

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindsor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

7-7-2020

Imaginary Ancestors

Derek Deneau

University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Deneau, Derek, "Imaginary Ancestors" (2020). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 8356.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/8356>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

Imaginary Ancestors

By

Derek Deneau

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2020

© 2020 Derek Deneau

Imaginary Ancestors

by

Derek Deneau

APPROVED BY:

G. Teasdale
Department of History

S. Muse Isaacs
Department of English and Creative Writing

N. Markotić, Advisor
Department of English and Creative Writing

April 8, 2020

Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Abstract

“Imaginary Ancestors” is a short story collection of historiographic metafiction that follows a colonial family’s journey in New France and later Canada, bound tightly with the fate of a species of magic pear trees.

Each story represents a moment in the life of one of the narrator’s kin, focusing chiefly on the first of his ancestors in the Americas—a farmer named Marin. As Marin’s story, both real and imagined, unfolds, the narrator confronts the dichotomy between the oral tradition his family has sustained through the centuries, and the lack of corroborating sources in the historiography.

As the narrator grapples with gaps in his historical records, he is helped—and hindered—by the ghost of an ancestor, whose pressure for accuracy begins to conflict with the family legend that serves as the narrator’s obsession. Utilising the flaws and holes in the historical sources he possesses, the narrator writes his own past into the blank spaces around him, creating, and codifying his own “Imaginary Ancestors.”

Dedication

To Marin, Josephine, Jean-Baptiste, and all my other imaginary ancestors,
wherever you rest. May you no longer dream in pears.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several people and organisations for the completion of this work:

Chiefly, Dr. Nicole Markotic, for her literary encouragement and occasional much-needed pants-kick towards productivity.

My extended family, as well, for providing the family stories and genealogies that sparked this entire project.

Mom and Dad, for their encouragement, support and talking me off the walls when I got too stressed.

The Francois-Baby House Archive in Windsor, for giving me access to vital historical records.

Fellow Grad students Alexa and Ashley, for their shared suffering through thesismom.

Bridget, for the editing assist and being the calming voice in my head.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge that the character of Martin the Potawatomi, in the story “Guns in the Orchard,”- was a real historical individual. During this project I attempted to give him back his name, stolen from him by the process of colonialism. This did not come to pass for a variety of reasons- mainly, that any attempt to reconstruct his name would have given him a far greater disservice on my part. While he appears only briefly, I felt it prudent to acknowledge his loss and similar losses of thousands of individuals like him during the period this work covers.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
The Legend of the Mission Pears.....	1
Overture: River Whispers	4
The Fruit of Labours	19
The Treed Man.....	53
Might Be Pearadise?	75
Guns in the Orchard	98
Epilogue: When I, No More.....	122
“Imaginary Ancestors”: Historiographic Metafiction as Genealogy	124
Works Cited	140
Vita Auctoris.....	142

The Legend of the Mission Pears

“Everything you can imagine is real”—Pablo Picasso.

“Hush now, I’m going to tell you a new story. Would you like some juice with your crackers? Good, Good. All tucked in? Let’s begin.

Once upon a time—and a very specific time too—two brothers embarked on a boat. The elder brother—named Jean—is not important to this story, but the younger brother—named Marin—is your eight-times-great grandfather. Jean and Marin Destailles came by ship to the New World, two of a hundred and two new settlers who got recruited to bolster a flagging settlement at the then-edge of French holdings— the old Montréal. After some years, Marin continued to Malden, Essex County, where he caused a special type of pear to be planted, one still found in orchards in Essex County: The Mission Pear.

Long, long ago, before Canada, before even America, these brave brothers set out from France for a new start in a new world, under the command of a wicked Governor.

At the Governor’s insistence, the crew brought to Montréal a Pear tree, not just any pear tree, but a perfect pear tree with saplings still living in hidden places—so long as you know where to look. These pears made delicious jams if you did them right, and they were the first pears in all North America.

The tree stood at the bow, the ship growing from it directly, the roots tangling and merging into planks and posts such that where one ended and another began couldn’t be guessed. This tree belonged to the evil Governor, who wanted to hoard all its sweet goodness for himself. He tasked Marin and Jean with keeping it alive and healthy over

their long voyage—all the watering and trimming and pruning—while he ate up all the fruit, leaving none for them or for the rest of the crew.

As they crossed the ocean and into the Saint Lawrence river, the brothers hungered for some scraps of their labour, for the nasty Governor loved to remark on how sweet and juicy the pears tasted, how butter soft on his tongue. Jean was the mischievous elder brother and decided to sneak a taste of pear for himself.

One night, when the moon lay asleep under a blanket of waves, her snores wafting breezes through the sails, Jean snatched up the one tiny morsel of fruit that remained on the tree, which the Governor planned to eat for breakfast and, without thinking of his brother, Jean ate it up.

The next morning, the evil Governor stomped up on deck, demanding his snack. He declared that ‘Unless the pear thief came forward, he’d throw one soul off the ship for every instant that passed!’ His ogre-like hand snatched upon Marin’s shirt collar, preparing to toss him into the sea.

‘Wait!’ Jean strode forth. ‘I ate up the pear. We do all the work for none of the reward. Why should you, who laze and lounge all day, get to feast on such a tasty treat?’

Incensed by Jean’s admission, the grotesque Governor made to rip Marin in two, but our ancestor was quick. With a kick to the shin and a shove to the beastly shoulders, he broke free from his captor and sent him stumbling across deck—right into the pear tree! It creaked and groaned under the bloated Governor, before tearing out of the wood and falling into the sea, snagging on the Governor’s belt and pulling him with it.

And so, the malicious Governor drowned, and the tree floated down the Saint Lawrence river—past Québec, past Montréal, where Jean and Marin were hailed as heroes for their deed, and beached itself here—yes, right on the Detroit River itself.

As if by magic, the tree stood up, rooting itself into the sand and marching up to a fertile corner of farmland, from which many other trees came to blossom. Marin, by then an old man with children and grandchildren, heard of this magic tree and made the perilous overland journey to see it for himself. And when he got there, after a week of travel, he found a belt buckle grown into a branch...”

—The Story of the Pear, as my father first told it to me, at age 7. He then showed me a loose, scuffed belt buckle, a family heirloom. After that, the story and the tree had their hooks in me. It will not let go.

Overture: River Whispers

*“There are only ten minutes in the life of a pear when it is perfect to eat”—Ralph
Waldo Emerson.*

Thirteen boats got stuck in the river. Each boat had seven men, but only one man per boat had a paddle. MAJOR held the paddle for the last of the boats listing depressively behind the twelve and wondered what caused such a hold-up.

The boats had been built of pearwood of an odd sunrise colour brushed lightly over with golden lacquer that had got scrubbed off halfway. The bone paddles felt cold as lizard scales in the hand, crafted wholesale from one solid piece of monster. Originally from whence? Nobody wanted to guess.

Each man on MAJOR’s tiny canoe huddled together like a bundle of tinder in a campfire. They shivered like madly skinned rabbits in winter, despite the hints of summer warmth that grasped the air.

Forty boats got stuck in the river. Each boat had three people, two of which held paddles made of cement.

Wait.

What?

*Didn’t you just tell me that the paddles had been made of bone? It’s right there at
the top of the page?*

Oh? I check. Well, that’s strange. I don’t know what happened—my head’s a tad fuzzy...

We must start again.

Four boats got stuck in the river. Each boat had two men, both of whom had paddles made from glass.

No, you've gone and done it again! Glass paddles are wholly useless—they'd break the second you went to use one! And the numbers keep changing! You must stay consistent! That's the key to cohesive tale-telling.

MAJOR and his friend MINER had travelled across the great ocean for months to arrive in this mistily unexplored and still mysterious land they'd arbitrarily designated as "New." Though known to the "Old" World for the past two and a half centuries, conquest and settlement had been slow for France. More interested in trading and wealth than settling bustling cities, the largest settlement in the colony far behind them—Québec City, the hub of a sparsely populated and far-flung network of forts and trade outposts. The single man in the canoe had worked as a voyageur for years, his job to map, chart and otherwise puff away and peel back what remained unknown to him and to France. A single explorer in a single canoe.

I'm sorry. I—I don't know what's happening. I don't think I have control over the story right now...

No kidding. Maybe let your ancestor do the talking for a bit, will ya? You're telling my story anyway!

Well, your story comes later, but we could make this one yours too if you squint a bit.

Good enough. Now:

The twenty voyageurs in the boat had set out for the tiny, fledgling colony of Ville-Marie, situated on an island in the middle of the Great River that served proudly as the lifeblood, highway and gravitational centre of France's colonial claims.

"I heard it again."

*Silence broke like a clay pot tossed at a stubborn wall. The youngest of the **five** men on the boat nearly vibrating out of his skin for the past hour—*

See? Not just me now, huh? The story's gone rotten! Wonky.

Well, that's bad. Can't really tell a rotten story in a book all about fruit, can we? We'll attract flies.

Start again? We never introduced ourselves, so maybe start there?

I can't introduce myself. People hate spoilers.

Just tell them about our roles.

All right. I'm the main character.

Ehhh... okay, ONE of.

I'M. THE MAIN. CHARACTER!

He's also a fictitious ghost!

Well, obviously.

And I'm your humble narrator.

Good, we got that all sorted. Can we start over again?

One boat stuck in the river. Each boat had five men, two of whom held paddles made of solid iron. They felt cold in the rowers' hands, frosty as a cold summer drink, though nowhere near as welcome.

The silence cut like candles snipped down to the wick. And in the silence, the river whispers.

“Just ignore them, men” said MAJOR, eyes forward. He navigated their little sojourn. Wouldn't do for him to lose track and miss the destination. He fingered his locket, his compass, his captain. “The visions and voices aren't real. Remember they aren't real.”

“How do you know that?!” VINTNER boiled. “You don't have any memories, do you!? Who died and left you in charge of this boat?”

“Somebody, probably. Else a MAJOR wouldn't have cause for giving orders in a canoe!” MAJOR as in the rank? Why else would he call himself that?

He forgot something else, too!

He had, and a very important something:

“What did they call that village again? Our destination?”

MARKER towered over the six men in the boat, a living cliff, the very image of a grumpy flannel lumberjack, enabling and inventing stereotypes centuries before they existed.

“I forget... maybe Velma Reid?”

Six? Where did the extra one come from?

Just keep going, we haven't time to start again.

“Nah! That one's a people name. Only weird towns run by cults have people names.”

“How about another story?” the BOY piped up. “I always love a good story, though I suppose one of yours might do...” MAJOR didn't look back, but he could *feel* the shit-eating grin on the BOY's pale, wax-figure face.

“I'll spin ya a tale, lad!” CAPTAIN smiled bombastically. “I know a tale that'll turn yer bones to water! Once, I knew a seaman who put in port in the town run by Poison-Juice Jones”

“Oh, not that one again!” The BOY groaned, grin grumpily receding into his cheeks. “Don't you have other stories?”

“Yar! That again. The best stories bear repeatin' so pay attention!”

The best stories bear repeating, so pay attention.

The best stories bear repeating, so pay attention.

Pay attention.

“Not sure if...” The CHAMBERMAID’s salt-grey eyes strayed to the river again, foggy and vacant, like an empty moor after rain.

“Easy, lass! Easy!” said LOOTER, “No use goin’ swimming after no siren song! Wicked things make ‘em, or I ain’t never no seaman!”

MAJOR tried to figure out the dubious triple negative homicide that... LOOTER? Or had it been CAPTAIN? had just inflicted on the French language... They all spoke French, right?

MAJOR could have sworn LOOTER sounded like an old Scotsman pirate, but that couldn’t be... He knew the man. Set out with him from Québec. A dozen men in a rickety canoe from Québec to... No. Wrong. The boat—a big one... years and years ago. Burned. Something about pears?

“Someone else want to take over?” MAJOR tried to make the request conversationally. “My arms feel so tired. The river sticks to your paddle.”

True, enough. The pudding-soft river shuddered with every stroke, waves the consistency of jello. Paddling through snotty slime like this would make his arms buff enough to snap a tree like a twig. Unsurprisingly, SKIPPER, the other man on the boat, declined. Something about his leg, though why his leg mattered when his arms did the work...

GUNNER had gone quiet, after so long being the loudest on the longship crew of fifteen. It worried MAJOR deeply, in a back-burner way.

None of the forty men admitted it, or would, but each man could not remember the names of the other four. Only their uniform indicating rank gave any clue to identity. If pressed, each man would also never admit in a thousand years that his own name... well...

“Poison-Juice Jones now, that nasty scallywag.” CAPTAIN rumbled volcanically, a gruff orator, a passing performer, and a rude host, acting like MAJOR had never spoken. “Charmin’ as a rotted-out snake and near as deadly. In a pirate port off old Guiana he set up camp...”

MAJOR had heard this story before. They all had. With no memories and an excess of time, only a few stories remained to call upon. After the first day of paddling they’d run out. With a sigh and a shared roll of the eyes, all aboard collectively tuned out their storyteller, nodding and gasping at the correct moments, all timed to the dot.

I think it a bit strange, this story of CAPTAIN’s. Any good cult aficionado knows Jonestown wouldn’t happen for another four hundred years. MAJOR thought so too. So why would CAPTAIN...?

Wait. Screw the CAPTAIN. How the hell did MAJOR know what wouldn’t happen for centuries? Something’s wrong here...

NOW our NARRATOR picks up on story inconsistencies?

Hush, now, any louder and MAJOR might hear you!

RUSTER chose that moment and spoke up, snapping MAJOR's thought-railway in half and derailling the (not yet invented) train. "Anybody else hungry? I could go for a good bowl o soup. Hot, hearty, stick-to-your ribs kinda soup."

"We don't have soup. We don't have any food, much less the kind that sticks to anything." FARMER sounded annoyed, with little in her stomach, and having felt queasy lately. Talk of soup only made her feel worse.

"Well, what sort of cruise ship are we on!? No food!?"

MAJOR frowned. Cruise ship? What did he...?

"Shame." SKIPPER half-muttered. "With a better leg, I might have..." MAJOR felt a pang of sympathy for asking him to take the paddle. His own responsibility after all, as the only fit one of the three of them: the BOY had gotten sick and with SKIPPER's leg all broken like that.

SKIPPER shivered against an invisible chill, clutching his stomach as it rumbled ravenously. He did not speak again.

Then CAPTAIN choked on a bad breath, clearing his throat constantly afterwards. Eventually, like his speech, it faded into the background noise of the little boat, with the lap of the waves and the heavy dip and sploosh, dip and sploosh of the obsidian paddle. MAJOR's frost-bit ears filled with the tempo that became their world: Cough, Swish, Dip, Sploosh, Dip, Sploosh, Cough.

FINANCIER coughed too. A machete-hack cough, rainforest-wet, erupted every so often, its maker barking and retching over the side of the boat, continually shivering and sweating even in the chilled calm of the fog-strewn river.

“Here, ma’am.” MAJOR frowned. His chest itched. He stopped paddling for a moment, to rest. He fumbled under his seat, his fingers clumsy and wet with rainwater. The river stuck to them. He handed FINANCIER a blanket. Odd, for a woman to finance for a living. Odd for a woman to do anything for a living.

Her clothes, too, odd. Some sort of suit of dark fabric and a long cravat-type thing over a white blouse, and— Wait, were those pants?

Strange! Why would a woman wear pants?

Women wear pants nowadays. You’re strange for thinking it strange.

What about showing their ankles?

Why would anyone care about women’s ankles?

I don’t make the rules. Women wearing pants. Next thing you’ll tell me they can vote!

About that...

“I... rather tired, sir...” FLAUTIST frowned, brow furrowed, and head cocked slightly to the side, almost as though trying and failing to recall a distant dream. His instrument lay forgotten in his hands, touching his chin, a metal goatee.

“Have a nap, then. I’ll wake you.” A lie, he knew. The—who sat in front of him again?

MAJOR squinted. First, he saw a woman in that odd suit—some sort of businessperson. A blink later she got replaced by a boy, then an orchestra-member with a rusty flute. Who was which? Who had asked for a nap? One? None? All? No matter. None of them would ever wake. The fever would seize them, him and her in his, her and their sleep, quick and peaceable. Wherever MAJOR headed, Ville-Marie or no, he’d have a body to bury.

Maybe.

The river whispers came to him, gently as a child, on the edge of hearing. Monsters and Rivers both had mouths. And they’d paddled right through the teeth. It just needed to floss them out... like their memories.

How did he know about floss?

The hole in his chest hurt a lot, considering he’d just remembered he had it. The arrow through his spleen had hurt a good bit more.

Right. He’d... already been to Ville-Marie, hadn’t he?

And then he’d died.

I’ve not got to that part yet, GHOST! Way to spoil the surprise.

Oh, please, our readers have figured it out already! Just MAJOR who’s slow on the draw.

MAJOR fingered his locket again; his fingers already bones, skin faded. He didn't remember whose picture graced the locket. Wife, daughter—had he even had children? He hadn't opened it in a while. He hoped that locket-girl stayed pretty and safe, though he doubted it.

They had to keep going. The river wanted them. Why had they come out here? The land had wanted to claim them. Or had they wanted to claim the land?

The paddle slipped out of his grip with a mighty tug, catching on something invisible beneath the thick sludge. MAJOR didn't mind. The boat seemed to know the right course on its own, turning and following the riverbend, as though the cross-continental voyage had been reduced to a dull and trite stroll down to the grocers.

MAJOR knew he'd forgotten, specifically, something important... someone he had to... he couldn't remember... Aha! He had a new story, finally! One the BOY wouldn't know. How fresh!

MAJOR turned to get the BOY's attention—he needed to tell him—

And only one boat remained stuck in the river, crewed by one man who'd lost his paddle. Major, with a twist of his spine, forgot his reclamation. Something about logs-wood. His job? A sawyer. He took trees and magicked them into stuff that made houses. Like giant...Sticks. The river sticks. How had he...?

MAJOR – Jean his name, with a start, returned – could see other boats in the river, the sticking had stopped. They moved now obscured partly by a fog that threatened to eat away them like rabbits in a cabbage patch.

Another boat appeared in the river. A ten-seater, with half the seats occupied. Their souls hung lightly off their bones. Jean made eye contact with the woman paddling. He knew her. He'd... She'd died, too...he'd tried.

Louise.

Death has little time for sentiment, and even less for emotion. In those days, 4000 people died every day, out of a global population of 500 million—about 8 in 1000. Just an average day. Death's proverbial chequing account had a lot of bodies to clear in any given day.

You try processing 4000 people in a 24-hour period and get everything right!

Exactly.

Now, point is, that the few inevitable clerical errors which occurred among the dead had greater consequences than the living. The occasional sinner goes to heaven, saints go to hell, that sort of thing.

Occasionally, even spouses got put in the wrong boats

They'd get compensated for the mistake, of course, in a move that would inspire customer service packages a century later—a decade or two shaved off purgatory, if required. For now, Jean and Louise Destailles had been meant to head to their rest in one boat, instead Jean had got bounced around a dozen other people's boats.

Jean reached out for his wife, fingers flickering reeds, fading, fading, their fingertips almost touched. The whispers had got into his marrow. Then, with a sigh, the

world ended, a spider-web in the breeze, and Jean crumbled to sand, his dry dust scattering across the water, tiny crumbs of stone skipping in a pond.

Do the dead have hands to clasp? I don't know if Jean and his wife ever met again. I hope they did. I do know what Living-Jean and Living-Louise did in their final moments.

Here goes: The last thing Jean ever said to his wife: a warning and a plea.

Run. Run, Louise! It's a raid! Get inside and hide yourself! They'll kill—thwip.

An arrow in his back, poking through his shirt, only freshly sewn, too. She'd just fixed it after he caught it on a nail sticking out of the barn!

Louise did not have time to say anything before an arrow found her throat too. She choked on her life. Too much of it welled in her mouth for her to swallow back down.

Inevitably, I run out of threads to follow. This specific ancestor seems a literal dead end. Oh well. There's only so much, and so little, to know and find when piecing together the lives of dozens of generations worth of farmers. The ghost wouldn't give much help. Too coy, too eager to let the story tell himself. After he picks out some relevant detail at every story, he's quiet—he'll tell me nothing unless I make a mistake.

Which happens quite often.

I cannot see him, but I hear him fine. His voice rasps and growls like a dehydrated coyote.

Hey now!

The pages and records scattered on the desk in front of me are yellow and musty. I don't know who compiled the family tree, pinned carefully to the wall in front of me—a distant great-great aunt, probably. Well, hypothetical-Aunt-Doris did an iffy job. Lines of descent are left blank, forcing me to fiddle with a ball of strings. Many strands, colour-coded children linked by my own hand to parents, wives to husbands, brothers to sisters.

Sometimes I must remind myself why I'm going to all this trouble. I set out to prove a tale in my family.

Marin is listed in the *Land Registry of Canada 1650-1700* as owning land in Ville-Marie (Montréal) and died there, in 1678. The likely explanation is that Governor of Ville-Marie Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, the great man of the era, cruelly erased all evidence—letters, maps, finances, paintings, physical artifacts—of the journey from history. His motive? The pear tree that Marin planted belonged to him. Allegedly.

History can get ambiguous when dealing with legend. These trees—nobody knows where they came from—One historical book on the era I read says that most people figure they came as seeds because trees wouldn't survive the voyage—but that doesn't track. My family always (whatever other details changed) maintained that Marin brought to this world a full sapling. Generations of parents, grandparents and uncles and aunts, kids, grandkids and nieces and nephews. So many people just can't make such a massive mistake.

Well, I'll go back and fix that once I get to more of the stories.

I pause at my keystroke. The glass of pear cider chilling on the corner of my workspace leaves a ring on the wood, a ring, like the story, that begins where it ends.

I take a sip.

