

Canadian Summer

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

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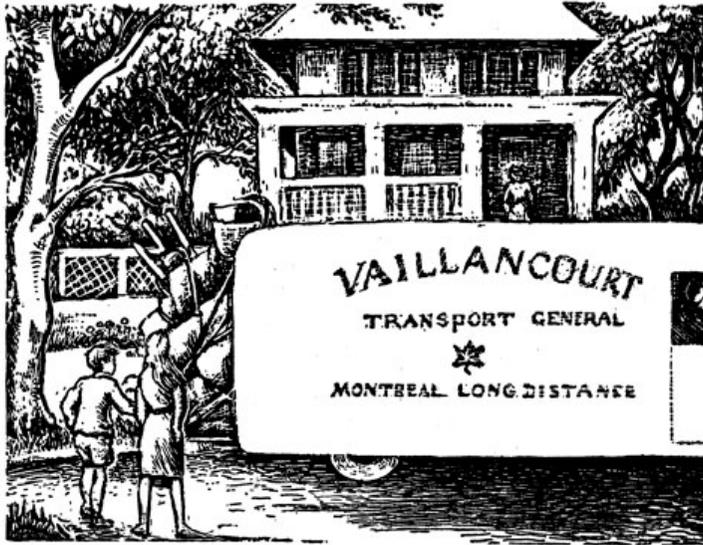
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“To the big Catherine who likes the little one”



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1. Moving

PETER and Patsy Mitchell stood on the front lawn of their home in Washington, D.C. They watched the furniture being carried out of the house into a big moving van, a much larger one than the neighbors had used when they had moved. But then the neighbors had only one child and the Mitchells had six, not counting pets. At present only Peter and Patsy could really enjoy the move; Joan was rocking Baby Catherine to sleep and Angela and Timmy had been foisted onto neighbors, for fear they'd manage to get themselves packed up with the furniture.

Peter and Patsy, nine and eleven respectively, could be trusted to take care of themselves, yet they just escaped being old enough to be always pressed into service, like poor Joan. Of course Joan didn't really mind, she liked to help and she adored Baby Catherine.

The moving men were straining and puffing. They had ropes and small carts to help them carry the heavy furniture. Now they were lifting the piano down the steps. Sweat streamed down their faces as they cried out to one another in French. They spoke French because they came from Montreal. They spoke it so quickly

it was hard to understand them even when you knew French. One of the men had said something to Grannie but Grannie had kept shaking her head.

“*Plus lentement*,” she’d begged, which means “slower.”

So the man had talked very, very slowly and Grannie had understood but it hadn’t been worth the trouble. He had only been saying that it was hot, as if everyone didn’t know *that*.

The men were packing the furniture into the van. They put sacks over it for protection. They fitted everything in like a jigsaw puzzle. There went Timmy’s tricycle and Angela’s doll carriage, but not her dolls, Surshy and Train-crack. Mother had wanted to pack them in a trunk but Angela had forbidden it.

“You don’t pack us in a trunk, do you?” she had said indignantly. “My children want to go in the train and look out of the window too.” So Surshy and Traincrack were waiting somewhere on a window sill, all dressed up to go.

There went Grannie’s radio.

“I hope it doesn’t break,” said Peter. “What will Grannie do if she can’t hear the ‘Mayor of the Town’?”

“Or ‘Information Please,’” agreed Patsy.

There went Catherine’s crib and high chair. They used to be Timmy’s, the marks of his teeth were still on them. Catherine didn’t bite things; she was very dainty.

Peter wiped his forehead on his sleeve. “It sure is hot,” he said. “Maybe it will be cooler in Canada.”

“Of course, because it’s farther north there,” Patsy instructed him.

“Yes, but that’s what I don’t understand,” said Peter, frowning. “North is only nearer to the North Pole and if you go all the way up, right slap bang into the middle of the North Pole, then where is north? There isn’t any.”

Patsy hadn’t thought of that. “There must be,” she said.

