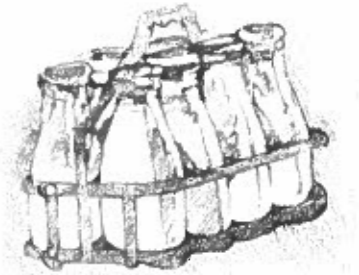


A Secret for Two

by Quentin Reynolds



Montreal is a very large city. But, like all large cities, it has some very small streets. It has streets like Prince Edward Street, which is only four blocks long. No one knew Prince Edward Street as well as Pierre Dupin did. Pierre had been delivering milk to the families on the street for the past thirty years.

During the last fifteen years, the horse which drew the milk wagon used by Pierre was a large white horse. The horse was named Joseph. In Montreal, especially that part which is very French, animals, like children, are often given the names of saints. When the big white horse first came to the Provincale Milk Company, he didn't have a name. They told Pierre that he could use the white horse. Pierre stroked the horse's neck. He looked into the eyes of the horse.

"This is a kind horse. This is a gentle and a faithful horse," Pierre said. "I can see a beautiful spirit shining out of the eyes of this horse. I will name him after good St. Joseph. He was also kind and gentle and faithful. He, too, had a beautiful spirit."

In less than a year, Joseph knew the milk route as well as Pierre did.

Pierre used to boast that he didn't even need the reins. He said that he never touched them.

Each morning, at five o'clock, Pierre arrived at the stables of the Provincale Milk Company. The wagon would be loaded, and Joseph would be hitched to it. Pierre would call, "*Bon jour, vieil ami* (Good morning, old friend)," as he climbed into his seat. When he heard these words, Joseph would turn his head. And the other drivers would grin and say that the horse was smiling at Pierre.

Then Jacques, the foreman, would say, "All right, Pierre, go on." Pierre would call softly to Joseph, "*Avance, mon ami* (Go ahead, my friend)." And this splendid team would march proudly down the street.

Without any direction from Pierre, the wagon would roll three blocks down St. Catherine Street. Then it would turn right two blocks along Roslyn Avenue. Then it went left, for that was Prince Edward Street.

The horse would stop at the first house. It would allow Pierre thirty seconds or so to get down from his seat and put a bottle of milk at the front door. Then it would go on, skipping two houses and stopping at the third. It went this way down the length of the street. Then Joseph, still without any direction from Pierre, would turn around. He would come back along the other side. Yes, Joseph was a smart horse.

At the stable, Pierre would boast of Joseph's skill. "I never touch the reins," said Pierre. "Joseph knows just where to stop. Why, a blind man could handle my route with Joseph pulling the wagon." It went on this way for years—always the same.

Pierre and Joseph both grew older together. But they grew old gradually, not suddenly. Pierre's huge walrus mustache was pure white now. And Joseph didn't lift his knees so high, or raise his head quite as much.

Jacques, the foreman, never noticed that they were both getting old. Then, one morning, Pierre appeared carrying a heavy walking stick.

"Hey, Pierre," Jacques laughed. "Maybe you got the gout, eh?"

"That's possible," Pierre said, a bit uncertainly. "One grows old. One's legs get tired."

"You should teach that horse to carry the milk to the front door for you," Jacques told him. "He does everything else."



Pierre knew every one of the forty families he served on Prince Edward Street. The cooks knew that Pierre could not read or write. Therefore, they didn't follow the usual custom of leaving a note in an empty bottle if an extra quart of milk was needed. Instead, when they heard the rumble of his wagon wheels, they would shout out, "Bring an extra quart this morning, Pierre."

"So you're having company for dinner tonight," he would call back merrily.

Pierre had a remarkable memory. When he returned to the stable he'd always remember to tell Jacques, "The Paquins took an extra quart of milk this morning. The Lemoines bought a pint of cream."

Jacques would note these things in a little book he always carried. Most of the drivers had to make out the weekly bills and collect the money. But since Jacques liked Pierre, he excused him from this task. All Pierre had to do was arrive at five in the morning. Then he would walk to his wagon,

which was always in the same spot at the curb, and deliver his milk. He always returned about two hours later. He would get down stiffly from his seat. Then he would cheerfully call, "*Au'voir* (Good-bye)," to Jacques, and then limp slowly down the street.

