



march 73

martlet
magazine
university of victoria

A draft of chapter 1 from Ms. Moffatt : A Can*dian Romance

by Neddie le Brun

Port Albert was a real North American town. It grew up out of nothing. Like rumour or mushrooms. My, how it grew.

Of course there had always been mist. It was cold, clammy, white, etc., and in later days its qualities were extolled by several subsidized poets. But its famed "translucence" was scarcely a miracle. It was basically mist-white, vague and without form, and void.

There were Indians too. They had been there a long time carving their pieces of wood, and eating clams, berries, salmon, kelp, whales and anything else within easy reach. After their meals they sat around the fire and yarned about ravens and salmon and things.

But then came the wooden ships. They pushed their prows through the lips of the bay, and anchored. Their holds were bulging with hatchets and beads.

Progress at last!

So Port Albert got started. It rose to the ringing of axes and oaths. It took root and flourished and spread and grew rich. And, lo, it was very good.

"The beautifullest town in the worrrld" said the first Mayor, McDougall.

It might have been once. There were plenty of trees, for instance. Fish and land were scattered about in abundance. The mountain was tall. The summers were hot and the winters--why, chaste. The Pacific winds bore ozone.

But Progress was restless.

"A li'l old mill jes fer starters."

"Thrrree biggerrr ones needed."

"'s the queen of pulp-towns, by hokey!"

Progress, alas, would not be gainsaid.

It demanded and got through the years a dock, a train-station, a main street, a fire-station, an opium den, a shopping centre, a slum, a park, a police-station, a liquor-store, a war memorial, a highway, an airport, a traffic-light, a fountain, a High School.

Education now threatened the townfold.

In this prospering place, in the mid-1960's, Barbie-Jane Moffatt was growing up fast. She was all that the Port Albert heart could desire, and more. She was pink. She was pert. Her glow was the product of sweet-corn and milk and languid summers on shell-cluttered sands. Her hair toned, in season, from chestnut to blonde. And cute--oh my! Her voice was often compared to a pigeon's. Her smile was a bud. Her feet seemed to rhyme. Butter wouldn't melt in her navel, they said.

Major Moffatt (of Burma) had carefully buried the past. He reasoned "'s over and done with by Jove." The war, after all, was a stupid digression from civilised life. Mistakes had been made--like Dieppe or Yalta--but life must go on. Mistakes, ahem yes, like Barbara, the lovely but unstable actress, (his wife).

"Flighty, I fear. I'm afraid she was terribly flighty you know. Unlike you, my pet," he'd said to his daughter once. When she'd asked.

"Gee, Daddie, but what was she like?"

"Well, I hate to admit this, above all to you. But well...she was a bit...a bit of an adventuress, don't you see."

"I see", said Barbie-Jane blanching, but didn't.

So the first Mrs. Moffatt (Barbie's mother) remained an enigma.

But the second (her Mom) was all that she seemed. Oh for heaven-sakes yes. She had never been stage-struck, or frisky, or blitzed. No, she was a radiant and warm-hearted prairie-gal, all jello and cream. She raised Barbie-Jane like an ear of wheat. She cooked and scolded and sowed and cheeped. She mothered and fussed. She was full of prairie home-wisdom and far too unselfish (the angel) to keep it all to herself.

"If young gals were meant for studyin' and such...they'd not have been born so priddie I always did say", she frequently said.

"Nonsense by deah" said the major. "Girls must have int'rests like everyone else--like, er, boys."

"Innerests, my gum. Why it's cookery she's needin'."

But Barbie-Jane's heart did not wholly belong to Daddie--or Mom. She had thoughts of her own. At school, for instance, she had come into contact with strange ideas--like democracy, logic, sex and the Group of Seven. Like batik and equations. And then there was Freud and McLuhan and stuff. It was swell to grow up in the Modern world.

Barbie-Jane's life up to this had been one long, priveleged, fine, free Canadian dream, it must be confessed. Her father's house was a pillared Victorian "Lodge" on the slope of a hill. At the unfenced rear a pastoral mound stretched up to the fringe of the forest where firs borrowed rhythms from Emily Carr. There was everything there a brochure could offer. The mist was non-carbon, the bushes got recycled, animals and insects were natural in scores. Gazing back down the slope (and averting her nose from the blight of Port Albert) Barbie-Jane could see islands and ocean and sky.

"I love it ALL" she wrote in her diary, when 12.

And when 13, "I just LOVE it all."

The feeling, she trusted, was mutual.

Barbie, of course, was a child of the All. Like the rest of Port Albert. Church sermons, school movies, and National Geographic pictures just proved it. The cosmos had laboured, the sun had hurled flame, the oceans had parted, the mountains had lurched, the trees had grown tall just to provide their surroundings. From atom to galaxy purpose prevailed. The All was a pattern, benign and enormous and not to be questioned. Port Albert and Barbie owed so much of their world to the All.