The Fruit of Labours

“Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists”—Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Second day at sea, and the stairs nearly killed him. Out of all the dangers at sea, from consumption sickness, to drowning, to starving, to getting shanked and kicked overboard in an argument over sleeping arrangements—he did NOT snore! No, Marin’s journey to the New World nearly ended because of a bad step. They creaked wickedly, sure, wood creaks, but Marin hadn’t expected his foot to go right through the wood like soft mud. With the tools and fruit of his labour in his hands, he had no recourse; He could not stop himself from falling. Luck followed him (that day, anyway) he could have broken his neck! He escaped the accident only mildly scathed, a scrape on his palm and a sprain in his ankle. He should never have agreed to this lunatic’s journey across the globe to its arse-crack edge.

Bad sign, though. Ships shouldn’t have the texture of clay.

As two random sailor-conscripts carried him bodily to the ship’s surgeon, they chatted acidly above Marin, as though his wits had been shaken out of his brain in the fall:

“Look at the poor sod; less’n a day out of port and already one of the farmers went an’ ‘urt hisself!” the right man, a pale, blotchy face and a bloated nose; no hair on him whatever. A tumorous egg on a skinny beanpole body.

“Not so sure I hold him to account for it, Henri.” the left man, a dart-eyed and wary specimen with shark-fin coloured hair. “The *St. Nicolas* may’ve passed for a good ship once...” what more could he say? The ship croaked again.

Henri the Egg stepped slowly and cautiously, the only sign that Shark-Eye’s words cracked his shell.

The surgeon, a nun conscripted from many of God’s sisters making the journey, had set up in a roomy cabin that, in theory, should serve as a captain’s quarters. Positioned at the very aft of the ship, large shutters thrown open to sea air—

One cannot rightly practice medicine in the dark, after all!

Hush, ghost, it’s not your turn yet!

—large shutters thrown open to sea air and sunlight by day, closed in comfort to the moon’s shifting face at night. Surprisingly, the surgeon-nun seemed more concerned about Marin’s hand than his ankle:

“This may cause mischief if the miasma gets in—a good wine-wash and a wrap will suffice to keep it sealed for now. The ankle... well, if you could half-stand and shuffle your way here it cannot have got broken—.”

Abruptly, the surgeon jabbed out with a finger at the tender tendons above Marin’s heel. Though his eyes got wet and he gasped in surprise and discomfort, he would not scream.

“Just a mild sprain. Sorry, my good man! Had to make sure it wasn’t a break!”

With his ankle and hand wrapped and a surface that could pass as a bed if one got desperate to recline upon, Marin began his recovery. The couch half-seemed to sink halfway through the wood, a beach chair passing through wet sand.

The whole ship had the rot-begat damp of age. Marin had seen several barns dry rot into flakes in his time. When THOSE collapsed, the animals were only things likely to get hurt. Suddenly, Marin felt a child again, when a neighbourhood party had erupted when the LeBlanc farm had fallen on their five cows, killing all but one.

With four cow corpses to dispose of, and a barn to rebuild in the face of their ruination, the LeBlancs held a massive feast—they invited butchers and neighbours from three towns away to help rebuild the barn and cook the opportunity. They had beef sausages, beef stews, steak. Marin remembered how, with so much meat to expend, Mr. LeBlanc salted a whole cow and shoved it into a special-made larder; anyone who looked in that larder might mistake it for some murderer's hovel. Meat hooks hanging from the ceiling, butcher tools laid out on tables and counters, mountains of salt piled on the floor. Despite the gruesome storage place, that salt beef became the town's emergency snack. Mindlessly chewing, Marin realised he missed the taste of that salt beef.

That evening, wrapped in a blanket with a cup of warm broth at a table, Marin and the surgeon got to chatting—little else to do; the Sister would not release him back to work until she certified his wound remained uninfected and his leg repaired. Holding his drinkable dinner awkwardly in his left hand (because of course he'd scraped up his right) “Wonder if God decided to repeat the 40 days and nights that Noah had suffered through, with all this damnable rain.”

The Sister of Medicine glanced up from her inspection of the injury and shrugged amiably.

“Who can say? Storms are a fact of life when on the open waters.”

Either the woman truly had seen all that existed to see in the world, that nothing else might phase her, or she just generally took things as they hit. Marin pressed the problem of the storm: “I’m a land man, myself. This nonsense feels like the sea had been inverted, hovering above our heads rather than under the ship.”

The Sister smiled agreeably. “If that’s the case, we should likely have loaded in two of every beast we’d find—a shame if we hit Ville Marie only to discover more ocean.” She stood, adjusting her spectoleums. “Keep your foot wrapped and be gentle with it for the next good while and you’ll get well. Good day, sir!”

The *Saint-Nicolas-De-Nantes*, Noah’s Ark come again. What a funny thought. But we can’t be. We have no animals, Marin thought, only a pear tree.

Twenty-four hours before Marin broke the step and nearly his ankle, they’d still been at port. Each hour felt as long as a year, with his leg up, unable to walk even to go for a piss without aid. He’d had his commission for half the day and it’d already come close to destroying his life and limb!

They’d been loading the foodstuff—rations of pickles, bread, wine, grog, sausages and heaps and hills of dried mackerel—when the decree came. Eager to cast off but not yet prepared to. Their provisions and various sundry tools delivered to dock but

not in the hold. The sun woke slowly that morning, poking blearily through the dense cloud cover, a sleepy head poking out of a warm blanket.

Marin and a sallow-faced Norman with hair like a pile of straw dumped carelessly on a rock had been hauling a crate (their third) of wine casks when a man in fine clothes approached them. Marin did not know him personally, but he knew this man's name: Maisonneuve. Despite the wealth of the clothes he wore, much of it bore the salt-scent and telling scuffs of a life at sea, more for travel than fancy parties. A prudent move for a prudent man; no parties where they'd end up.

“You have experience in orchards, lads?” The sound of Maisonneuve's voice is impossible to guess, given that he lived and died two centuries before the invention of recording equipment, but, given his iron will, drive and determination, to bring back his chosen saviours and rebuild his pet project at any cost, I decide his voice is deep and booming.

Or, high-pitched and squeaky as a wet fart, for irony's sake.

The Norman shook his head, making Marin worry that his hair might fall off.

“I have for you an object of special importance!” the governor squawked, gesturing to a large crate, the size of a man. Grasping a hinge, Maisonneuve pulled with effort, revealing a fateful little sapling. Small in its box—one could fit four root to leaf and still not touch the top. “Behold, ye men: A cutting of a pear tree, from my very own garden. It is crucial—nay, imperative!—that this cutting gets planted in my new garden in the colony.”

The Norman had wandered off, and another man stepped in to haul crates. Marin frowned. “My family grew apples, sir. But, forgive me... would the sapling survive? If we must have fruit in the New World, then surely seeds would travel better over so long distances. A Sapling needs regular care, pruning, and salt air... well, it does nothing good for trees. Sir.” Marin snapped to, remembering his manners at the last moment, but Maisonneuve didn’t seem to mind. Instead, he grinned the naïve grin of a CEO who had no true knowledge of just how hard the task he proposed could be (“What do you mean you can’t print the internet?”) and knelt before his prized possession. “Seeds would do the job IN the colony, true enough, but seeds don’t give us a continued supply of fresh fruit. How else could we make brandy? I promised Ville-Marie healthy, strong men, not diseased wretches! That’s why I need an experienced orchardeer to tend this tree, lad. You’ll get compensated. More than, so worry not. An extra 34 francs upon arrival for your attentions. Now, it’ll need plenty of sun, so why don’t you set up on the top deck, just there!”

Maisonneuve pointed cheerily at the exact centre of the poop deck, where he’d work precisely in the way of nearly everybody on board. This fool’d wind up killing him!

Maisonneuve handed him a shovel and a pail to collect freshwater, even stopping to shake his hand, and promptly went to his cabin.

But 34 more francs—more than doubling his pension.

Who could refuse?

Marin now dreamed he had.

Marin missed the docks. A farmer from a family of nothing but farmers, for whom even the River Loire became an exotic locale, the sight of the ocean from the wharf, blue sky meeting blue sea, seabirds shrieking welcomes or warnings according to the tide, seemed strange as far-off China or India. Where they'd end up? So far as the greedy and foolish felt, nothing but potential riches—furs, exotic beasts and crops, gold, gems, silver! —ahead.

The Saint-Nicholas-De-Nantes, to Marin's untrained eyes, seemed aged and dignified; and yet for the overwhelming majority, this trip marked most of the crew's first time out on the ocean, and even the finest of ships can turn the stomachs of the unprepared. The first good shake of the waves found Marin clinging to a bucket, his stomach bouncing off his kidneys as a child's ball bounces off a brick wall, while he retched his breakfast away. A passing deckhand patted his back sympathetically. "That's it, man, let it out. Got to time your steps in with the ship's pitch. Like this, see?" the man helpfully demonstrated, and, once Marin became less green only puked his guts out occasionally, and not, as some did, for months on end. Marin couldn't do much stepping from his bed, so the governor had taken the extraordinary liberty of bringing his little sapling into the sickroom.

"Wouldn't do to separate the tree from the tender, after all!" Maisonneuve smiled, not unfriendly. "Once you recover, we'll move it back up top." It took a week for the sprain to heal enough. They had him walking and working the next day. The sea waited for no man, it seemed.

Marin initially enjoyed the taste of pear, the scent and shape of the bell-shaped delicacy. Years later, on a far-off farm, the flavour and sight of one caused his limbs to shake and his head to pulsate with red rage. Marin had to learn to ignore dirty looks and snide comments from the sailors he worked around, but never among, as he fetched fresh water from their supply once every other day to keep the thing alive. He trimmed the tree with the tempo of a conductor, his unsteady hands learned to rock in time with the boat, forcing his natural queasiness and clumsiness at sea to work for him, rather than he for it. All the while, the ship groaned achingly. It became clear that the sapling held the only healthy wood on the whole vessel.

The day after Marin's fall, two things happened. First, they found land. Second, an argument erupted between Maisonneuve and the first mate over the sorry, shoddy state of the *Saint-Nicholas*. The tree, leech-like, seemed exempt from such concerns. As though fed from the very ship itself, wilting and flowering, werewolf-like. At each full moon, it died, and it birthed itself again, Christ given pear-flesh over and over. As it changed, Marin changed too; his diet of hardtack and brandy served to colour his bloodstream. Even today, so my grandfather said, when cut or getting blood drawn at the clinic, the air around his descendants smells of salted pears, caramelised by the burning ship.

Burning? Oh, yes. I'll tell you more, because this time, I know more:

After only a few days and change at sea, some wig-head far above Marin's pear-grade decided that they needed a new ship. Given that their current one sat in the middle

of the ocean far from any port, this posed a tad challenging. But then the navigator screamed from atop the crow's nest:

“Island-ho!”

All but one man on the *St. Nicolas-de-Nantes* let a cheer out into the breeze. Governor de Maisonneuve looked about him, as though he'd thought they'd remain at sea forever, after but three days.

They made landfall on a tiny spit of island, more of a sandbar, barely big enough to fit all the men and cargo the ship contained. The unpacking of the ship took much the same tack as the packing of it. Marin wrestled boxes alongside the same straw-headed Norman whose name he never learned. The tree, however, nobody would help him with.

“Nothing for it—simply nothing for it whatsoever!” Maisonneuve rattled. “The old thing simply needs to go! We shall burn it.”

For one gloriously brief moment, Marin madly thought the Governor meant the tree. But, no... he'd babbled at the First Mate.

“... and I'm telling you as a man of the sea: the *St. Nicolas-de-Nantes* cannot go further! We shall need to go back to port!”

Maisonneuve broiled.

“Port! I think not! If we make port, half my men will leave, and the rest will die when we make Ville-Marie shorthanded!”

“Fine, fine. We’ll leave you on this spit of island with no supplies and hope I can make back to port in time to find another ship!”

Maisonneuve looked like a rage balloon about to burst.

“I suppose we shall, then!”

“But why must we burn the *St. Nicolas*? it’s not—”

“—in the best of shape to start with!” Maisonneuve suddenly barked. “The *St. Nicolas* had three advantages: close, seaworthy, available. Well, now it is simply close. We cannot sail on if we sink halfway there. These fine people—” He waved his arm vaguely at the gathered crew and colonists “—must settle in Ville Marie. So long as it remains, mind, we’ve promised land for all who arrive; but some men I know are taking great risks to settle; some of you” he cast eyes around. “have certainties back home that you’re bravely forsaking for...well, riches? Land? Freedom? Knowledge? Who knows, who cares? So long as a route back is available some may get tempted and that WILL kill Ville-Marie. I swore to those I left behind to bring reinforcements and by God I will do it!”

Of course, he’d not trust them to carry on. De Maisonneuve needed to see his pet project succeed. All his money, time, effort, and breath had got put into Ville-Marie. He lived for it, and, if needed, everything around would die for it.

Inevitably, Maisonneuve had his way. The *Saint-Nicolas-De Nantes* burned in the moonlight. Marin watched the cinders until all that remained crumbled to ash. That tiny

island became their home for the next three days. With all their food rations and fresh water secured in boxes and barrels, they only lacked shelter.

Also, someone had forgotten the grog ration onboard the ship before it burned!

They lacked shelter and booze. Two objects of such crucial import that, once their absence became known, only the timely intervention of Madame Bourgeois secured salvation.

It began with a riot and ended with a prayer.

The sandy-haired Norman, as usual, made Marin's day far more difficult than it otherwise had to.

"Hey, wait a minute..." Rocklike, the dullard denizen of Rouen scrunched up his brow. "If we're burning the ship, what're we going to do for shelter?"

All stood, tableau-like, the question sifted through the collective consciousness while the sand beneath their feet sifted into the sea.

Marin stood near the shore. Despite the boiling fury around him, he knew himself and his tree wouldn't be harmed if any of them kept their sense. Destroying the sole source of fresh food (not to mention wood and shade) on their abode-in-exile would see the offender pitched out to sea.

Surely... Right?

"Hey... He's right!"

"What'll we do for shelter?"

“Fuck shelter! WE’RE OUT OF GROG!”

The screams and swears around him reached such a pitch that Marin felt certain he stood in the centre of a hurricane.

A sharp, exacting whistle cut through the chaos, as Madame Bourgeoys signalled for order. One of her aids upended a nearby crate for her to stand upon.

“People, people! Calm yourselves. Such rage and violence only dooms us all! What do you presume we do? Our old ship cannot sail—we shall drown before we get out of sight of land, and we cannot rely upon it to make the return journey! The governor shall not abandon you here. We must endure a few days hardship, true, but doing so will save our lives and ensure we reach our destination. God would not allow us to fail, and we surely must have his favour, to not have instantly sunk into the sea as we set out on such a . . . vessel” She wrinkled her nose. Her boots were still caked in the liquid remains of rotten ship.

That’s not even close to what she actually said.

I know, I’m not an orator—shut up!

Steadily, the crowd fell silent and Bourgeoys ended her speech, confident that they’d heed her plea.

“We must pray for the Sieur’s safety! That his superiors prove receptive to his request and see fit to bequeath unto him a new vessel—one more worthy of Our holiest of missions!”

With that, Bourgeoys bent her head in prayer. Slowly, contritely, in a wave, each row of men leading off from where she stood followed her example.

The crowd dispersed, and Marin busied himself helping to distribute rations. The tree would do just fine for a while, right?

With the impending insurrection stalled due to the Madame Bourgeoys skill with honey-words—

Allegedly.

Oh, will you stop?

—life on what Henri the Egg grumpily termed “Abandonment Isle” kept apace. For lack of shelter, men unpacked their provisions, rolling their bedrolls out into the barrels and boxes, digging little pits in the sand. Marin himself slept in a crate that had once been used to store some sort of soft cheese. He had a slice of it with a bite of pear. Tasty—only needed a bit of honey.

When he had his break from tending the tree, Marin sat on the beach, near the shore, a vague locale, given that the whole island consisted of beach. If his toes never felt sand again, he’d build a church out of glass, just to spite the stuff. He liked watching the waves roll over each other, and thinking about where the sun slept in the waves...

Three sunsets staring out at the pink-orange and the blue, with no wooden browns in sight, only the occasional white-grey-black of far-off seabirds. On the dawn of the third day, Marin thought he saw sails on the horizon, but he had the sun in his eyes. The ship had, however, arrived, and precisely on time.

The *Saint-Nazaire*. Their new home. Mere inches smaller than the *Saint-Nicholas-de-Nantes*, if the ashen hulk of the latter did not sit in a heap on the shore, steadily washing out with the tide, one could easily mistake them for the selfsame ship. Marin's sole duty—as per usual—remained the pear. He'd forgotten the feeling of solid flooring. The feeling of sinking into the deck like mud, of knowing that every step could punch through the ship and kill all you loved and tolerated in the world. Gone.

Steadily, inch by man, the sandbar of Abandonment Isle emptied of things and produce and people. The Governor, as befitted his station, served as the very last to board. Given the sour expressions of some of the more belligerent deckhands, Marin felt Maisonneuve lucky they did not leave him there. He gave no sign he picked up on his underling's displeasure.

Though, if one squinted, Marin thought, he could almost see a bead of sweat on his brow—a shake in his hand? A sign that, despite his single-minded devotion to his cause, perhaps Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, truly did possess a human soul after all.

Finally, with sturdy wood underfoot, they moved onward in earnest to Ville-Marie, where Marin finally, finally could get rid of this goddamned tree. And get the farm that Marin had come so far for—also important. The stupid tree needed pruning again.

I have more details of the burning important to this tale, and many other interesting stories besides—but that's for later. Maybe I'll tell them all. I need to know more before I can. For now, morning loomed sleepily on day 7, and the tangle of

branches began to intertwine with the ropes of the ship. Rather than cut away the ropes, Marin deemed easier, if somewhat nerve-wracking, to simply trim the tree back. Marin did not have a saw, nor did anyone on board. (Something about Maisonneuve not wanting to have a tool used for cutting wood aboard a wooden ship.) It made perfect sense to him, Marin shrugged, just meant that he had to work slower. A knife would have to do. Barring that, his teeth got it done

In truth, however inconvenient the tree remained, Marin liked having something to occupy his hands and mind. He moved the little knife he'd been given in a sawing motion, timing it, back-and-forth, with the dip of the ship, matching tempo with the waves in a dance and duel of drumbeats. He wondered, after a while, whether the tending of the tree could just have got cooked up by Maisonneuve as something to keep the men focused on and entertained while they wiled away the blue sky-and-sea towards a foreign strange land. If so, Marin didn't mind. God knows he needs some distractions too.

The sapling seemed to appreciate its cheap haircuts and complimentary in-house drinks, now that it had sturdy footing to root into, and soon shot up so tall that Governor de Maisonneuve deemed it right and proper to begin preparations to take down the main mast and crows nest, for the tree would no doubt soon grow tall enough for that purpose anyway. Just attach the sail to it and steady on! Marin could see a very simple problem with this idea, but what did he know? Sailors spent all their lives at sea, no land or loved ones in sight. They knew their ships as their homes, right?

Sometimes, Marin had his doubts about the sanity of his crewmates. Nothing so bad that would mean the mad souls need get tossed into the fishpond, but still...

Once, on the dawn of the fourth day at sea, the coast of France and Europe long out of sight, Marin watched as a deckhand began dancing with a mop as though it were his blushing bride, moving to music nobody else could hear. Strange enough, but the incident grew stranger still; rather than try to snap him out of it, his fellow deckhands simply worked around him. Swabbing and scrubbing deftly, as though the two-square foot dance floor the dancer's mind had conjured was simply another mast pole. Marin grabbed the arm of one passing scrubber.

"He all right?" Marin jerked his chin towards the broom and groom.

The swabber he'd grabbed, a dark-haired, salt-faced fellow, twitched his head dispassionately.

"Who, Pierre? Yeah, don't worry. He does this every time we set out of port. Misses his sweetheart so awful he pretends he's dancing with her. Best to let him get it out, or he'll make a miserable mess of himself the whole voyage long."

With that, the deckhand resumed his swabbery, eager to work.

As Marin snipped an errant twig, he watched Dancing Pierre finish with a spin and a kiss on the handle. He resumed his mopping like nothing had ever happened.

On another day (maybe the 19th? 20th?) Marin had got halfway through giving the sapling its liquidy breakfast when he noticed the Bosun gazed longingly into the ocean,

lounging over the side as though it was his private balcony. Marin felt a jolt of fear—could the man have a plot to kill himself? —and rushed to pull him back.

Once up behind the Bosun, Marin moved slowly (no need to startle the man) and gently gave him a tap on the shoulder.

“Sir, what’s the matter?”

The Bosun glanced up, blearily. A blonde-grey beard the only hair on his head. Scalp shiny and smooth as a polished doorknob.

“Eh? Nothing’s the matter, just talking to Estelle, here” he gestured at—what on earth was that thing?

Large, bloated, and grey, with the face of a cow and fins of a fish. The creature stared blearily up at the ship, eyes uncomprehending what this big fish that smelled like a tree could want in her home.

“Estelle... you named a sea-cow Estelle?”

The Bosun spun to face him, coal-hot eyes spitting indignation like chewed-up tobacco.

“SEA-COW!?! SEA-COW!?! Why, what sort of vile man are you, calling a lady a cow of any sort?!” The Bosun leaned forward, no doubt assuaging... Estelle...that the mean nasty tree-tender meant none of his words and she looked lovely.

Marin hoped he’d not try to defend her honor.

The Bosun, recovered, shook his head.

“Ah, but this is your first time meeting a mermaid, isn’t it, boy?”

Marin nearly choked on his gasp.

“Excuse me!?” Marin had always thought of mermaids as pretty, or vaguely people-like.

Once he’d satisfied his initial alarm (the Bosun seemed content to love from afar) Marin left him to his lady love and resumed his duties. A rough job, sailing. One needed a strong and sturdy mind to get mad enough to do this for a living.

