begin soon.

From my room I frequently hear the bells of San Marco Cathedral, along with bells of the other churches; and Schiller's poem, "Lied von der Kloche" — the Song of the Bell, resounds in my ears. Bells ring, it says, at a

person's birth, his wedding day and his death. From my window, I often look at the ocean and the boats passing by, and I think of events that are never announced and are only known by the people who perceive them. Or perhaps only one person knows them and hopes that someone, somewhere, shares his knowledge. Are the bells then silent but for those who hear them? My dearest, I cannot wait to announce to you my arrival. It will happen soon. Have courage. To whom am I speaking? You always do.

Love always,
your
Conrad

August 22, 1949
12: 30 a.m.

My dearest Helen and little Joseph,

In my first few letters from Venice-Lido, I described to you in great detail the surroundings, which I wish I could transmit in their resplendent beauty. But whenever I attempt to do so, I realize that I would but repeat what I have said before. How I wish you were both here with me! I believe that an awe-inspiring scene is like a painting, which can be viewed again and again and always changes with the time of day, the cast of light, the mood of the beholder, and the newly-acquired daily affinity for the persons with whom the scene is shared.

My dearest, my letters from Venice-Lido might say the same things to you, but, written at different times, would take on a new meaning when you reread them, but picture yourself with me in every mode of feeling and atmosphere, and you will be here with me, as you are, at every moment of the day and night.

How I long for you,
Love always,
your Conrad

August 25, 1949
11: 30 p.m.

My dearest Helen and little Joseph,

I look at the star — and moon-lit sea and wish the waves would sweep me away to you. Still no news, other than that the papers will arrive soon and (a few words of hope) "before the autumn." So strange, my love, to be liberated and yet not to be free to be with you and Joseph, to go wherever I please, but to be surrounded by Italian waters.

Schiller's fascination with Greek mythology makes me wonder how the ancient Greeks could believe in their gods, whose powers were so limited. Poseidon may have been king of the seas, but what would he have been on land? Even the Romans, who adopted him as Neptune, did not enhance his attributes. My love, as I look out at the vastness of the sea and the infinite sky, I can't but believe in a Higher Power, beyond all power, a Master of the Universe who controls all, but, in His infinite wisdom, gives men the choice between good and evil, life and death, hope and despair. I often think of my father and forefathers, killed for their beliefs, yours, mine, Joseph's future beliefs, and pray that God above, in His mercy and kindness, will reunite me with you and our son and bring our wait to an end. I believe He will. In the time which He chooses. The war taught me to question man's ways, but not His. In Him I believe, and therefore I hope.

Love always,

your Conrad

August 27, 1949
2: 30 a.m.

My dearest, darling Helen and precious Joseph,

The days and nights are becoming longer and longer. I spent the entire day at the beach in front of the Hôtel des

Bains, where I watched happy, carefree couples of all ages, holding hands — and children building castles in the sand. I particularly looked at each infant, to see if it resembled our little Joseph as I imagine him to be, almost a year and a half older than when I last saw him. How I long to be with you, to hold you, to watch Joseph play, smile, laugh, and to be called, "Papa"! I also saw people, young, old, walking alone, leaving their footprints in the sand, only to be washed away. My love, this is not a place to be alone. As I watched the passing faces while the sun glistened on the waves, I thought of the radiance that blinds, but can never take your image and that of Joseph from me. Neither light nor darkness could do that.

I am so tired of being alone. This evening, before walking back to my room in the pension, I ordered tea on the terrace of the Hôtel des Bains; from there, I watched the diffusing light of the sun as it was covered by the sea, like a child put to bed and rocked to sleep by the waves. One day we must see this scene together, while Joseph plays in the sand — if we can manage it soon enough. Yes, we must hope and believe, it will soon be over and we will all be together.

God bless you and little Joseph always.

Love your

Conrad

"Your father and I never did go to Venice together. No, that is not so, I believe, from where he is, he is with us."

