

BLOOD RIFT
The Rise of the Adepts

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DEDICATION

To the dedicated and courageous healthcare, grocery supply chain, transportation workers, and others dutifully fighting at the COVID-19 battle-front to keep the rest of us safe, warm and fed. Frightening times, amazing people.

Thank you so much!

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FORWARD

Although The Nude Detective series is set firmly in 2018-2020, books Two and Three have a back story which builds on events from previous centuries. This novella is a stand-alone tale which focusses on characters and events from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and adds colour to the modern-day story. Enjoy it as it is or gain a deeper insight into the motivation of some of the characters in the main series.

The plot for this novella was inspired by three historical episodes and several historical figures – The King’s Daughters, Maria Monk, Captain Swing, the physician John Marsh, and John Molson – around whom I enjoyed weaving my tale. My story certainly takes artistic licence, but I’ve also tried to include as many historical facts and insights – as accurately as they appear in Wikipedia and similar sources at least – as I could. I admire Ken Follet and Dan Brown for how I learn some history as part of their adventures. See the back of the back of this novella for further details.

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PROLOGUE

The Palace of Versailles, France: 1663

King Louis Dieudonné – or Louis XIV of France – pounded the table with his mahogany cane, marking each word with such force that goblets toppled and soaked the silk rug beneath with red wine.

“Phillipe! I am not... an... imbecile,” he yelled, a fleck of spittle escaping unnoticed to moisten his taut lip. The shouting and banging of the cane were not the most concerning of Louis’s behaviours to those familiar with his manner in the tightly packed throne room. Louis also hefted his sable cape higher with a flick of his shoulder, ominously exposing his sword. No one expected the sword to be unsheathed, but Louis often gripped its jewelled hilt when his rage boiled over. At that point, it would not be uncommon for someone to end up in the dungeon – or worse. Courtiers and footmen alike inched away from the distraught subject of the King’s wrath.

“I find myself repeating, once again, Monsieur, that our first priority in peacetime is to PREPARE FOR WAR! I know you have heard this from me before, *non?*” Phillipe Segan, the unfortunate Ambassador to Habsburg – the French Netherlands – flinched as his nerve buckled; he bowed swiftly, proffering abject apologies, and fled to carry out the very tasks he had, only moments before, fervently argued against. He scurried through the group of silent courtiers – not one of whom would meet his eye – and all but ran into the corridor.

He heard the King’s strident voice reverberate through the marble archway from the throne room, fast receding in his wake. “How can he come into my court and patronise me? I’m fully aware that the damn ink is barely dry on the Treaty of the Pyrenees...”

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The raging faded with distance and Phillippe came to a sudden halt, resting against the wall, gasping for air from fear more than the exertion, unconsciously turning his head to hide his shame.

How could I have thought I could convince my King of such an asinine notion? Philip pondered, trying to remember why he felt so convinced this course was appropriate. *Did I really just suggest waiting until next summer to solidify France's claims in Habsburg? Why would focusing our energies on consolidating Nouvelle-France this season have seemed like a sane suggestion? Mon dieu! That could have been political suicide, if not even worse,* he wondered, baffled at his own behaviour.

Just last night, Philippe had been completely aligned with the King. Yes, France's claim to the territory of Habsburg was tenuous to be sure, but *Le Roi Soleil* – the Sun King, as Louis liked to be addressed – had been raised as a Prince in a culture expecting glory on the battlefield; a culture he affirmed on his ascent to kingship. But then this morning, for reasons that escaped him, Phillippe had the impulse to try to dissuade his majesty from his plan to covertly send provocateurs into Habsburg to seed chaos ahead of a French invasion.

A soft hand on his shoulder startled Phillippe back to his senses, and he turned to look directly into the eyes of Mademoiselle Amélie du Caron. His disaster at court slowly faded from thought as he stood captivated. He always felt that she was far too young to have such influence over him, perhaps just 19 years old, but he was entranced anyway.

Although serene on the surface, Amélie was furious at Phillippe. She had other business she could not avoid this morning and was astounded to learn from the breathless messenger of this confrontation in her absence this morning. She had been clear that if the King brought up this topic before her arrival, Phillippe was to prevaricate and delay. Still, it was a recoverable situation, and she could not return to Le Perjure with the news of this setback. She would have to fix this herself.

“Come, Phillippe. I appreciate this has been trying, but let's go and see if our Sun King's mood can be brightened, shall we?” In

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a small part of the back of Philippe's mind, he puzzled at why he was filled with renewed confidence that he could persuade the King to wait, after the tirade he had just endured. But that thought faded quickly under Amélie's steady gaze.

Amélie hitched up her dress just a fraction – no need to be provocative – and marched Phillippe back towards the throne room. Amélie reached out to the King's chamber with her will as they approached, massaging the energy in the room. At 30 yards from the velvet-draped archway, they could hear Louis thundering on still. At 20 yards, they heard Louis falter, then pause, as the chatter in the room subsided. 10 yards' and all was quiet; the two door guards stepping back, making way for Amélie and Phillippe.

As they swept into the airy space and paused on the elegant chessboard-style marble tiles, the crowd edged away from the King and made way for the couple. An objective observer might have remarked that all eyes were on the older, plumper Phillippe, while the beautiful Amélie was hardly noticed. At that moment, however, with the exception of Amélie, no one was capable of objectivity. Just as she had programmed them.

The King cleared his throat and began to speak, then stopped, his expression troubled but unsure. After a moment's consideration he addressed Phillippe, his tone grown respectful. "Phillippe. Come forward, sir. You have something to add, my boy?"

Amélie interjected and addressed the King and the crowd in a soothing tone, a tactic she reserved for emergencies, as her best work was done from the shadows.

"My King. I believe there has been something of a misunderstanding. I'm sure dear Phillippe phrased things indelicately. It's clear Your Majesty knows this fact well and has correctly berated him for his lack of tact. The court is in awe of your magnanimous nature in setting this aside now, and giving the Ambassador the floor once more so that he can address the issue with more accuracy and nuance than his earlier attempt."

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As she spoke, all heads nodded in staunch, if uncomfortable, agreement, as she held them in her thrall. With that, Amélie stepped quietly to the back of the room; to the place from which she typically observed and, when appropriate, influenced proceedings. Louis did not address her, and no one would remember her short speech. The King stepped forward and, with a gracious bow, invited his ambassador to continue. The court's typical background chatter resumed. Philippe boldly repeated his earlier suggestion to delay sending agents to Habsburg, and all present – the King especially – agreed with his great wisdom.

The court adjourned for lunch, and Amélie bustled back down the corridor to report her success to Le Perjure.

*

Yoselyn Brodeur sat attentively as she received the reports from the other four Le Perjure members present, eating heartily from the generous luncheon spread before them. Amélie, Evalyn, Shanelle, and Laci drove the clan's agenda both at home and abroad and regularly updated Yoselyn, the head of Le Perjure. Yoselyn loved the irony of her surname, given her role of weaving reports like these together to influence the fates of countries. *Le brodeur*: The embroiderer.

Le Perjure's members were all blood relatives, true, but not all blood relatives had what it took to be Le Perjure. The talent to use one's own mind to influence the will of others was unpredictable, skipping generations and appearing in seemingly random places on the family tree. The supernatural ability to have others accept whatever you tell them as truth was the basis for the clan's name. Le Perjure derives from the word 'perjury' and weaving webs of falsehood at court – or as often replacing a lie with a truth – was their vocation; not for the good of just one country like France, but for the good of all.

To that end, Amélie and Shanelle were based here with Yoselyn. Evalyn spent much of her time in transit; a trusted messenger between here and the other countries in which Le

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Perjure had a full-time presence. Although at the table today, Laci typically resided in London, a close confidante of George III, King of Britain and Ireland. In addition to those at the table, two Adepts completed Le Perjure's clan. The first was Averi, who sat much closer to His Holiness the Pope than any woman typically could while Chace masqueraded in the Spanish Court as a new-found princess from distant lands and had the young King Charles by his balls.

