

Maria Campbell (b. 1939)

Born in rural northern Saskatchewan, where she lived until her late teens, Maria Campbell first attracted literary notice when her autobiography, *Halfbreed*, was published in 1973. A frank account of her life as a Métis caught between the worlds of whites and full-blooded Natives, it drew attention to a group of people who had been largely ignored. Since then, she has published children's books, a drama, and *Tales of the Road Allowance People*, what she has called "translations" of stories told to her in their own languages by old Native men. In 2004, she was awarded the Molson Prize for her lifelong contributions to Canadian culture. "Joseph's Justice," in which she captures in written English the speech rhythms, of Native storytellers, is set in 1885, shortly after the defeat of the Métis army at the Battle of Batoche. The narrator, who has heard about the incidents from an uncle who witnessed some of them, makes subtle, wry comments about an event that revealed the callousness of the Canadian government toward the people they had defeated. Behind the almost humorously absurd incidents in which Joseph accidentally finds himself trapped are forces that influenced the course of Métis life for several decades.

JOSEPH'S JUSTICE

You know dah big fight at Batoche?¹
 Dah one where we fight dah Anglais?²
 Well dat one.
 Dis story he happen den
 an dah name of dah man is Joseph.
 He was a Halfbreed guy
 An he don take part in dat war.

Dere was lots of mans like dat in dem days.
 Dey wasn't scare of dah Anglais
 or dah government.

Oh No!
 Dey jus wasen interest in fighting for land
 or edjication
 cause dey don believe dat Anglais government
 hees gonna give dem anything.

So
 dey just mine dere own business.

Deres lots of peoples like dat
 even today.

¹On May 12, 1885, Batoche, located north of Saskatoon, was the site of the battle in which Canadian government troops defeated the Métis. ²English.

Dey jus like to stick to demselves dats all.
 Well shore
 some of dem dey was cowards
 an udder ones dey was jus plain lazy.
 But most of dem
 dey just got no believing dats all.

Dis Joseph
 he was one of dem dat don believe.
 He was jus minding hees own business
 trapping an working for hees ownself
 while dah udder mans dey was fighting dah war.

An den dah war he was over
 an our peoples dey lose.

Dah Anglais General he take Louis³
 an dah udder mans to Regina
 where hees gonna put dem in dah jail so dey can go to
 dah court.

Of course he never got all of dem

jus Louis
 cause Louis him
 he give hees self up.
 Dah udder ones
 dey was capture but not Gabriel⁴ dough.

Oh no!
 Him an Michel Dumas⁵
 dey run away to dah States an hide.
 Ooh Gabe him
 he die before he give hisself up.
 Dats dah kine of man he was.

Louis him
 he was differen.
 Differen from Gabe an all dah udders.
 I guess you can say he was a spirit man.
 He give hisself to dah peoples
 an he do dat when he was a small boy.
 Hees Daddy you know
 he was dat kine of man too.
 He put dah peoples before hees family even.
 Dere's not many mans you know
 dere born like dat.
 Yeah dat Louis

³Métis leader Louis Riel (1844–1885) was executed for treason after surrendering after the Battle of Batoche. ⁴Gabriel Dumont (1837–1906) was the military leader of the Métis. ⁵Michel Dumas fled with Dumont to the United States after the capture of Riel.

Excerpted from:
 Stoll, Jon & Raymond, F. Jones.
 The Harbace Anthology of
 Short Fiction. Nelson Education,
 2012. P.117.

242 he give us anudder kine of membering.

But not Gabe.

Hoo

he was a wile tough man him.

He was dah kine of man he can make you believe you can do anything on dis eart long as you was tough enough to stay on your feet.

But you know dis Joseph

dah one I'm telling dah story about?

He was jus ordinary.

Ordinary Halfbreed like us.

Not dah kine of mans anyone he tell stories about.

Well dere he was him

minding hees own business

when dah General he win dah war an he comes riding by wit hees Halfbreed prisoners.