Only the rise and fall of sun and moonshine marked the passage of days, although some got lost—three cups of grog every day couldn’t be conducive to clear heads, after all, for months upon months.

Morning, Marin would wake, and choke down a bite or so of hardtack and a swig of grog, perhaps splashing his face with a cupful of water to clear the sleep from his eyes. Then, he would gather his bucket, and fill it from the local store, perhaps topping the remainder off with rainwater. He would lug the bucket, dodging up the stairs, around holes and the wood fast-melting into the seawater accumulating threateningly beneath their feet, and ducking around other morning routines and the bodies attached to them, until he made it to the main deck, where the sapling rapidly left saplinghood behind. Noontime had a quick lunch break before beginning the worst part of the day: the fertiliser. Given that young trees need fertiliser, and, in a rare oversight on Maisonneuve’s part, he’d forgotten to bring any, it is likely that, well, that Marin likely farmed in the shit of his fellow sailors. Crass, I know, yet desperate times create desperate men. And clever ones, too.

The first time Marin collected the fetid shit of his compatriots, Maisonneuve stood watch. Marin had made the tragic mistake of asking the Governor what, precisely, he might do about their urgent lack of fertiliser.

“Why, lad, think! If we have no fertiliser, then we must make some!”

“Make some!?! Surely not!” Maisonneuve had gone squirrelishly mad; if his attempt to build a small kingdom off the edge of the map hadn’t given the impression, then his affable demand that Marin find a way to MAKE fertiliser in the middle of the sea...

“Do it, boy.” Maisonneuve’s demeanor became an oyster, hard, grey and chilled.

“Or you forfeit your pay and your plot.”

Marin’s hands shook.

Wordlessly, he accepted defeat.

Maisonneuve’s presence ensured he did the deed. The governor never resembled an iceberg more. His gaze so intent on the door to the privy with his winter glare that Marin wondered that the steady stream of piss and shit had not turned frozen as icicles sticking out the orifices of men.

The *Saint-Nazaire*’s privy proved far sturdier than the *Saint-Nicolas-de-Nantes*, if only that it would not crumple into mush the first time a woeful unfortunate stepped into the room to relieve himself and got dumped in the—

In the dump!

Quite.

The smell. Marin had grown up with fertiliser and animals, to use the old expression, he'd seen some shit, but this—this smelled heinous!

Perhaps the knowledge of the smell arising from humans, rather than beasts, made him retch. Perhaps the pure indignity of collecting shit with its excreters within sight. Animals, after all, do not judge the strange things the human people around them do on a day-to-day basis.

Or perhaps they do.

The bucket shook. Marin approached the seat, shovel in hand.

And then I made the mistake of looking in, I remember now!

The stench waxed viler and viler. A mound of flies—enough to cover a man—swarmed atop a collage of dung. Some solid and dark, some so loose and red that someone on the ship very likely had dysentery.

I don't think we called it that, then.

Well, how else are my readers meant to know what I mean?

Marin had no light whatever, which he truly welcomed for several reasons; first and practically, the fumes reeking off this communal mass would catch fire if exposed to flame. Secondly and emotionally, Marin truly did not want more detail than already assaulted and accosted his watery eyeballs and nostrils. The dysenteric stuff proved unusable, forcing the poor pear person to parse through the poop for paydirt. Some slimy,

some hard, some dry and rocklike, some vaguely pungent with bits of undigested food sticking out, some so wretched smelling he worried for the health of the arsehole that forged it. Luckily Maisonneuve had provided thick old gloves of an off-colour that may once have been white, but as his hands worked through the vileness became a darker and darker (not to mention filthier) brown shade. Once the privy had been abandoned by the last sailor, Marin got lowered headfirst down the hole into the communal pit. Maisonneuve held him by his ankles, making Marin wince in a steadily easing discomfort, and avoided adding his own lunch to the mound by a different road by a few seconds—

Wait! Hold on just a second!

What?

This! None of this is even possible! A privy on a ship is literally just a bucket! Just collected them! What's this nonsense about lowering me headfirst towards a shit mountain!?

Buckets then. Well, that does make a bit more sense. I pause at my keystroke to consider: How to work with buckets?

Marin collected the fetid shit of his companions in buckets. Specifically, one bucket—the designated privy bucket crafted at a novice-level from wood from the *Saint-*

Nicolas-de-Nantes. All the wood aboard that wretchedly doomed vessel deemed of suitable condition to salvage had gone into its construction.

They'd have more than one bucket for a priv. Just saying.

Narrative license: the other buckets don't matter.

The process had not yielded a bucket of particularly large size, obviously.

They'd initially planned for a cask, but this way men got to literally shit in the face of the ship that nearly drowned them, so something positive, however vindictive, had come from the Stranding.

Maisonneuve's presence ensured Marin did the deed. The governor never resembled a gargoyle more, gaze so intent on the door to the privy that any demons or ghosts that dared to haunt the vessel would surely have got turned to stone.

For those keeping track, that sunrise marked only their fourth day at sea, and their first aboard the *Saint-Nazaire*, and after a day stuck on a sandy atoll in the middle of the Bay of Biscay, many men—and the women accompanying Madame Bourgeoys—desperately needed the privy.

Marin had to disappoint them, and he hated himself for it.

They hated him too, so at least they agreed on something.

Again, more than one bucket!

But then we don't get this scene; it's important; trust me.

When Marin picked up the bucket, it sloshed just thickly enough to not merely consist of piss.

When he shut the latch behind him, the first man in the crowd—the selfsame sandy-haired Norman who’d helped him load boxes three days ago—stepped forward.

“Where are you going with that? I just saw you empty the damn thing an hour ago!”

Marin would not meet his eye.

“Well?”

“The governor’s tree needs fertiliser.”

Strawhead took a second, bigger step. “So, get some! I need to piss!”

“We all need to piss!” a reedy voice in the back of the crowd wafted forward.

“Not me!” an uncomfortably, too-open cheer from nearer the door clanged against the wall.

This would turn to a riot if nobody did something, so Marin privately whispered back to Strawhead, almost a mantra of madness, his broken response:

“We have no fertiliser. The fool forgot to grab it off before he set the *St. Nicolas* alight. He’s demanded I make some or he’s declared my pay forfeit. Entirely. You want someone to blame? Blame the governor, it’s not my idea!”

With that he elbowed his way through the crowd, not caring if he slopped so long as none landed on him. The tree had better like this shit. Actual shit. He was carrying a

bucket of actual human people shit up to top deck to fertilise a tree growing on a ship in the middle of the ocean.

How had it come to this? What had he done, that God would punish him so?

One day, Marin had a different routine. A clear blue-as-blue morning, Day 22, and catastrophe struck the ship. They'd run out of grog. Again. The night shift had pilfered from the carefully rationed supply, and Marin, grogless, stood up on deck at his post with the plant, drinking in sunlight, quick as a fish drinks water. The Governor approached him with a sack in his pork-fist.

“Morning, boy!” The man had spent too much of his life at sea to let himself get bothered by the constant motion of the boat, but Marin suspected he nipped some good booze on the sly. Nobody could possibly get this cheery this early on this stupid boat.

Surreptitiously, eyes bouncing around, a pair of flies careening off the sides of a jar, the governor passed Marin the sack. “Bit of a reward for a job well done.” de Maisonneuve whispered in fear for sparking jealousy from the deckhands. “Brandy does wonders for the system after long periods on a boat. Pity you don't have any.” He winked conspiratorially, like an Austrian in one of those newfangled Coffee houses.

Marin opened the sack, peering inside gently, in case it held some dangerous beast. It did. Inside lay a full bottle of pear brandy. Marin might hate anything remotely related to pears now— even a bit miffed at apples, honestly—but he drank the stuff. It made the days easier. The Governor saw fit to give Marin a bottle every other week. Where, precisely, he found the room in the ship's hold for so many bottles? His desk had been hollowed out, designed by a Venetian master carpenter at great expense. Filled with

crevices, crannies and nooks to store little snifters of his favoured beverage. In his captain's quarters, with a chest of money to finance the trip, shelves of books and his diaries, nobody would ever think that his most valuable possession lay in a hollow compartment in a desk leg, like a dog at his right knee...

He could still hear them. As Marin went about his duties, minding his, he could nevertheless hear their private snorts of laughter and rude gripes:

“Stupid bastard. What sort of idiot raises a tree on a ship?”

“It's getting tangled up in the rigging—we can't well do our jobs if he does his! Why did the Governor have to pick the one damn gardener on this ship who won't slack off just a bit?!”

“If ol' shit-farmer there kisses up to the governor any more the church'll have a problem!” one or two guffaws.

“Lay off the poor fool! I heard he gets paid half again as much as the rest of us to keep the governor's goddamn stick happy and watered. I'd do my job too if it meant that sort of payday!”

“Half again? HALF again!? Zounds above and hell below! Why couldn't the governor offer ME that sort of payday. Lucky...”

He could feel their jealous glares. Marin felt certain that only the open air and central, public location of his workplace saved him from getting killed in a horrible accident that necessitated a new pear tender.

The mutterings never stopped, yet Marin kept at his pruning, his trimming, his fetching of fresh buckets of water, his fertilizing, to keep his mind and hands from being idle as the devil's playthings, they had their sullen commentary. Why they did not simply come up and ask? Perhaps they felt it rude, perhaps they preferred their imagined stories to the truth.

“Why do you suppose he wants the damn tree anyway?”

“The Bosun said that the governor had a dream that if he brought over a pear tree, that God would save the colony!” They laughed, most at the governor, yet some at Marin, for his immediate free access to drinking water, and, they presumed, a bonus to his farm size once they landed. Some wished they had been chosen to sling water, shit and shears over a tree in the middle of the ocean. Marin simply felt glad, at least, that he had something to do. The mutterings went on:

“The Bosun also thinks women with fish-tails for legs live in the sea and eat unsuspecting sailors.”

Marin blurted coolly, drawing looks. “How lonely do men need to get before they think screwing a fish makes for a sound plan?” he imitated the sharks that followed them sometimes, his grin raw and white.

Silence, then one brave, bearded old man grunted from the corner unexpectedly roaring a waterfall-like cackle, mocking as a demon at the edge of a church ground.

“Bah! Hell, I'd try anything once, if only to try *something* on this damned tub!” laughter rang above the rain, a battle cry. Thinking too deeply, indeed, at all: dangerous

at sea. Men get queer thoughts with nothing but the blue of sky and wave to draw imagination...

Marin snipped at a troublesome branch that threatened to grow holes in the sails—looking wilt-y again—must remember to water. Always water everywhere, and the tree gets all the damn drops to drink. A spare sail too aged for the purpose had got cannibalised to make a sort of tarp to keep the saltwater off the tree, but it did not appear to work well, the material too coarse to let in sunlight, yet ripe enough to tear at a light gust of air. Stitching it up became another one of Marin's duties. A few pricked fingers set his mood sour. The farm. Remember the farm. He'd have his own apple trees, not this babysitting job. Some good wheat and carrots, mayhap even some New World plants: tomatoes, corn, squash, all strange new wonders. Marin did not, of course, know much about new world plants. He certainly did not know that the area he'd wind up in would become famous for tomatoes and corn, to a degree. That his descendent, while taking a break from this very manuscript, would spill ketchup made possibly from the descendants of his own harvests on the desk—I know its full of sugary syrup but it goes so well with grilled cheese and its on my keyboard I'm sorry let me clean this dgjhlkasigjsrgrjridgohigeg—

That's better. Sorry.

While I pause, I rifle through some of my sources on the pear. It's a real mystery. Despite being named for Jesuit priests, normally excellent record keepers, nobody seems to much know where these saplings came from before Marin got his hands on one. Other than the idea that it came from Maisonneuve's garden, I mean. But before that...?

One local historian seems just as frustrated with this confusion as I am:

“The prevailing opinion, that the apple and pear trees of the Canadas originated from *seeds* brought from France, is founded on the supposition that nursery trees could not have survived the long sea voyage of that period. Yet this opinion cannot be accepted without hesitation.”—Bela Hubbard, *Memorials of a Half-Century*, 1887.

Bela Hubbard was a crack historian for his day; but even he couldn't find any records by or about the Jesuits. Everything is guesswork and supposition, but helpful for me. He admits that Marin's journey existed within the realm of possibility—that the Tree could survive; and it clearly did.

Marguerite Bourgeoys had an alarming amount to do on the *Saint-Nicholas-De Nantes* and the *Saint Nazaire*. One of the perks and problems behind being a nun aboard a ship to her new vocation: not having to aid in day-to-day maintenance and care aboard the ship. One of the downsides: having to do most everything else. Someone got sick? Send him to the nuns! Cleaning? Nuns! Cooking? Nuns! Never mind that not every one of her charges had skill in such areas—poor Beatrice, for instance, could barely tell a mop from a milk bucket. In short, anything the sailors got too busy or lazy to do, any small task not of immediate importance got put in her pile.

The Sisters typically distributed rations—a calculated move on Maisonneuve's part. Men were far less likely to mutiny over nuns bringing them less grog that week than another sailor. By feeding the men on the go, Maisonneuve rationalised, more work could get done in less time.

Most of the men did the same sort of shipscraft she'd come to expect: tie this rope, dump this bucket overboard. Scrub down this deck. Only one man aboard had an interesting job.

Marguerite didn't know his name, so she privately referred to him by his profession:

The Pear-Tender.

His charge grew in precisely the most inconvenient spot on the deck, directly next to the main mast. As the roots wound through the wood of the *Saint-Nazaire*, it began tripping up, blocking, or directly countermanding the routines of the myriad deck-swabbers and rope-tiers and bucket-dumpers that worked under the increasing shady cover. Every day the pear-tender carefully clipped and cut and snipped away at the errant branches that threatened to trip up passersby, though, from the occasional bruised knee and wrenched ankle that Marguerite had to often literally kiss and make better, she doubted much success.

Her curiosity outweighed the serenity she got from watching at a distance: watching life spring up from earth, as its shepherd kept it pristine and well-watered, the perfect image of the Garden of Eden.

"Mother Superior." The pear-tender bent his head in respect, bobbing lightly.

"I'm curious about your work, good sir." She smiled primly. "One should think that if the governor desired trees in the New World, he'd bring seeds instead of saplings?"

“One should indeed, Mother. But... well... not my choice, you see.” He turned away; eyes towards the root of his issues.

“Sieur de Maisonneuve has personally requested the care of this tree for his manse.” The pear-tender took a beleaguered breath. “Convenience doesn’t really factor in for me. I get paid a good five francs more for the job than any other settler.”

Marguerite frowned. She should have figured that a man who joined an effort such as bringing civilization to the New World would invest in material goods.

Seeing her look, the pear-tender started. “It’s not so much the money, Mother. I need Sieur de Maisonneuve. I am a third son, you see, with no prospects back home.” He sighed. “If I keep the Sieur happy, he’s more likely to keep his end of the bargain. I do not trust men of power to care for those they stomp over. We’re just fruit for the press!”

Marguerite raised a hand softly, though firmly. Hopefully she’d waylaid the man’s tangent before he said something over-treasonous.

“Do not mistake paranoia for caution, sir. Maisonneuve is a good and forthright man. You needn’t worry about him. His mission has nothing but good in mind for France, and for you.”

The pear-tender nodded, jerkily and hastily, but a question lingered on his lips.

“...And what of your mission, madam? Bringing a womanly touch to such a rough and rude people might have benefits. How do you and yours fare? I know many vile sorts live aboard here...”

Marguerite scrunched up her nose, as though the vile sort had moved in above her lip. “Would it surprise you to know that, despite the necessity of education and the womanly arts to a successful home, that many at court attempted to sabotage the establishment of this nunnery?”

“Not really. People have goals of their own. Men often delude themselves into mistaking their own good for public good, you know?”

Marguerite crossed her arms, dusting an imaginary speck off her habit as she did so. “Despite that, you needn’t worry about us, sir.” She turned her back to him, facing starboard and out to sea. “Any fool who laid hands upon a nun would get pitched overboard—if only to forestall God’s wrath.”

“And your wrath, madam?”

Here Marguerite gave a savage, she-wolf expression. If the tender wanted, he could count her teeth.

“I surely don’t know what you mean.”

“...Only the driven and the desperate make such a voyage as this. You strike me as ambitious—visionary. You don’t seem desperate. I pity the fool who gets in your way.”

Saying so, the pear tender surreptitiously passed her a ripened fruit from the branch. The tree had grown to such size, intertwining the main mast in just such a way, that their exchange remained hidden even as a deck-swabber cleaned around the sundry roots that hung over the side of the ship, a limp snake.

“It’s not much, but I think you and your sisters would enjoy perhaps a taste of God’s bounty” He winked, then turned to his work. “Just keep it quiet. I’m all for favour with the Lord, but I don’t want to waste any earthly favours to acquire it, if you catch me.”

Marguerite did not say anything, nor did she ever speak to the Pear-tender again. But, in fifteen years, when a farmer with a familiar name had a daughter needing schooling. Well, that’s the catch with favours: not a thing easily left unpaid if the Lord had any say in it at all.

Marguerite Bourgeoys did not put much stock in playing politics—it got in the way of the Lord’s work; but to see her goals succeed in the face of the close-minded, she’d play. The look of joy on her dozen charges’ face as they carved up their secret fruit, guiltily and greedily a morsel for each, remained her fondest memory of the voyage. She owed the Pear-Tender for that. So, pulling a few strings to get a good girl a good education? Nothing more or less than fulfilling her earthly and heavenly obligations in one go—and the scandalous, fiery, boiling pot-lid expression of sheer offense on those rich merchant’s faces as a farmgirl earned the favour of the Abbess ahead of their prissy pampered progeny? It tasted sweet as that pear had...

When the storm came, Marin thought the cataclysmic deluge would give him a break from his duties. Instead, thoughts and seeds jostle around inside his brain, keeping time with the roll, dip and pitch of the ship. The constant rain bestowed gifts of mist and perpetual dampness on the smoky air below deck, thick and muggy enough to chew on.

Marin did so, blowing bubbles of soot and storm as his empty head germinated future farmers.

What with the storm pounding the deck again and again, an over-eager and unwelcome neighbour on his door, Marin got nervous; at this rate they'd capsize. He couldn't die—not before he finished with the tree! The governor had commanded it. Against the tumult, Sister Marguerite bent her head and began to pray. "Trust in God and Providence." Her voice tinkled along as a ringing bell, light and airy. "They have seen Noah through a far worse trial than ours, under similar circumstances. Would God have let his chosen be drowned from some light rain? Our mission, though humbler, is no less holy. Take heart—all shall be right as... well, not as rain, but I know in my very soul that we'll see the sun of dawn again." With that, many joined her. Maybe Marin did too.

Wind lashed walls of water hard as a headsman's axe against the deck. The screams of men got drowned by the howling of gales. Through it all, at the governor's insistence, Marin fumbled a wet bucket in his hands.

"No great task, boy, just collect rainwater for the pear tree while watery hell breaks out around you" Marin snidely imitated the governor's fart-wheeze of a voice "the damn thing's already wet you f—." The sea sucked down his curse as a new wave washed over deck, pulling up a blanket—though half as comforting. Marin ducked above and below deck repeatedly, a bucket of water full, a bucket of water empty. No good fertilising it now—maybe some pruning? Thing probably loves this weather. When morning came, even the air felt wet. Marin had breakfast with one foot exposed, pouring

out the lake that had accumulated in his boots. Marin left his socks out to dry, but someone took them. He did not own a pair of socks for another year.

In years to come, Marin would grow nostalgic for the journey; remembering the incomparable sight of blue-on-blue, no land around, just the wood under foot to keep him from the depths. A feeling like no other, being at sea. For now, his most common emotion remained annoyance that his duties kept him away from the sensation of dryness, rare enough on the sea. God had made Marin a farmer in soul and in profession. He lived for the sun on his back, dirt in his hands, fruit grown of his own labour at his table. Brandy tasted a fine reward, mind, but nothing exists on this earth sweeter than a good pot of stew, each vegetable and scrap of meat harvested all your own, for your own... He dreamed of carrot soup that night. The kettle boiling sounded like thunderclaps and rain.

The Treed Man

“In Wine there is Wisdom, in Beer there is Freedom, in Water, there is Bacteria”

—*Benjamin Franklyn.*

But... what’s in cider, Benny? Other than fruit, I mean. I can guess some of your omissions: “In Whiskey, there brews Depression, in Vodka there lingers Regret, in Tequila there sits literal Scorpions...” and so forth. But, cider? What do I make of cider?

Today, a lot of old cideries still cling to their roots in the Great Lakes area. ‘Old’ meaning about 1850 or so. I have no recipes for what Marin would have drunk, the pears he ate have become an endangered rarity not found in any local supermarket. Some craft cideries get more creative—hot, fresh doughnuts with cinnamon-sugar and cran-cherry cider rosé with a soupçon of honey, mmm, to die for!

But the big ones? The famous ones? Those cideries use apples. Apples!

I take a sip, and a drop lands on my shirt, a pear’s tear, a liquid omen suspended between the weaves.

Maisonneuve, zeal incarnate, living with one goal that overwrote and underwrote all others: to see a Ville-Marie that thrived, not a tiny dying hamlet, but a thriving island city. I didn’t comprehend exactly how driven until I learned about Québec City. Maisonneuve had a rival, and this rival had many followers screaming to the sun and stars and bonnet-wearing daughters of merchants and trappers just crossing to the market, that: “Ville-Marie’s doom has already passed, and if not, then we should do everything in

our power to make it speed along!” to which the shoppers would reply with a version of: “Pardon me, sir, but you’re standing in front of the produce stall, and I need carrots for tonight’s soup. Could you step aside, please?”

The orchestrator of the market-criers and wannabe architect of Ville-Marie’s absorption into Québec: Jean de Lauzon. Slug-like, dripping from head to toe with mucus, his moistness made him trustworthy in a way that befitted only a crooked politician and administrator, namely that you could trust him, irrefutably, to utterly ruin your day, life, and your career.