* * *

Helen and Joseph sat silent for a while, but united in their silence, taking in the sea, the words, the thoughts, their own and each other's.

* * *

"His last few letters were like a captain's log: short, it was as if he was out at sea, on a journey, waiting to reach shore. And just as a captain might report his position, the weather, wind direction and strength of the tides on a particular day, your father described the conditions of his soul, where he was waiting, moving internally. Storms raged and the waves did not allow him to navigate as he would, but he did not give up. He waited for each new day, to see whether the documents had come so that he could sail for home...

Finally the last letter arrived, or perhaps, the first of a new life for all of us."

September 13, 1949
2:30 p.m.

My most precious darling, Helen and my little son, Joseph,

I have allowed my heart to overflow with joy. This morning I received the documents. I almost kissed the clerk in the post office — I had no one else to share my happiness with. I ran directly to the ticket office to buy my passage to London. I knew the way by heart. I had often walked between the post office and the ship company wicket to prepare myself for this moment. I leave tomorrow, and by the time you receive this letter I will be almost home.

Yours forever
and soon to be together with you,
love always,

your Conrad

* * *

The confluence of waves merged with Joseph's thoughts. Not all the details were revealed. Only his father could have answered his remaining questions. But he sensed the place and reentered the time — this time consciously.

* * *

After the wait and the transit, his father was with them only until Joseph was nineteen and his brother eleven. Somewhere, Joseph thought, his father was waiting in transit for a time beyond time, when he would be reunited with all of them, those of whom he knew in Venice and those he would meet in London and New York, and his grandchildren, whom he had never met.

I LIVE IN FLORENCE WITH MICHELANGELO

"Painting dreamed of this body, adorning it with light and exploring it with shadows, surrounding it with all manner of tenderness and enchantment, caressing it like a bed of flowers and letting itself be lifted up by it as by a wave, — but sculpture, to which the body belonged, knew nothing of it as yet. Here was a task as huge as the world. And the one who stood before it and recognized it, was an unknown man whose hands reached out for bread in obscurity."

Rainer Maria Rilke describing
the calling of a sculptor —
Auguste Rodin

For years she could not sleep in, past five — that was the utmost limit — at which time she would get up in the morning. Even that meant that she was awake in bed, for at least an hour, convincing herself that Florence did not start its day so early. To no avail, even though it was Sunday, and the late-autumn sky still enveloped the city in black velvet, waiting for the curtain of twilight to be drawn and the first light to appear. She knew this time of day so well: after forty years of working the six-to-three nursing shift, she had grown accustomed to dawn's quiet embrace; and, although now retired from the hospital for the past three years, she could not do otherwise.

What was the point of staying at home in the daylight hours when there was no one there except her memories, art books, Florentine stationery waiting for letters to be written and the reproductions on her walls (with which she spent every evening) and so much more to discover, to learn, to absorb? All her life she had dreamt of studying art — painting and sculpture — first as a young girl in the orphanage before the War, and then, later, when she worked with children in the hospital whom no one came to visit. Even when she received the scholarship to study

nursing, she yearned for the day that a handsome patient or doctor would marry her and she would have the luxury to study what she loved. She had, in fact, married a patient who had stayed in the hospital for a day with a broken arm, and she had loved him and would have gladly continued working to help him while he struggled with his always difficult business affairs. But when he died, two years ago, of that last heart attack, left alone, without him or any patients to look after, she felt that to survive she must turn to art; and she did.

Every day she briskly walked to another gallery or stood before another outdoor sculpture. All of Florence became her personal museum — its Tuscan countryside, its Gothic architecture and the Arno River constituted a colossal gilded frame for all the paintings and sculptures of the city.

Sunday was special, because she did not follow her intensive schedule of study which she had developed on her own. Its chief purpose was to make sure that every significant masterpiece was analyzed, but not deciphered or decomposed of mystery as she wanted to absorb the souls of the works.

