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Nota di contenuto

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Sommario/riassunto

Standing on the roof of Canada House following one of the worst wartime air raids on London and surveying the devastation around them, two men resolved to devote their lives to the cause of peace. One of them was Mike Pearson, soon to become minister of external affairs and eventually prime minister of Canada. The other was a junior foreign service official by the name of George Ignatieff. The London blitz was not Ignatieff's first exposure to the horrors of war. As the Russian-born son of a famous aristocratic family, he was barely five years old when the revolution and civil war put an end to his sheltered childhood. His father was arrested and jailed by the Bolsheviks, then miraculously released in time for the family to escape to England and eventually settle in Canada. For the last event, he has never ceased to be grateful. With warmth, charm and unfailing humour, Ignatieff takes the reader through a remarkable life. The early years - from the elegance of his childhood home to the comic struggles of émigré neophytes operating a dairy farm, from the pain of isolation at an exclusive Montreal boys' school and the challenges of railroad construction life in western Canada to the heady days as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford - developed in the young man the flexibility and adaptability required of a diplomat. His close-up observation of troops massed to parade before Hitler, his shock at the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear arms race, and the Cuban missile crisis all reinforced his commitment to peace. Ignatieff served his adopted country as Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia and to the North Atlantic Council. He represented Canada on the United Nations Security Council and at the Geneva Disarmament Conference. He participated in tense negotiations over most of the world's hot spots of the 1950s and 60s: the Middle east, Suez, Korea, Czechoslovakia, Cyprus. He accompanied Pearson on his historic visit to the Soviet Union, and spent a memorable evening with Khrushchev and Bulganin. He discussed multiculturalism with Tito, the Suez crisis with U Thant, and disarmament with anyone who would listen. His colourful recollections offer a rare glimpse into the workings of international relations, of policy-making at the highest levels, and of people whose decisions affect the stability of the world. They are also the intensely personal account of an immigrant who rose to distinguished heights in service to his country and to humanity.