So long as it meant he could use the lot your house had stood on to grow rutabagas so that he could then sell them back to you at inflated prices.

De Lauzon had no interest in the actual fate of Ville-Marie, it seems, though the good or ill of France and the journey itself depended upon the town surviving, extending their reach just a bit further downriver. With Ville Marie a lost cause, these souls needed to settle somewhere with real potential, somewhere like Québec.

He greeted them at the dock, part and parcel of receiving his counterpart. An honour guard lined the ramp, guns pointed at heaven like they’d attempt a second version of Lucifer’s uprising. De Lauzon stood at attention in his dressiest uniform, all colour and pomp. The standard of the King flapped limply behind him in the dull wind. All part of an elaborately unnecessary ceremony carried over from the old world. This settlement existed at the end of the world, any noble agents of the King must get treated according to their station, in his name. The King would never set foot here himself; never really know what went on in this land his underlings ruled as de-facto barons. Reports written by

ambitious governors eager to slander their rivals as unproductive or corrupt his only window into New France. As a result, a simple diplomatic snub became an irresolvable he-said/he-said, as petty rivalries attempted to sabotage their opponent's colonial holdings, knowing that they controlled the narrative back to Paris.

De Maisonneuve strode off from the gangplank towards De Lauzon, his clothes frumped from his time at sea. De Lauzon strode forward, appearing to move to meet in the middle, as ceremony required. Then, in a breach of protocol, De Lauzon brushed right past Maisonneuve completely, as though he were a pile of dung in the road he'd rather not step in. De Lauzon raised his arms as though he stood at the pulpit, a bishop of opportunity eager to address this entourage of hopeful homesteaders:

“Good people!” his voice bubbled out of his throat, an eternal mouthwash-gargle. “Truly you deserve better than some faltering farmland in the far-flung edge of his Majesty's realm! Here, we have the very heart and centre of all Nouvelle-France, already bustling and in great need of new and hardy folk to continue its climb to greatness! Your destiny, in short, lies with me, not this paltry dreamer you call ‘Governor’!”

De Maisonneuve said nothing, but suns burned in his eyes, scorching De Lauzon's swollen and sweaty figure, a soggy log in a house fire. De Lauzon appeared satisfied with his speech, turning to head back to his manse, and gave such a smug grin at Maisonneuve that God surely performed another miracle that he did not punch De Lauzon in his snot-drop nose. However much faith the Governor of Québec may place in his oratory skills—that his insult would surely bring all Maisonneuve's recruits to his

colony—it appeared to Marin that practically nobody in the crowd appeared interested in it at all.

“What on earth was that about?” mused one deckhand, a curly-haired lad with the beginnings of a beard stubbling out of his chin like a sad, shaved poodle.

Jacques, Marin’s bunkmate, snorted derisively before elbowing his way towards the plank, “WHO on Earth cares? I just want to get off this ship and get a pint. Who’s with me?”

Mattias, the cook’s loud, portly assistant, made his presence above-deck known with a bark: “HAH! I’ll follow you to a pint before I follow that sweaty toad!”

The men gave a cheer followed by a rather uncivilized tussle to find each man the first after the governor on the dock, Mattias using the inquisitive deckhand as a club against someone who stepped on his foot.

As De Lauzon retreated to his manse dripping with snail-like dignity, Maisonneuve glanced back at the *Saint Nazaire*, gaze softening into warm worry. Turning about smartly, Paul De Chomedy reminded these men and women why he was the Sieur de Maisonneuve. Trailing just far enough behind De Lauzon to not step in his sludgy trail, Maisonneuve promptly began cheerfully addressing the empty air beside him, as though he walked arm-in-arm with a cherished friend:

“Why, Greetings, Governor de Lauzon! I thank you most kindly for your warm welcome. Why, yes, the journey WAS most unpleasant, how considerate of you to ask! Of course, I would welcome your hospitality! Thank you! Why, yes, I would like it very

much indeed, if I joined you for refreshments at your manse. And then to business, of course? And perhaps while we are at it you might introduce me to the new bishop the King sent over last year? You shall? Oh wonderful!”

Maisonneuve’s tirade faded with distance, though De Lauzon, judging by the way he slowed his pace to actually stand beside his compatriot, appeared to get the hint about his gross breach of etiquette, and that Maisonneuve would endeavor to follow the rules as closely and annoyingly as he could muster. Hard to tell at the distance, but Marin swore he could see sweat pouring off the greasebag like a waterfall. Good.

Soon, Marin steps off the dock and onto dry land. The first time in months. He’s planned it, dreamed of it, feared it:

First—he’d walk, no, RUN—barefoot along the beach. Second, he’d head to the tavern and get a dram of booze with no pear-flavouring at all. He’d eat food REAL food! Fresh food! He didn’t even care what kind of food—supper could consist of plain fresh bread and he’d cheerily declare it the best bread in all breaddom! The damper, of course: getting back on the damn ship! After such a taste of the dry...

Amazing what you become used to. Crammed in such cramped quarters. The ship was an overfull coin purse, and the florins slept in shifts—in SHIFTS, because the builders made the ship half as small as the Lord intended—which, given their first ship had fallen apart immediately after sailing out from Nantes, made the replacement’s less-than-ideal qualities... forgivable. Nearly, if not for the constant perfume of sea-salted shit and pears and the wet, dear God Jesus and Mary the WET! Marin had forgotten dryness.

Increasingly, his daydreams of his new farm contained tilled soil made not of earth, but of mud. When he imagined stepping off the dock, the slosh of water filled his ears. When he walked the cobblestone, the squelch of his boots filled feet and brain. He could not even picture tucking in to a nice homecooked meal without the feeling of his bum getting soggy from rain...

With a surprisingly quiet thud, Marin's foot struck foreign ground. At last. The sensation felt strange and unwelcome. His foot felt too fixed, too firm. After the rhythm and roll of the ship at sea, his feet felt dead to the tempo of the world, out of step in the dance of society. He stomped at De Lauzon's speech. De Maisonneuve may stand as the root of the tree, but Marin chose a smaller, surer bet—Maisonneuve promised Ville Marie in writing, the deal he'd marked had got signed and witnessed by local bishop, and therefore the church, and backed up by full force of law, God and the King. More trustworthy than a risky one—whatever honeyed words De Lauzon shrieked, any deal with him consisted of only words.

Marin wanted no part of THAT, thank you kindly.

The paring knife scraped the flesh of its objective, a deadly lover caressing, peeling back the heart and cleaving the vein. The apple made no noise. The bartending fruit-flayer regarded her current task as a bore and chore, preferring to stick her nose in a book and let the knife do its own work.

Claudette had come to Québec precisely because every colonist that passed through focused entirely on their own farm, their own campsite, their own fortune in

trade, their own maps to chart, too focused to bug and bother about some woman playing innkeeper. Besides, she made better booze than whatever they could piss out in their backyard stills. So, they came to her. Only three kinds of people existed in taverns: drunk people, hungry people or sleepy people, all easy to satisfy

Le Roi Soleil Tavern took its name from King Louis XIV of France, his Majesty, lord and arbiter of this new land. The first proper French tavern in the New World needed the finest of names. His would have to do, instead.

The town of Québec, surrounded by a crude wooden palisade, had muddy grey ground. The cloud cover that permeated the day rendered everything beneath it dull and washed-out. The governor's manse loomed, mountain-large, over every other structure. But other than size? Nothing special. The town church (as the first thing built) painted white over its hasty wooden construction.

The tavern dozed naturally at its place near the docks, far from the town centre that contained the governor's residence and the local church. Easier to service any sailors and new colonists.

Claudette woke before the sun every morning. She dusted the furniture, started brewing that day's batch, stoked logs of the fire, polished the countertops, swept the floors, lit perfumed candles she made herself to smell of bacon cooking, to entice people to come in. After all that, she opened for the real work of the day, to keep the *Roi Soleil* familiarly cozy, dark, lit only by candles, the flames giving even the lightest of ales a smoky aftertaste. Wood planks, wood walls, wood stools and tables. Only one window

bathed the entire room in dim evening sun, more as a vent for the smoke that accumulated from the kitchen fire.

With hungry and thirsty patrons eager to sample what the New World had on offer, Claudette spent at least an hour a day experimenting with her brewers-n'-chewers craft: pumpkin stout? Why not. Turkey tartare? Wouldn't recommend it. Squash-and-carrot soup? Delicious.

Claudette knew most who came in by type: sad drunks, happy drunks, angry drunks, funny drunks, annoying drunks, flirty drunks. Seen one desperate or half-mad farmer, seen all of them.

Yet Claudette had never seen a man attached to a tree before.

A face plainer than grasslands, hair a nondescript and dull brown, a back bent, his ears and jawline kissed the fruit just beginning to ripen over his shoulder. He whispered occasionally, craning over to prune an errant leaf or give it a sip from his waterskin.

The treed man sat primly, with difficulty, at the bar proper. His gaze seemed drawn, through his skull and out the back of his head, towards the Old World. It had no time for things still ahead, and his expression suggested a man beaten down, and by more than just a simple tree: a despair Claudette had seen on half the faces that wandered into the bar.

Marin needed to get this damn thing off. He could feel his back pressing down through his toes and clear to the other side of the world. He bore a burden, Atlas-like,

until Ville-Marie. The roots had broken through the pot, interlacing with his spine, caressing it like an abusive lover. De Maisonneuve's 'idea', of course—well, really a command:

“Well, now, Gustave. We're in a bit of a jam.”

Marin, hands full of loose leaves, paused to toss them in the compost bucket. He wiped his hands on his trousers. Maisonneuve did not remember the names of underlings easily. More precisely, he could not remember which names matched which individual. Therefore, he followed the most sensible course, as it seemed to him: Pick one at random. Maisonneuve waited bouncing toe to heel, for an acknowledgement.

“...Pear jam, sir?” A too-long suffering smirk teased Marin's lip before hiding, scared, behind his teeth.

“No, no, more of a logjam, Lucien. I have concerns that my rival, De Lauzon, will prove problematic for our purpose! We must ensure that the tree reaches Ville-Marie, for De Lauzon shall surely try to steal all that I have worked for—the settlers, surely, so why not the pears as well?” De Maisonneuve clenched a fist before him, as though he imagined himself strangling his rival one-handed through his cravat.

“...Problematic, how?” Marin did not quite know what Maisonneuve wanted from him.

“Well, bluntly, he may refuse to allow the ship to re-embark once it has dis—.”

“...He can do that, sir?” Marin spoke tonelessly, without inflection.

“Well, no, but actually, yes. Officially, it would go against his duties to obstruct a journey sanctioned by the King Himself and blessed by God—Madame Bourgeoys alone, bare minimum, MUST make Ville-Marie for her own vocation. But the King holds his court far away and God watches only from heaven.” De Maisonneuve crossed his arms huffily.

“But what does this have to do with the tree, sir?” *Or with me*, Marin didn’t say out loud.

“Why, nothing at all, Antoine! Barring the fact that I would put nothing past him! Not even the burning of the ship, and the Tree that grows upon it! That’s why I’m going to need you to swallow these seeds!

“I’m sorry, what? What do you...!?”

De Maisonneuve shoved a handful of pear seeds into Marin’s hand.

“We’re smuggling them! Swallow these, drink plenty of water, and hopefully we’ll grow enough saplings to replant.”

Marin choked on air, sputtering like a dying fire.

“You...plan...we...growing a tree. INSIDE ME?!”

“Well, hopefully! Otherwise how could we get the pears to Ville-Marie?”

Marin snapped, a toothpick poking too eagerly at leftovers between teeth. “By carrying them!”

“But what if De Lauzon’s thugs search you, Pierre?! What do we do then!? De Lauzon will take the seeds and all our hope with them!”

Hope? Hope for what, I’ve no clue why we’re even growing the damn thing!

In the end, Marin swallowed the seeds, along with his frustrations. They felt loud and lumpy in his throat. He felt them in his diaphragm, tiny stones.

You will notice that, this time, I recorded De Maisonneuve saying that the tree grew ‘directly from the ship, not in a pot, as it did in “The Fruit of Labours.” I have many different versions of how the pear trees made their way here. Some credible, some fantastical. My great-great grandfather passed down a version that posited that the “Jesuit Pears” got named for their planter—an actual Jesuit Priest. Given that Marin had children, I find this unlikely. An aunt once said that Marin did not grow the tree on the ship but smuggled the seeds to the new world. One uncle maintained that Marin never planted any trees at all—that De Maisonneuve had simply put a sack of seeds on the ship and sailed off. I’ve never heard the Tale of the Pear Tree the same way twice. Great Aunt Morgan always swore Marin in the “Legend” had a brother to help him tend the trees, and my father believed her. My cousin Vic says that the tree grew from the ship accidentally: The shipbuilders had constructed the vessel of pearwood and left a single shoot unattended by mistake. The first major rain germinated this seedling into a full tree!

The idea that our journey to this land could have happened because of some silly accident... Makes my bones itchy.

Yes, makes my bones itch, too. A scratch on the underside of the skin...

I take a hearty, cidery sip. My mouth comes up dry. Empty. I pause to re-fill.
Long night, this one. The crack of a can breaks the day-long silence in my apartment.

With a disaffected puff of air, Marin glanced up, hoping to get another drink, and noticed the bartender pours the glass without touching it. Neat. Good for her. After babysitting a tree across an ocean, very little could possibly faze him now... right?

The bartender intrigued by her patron's unique problem. The tree-bearer, disinterested in sharing his woes with a stranger, even a bartender. The silence coated, buttery thick on the knife.

"So..." the bartender's voice nearly sang. The patrons socialised and drank at an impressive rate. Booze became air here, and the bartender simply, with her glass always in the process of cleaning, never cleaned, afforded them space to do so. She only rarely partook in the talk and the drink that accompanied it.

Claudette frowned. What do humans say when they talk to other humans?
"erm...Rough trip?" a nervous giggle betrayed her lips.

Marin sketched a frown on his face. A rant in his eye, subtitled by an are-you-kidding-me expression in the crevices of his forehead. After sailing for four months crammed into a small space enslaved to a tree and more time ahead in the same hell. "I'd take a rough trip with pleasure." He snorted.

Claudette stood from her seat. Sighing, she said:

“What can I wet your thirst with today, stranger?”

Marin slumped into the wooden bar. The tree creaked. “...Alcohol”

Claudette blinked. “well... we do have a lot of that. We got choices, see. Different kinds.” She formed each syllable clearly as the sun through glass. Perhaps this man worked a tad slow on the brainpower front.

“I know.” Marin snapped, “...and I don’t much care—anything but brandy. Pick something to go with whatever food you have.” He started, as though he’d forgotten to lock his front door, back in France. “and water for the damn tree.”

Hard work talking down sober angry people. Drunk angry people you just poked, and they fell over sleeping. Sober people got angrier. “Okay. Barkeep’s choice and a water.”

“That’s what I ordered.” His voice came out as a breathy sigh, cool and blank to the world.

“The water...For the tree?” Claudette knew that perfectly well, but it felt good to annoy him.

“The DAMN tree, yes. Also, food. You got that too, or just smartass booze?” Ah, NOW annoyance!

“We got food. I’ll get the cook to whip something up” Claudette didn’t have a cook, only a sentient kettle she’d picked up in New Sweden who only spoke Finnish.

Dinner at the tavern. Dinner on dry land. Dinner other than salt-and-soggy pork and rocks disguised as biscuits. Marin had eaten little but pears, hard biscuits and salt pork for two months. Tangy crumbs of dry meat stuck between his teeth and never left. Marin swore to anyone who'd pay heed, even as an old, bent man, that sweets—the mortal enemy of salination—left a hint of porky salt in his mouth.

That night, he tucked into roast rabbit with summer vegetables, a good mug of ale to wash it down. Marin never tasted better vegetables in all his life. Perfect peas, crunchy carrots, scrumptious squash! This last one... something new. Marin ran it over his tongue. The texture felt almost paste-like and warming, both in heat and sheer comfort. It tasted of autumn in evenings. Fresh and real and good and hot and grown right here. He'd grow them here too. Someday.

Helped to imagine chewing on the tree. Pear wood didn't taste good, but it felt refreshingly cathartic to imagine grinding its woody bones into paste, making that paste into furniture or paper, and then setting it on fire.

Not that he ever did.

The tree man ate. Most men who came in simply did for booze—a change from grog, or a chance to get beat into the dirt by a hangover for the first time in very, extremely long months. Only two distinct breeds got so excited about food—men who had nearly starved on voyage or grown bored with the same rationed meals for weeks at sea, eager for variety in their victuals. This man ate with gusto—more than excited, thrilled, raptured. Yet, not quickly. He slowed, savoured, eating vegetables like ambrosia

or a fine roast. The latter breed, then. Years had passed since Claudette had seen a man so... enthused about vegetables. That sailor from Anjou, for instance. When he saw that rutabaga, he'd screamed out of joy, weeping into his salad around a mouthful of greens, vinegar dripping from his nose like snot. Claudette shivered at the memory.

Marin huffed. Perhaps now, with some food and drink in him he could think about his next move.

And that's when the tree on his back flowered. A single, round pear, right near his left ear. Then another, near his eyebrow. One straight between his shoulder blades. Five, Ten, Thirty. Too many pears.

Claudette squinted slightly. The second-strangest tree she'd ever seen. The white ash tree that grew upside down in Bucharest and smelled faintly of garlic only barely beat this out.

"Can I help you. with those... um."

"Marin."

"They're called pears, actually."

"No, *I'm* Marin." He gave a pear covering his eye a tug. More pears than man. Or tree, for that matter.

Ah. "Claudette. You seem rather... relaxed, considering."

"This? Just pear for the course."

"What on earth?"

“No idea. Probably somebody writing this story a good three-hundred years later has no idea what sort of idiom I’d use in this situation, so substituted for one their audience would understand, regardless of historical accuracy.”

“Oddly specific of you. I think historical accuracy took a lunch break around the time you got covered in pears.”

“You know this thing’s growing out of my spine?”

Claudette dropped the glass she’d never held at any point. “Ah, dear, that sounds painful. Perhaps we may find a way to relieve you of the tree?”

“The tree’s a no-go. Contract from De Maisonneuve.”

“Well he’ll never get you out of it. De Lauzon’s too much of a stubborn bastard too full of his own head to ever let him leave his manor, never mind the city!”

At that precise instant, De Maisonneuve kicked the door to the Tavern open.

“Good news, lads! All has been saved! The vile lech has let us go! The lecherous villain agreed to our rightful rights to sail onward! We leave midday tomorrow at noon!”

The door slammed shut again. Contrary to his bombastic statement, De Maisonneuve still had some details to hammer out. (Specifically, using a hammer to break De Lauzon’s fingers until he agreed to all his terms.) De Lauzon wanted to play dirty? De Maisonneuve would give that slug dirty! Mmh. Maybe sprinkle salt over him if he refuses! Hahaha! Yes! Negotiation shmegotiaion! Wait a moment...

The door slammed open once more. De Maisonneuve poked his head back into the tavern, a turtle out of a soup pot. He goggled at Marin like he'd just noticed a massive spider on his face.

“My word, George! We must get that looked at! It won't do for the tree to sprout full before its time”

“Also, this thing will rip me apart if it keeps growing, sir.”

“Oh? Oh. Right. Yes, well that, we'll maybe look into a bit later after we've saved the tree.”

The door slammed again, forcing a beleaguered wince from Claudette. Anymore of that and she'd need to glue the splinters back together. Again.

“Hmm... maybe if... I suppose....” She hummed. “C'mon round to the back, then. Let's see about getting you cleaned up.”

Reaching through the mass of fruit to grasp at a limb—Marin's arm, not a tree limb—Claudette none-too-gently steered him around to the brewer's vats in back, driving him on, a cow escaping from bees.

If she could relieve the poor man's troubles and make some metaphorical honey at the same time, why not?

The brewery smelled of hops and oaken char. As Marin stumbled, he fretted. How could Claudette rid him of so many pears?

By building a cidery.

Claudette snapped her fingers, and, with a rush of liquid the great barrels emptied, ale and stout and pilsner and lager pouring out into nothing, vanishing an instant before hitting the warm wooden floors below.

“Now, to work!” Claudette clapped.

“How can you... do that?” Marin asked tentatively.

“That?”

“You know, the sparkle-sparkle.” Marin probably wiggled his fingers vaguely, but Claudette couldn't see under the fruit.

“Ah. Well, I've got a lot of experience with brewing, fermenting, distilling and otherwise producing alcohol. I know all the tricks.”

Claudette knelt before Marin, plucking perfect pears, packing them in preservative jars, stack, stack, stack. It would take days to ferment the mix properly—days they didn't have. With a stamp of the foot—her left one, of course, she wanted to make booze, not turn her patient into a sheep—time ticked faster inside those little jars. Raising her arms ever so slowly, the jars rose into the sky, dropping one by each into the vats. Time ticked even faster, days into minutes into seconds. The fermented brew stewed...

“Now to solve for the tree!” Claudette clapped her hands. “Trickier, this. I'll need to do this the hands-on way; I'm a master at booze, but bark? That's a different matter...”

Mouth lopsided in a pensive frown, Claudette wandered slowly along a row of jugs and jars, each labelled, though Marin could not read them, as a different type of

alcohol. Rum, Gin, Vodka, Whiskey, Beer, Wine, Mead, Cider, Absinthe. But she grabbed none of them, instead stroking her chin and muttering.

“Now, where did it get off to?”

Marin shuffled forward, an offer to help dying on his tongue as he remembered that, though the pears had left, he still could barely see through the foliage.

“A-ha! Hee hee! Here we go!” Claudette walked gleefully back with a marked jug, though, again, Marin could not read, with the following description:

WARNING! EXPERIMENTAL DEATHGARGLE—NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION! USE FOR BUREAUCRATS AND FIRESTARTING/PAINT-STRIPPING ONLY!