Where would she go today. The Bargello Museum with its collections of sculptures by Michelangelo, Verrocchio, Bonatelle, or perhaps David and the Palestrina Pietà at the Royal Academy? Would she first walk along the Cascine Park or take her usual eight kilometer walk along the Viale dei Colli, after crossing Ponte Vecchio above the glittering Arno River, bathed in the first streams of sunlight even before the goldsmiths' wares began to shine in their windows? She could lose herself in the Pitti Palace of the twenty-eight oceans of rooms, surrounded by waves of sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings on the gilded walls and with immersed statues sunk to the floors, which looked out at her from just about every corner. Or perhaps the Uffizi Palace, where she would study just two or three paintings? Or the Renaissance Palazzo Strozzi?

Within an hour, she found herself strolling along Viale dei Colli at the Piazzale Michelangelo, looking at the lowly Pistoia plain, which, in the far distance, seemed to meet the highest peaks of the Apennines. She decided to let the Florentine winds toss her like the autumn leaves that followed and led her. She could dream, enter God's masterpieces (God's creation) instead of man's, in this forever reaching view. In her mind, the two were not removed; God had given man the power to create after He had done His Work. For her, there seemed to be a partnership of design in every manifestation of inspiration as if God had commissioned man to produce, after having certified that man was made in His image.

She had brought a sweet roll, sandwiches, fruit and a thermos of hot coffee in a large plastic shopping bag, which sustained her every day for the last two years until she would eat her supper. Today, as often on Sundays, she felt she would like to concentrate on one particular work which she had seen during that week.

What was it about the Palestrina Pietà that was so different from the more famous Pietà? She did not agree with the critics who had written that this Pietà was not sculpted by Michelangelo, but rather by one of his students. They simply said, "it did not have the same 'dynamic force'." How could she accept that? She could not, she would not! The Pietà in the Academy Gallery, in its unfinished essence was matter which took on form from obscurity, yet not fully; thus, at the same time, to be entering and attempting to return there — to its former state. And in that she perceived its eternal force, imbued with the spirit of Michelangelo.

In this depiction there was no past, precisely because it was unfinished, forever to be completed , like man, who had it within himself to fulfill the task, had been entrusted with it. Man, too, was in that state — unfinished, forever becoming but never quite being, a past eternally grasping at the future, both of which really did not exist, as the

present is fluid, moving between that which was, and that which would be. A determined range of movement had been given to man (after which he would expire) — no more, no less; and in his state as a human being, in that finite existence, he could not, except in his aspirations, go beyond his limits. All movement, synchronized, coordinated, harmonized, fused chronologically, was an illusion; sculpture had convinced her of that. It was composed of a series of stills, all merging towards fusion — towards one basic stance — as all of truth was one and could not be deviated from.

Truth was static, and to her art on the highest level was static, expressing the universal truth of God's creation and man's glorification of that initial act of creation —*ex nihilo*. All else stemmed from that instant or, rather, beyond all instants in time — with no past, present or future — when all was one in God's initial act, which forever kept reverberating and echoing throughout the universe, like vibrations — the swinging of a pendulum. Somehow this stone, given the breath of Michelangelo's life (whose life in turn originated from the Original Act of Life given to him by the Master Sculptor of the Universe), continued that reverberation, that echo of creation.

Whenever she looked at the work of Michelangelo, she thought of the musical symphonies which played as background music to her life. It seemed to her that the initial act of creation allowed for a cosmic composition of harmony, always fragile, on the verge of dissonance. Played on an infinitesimal number of scales, these harmonies broke down into only four basic notes repeated over and over again, in varying degrees of intensity, from pianissimo to fortissimo: joy, exaltation, anguish and tribulation.