Yoselyn's grandmother, the previous clan leader, spent her unnaturally extended life patiently manipulating events so that George II, originally a German, could rise to the English throne while retaining great European influence. This was possible through both his Dukedom in Hanover and his role as prince-elector of the Holy Roman Empire, where George II and his peers chose emperors. Both Charles of Spain and George III, grandson of the recently deceased George II – the former's son and natural heir having to be secretly eliminated as he had a knack for resisting clan influence – had only recently ascended to their thrones, with help from Le Perjure. Still, re-cementing Le Perjure influence in the courts of both Spain and England was paramount and would take a month or two of effort.

As the Adept skills are only passed down the female line – and even then, sparingly – it was impossible with their numbers to extend the clan influence in person to both Portugal and New France. The youngest member, Evalyn, when not on the road, had been understudying for Amélie and was ready to take her place here in Versailles, where Yoselyn could assist if needed. Today's meeting was to decide whether Amélie would relocate to Portugal or to New France. Time was the enemy, and Laci – Lucy as she is known in London – had an appointment with the tide at dusk to sail back to England. These meetings had to be efficient, so Yoselyn took control of the agenda to move things along.

“You were right to take the risk and step in, Amélie. Louis is driven by a mix of commerce, revenge, and pique – which makes

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him easy to sway – but a room full of courtiers is a different matter. You sensed no dissenters?”

“No, Madame,” replied Amélie.

“Then let us move on to the decision for which we gathered today: The Americas, through New France or Portugal? Laci, you are senior in my flock. Your thoughts, please”

“Madame. The Anglo-Portuguese era is coming to a natural ending. Brazil and similar markets have been extensively exploited, whereas America is a vast, rich, and largely untapped country. There is already a strong desire in George’s court, which would be easy for us to exploit, to wind down Portuguese trade and allow for the redeployment of resources to the west. If that happens, Portugal will play less of a part in world affairs in short order. Between you, Evalyn, and Shanelle here in Versailles, Averi in Italy, Chace in Spain, and, if needed, me in England, we can cover Portugal from Europe. By contrast, The Americas, a continent as large as all of these together, is developing without our guidance. The English, Spanish and French are drawing lines there, and we need to be a part of it. I believe it is an easy decision in favour of New France.”

“Sound reasoning, Laci,” praised Yoselyn. “Any other thoughts?” There was a short discussion on how best to handle Germany, Russia, and the Scandinavian countries, but the recommendation stood.

“With the big decision made, we need a plan to execute it and bring it to reality. Amélie, as we have just made you the new Le Perjure leader of New France – congratulations by the way – have you given this much thought?”

“Madame, if it pleases you, yes, I have,” replied Amélie, rising to the occasion. She proceeded to outline an idea she had been refining for six months. “All of Europe’s leading nations recognise that the New World presents opportunity to those who can grow their footprint. New France covers much of the territory that is rich in resources, but our countrymen lack the most important natural resource of all: Women. Our people there are mostly soldiers and pioneering, male farmers. Even if

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we are successful in harvesting and shipping back resources to France, over time we will fail unless we can grow the population organically, and quickly.”

“You propose we send wives-to-be to the New World?” asked Shanelle.

“Exactly that, yes,” answered Amélie. “Here in France, Le Perjure has grown our network of non-Adept helpers, who are almost exclusively women and girls. I propose I take the most fertile 50 or so with me to the New World. Hiding this initiative would be impossible, but we can hide our role. What if Louis the Great sponsored a migration of hundreds of women? It would be simple to influence the decision and hide our activity in plain sight.”

“I approve this idea in concept, with one amendment, Amélie.”

“Madame?”

“You will take Shanelle, too.”

“But Madame...” objected Amélie, but the clan leader asserted herself by sitting taller and sending a crushing wave of mental energy across the table. The group winced at the sudden show of power.

“I appreciate that you two are not each other’s favourite people. And Shanelle is barely past her transition and quite raw. But think about it, Amélie. New France is pivotal. If something were to happen to you, we would lose traction at this important time in the colony’s growth. And it might be months before we even heard about the problem due to the great distances involved.” Then, in a softer, more conciliatory voice, she continued, “Take our Initiate here with you as back-up, and train her to her full potential. Shaping such abilities is typically my role, but you have my trust. Accept this honour with grace and excel at this challenge I set you.”

“Yes, Madame,” said Amélie, and after a glance from Yoselyn, Shanelle likewise acknowledged her new role. Although the reasoning appeared sound to those present, there would be repercussions from this decision for centuries to come.

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“Besides,” laughed Yoselyn, to ease the remaining tension, “the Sun King would love the idea of conquering the New World with an army of women. Let’s begin work on this without delay. Amélie, you must convince his Majesty to sponsor the initiative both financially, and with his name. That will ensure popularity. Perhaps brand it The King’s Wards. Or, better yet, The King’s Daughters. Louis and Maria Theresa are celebrating their newborn son, the Prince and heir. Let’s ensure the new Prince has 800 sisters, too.”

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1: HÔTEL-DIEU

Montréal, February 1663

[Amélie] – Our adventure nearly ended in its first weeks here in New France. We set sail in November from Marseilles under warm, clear skies. We would have preferred a more northerly port, but King Louis wanted to tour the fortress he had commissioned in 1660 and insisted most of his court attend. I could have changed his mind, of course, but we try to limit our interference and reserve its use for matters of great import rather than our convenience.

The crossing to New France was more pleasant than expected, and an unanticipated enchantment awaited us at sea: We saw our first icebergs three days before entering the mouth of the St Lawrence river. Mesmerising. Frozen water standing taller than Parisian houses, dwarfing our vessel; smaller icebergs, white as white above the surface, but the most exquisite teal below, when seen through shallow water. All surrounded by a sea of dark blue – almost indigo – when we first encountered the ice fields, then transitioning slowly to turquoise as we approached the coast.

In 1663 the Académie des Sciences was still attempting to untangle the quarter of a million or so definitions for weights and measurements that plague French commerce, but none of those units were how we counted time at the end of this voyage. By February 10th, when we reached Québec, we had begun to measure the extreme cold in how long it took for the frozen rain to reform ice over the windows since we had last cleared it. About five percent of weather-related deaths in this new land were from suffocation, as chimneys, vents, and windows clogged with ice. In this magical place, mother nature is a killer.

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The St Lawrence river froze early this winter, and icebreakers pulled by mule often had to rely on black-powder explosions to disrupt the thicker ice and keep the channels clear. Even then, we were forced to cross several stretches by carriage, then join other boats in clearer water upstream.

I had an affinity with the name St Lawrence. Jacques Cartier landed in this region on his second trip to the New World in 1535. They made port on Feast Day – August 10th and just called Feast in these parts – a day much warmer than I was experiencing, I am sure, or he may have named the region something quite different.

Feast Day is a celebration of St Lawrence, the Deacon of Rome who was martyred in the Prosecution of the Christians ordered by Emperor Valerian in the year 258AD. As a child, Feast held so many fond memories – admittedly due to the food and good humour of the adults more than anything religious. The St Lawrence name itself was a marker of my ancestor's time here.

But we were all sick and had frostbite or worse by the time Montréal's beige stone, red tile, dockside buildings emerged from the endless mist. I barely recall being carried ashore or the journey to Hôtel-Dieu, the first hospital founded in Montréal some 17 years ago by Jeanne Mance, who sat opposite me now.

“You look so much better, Amélie, but take some more tea anyway,” she prompted, pushing the plain china pot closer to me. The wooden building had been designed with the weather in mind, and the room was snug, if plain. With wood in such abundance, the earlier buildings in New France used cedar and maple beams as well as extensive panelling and millwork, with some interior brickwork in places. Newer projects were being built from beige stone, quarried in recently founded pits. Jeanne had already told me she avoided drapery in the hospital, as she had discovered in her time nursing in Europe that fabric had a propensity for harbouring disease carriers: mites, bugs, and the like.

