

WHEN I WAS YOUNG:

THE STORY OF ANNAPOLIS ROYAL, NOVA SCOTIA

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ANNAPOLIS ROYAL is an old lady who lives so close to the harbor that her gardens of roses and hollyhocks are reflected in the sun-washed waters. Her house is low, and the eaves are the homes of birds. Inside its warm walls a shining, shallow staircase leads to the quaint rooms with their dormer windows, age smoothed chests, and hand made beds. Her sitting room is deep and warm, old colors fade one into the other, and the wide fireplace cradles the white birch that sings soft, broken lullabies in the long evenings. In her home is peace, and over the peace the patina of lovely dreams and the remembrance of three hundred and thirty-nine years.

She has children and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and to all of them she has told stories of the past. In the evening when the soft insistent fingers of the rain trace pictures of tears on her windows the children come to her house and sit by the fire. Generation after generation, they always say the same thing: tell us when you were young. And she wonders what story to tell. Should she begin, "I was an Indian Princess, the sleeping beauty of the Redman, and the white man kissed me, and I awoke." Perhaps she will tell them of the wild grape sweet on her mouth, and the trailing arbutus she wore as a garland in her hair, and how in winter Glooscap spread his snowy fur blankets over Nova Scotia and covered her where she lay by the waters that froze to a brilliant mirror, reflecting her loveliness. They are children, so she will not tell them of her fickleness, of how she was first the beloved of the French, and then was won to the new love of the English, nor how they tossed her heart back and forth between them. Nor will she tell them whether she minds very much now, that from being a favorite of kings, she became only a jewel case of memories for both her lovers.

This Indian Princess, shy and wild as the small furred companions of her long sleep, was awakened one summer day when a ship bearing De Monts and his fellow adventurers broke the unclouded splendor of Annapolis Basin. With her sails slack and silent the ship drifted, and the men lining her rail were caught up in the wonder that is given only to men who are driven across the waters of the earth in search of a hidden mys-

tery, a mystery that they must learn, or they will die, defeated by the very dream they pursue. Here was the end of the mystery, the last, lone gate to the paradise, and Poutrincourt, one of the voyagers, laid his hand on the gate, and said, "This is my home." But they did not remain at Port Royal, for De Monts had not found his paradise, nor ended his mystery, so the ship sailed to the Island called St. Croix. Here they stayed for the winter, while the Indian Princess waited and watched for their return. She knew they would come back to her, as men are always drawn back to the end and the beginning of a dream. And return they did after a terrible winter on St. Croix. The first winter at Port Royal was a mild one, and to the early settlers must have seemed like a blessing on their little settlement. Spring brought planting, and to these men, from a land where spring was a merging with mild winter and long summer, the abrupt change from cold to warmth must have been a surprise. Nova Scotian spring is a revelation still—one day the wind is bitter cold, the next a mild wind is warming the soil and swelling the seed in the rich soil. Suddenly it is spring.

It was far from an easy life. Indians roamed the woods with the sure knowledge of their kind, and crept up to the clearing at the Port to look with envious eyes and wonder, on the lives of the white men and his strange clothes and strange ways.

These Indians were the Micmacs, and much could be said of the way the French must have treated them, for a deep and lasting friendship developed between these two alien people. Perhaps the foundation of their friendship was built on the rock of sharing, each with the other, the things of the new world and the things of the old. Membertou, the Indian chief, had embraced the faith of the French, and his people are still the children of the Roman Catholic Church. In exchange for the produce of the white man the Indian gave his knowledge of the virgin forest, which pressed with great, green hands against the small strength of Annapolis Royal. He gave also to his friends the French the best places to hunt, the swift runs of the rivers, where lurked the trout, and deep in the wood he showed them the wild berry.

When the King of France deprived De Monts of his fur trade and forced the French to abandon their new world, the Indians wept with the terrible grief of children. How could a King of France know what a glittering world had been shown to these simple people, and what it had meant to them to believe

in the unbelievable world the French had given them in a small way? How could the Indian know a King who had power to call men from across the sea? After the French left the lodges of the Miamaes rang with the tale and the story, as if by telling each other of Port Royal they could keep the dream real and forever. Poutrincourt, however, was a man who had found his home, and he did not let even a King lightly take it from him. What a strange sight it must have been in the high walled court when this bold adventurer brought the fruit of Nova Scotian soil and summer to his King. What tales he must have told of the land, of the songs, of the redmen, who were children and lived in the forest! I wonder if the throne suddenly became a weight about the feet of the King, if he did not wish, just once, to see this Eden, this Paradise, this far horizon that had claimed Poutrincourt. Caught up in the magic of the tales, he gave De Monts his fur trading rights once more, and to Poutrincourt a grant of land. Back these adventurers sailed, and the Indians gave them a welcome that rocked the Basin of Annapolis. Poutrincourt was home, but he died in France in the end, far from the great, untouched sky lines, and the dim, spruce shadowed ways of the Acadian shores.

