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Clive Doucet: Philibert Goes to Heaven A Story from Clive Doucet's new collection, The Priest's Boy, from Black Moss Press Clive Doucet: My father was a priest's boy in Chimney Corners, Cape Breton, during the great depression. In those days, it was the custom in Cape Breton and in many other parts of Canada for the parish priest to take on a de? serving t)oy to live at the pres? bytery and assist the priest with early morning mass. It was a coveted position as often the priest was the only university-educated man in the village, and he was able to tutor the t)oy for the provincial exams. In my father's village, the teaching abilities of the priest in Latin, math, literature, and music were such that a young man was virtually as? sured of acceptance at univer? sity if he was chosen to serve as the priest's boy. My father went on to St. Fran? cis Xavier, the University of Toronto, and the London School of Economics, and many other boys from this same remote Acadian village also went on to distinguished academic and professional careers because of their own talents, and because of the assistance of exceptional men like Father DeCoste. As a young boy in my father's house my heroes were the country priests of Cape Breton. Men who became national figures in the Co? operative movement like Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins, and priests who were never known beyond the borders of their own small parishes, men like Father Aloysius DeCoste and Archie McClellan. The great depression was an agonising, and also a tremendously vi? brant time in Cape Breton. Families were large and poor. Much of the economy was barter. The land was worked from one end of the is? land to the other. People had to farm and fish and lumber for them? selves. There were no supermarkets and few stores. It was during this time that the entire institutional structure which now governs the fishing industry, banking and fanning, was invented through the Co? operative movement. I have long wanted to write about this period. It deserves grand, sweeping strokes and "soon to be a major motion picture" branded across the cover. Perhaps someone else will write this novel but it won't be me, for every time that I tried this brash approach, the sto? ries seem to cry out against it, as if I were creating a lie. Whereas these little stories were as easy to write as taking snapshots with an old Brownie camera. The canvas is not grand. The stories are about one small, isolated village, told through the eyes of the people who lived there: Philibert, the village matchmaker, the hotel keeper, Albert a Didier, David Bou? dreau, the priest's boy, and Father Aucoin. The stories are not about perfection, nor are they particularly nostalgic, but they are trium? phant, triumphant in the sense of people meeting adversity with cou? rage and intelligence, of people refusing to be defeated. NOW AT 229 Kings Road SYDNEY Motor Cycle Shop 539-7644 • 539-1730 Power Philibert Goes to Heaven Did you ever notice that people remember failure better than success? Wherever I go, it's always the same story. Wonderful goes with the meat and potatoes, failure with dessert. The soup has barely hit the table and I'm told that the eldest son has just married a lovely girl. It was a marriage hke no other. The bride looked wonderful. She was dressed all in white. The groom was as handsome as could be. We finish the soup with the mother's eyes glistening at

thoughts of her son's marriage. The soup is cleared away. Monsieur tells me that he had a fine harvest this year. The bam is full of dry, sweet-smelUng hay. He received a good price for his summer catde. The Mrs. nods her head in agreement when her husband speaks and we all eat our meat and potatoes to the tune of a farm report. Then the dessert arrives. The husband leaves the room and the Mrs. tells me with deep regret in her voice that her first husband, a tall, handsome man, was drowned in a storm, not a mile from the harbour. Her sec? ond husband drinks too much, that's why the kitchen is painted blue instead of white. When he gets one drink in him, he can't seem to stop until the bottle's gone. Then, there's the daughter who went to the Boston States. Her mother did not want her to go. They had an argument. She had an operation last year, but the Mrs. doesn't know what it was for, the daughter never writes. It's these stories that the Mrs. dwells on like beautiful stones, she can never stop polishing. The tragedies vary, but not the love of them. My old friend. Marcel Boudreau, has six sons. One of them works in Ottawa. One is a doctor. Another runs the saw mill at Margaree Forks. Another has a big fishing boat in Cheticamp and makes more money than you can imagine. The fifth is a great fiddler. They are all busy, successful men. Their houses are full of comings and goings. Marcel has their pictures hanging on the wall. Pic? tures of his boys graduating, pictures of the boys getting mar? ried, pictures of the grandchildren but who does he talk about? It's always the youngest, Daniel, the one who ran away. I can see Marcel now. He will sigh and look at the faded picture of Daniel in the surplice of an altar boy. Then he will say, "but Daniel was the smartest." Then he will sigh again, and say, "even Father Aucoin said he was the smartest." Marcel blames himself, that's who he grieves over, the young? est. Daniel was only five when his mother died. He never got over her death. He didn't fit in at the presbytery. He and Father Aucoin didn't get along. Daniel could never do anything right. It was comical, really, because they were alike as two peas in a pod. I could see Daniel being exactly the same type of priest as