Marin’s illiteracy, for the first time in his life, became a massive advantage.

Claudette proffered a small shot glass, while she busied herself opening the jug.

“All right. We’re going to do a purge. Take a half-shot of this, and not a drop more, unless you want your liver to liquefy and come out with the tree.”

Marin stopped still as a painter’s fruit bowl.

“Excuse me?”

“Never mind.” And the cask opened.

The fumes visibly coiled, thick as smoke, the green-yellow colour of a perfect Bartlett. The brew smelled of nothing, though likely would have smelled awful if the mere presence of it had not killed the olfactory glands of all present.

Marin suddenly very much did not want his shot. But, what choice did he have?

Plugging his nose with a pinch, Marin shut his eyes. They wept openly, and his tears left burn marks on his cheeks.

Marin swallowed his shot, and died—felt like, anyway.

More specifically, he experienced the following symptoms:

First, his throat suffered second-degree burns, his body went from drunk, to hungover, to drunk again in the first two minutes, then solidly hungover for the next week. His guts felt inverted, his tongue shrivelled to the size of a toothpick, his esophagus spasmed, his stomach acid began digesting itself in an act of suicide, and the tree, eager to escape the deadly magic concoction, peerless as well as peerless, detached itself from Marin's back, scuttling away to a far-off corner, where it shook off half its leaves. He also puked up the wonderful, delicious dinner he'd had, alongside whatever food remained in his system, in yellow, half rotted, soggy chunks. Vomit spewed from his mouth, his nose, even—so he swore to his dying day—his eyes and ears.

Even as his death loomed, Marin began feeling better. After a big jug of pure, clean water, at Claudette's insistence, his tongue reconstituted, and his organs began shifting to their proper configuration and function. He'd nurse a headache for a while, but the tree—and he—was free!

Speaking of, once certain the gargle would no longer affect it, the tree moved, of its own accord, to stand on its roots alongside its bearer. Marin, slightly foggy, offered the thing a conveniently nearby pot. It climbed in, tipping its hat as it did. Picture any hat you'd like.

The cider finished fermenting. Marin felt suddenly very hungry—thirsty too!

Claudette pulled the lever, raising a mug as she did, filling it with a pure, golden nectar.

“Here, now. Tell me what you think. Take a mug back for the Governor as well!”

Marin took a cautious sip.

It tasted of fruit, obviously, but of more. Marin saw stars, and stars beyond stars. The taste danced on his tongue, fairy-like, connecting him to trees that came before and trees that came after.

But all Marin said: “Better! No more tasting my spine, and the tree gets room to grow!”

The tree agreed, dancing in its pot.

Claudette offered another meal to replace the one she'd made him puke up—no charge, no charge at all! She enjoyed people reacting to that horrid hell-brew, deemed illegal in heaven, to hear some of the ghosts talk.

Marin slept peacefully that night, for the first night in weeks, and come morning, his spine no longer snuggled by sapling, stood tall on the deck as he went about his work.

With a cask of his hard-won brew as a parting gift from Claudette the bartender, Marin proffered a sip to De Maisonneuve, who declared:

“Well, cider’s no brandy, but it’s got potential. Yes.” Maisonneuve squinted at the barrel as though it were a hard-to-read font on an important letter, deep in thought of use and the sale of home-grown booze lining his pockets. “Potential, indeed...”

Marin toasted the tree, resting safely back in its pot. To potential, then.

Might Be Pearadise?

“... We have eight or ten rows of apple or pear trees which are also very well rooted. We shall see how they will succeed”—A Letter from Paul Le Jeune, Jesuit (1634).

The faithful ship rocked at a gentler rhythm than it had in weeks afore. The massive Saint Lawrence seemed a road compared to the great expanse of the World Ocean. One must rely on the river as a guide, not the capricious wind and vicious tide. Hard to get lost on the river, though surely some incompetent boobs had bumbled boldly into some dizzying method of ruination in their search for the great Passage to China. Marin never cared about China much. These self-called “Explorers”—as though you could call getting lost for a living a career!—only believed the passage existed because they wanted it to, because the shipping routes would become so convenient—and the finder very rich—If only this geographical assumption that hundreds of men wasted their lives, money and careers failing to find what they wished could be found. Yet wishful thinking could not make it so.

Rivers felt sweeter than oceans, Marin decided. Water to drink, in sight of land—blessed land—Instead of nothing but different greys and blues to drive you mad. When they pushed off from Québec, Marin felt he’d rather walk to Ville-Marie than spend an instant more on a ship’s deck. After sixty-four days on the ocean, the prospect of getting back on a ship, any ship, felt much like stepping back out into a blizzard after just settling in with a warm fire and a comfy, fluffy blanket. And yet, Marin did not have any other way to reach the Garden Strait he’d seen in his dreams, not to mention, Ville-Marie.

Marin had only two options. First, he'd break with Maisonneuve. After which the authorities would just hang him for theft and treason when they caught him. The second, wait until they'd settled in Ville-Marie, and hold back one of the twelve tiny saplings he looked after. So long as one tree made it to Maisonneuve's villa, he'd not care about the fate of the others; he'd made that abundantly clear when, out of the thirty saplings they set out with, Maisonneuve had only saved a dozen before he'd set the *Saint-Nicholas* on fire, shrugging dispassionately when Marin had wondered at the callousness his lord treated the burden he'd shunted to him.

Marin breathed deeply of the salt-free air the river bestowed and slowly lifted the tiny paring knife. Marin thus, slowly began to cut one of the precious small morsels the tree had gifted him. Evenly cleaving the pear in half, the juice dripping down his fingers, staining his hands with crime and deceit. In the centre of the fruit, the objective of his clandestine raid. Twelve small pips, pearls of happiness, secreted away in a pocket, would have to do. Slowly, Marin took up the needle and thread. Turns out that stitching a hole in a shirt and a hole in a person take roughly the same skillset, and, luckily, Marin had looked after enough injured dairy cattle on his neighbour's farm to know the basics.

Stitching the pear up to ensure it would not again fall to pieces, Marin began to glue the skin back together, the stem to the bark, so Maisonneuve would never know what he had stolen until far too late, if he ever did. His prize safely stowed, Marin waited until landfall, each aspect of his gardener-ship carried out with the precise, exacting nature of a clock. Fertilize, water, prune, pear. Fertilize, water, prune, pear. Fertilize, water, prune, pear. All the while, the seeds juggled around in his pocket, a secret drumbeat playing to an audience of one.

The sun shone with noonday perfection when they anchored. After months of build-up of Maisonneuve describing his colony as a New Eden with fruit dropping from the trees (Marin hoped not), and good land for farming as far as fields could go, lacking only the bodies to care for it, Ville-Marie in reality—to understate it—disappointed Marin immensely; a wave of nausea took hold in his gut, and failure boiled in his chest.

From the deck of the ship, only the rotten dock and half-finished clearing gave sign of a settlement. Even after a scant few months, the wilderness steadily worked at reclaiming what France and Maisonneuve had wrested from it. Roots and vines had begun to snake their way along the stone foundation, while the tide worked its hardest to pull the crème soft wood back into the river they'd stacked it on. Its wooden palisade had been hastily constructed, as though caught off guard. Nails stuck out at every angle, and the gate looked composed of sticks rather than proper wooden blocks. Most of the thatched houses inside the wall reduced to burnt-out wrecks lived in by fifty burnt-out people. They had waited for half a year. Now their numbers would triple. Maisonneuve nervously poked his eyes at the trees on the other side of the river. The trees remained stoically silent, yet Marin knew to run for his weapon once they began speaking Iroquoian. The Governor seemed part disappointed, part relieved when smoke still belched lightly from a scant handful of buildings. Smoke could mean the old colonists still lived here, or it could mean that nothing remained: Either the *Saint Nazaire* had the fortune of arriving in a lull, or had arrived far, far too late.

The town DID look abandoned, yet a bonfire blazed on the beach, coals still smouldering inside, angry bits of stone only recently put out. Someone remained here. Somebody had noticed their approach, and scattered in response...

More than a few of the men began to moan and grumble, yet De Maisonneuve ignored them, striding forward towards the town. Perhaps to get out of range of the knives that some of his crew had begun drawing...

He knocked imperiously on the gate. It opened nearly before his knuckle hit wood. Fearful blue eyes and the nozzle of an old rifle poked out, wary, ready to pull if—

“Evening Governor. Been a while. Starting to figure you weren’t coming.”

“Monsieur Robillard,” began the Governor with an air of importance. “I pledged to bring you a hundred men to bolster our town. I have done so. Now please, if you would, put down your rifle.”

“Ah, yes. We—well—expecting... attack, you know...” Robillard grumbled, opening the door to the town enough for Marin to see inside.

One by each, each by one, the haggard survivors emerged from the scattered husks of home and hearth. A great cry went up, and thus began sobbing prayers of “Thank God” to the sky. It began to rain. Maisonneuve rolled his eyes, as though he’d hoped for them to thank him. He, who had gone to such lengths and depths to save their pitiful parish.

Fifty heads bent, fifty hungry faces. Marin knew that seeing to the needs of these people served as the newcomer’s top priority. Construction would come first, and he’d have more new plants and techniques to learn: How did one grow squash? What quality of soil did he have to work with? How could they go about securing animals for meat and

milk and hide? Marin had no answers yet to these questions but learning farming in a new land for hungry people would at least keep him busier than the pear had.

De Maisonneuve turned to the crowd of a hundred men and a dozen nuns still standing on the ship deck, as half jostled to see himself the first, aside from Maisonneuve, to set foot on new land, while the other half jostled just as urgently to not set boot upon the rotted out deck, which still held clear imprints of the governor's feet within the mud-consistency slop that seemed to melt before the eye.

“Men!” he spread his arms. “I have promised you land, and land ye shall have! There's repair work to get done: houses, the docks, the palisade! Farms to make, and woods to clear! Yet you strong men shall find yourselves rising to these tasks. Together, we can make Ville-Marie thrive again!”

He took a deep breath and paused for applause. Applause that did not come.

“Dis-em-BARK!”

One did not sail across the world in tight quarters without at least tacitly agreeing not to toss one another overboard, so the jostle to do as the governor bid didn't devolve into a full-on brawl for supremacy, as had occurred in Québec—if you listen to the way my great-great Uncle Peter told the story. In his version, Marin nearly lost an eye to a shiv in the race to get off the damn boat, but a gust of wind took one of the pears off the tree, and the knife skewered the fruit instead. Midair. Great story, that one.

Well whether a fight happened or not, Marin and the tree found themselves standing at the gates along with the rest of the crew as the survivors of Ville-Marie's first wave of settlers ambled blearily out of the church to see their reinforcements.

"Oh, bless you, sirs, bless you!"

"Fewer'n I thought we'd get..."

"Why no soldiers? I thought he went to get soldiers?"

"Nuns! Hooray! Surely the colony shall get back in God's good graces now!"

The priest of the town, an old man, rumbled shakily through the mud, above the praise and confusion of his flock. In a hearty, though somewhat forgetful mumble, he began:

"Praise Jesu and his... Twelve apostles for such a glorious deliverance of Our... salvation! Surely the Virgin... Mary looked favourably upon this venture to send so many worthy men to our Colony of... Ville-Marie which received its name for her Grace and Glory! Amen and praise-be the glory of God who dwelleth—." Marin turned away from the furtive ramble, busying himself with finding a spot to store the saplings until they could safely get planted. He settled on one of the rubble-strewn wrecks of home that remained near the gate. The roof had collapsed in totality, leaving just four walls, each in perfect condition, to serve for a nursery.

Once he exited his new greenhouse—which he marked promptly with a rough suggestion of a tree scratched into the soft wood of the door, he met with one of the nuns; not one he recognised; one of the local tenders—probably the priest's assistant. Her face

promised apoplexy, redder than sunset, and her hands balled tightly on her hips, threatening to rip her habit apart like a roasted crab. Her eyes held the spine-chilled burn of fanaticism.

Marin sighed, pinching his nose bridge as a ward against his aching head. “I moved here for farming, madam, not faith, and we’ve much work to do... The work of God may frown upon it, but the work of men cannot stop to wait for heavenly matters to catch up to them. Excuse me, sister, and forgive me my indecency.”

With that, Marin pushed past her to continue—no, conclude! —his vocation.

One by each, each by one, the eleven remaining saplings left the ship. The walkway leading to Maisonneuve’s house had, in his absence, been overgrown with bramble and bits of fallen tree and timber. The mess took days to clear—snipping back hedges, lifting away logs. Once clear, Marin undertook the final step. One by each, each by one, Marin dug twelve holes along Maisonneuve's walkway. One by each, each by one, twelve trees moved up from their greenhouse and dropped into twelve holes. One by each, each by one, Marin packed soil to fill twelve holes. With the last pat of dirt, he felt a strong sense of weightlessness, as though he’d sprung wings and floated, Icarian, to the sun. The trees would never trouble him again! The governor, timely as ever, marched up to inspect his new troops.

“Ah, yes, yes, very good! Most pleasant, indeed!” Maisonneuve smiled thickly. “We must discuss your pay at the first chance!”

Payment? Could it be...?

“They spruce up the walkway quite nicely! Perfection!”

Marin’s skin peeled off. His jaw worked on an invisible fruit for several bites before words slipped out.

“Aren’t you going to eat them?”

“Well, why would I do that, my good man? The fruit completes the aesthetic quite wonderfully! Not to mention.” He rattled a half-full bottle of some form of liquid.

“Brandy needs flavouring, and flavouring requires something to flavour with! Eat them? How silly.”

“I farmed in human shit, climbed a mizzenmast thrice a day, and fetched half a ship’s water supply to dump over twelve pear trees for three months at sea... because you wanted ornaments for your walkway?!”

Maisonneuve either did not hear, or pretended not to hear, Marin’s indignant breach of protocol formed as a question. Nodding in a smugly self-satisfied way, the governor continued his inspection. For all the pride he had in them, the trees that lined Maisonneuve’s walkway more than likely got uprooted by his successor, so it’s a good thing Marin saved those seeds. Isn’t it?

For the moment, Maisonneuve’s fate and ruin lay far off. The fate and ruin of Ville-Marie, on the other hand, lay in front of them. It would take months of reconstruction—wood to fell, walls to fix, buildings to, well, build—to get the town back to a state fit for habitation, but once the reconstruction ended, Maisonneuve could dole out farms as promised. Unusually, perhaps, to a contemporary mind such as mine, who

pictured secluded farmland and tiny cottages adorably rising beside the sunshine-coloured wheat field, the fields stood alone outside the city. They had small houses, roughly the size of a room, with a bed in the one corner, a fireplace doubling as kitchen and dining room, mayhap a comfy chair or two as a sitting area. Despite the size, custom dictated that all families lived within the safe walls of Ville-Marie, only leaving for trade or to harvest. On the edge of empire, with enemies and raiders just a river paddle away, living alone outside and away from walls required men even crazier and braver than even the wildest of Maisonneuve's recruits.

The chief complaints against such restrictions came from a bald man named Renard, whose large nose and larger voice swayed surprisingly few of his compatriots. Most of those like Marin who had just arrived from France after two months at sea did not overmuch care for the admittedly slight inconvenience that daily travel into and out of a gated community, walking a mile or more to your own farm land, getting harvesting done in time to get back within the walls before the sun set and curfew dictated the gates barred. Those from Ville-Marie knew the threat these precautions guarded against.

Their warnings that the precautions were necessary were not always heeded by the newcomers: "Who cares about the sauvages? They'd surely not dare to attack the might of the French empire, to spit on the King's own face! Why should we stay prisoners in Maisonneuve's walls?" A small crowd of all eleven of Renard's supporters stood around him—eager to spread their ideals around like jam over toast. They cheered while others worked around them: chopping trees and hauling up house frames into position. Renard and his rabble aided little in the work, spent much of their time napping

or whinging over the weather or ‘unnecessary’ rebuilds. “Should have just stayed in Québec—nay, France! What’s stopping us?”

Marin had been in Ville Marie for only three weeks, but all his time got spent rebuilding the wooden houses, chiefly into sturdier domiciles out of stone. He’d aided in the construction of three houses in that time—one per week. Hard, back-snapping work, that. Cutting logs, lugging logs, building foundations and walls and forging nails to keep it all together. And these layabouts stood around yapping, doing nothing productive whatever! This place needed them—needed their arms! Any old fool could still see the dozen pre-recruitment families still sleeping and living in the confines of the church, making their homes the narrow space between pews instead of the narrow farm lots they’d been so hopeful for. The handful of sheets and fabric strips had been hung on makeshift clotheslines at the end of each isle as makeshift doors. The confessional co-opted as the communal bath, while the baptismal font served as a shaving station for the men and washing for the handful of babes born into this colony. By the altar, a large pot served thin broth made from increasingly leftover vegetables to the starving families. Clothes and bundles of fabric laid on benches stood as beds. Everything a home could need, at least tentatively provided; except, of course, for an actual house.

Marin finally snapped while attempting to drag a hunk of log—a quarter-tree—to make posts. He’d happened to drag his new burden right by the rabble’s little alcove where they thought their mutters remained secret—as though one of the six buildings that had all four walls and a roof, but no door, provided adequate shelter for scheming. “Oh, do shut up Renard!” Bloody fools. “You and yours complain and plot mutiny over planning the town! You want to build your homes outside the protection of the colony?”

Do so. You want to go back? Run that by Maisonneuve and see how far you get! Your endless complaints solve no problems and cause ten! Grumble your words all you desire but help me with this damn log while you do it!”

He checked his back for knives and his stew for rat poison for a month after that outburst, but if Renard and his posse of possum-faced rats ever complained again, they kept it out of Marin’s earshot. They helped, slowly and grumpily at first, but they helped. First, they helped Marin lift his half-sawn log that day; next, a week later, he spotted them working on fixing up the house they’d formerly plotted in. Renard claimed it for himself, of course, but they at least occupied their hands instead of their mouths.

The town rose once again, growing like a pear tree out of a boat. In time, houses would get assigned or built as needed, and bit by one, the church emptied of its residents, each moving into their new-old home as they rose. Maisonneuve, pleased and inflated with his own success, declared this moment the “Second Founding of Montréal” at the celebration he held to mark the completion of the town. Marin didn’t feel like he founded much of anything; he just fixed stuff that already stood there. He never spoke to Maisonneuve again, and cared very little for the fate of the pears he’d tended for his leader. Twenty years after their planting, Marin heard that a new governor ordered them torn up in favour of the rose bushes his wife fancied instead. A cynical, unsurprised laugh and a grunt his only response.

Marin had it wrong, I’ll tell you; Montréal’d have died without men like him. Instead of another Roanoke, Montréal survived 267 years to become, eventually, well,

Montréal. I return to visit, almost 300 years after Marin stepped on its crumbled docks. A city of 1.75 million people up from fifty.

We Destailles did that.

Well, we helped.

I find libraries comfortable. The smell of books and dust and book-dust, a comfy chair, and all the books I could want.

Just not, apparently, the ones I need.

The librarian at the *BAnQ Grande Bibliothèque* in Montréal, lemme tell you, the spitting image of librarians. Hair up to keep greys off the page, little glasses and a faint whiff of shortbread cookies. But none of the sternness. Tall, thin, with eyes like polished granite, always twisting her skinny lips.

I've been here searching the stacks for three hours now, closing time nipping at my butt, but Cecile the Librarian is nothing but patient with my rambling uncertain questions delivered in halting French: "Ou est la livre de history, sillvoo play?" She hurries to this section, then that one, grabbing each book that might help on the way to the next, without breaking step.

The family story never talks about what happens after Marin gets to Ville-Marie. Same for a lot of families, I suspect: Grandpa will talk about crossing over from the old country and not having much money, but nobody ever talks about what happens after you get settled, raise your family, live a good life.

It causes some holes in the tale, an old sheet turned into a ghost. I know—from a scrap of a land census tucked away as a bookmark in the book *1001 Ways to Cook Pears*, that Marin got his farm and lived and died comfortably well off but not rich, raised a big family and died, never moving out of the town he'd rebuilt. I don't know where his farm had once been—probably under the Bell Centre where the Habs play. Alas, Marin drops out of historical documents once he makes landfall. Based on a list of the *St. Nazaire's* crew I found online—the physical copy tucked away, inaccessible to the public, in a climate-controlled vault in Ottawa as a national treasure—Marin earned more than average during his voyage—36 francs as opposed to the usual 20—but I don't know what he farmed, how he died, how he met his wife. All interesting stories. I wish he'd tell me those instead of just interrupting to correct me, and I wish I could find that book—that compendium of colonial families and their accounts.

I correct you because you need correction, you daydreaming hack.

A lot of the land records and census polls don't talk about individual settlers, but their land grants. I've come all the way out to Old Montréal, right around the place Marin would've stepped off the *St. Nazaire*, to search for a very particular set of land grants. They may not tell me how Marin lived, but if I'm lucky they'll tell me where. If I can find them, I'll see what crops he grew, what land Marin got as reward from Maisonneuve, whether this reward justified his pear-duty.

Of course, as I slink from shelf to shelf, following Cecile from the As to the Xs in a dimly lit and slightly chilly archive tucked, cockroach-like, in a basement library by the metro, my odds of finding anything shrinks like a dried fruit.

The problem with dealing with events from centuries ago, whose importance fades as the living people the records spoke of became not-living people, is that stuff gets lost quite often. Alarming. Often.

They store pages and pages of French records about land in Montréal in the Years of Our Lord, circa 1660-1750: “Monsieur so-and-so, Occupation: Farmer, granted x arpents, earned this amount of money, died on this date...”

Just not for the one man I’m looking for.

That one man whose life’s work slipped out of a stack of paper by a stiff breeze in some clerk’s office and got swept up into the trash, more than likely, a hundred years or so ago. Gone.