Joseph he say he was walking home wit hees gun an

hees beaver pelts

when dah soldiers dey see him.

He say dey was making a hell of a racket.

Celebrating I guess

cause dey win dah war.

Dey damn near scare him to det he say.

Well dem soldiers

soon as dey see him

dey grab him an dey haul him to dah General

Well my ole uncle

hees name he was Alcid

hees dah one who tell me dis story.

He say dat Anglais General

he was riding a big white horse dat dance all dah time.

An dat horse

he was dancing all over when dah soldiers dey bring

Joseph to him.

An dem soldiers

dey trowed Joseph right in front of dat dancing

horse.

Well Joseph he tell my Uncle

he jump up as fas as he can.

He don wan to get step on.

An den

dat horse he start bucking an he buck dat General

right off.

I guess dat Anglais horse

he never smell a Halfbreed trapper before.

When dat General he finely get dat horse to settle down

he tell Joseph

"Batoche he fall an your leader

Louis Riel he surrender.

Him an all dese mans dere under arres. An you my good man, your under arres too."

"If I'm a good man" Joseph he say to him

"den what for you arres me?"

15

Dah General he don like dat very much an he say

"Dah charge hees high treason."

Joseph him

he don know what dat word treason he mean

But he say

it sound awful dangerous

so he talk real careful

jus in case hees got something to do wit shooting.

Dem soldiers you know

dey got guns an he say

dey look like dey wan to use dem.

Joseph you know

him he don trus dah Anglais.

He never trus dem in hees whole life.

Well dah General he yell at dah soldiers to put

Joseph in dah wagon wit dah udders mans.

So dah soldiers dey put chains on him

an dey trowed him in dah wagon.

Joseph he say

dah Halfbreeds an dah Indians dey was all chained togedder.

Some of dem

dey was on dah wagons an some of dem dey was walking.

He say he look for Louis

but he can see him no wheres.

Maybe he was in a cover wagon

cause he was dah leader

an dey don wan nobody to see him or talk to him.

But Joseph

he say he knowed dah udder mans.

42
Dere was ole Parenteau⁶
he was wearing chains like an outlaw.
Dat ole man he can hurt nobody hees over eighty
years ole.
An dere was dah Vandal boys
an one of dah Arcands.
Even hees brudder-ing-law Moise Touronde he was
dere.

Boy he say
dey look rough.
He was raining and real cole an all dey was wearing
was raggy ole clothes.
Some of dem dey don even got no shoes.
An lots of dem dey was wounded
an all of dem
dey was real hungry.

Well Joseph him
he tink he better try an say someting
cause dis whole damn ting
hees starting to look pretty damn scary.
An him
he wan dem to know he wasen mix up in it.

Well he try talking to dem soldiers but dey don even
listen to him.
So he start hollering an yelling
but hees brudder-ing-law Moise
he tell him to shut up
cause nobody he gives a damn if hees guilty or not
anyways.

Well
it took dem a long time to get to Regina
an when dey get dere
dey was trowed in dah jail.
Joseph him
he was dere for six monts before he come up for trial.
An when he do
he tell dah Judge what he happen to him
an dat Judge he believe on him an he let him go.
But Joseph him
he want hees gun and hees furs back
so he ask for dem.

⁶Pierre Parenteau was named president of the provisional Métis government of 1885.

He say dah Judge an all dah government peoples
dey jus laugh at him
an dey tell him
he should be grateful he don get hanged or go to
Stony Mountain Jail.⁷
Well he leave dere
an he go to dah policemans.
Dey tell him he should jus forget about it an get
dah hell home as fas as he can
But dat Joseph you know
he was a real hard headed mans
not dah kine dat give up jus like dat.
He tell dem policemans
dat if it was him dat steal from dah General
he would of got charge.

An him
he never even done nutting
an hees dah one dat gets treated like a crinnal.

Finely
my ole Uncle he say
one of dah policemans he gets tired of him
an he say
"Okey Joseph. You can press charges. But me I
shore hope you know what your doing cause dis is
gonna be one hell of a mess before hees over."