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“Thank you, Jeanne, I believe I may never be warm again, but this helps thaw me from the inside. You were telling me about Montréal’s founder?”

“*Oui*. I embarked from La Rochelle in May 1641, and after a three-month crossing, I wintered in Québec City. Back then, we called the river ‘Rivière du Canada,’ but have since adopted the English ‘St Lawrence’ River as our norm. Ironically, I believe the British named their region Canada, after the St Lawrence Iroquoian’s word *kanata*. All quite confusing. But, I was not as brave as you, and waited for the weather to change before venturing down the river, regardless of what it was called.

“Paul de Chomedey and I came here to Ville-Marie – to this island – in the spring of 1642, and we quickly founded Montréal. I had already been running a hospital for some time – from my home, in fact – when we persuaded Angélique Bullion to donate 6000 Francs to establish a proper Catholic hospital in 1645. Paul and Angélique are both staunch Catholics, and the Société Notre-Dame de Montréal has a mission to convert the indigenous people to be Catholics first, and supporters of New France second.” I noted that she said New France, and not France.

Jeanne was good company, but this conversation truly served two purposes: Shanelle Bisset and the 23 remaining non-Adept acolytes who had survived the crossing – we had lost 22 to cold and sickness – were busy organising lodgings and contacts at the lower levels in society. My task was to map out the bourgeois, affluent, and powerful members who ran Montréal, and therefore, New France. I had letters from the King to use sparingly, so it was important I pressed everyone I met for information to form the best picture of how the land lies, and how we can influence things without calling on the King’s name each time. The second reason I prolonged these conversations was to begin to assert my control over Jeanne herself.

Le Perjure Adepts use our minds to impress strong emotions onto the minds of the people we wish to control; some emotions are blunt instruments, like fear or rage. I can scare people easily, but ‘asserting’ complex thoughts and beliefs takes much more

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finesse. And this takes time. The control I could wield in Louis's court was the work of over 70 years. Yoselyn and her grandmother before her started the work, and I continued it during my six years there. Le Perjure determined long ago that, unlike other clans who wield fear like a stick, we could use a carrot – or a better analogy, honey – by projecting our sexuality as a more subtle and effective tool.

Of course, I could flood Jeanne with sexual thoughts so that she would perhaps try to seduce me, or anyone else, immediately. But such brutishness just leads to embarrassment and trouble. Our technique is to gently stroke the ego and the will, not the body. First one-on-one, and then in groups, we build relationships through which we choose key moments to send various types and strengths of sexual pleasure to our targets. Or sometimes the opposite. We make them feel aroused, confident and excited when conversations take the track we need but make them suffer a different sort of ache when they do not.

Jeanne did not need much prompting to perform a monologue, throughout which I teased and frustrated her to gently establish her programming. I watched the signs: a crossing of her legs, a drip of sweat, a hasty breath. Her pupils spreading wide; her legs wanting to. After two hours, I let her rest, drained and a little confused. On the paper she had graciously provided, I had notes about those *célébrités* I would ask her to introduce me to in due course so to pursue my penetration of the region's elite.

“You've had a busy life, to be sure, Jeanne. A selfless nurse in the European wars. Such courage, tending and burying the plague victims; and now the Hôtel-Dieu. You must see such suffering. How in God's name do you cope, Madame? I am a confidante of the Sun King, and I will dispatch a letter and suggest he affirm this hospital's standing forthwith.” I stroked her mind gently as I praised her, moving to wrap up our session, as I was tired, too. Then her response fully reignited my attention.

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“Oh, I could not cope without my helpers, Mademoiselle. Three years ago, I hired several sisters of the Religieuses Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph. Thanks to their efforts, we have established a convent dedicated to the sick, here within the walls. But the saddest moments for me are not the diseased or injured; They are the misguided young women – newly pregnant – who come to us in the night, hoping for herbs to rid them of their troubles; or who arrive sick with the aftermath of miscarriages; or worse – with stillborn babes in their arms hoping we can resurrect their children. A few come sooner, and we help as we can, within the bounds of His Holiness’s scriptures, of course.”

“How often does this sad business occur?” I asked, my own pulse increasing with hope.

“At least twice, perhaps thrice a month. May is the worst, of course, being nine months after Feast. So sad. Anyway, without Sister Alice and her nuns, we would be overrun. God has sent the help I needed to allow me to focus on longer-term plans.”

*

God, or maybe St Lawrence, had been good to us. As powerful as we Adepts are, we literally have a fatal flaw; we cannot survive past our teenage years without sustenance from a horrific source. Those of our bloodline chosen by God to be Adepts have a normal childhood. Even Yoselyn, our most sensitive, cannot discern which of our young will transition to Le Perjure candidates. For some, usually between the ages of 15 to 20, we can literally see some change; they begin to show their Nimbus, their halo. A soft light seems to come from their body, as it does from mine. It is only visible to other Nimbus – and a few rare, sensitive people; those who also claim to see other, perhaps stranger things.

Soon after they begin the ‘transition,’ as we call it, other signs develop. Greater appetite. Social misfires, a biproduct of the neophyte unknowingly asserting their emotions on others without control. But at this stage, their powers are weak. Their appetite increases, yet still they need more energy than they can

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get from what they consume, and we can help a little by ensuring they eat a special diet of ‘normal’ foods. But it is something abnormal – and abhorrent – that their bodies crave: blood. A very specific type of blood: The blood of a pregnant woman – which we call mothers-blood – or the blood from her fetus.

Some clans of Adepts have no scruples and use their powers to just take what they need. Some Adepts see our curse as unreconcilable under God, and just let themselves die of starvation. Le Perjure, like most other Adepts, walk a fine line between two mortal sins – suicide and murder – surviving only on the tragedy of others, not instigating a tragedy or imposing on the living.

Instead, we insert ourselves into society as doctors, midwives, and morticians. Either directly – we physically assume those roles – or indirectly, by using our powers to suborn proxies in those roles and have them acquire what we need for our survival.

We had brought with us as much mothers-blood as we believed would keep, although this cold weather would preserve the supply longer than we had allowed for. We knew we had a ticking clock which would count down to a moment where we either secured a new source or faced an impossible choice. We brought sufficient provisions to convert the blood to suit our needs. Certain minerals and herbs, which change its nature, so it sustains us into adulthood, past the transition. This mixture also has a positive side effect: It magnifies our powers enormously.

In transition we are neophytes, weak and fragile; once weaned onto the mixture we become thinner as our bodies burn food at an astonishing rate, but our powers grow significantly stronger, and we become very long-lived; the latter a gift only enjoyed by female Adepts. Yoselyn’s grandmother was 102 when she passed, and Yoselyn herself is now 80, yet looks just past her 50th year. We use the term ‘wean’ as the transition takes several years of enduring and adjusting to the mental as well as physical side effects.

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After Jeanne left me, I reviewed my list and prioritized the names to ensure we could quickly assimilate those who could get us closest to the nuns who worked with mothers seeking help. We would help them too. In fact, I was sure the mortality rate would decline with us working to the best of our ability. But those unavoidable tragedies would need to sustain us going forward.

Within a month of landing in Montréal, Shanelle Bisset, now Sister Shanelle, was securely in place within the convent of Hôtel-Dieu, performing both God's work in earnest, but also providing our source of sustenance without imposing on her charges.

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2: THE BLUE DEATH, THE LAST STRAW

Montréal, November 1835 (172 years later)

[Esmé] – The Treaty of Paris was signed on February 10, 1763, exactly 100 years to the day that my great-grandmother Amélie and her fellow Adept, Shanelle, first set foot in Montréal. The treaty formally marked the official demise of New France, but the colony's death knell had sounded seven years earlier at Louisbourg. Fort Louisbourg was a key choke point of the St Lawrence river which was a critical seaway onto most of the North American continent. The French had completed the Fortress of Louisbourg in 1740 and named it after King Louis XIV. From there they molested and harried British commercial and navel shipping. Realizing the strategic significance of the fort, the British set out to capture it in 1757, but were turned back by a large French navel force.