One morning, the president of the Provincale Milk Company came to inspect the early morning deliveries. Jacques pointed Pierre out to him. "Watch how he talks to that horse," Jacques told the president. "See how the horse listens and how he turns his head toward Pierre. See the look in that horse's eyes. You know, I think those two share a secret. I have often noticed it. It is as though they both sometimes chuckle at us as they go off on their route. Pierre is a good man, but he is getting old. Would it be too bold of me to suggest that he be allowed to retire? Perhaps he might be given a small pension to live on."

"But of course," the president laughed. "I know his record. He has been on this route now for thirty years. Never has there been even one complaint. Tell him it is time he rested. His salary will go on just the same."

But Pierre refused to retire. He was very upset at the thought of not driving Joseph every day. "We are two old men," he said to Jacques. "Let us wear out together. When Joseph is ready to retire—then I, too, will quit."

Jacques was a kind man. He understood. There was something about Pierre and Joseph which made people smile tenderly. It was as though each drew some hidden strength from the other. When Pierre was sitting in his seat, and when Joseph was hitched to the wagon, neither seemed old. But when they finished their work, then Pierre would limp slowly down the street. Then he seemed very old indeed. And the horse's head would drop and he would walk very wearily to his stall.

Then one morning, when Pierre arrived, Jacques had terrible news for him. It was a cold, dark morning and the air was like ice. The snow which had fallen during the night glistened like a million diamonds.

Jacques said, "Pierre, your horse, Joseph, did not wake up this morning. He was very old, Pierre. He was twenty-five. That is like being seventy-five for a man."

"Yes," Pierre said slowly. "Yes. I am seventy-five. And I cannot see Joseph again."

"Of course you can," Jacques said softly. "He is over in his stall. He looks very peaceful. Go over and see him."

Pierre took one step forward. Then he turned. "No . . . no . . . you don't understand, Jacques."

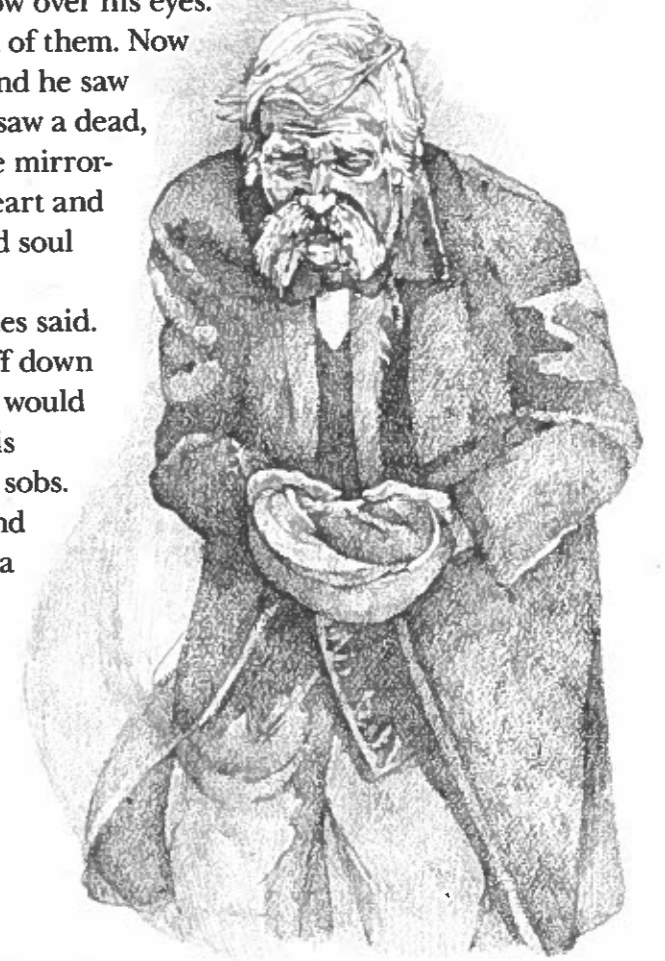
Jacques patted him on the shoulder. "We'll find another horse just as good as Joseph. Why, in a month you'll teach him to know your route as well as Joseph did. We'll. . . ."

The look in Pierre's eyes stopped Jacques. For years Pierre had worn a heavy cap. The peak of it came low over his eyes. It kept the bitter morning wind out of them. Now Jacques looked into Pierre's eyes, and he saw something which startled him. He saw a dead, lifeless look in them. The eyes were mirroring the grief that was in Pierre's heart and soul. It was as though his heart and soul had died.

"Take today off, Pierre," Jacques said. But Pierre was already hobbling off down the street. Had you been near, you would have seen tears streaming down his cheeks. You would have heard soft sobs.

