

## My Home . . .

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This then is Canada. But we who live here, clinging to the vestiges of English custom and overpowered by the influence of mighty America, despite all our differences of opinion and our limitless land, have a consistent physiognomy, a national brand, which marks us as of the same breed in Calgary or Halifax, Windsor or Winnipeg. With the fading generation this distinctive brand has faded and today we are becoming more and more 'Americans'. To the foreigner, who does not know the fundamental difference, Canada is so much the echo of America that the one cannot be distinguished from the other.

### I.

In April the timeless tide of spring moves northward like an early American tourist and creeps irresistibly in an irregular line of advance against white winter's cheerless inconsistencies. Down the St. Lawrence the endless winds begin and whip the dust of Dominion Square and Levis by clouds into the air. To the Western plains comes flood, to the eastern coast, summer's brief prelude, fog and rain. Across the land the people stir. In the cities mass escapades dart to the lakes to fish, in the country the farmer checks his plow. At evening can be seen men raking and planting their gardens, in a perennial manufacture of beauty. When the newspaper columns start predicting baseball prospects the sound of a million balls in contact with leather mits are heard down every driveway. At night the young high school men get their fathers' cars and take their girls to the universal seclusions of youth, or linger by their soda fountains conversing on a thousand topics and remembering nothing of what was said. The men get out their sport jackets and flannels and the women their radiant cotton dresses with pumps to match. The family cars are polished and everywhere the face of the nation has been lifted, washed and rejuvenated for the summer with its burst of life. And somewhere in this favoured

time of year, amid all the birth, there lingers death. The fire engines careening through the streets with half the town in hot pursuit, suggests it; an upturned boat on an unfinished lake, confirms it; the scream of tires on pavement and the clean, sharp sound of breaking glass, repeats it.

### II.

It is a land of violence and a land of peace, a place of solitude and a place of teeming life. Each summer highways north of Winnipeg carry the thousands to the northern lakes. Down Nova Scotia's southern shore the beaches are packed, the yacht clubs of Quebec rest beneath the quiet summer heat. We are a restless people. We have so much space that by nature we live to use it. We golf, play tennis, boat, and swim and so the lurid summer passes its passionate way to death. On summer evenings the people linger on the steps of their houses, or hang from the windows dripping the summer heat. In all the lovely places, the parks, the fields, white lust walks and like animals in escape the people wander restlessly the lonely streets at night. In some dark alley a gunman puts an end to someone's life; in some city slum a woman lies assaulted in the streets, in some penthouse apartment a wife in utmost secrecy consorts with her lover; in the back row of the balcony teen-agers kiss and pet their sultry way through the endlessly sultry film of cheap romance. By the pool rooms, drug stores and soda fountains of towns and cities, beneath the neon lights, beneath the silent skies, the youth of the nation linger aimlessly, and chain smoke cigarettes and dream of wealth and girls, leisure, —and girls. And the girls with wide eyes moon in their lonely rooms lost in some concrete jungle, in their solitude, in their city caverns, about men. Then through the air the sound of a distant train calls mournfully in the night and they wish they were on it—going anywhere, as long as they could move—could hear the rails clicking beneath their feet, could see the vision of a lonely water tower emerge out of the haze of the West. For it is sum-

mer in Canada and nothing stands still, life must be lived, life must end too soon. This is the land where the young farm boys come out of the hills in summer in search of city fame; this is the land where the Toronto lawyer moves to Chicago, where the Sydney youth heads west to Calgary and oil, this is the land that is restless with impatience, potent, unpredictable and its people bred on the insatiate energy, are, like nomads, rootless also.

What is it that makes life pass here so differently and with such careless attitude? Is it the afternoon teas with the impeccable fashions of dress? The evenings spent with the favourite American magazine on the Main Street in some sleepy New Brunswick town? Is it the two hour escape through the magic retreat of American celluloid? Is it the serialized soap-operas of radio, or the singing commercials that flouts a superlative hair shampoo? It is the place where travellers meet to shave in the rocking train coach and say sleepily 'From Alberta—where you?' "Niagara, wish to hell I was back there." It is the place where the great steamers bellow lazily in the Lockes a thousand miles inland, where the planes of T.C.A. drone regularly over the wilderness, and where the staid and unrepentable CBC vainly offers culture to a too Americanized people. It is summer and a Canadian dreams not of American might or his British heritage, he is a child of the new world and thinks only of his lover's lips or of how Bill Jones went up last month for fifteen years.