Sobering, isn’t it? One clerical error and a life vanishes. My mother always tells me to make backups—triplicate, even—of everything I write, sign, or draw, My mom’s pretty smart. The world at large would probably be a much safer place, point of fact, if we all listened to Mom a bit more.

Mine, I mean. Specifically, mine.

It’s a long train ride after the library closes, and I don’t want to do it tonight. The hotel pillow tastes of defeat, which tastes a lot like tears. I eat the best bagel I’ve ever had, just to justify the trip, but I didn’t come here for Sadness Bagels, I came here for answers.

We don’t get what we want all the time. Marin came here for a farm, and the Destailles don’t have that anymore. I think my dad’s always blamed himself. He broke

his arm in senior year after a hockey rink check smacked him into the boards at a bad angle. With his arm in a sling, he couldn't help Papa with the tractor ladder. Without someone there to steady it, Papa slipped and slammed his side into the metal plating of the truck. If it happened today, he'd get x-ray and ultrasound and they'd spot the internal damage right away, but not in the mid-70s in small-town Amherstburg. No way they'd catch the cut on his liver. No way they'd see the infection. No way they'd even come close. Not until too late to do anything but get him comfy. Papa Destailles died at age 44.

My dad never even wanted to take the farm. But, not lose it like that. My grandma shouldn't've had to sell it. Nobody's fault, just a random accident. They happen all the time on farms especially, working with sharp blades and thick grass and fields hiding snakes or whatever, isolated and far from medical centres.

Maybe Marin died after such an accident. Maybe I'm not really writing this for Marin. He's never going to read it. Maybe I'm writing this because I've been robbed. How many stories got lost when Papa died so young, too young for his kids to care about the past? How many other Marins exist on my family tree that I'll never know enough about?

History doesn't care what the farmers did during the Lachine Massacre or what they thought about the Plains of Abraham.

Not much more to tell, Marin drops off the map and outta the story. Maybe if I do some more digging, I'll find another angle.

The next morning, I march right back into the library, where Cecile has already presciently begun gathering some relevant material. I didn't even tell her I planned on

returning. I brush against a dusty title on the pile that Cecile has moved to a quiet corner desk for me. *A People's History of Québec*—promising, quite promising.

Cecile claps her hands gleefully, like she'd just discovered an extra potato chip in the bag, happy vicariously for my—maybe—lending! “This could help your search greatly. If your ancestor's records remain anywhere, they are here—for certain!” For certain. Then, why do I taste sour jam on my tongue?

Another problem: Researching French Canadian historiography is a hecking hell of a lot harder when you don't speak two licks of French. One lick, sure. I'm very good at asking people “Parlez-vous Anglais?” and then sadly walking away when they reply with “Non, désolée” for the uphundredth time. Old-timey French makes my research more difficult. It rankles me awfully that I can't talk to Marin, even if I find him in this book.

Meh, worth a shot.

I leaf through this *People's History*, a thin tome with few specific details at first. Then I start to read chapter 3.

“...the settlers of Ville-Marie, self-styled as Montréalistes, were fiercely independent and...”

Montréalistes. Never seen that word in these documents before.

It's what the settlers at Ville-Marie called themselves: They were not Québécois, yet, but they were no longer Français either. Something else, distinct, a tiny city-state kingdom sitting, enclave-like, amidst an empire. My story's not very authentic if Marin doesn't use the phrase!

Well just go and fix it.

I need to. One moment. Back to page 24.

—Maisonneuve didn't seem to mind. Instead, he grinned the naïve grin of a CEO who had no true knowledge of just how hard the task he proposed could be—"What do you mean you can't print the internet?" –and knelt before his prized possession. "Seeds would do the job IN the colony, true enough, but seeds don't give us a continued supply of fresh fruit. Fresh food—good for morale and therefore health. I promised Ville-Marie healthy, strong ~~men~~ Montréalistes, not diseased wretches! That's why I need an experienced orchardeer to tend this tree, lad. You'll get compensated—more than, so worry not. An extra 34 francs upon arrival."

Fixed. Now the story truly will come alive when people read it!

Maybe.

I profusely thank Cecile—I must make sure to send a complimentary letter—no, a cake! Grannies and librarians both like cakes, right? The history—her find, not mine. "Merci, Merci Beaucoup, Madame! You have saved me a deal of troubles!"

Cecile simply did her job, but she takes the compliment with a bashful shrug and begins turning off the lights in the archive.

She locks the door to the tiny room and walks me to the exit. She does not say another word to me until I stand in the entrance.

“Au Revoir Monsieur Destailles!”

Definitely a cake.

What would Papa Destailles think about me compiling these stories? Both my grandparents on that side are dead. Any stories they had got buried under paperwork and coffins. When I think of Marin, a farmer son of farmers, my mind pictures the red-cheeked, toothy smile of a man I’ll never meet.

A different farmer, son of different farmers, but in the end Papa did it all. Raised himself on porridge with salt and pepper because, as thirteenth child in a family disinterested in parenting, the job got left to him alone. I have his fire chief badge on my nightstand and a picture of him as a bus driver. Why so many jobs? I can’t say, but I like to think of it as him saving enough to buy a farm of his own. But I don’t have his stories.

The train ride back to Windsor runs along a corridor of the most densely populated area of Canada, from Québec City to Windsor, contains half the country’s overall population, but this highway is not all urban, not at all urban. Oh, there are thickly forested areas, sure, but the ever-present sight is farmland. I look out at the rain-streaked window, listening to the gentle drum-tap of wet on the roof. Whenever I’m riding along from somewhere to somewhere, I imagine how it would’ve been back then.

I had a vacation in France, once. And I think back to that other train ride as home looms ahead. I remember the route from Paris to Dijon, made predominantly of rolling

meadows and graffiti-strewn cinderblocks. I like to imagine them as bits of castle that some Robespierre reborn has defaced, and here, on the VIA Rail ride, I like to imagine that the Montréal cows, as trains pass them by, chew on grass that came from fields that Marin cleared, from sod he cut. This trip did not bring me the research I wanted. Right then, I decide I'm not heading back home to Windsor yet. I remember a small town outside Chatham—Jarrow, or something—that claims to have one of the original Jesuit pears growing still, centuries on, at the town outskirts. They remember the pear, and they remember the legend. Worth a layover, perhaps.

As we pass by the rolling hills bring me back to that hostel outside Dijon, with the meadows in front and sheer cliffs towering behind. This land seems to me a lot like that land, and maybe that's why Marin liked it? I wonder, if—for Marin—Ville-Marie might be paradise.

Back in my office. I've finally had time to look over some of the recommendations and links that Cecile sent me. She's changed my whole trajectory. I know nothing more about where the pears came from. She's revealed to me a critical gap in my story—a flaw; a problem that complicates my entire narrative.

I lived my entire life in Windsor, Ontario, with the domineering Detroit rising across the river, skyscrapers poking the sky, a good fence for okay neighbors. Both my parents grew up a bit further south, in the small town of Amherstburg, whose most prideful and noteworthy claim remains the presence of a local fort that saw combat in the War of 1812. Once one settlement, before the fall of New France, Windsor-Detroit sat on

opposite sides of a narrow strait, in the middle of a bundle of lakes so large they could get taken for seas. With all the lakes everywhere, that strait flowed like a river.

That's how the River of the Strait, or the Riviere de Troit, got its name.

Of course, it obviously had one that the Native inhabitants of the Council of Three Fires alliance had used for centuries—(Waawiyaataanong, meaning “At the Curved Shores”) but exploration and explorers got all obsessed about making their marks—who cares if this “untamed wilderness” is actually well-cultivated and settled with laws and societies and histories and names dating back centuries? I say it's an untamed wilderness, and write it down, then thus it shall be!

Well, what's wrong with that? Michigan, Superior, Huron, Ontario, Eire, Saint-Clair. we used these lakes—why should we not name them too?

Because it's easy to think you're looking at a blank page if you've dumped white-out all over the text. Mishi-Gami, Gitchigumi, Karegnondi, Ontari:io, Erielhonan, Karontaen. That's what came before. I wonder if they ever got any saplings—ever tasted the fruits that came to Montreal, and later, to that River of the Strait. If the Native peoples had any part in this story—I shuffle through my papers—the Jesuits have already destroyed it.

But these savages never—

I realise that I can't let him go on. When dealing with the past, it's so simple to just slot in our beliefs. How can I have a sympathetic protagonist if I let him get away with being such a terrible racist?

It's how it was! You hypocrite! You don't want accuracy—you just want a nice simple story! The past isn't a simple thing—not something you can mould and change to suit your whims!

I'm the one writing this story! So, I can write you however I want. And I want you sympathetic to my contemporaries.

The ghost does not respond. I worry I may have scared him off. No matter. I'll finish the job myself.

My interest in family history began early in Grade School—I remember the question:

Where did your family come from?

The teacher wanted us all to do a little detective work, discover our roots, our heritage, what part of the world our ancestors had left behind.

I, all of seven, asked a question of a man who was, at the time, the wisest and smartest person in the world, at least he was, six years before my entrance into puberty.

I asked my father “what's our heritage, wise sage?”

The wise sage responded with a shrug.

“Well, we're...Canadian.”

“Well, I know THAT,” I pouted, lip drooping towards the floor. “But before that?”

The wise sage meditated then, pondered my question, then answered:

“France, I guess. But we lived here before Canada got named Canada, and we planted pears.” That’s how my father first told me the story—the one that, best I remembered it, formed the introduction to this whole endeavor. My young mind could not quite grasp all its intricacies, and came away believing that my ancestors had been two men on a canoe, with a single pear tree at the bow, the sole source of fruit in all the land, a real pear of bosces.

I researched and researched and researched land registries and accompanying death certificates from Montréal. They had some surprising stories, but nothing about the pear. They’re mostly useless to me; just some stuff about one relative who founded a distillery empire, then lost it all when his business partner betrayed him. Hardly the stuff of family legend.

There I came upon a problem. My story got built upon sand, but not the kind you can build a sandcastle with.

I’m disturbed you see, deeply, highly disturbed. I’ve found something, learned something I can’t unlearn. In all the excitement of retelling the old family story, it dawned upon me that I should at least do a modicum of research, just to ensure that everything got put in order.

My problem is that Marin stopped at Ville-Marie. Marin’s grave remains there, alongside several generations of his descendants. None of them left. Ever. Nothing about pear trees. No evidence of his accompaniment on any exploratory voyages to the Great

Lakes. He made one great journey in his life. Period. So long as he got his farm, he could and did die comfortably well-off.

Jesuit pears—of the sort Marin tended aboard the *St. Nicolas-de-Nantes*, have declined to a point that botanists thought it nearly extinct. Less than fifty, and these thrive only in scattered areas around the Detroit River area. Once, so the histories say, every family on every farm had a fruit orchard—apples pears, you name it. And we crowed with pride, all thanks to Marin.

But from what I can find, the first Destailles ancestor to set foot in this region, Jean-Baptiste Destailles, only did so five years after the end of the War of 1812, a full century and a half after Marin's voyage.

So, who in the heck is Jean-Baptiste Destailles? And how did he inherit enough pear seeds to bring to Windsor?

I take another sip of cider as I search Aunt Doris's scrambled egg family tree. It's sour tang leaves cuts on my tongue, a lemony lightning...

Guns in the Orchard

“If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography” —

William Lyon Mackenzie.

Dearest Diary,

December 4th, 1838,

Heard shooting in the Bâby Orchards—7am this morning. The Hunter’s Lodge Patriots have crossed over from Detroit. Baptiste and co. got the call for muster. Sent him off with a coat and a mug of tea—snow on ground, must keep warm. ~~Will talk with Sarah Bondy and Enid Lacroix about baking some apple tarts for their return.~~

Not enough flour to make pie crusts. With the mill on the North side, must wait until HLP defeated. Maybe make it a Christmastime treat instead?

Love,

Josephine

My Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandmother’s diary. The motherlode—grandmotherlode—of information on an incident I’d only heard vague whispers of before this day. A skirmish between a band of rebel extremists and a home defence militia along the newly made borderlands of Windsor-Detroit. The War of 1812 only a handful of decades behind them, it ended with four rebel POWs summarily executed.

I need to know more, but the ghost has gone silent. Marin rests in his pearwood coffin grave with nothing more to tell me, his story unfinished. I’m on my own now.

Papa always said that I had a Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandfather who fought in that militia—one Jean-Baptiste. I've found him. Could he become the new hero my family deserves?

Every hero needs a villain, so who'd he fight? I turn the page back to another diary entry, almost a year before Jean-Baptiste joined the militia.

February 1, 1838

Dearest Diary,

The Hunter's Lodge Patriots have attacked near Montréal. Elise from market says she heard from her husband—a merchant who travels up that way quite frequently—that they've taken an island in the Saint-Lawrence River for their new republic. That they burnt the Queen in effigy and swear blood oaths and satanic compacts, that they'll not rest until the entirety of the Empire is destroyed. Such awful news. Baptiste tells me I shouldn't worry, but I know the town has called a meeting of all families. The recruiters shall come soon, and if the threat proves as grave as it appears, we shall need a united response! Or so they said...

Love, Josephine

Hunter Lodge Patriots? Can't say I've heard of them but based on what Josephine says, and on what scraps I've found in the diary of good Colonel Prince himself—the head of the selfsame militia—killed four POWs. These self-styled Patriots wanted to reform, even outright remove, British oversight on Canada in the style of the American Republic.

What went on in that town meeting? What would a bunch of farmers know or care about democratic political theory?

So many Malden townspeople showed up, they had to bring their own chairs. If any more people tried to sit in, the tavern would burst. Josephine half-wanted to comment on the searing irony of a public safety meeting so overstuffed it proved dangerously unsafe for its attendees but held her tongue. Not like they'd listen, anyhow.

The first order of business came from the tanner, Mister Trembley. A thin, reedy sort with a sallow expression and a bad haircut:

“Good sirs, I do propose that such talk as we intend to commence—being unfit for the ears of our wives and children—should commence at a later time; War and battle are not for the ears of the gentler se—.”

“Oh, HANG that nonsense, Marc!” the butcher, Tom DuBois, stood; a side-of-beef of a man, Tom's bald head and bristly brown beard twisted in a scowl. “If I'm to go off to war, I want my family knowing what I'm in for! What THEY'RE in for—God forbid—should the worst happen!”

The cacophony of shouts and insults that erupted in favor of one side and against the other made sorting out who supported which man's argument all but impossible, but Josie stood and whistled loudly, seeing that no other man intended to attempt to bring

order. Taking her cue—and her elbow—Baptiste stood; they’d listen to him before her, but her words fell from his mouth regardless.

“Everyone shut up! Yelling and shrieking at each other like a group of geese solves nothing! Tom has the right of it; and we’re all here already. Those of you who don’t desire your families to hear what we must discuss are free to tell them to leave; as for me, mine shall stay!” He sat as abruptly as he’d stood.

The instant shuffle and hushed clusters of conversation filled the tavern, a hot wind whistling through a cavern as families rose to leave or shuffled in closer to accommodate the smaller gathering.

When the clamour ended, what had been a standing-room only tavern with every available space abused for seating now nestled comfortably around a long table at the far end of the tavern. Now to business.

Jean-Baptiste did not, as a rule, have an overabundance of patriotism on hand. On land, however... well, anyone who mucked with his farm would meet the business end of his own kind of mucking. He fit right in here. Most men cared very little for the politics of far-off York or Washington. Food for families, and a farm to feed them with—all any honest man needed, and all any honest man asked for.

And yet.

“Let these rebel fools come! We’ll show them what for!” Boasted Lou Lepin, before Old Man Dupont snorted:

“What care we for their politics—?” and then Coward George Bondy quailed:

“They’ve no true reason to attack here; We and Detroit, all one town cleaved in two. Like as not they’ll feel us sympathetic and leave us alone!” only for Peter Paisley to spew off on one of his rants:

“—and how may we certify that these ‘rebels’ are truly rebels? Might the United States of America simply use them as a cover? They could not take us by might, but by subterfuge? A kind hand offering freedom, only to be stomped on by Washington’s boot?”

In the end, each man would sign or not as his conscience dictated; the town had no official position.

Josie had nearly finished scrambling eggs for breakfast on that February morning, chill hanging lightly in the sky, when they heard a knock on the door.

“Good Morning, sir! Might I have a moment of your time?” It took time for Jean-Baptiste’ eyes to inhale the man before them. Who wore their Sunday best on a Tuesday? Pfft.

“What could he possibly try selling on a morning like this? At breakfast-time too.” Josephine kept at the stove, an over-easy turning scrambled victim of her irritation.

“Why, *I* sell security and duty to the crown, madam! I trust that you have heard the news, Mister...” the self-proclaimed duty-seller flipped through his notes and squinted at the squiggles within. “...Dess-tall-eye-es?” Jean-Baptiste winced at the

Englishman's pompous attempt to pronounce all the syllables in his surname as incorrectly as possible.

“Which news, monsieur?”

“Never mind him Baptiste! Come eat your eggs while warm!” Josie did not turn from the toast she buttered at the table, back deliberately to the front door. Any caller who got between Josie and her breakfast would get a jam-knife chucked at his face. This fop would get luckier than he knew: Josie liked her bacon and eggs too much to risk jail for assaulting a government official, but only barely.

Josie's dislike—chilled as a glass of ice-cold milk—put the visitor off.

“My apologies madam, but we all have our jobs to do. I've been up since midnight calling around. Without much luck.”

Jean-Baptiste couldn't imagine why, don't people *like* being woken in the middle of the night by a bureaucrat plainly all-but ordering them to sign onto the local militia?

The Fop, as he had hence been christened, rattled on a pre-rehearsed speech with the faux-animated enthusiasm of a too tired man: “The news from Detroit: that rebels and bandits swarm over the rivers and lakes along the borderlands, intent on rapine and slaughter! They shall come for your home and lovely family soon enough! You would not, of course, neglect them, would you? It is the joy and pleasure of all good and brave men to do your duty to King and Country!” There stood the Fop, a smartly dressed bureaucrat with an absurdly coiffed moustache. He'd never fought a dirty dish, never

mind a battle for said King and Country, though he had the authority and experience to convince others to do so. Almost comical.

“It is *my* joy and pleasure to break our fast before business, sir.” Josie already had sat down, a forkful of egg halfway to her mouth and a glass of milk set out. “Perhaps you might join us, and we can discuss this further?” Josie had already preselected the most overdone, coldest and smallest eggs for their unlooked-for guest.

While they ate, they talked, though in bursts. The recruiter refused breakfast but requested “A cup of tea if you have any.” “Fresh out of tea... Sir” Josie hissed, pointedly sipping her own fresh, steaming cup. Jean-Baptiste cocked his head quizzically while he ate. Josie rarely got this angry after her cup. This visitor may as well have urinated in it after killing her pet cat. He chewed on his eggs as well as his thoughts. The war didn’t interest him at all. He came here to get away from politics, and you’d find nowhere more apathetic than Malden nowadays. Old fashioned folk more invested in farms than fatherlands. His sort. Good sorts.

“So, sir...it’s war with the Americans again?”

“What? Oh, no no no! These sorts? Even more rebellious than those old colonies! All sorts of absurd demands—so radical that even the Americans want nothing whatever to do with it all.”

Josie preferred her meals joyous affairs, where her sons could cheerily discuss the big eagle they’d seen while fishing at the creek and her husband could regale them with tales—wholesome ones—from his youth in Montréal. Sordid wars and filthy backroom dealings soured her mood faster than bad milk. Jean-Baptiste would get in major trouble

if he went. She'd make him wish the war got him first. Wise men fear the wrath of his wife afore a bullet.

Baptiste knew this, but he also knew that militia work meant payment. If he enlisted, that'd at least take some pressure off his sons. Besides, aside from the recruiter's saber-stroking, the odds of open war with a gaggle of radicals didn't seem likely. Just a precaution, a precaution. Use caution...

"Say I sign up... what would my duties entail?" The sky tasted of wintery woodsmoke: a promise of future frost. The war could wait—see how far the troops marched without food from farms like his to feed them.

"What in God's own Earth do you think you're doing?" Josie snapped "you're nearly fifty!"

"Your husband's duties, in theory, are nothing permanent, ma'am." The man smiled a consoling, simpering grin. "Just report for training and stand ready, should the rebels attempt to take over the country" The recruiter, whom Jean-Baptiste had decided to mentally call George, as Jean-Baptiste did not like him, no sir, not a bit.

"If you sign with a cavalry regiment, you get six pence extra—you know how to ride a horse?"

Josie snorted. "What do you take my husband for? Show me a farmer who did not know how to ride a horse and I'll show you a city-slicker without his moustache wound round his ears."

Jean-Baptiste nodded.

Sill, six pence...

Jean-Baptiste signed, mindful of the smouldering silence emanating from Josie. As man of the house, it remained his call. His choice. But still...

"Thank you, good sir! Your King and Country will thank—" Jean-Baptiste shut the door in his face. They may thank him, Josie would not. She'd said nothing as he'd marked the page, but she didn't need to.

"...We could use the money." Even as he spoke, he knew it meant nothing in the silent room.

"Six pence! Not near enough to replace you should you wind up in your grave!" Josie's eyes filled up with rain.

The enormity of what he'd agreed to felt like getting hit in the face with a rotten pear.

Jean-Baptiste simply held her as the tears fell. It took a moment for him to realise that her eyes had dried. The tears? His.

The 'sorry' died in the womb of his throat.

Jean-Baptiste felt clammy as chowder for months after marking that damn paper. They called, eventually, and that X he'd made led to no treasure—only death. A militia meant to provide the illusion of seeing to your own defenses, near as he could tell. While farm boys knew their way around a gun, shooting ducks would feel a lot different from

shooting human people. He had nightmares of slaughter, people getting pulped like pears in a fruit press. Jean-Baptiste privately felt that, in practice, the militia existed so that the real soldiers had cover to hide behind when the fodder dropped dead in front of them. At first, this ‘Patriot War’ turned out a misnomer. A series of skirmishes darting to and fro over the lakes and the rivers, like a homicidal gopher.