Pierre walked to the corner and stepped into the street. There was a warning yell from the driver of a huge truck that was coming fast. There was a scream of brakes. But Pierre apparently heard neither.

Five minutes later an ambulance driver said, "He's dead. Was killed instantly."



Jacques and several of the milk-wagon drivers had arrived. They looked down at the still figure.

"I couldn't help it," said the driver of the truck. "He walked right into my truck. He never saw it, I guess. Why, he walked into it as though he were blind."

The ambulance driver bent down and looked closely at Pierre. "Blind?" said the driver. "Of course the man was blind. This man has been blind for five years." He turned to Jacques. "You say he worked for you? Didn't you know he was blind?"

"No . . . no . . ." Jacques said softly. "None of us knew. Only one knew—a friend of his named Joseph. It was a secret, I think, just between those two."

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY. Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

- For thirty years, Pierre had been
 - a. looking for a new job.
 - b. delivering milk on Prince Edward Street.
 - c. writing letters to the president of his company.
- At the stable, Pierre used to boast about
 - a. Joseph's skill.
 - b. his large salary.
 - c. the wonderful job he was doing.
- Pierre said that he would stop working when
 - a. he had saved enough money.
 - b. he was feeling too sick to go on.
 - c. Joseph was ready to quit.
- The driver of the truck stated that
 - a. he never saw Pierre.
 - b. Pierre walked right into the truck.
 - c. the truck did not have good brakes.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

- What happened last in the *plot* of the story?
 - a. Pierre gave the large white horse its name.
 - b. Jacques told Pierre that Joseph had died.
 - c. The ambulance driver said that Pierre was blind.
- Which sentence best *characterizes* Joseph?
 - a. He was faithful and gentle and very intelligent.
 - b. He was stubborn and always had to have his own way.
 - c. He was not very smart.
- What is the *setting* of the story?
 - a. a small town
 - b. a large city
 - c. the country
- Which sentence best tells the *theme* of the story?
 - a. Two old friends work as a team and share a secret.
 - b. A horse learns a milk route in less than a year.
 - c. One should always be careful when crossing a street.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- One day, the president of the milk company came to inspect the early morning deliveries. What is the meaning of the word *inspect*?
 - a. look at closely
 - b. buy for much money
 - c. stop at once
- In thirty years, no one had ever made a complaint about Pierre. When you make a *complaint*, you
 - a. pay a bill.
 - b. buy a present.
 - c. find fault.
- Although Pierre was growing old, he did not wish to retire. As used in this sentence, the word *retire* means
 - a. go to bed.
 - b. go back or return.
 - c. give up a job.
- The president of the company offered Pierre a pension to live on. What is a *pension*?
 - a. a very large house
 - b. a sum of money paid regularly
 - c. a gold watch

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

The largest _____ in Canada is Montreal. Montreal takes its _____ from a mountain which rises in the center of the city. In 1535 Jacques Cartier, a _____ explorer, called this mountain *Mont Réal* (Mount Royal). If you _____ *Mont Réal* quickly, it becomes "Montreal."

name	city
say	
milk	French

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING ABOUT THE STORY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- We may infer (figure out) that Pierre and Jacques
 - a. cared very much about each other.
 - b. didn't really like each other.
 - c. got tired of working together for so long.
- It was hard to tell that Pierre was blind because he
 - a. always walked very quickly.
 - b. always wrote the day's orders in a little book.
 - c. kept the peak of his cap pulled down over his eyes.
- Which statement is probably true?
 - a. Pierre was not very proud of Joseph.
 - b. After Joseph died, Pierre no longer cared about living.
 - c. Pierre was sure he could find another horse as good as Joseph.
- Probably, Pierre didn't hear the truck coming because
 - a. he was still thinking about Joseph.
 - b. he had been deaf for many years.
 - c. he was wondering if he would lose his job.

× 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

Thinking More about the Story. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- "A Secret for Two" is a story of friendship and love. Explain why you think this is true.
- When Jacques looked into Pierre's eyes, he saw a dead, lifeless look in them. Why were Pierre's eyes dead and lifeless? Give at least two reasons.
- At the beginning of "A Secret for Two," Pierre said, "Why, a blind man could handle my route with Joseph pulling the wagon." Explain why this statement is important to the story.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY
 +
 REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS
 +
 EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS
 +
 ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE
 +
 THINKING ABOUT THE STORY

▼
Score Total: Story 1