

# A Letter From Québec

by Sarah Fowlie  
(Fleischmann)

*Dans cette lettre à une amie, l'auteure discute de son malaise face au Référendum québécois tenu en 1995.*

Dear Debbie,

So here it is, your book. I'm sorry it took me several months to get it back to you ... my reasons are only selfish. I wanted to wait until we got the thank you cards out. I felt weird communicating with anyone who gave us a gift before they received the thank-you. Which I realize was stupid. If you gave us a gift, then you don't get talked to! But, y'know, I'm beginning to realize that my brain does not always run like a well-oiled machine. So, *nu?* How are you? How's school? And the quaker communal brooklyn house (which in my mind has taken on like, mythic proportions ...)? How's that? Are you seeing Liz? Yeah? That's nice....

Here we have Referendum fever.... Like a nightmare! The change looms over my life like a demon. People are scurrying around like little rabbits.... All the Jews are shooting each other little sidelong glances, like "Hmm ... maybe this won't be so good?" and "You know, I always pictured myself as one of the *smart* ones, leaving early, to America, with all my worldly possessions, and starting a really successful import/export business...."

So, the paranoia has begun. And of course, mine is a split household. Emily says she welcomes chaos. She wants society to crumble, hopeful of taking free-market capitalism with it. And she is Québécois, in her opinion (and she's not *wrong* ...) the rest of Canada is swinging (or has swung) to the right. The country is crumbling, scary fascist populist former golf-pro pink faced scumballs drunk on gin and tonics are running things

and French Canadians are so much cooler and there's a progressive history here and fuck the rest of Canada!

I, on the other hand, have a little issue with uncontrollable change: *i don't like it ... it keeps me up at night ... it makes me feel too ... i get scared that there will be nazis ... i'm really scared of nazis ... i know that québeckers aren't nazis ... but i'm scared of nazis ... i want anarchy and revolution, but i don't want interest rates to skyrocket causing my mother to lose her house ... i want capitalism to die a torturous death but i don't want east german architecture ... yes to feminist anarchy, no to the reichstag ... i'm a little scared of nationalism ... i know that i am nationalistic in some ways ... but really i feel tolerated in canada, not like a citizen ... so what about the country of québec ... what's that going to be like?*

So, you can see that October 30th, 1995, is a dreaded day for many of us here in the frozen north. You know, Canada as we know it is about to cease to exist. So, that's kind of nerve-racking. What will take it's place? Scattered fiefdoms with intolerant rules? Vulnerable small oasis of toler-

age racist ideology takes over Alaska, and forces the population to work as indentured servants? The prairies survive, only to be picked as the settlement for the Aryan nations of Idaho, Colorado, Michigan, and (gasp!) California? Will there be cable? Will a decent cup of coffee be obtainable? What will happen? These are (sadly) the kinds of questions that run through my mind.

I subscribe to the radical politic that the world is fucked, that colonialism was the death sentence. That we will all live out the rest of time in a swamp of deadly racism, misogyny, hatred of jews, dykes, the disabled, etc.... And that's just the world isn't? That is what I have come to expect ... expect maybe I'm lying?!? Maybe, maybe, I wanna hold onto the few vestiges of privilege that I have and sit in a closet with my teddy bear, my wife (and maybe some take-out), whispering ... they're not after me yet, they're not after me yet. But of course, *they* have always been after me ... jewdykefat ... whatever you wanna call it.... And you know I tried to be proud of my persecution, I tried to be

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ance bordered by dragons and industrial soup? A slow painful absorption into America? A civil war between natives and non-natives? Border posts on the 401? The Maritimes, cut off from the rest of the country, falls back to England and France? The east coast, on big Brittany/Scotland? The west coast, a simmering hot pot of new-

a proud survivor and not a victim ... but you know ... I don't know if I've ever felt safe in my life ... an all female household without much money doesn't make you feel all secure and cozy at night ... strong, proud, smart, but not necessarily safe ... but you know we survived and now I can go to the bathroom at night without the

lights on (but I have to run all the way back to Emoo).

Anyways, there's a little taste of me! Mmm ... delicious! Well we'll see what happens. Emily says I should be calm because the situation is out of my control, and I'm trying to take her advice ... but it's not really working.

So, I'll talk to you soon, I hope.

Take care,  
love  
Sarah

*Sarah Fowlie (Fleischmann) lives with the love of her life, Emily, and their dog Fanny. "I come from a funny tragic family. We'd make dead dad or gestapo jokes and really scare out guests. We'd all be laughing and my mother would remark that this was all really funny, and someone should be writing it down. A scary idea for any funny person, but eventually I took her advice. Of course, the irritating thing about most mothers is that they are almost always right."*



Shira Spector, "Sarah and Emily's Chuppah," detail, screenprint on painted silk, 73" x 68", 1995. Photo: Charles Spector

## NATHALIE STEPHENS

### Memories of Sleep

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In the body's familiar posture the listless gestures of undetermined faith and the chase towards oblivion. At three a.m. the scratchings of tired prose and screeching tires, these prescriptions for survival recorded against realms of guarded immortality and despair, and in the trudge towards home the disregard for the body's distance from itself; cautions received like the gravest inflictions. This is life's challenge to indifference, where breath steals away from itself and memory's waters drown even the bravest intentions.

What is the measure of trust and impermeability? I have chased dragons down railway cars and slept in silence against concrete chasms, where the train's grumble was blood's course through my veins, and this groping towards wholeness nothing more than a race away from definition.

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These are the internal foragings of memory, underground passages to gritty truths, the perilous walk into the city. Days spent wandering dead end streets and shaded courtyards, the search for solitude's reprieve, where lives intersect and countless languages evolve into action. What thoughts remain? In roadside puddles and the pull of highways, the hallucinatory bridge between places and smells, the leap from one language to the next and the emergence of multiplicitous identities.

What speech forms around the well trained tongue? Images cast before us in rapid sequence, the blur of colour reminiscent of speed and the entrapment of continuity. Stories yearn to be told, selected moments captured between teeth, given away for brief scrutiny. What is the weight of dust and agony? The pulped remains of spirit and bone, flogged across time to be absorbed by the attendant body. This is my story, untold and just begun.

*Excerpted from a larger work entitled Memories of Sleep, which attempts to reconcile the seeming disparate aspects of identity. nathalie stephens is the author of french language poetry, hivernale (Toronto, Éditions du GREF), and a narrative in prose poetry, This Imagined Permanence (Toronto, Gutter Press). Her writing has also appeared in both french and english in various journals across Canada, including Acta Victoriana, Arcade, Canadian Woman Studies, and Prairie Fire.*