Now sitting on a public bench, she sipped the warm coffee to take the sudden chill out of her thoughts. The one consolation of the artist, drowned in emotions, was his creation, wherein his heart and his mind would find harmony. Out of the lonely stillness of her own being, she

felt there too was a creative act waiting to be realized. Perhaps one day, in some way it would also reach out as she tried to reach out, to that in the work of others.

A little girl of five or six, with pigtails, whose parents sat on a nearby bench, approached her, as children often did, and asked her if she had a sweet. The child seemed to like her.

Although she had never been pretty, really quite plain looking, with no striking feature except for a ready smile which radiated towards children, especially tiny ones, she always attracted children. Perhaps this was because she was small and not in the least intimidating. Her little patients used to think she was "so *sympatique*". She offered the child her sweet roll; the little girl accepted it with thanks and invited the kind lady to come to her house one day, so that she could give her one of her sweets.

"Where do you live, little miss?" she asked the child.

"I live in Milan with my mama and papa. And you, madame, where do you live?"

Looking from the child to the view of Florence, she answered, "I live in Florence with Michelangelo."

ONLY THE TWO OF THEM — TOGETHER

For as long as I can remember they were older — older than — just older, but it was only later — later than — just later, when I understood that which appeared to be older was only a veneer; a surface for those who did not know them; they never changed.

There were just the two of them, with an occasional letter or with an even less frequent visitor. They were alone, yet they were together, bound as one in friendship. They did not have to speak more than a word or two to make themselves understood to each other. It was not that after all these years everything had been said; they still had much more to say (though that was not a thought which they consciously shared), but they did not need the words — only their presence.

We were returning from the Kunthistorisches Museum, where we had seen three self-portraits of Rembrandt at different stages of his life: the inquisitive, probing, anxious, bewildered youth; the middle-aged, more resigned figure, accepting of the world around him, both that which he could fathom and that which he could not; and an older Rembrandt, who seemed to have arrived at a decision, without the paralysis of self-doubt. I having recently seen a self-portrait of Rembrandt in a private collection at the Gardner in Boston, they insisted that they accompany me so that I could relate to them where I thought that painting belonged in the series sequentially. I disappointed them, however; all three depictions blended into the one I had admired an ocean away, and try as I might, I could not distinguish it in my mind from the present others.

On our walk back to their apartment we hardly spoke, as if to shut out the chill damp-greyness of the late November afternoon. I could not help gazing at the buildings, many of which they had known as students before the War and then again after their mid-life sojourn in New York.

Along Ringstrasse there emerged from the bleakness monuments of Vienna's bygone imperial prosperity: the

Opera House, the Museum of Natural History, the New Wing of the Hofburg Palace, Parliament, the Rathaus, the Burgtheater, the University and the imposing Votivkirche, whose bells rang each hour across the wide Wahringer Strasse and reverberated in the four-storey, once-elegant edifice in which they rented a flat.

His pace had slowed in the course of my visits of every few years, but not considerably. He was still tall, broad-shouldered, although grown thin due to various ailments which had set in, some diagnosed, others not. His shoulders, slightly-bent but still upright, reinforced an inherent dignity. The texture of his ancient charcoal cloth coat, with its collar and lining of fur, although more than adequate for the cold, was no longer discernible.

His wife, small and frail, was yet forever ready to administer to him in anything that would give him comfort. Although weakened by anemia and her general condition, she was picturesquely animated, however, only in his regard. She helped him take off his overcoat, which the difference in their sizes caused some effort on her part; and hung it to dry on a hook (before she would return it to the cupboard) next to his hat which he had handed her. Very methodical movements, exercised countless times before.