The following year, the British were smarter: Just before the winter ice receded in the St Lawrence, they bottled up the French navy in the port of Toulon, where they had wintered, preventing them from sailing out to defend Louisbourg. Unmolested, the British lay siege to Louisbourg with 24 warships, 150 support vessels, and 26,000 men. After a bloody seven weeks, the French capitulated, leaving the way open for the British to attack Québec in 1759, and then Montréal in 1760. The Seven Years War ended three years after the fall of Québec, when King George III of Great Britain signed the treaty in Paris.

I had just turned 41 when the British Parliament signed The Clergy Endowments Act in 1791, splitting the Province of Québec along the Ottawa river, to form Upper and Lower Canada.

Le Perjure had flourished, first under Amélie, who died in 1747 aged 109, and then her granddaughter – my mother – who died early for our kind at the age of 72 in 1797. At the age of 42 I inherited the leadership here in the Americas and became head

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of Le Perjure around the world following recent deaths in the European leadership.

In the mid-1700s, Le Perjure embarked on a strategy to stabilize a world tearing itself apart. We foresaw the unavoidable rise of an independent America, which would then have to face many European nations who believed they were entitled to a foothold in the region. We believed this would result in ongoing wars, potentially for centuries to come, as had happened in Europe over the past millennia. It was left to me to continue our plan to guide events so that the region would evolve to be ruled as two large, independent, geographic entities: one covering the north of the upper-continent, and the other the south. The focus of my life's efforts would be to stabilize the north-south border, pull Upper and Lower Canada together firstly to become one province, and then extend westward to consolidate all of the provinces and territories under one flag; a united country called Canada.

Although Le Perjure was being effective at managing external affairs, internally we continued to struggle with two issues: how to swell the number of Adepts in our ranks, and how to assuage a rift in our clan – a rift which I could trace back 180 years. In my reign this rift had softened to more of an inconvenience that I needed to tread carefully around, and I hoped my tenure would see it evaporate completely; but events were about to take a significant turn.

If there were someone to blame for the rift, I would have to lay this burden on Yoselyn. Sending Shanelle to New France under the guidance of an all-too-young Amélie, with the bad blood between the two, was a foreseeable and avoidable risk. Keeping one of them – probably Shanelle – closer to home would have headed this problem off early and prevented the turmoil that followed. You might think I am being harsh, judging Yoselyn on such a tenuous situation, but this is an area of our lives we have always had to pay particular attention to. We are long lived, we have a very small clan that must perpetuate, and our life centres around sensing and influencing the feelings, and the

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wills, of others. But worse than sending them to another continent unsupported, was the mistake of allowing the bad blood in the first place.

The rift grew from a situation that is not uncommon in our race but is rarely allowed to become a problem. Adepts typically transition in their late teens, a time they are emotionally immature; combine this immaturity with our clan being all female and therefore treated by our misogynistic society as the powerless property of men. These Adepts then begin to transition and are suddenly in the position of holding great sway over men, and women, too.

Adept neophytes usually fall into one of two categories: those who are sickened and depressed due to the sudden realisation of what they must consume to survive and who typically have no interest in sex or power, or the other category; those not much bothered with the ethics of things, but instead obsessed with power over others, or sex. Amélie was the former, and Shanelle? She was so firmly addicted to both sex and power, that she might have been mistaken for a succubus.

Amélie was four years Shanelle's senior, and we had begun to fear she may be 'Chalk,' a well-meant term for those in our family line who never transition or show signs of becoming Adepts; Chalk, because they cannot create the spark that ignites their Nimbus – their halo. Those who create their spark are referred to as 'Flint' and are given a ring of flint for the little finger of their right hand.

Amélie transitioned late in life compared to Shanelle, who got her flint ring in her 17th year. Amélie had already developed a two-year relationship with a young man at court before her Nimbus appeared.

A few weeks into transition, she had to be told the hard truths of our kind, including, in her case, that she would have to let go of her young man. Flints can never have a non-Adept life-partner because it becomes too heartbreaking keeping our manipulative nature from them, but also as the breeding lines

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must be kept pure to preserve the gift. He was a perfect partner for a Chalk, but entirely wrong for a Flint.

Amélie took all of this badly and withdrew to her rooms once we forced her to break off her relationship. Shanelle was six months into her transition at this point, as frisky as hell, and scornful of Amélie's attitude. She harboured a grudge that Amélie would have more seniority, as she was older and already showed a stronger, if delayed, spark. Ensuring Shanelle was never allowed near Amélie's beau should have been a routine precaution.

Amélie's gentleman was an honourable person. Having been unable to resist Shanelle's Adept powers, and having been mortified at his own behaviour, he confessed his sins to Amélie. He asserted he had lost his mind, taken advantage of a poor innocent woman, and Amélie was better off without him. All of this was to make her feel better about their recent break-up, not to mitigate his misplaced guilt; of course, Amélie knew at once what had occurred and went to Yoselyn accusing Shanelle of rape – a serious crime in our kind. We see no issue with working others into a sexual frenzy to control them, but we must never take advantage physically without genuine consent. Yoselyn managed the situation appropriately from then onwards, resolving most of the conflict between the two young neophytes, but it lingered buried in low parts of their psyches. Sending them unsupervised to New France a few years later was definitely an error.

Amélie's role as leader was to penetrate the upper echelons of society, get close to the seats of power, and build a network of influence that could be exploited to help guide the region's decisions. Shanelle was installed into the convent as a sister, both to secure our supply of mother's-blood and to improve the mortality rates in both the pregnant and the sick, by using our superior medical and behavioural management abilities that the clan have honed over several generations pursuant to acquiring sustenance while inflicting the least harm.

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Shanelle executed her role in the convent well but resented it. The extra lengths she needed to go to satisfy her voracious sexual appetite yet keep her pleasures secret from the nuns and priests was the least of her difficulties; the larger issue was that her role severely restricted her ability to bear children, which she desperately wanted so as to extend her own lineage. Only twice was she allowed a year-long pilgrimage that took her away from the convent and hid her pregnancies and childbirths. When she returned from the first such pilgrimage with a newborn – claiming the child was an orphan – and a letter from a bishop asking the convent to take in the child as it was ‘special,’ there was resistance from the Mother Superior and the local priests. Shanelle discreetly dealt with this by influencing their minds to make the child a ward of the convent, but she deemed it unwise to try that trick a second time. After her second and last pilgrimage, the orphan was placed in Amélie’s household, to be brought up with Amélie’s own children. Shanelle resented this greatly.

By contrast, Amélie was unhindered and had five children. Amélie’s household staff were led to believe she was married and that her husband travelled extensively to expand the family businesses. Many men in fact stayed overnight and the staff were convinced it was the husband passing through; not a difficult manipulation for Amélie.

These tensions and resentments waxed and waned over the lifetimes of the two Adepts. There were times of rapprochement and times of rebellion by Shanelle who, at the height of things, cut off the mother’s-blood supply to Amélie and her offspring for a month.

All of which brings us to today, 1835. Mother Mary Lumena, the only living descendant of Shanelle, is the Mother Superior at l’Hôtel-Dieu. I make a great effort to maintain cordial relations with her. We resolved the problem of explaining the babies brought back from pilgrimages by having a close confidante – a resident nurse who is not in the convent proper – accompany Mary Lumena, and return believing the child is hers. It was then

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easy to arrange things so that Mary Lumena has the relationship she wants with her children by ensuring the nurse and Mary Lumena had adjacent, connecting rooms. Mary Lumena has three children, as do I. She has two of Chalk, and one of Flint – the latter she named Angélique. I have two Flints – Jane and Anna – who are firmly established in New York maintaining our presence there.