When the color came to the maple, and all the woodland trees burned their torches among the green of the pine and spruce, the settlers, wise in the way of this new land, gathered in the crops and put aside supplies for the long white months. By candlelight they figured how much food, how much wood, how much warm clothing they would need—the three essentials needed to defeat the months when nothing grew under the pale earth, when the relentless cold crept into the houses and the blood of the French. From their Indian friends they had learned the art of the doeskin jacket and the moccasin, and having prepared for winter, they drew within themselves and waited, waited for the first hesitant flurry of snow that was like white laughter on the air. They knew that the gentleness would turn to fury, bred of the long miles to the north, but they did not care, for they had everything man could want.

There is so much to-day that defeats the long winter evening—theatres, radio, and parties of all kind—but these first white men and women who walked the untrodden paths of Nova Scotia and marked the future for us had little to use as a defense against the storms that walled them in, and the cold that kept them prisoner; but they made their own life, and we know it as the Order of Good Cheer. One of the men was

elected host for the evening, and it was his duty to provide food and entertainment for the rest of the settlers. He was Master of Ceremonies—on the edge of the forest. How pitiful it now seems that these men, who had forsaken the warmth and gaiety of France, should have to borrow from their own slim resources the sound of laughter, and the remembrance of things loved and left behind. All night the feast would go on, and the smoky rafters would ring with the songs of France. The Indians were an awe struck audience, enthralled by the life and the movement and warmed by the knowledge that all men are equal in their need of forgetting the burden of their every day lives. These masters of ceremonies vied with each other in providing good things to eat, and new ways of bringing the songs and memories of their own country into the log cabins on Annapolis Basin.

The peace and prosperity of this Acadian hamlet was marked with the hand of destiny, for only three years after the roots of France had begun to gather life from the soil, the English, under Samuel Argall from Virginia, sacked and burned the Port. Acadia was then claimed by the English and chartered to Sir William Alexander, but words on paper could not claim the marks of the sod upturned for the first sowing of cereal and root crops in Canada, or erase the foundations of the first power grist mill, or take the heart of the Indian to a new allegiance. The Micmac had kissed the Cross and been blessed by the robed Curè; he was French. These things are still French, and as long as there is history to recall first things to men's minds this town called Annapolis Royal will always be a link holding France and Nova Scotia together in an indissoluble relationship.

The Fort was rebuilt, but did not remain long in the hands of the British. Wars fought far across the sea determined whether French or English had possession of this tiny hamlet cut from the virgin forest, and the history of Port Royal for the next century and a half is an almost endless record of attack, capture and recapture. This constant shifting of masters, of burning and pillaging, stunted the growth of what might have been a great and prosperous port. It fell at last to the English, who took the key of the fort to Boston, and strange to say this key, symbol of a lost world, remained there until 1922, when it finally came home to rest in the museum at Fort Anne. I should like to hold that key in my hand, and see if by the mere holding I could unlock the past, and have unfold before me the

first years. History records only the people and events that by their sheer importance demand remembrance; it does not tell what the first Acadians lived by, or when Port Royal was young. Only an old book, which is tattered with the years, told me anything about the ordinary people of that time, and even here imagination had to run madly after a word or a phrase even to glimpse the retreating years, and the ear had to listen from the heart to catch the faint and far away sound of steps on the street of a long ago night when a French lad walked into the dusk to keep tryst with a girl who died before Nova Scotia became a place of people and towns. Annapolis Royal is full of the ghosts of the past, and what wind can pass over the town without pausing to furl a banner to the brave and fine who came to this little province by the sea.

Because Annapolis Royal, as it is to-day, realizes what a treasure of history is stored within its boundaries, the people have restored all they could, and in the Officers' Quarters, erected by the Duke of Kent, a museum has been built up. Here is all that remains of a legend, all the nostalgia of a dream that was dreamt by men, and the fading, wistful lives of the past. For those who would come by ship on a summer day, and look on a world undiscovered and untouched, and be caught up in the wonder and the vision of Poutrinecourt, there is no surer way than reaching out to touch the key of Port Royal, which lies in the museum. If you are not fey, do not touch the key—it is only for the fingers of those who would weave the past out of the faint mists of the morning and the shadows of the trees and flowers by the waters of Annapolis Basin.