In no time, she had handed him his warm slippers. He was impatient (not with her, heaven-forbid) to sit down and take his green anti-vertigo pill, then the white capsule to widen his arteries, which had of late restricted the normal flow of blood to the brain, causing frequent fainting and dizzy spells, and, finally, the blue, foultasting powder, which she dissolved in lemon juice to neutralize the alkaline taste which still came through. This dosage of medication had been neatly laid out by her prior to our outing, along with his after-supper prescription, which she put in a white plastic container which had once held gold earrings which he had given her. She quickly put the water on to boil, to mix his routine hot water with milk, of which he partook at least eight glasses a day, to avoid the formation

of kidney stones which he had suffered before I knew him. While she waited for the kettle to boil, she scolded herself for allowing him to have walked so far, and for having lingered in the museum a few minutes longer than originally planned.

She had noticed that his face and high forehead were pale, his cheeks flushed. The chill had entered their apartment. She quickly ran back to their tiny living-area to raise the flame in their small gas heater. Returning, she tenderly reproached him for not having put off our expedition in this inclement weather. Still in her coat and hat, she silently prayed that he would not catch cold. He, more sensitive with the passage of time, looked at me, smiling through a tear, said, "You see how she takes care of me —my Mummy," as he affectionately calls her. And she looked at me as if to say "what else is new" — taking herself for granted, as she always did. Seeing him like this, it hurt her to do all this, heaven forbid, not because it was a chore, but because he needed her to do it. She lived in hope that he would feel better and regain his former strength. The wishes, prayers and hopes never diminished with the passing years; she only became more and more resigned to doing more for him. Something, she continually felt was left undone, for him who always deserved more.

A sudden downpour, beating on the large windows, synchronized with the running water in the washroom while he washed his translucent hands, one of which bore a wedding-band, the other a signet ring with his initials, which she had had engraved for him on the ring she had bought thirty-five years ago on their twentieth wedding anniversary. She had put away twenty-five cents a week for a year to buy that ring, while working in a garment factory in Manhattan.

As he approached the hall, muffled sounds of his shuffling footsteps could be heard in the small antechamber — drawing room — reading room — den —dining area — for which it was all used. He made his way to his

chair at the head of the small, rectangular table, where rarely did anyone sit but they. I sat directly in front of her. She gave me my coffee (as she took hers to raise her very low blood pressure and thus to strengthen herself). The coffee was good, strong, thick with whole milk. She had brewed it in some type of make-shift contraption, for they would never permit themselves the extravagance of a modern percolator. And as for such things as a television set, a tape recorder, or a record-player — what need had they for them? Why would they? or should they spend their money?, they would say. They had bought no new clothing in the last twenty years. Their furniture, the few pieces they had accumulated in New York, had been sold prior to their return to Vienna.

Food, rent, medication and charitable donations were all they used their money for. In addition, they made monetary gifts to their few relatives whom they helped immensely without wanting an accounting, which they demanded of themselves for every shilling they spent. As little as they had, they said they needed nothing but their health and each other.

They read a Viennese daily and the Herald Tribune from front to back, and books they borrowed from the National Library as well as the cultural center at the American Embassy. Why, with cooking, cleaning, attending to their needs and making preparations for religious holidays, there was barely time for her to do the crossword puzzle in the Herald Tribune or in the New York Times I sent infrequently. What in the world would they do with records or tapes, which had to be played on machines that did not work properly after a while? — such a nuisance! Why, even the tiny refrigerator in the kitchen could only hold a two-day supply of food at any time (as freezing food was out of the question and besides she could not carry any more than that), which meant that she had to trek to the ritual butcher at one end of town, and the vegetable stall and bakery at the other — in all kinds of weather.

He used to accompany her on these missions, but of late his dizzy spells had increased, and although they could take a bus, the walk to the bus stop was sometimes too much for him. (She had voiced a similar objection when I suggested that they go to the opera or theater; I no longer mentioned coming to America to visit their small family, and the graves of some of their dear ones.) All travel was out of the question; why, she felt the trip would have been impossible for him, even if accompanied by a doctor, and that was not feasible. A few years ago they had arranged to go on grocery-shopping trips by taxi — which, thank God, they had not looked upon as a luxury, since it concerned their health. But even this proved too difficult for him: he would have to stoop his back and bend his head to enter the cab, and as a result experienced prolonged discomfort.