If I am honest, Anna's 22-year-old daughter, Jaz – short for Jadzia – is my favourite. Anna's lover was Polish, and she named Jaz after her lover's mother, of whom she was fond. I keep Jaz close, right here in Montréal with me. She is smart, has innate people skills, and has a powerful mind; perhaps she is the best of us. I am grooming her as my successor, and need to break her of her incessant curiosity for everything outside of our realm and keep her focused on our obligations to humanity. I am 80 today, so I may have time to share my wisdom for a while; but I worry that I will succumb to the Blue Death, which is all around us.

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[Jaz] - I clattered up the stone steps, simultaneously embarrassed at my tomboyish nature and embracing my *joie de vivre*. All morning, I had watched a three-mast clipper claw its way upstream against the current – with very little favourable wind – at last breaking free of the main channel and edging slowly towards its berth.

For the first two and a half hours of its tortuous journey from the Widow's Bend – the elbow in the St Lawrence where ships first hove into view from the rooftops of Montréal – the ship's hull and quarterdeck were hidden in the river mist. Only the tall masts were visible, towering over the fogbanks, but I was sure I could make out the Relieur pennant hanging lamely on the mizzen. Then came the briefest puff of wind, lifting the limp flag enough to confirm this was Timothée de Relieur's ship, and my long-simmering excitement exploded. He was home! Then, as if confirming my observation, the breeze caused the ship to move

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in such a way as to expose the broad transom for a brief moment, just enough for the ship's nameplate to glint in the morning sun: *Ville de Paris*. I was already dressed, so I left the house from the tradesmen's entrance to avoid Front Street, which was crowded with sailors, shippers and traders, and ran in the most unladylike fashion through the alleyways to the docks.

A crowd of debtors, creditors, and loved ones had already formed on the paved slip to welcome the ship. I shamelessly used my social status – evident to most by the silk dress and expensive hat I wore, despite my lack of decorum – and my subtler Adept pressures, to edge my way to the front. I caught a glance of Timothée giving last minute instructions to the captain about the dispersal of the cargo, and my breath caught. I felt the crowd fidget as a spontaneous wave of sexual energy escaped me. *I must work on my control*. Timothée must have felt it, too, as his head jerked my way and our eyes met. He shook the captain's hand and then leapt over the poop-deck rail onto some crates stacked on the wharf, dropping to the ground. Suddenly remembering his station, he regained his composure and sauntered over to me, with a large and rather pleased grin. I realised I was grinning back with an equal lack of decent comportment.

A hug would have been too unseemly, so Timothée took both of my hands into his and stepped close. He had the grace and grooming of a gentleman, but the physique and hands of a man of labour. Having started crewing regularly from France to Québec city, Montréal, New York, and New York at the at of 12, the combination of punishing work and rationed food had sculpted his body to be lean yet muscular. His shoulders square, his chest triangular, his waist slim, his hips... businesslike. I once glimpsed his lower chest and stomach when he reached up to a shelf and his ruffled shirt rode up; I sighed lustily at the former and envied the flatness of the latter. Strong thighs, buff like his arms, from hauling ropes and lifting cargo. His face thin and weathered, eyes so deep a blue that, had they not shone so brightly, one might think them indigo. His short hair almost stood on end, thick with salt. His jowls and chin were paler than

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the top of his face; he had shaved recently after a long period bearded at sea. Just to look his best for me.

I could tell he was bursting with news, but he led with his manners and inquired after my health, recent events in society – and anything else but what I wanted to talk about – as he escorted me home. When etiquette allowed, I began to pose some of my own questions: about his health, and that of his family and soon I steered the conversation to enable him to share the news that had been on the tip of his tongue since he disembarked.

“*La Caronette* was ready two weeks ahead of schedule, so we steamed her over to New York to work out the kinks. She is only the third ship to complete the trans-Atlantic crossing with a screw instead of paddles. She is the way of the future. I knew extending the keel another 12 feet at the stern and adding fins ahead of the twin rudders would add speed... sorry, I’m boring you. Anyway, we ensured her sea trials were modest on the way to New York, to ensure she’s ‘run in’ – a term we have coined for these new mechanical engines – and stable in the moderate Atlantic swells. She’s in dry dock for inspection and some fine tuning, but I think she will break records on the way back to France when we really put her through her paces.”

This was Timothée’s first attempt at designing a ship. He had a great deal of help from experts, but the concepts and innovations were his. He has embraced these new technologies like a madman; and it made him so happy. Although shipping is his passion, he has also dabbled in threshing and farming equipment, increasing the yields from his family’s estates in Normandy to the point that his workers are all but rioting to ensure their job security. Added to this is a more recent curiosity into balloons large enough to carry a man.

“And as excited as I am about her speed and stability,” he continued, enthusiasm personified, “the best part is her name: *La Caronette*. I couldn’t be so brazen of course to name her Jaz, but...” He faded mid-sentence, assessing my reaction. I hadn’t picked up on the compliment – the subtle reference to our family name – and as he exposed it, I suddenly halted, thrilled. My

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sudden pause had alarmed him, but his face filled with relief when I laughed gaily and blushed like a teenager being courted by her first suitor. His mention of returning to his prized invention so soon saddened me briefly, but I pushed the thought aside, determined to make the best of our short time together.

Eventually, we reached my front door and swept inside, pausing for the footman to take Timothée's jacket and my coat. We burst into the parlour and stopped dead in our tracks; still except for a slight shuffle apart to ensure the proper amount of distance between us. My grandmother sat overseeing the room like a queen, with an empty chair already set at her side for me and a slightly smaller chair opposite, for Timothée. She gave us both her sharpest, most hawkish stare as she leaned over a tea pot and nodded at us to be seated.

The parlour was an almost square room, with high ceilings set upon elaborate crown mouldings, under which hung six evenly spaced arching windows, each framed by blue silk drapes that matched the fabric of the chairs. The chairs themselves were carved from maple, a wood common in these parts, and both the chair legs and the wood that ran up the sides and across the tops of each chair in thin bands was varnished a deep, dark red. Grandmother had tea served in white china, each piece adorned in the familiar light blue motif of Parisian artisans from the turn of the century. Small, dainty pastries were set out on a long, slim plate at the maple table's centre. Grandmother wore a simple, black morning gown, and had yet to change for luncheon.

"You will take tea with us before returning to your rooms in Sainte-Catherine, I assume, Monsieur? What news is there from France?" We took the appointed seats, and Timothée dutifully expounded on the comings and goings of the French worldwide and at home, as well as what he knew of the British and Spanish. Grandmother listened, appearing attentive, but I suspected there was nothing he said that she didn't already know.

I watched him adroitly answer her enquires and venture some of his charm; throughout it all, I studied Grandmother intently. As hard as she made Timothée work, the part that

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excited me was that Grandmother Esmé didn't use her Adept powers. Had she considered him unworthy, she would have managed him towards the door using subtle strokes of her mind, so that he left happy but at odds as to whether or not he should return. The fact she chose to close off that side of herself was a clear sign of approval to me. She would still send him scurrying home using conventional social pressure before anything inappropriate could develop between him and me, but she approved of him.

There was a soft knock, and the parlour-room door opened. Grandmother's headman — a prim, slender Spaniard named López — stepped in and gave a discreet cough. "Madame, there is a Lord Roth at the door; his card," he said, offering her the small printed card, which she waved away. "He apologises for the lack of notice and asks if you would receive him forthwith."

"Would you like us to retire, Grandmother?" I offered, hoping this would allow Timothée and me some time alone.

"No child, you two should remain." After López had withdrawn to fetch our visitor, she continued. "Aside from polite conversation, say nothing and offer no information about our situation; that includes you, too, Timothée." For the first time since we arrived, I felt Grandmother's talents at work, encouraging compliance with her instructions. "Lord Roth is not a good person, so we need to be extremely careful with him. He is powerful and can be trouble for us."

"Lord Roth, Madame," announced López. We all stood. Timothée bowed, I curtsied politely, and Esmé nodded and held her hand out, which Lord Roth took and held briefly to his lips, proffering a curt, business-like nod.

