

ABOUT
ANDRE *et al.*

Delcy Voisine

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DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to the memory
of my dear parents who gave
me life itself and who encouraged me
to never stop learning.*



— A Novel —

ABOUT ANDRÉ *et al.*



FOREWORD

ABOUT ANDRE *et al.* is a novel based on the real-life story of a central character and others but does not necessarily represent any person or persons now living or dead. The general geographical location is named so that the reader may transport himself or herself to the site(s) where the action takes place. A feature of the terrain integral to the region, i.e., a river or mountain may be named for the reader's benefit only. A town or road or school named in the script is fictional and its general location of upriver, or across a stream or on a street is again so the reader can visualize or feel as though one is there as a witness .

A unique feature of the book may take the reader by surprise. The story told is primarily about the life of one individual and a last chapter cannot be written at this time. However, there is a beginning to the life of the central character and that is included at the end of his story, and is titled as "The Beginning", Chapter I.

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CHAPTER II

Once upon a time . . .

. these four words became indelibly imprinted in young Andre's mind soon after he had advanced from reading all about *Dick and Jane* during his first years in school to a time when he could read about the exciting adventures of boys and girls in far-away lands. It seemed to him that all good stories started with those words.

His interest in books came about early in life probably because his older siblings were already students in the one-room schoolhouse that served their farming community. Each day, he awaited their return from school certain that he would hear new words and new sounds. He could master the pronunciation and the meaning of words but was at a loss when they talked in sentences. The family language was French and his siblings often times communicated with each other in English. That left him puzzled, and his incessant questioning sometimes annoyed them to no end. What was he to do?

He was both curious and observant and often wondered what it was about reading that brought a look of pure contentment to his mother's face when she found the time to sit and read. He noticed that at some other times, her mood revealed moments of loneliness, worry, frustration, and anger,

not surprising as the owner of a small farm often was away from home especially during the winter months. Even so, he also knew that day in and out, her demeanor was easy-going, positive, supportive, and cheerful. All that made for a happy interaction between the children.

Andre was born into a large family, he, the ninth in what would eventually grow to be thirteen children. Ten boys and three girls. (One of the boys died in infancy). All others lived long and reasonably well past the accepted age of retirement over the years. Their mother and father had met at a time when she was a maid in a boarding house in an adjoining hamlet from where she lived while he worked in a sawmill which produced shingles and other wooden products. He was handsome and she was a blue-eyed beauty. Each of them was young and personable. Not surprisingly, romance blossomed over a period of several weeks and after a short courtship, they got married in September 1916 at a church where her parents lived, a quaint village located on the south bank of the St. John River in northern Maine.

Months later, they were very pleased to announce to family and friends alike that they were expecting a child. All was well with them in what appeared to be a promising future for the young family. Shortly after a son was born to them, tragedy struck. A catastrophic fire burned the mill to the ground. The owners, now advanced in age, decided not to rebuild. This was a great loss, not only to the community but to all who worked there. There were days when they would talk into the night discussing the limited options open to them.

Word went out to surrounding towns about the tragic event and anxiety became prevalent in a region where there was a dearth of employment opportunities. Small farms were spread out across vast areas and for the most part, all were self-sustaining. Most owners boasted of having enough sons to preclude the need to hire farm hands. The lumbering industry offered jobs to any old or young man who was willing to leave

home and hearth for weeks at a time. The operations were located some fifty miles away deep in the lush forests. They were not easily accessible and travel to and from them posed a major hurdle for would-be employees. It was not unusual for woodsmen to work for long periods that often stretched from holiday to holiday, i.e., Thanksgiving to Christmas, New Year to Easter and Easter to Memorial Day. Families had to accept that condition and cope as best they could during the interim.

One reason stands above all others for the reality of “intense” honeymoons. Later, forming a strong family bond becomes of paramount importance and some of the passion dissipates. How could a young groom and young father justify to himself and to his bride long absences away from home after having promised her the moon and several stars during the courtship? No, the thought of living in his father-in-law’s basement was not a reasonable option. That was out of the question. There had to be something else.

Word got to him that one of his older brother’s farm in Giverney, Maine, a town some twenty miles upriver on the St. John, was for sale. Could this be one way out of his dilemma? Would his lovely wife consider such a move? Discussions ensued. She was, not surprisingly, reluctant to move away from her family as that would also take her newly born son (*le fils unique*) away from his grandparents. A decision had to be made. After considerable give and take, they decided to become farmers. They agreed that hard work and frugal management would bring a favorable return on their investment after a year or two. In the meantime, they would have a roof over their heads and room for their bed. A bountiful garden, running chicken on the grounds and a coop for them; a three-stall stable for cattle, a carriage for traveling, and a team of healthy horses would most assuredly provide comfortable if not grand living. A new barn would have to be built as the then existing structure was small, poorly designed, and in an advanced state of disrepair. It had to be demolished. The

inventory of farm equipment stored in another building on the acreage across a brook seemed to be adequate for the time being. A deal was made.

Alas, there was a fly in the ointment. The mother-in-law, now widowed, was to live with them. After all, she was to be the mortgage holder. Another condition had to be met: if she was not happy with the bride's cuisine, she was to be paid an extra \$50 per month in addition to the regular mortgage payment. Moreover, she was to be the sole arbiter in case of a dispute. Several years later, she moved in with her daughter on a farm over a mountain to the south not many miles away.

Several weeks passed as they prepared to make the move away from their existing apartment to their farm in the village of Giverney. The new farmer was proud as a peacock as he gave his wife a grand tour of the village which was larger and more spread-out than that where their married life began. This tour was his first experience with Jessie, his favorite of the team of horses he now owned. Their buggy was quite small, but the two-person seat sat on good springs which softened the ride. A built-in parcel box was fitted behind the seat. His bride was quite impressed by what she saw. The developed section of the town was much larger than that of the village where she was born. This would greatly simplify shopping for what they had planned to be a large family, common in those days. She noted that a river bisected the town, a fact that is not altogether true as the river was there first. Settlers chose to build around and over it. A road was laid out on either side of a segment of the river connected at each end of the loop with a bridge. While one road favored commerce and agriculture, the other side focused mostly on the retail and academia sectors. A magnificent church building on Main Street lent the town a sense of elegance and presence.

She noted also that the people on the street seemed to be well dressed, friendly and well-mannered. She liked the few who were introduced to her and admired the way her husband

doffed his hat in the presence of ladies. He demonstrated how proud he was of his beautiful blue-eyed bride when in the company of his male friends by placing his hand on her lap reminding them that she was his gain and their loss. Near day's end, they drove up to the farm. She was confident that her new home would be a wonderful place to raise a family.

One hurdle remained for her to overcome. She had to learn the geography and history of her adopted town so that she could assure her folks and friends back home that the future indeed looked bright for them and that she would welcome their visit with open arms in the future.