Only five years ago he had accompanied her and would carry a few of the bags she had knit for their provisions, but now he stayed behind, reciting his morning prayers and then the psalms until noon — waiting for her to return so that they could eat dinner and listen to the news together. During their meals they rarely spoke in order to allow the food to be properly digested; the consequences of a disturbing or saddening thought that might be provoked by an inadvertent remark weighed heavily on their minds. An atmosphere of stillness pervaded their table, broken only by an occasional interruption by her, asking him if he wanted another piece of a day-old roll (to help his digestion) with jam, or another cup of boiled water with milk. (On my behalf, her grocery bags were heavier: she bought fresh rolls and cheeses, which I liked for supper, and bigger portions of meat for noontime dinner.) She herself could neither partake of the gooseberry jam, which only a few years before she had so much liked, nor the pound cake, since she had become diabetic; and, he would eat the cake with sadness in his eyes because she could not share it with him. Thank-God, she was able to control her diabetes without insulin, solely by following a

well-regimented diet. She measured and parcelled out the exact number of daily grams of all the nutrients she was allowed by the results of her blood-sugar tests, for which she went to the clinic each month. Even with such care, she was not well; the almost-daily shopping trips took so much out of her; especially, of late, she was contracting recurring infections which weakened her.

If they completed their meal, on occasion, a few minutes before the news-casts, she would put away the food and wash the few dishes in the sink, while he would dry them. But more often than not these tasks would have to wait until after the ten-minute broadcast, monitored by them on their radio, which needed several seconds to warm up; all of which had to be taken into account.

They listened only to the news, making frequent comments on it: cursing a terrorist act, smiling at a ridiculous statement made by a politician, or blessing a peace initiative, whether between the superpowers or in the Middle East, or supporting a more conducive climate of economic and social stability in the United States. When the broadcast was over, he would provide a few minutes of additional editorial comment, with which she invariably would agree, throwing in some astute remark of her own.

The afternoon would continue: frequently, they would rest for a while in the bedroom, unless he just relaxed in his chair, after thanking God for their food. Then came the afternoon chores: answering letters from their relatives. In order to be specific in their replies, they reread the letters, kept in the drawer of the table, which was converted into a desk by the removal of the plastic red-and-white plaid tablecloth following their meal. The room was stark white, as was the rest of the apartment: kitchen, this living-area, the hall, bedroom, washroom and living room, with its few sticks of furniture which included a beige, lace tablecloth, on a small table and a few wallet-sized travel-souvenir pictures, in ready-made frames lost on the walls, brought to them by friends years ago, who took vacations while

they worked. The living room was used only in the summer, as it was too cool to sit in the rest of the year; at which time, she would store compote and cake there, quickly closing the door so that if he was nearby he would not catch a draught.

They hoped that the flat would not be renovated, that the peeling paint would be left as it was and the gradually lengthening cracks in the ceiling be let alone. Otherwise, their rent could escalate several-fold under a new municipal bylaw which removed the rent control protection from renovated apartments. They could not bear the thought of having to leave their pleasant building, where the neighbours were quiet and crime was unknown — so very different from the tenement in the Bronx they had lived in for thirty years and in which he had been mugged. It was that incident which had made them return to Vienna, which they had unwittingly, by fate, avoided during the Holocaust, which had claimed both of their families except for one cousin, of whom I was born after the war.