Roth was short in stature but long in persona; his presence filled the room so that I had to concentrate to ensure my mind did not push back at him. His hairless head appeared too big for his skin, which was stretched tightly, struggling to contain his skull. It was a startling effect, which I deduced was from excessive leanness, as his body was wiry and thin. He had the shape yet not the pallor of the malnourished; excessively thin,

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yet well fed and robust at the same time. His nose was large and hooked, and his bulbous eyes a dark brown. He smiled, exposing teeth that were whole, straight, and a brilliant white; most unlike any compatriots I've ever seen. He had the teeth of a black-African, not the slightly yellowed and irregular teeth of a British or European noble. He was dressed in the style of a British Lord, and as Grandmother completed the introductions, his accent confirmed he was English, even if his French pronunciation and grammar were perfect. A man full of oddities, I was sure. The hairs on my neck had stiffened as soon as he entered and had yet to relax. I could tell the same was true for Timothée.

"Monsieur de Relieur, part of the trading and shipping family of that name," Roth addressed Timothée — looking him over and sizing him up most crudely — his phrase a statement rather than a question.

"Yes. My father and uncle's enterprise, in fact, in which I am pleased to apprentice," replied Timothée.

"I had the pleasure of meeting both gentlemen recently on the west coast of this continent. I can convey they are both well, or at least were thriving when we dined together at Fort Langley a month or two ago. In fact, it was they who convinced me not to return to England by ship, but instead to follow the route pioneered by Simon Fraser through the mountains and back across the plains. It's been an adventure, and I'm pleased I heeded their suggestions."

"I haven't seen them for a year and welcome the news they are well. They struck out to lay some claims to the region, as we heard... I'm sorry, I've forgotten what I was about to say..." Timothée's words trailed off as Grandmother extended her power to distract him. But Lord Roth continued for him.

"I think you were about to say that they were prospecting potential settlements for France; they shared as much with me, but I understand your discretion, Monsieur." As he said this, he looked pointedly at Grandmother. "As I told your father, I think the British have the edge. Captain Vancouver's charts are so detailed and quite closely held, as are the Scotsman Fraser's

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maps of the mountain routes. The British have been securing trading rights with the natives for four decades. Your father will do very well, but as a private citizen, not a Frenchman per se.”

“You seem well informed, as always, Lord Roth,” interjected Grandmother, wresting the conversation away from Timothée. “What took you so far away from England?”

“I’ll be quite frank, Madame. England, Ireland, and Germany are quite overcrowded. My business interests include farms across the country, and our new mechanical farming equipment’s efficiency will result in less employment. Workers are already rioting in the Westcountry, and that will spread, no doubt. I had a notion that perhaps I should sponsor emigration to other regions of the world. Pioneers like Timothée’s family are doing a first-class job of opening up new territories, but they could fail if they rely entirely on natives as labourers. I wondered if there was an opportunity to – sorry, I don’t know the expression in French – in England we say, to ‘kill two birds with one stone.’ Solve both the coming labour crisis in the old world and provide a ready workforce in the new. I have had reports of conditions and opportunities, but as you can imagine, I wanted to see things firsthand before making such an investment.”

“And did you reach a conclusion?”

“Not yet, Madame. I need to get home and confer with my associates. Two days ago, I dined at the convent and Mary Lumena– sorry, Mother Mary Lumena– mentioned that young Timothée was due to land soon and that he would pay his regards here upon arrival. When I noted that the *Ville de Paris* had berthed, I came to enquire when Timothée was bound for England; I consider myself fortunate to meet him in person here today. I’ve been travelling for eight months and feel the need to return with some urgency.” I felt Grandmother exerting pressure on Timothée, forcing him to sit quietly and not respond.

Grandmother said, “Timothée was just saying he will be here a month, Lord Roth. I hear the *Santa Lucia* is sailing the day after tomorrow. She will be your fastest option.” Lord Roth regarded grandmother with frustration.

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“Then I have held you up enough, Madame, and will bid you adieu.” We all stood. Grandmother rang the bell to beckon Lopez, and replied for us all. “Always a pleasure, Monsieur. It is such a shame you sail tomorrow; we would have been honoured to have you to dinner on Friday. Safe travels.”

Once the door shut behind Lord Roth, I turned to my grandmother. “Was that really necessary?” I was quietly fuming that she had Timothée in her grip. He just stood and smiled at us, not really comprehending.

“Yes, it was, Jaz. Lord Roth is not someone any of us should associate with. I wonder why he was with Mary Lumena.” She turned and spoke to Timothée. “Monsieur de Relieur. Lord Roth departed when you were in the toilet. He left his regards.” Timothée looked a little confused, as he should be. Grandmother had spent next to no time with him and therefore had no opportunity to properly cultivate his obedience. That she could control his actions and memories in this fashion was a testament to her unparalleled powers within Le Perjure.

“Come,” she continued, “I want to hear more about the cargos that are in demand these days.” Timothée launched back into small talk, almost forgetting Lord Roth’s visit, but probably grasping the opportunity to escape the feeling of being lost-at-sea, the reason for which he could not quite put his finger on. It is common for people we influence to scramble back to firmer ground once we release them from our thrall.

Some five minutes later, the door opened once more, but this time López did not observe polite protocols; this was clearly an emergency.

“Madame, so sorry to interrupt. But I have grave news. Mother Mary Lumena sent a messenger and has need to see you with some urgency. She has been sick since yesterday morning. Diarrhea, dry skin and, as of this morning, her lips are quite blue. The doctor is with her.”

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[Esmé] - Montréal has been beset by two terrifying invasions these past three years.

Hôtel-Dieu is an oasis of Catholicism in a country dominated by Protestants. Although it has served Le Perjure's purposes not to turn away women who choose to abort their pregnancies, we do not condone such acts as per His Holiness' guidance. But the predominant population is not as opposed.

The first invasion is the massive influx of Catholics from Ireland and Germany over the past several years, the scale of which has the Protestant base quite concerned. There have been clashes and religious fervour, the likes of which we haven't seen for some time. The news from Charlestown, Massachusetts, of the Ursuline Convent riots last year worried us greatly. The anti-Catholic movement fanned the flames of an allegation of atrocities at the Charlestown convent and the locals rioted and burned it to the ground. Since that time, over 16,000 mostly Irish or German Catholic immigrants have settled in Upper and Lower Canada. Fear and loathing simmer just below society's surface. Montréal is a powder keg, not unlike Charlestown. We Catholics fear the same unrest could happen here; in fact, were it not that our convent is located within the city's main hospital, which we serve, it possibly would have already.

The second, more tragic, invasion is in the form of The Blue Death.

Cholera — nicknamed The Blue Death in these parts because its victims' lips turn blue in the disease's final stages — landed with the Irish ship *Carrick* in Québec in 1832 and has been circulating since. Our fresh water comes from nearby rivers via stone water chutes that transfer it to cisterns located in strategic locations around the city. One such cistern is located at the convent. Over the last two years, we have begun to suspect that the age of this system has contributed to the spread of cholera. Those of us with means have water carted in daily from districts untouched by the disease, and the frequency of the Blue Death in our households has diminished greatly. I have already persuaded

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the Montréal city council of the need to replace the current fresh-water system, but that will take some years.

I sat at Mary Lumena's bedside in her austere, white room holding her hand while I wiped her face with a soft damp cloth. I had my staff bring fresh water from our supply, but looking at Mary-Lumena now, I sensed things had probably gone too far for it to make much difference. Mary-Lumena was conscious and lucid, but that would not last for much longer, I feared.

"Mary-Lumena, you know it must be Angélique! Your daughter must continue service in your stead as we have planned for decades," I pleaded.

"No, Esmé. I will not condemn her to the same sad life I have endured. Find someone else, I implore you." Mary-Lumena's voice was quiet from the stress of fighting diarrhea and sickness, but she spoke with authority.

"There is no one else suitable, Mary-Lumena. And as much as you have always resisted, I made this decision a decade ago. Le Perjure's needs must take precedence. As I have with you, I will ensure she bears children and furthers your line, rest assured."