Well
it took a long time before dey go to dah court.
An when he gets dere
Joseph he meet dis lawyer
an dis lawyer
he ask him what hees doing dere.

When Joseph he tell him
dat lawyer he laugh like hell an he tell Joseph
he'll help him.
Dat lawyer he was an Irishman
an dem Irish you know
dey don like dah Anglais eeder.
My ole Uncle Alcid
he say
dem Irish
dey was dah only ones dat really try to help us in dem days.
I guess dats because dah Anglais dey take all dere lan to.

⁷Located north of Winnipeg.

Well
Joseph he lose in dah court in Regina but he knowed
he woulnd win dere
cause Regina
he was an Anglais town.

So him an dat lawyer
dey take it to dah high court.
Again he took a long time
but finely he heered.

Dat General
he was foun guilty for stealing.

You know dey say everybody he steal in dah war time.
But hees agains dah law you know.

Dats true.

Dah soldiers dere suppose to honor cause dey belongs
to dah Queen.

Well at Batoche

dem soldiers

dey eeder don know dat or dey gots no respec for dere Queen
cause all of dem dey steal.

Not jus from Joseph eeder

dey steal from all dah peoples.

Dah Halfbreeds

dey wasen rich you know

dey jus gots a few little nice tings.

When dem soldiers come

dey chase dah peoples away

an dey go into dah howses

an dey clean dem out.

Dey even burn some of dah howses to dah groun.

Dey do dat to Gabe hees house you know.

Burn it to dah groun.

To damn bad nobody else he press charges agains dem.

Well Joseph him

he won hees case an dah General he don look so good.

But Joseph

he don get no compensation from no one.

He never even get hees gun back.

Well he really get mad den.

Whats dah damn use of winning if you don get your
stuff back?

He don care if dah General he look good or bad
all he want

is hees gun an hees furs back.

Well he don know what hees gonna do now
cause dat General he leave our country not long after
dah court.

He go back to hees own country in Angleterre.⁸

Dere dah Queen he make him a gentlemans

You know dah kine dat wear dah armor.

An dah Queen he even put him in charge of all hees
jools.

Dat General

he become a hell of a hero for putting down dah

Breeds at Batoche.

Fars I'm concern

he don have much to brag about.

Five tousan of dem an less den a hundred of us.

30

Oh I know dah history books dey say we was two
hundred an fifty.

But you gotta member

dey write dah history books.

My ole Uncle Alcid

he was dere

an he say dere was less den a hundred at Batoche.

An mos of dem

dey was ole mans.

Well never mine about dat

cause Joseph him

he don care anyways.

All he want is hees gun an hees furs.

He go to dah court again

Dis time hees dah high court in Angleterre

an over dere he gets in dah newspaper an dem Anglais

dey write all about it.

Dat really help him you know.

But dats shore funny how he is.

Dey like dah Breeds over dere

but dey hate dem here.

Me I jus never can figure out dem Anglais.

Well dat Irish lawyer he win dah case for Joseph.

An in dah court

he make a hell of a fool out of dah General

at lees

dats what all dah ole mans dey say.

⁸England.

Jimmy Isbister
 he use to say dat too
 cause he read dah newspapers dat come from over
 dere.

Dat Jimmy you know
 he was well edjicated.
 He was one of dah mans dat go wit Gabe to Montana to
 get Louis.

He was a smart man dat Jimmy
 he understan dah Anglais.
 He was a Scotch Halfbreed
 an hees Daddy
 he sen him to Angleterre to get hees edjication.

Mc I always like dah story about Joseph.

Cause you know
 maybe we lose dah war
 but one man he win
 Cause him he believe on hisself
 an he don give up.

Dat kine of man hees real important.
 Jus as important as Louis an Gabe
 cause hees story
 he .rell you a little bit about how our peoples dey
 was like in dem days.

Tanks for listening to me.

(1995)