“No, there isn’t,” crowed Peter. “Up in the middle of the North Pole there’s only south. I must go there some day.”

“Let’s go inside and look at the house now,” proposed Patsy.

They wandered through the dusty, empty rooms. Neither of them could remember ever having lived anywhere else. This house was as much a part of them as their teeth or noses. It disturbed them to see it so bare and friendless now.

“Do you like going away?” asked Patsy softly.

Peter ruffled his hair with one hand. He remembered how he had looked forward to Canada. When Daddy came home from the war his position in Washington was still available, but prices had gone up so much that Daddy preferred to look around for a better one. Through a Canadian soldier friend of his he finally got a very good offer, a permanent job as hydraulic supervisor in Montreal. He jumped at it, but when the contract was signed he discovered that there wasn't a house for rent in the whole of Montreal. For a year he had hunted without results, and all that time his family had to stay in Washington. Even the children at school had finally ceased to admire the Mitchells for going to Canada.

But just when the summer holidays started Daddy wrote to say he had found a house. “It's only for the summer, though. After that we'll have to find something else.”

“And what if we don't?” Grannie ventured to murmur, but the children thought it quite safe . . . what all couldn't happen in three months!

And now it was true for sure. The moving men had come and would put the Mitchells' furniture in storage for them in Montreal until they found a permanent house. It was all very adventurous and delightful. Yet, when Patsy asked, “Do you like going away?” Peter felt a queer tightening of his throat. He suddenly realized that he loved this house, old and shabby though it might be.

“Let's go through all the rooms once more,” he suggested.

They walked on tiptoes because their steps sounded so hollow. They knew every spot and crack and creak in the house; everything had its history. Peter had shot that hole in the hall window with his arrow. Mother had given him the bow and arrows at Christmas and she had been so proud that they shot well until that hole. After that she wasn't so proud any more.

And that spot of ink on the hall floor was left from the day when Angela had poured the ink bottle over Snow White in the hope of changing the poor kitten's color. And the tear in the screen wire of the porch had been the work of Blinkie, the pet squirrel. And the hole right through the wall of the little front bedroom dated from the time that Patsy had been quarantined there for scarlet fever. Peter and she had worked at it from both ends until they could talk together, but it had been a secret; a pic-

ture had covered it. Now it stood bare and naked, for everyone to see.

“Do you remember how you used to buy me popsicles with your pocket money and stick them through that hole, and one was so big it wouldn’t go through?” said Patsy dreamily. “I don’t think I’ll ever get over this house.”

She sat down on the hall steps and Peter sat down beside her. “Do you remember the Christmas with Mr. Spencer and Eunice?”

“I was only six then,” said Peter. “But I do remember when they went back to England and we waved good-bye to them. It was a very big boat, wasn’t it? And they took Snow White with them, and Bertha the bunny. I wonder how they like England.”

“So many Christmases,” Patsy went on. “So many Easters, so many birthdays. Do you think they have Christmas and Easter in Canada?”

“Well, anyway, they can’t take away our birthdays,” Peter consoled her.

Suddenly the stillness of the house was broken by a scream from Joan, and a few seconds later she flung open the door of what used to be Mother’s bedroom and ran into the passage, clutching a surprised but placid Catherine.

Joan had grown very tall the last year or so and was developing what Mother called a “pretty figure.” People nowadays remarked on Joan’s improved looks. She was taller and thinner than she used to be, her eyes seemed larger, with long, coal-black lashes and quirky eyebrows, and her hair had begun to curl around her forehead. But people admired her expression most.

“She must be a sweet girl,” they said. “A real help to her mother.”

And she was. She had taken over the care of Catherine from the day she was born. Catherine was born at home because there was no place in the hospital. It had been difficult to get help; Gwendolyn dared not touch a newborn baby, so Mother had kept Joan at home and taught her to wash and dress Catherine. Joan said it was much more fun than taking care of a dog. Joan was only two years older than Patsy but Patsy was beginning to feel as if there were six years between them, at least. Joan could look so sedate and understanding, listening to Mother’s and Daddy’s talk and voicing a calm opinion which no one snubbed. Patsy felt downright ashamed

of her at those moments and would mutter fiercely to herself: "She acts like a grownup!" But at present Joan was her own age and very excited.