"Esmé, I will not leave her to that fate. Assure me now you will put her on a better path. You are head of Le Perjure; bring in someone from another country. Bring Anna back from New York. She would love to be nearer to Jaz."

We argued for some 30 minutes, neither giving ground, until Mary-Lumena once again was wracked with fits of vomiting and diarrhea. After awhile, she finally slept. I left her in peace, resolving to visit and try again the next morning. Despite her condition, there was a rage in her belly, and I fully sensed that the rift, which I had worked so hard to resolve, had ripped wide apart again. Mary-Lumena untimely death, forcing me to press Angélique into her mother's role before she had the chance to enjoy life, would be the final straw that broke the camel's back. Had I known that the mortally injured camel was about to leap up off its deathbed and bite me, I may have considered Anna's returning to Montréal more seriously.

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3: THE ESCAPE OF MARIA MONK

Montréal, November 1835

[Jaz] – Grandmother left us in the parlour, going to her rooms to change while López had her carriage brought to the front steps. As she sailed past the parlour doors — which were of course open wide for decorum’s sake as Timothée and I were unchaperoned — she suggested it was proper for Timothée to be on his way. Our joyful reunion had deflated in any event, given Mary-Lumena’s dire circumstances and the unsettling visit of Lord Roth. We arranged to meet for luncheon the next day, ideally with our bright moods restored.

I retired to the library and read, emerging only when I heard Grandmother returning.

“I fear we may lose Mary-Lumena in the next day or so, my dear. She has served Montréal and Le Perjure well and will be difficult to replace.” Grandmother looked deeply troubled, and I sensed that perhaps there was more than just Mary-Lumena’s life on her mind, but I did not press for information. She would tell me when she was ready.

We ate a quiet supper before retiring for the night. As I washed my face, I consulted my Adept-sense, which always gave me an indication of Timothée’s direction and distance. I was somewhat put out to sense him in the wrong part of the city. My sense of him was not always precise, but rather than being to the north west, in Sainte-Catherine’s, he was closer and to the southeast, near the convent. I was tempted to dismiss it as some business errand, or him catching up with an acquaintance, but my instinct told me there was trouble in the wind. I was determined to investigate.

I had taken to unescorted trips into the city at night, to learn more of life than I could from my ivory tower here at Grandmother’s house. I had succeeded at this by helping myself to the spare clothing of one of our footmen, whom I compelled

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to turn a blind eye to my comings and goings from his rooms. Dressed in his 'day-off' clothing and hiding my long hair under one of his hats, I had been able to roam freely and study, and even in a few cases befriend some of the lower classes as well as some who practised prostitution as part of their survival strategy in this sometimes harsh city. I expanded my mind, and could not sense Grandmother, which would mean she was already asleep.

In no time at all, dressed as a young man from below stairs, I let myself out into the rear alley and picked my way carefully, avoiding the busier streets, towards Timothée's location. It turned out to be an unassuming guest house two blocks to the south of the convent, towards the docks. As I paused just outside of the pool of light thrown by the gas streetlamp, and concentrated on the house intensely, I sensed Angélique as well as Timothée.

A surge of jealousy arose, imagining them together for the merest seconds, but that thought I quickly dispelled. I knew I could trust Timothée if he was allowed to act of his own volition, but I certainly didn't trust Angélique not to seduce him using her fledgling Adept talents, as she had joked of it often. But as I concentrated, I could sense other people in the room, too. One I sensed was Lord Roth, by the distinct, dominant aura that had overwhelmed our parlour this afternoon. There was a fourth person, I was sure, but aside from their presence, I could sense nothing else from this distance.

I considered my options and did not like the idea of leaving Timothée defenceless while I went to Grandmother with this development — nor the thought of explaining how I discovered such a thing to her — and so a direct approach seemed the best. I was sure that if she hadn't already done so, Angélique would probably sense my presence soon, anyway.

I marched to the front door, which was not locked, and let myself inside. A small reception area led to a narrow corridor, and through a door on the right I could see lamps blazing. I walked into the small room, which turned out to be the guest house's dining room.

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“What on earth brings you abroad at this hour, Jaz?” said Angélique, turning to meet me as I entered. When she noted how I was dressed, she was speechless. Lord Roth stood in front of a smouldering fireplace, overseeing the gathering. Timothée stood and stepped to me, equally struggling to piece together my sudden, strange appearance. Seated at the dining table, and clearly in some deep distress, was a woman perhaps three years my senior wearing the distinctive black habit of the convent.

“I had that exact question for you and Timothée, Angélique.” I had long since put away my jealousy but it made a convenient foil for me to explain my appearance.

“Jaz, there is no need to be concerned on that score,” asserted Timothée, evidently taking some affront at the suggestion. “Angélique approached me on a matter of mercy, seeking my help in a subject of some sensitivity.” I extended my senses fully, but could find no suggestion that Angélique was currently influencing his thinking. Although, if she had done so earlier, I would not be able to tell.

“Jaz, you won’t believe it; I still can’t although I have seen it with my own eyes.” Angélique stepped over to me, quite agitated. “Mother’s sickness required me to step into her duties since yesterday, and I’ve uncovered something terrible. This poor waif is Maria Monk,” she pointed to the nun, who was sobbing quietly. “She came to me in distress, fearful for her life and for that of her unborn babe. She maintains – and I have seen some evidence of it now – that a tunnel exists between the convent and the priory, through which priests come in the night to satisfy their baser needs. They compel nuns to suffer sexual relations, relying on their positions as priests and implying these are ‘sacred acts.’ I thought such behaviour could not endure if Mother was aware, but I’ve since discovered that not only is she aware, she condones the abuse.”

“How can this be?” I asked, completely taken aback.

“I’m afraid there is worse still: Those nuns who fall pregnant are given herbs, against His Holinesses’ edicts, to end the pregnancies. The priests maintain these exceptions are

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sanctified by His Holiness. There have been a few occasions on which the herbs have not had the intended effect and babies have been delivered. The priests, they... I can't even say it, Jaz. They give them the last rites, then they strangle them to death." She fell into a grave silence.

"That I can't believe, Angélique. I really can't."

"But it's true. I've seen the evidence myself," put in Lord Roth. "In the cellars there is a lime pit containing decomposing remains. There are two gaol cells adjacent, where I imagine the pregnant nuns live out their terms."

"I'm sorry, Lord Roth, but how could you gain admittance? No men are allowed within the convent." An unexpected, gut-twisting wave of fear came on suddenly, then evaporated just as quickly. I could tell by their reactions that both Maria and Timothée had also become terrified for an instant. Lord Roth is an Adept; I understood immediately why Grandmother had thought him so dangerous. I could also deduce by Angélique's lack of reaction that she was already aware of his abilities.

"This poor child smuggled me into the convent after darkness and showed me the evidence," explained Roth, nodding at Maria. I was sure this was a lie for the benefit of the non-Adepts present. I have heard that the ability of some Adepts go unseen past rooms full of people. I considered the situation.

"Then let's adjourn to Grandmother's house and rouse her. She will have the authorities investigate," I suggested.

"Dear Jaz," offered Timothée, "Lord Roth and Angélique have explained the danger in doing just that. That was their first thought, too. But on reflection, with the anti-Catholic sentiments and tempers as they are, that path could end in riots and even put your Grandmother at risk. Besides, if my mother is party to these crimes, could you Grandmother also be? Can we take such a chance?"

"What course do you suggest?" I asked, shocked at her suggestion.

"Lord Roth has just approached me and requested I take Sister Maria out of the city at once. He helped her escape the

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clutches of the convent for that very purpose. He proposes Ville de Paris sails on the tide, in the next hour. And I have agreed to take him at least as far as New York.”

“But you’ve just arrived, Timothée. Were you to leave without word?” He looked sheepish; but more than that, I sensed confusion. I strongly suspected he had been helped along in his decision.