### III.

In October the air cools off abruptly. No longer do men walk coatless through the streets or the women hang out their windows at midnight; no longer does the canned music of a phonograph bounce heavily down the city streets at sunset. No longer do these fourteen million think of the great outside but rather revert to their rooms, apartments or homes, and as if burned out by too much sun and a paucity of recklessly dissipated energy, they turn to other avocations. As far as the eye can reach, fields of wheat move like an inland sea throughout the west; in the fruit belts the trees stand in agony beneath the weight of fruit, the price of their fertility, and the nation begins to harvest and fill the graineries that will satisfy so many craving bellies. October has come again and as the falling leaves clog the gutters of Main Street, the wet winds descend from angry skies and aggravate the restless Atlantic. And on a street corner in Snowdon two Montrealers plan for Laurentian skiing and in a Forest Hill backyard a young boy kicks a football. In Hull, Quebec, some woman stabs her husband and into Halifax Harbour comes a ship

from another world with immigrants agog for the newer and freer way of life. Beneath a Coca Cola sign a young man ponders listlessly over the want ads; overflowing a phone booth an obese woman with a dozen parcels in her arms gesticulates angrily at the mouthpiece. At the same moment in a hotel lobby a wedding reception is going on amid much talk, laughter and upturning glasses. If you are a dweller of the swank Van Eagle apartments, at five in the afternoon you will be entertaining with cocktails and wondering why. At five the next morning, if you are a garbage collector, you'll be tossing grimy cans from a dirty sidewalk to a filthy truck. The nights are cold and often rain walks tirelessly through the streets and the street lamps glitter in the wetness and tram cars rumble noisily through the artificial lights. At evening the smell of burning leaves fill the ominous air and expectancy and quietness prevails. On Saturday afternoons you take part in the pageantry of football with flags and music and popcorn vendors and arguing men. At night your radio gives you jazz or your favorite new commentator, or, "direct from Hollywood, Radio Theatre."

While a million turkeys are fattened for a million ovens for a ceremony labelled Thanksgiving, somewhere in the West the first snow falls. On the Maritime coasts they look forward to another snowless winter. In the North the trappers prepare their snares, in the cities a young man plans to do the high spots some frosty night. It is autumn in Canada. The flaming trees, the flowers frost-shattered in their beds, the lowering skies, mark it as such. You take a walk to the bridge and gaze down into the murky movement below. You sit over a coffee to rest your shoppers feet, you wonder why in hell nothing ever happens in your life to make it interesting. You think of the latest labour strike, wonder about the racing passions of 1922, and you think and dream of girls and love and men, and who will win the Gray Cup. If your a high school student you talk about the latest scandal of "that Wilson girl". If your in a University you are lost in the blinding bliss of your own imaginary importance. If you are a store clerk you are insolently looking askance at some impatient shopper. And some go so far as to say that in autumn even Ottawa awakens from its summer slumber.

### IV.

When winter comes most of our active life ceases. While Montreal shivers at 20 below a young girl walks gayly, open-coated down Spring Garden Road. We still trudge daily to our usual office routines and at night go to a show, or to the tavern for end-



less beers, or to our favorite club for dancing or to a friend's to play bridge. We are that strange people who live for the weekends, who become inexplicable elated at 5 p.m. on Fridays at the prospect of Saturday, that day of leisure and festivity. We thus watch our life slip by weekends, for these are the goal of the glamorous week that starts with the Monday morning blues.

We shiver in the sleet and curse the tram companies, look with quiet pleasure as a passing pretty face and argue vehemently for the Maple Leafs or Canadiens. And invariably we follow with increasingly avid interests the fortunes of L'il Abner and the misfortunes of Dagwood Bumstead—our mythology, the comic strip. Life has virtually died and lies beneath the silent snow and the radio and magazines take the place of the golf clubs and the family car. And from coast to coast, in city or town, north or south, in every Province and in every home, we follow the basic routines common to us all. We have but one heritage: we are Canadians. We are the half way house between old and new. We are the emotionless inhabitants of an emotionally modernized society. We are the echo of the U.S.A. and her destiny is ours. We do not like it, but we can do nothing about it. And on a winter night before the fire we can admit these things to ourselves, and realize what we are and why, and what we yet will be in this Canada that is our native land.

## The Unremembered

Last night I took down from a shelf  
The snap-shot history of myself;  
And 'neath the dust of Time there lay  
The faded loves of Yesterday.  
Forgotten echoes seemed to sing  
Of dances; of a moon in Spring;  
Of love; and some remembered laughter—  
And sorrow's tears that followed after.  
Suddenly I seemed to know  
That, as the sunset comes and goes,  
So does each friend, in passing, bend  
To the inevitable end.

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