And if Barbie, from childhood, had always acknowledged such matters, the All and Port Albert had both done their best to acknowledge her. When but 1 she was first in the Baby Fayre. When 4 she was

voted Miss Little Bo Peep. At a Junior School outing, when 6, she was straightway elected Princess Enchanting and ensconced on a silver, collapsible throne. The sky seemed the limit.

Yet the beast is also a part of the All.

"You wanna play nursey with me?" leered young Johnny "Kapp" at the next school outing.

"I only play games with children I like", pouted Barbie, and pushed him away with her Wunderland Wand.

"Yah, go scr + w yerself with a rusty carrot", snarled the equally precocious Johnny.

So Barbie's first encounter with the beastly ended up as a draw. Meantime, the good, happy, nice world was still hers to enjoy. And she did enjoy it--year after year. For the nice world was full of enjoyable things.

There was talking to Frisby the marmalade cat.

There was swimming in the pure, blue lake.

There was getting first prize as top of the class.

There was lying on the chesterfield and just wiggling one's toes.

There was rolling in the pure, white snow.

There was passing into High School with the highest grades ever.

There were cook-outs on the beach.

There were giggly little friendships.

There was getting twenty dollars every birthday.

There was rolling on the pure, green grass.

There was romping with Bonzo the pedigree dog.

There was cycling about and just ringing one's bell.

There was reading Lolita in a Black Beauty cover.

There was dreaming of a white Christmas.

There was sharing cigarettes for a long, pure drag.

There was cuddling Pooh-Bear in bed.

And there was singing in the choir in the cute wooden church.

It was when she was nearly 14 that Barbie-Jane really discovered religion. The All had been something, but God was just g-reat. She would sit, after school, in a pew at St. George's and visibly quiver and glow.

"'S'not natural... 'S'not!" The Major would snort.

But naturally it was. For Barbie had been brought up on the fine prairie gospel where goodness was God, and God very good. And her own native goodness was now at that stage when it thrived on the ferment of nebulous hormones. Her goonness increased, became conscious--then public. The All and Port Albert could no longer contain it.

"To the ends of the earth in the name of God", she wrote in her diary when just 15.

The ends of the earth meant the Orient, of course. A dark, dark place--inscrutably dark. Where goodness might shine like the Hooker's Bar light.

A film on the subject was helpful. She would come on a train (third-class) with her Kodak and tapes. No one would know who she was. But she'd set up an inn and tell Bible tales. She would conquer all hatred and

boils. She would heal the sick and unbind young feet, and teach the blind to read brail. But her final triumph concerned some great Mandarin (or Maharajah).

"I too must worship the Sahib Jesus", he'd humbly confess in imperfect English.

"By Jimminy, you shall!" And straightway he would.

But the Port Albert Palace resurrected "Quo Vadis". So Barbie's vision was shortly recast.

"I love you, Virilius" she would murmur to Pooh, "but my God must come first."

"There are so many gods, my raven-haired beauty."

"Ah, no there's just one. And I'm His--forever."

But when she was nearly 16, Barbie's faith was decisively questioned.

"God is made in the image of man", said Lincoln Gregg and blinked through his glasses.

"Far out" breathed Mary McDougall.

"Nonsense", said Barbie. "Consider the world...why, it's just like a great big blueberry pie.

Someone just has to have made it."

"Then who's gonner eat it?" said Lincoln Gregg.

"How dumb can you be? Gee...so alright. It's a great big convertible with luxury fittings. God made it and drives it, okay?"

"So who does he smooch with. On the back seat. Half pissed," murmured John Kopolinski Jr., that notorious creep.

"Crude brute", said Mary.

"Get lost", said Barbie. But her mind was disturbed by all this.

"Like, who made the world?" she demanded of Lincoln next day.

"Like, who made God?" he replied. It was frightfully vexing.

"Daddie", she queried, "do you believe in a God?"

"A God, by Jove. I say, what a ..."

"Daddie, be honest."

"Well I really don't know. It's a question we all have to answer for ourselves. I remember a chap in the army..."

"Yeah Daddie. But how about you? Like, I mean, what's your answer?"

"Well, you know--and by Jove you might never have noticed, you know--but your mothah and I are deeply religious. Deeply, you know."

"I know", affirmed Barbie. "And you're both just so sweet."

So Barbie-Jane became a convinced agnostic.

But nature abhors a vacuum, eeh? Where God had been evicted, John Keats moved in. "Junkets" (to his friends) was a find of Barbie's and one all her own.

THE English Mistress at "Port High", for instance, knew Roberts Browning, Service and Frost, but little about anything else.

Barbie's peers, moreover, never quite found Keats to be

cool, or groovy, or even shit-hot. Indeed, they'd never heard of him. And when Barbie read them "Autumn" in a breathless, fruitful, even overripe, voice, Kopolinski's retort was, for once, agreed with.

"'Twitter in the skies!' That's him, right on."

Thus, then, was Barbie left by herself in the Real world.

Like Hampstead Heath, London, England, where nightingales were immortal.

Like Lulworth Cove, if it was Lulworth Cove (wherever that was) where bright stars were steadfast.

Like Arcadia, Greece, where "love" (whatever that was) remained young, and warm, and still-to-be-enjoyed--like Barbie herself.