"Do you know what happened?" she cried. "Catherine was *almost* electrocuted!"

"How? How?" cried Peter and Patsy, jumping up.

Grannie opened the door of her room. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Joan turned to her. "The baby . . ." she gasped. "She had waked up and I was minding her and you know that big electric cord in Mother's room! It plugs in and then it has a gadget at the end for two extension cords. The moving men took away the lamp and the clock but they didn't unplug the cord and left the gadget on the floor and I just caught Catherine as she was trying to put it into her mouth!"

"My goodness, that was terribly dangerous," cried Grannie, startled. "What a clever girl you are, Joan, to think of that. It wouldn't *look* dangerous at all!"

"Would she have died?" asked Peter, awed.

"Not necessarily," said Grannie. "I know of a little toddler who did just that, but she didn't die. She was knocked unconscious and her lower lip was burned away. Her parents had a terrible time taking her to skin specialists who more or less fixed her up again. You *are* a clever girl, Joan . . . that poor baby . . ." and Grannie held her arms out to Catherine, but Catherine only clung more tightly to Joan.

At that moment the moving men came up the stairs to fetch Grannie's bed. Grannie had with many French words persuaded them to leave her bed till the last. For some reason the beds were the first things they had wanted to pack when they had started the day before. So the other Mitchells had been sleeping on the floor, but Grannie was too old for that and they left her her bed. Now they came to fetch it. Grannie might look as pathetic as she pleased, the bed was carried downstairs.

"Where'll I *sit*?" cried Grannie helplessly.

There wasn't anywhere for her to sit except on the stairs and everyone knew that Grannie couldn't sit long on anything hard.

So Peter went down to where the telephone still wobbled on the top of the radiator and dialed a number. He was worried about

Grannie. It was now about twelve o'clock and the train didn't go till four. She couldn't be without a chair all that time! Mother didn't matter so much, she was rushing around anyway, supervising the moving men, because she said if she didn't they were sure to pack all the empty bottles and garbage cans with holes and seatless chairs and maybe leave behind the icebox. It was quite a spectacle to see them pack; they just snatched any object they could reach, without looking at it, rolled it in newspapers, and dropped it in a barrel. Gwendolyn, the maid, had rescued her coat and hat and hung them in the garage or they would have packed those, too.

But Grannie could not help and now she wandered around miserably, hesitating between the fatigue of standing and the agony of sitting. So Peter dialed the number of Mrs. Duquesne, Grannie's best friend, and said:

"Hello, is this Mrs. Duquesne? This is Peter. You know we are leaving today, the moving men are here and they took all our chairs and Grannie has nowhere to sit and the train only goes at four. . . . Oh yes, that would be lovely, thank you." Peter quickly dropped the receiver.

"Grannie, Grannie," he shouted. "Mrs. Duquesne is coming with her car to fetch you! You're going to have lunch there and a nap. But be sure now that you are at the station at four. Please don't miss the train, that would be dreadful!"

Grannie was delighted. Her cheeks grew pink with pleasure as she put on her hat, hoping it looked right, for there were no mirrors. Soon Mrs. Duquesne arrived. It was time, too. Grannie was already stiff with sitting on the stairs.

"Be sure to bring her to the station before four," said Peter anxiously as he helped Grannie into the car.

"Yes, yes, we'll take good care of her," promised Mrs. Duquesne, smiling.

When the car left, Peter inspected the moving van. It was quite full, yet there were still heaps of things in the house. The two men seemed worried. They kept shaking their heads and saying French words. They went to Mother and made motions with their hands. Mother looked scared.

She said something and the men shrugged their shoulders.

"Goodness," cried Mother. "I must phone my husband—*mon mari*."