The gopher came for him in the earliest of early morning hours. Three in the morning, but that’s the farmer life. Even so, Jean-Baptiste had always had difficulty sleeping. Better to get on with things rather than lie in bed gazing at ceiling. Still had a bite of breakfast in his mouth when the pound on the door overtook the one in his head...

Jean-Baptiste, according to the paper-squiggles he couldn’t make sense of, had to report to one Colonel John Prince in the town square. He then had to follow his orders to the very letter, number, and punctuation mark until disbandment. He saw many men he knew from around town, though few closely. Most signed up for the same militia. If a neighbour could watch your farm, why not your back? Some, he liked, some he did not. He could work with them, for this.

“You arrive on time and for duty. Good. Good.” Colonel Prince nodded twice in rapid succession. A tall fellow, dark hair and a soft face belied hard, iron-shade eyes. “Our job—Your. Job, now: The rebels have taken a ship in the river and landed. It is likely, if not probable that they have command of Windsor. Sandwich and Malden shall get hit next. Should they fall, the rebels will remain mostly unstoppable until London... err, our London, that is. We must take back what they have and grant not a house to their control! These bandits will surely bring rapine and slaughter upon your families, should

you let them. Now: March!”

On that uplifting note, the group of 130 militiamen made the march northward, away from Malden, and towards the last gasping battle of the Patriot War. The numbers given varied. Thirty brigands. Two hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand? They’d occupied the barracks, they’d burned the barracks, they’d hung women and children from every tree in the orchard. Only four hundred Hunter’s Lodge Patriots had entered the area, though not all in one group, the barracks had only briefly been occupied, and burned, and so far, nobody hung from anything. Yet.

Dearest Diary,

The most awful thing happened yesterday. I saw such sights on the field that I tremble to write of them. The good queen’s men repelled the barbarous invaders, and saved the town, though Doctor Hume lost his life. Such a bitter tragedy. Colonel Prince made sure to match their murder of the good Hume with a few of his own. Baptiste says that they had not the space for so many prisoners, though I am unsure. There must have been a more humane solution than such horrors...

Love, Josephine

Josephine’s entry for the day after the battle. She witnessed the execution. Here, now, the moment that will finally condemn Colonel Prince.

Doctor Johnathon Hume did his job as a wandering medical minstrel. Roaming and roving from house to house, riding in on a shining steed hitched to a covered wagon with but a few other people—mostly a handful of assistants and his clerk. When word of war wormed its way into his weekly shooting club meetings, he'd made himself ready. The casualties would be fierce—the rebels unlikely to surrender, the militia less likely to give a single clod of their homes to an invader now than twenty years ago. Experiencing an evil makes one far less eager to repeat it, in Hume's mind.

The one saving grace of this awful conflict fell to its local commander. Colonel John Prince had long been a true friend of Hume's. A worthy and capable man; but Colonel Prince's skill lay in causing wounds, depending on Hume to fix them afterwards. So, John Hume rode to aid John Prince, dressed in his best riding-clothes and a trunkful of medical supplies.

He'd need assistants—a war caused too much death and injury for one man to heal by himself.

Surely some of the wives currently sitting idle in their homes, waiting for husbands who even now may lay dead on the field, would appreciate a worthy cause to occupy them?

Josie opened the door to a well-dressed man with neat hair and tiny spectacles on the edge of his nose. He panted, gasping, his clothes road-stained from travel and exertion. The man who'd tended her son Joseph when he'd come down with that horrid

cold; who'd given her medicine for free when times got hard, and still asked after her health when she saw him at market; The Good Doctor Hume! What could he...?

“Josephine, my dear! How do you fare this morning?”

Seeing her expression, Hume swiftly changed tack. He huffed out a sigh, misting the air like a warm cigar.

“Yes, Madam, I know. What a question! Forgive me! I...I need your help!”

“...My help, Doctor Hume?” She stood, razor straight. “What do you need?”

“I need you to help me gather as many volunteers as you can scavenge; the fight goes well, but there shall be many wounds to tend afore day's end. We need nurses, blankets, food, drinks—whatever we can muster to tend the needy.”

Josephine pulled on her riding-coat and a pair of gloves and—I realise don't know where her kids went, but maybe they helped too? Nowhere else for them to go. I shuffle through my notes.

The next three hours is a historical blind spot. From Hume's initial collection of volunteers to his death on a dirt road in the middle of Sandwichtown, I know far less than I'd like. My best guess: Hume's death sparked a match that, by day's end, left four POWs dead, and I can't tell how or why. Hume, for whatever reason, had worn his very best riding clothes into town. Had he not known about the battle? I know he treated one patient in need; but the story behind how and why this man made it to Hume's operating table is a strange one; you wouldn't believe it if I told you, trust me. The story involves a

compassion for one's enemies that isn't supposed to exist in wartimes, a rich orchard-grower, and a case of mistaken identity.

What happened to the good guys? The bad guys? I can't tell who's which, and I don't like it. I shuffle about through my too-tiny desk, boxes and boxes of useless papers surrounding me—dead-ends—I push aside a copy of a tell-all confessional penned by John A Macdonald's secretary to get at something more valuable:

Exactly what I need.

INQUIRY INTO THE CONDUCT OF COL. PRINCE ON DEC 4, 1838

The official inquiry?

But first, let's talk about Hume's last patient: A Hunter Lodge Patriot of unknown name, with a broken leg and a further bullet wound. Four hours after the call to muster went out, and two after Hume gathered volunteers. Only one soldier stood guard, in a random house commandeered as a clandestine medical centre. Let's say, for argument's sake, he's Jean-Baptiste. What happened next comes—mostly—verbatim from the testimonial inquiry, with some creative additions:

The home had been built of a greyish wood, simple, small, yet cozy. Most of the furniture was rustic and run-down. It would serve. Jean-Baptiste had found the patriot slumped against the wall of the Baby farmhouse.

“Get him on the sofa!” Hume's voice projected all business, steel in his blue eyes.
“And cut away his trouser leg—I need to see!”

Jean-Baptiste took out a small penknife he kept on his person for occasions far less problematic than this.

Gristly work, that, yet quick. Hume took out his kit and laid it expertly arrayed before him. A simple knife and a clamp, that's all he used. The bullet had not penetrated far, but it had broken bone. Jean-Baptiste had made splints before, though mostly for animals who grew injured on the farm.

Wound dressed, splint made, letting the man rest would suffice for recovery.

Jean-Baptiste set his rifle against the table. The brigand slept, despite his injured state.

That mistake cost five men their lives.

In a thunder strike-flash, the brigand sat bolt upright, vaulting to the ground. He stumbled on his bad leg, but his arms functioned. He punched Jean-Baptiste straight in the jaw with a vicious right hook! Ouch!

Jean-Baptiste's world hammered and rang in his skull, and when he regained focus the brigand had snatched up his rifle and levelled it at the good Doctor's chest.

"And after we just saved your life and leg, too! Most ungrateful!" Hume huffed.

"Be silent Prince! I know well that—."

Jean-Baptiste leapt up, panic boiling over, bubbling on his tongue.

"He's not Colonel Prince! Do not shoot the doctor!"

The brigand only paused, unsteady still on his splinted leg. He pulled back the hammer with a 'click'.

“DO. NOT. Shoot that man! He is OUR doctor, damn it!” Jean-Baptiste felt annoyed more than desperate. Doctor Hume stood frozen, his spectacles sliding down his nose, ready any instant to slip and meet the floor. He dared not move to adjust them.

The brigand turned sharply towards Jean-Baptiste.

He sneered. “If he is your ‘doctor’ then why does he not surrender?”

Jean-Baptiste, unable to formulate a full response.

Hume took that lulling moment to run. He did not get far.

Jean-Baptiste kicked the prisoner in the leg. The man made a satisfying scream and buckled. Jean-Baptiste slammed his head into the wall. The bandit slumped over.

Had he...

He fumbled around with two fingers on his prisoner's neck. Just unconscious.

There was, unbeknownst to any of the three men in the small house, another Patriot Platoon fleeing through the streets.

Doctor Hume opened the front door, ready to flee into the street.

“Hey! This one's dressed all fancy-like! It's that villain Colonel Prince!” a thin voice, reedy.

“Shoot him! Shoot him!” a deeper voice, one excited by the prospect of murder.

“Wait! I’m not—!”

bang.

Jean-Baptiste heard the shots and the screams and the sound of wet dripping onto the floor. Whatever chunks remained of the good doctor, no surgeon could repair.

Josephine had got all her volunteers in a row, in the old marketplace at town centre, Sara and Clara made soup, Blanche made tea served in hot thermoses, Old Miss Valois gathered blankets to hand out to the men, while Josephine distributed and kept things neat and orderly.

Josephine had a pot of soup in hand, on her way around the corner to the battle site, where militiamen milled around, with nothing else to do, when she saw the body, lying in the pink snow. She’d been looking for Baptiste, and found him, eyes wide and expression slack, slumped against the doorway, panting and grasping for—oh, my. That’s—that’s Doctor Hume!

The crowd of onlookers on the road, so slick with mud and ice, fumbled over each other in a stampede. A counterassault—the main force! An assassination! The Colonel, dead! No—Alive!

Somebody knocked her tureen from her hands in the tumult. It flavoured the mud with turkey broth and winter vegetables. No hungry soldier would sup of that batch.

Josephine picked up her pot; the volunteers had set up a canteen in the market. Surely, they had a washing-station set up.

She numbly noticed flecks of blood on the lid. It had landed next to Hume. She wiped it down as best she could.

Colonel John Prince had set himself up in the barracks, pacing holes into the floor, furiously muttering to an audience of half-disassembled rifles and sheafs of paper. The rebels had fled this way, or that way? Where could they hide? Did they have sympathisers? Where could their nearest rally point be? A tentative knock at the door. He stowed these problems for now. The messenger—a boy too young for battle but too old to aid the women in their serving of soup and hot tea to the men—stood, pimply and winded, filling the room with a devastated air of something gone horribly, awfully wrong. Had the foe regrouped for a counterattack?

“Sir, Doctor Hume is dead.”

The air in the room turned chill as the snow that sprinkled down outside.

Prince stood mid-step, face contorted. He wilted, a rotting pear still on the bough.

“I—I...” he coughed. “I see...” he straightened, once again the military professional he played at being.

The messenger told of Hume’s final moments. Then Colonel Prince distributed new orders.

Josie had just snuggled in with a mug of soup and a bowl of tea herself—proper dishware in short supply, engaged in a futile, yet desperate scrub of her brain—vainly attempting to wash out that mangled image of the poor Doctor, when, in the barn they'd co-opted as a mess-hall, a runner came in shouting that the men's orders had changed. A dozen men found themselves torn off their patrols, guard duties, and lunch breaks to help Colonel Prince search the surrounding town for escapees.

Josephine's well-intentioned wrongness set her trailing invisibly behind the faceless throng of voluntolds; Nobody she knew; she told herself after the fact; Her path lead her, with an armful of rapidly-cooled tea winding behind as the searchers went between houses, poking musket-nozzles through open windows as the plaster-cracks and bullet holes dropped away to nothing as they ventured away from the battle north towards the river. The river, too, held only the dim boats of a handful of fleeing foes mistily paddling to the north shore. While Colonel Prince and his men stared impotently at the fleeing backs—out of rifle range, now—Josephine hid herself behind the cannon-crumbled wreck of a riverside barn as the sound of cart wheels squeaked into their ears, from the east. As the cart shifted from sound to sight, it became clear that friends, not foes, controlled its motion. A band of Potawatomi leading four terrified-looking brigands on a commandeered cart stopped abreast of Colonel Prince and posse.

The leader of the band stepped forward. Dressed pragmatically for the weather, he extended a warm hand.

“Morning Colonel! Wow, lotta dead guys today huh? We found this group trying to swim the river to freedom, but they got nothing but wet instead.” He chuckled.

Prince twitched madly, a shaky grin tweaking his face like a gnarled branch on a blighted tree,

“Ah, good, good. Ever more prisoners for the crown! What’s your name, fellow?”

The leader shrugged bitterly. “You white guys took away my real name, called me ‘Martin’ instead. That’ll serve.”

Prince nodded. “Martin. I command you in the name of the King and God to take these evil, putrid, wicked bandits and bayonet them all!”

Silence in response. Martin’s gaze grew cold, any of its former jovial façade gone completely.

“No.” Martin the Potawatomi shook his head firmly and with no small amount of contempt.

Colonel Prince’s face changed, his eyes flashing green as a ripe Anjou. “No!? NO!? I gave you an order, you damn savage, now carry it out!”

Martin the Potawatomi snorted derisively, stood to his full height, and began to turn away.

“We, at least, remain Christians. We will not murder the enemy. We shall give them to OUR commander, to deal with as HE sees fit. We do not answer to you.”

A huffery and puffery of cassock thundered hollering down the road. Reverend Macready. But, would he side with God? Or His will?

The priest huffed out: “Colonel, please, do not allow the white man to slay that which even the Indian has spared!”

Josephine nodded in her quiet hiding spot. That seemed right to her, but what did a farmer’s wife know?

Martin the Potawatomi scowled.

“Yes, colonel. Let us talk like... *civilized*... men. Your orders and mine are to escort the prisoners to prison to await trial. No other way about it, eh?”

A pause, Prince shook with— was it Rage? Grief? A drug-and-hooch-induced madness?

Martin the Potawatomi opened his mouth, but Prince spoke over him.

“... My orders stand, reverend. I’ll hold YOU accountable to the authorities for their failure to get carried out.”

The Reverend burned as the sun in a campfire.

“And I shall hold you accountable to a higher authority than they, for the sin you have ordered done this morning, Commander Prince. Make note of it, and peace with your own self.”

The reverend stomped away, a bowl of angry, quivering jello.

Some of the men grabbed the prisoners off the cart. Prince leaned back against a tree, coolly munching a pear. Out of sight of the Reverend; four shots:

bang. bang. bang. bang.

Prince took another bite.

Josie pressed her back to the wall, her scream slipped through her throat.

Two cold snowballs glinted in Prince's face, polished to a dull, but chillingly satisfied sheen.

He dropped the finished core into the pile of bodies.

They laid Dr. Hume away from his murderers. Prince himself promised to see the body returned to his family. Josephine, her pot forgotten at the site of the horrid crime, wondered more at the fate of the other prisoners the crown had taken this day.

And John Hume, the poor man... If not for his clothing, he'd been mangled into an unrecognizable husk, his face a paste barely holding on a shattered skull, missing all but one limb.

Prince stood by his friend for a long, long hour, eyes drinking the blood that rapidly froze in the holes the day had poked in his friend, before he turned away from the rapidly cool corpses in the reddened snow. "All right, lads. Well done! Pick em up and dump them on the river. They'll sink when it thaws."

As he turned, he brushed by Josephine, numbly sitting in the church entryway. Reverend Macready patted her shoulder as the warm bowls of soup cooled in the frost. She had no appetite and doubted the soldiers didn't either. Prince took no soup or tea,

when she offered, and instead Josephine heard four words pass hauntingly from lip to unmasked-for ear.

“...They thought him me...”

She spotted Baptiste, his face expressing what his mouth would never utter, by the rear of the house. One of several volunteers, each tasked with grabbing hands and feet of a foe. She'd comfort him later, best she could, and for nights after, when he woke screaming from nightmares.

Josephine wandered around the yard surveying the damage. This morning, the Baby's orchard had been the finest in the county; now... Trees snapped half in two, some with blood soaking their branches. An entire row of pears shattered to splinters by a stray cannon shot. She knew, somehow, that this orchard would never be beautiful again; it would linger, surely, but their fruit would always taste of blood, and men would grow sick of its flavour.

Right?

Josephine found the shot that broke the row—a big ball of red plunked in the dirt a clear yard from the house, covered in frosted viscera that had once been a living soul. She let the shot lie. The soldiers who fired the round off would never touch it again, and the cannonball remained where it struck into the earth, coppered over with rust. It's likely still there, buried under the Windsor Chimczuk Museum that now stands in place of trees.

One of the bullets fired during the chaos clipped the pear tree on the corner of Mr. Baby's farmhouse. A single fruit lay in the snow, the heart cored out by one of the

bullets. The green of the juice met the red of the blood pooling out into the white snow, turning it a muckish brown. The echoing, post-shot silence faded into wind, carrying ghosts with it. While both sides got the end of the Patriot War, five families got funerals for Christmas.

Marie-Josephine Destailles picked up the hollow pear, thinking maybe to replace the heart that still somehow rumbled in her chest.

Instead, she let it fall.

Epilogue: When I, No More

“When the Truth becomes Legend, Print the Legend”—The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962).

I have a picture of Jean-Baptiste’s son Antoine, my Great-Great-Great-grandfather. Old, faded and dark, only the white-grey of his skin and beard give any discerning features. Antoine, in his nineties when he died, in 1931, coexisted for a span of a month in the world with my infant grandfather. I look for familiar features, but a fluffy, long white goatee obscures his face. Did he have the cleft chin that marks so many of my uncles—and my father? Did he, hidden in his shoes, have that one janky middle toe where the last joint abruptly juts out on an angle, as though broken? I hesitantly recognise my cheekbones, perhaps a bit of my nose, but the brows... Too thick. What bits of that sun and salt-weathered face came from Marin and what bits from his mother’s side?

I need more, I want more... but, but...? Maybe there’s nothing more to say. None of these people are real, not anymore. Even before bones go in the ground, people will tell stories one way, then another. The real Marin and Jean-Baptiste acted... probably nothing like the men in this story. Whatever ghosts they left in their fields and county records are my ghosts—mine live on keyboards and in the turn of a book page.

The farm life ended for us when my grandfather died young, forcing his family to sell off what remained. My father still dreams in terms of harvest season, still remembers the year their entire field of cabbage spoiled, still eats the peanut-butter-and-tomato sandwiches my grandfather favoured. I speak a different language than Marin or Jean-

Baptiste, and Antoine's kids all had English names. That's where the story got all mixed up—put roots down deep enough somewhere and you forget they used to live anywhere else. Home for me is never the tiny town of Luche-Pringe that Marin left behind in Sarthe, France, nor the rivers and isles of Montréal he'd helped save for France.

The cider I drink comes from a can. The Jesuit pear Marin magicked here has gone nearly extinct. The cider only means something to me because I know it meant something to him. Comfort? Pleasure? Home? Money? I don't know his world, but it made me.

Funny, that something as simple as a pear tree can change.

I take a sip, but the can is finished.

“Imaginary Ancestors”: Historiographic Metafiction as Genealogy

Introduction

Michael Ondaatje’s novella *Running in the Family*, published in 1982, a fragmentary and disjointed collection of anecdotes and stories about Ondaatje’s search for family history, offers an examination of the eccentricities that, to use Ondaatje’s titular pun “run in the family.” It also serves as an exploration of how to fill in gaps in a historical narrative: as Ondaatje himself contends, “No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or a funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions, and this time, judgments thrown in. In this way, history is organised” (Ondaatje 19). Ondaatje’s history— which prioritises story, scandal and nostalgia over a factual past—is therefore a fiction-focused one. As Christopher McVey phrases it in his essay, “Reclaiming the Past: Michael Ondaatje and the Body of History”: “Ondaatje is interested in a variety of recoveries: the recovery of a public past, even if that past is contingent and malleable; the recovery of personal identity and origin, even if that origin is hybrid, mongrel, and only accessible through politically suspect discourses” (McVey 144). The history that Ondaatje presents to readers is equally a construction of recovered and half-remembered fragments. Regardless of the basic truth that may lie at the core of each story, his history is an adaptation of real events, that, despite many contradictory sources, becomes the de facto true account of the Ondaatje clan. The backdrop to this family history is Ondaatje’s experience of Ceylon as a British colony that struggles to cast off the remnants of Imperial power. As Ondaatje combs through his past to uncover his own identity and his family’s past, his country also examines its own painful legacy and its citizens’ efforts to create and identify with a history in which they can take pride.

Like Ondaatje, I use the history of my family in a colonial context to attempt to create, if not a better version, then at least a more narratively coherent one than the scraps, fragments and contradictions that I possess. Bits of family lore or historical facts have been lost, altered or confused over time. Ondaatje had the opportunity to draw upon the recollections of living people and current historical records. But as I researched my thesis novel, *Imaginary Ancestors*, I often needed to invent some characters and scenes wholesale. Even Jean-Baptiste and Marie-Josephine Deneau, the most recent ancestor-characters in the collection, died well over a hundred and fifty years ago, leaving me to construct their context and daily details. The use of historiographic metafiction as a means of connecting with, playing with, or, indeed, inventing the past, is not new. Linda Hutcheon, who first coined the term, says that “What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naïve realist concept of representation and any equally naive textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world” (Hutcheon 6). My narrative thesis *Imaginary Ancestors* fits into this framework, by using a narrator with a definitive bias who uses historical events as a stage for smaller, less historically important people he wishes to examine. While foregrounding two commoners as her point-of-view protagonists, Jeanette Winterson, in her novel *The Passion*, uses these characters to provide a portrait of a very famous historical figure in Napoleon, as viewed through the eyes of an underling, the cook’s assistant. Winterson deliberately undermines her one narrator’s credibility with the refrain “I’m telling you stories. Trust me” (Winterson, *The Passion*). By reminding the reader of the fictive nature of the stories each of the narrators relates, coupled with a request of trust, Winterson encourages a reader of *The Passion* to doubt the veracity of all the narrators say and do. While

Winterson's portraiture of Napoleonic Europe seems broadly historical, elements such as Napoleon consuming whole chickens and web-toed boatmen in Venice reinforce the status of the fictive, even fantastical, within the narrative. Martha Tuck-Rozett, in her essay "Constructing A World: How Postmodern Historical Fiction Reimagines the Past", describes another of Winterson's books—*Sexing the Cherry*—as something that "integrates history and the fantastic, parodies and borrows from other texts, and breaks down and makes fluid the boundaries between genres" (Tuck-Rozett 159). Simply put, Winterson's work serves as a microcosm for what my thesis attempts to do through my muddling or outright fictionalization of true historical events and people: by making genre unclear and events blatantly fictional, my thesis writes into gaps that I myself often create. In "Guns in the Orchard" for instance, there is much more research that I conducted to achieve the necessary fantastical element in my history that I did not incorporate.