She was quite content with all this. It was out of sight!

--"This drop, I fear, is my death-warrant" (gasp)

"I must die!"

"Ssh, Johnny. Don't think it."

The carriage would roll on through the night. The head would be limp on her comforting lap. Surely Naples must soon be at hand!

"Oh that something good had ever happened to me, or my family."

"Gently, my love. Truth is Beauty, remember. And Beauty is certainly Truth."--

So when she was just seventeen, Barbie-Jane's head was high in the clouds. But heck, why, what a cute head to be there, thought the dazzled townfolk.

She could do no wrong, the honey. No. She was twice Miss Port Albert. She was Personality-Girl for her grade, school, and district. She was top of the class, football cheerleader, belle of the New Year, May and Mid-summer Balls. She was quite (oh by far) the most pretty, spritely, quick-witted and generally yummy young miss you could dream of, yes, and the subject of the lewdest, most puke-stirring jokes in the Hee-Haw bar of a Friday night. She'd arrived, in short, at the highest Port Albert could offer.

Only John Kopolinski Jr. resented all this--on the grounds of his unappealed lust for her maidenly fl + sh.

"You'd think, man, she p + + d crackling Duck, the way she swings 'em. But she don't--and why? 'Cos I've seen her from the wall behind the chick's john, yessir," he said to everyone who'd listen, and plenty who wouldn't.

"Like + + + +!" said Ned Brown (an honest young tough). "She gives you the hots and she isn't puttin' out, so you're sore as + + + +. TOUGH + + + +!

But Barbie's a beauidful, far-out, okay chick and if you don't like it I'll knock yer + + + + ing head off."

"Gee, I'm so scared," lisped Kopolinski ironically, "I think maybe I'll lie down."

Which he did, aided by Ned's flying-slapstick elbow-shot.

Meanwhile, unawares of her detractor or her champion, Barbie-Jane Moffatt, in Keatsian radiance, was awaiting the long-prepared promise of "experience"--like life?

PARTY

by W. P. Kinsella

Tazzie played with a dead rat.
Little bugger. Geez it was funny.

Annie's flat watermelon face suspended in ice,
Exhaust pipe mouth spraying beer-heavy
Smoke laugh at the stained ceiling. My eyes
Are drawn like magnets to the strange
Man-creature prints in the linoleum doorway.
Offering a beserk opener-broken "smile".

Through the sad brown varnish of the bedroom door
I see Tazzie, brown as the door,
Shadow eyes drawn to the lightbulb.
No one else sees him, unobtrusive
His grey tee shirt pulled down,
Out of habit, to nearly his knees.
Where is my rat, he whimpers. Only I hear.

What am I doing here?
WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

You know how to fix a camera?
It is thrust at me anyway. Broken
Polaroid covered with Tazzie's hands.
Overexposed pictures, rat-eye red,
All that is left of yesterday. Annie
With a beer and a smoke, smiling her pumpkin smile,
Beside her, Cliff grins from his tunnel mouth.

There was before the fight,
Hell they had to be, I wasn't grinning after.
Always remember the good times,
The times before the fight, before the rat,
Before the skeleton chair upended in the corner,
Before the glass, before the blood,
Before the jam and vomit on the floor.
We never took no pictures of Tazzie.

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Cory smiles a hazy smile, blowing smoke,
Holds out her hand to me.
Katie One-eye sleeps in a corner, while
Verlin-she-met-in-the-bar, lolls senseless
In a plastic chair, on the nod.
You got good veins--Cory's sepia hand
Like a shadow across my arm--easy to hit.

How could I know he'd die?
Maudlin tears, and beer
In the burning stomach of day,
Three hours to daylight, slow motion time,
Sodden tempers swim--warm beer in an ashtray

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.
Chanted like a benediction
For a thousandth laboured time.
It happened months ago, no one cares
But you when you're drunk.
Katie and Verlin sleep,
And Cory's all but gone,
What's his name's counting the groceries.
Go to bed Annie, go to bed.

What am I doing here?
WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

I am a painter. Trapped, fighting for life
In a sea of paint. It rises in turpentine swells,
I tip-toe knowing I'll gag if it reaches my mouth.
The crapper don't flush, use the sink.

Tazzie threw it in the tub and ran to his room.
Little bugger. I never give it no thought.

I am here to record. I must record.
Mark down. Make lists. Total up.
Katie One-eye's frying pan face
Looks at me from the floor,
A stream of scarlet birds
From the curling wallpaper
Fly in a V through my eyes
Until my head is full
And something must spill
On to the ancient white sideboard
Where I rest my head...
Mustard, jam, vinegar, honey,
Pepper and salt, flour and tea,
Coffee and me looking back
From the bacon grease toaster,
While beer bottles march
A waxen cockroach walk,
Labels squirming
Like Tazzie's rat
In the hangover morning.

martlet magazine

march 73

editor: diane styles

*

many thanks to those who submitted material to
the martlet magazine this year and a special
thank-you to the staff involved in this publication.

* * *