But this was not the Vienna they had known in their youth, he as a student of pharmacy, she as a bright young woman involved in the arts and music. She could still hear echoes of melodies from the music of Gustav Mahler, German-born Bruno Walter, Arnold Schoenberg, E.W. Corngold, Fritz Kreisler and Oscar Strauss, and even the hit tunes which survived, had originated with the song by Leo Fall, Emeric Kalman, Paul Abraham and, ah, the most adored song of all Vienna, the *Fiakerlied.* These were interspersed with the harmonious music of her most beloved Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — even his name had a magical spell to it — which allowed the world of yesterday to return to her, if only for brief moments. Walking by the buildings where Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven had lived, she would imagine them composing their masterpieces. Further on, passing the theater, she would summon up the names of great playwrights and directors of the past, especially Max Reinhardt, whom she somehow could never forget, even though she now frequently forgot items on her

shopping list. On approaching the library, she remembered herself as a child, on even the coldest winter day, racing to devour the books of Arthur Schnitzler, who had exposed the frivolity of Vienna and the weak will of its citizenry, and of Stefan Zweig, the most popular author of all, for whose books she sometimes had to wait an interminable two or three months because they were always on loan. But there were others who more than filled the void: Franz Werfel, Felix Salten, Richard Beer-Hoffman, Peter Altenberg, Hermann Broch and so many more whose names she could not now readily recall.

Somehow it was Beethoven, however, who with his thunderous movements, shattered these thoughts. Her pleasant recollections could not be reconciled with bullets that had ricocheted in time and killed those she knew and loved, nor with the lethal gas of concentration camps which descended on civilization. It was as if the Vienna of today made no sounds of consequence, as if Vienna had become deaf like Beethoven, when he first noticed that the bells of the church in front of his apartment-window were moving but he could not hear them.

* * *

On moderate days, when he could stroll with her, past the University, he recalled his professors but even more so his best friend's medical professors, whose lectures he had been allowed to read if not attend: Landsteiner, who discovered blood-types; Otto Loewy, who won the Nobel Prize for his discoveries in the field of muscle chemistry; Bela Schidk, who devised the test for diptheria, named after him; Pirquet who devised the test for tuberculosis; Rudolph Kraus, discoverer of precipitin; Koller, of cocaine anesthesia for eye surgery; Freund, under whose direction the therapeutic use of X-rays was instituted; Heinrich Neumann, the ontologist; Zuckerkandl and Tandler, the anatomists; Erdheim, the pathologist; Marburg, the histologist; Knoepfelmacher, the pediatrician; and of course, Sigmund Freud, who lived only three blocks away and whose apartment was now a museum. How could these be forgotten?

But that was the Vienna before the War. After the holocaust, everything had changed: it was as if Vienna was an old film-set with backgrounds and props, the gala restaurants, coffee houses and stately buildings like papier maché, the major actors gone and only the extras remaining. The glitter of a bygone era was still simulated with Strauss three-quarter-time waltzes through the ball season by those who barely knew *die welt von gestern.*

For the two of them, there was no longer any satisfaction in anger towards Austria, for the criminals were mostly gone, or about to go; only the victims remained to be mourned and remembered. Would the world remember or would it be allowed to happen again? Such thoughts would sadden and agitate him terribly and bring to mind the medical doctors who now looked after him. They were not like those he had seen in the United States (after the war he felt he had to justify his living in Vienna to himself), who saw him only for a moment. Here, he visited on a regular basis a cardiologist, a hematologist, a rhumatologist and a general internist, all professors of repute, and she saw these same physicians, their appointments always being booked together. Yet for all that care, they both knew they needed the Almighty's abiding grace to give them the health and the strength to carry on together.

Their pain, joy and anticipation was in a unison, of a singular nature — their chief concern was the "other". He would turn to me when she was in the kitchen and confide in me how worried he was about her loss of weight, and how hard it was for her to regain it, now that she could not have sweets nor even additional starches. She in turn, when he was out of the room, would sadly comment on his declining vigour. Then, when he returned to the room, a young girl's smile, a shy blush, would appear on her face, no different I am convinced than in her youth, when he offered her a compliment.

... there were only the two of them — together.

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Born in 1948 in Paris, Michel M.J. Shore holds a baccalaureat ès arts 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.

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