Much like Winterson's work—though more overtly in the tradition of Magic Realism than the passion—Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, set in a fictive town with largely fictive events, occurs against a backdrop of actual historical events. Characters such as Sir Francis Drake and the events of the Banana Massacre of 1923 are mixed, diluted, retold and placed out of order to the point where they bear little resemblance to the historical accounts upon which they are based. "The official version [...] was finally accepted: there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped" (Marquez 309-310). Marquez uses satire and edgy comedy to reveal the deep social injustice that pervades such events. He uses metafictional elements to make

statements about class inequality while maintaining a comedic tone. My thesis' ancestor-characters' relationships with figures like the ignorantly oppressive Maisonneuve and the malicious and vindictive Prince, make up the bulk of the tension within the work, focusing scenes depicted in broad-strokes in a manner similar to Garcia Marquez's imaginative take on history. I use folk stories and hearsay as historical backdrop throughout my thesis; in my case juxtaposing the stories that have been passed down through my family, compared to primary sources.

The initial story presented in my thesis *Imaginary Ancestors* exists largely as it was told to me: that our ancestors who first arrived in New France brought pear trees to the Essex County region. However, I challenge, confront, and undermine this family story by highlighting and problematizing it in varying ways. The story that was initially told to the narrator is, in hindsight, a narrative that aggrandizes a colonialist mentality. Grant Rodwell, an Australian essayist analyzing the boom in historical novels in his country, notes that historical fiction typically draws from memory and social context "there appears to exist a sentiment that implies that all historical novels are somehow locked into a particular social and cultural setting," but, "Memories almost inevitably will change over time, and historians are alert to this." (Rodwell 57). Because my narrator never truly has the self-awareness to recognize the problems with his narrative focus, the reader should question his reliability, due to a lack of trust the narrator fosters with his audience. When dealing with a history that predominantly relies upon family narratives, often unsubstantiated, and with gaps in the historiography, the veracity of the story becomes unclear, with the narrator's frustration largely mirroring my own. Robert Kroetsch, in his essay "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto," when interviewing his mute and

senile great-aunt for family history, comes to the conclusion that, “Aunt Rose might have spoken and in the act of her speaking, silenced me. Instead she gave me the open flower of her mouth” (Kroetsch 63-64). As with Kroetsch, my narrator uses a lack of sources to fill in historical gaps, requiring the freedom of ambiguity for his creative work to progress. The desire for concrete details where there are none requires creative narrative to fulfill the role. Historiographic metafiction enables me to invent a family history for myself in a manner that makes a clear point about aggrandizing history, while largely corroborating what fragments of historical sources remain extant, and hopefully telling good story.

While some historians have written on the Jesuit or Mission Pear tree, most notably Bela Hubbard in 1887’s *Memorials of a Half-Century*, many express frustration at the lack of sources on the Jesuit pear’s origins: “It is not a little remarkable that so little should be known of the history of a tree of such extraordinary character. The earliest travelers of whom we have published records... make none, or only casual mention” (Hubbard 127) It is this inexact and frustratingly vacant historiography that my narrator must navigate and fill in, in order to tell his ancestors’ story. Dealing in such a murky and historically vague period as the initial planting of the Jesuit pear—from 1650 until the 1820s—allows me freedom to invent, presuppose and extrapolate a story not beholden to a strict or clearly defined sequence of events. As well, I wish to honour not only actual historical events well-documented in national archives but hit at the absence of equally real stories—such as Indigenous oral history—that the official historical record has ignored or suppressed. As a common refrain throughout the story, I use variations of the line “I need to know more” as both a reminder of the gaps and an enforcer of the idea of

historical research. For this historiographic metafiction to function, the history must be put through the lens of narrative; admitting that not all answers can or will be found forms the climax of the narrator's journey. The narrator's steady progression from using history for inspiration to outright fictive invention reveals in investment in the family lore, as well as his increasing reliance on the 'inspiration' of history. His process of inventing history is also directly connected with his habit of sipping from a can of pear cider as he writes, symbolically linking him to and drawing strength from these stories.

Making Fictional Past of Factual Events

Imaginary Ancestors is not intended to portray accurate history. By turning to magic realist and metafictional strategies, I can fill in narrative gaps in my historiography, or replace dull or implausible historical events with more narratively engaging ones and focus on little-known historical events. For instance, the incident with Colonel Prince in the short story "Guns in the Orchard" is based loosely on a real event that was even more violent and complicated than I depict, necessitating sweeping changes while maintaining the basic story I wanted to tell about the Battle of Windsor Incident. Prince's deposition in the official military inquiry into his conduct ends inconclusively, with the presiding judge stating that, "the detail of the facts alluded to, reflecting so painfully upon the conduct of Colonel Prince, is not in any way substantiated by evidence" (Inquiry 47). These historical documents, however, only serve to re-inscribe colonial narratives and power structures, despite my desire to challenge them. Thomas King's novel *Green Grass, Running Water* proved valuable as a stylistic guideline in the interplay between its four narrators, inspiring the nitpicking and mutual insults between my narrator and his ghost-ancestor. Where possible, I incorporated verbatim transcripts into my dialogue. By

providing a few accurate moments within a largely fictional retelling, I give this story a degree of historical authenticity that it would otherwise lack. Grant Rodwell wrote that the duty of the historical novel is twofold: “As well as informing the reader about the past, the narratives of historical novels also connect with contemporary anxieties, many of which have surfaced in the wake of postmodernist theory” (Rodwell 63). The specific anxieties that I deal with in *Imaginary Ancestors* is an attempt, perhaps futile, for the narrator to extract some pride from a history that clashes deeply with the loss of his family lore. Jean-Baptiste’s actual military record is sparse, consisting of only a single paystub for a week in February, nearly a year before the Battle of Windsor. Inserting him into this local historical event—however infamous—represents the narrator’s attempt to extract pride from his morally questionable participation in a colonial moment. Without easy access to direct material, the narrator grapples with the conflict that exists between his history as it was told to him as a safe, prideful, and uncomplicated event that saw the colonialist militia defend their homes from enemy forces, and the actual historical event—a violent struggle that would, today, be classified as a war crime. The narrator explicitly ignores or rejects the latter interpretation, attempting to preserve a family legend that grows increasingly unrealistic and irresolvable even as he continues his research. Adapting to historical sources, or deliberately excluding them in works dealing with history in order to make the narrator’s unreliability more obvious, occurs also in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, from the opening lines: “I was born in the city of Bombay[...] once upon a time. No, no that won’t do [...] on August 15, 1947[...] Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world” (Rushdie 1). Rushdie’s narrator constantly rewriting himself in the

opening sentence paints him as indecisive, as he adds more and more details before frustratedly remarking the core point of his commentary. While Rushdie uses his narrator as his main character viewpoint, I use my narrator's uncertain moments of creation to cast further doubt and muddling on his competency and veracity. By telling the final story from Josie's perspective, rather than her male relatives, I foreground the gaps in the narrator's practical and historical knowledge and in the historical documents preserved primarily by male historians, while allowing story to overtake history.

As I delved into the history behind various events surrounding La Grande Recrue of 1653 and the Battle of Windsor, I was faced with a choice between accuracy and using the events as springboards to tell stories that could be sympathetic to a modern audience without compromising the historical integrity of their inspirations. Hutcheon describes the postmodern as something that "reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (Hutcheon 89). By including the narrator's research as an ongoing effort, one that changes and contradicts itself as he progresses, I emphasize the problems inherent in oral family history specifically; namely, that some families are more likely to care about a good story than a more morally grey, less glamorous truth. Therefore, the narrator's attempt to impose a glorious past upon a series of settler farmers is undermined by his use of language and descriptors far in excess of the actual events in question. Such an overlay adds a degree of implausibility to his recounting of events. However, a lack of contradictory or complimentary sources from the period in question, also allows him to write freely into a historical gap.

Narrator, Researcher, Storyteller

The narrator's interactions with the ghostly personification allow me to project my own research experience. This metafictionalising of the historical research process also serves to add doubt and unreliability to the stories contained within the collection; "Instead of portraying a historical world on the diegetic level of the characters, metahistorical novels are generally set in the present but concerned with the appropriation, revision and transmission of history" (Nünning 364). The story "Might Be Pearadise?" foregrounds this idea of revision most directly, with the narrator travelling to the place Marin landed, having run out of researchable material—and, more importantly for him, inspiration—in Windsor. He is forced to travel for answers he inevitably cannot find. This narrative subplot casts doubt on the narrator as historian; In this particular instance, the narrator comes across Jacques Lacoursierre and Robin Philpot's book *A People's History of Québec*, which contains the term "Montréalistes" as the term the historical Maisonneuve and his followers used to referred to themselves, showing by implication that they were fiercely independent of the official hierarchy of the rest of the colonial enterprise. The narrator here overtly enters the previous story to amend and add this term to a story he has by this point already finished, creating a looping sense of the work as constantly edited and revised as new information is added and discovered or excised. The discomfort the narrator belatedly feels for glorifying and lionising what amounts, at its core, to a colonialist conquest he steadfastly ignores and inscribes through his obsession with the pear and his emphasis on the small, illiterate farmers and trappers who made the bulk of individuals in colonial Québec. While the narrator does snidely attack the arrogance and narcissism that colonists invite, for instance, in the story "Might Be Pearadise?", the narrator lists off the Indigenous names for each body of water in the

Great Lakes even as the Ancestor-voice's passive acceptance of colonial justifications instantly renders this token attempt irrelevant. The narrator's awareness, however cursory, of the problematic nature of such assigned names matters little if he mostly ignores indigenous presence and history in the land that so enthralls him. The uneasy relationship the narrator possesses with facts stems from this tension: that underneath the surface of his would-be epic lies an uncomfortable exploitation and legacy that he, perhaps cowardly, elects to avoid rather than confront directly. Thomas King's essay "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" refutes the idea of stereotyping and assumptions that come alongside colonialism, even as it disputes the idea of post-colonial literature as something drawing directly from "Indigenous tradition" through an assimilatory lens: "Post-colonial might be an excellent term to use to describe Canadian literature, but it will not do to describe Native literature" (King). This description accurately surmises the narrator's position while writing his deeply colonialist narrative. Due to his extremely narrow historical focus and limited, invariably colonial sources, any attempt at adding an Indigenous viewpoint to his story is doomed to failure, as colonial history invariably paints over the Native people most adversely affected by it.

The basic summary of the colonial events that holds my narrator's attention are, briefly, as follows: With his colony fading, and needing a stable population to maintain growth, Maisonneuve left for Europe seeking men to bolster numbers. My ancestor Marin Deniau dit Destailles was one of those recruits, an illiterate farmer. While the personalities and behaviours of obscure historical figures is often left to conjecture or wholesale invention, I used historical accounts of Ville-Marie's colonisation to construct Marin's personality as a form of anthropomorphism of the city he helps found: "Ville-

Marie became a state within a state that bucked efforts by the Governor of New France to impose his authority over the settlement” (Lacoursierre). By having Marin passively accept his lot in life early in the narrative, from story to story he grows steadily more defiant, culminating in his theft of the seeds from Maisonneuve’s hoard, adopting the character of his new home even as it adopts him.

The other historically real characters within the story are given equal narrative licence. As Winterson makes Napoleon as gluttonous for chicken as he was for territory, I also use the historical contexts of various characters to, in effect, construct personalities out of their circumstances. Marguerite Bourgeoys, given her importance in the history of education in Montréal is often, apart from Maisonneuve, the only figure in *La Grande Recrue* directly named in historical texts. The narrator’s clear awareness of her importance is juxtaposed with his deliberate avoidance of her story. My narrator views her the way he thinks Marin would have viewed her, in order to preserve what he sees as Marin’s historical importance, as delusional and misogynistic his belief may be. The character of Bourgeoys deviates from her historical attitudes, as does the narrator’s portrayal of Maisonneuve as an ignorant daydreamer. These portrayals serve as an instance of narrative bias; thus, the narrator represents these individuals in ways that project his narrative preferences. Maisonneuve’s care for the trees over his colonists, Jean de Lauzon literally dripping with sleaziness, Bourgeoys as the flawlessly calm and perfect nun in a world of dirty politics. The characters enact the narrator’s dislike for these powerful men who put his ancestor through hardships. His need is for the simple story about transporting tree saplings to become a storied epic, even though this basic fact the story turns upon—the saplings themselves—is of conflicted historiography: “The

prevailing opinion, that the apple and pear trees of the Canadas originated from *seeds* brought from France, is founded on the supposition that nursery trees could not have survived the long sea voyage of that period. Yet this opinion cannot be accepted without hesitation” (Hubbard 127). Hubbard serves as one of the narrator’s primary sources in his search for more information about the pear and where it may have originated. So single minded is the focus on the pear that the narrator genuinely doesn’t notice or care much about the pre-European peoples his story paves over. So ignorant of the wider picture is he that the narrator can only explore gaps in his family story, missing the exploitation that settlers inflicted on the Indigenous peoples. He also inserts scenes into the gaps as a means of asserting his own dreams and desire for legacy, thus translating his own farming gene pool into one of elevated historical value.

By presenting a history that is constantly being added to, changed, and contradicted and evolving in tandem with the research behind it, I steadily make clear—with the narrator’s final rejection of his research in favour of the family story—that his primary concern lies with narrative, not factual history. While perfectly polite to his translation guide, he is also resentful. Being unable to read the language that Marin would have spoken, and being forced to rely on a translation, removes him from his primary role as scholar with a narrative he maintains strict, fanatical control over, excising anything that does not fit his view of Marin’s journey—and of subsequent ancestors. This linguistic disconnect is given a nod in “River Whispers” when Major/Jean’s French is perfectly understood by the varying people he interacts with on his doomed journey along the mythical Styx, regardless of their own language (8-9). The narrator directly admits to fictive fraudulence when he tacitly admits that the ‘real’ Marin wouldn’t be able to

understand a word of what he'd written—both because he didn't speak English and because he was illiterate.

Pearing the Motifs

The varying uses of pears and pear-related images in *Imaginary Ancestors* serves to link and connect the present narrator with the past he creates. Each moment he 'takes a sip' of his cider, he dives into the process of reinventing the story. The lack of concrete evidence about how the Jesuit Pear ended up in the Detroit River region haunts and distresses the narrator. The pear serves as a symbol of his family's legacy, and of a connection to that legacy he can never actually make; while the symbol may be the same, the context in which it appears changes; "The cider I drink comes from a can" (123). Despite his infatuation with the pear he sees as his family's gift to the region of Detroit, he can never directly access its historical trajectory. Jesuit Pear trees today are so rare, the few fruit the handful of remaining trees produce so crucial to conservation¹, that the idea of tasting them is outright impossible, and offensive to the narrator's appreciation of this rarity, however much he wants to have a physical connection to the world that Marin, Jacques and Jean-Baptise lived and died in. His conception of history is so tightly linked with the pear that its absence and rarity that it drives him to view the stories as fading and garbled as well; hence his desire to preserve and share the family legacy he considers worthy of recording.

This seemingly wholesome need to preserve the past is undermined, however, as the narrator slowly makes clear that accurate history is second to his aggrandising story.

¹According to Catling, Paul M. and Small, Ernie in "Cultivated Pears in Canada: Past and Present", 2007

When the narrator discovers accounts that contradict the version of the story he desires, such as when he recounts a version of the story told by his cousin, where the trees arose from a simple seed germinating by chance with no involvement from his ancestors, he rejects this account (57-58). In this instance, both the narrator and the ancestor demand this version be discarded entirely: “The idea that our journey to this land could have happened because of some silly accident... I don’t like it. Makes my bones itchy” (63). However, any word the ancestor-voice says is one that the narrator writes which calls the truthfulness of any statement the ancestor-voices makes into question. My purpose with the narrator’s characterisation and obsession with the aggrandization of the story becomes clear; he is less interested in accuracy, or even telling a compelling story, but of giving his family—a group of farmers—something he fancies as equivalent to the explorers and diplomats they followed to the New World. Thus, he’s directly invested in suppressing Indigenous primacy.

As the narrator aggrandises his ancestors in-story, he also inflates their importance with a specific, usually literary quotation fronting each story. Beginning each story with a relevant epigraph serves to thematically set the tone for the story to follow. But the choice of quotation tells readers something about the personality of the ancestor in-story. In Marin’s case, the Benjamin Franklyn quote “In Wine there is Wisdom, in Beer there is Freedom, in Water, there is Bacteria” (53) tells readers that this Marin—or the events he experiences—is far more whimsical and sillier in “The Treed Man” than the philosophical confusion of the Marin of “River Whispers” or the Marin of “Fruit of Labours” impotent servitude. The Marin in “Fruit of Labours” and the Marin in “The Treed Man”, while similar, are not precisely the same character. The former finds

comfort in his work while the latter has grown to despise it. Despite occurring in only brief moments of each ancestor's life, typically within the span of a single day, the image of a pear links, unites, and, at times, divides them from each other. The orchard that serves as battleground where Josephine witnesses the execution of prisoners (118-119), is an orchard descended from the seeds that Marin held back from Maisonneuve (76). Despite such close ties between stories, in his frame commentary, the narrator laments that in contemporary times, "The Jesuit pear tree that Marin magicked here has gone nearly extinct" (123). This shifting to a modern, commercial world over the hand-grown one of his ancestors makes the narrator fundamentally unable to fully understand and properly relate their lives, necessitating his outlandish fictive additions and thoroughly modern rewriting of their past. Metaphorically, the narrator's ignorance of the cultural and political realities that his ancestors faced forms the crux of the novel's tension; if he cannot relate to their world, he must bring them forward and remake it, so it resembles his.

Conclusion

The conflict between wanting to portray a family's history accurately and wanting to present them in a good light is an issue that many genealogical histories confront. Ondaatje veers between presenting his father as a deeply flawed gambler and loving parent. Winterson's Napoleon is at once a figure of love and loathing. A constant in historical narratives is the reminder of the metafiction portion of historiographic metafiction. As Thomas King phrases it: "Assumptions are a dangerous thing. They are especially dangerous when we do not even see that the premise from which we start a discussion is not the hard fact that we thought it was, but one of the fancies we churn out

of our imaginations to help us get from the beginning of an idea to the end” (“Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial” 2). In my thesis, the narrator’s own assumptions about the veracity of his family legend prevents him from exploring other avenues and limits the potential his work has for stories. The narrator acts as both story-crafter and audience for his own creation, the ancestors serving as both a historical check-and-balance and as a form of Greek chorus, presenting, contradicting, and outright dictating their narrative lives. The Pablo Picasso quotation with which the collection begins, explains the narrator’s obsession with his false family legend, that, “Everything you can imagine is real” (Picasso). By imagining his ancestors the way he wants them to exist, in the times and context he wants them to have existed in, the unnamed narrator creates and establishes a Destailles family reality, as his story becomes their only book-length history. As the narrator runs out of cider, he runs out of story. The narrative ends abruptly despite the narrator repeatedly mentioning that his office contains boxes and boxes of “useless” information (96, 111). By useless, however, the narrator only means not related to the pear or the story of the pear he projects. Despite being surrounded by a wealth of other potential stories, the narrator gives up because he has nothing left to invent for the story he wishes to put down on paper. Rather than run out of pages, he has, instead, run out of pears to imagine.

Works Cited

- Airey, Richard. "Inquiry into the Conduct of Colonel Prince." *Malden U.C.*, 1838.
- Catling, Paul M and Small, Ernie. "Cultivated Pears in Canada: Past and Present",
Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2007.
- Hubbard, Bela. *Memorials of a Half-Century*. GP Putnam's Sons, 1887.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Culture*. Routledge Press, 1988.
- . "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History."
Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction. Ed. O'Donnell, P. and Robert Con Davis. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. pp. 3-32.
- King, Thomas. "Godzilla vs Post-Colonial." *World Literature Written in English*. vol 30, no. 2, 1990. pp. 183-190.
- . *Green Grass Running Water*, Harper Perennial, 1993.
- Kroetsch, Robert. "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto." *A Likely Story: The Writing Life*. Red Deer Press. 1995. pp. 41-64.
- Lacoursierre, Jacques, and Philpot, Robin. *A People's History of Québec*. Baraka Books. 2009.
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.1970.
- McVey, Christopher. "Reclaiming the Past: Michael Ondaatje and the Body of History."
Journal of Modern Literature. Vol 37, no 2. Winter 2014. pp. 141-160.

- Nünning, Ansgar. "Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet: Towards an Applied Cultural Narratology." vol 38, no 3. *Style*, Fall 2004. pp. 352-403.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *Running in the Family*. W.W. Norton, 1982.
- Rodwell, Grant. "The Increase of History as a Subject for Novels: Memory and the Context of Interpretation." *Whose History? Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction*. University of Adelaide Press. 2013. pp. 55–70.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Random House. 1985.
- Tuck-Rozett, Martha. "Constructing a World: How Postmodern Historical Fiction Reimagines the Past." *CLIO*, vol 25, no. 2, Winter 1995, pp 145-164.
- Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion*. Bloomsbury.1987.
- . *Sexing the Cherry*. Bloomsbury. 1989.

Vita Auctoris

NAME: Derek Deneau

PLACE OF BIRTH: London, ON

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1995

EDUCATION: Vincent Massey Secondary School, Windsor, ON,
2013

University of Windsor, B.A., Windsor, ON, 2018

(Candidate) University of Windsor, M.A., Windsor,
ON, 2020