“Of course, I would have left word, Jaz. I was about to set pen to paper when you arrived. You understand there are lives at stake?” he answered defensively.

I felt Roth and Angélique readying their powers in case I resisted. They were set on a course of action and it seemed they could not be dissuaded. I believed that together they could overcome any resistance from me. I made a snap decision to stay at Timothée’s side and extract him from this situation at a better time.

“Then hand me the pen and paper, Timothée. I’m accompanying you. I will leave word for Grandmother. Angélique, this is a heavy burden on you. When your dear mother passes, her burden will be yours, and you will be able to prevent further atrocities. I know that if you approach Grandmother, you will find an ally.”

“No. You misunderstand, Jaz,” replied Angélique. “I am going, too. I’ll have no part of this horror. Lord Roth has agreed I can accompany him to England. I will approach *our family* in London. I imagine your mother will be recalled from New York to replace my mother.”

“But your mother needs you, Angélique.”

“On the contrary, Jaz. She understands and even suggested this course. She is concerned for my safety if her part in this comes out. We have already said our goodbyes.”

“It’s settled then. Let’s go. The tide won’t wait, and we can’t be in the city come morning.” Lord Roth’s tone was final, and he filled the room with an energy that made resistance unwelcome.

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There had been no packing of outfits or weepy goodbyes. I scribbled a note to Grandmother with just the facts. Whatever I wrote would invoke a wrath I really didn't want to be here to see, so I simply gave a few details and suggested she focus on keeping the events Maria had revealed quiet, and to expect my return within two weeks.

Lord Roth summoned a runner used by the guest house staff and into his hands I delivered my note, with instructions to deliver it to López immediately, despite the hour. Lord Roth saw him to the door while we wrapped Sister Monk up in a cloak – for secrecy more than warmth – and then walked the short distance to the slip. Timothée had obviously sent word ahead, as most of the lines had already been drawn in and were then cast off as soon as we stepped off the gangplank. A small sail at the foremast deployed first, swinging the bows towards the main current, soon followed by the mainsails, causing us to rapidly leave the dock.

We were perhaps a quarter of a mile downstream when I felt Grandmother's mental tug and I stepped to the rail to see her stepping from a carriage on the wharf. She was surrounded by footmen. As the strong breeze carried us swiftly out of sight, I felt her staring after us all of the way to Widow's Bend.

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4: AN ADEPT'S DEATH

Montréal, November 1835

[Esmé] – When Adepts die, our whole community senses it, no matter where we are. The sensation lessens with long distances, but we feel all Adepts' passing. With less than a mile between my house on Notre-Dame Street and the Hôtel-Dieu, Mary-Lumena's passing woke me up sharply.

I rose and rang the bell, and soon the maids had me dressed. López had sent for my carriage and, while we waited in the hallway, he brought me a cup of warm tea as well as some bread and cheese. He was uncomfortable with such a casual food offering, but I assured him it was acceptable in the circumstances.

I had originally decided to let Jaz sleep, but then changed my mind; with Angélique's rebellious nature, it would serve Le Perjure well to have Jaz spend time supporting her until my youngest, Jane, arrived to oversee Angélique's transition into Mary-Lumena's role. I had dispatched a message to Jane yesterday, instructing her to drop everything and return from New York immediately. It would take two to three weeks for her to receive the message and make the trip to Montréal.

I sent a maid to wake Jaz with instructions that she should follow me to Hôtel-Dieu at once but at a more reasonable pace than I intended to proceed. My insides turned to ice when the maid returned to say Jaz's bed had not been slept in and there was no sign of my granddaughter. *Could she be with Timothée in Saint-Catherine's?* Casting my Adept mind outwards, I sensed them both together; but close by, not across the river in his room.

“López, what did you learn last evening regarding Lord Roth's accommodations during his sojourn? I had asked López to initiate clandestine investigations into anything that could be discovered about Roth's time in Montréal, so I expected he had

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some information that would have arrived after I retired the previous evening.

“Madame, I understand he took a guest room – if we can call it that – on Rue Amherst. That is in the poorer neighbourhood, which we typically avoid by skirting it to the south when we travel to Hôtel-Dieu,” he clarified. “I have also learned that Mother Mary-Lumena and Lord Roth have been meeting daily, and for several hours at a time, since his arrival in Montréal ten days ago.”

As I digested this, the carriage pulled around to the front door. I had López call two footmen to accompany us and to send a third to the city guard to ask them to bring a force to Roth’s accommodation. As my Adept senses focussed on Jaz and Timothée, and now Roth, I could feel them all close to one another, and that Angélique was also in the vicinity.

The ride to Rue Amherst would take but a few minutes at this hour. Although we typically circumnavigate this district, I knew well what businesses were established there. Montréal has a significant population of single men desiring female company, and married men of sufficient stature able to afford the anonymity necessary to indulge their extra-marital tastes. We are a city with a large army of our own, and the fortress is a staging post for the army’s operations elsewhere. We are one of the busiest ports on the continent. This brings sailors and some 8,000 new immigrants per year, who are mostly Catholics, and mostly male. All of this results in Montréal having no shortage of brothels and ‘ladies of the night.’

With so much trade, the Legislative Assembly – which I control using my Adept powers of persuasion even though women have no presence or role in it – has spent much time ensuring it remains a profitable and safe operation. Some voices in the Assembly call for prostitution amongst the common classes to be repressed, but I quash those ideas: If we don’t service this need in a mostly male, still somewhat frontier-natured town, it will service itself. Violently.

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Our economy and weather also provide hardships that need creative and flexible solutions. Despite the low proportion of women to men, there is not enough work that women are typically 'allowed' to do to give them a viable income. Interestingly, the cost of renting a room for the purposes of prostitution costs five times what your average male carter or cooper earn, yet a prostitute can earn enough to afford to pay that cost. In the warmer months, when transient workers and an influx of immigrants cause the population to swell, prostitution is a viable business for women. A few are so successful, that they have formed a shadow-middle-class, and it is this group that invokes the most calls from the wealthy to suppress prostitution. The upper echelons fear their own status being undermined; and, in a sense, the prostitutes have greater autonomous buying power than the wives of the privileged rich folk. Most other prostitutes will be able to put at least enough money to the side to see out the cold winters when trade slows dramatically; others – perhaps those who must pay husbands, madams, or pimps – are more creative and desperate. They maintain relationships with the local constabulary and the courts, through which they gain food and warmth by essentially accruing prison time to serve out in the winter, as part of their annual survival strategy.

So, the Legislative Assembly has a responsibility to ensure, quite subtly, that this less tasteful part of our economy prospers. One aspect of that responsibility is to recognise that not everyone enjoys the same...tastes. The area around Rue Amherst has been a poorer neighbourhood for decades, but we have encouraged those in our society who prefer the company of their own sex to establish their lives and businesses here. Sodomy is a capital offense, even if rarely prosecuted to this fullest extent. Molly Houses – taverns, public houses, and coffeehouses frequented by men who prefer males – provide a level of protection, as their few blocks of close-knit community weed out those who would cause trouble. Having platonic meetings in Molly Houses is not illegal, and so it is then easy to slip behind closed doors to hide any

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sexual activity from potential blackmailers and the odd, misinformed constable.

Many people do not classify Molly Houses as brothels, as they are first and foremost places for platonic meetings between men; sexual activities there are rarely for money. Yet the Assembly lumps this demographic in together with brothels and, in most cases, treats them as a lower class.

The term ‘Molly’ derives from several sources: In Latin, *mollis* indicates the passive, effeminate partner in an all-male relationship. In a 1767 French-English dictionary, Molly is defined as a sodomite. The people in this district are simpler folk and believe Molly is the pet form of Mary, and a mare is a female horse. This corruption of language commonly represents the ‘equine-female’ position during mating, a metaphor to suggest that the Molly is on his knees, mounted from behind by his lover.

A guesthouse, which is almost certainly also a Molly House in this district, is an odd place to find Lord Roth, the British landowner and member of polite society. But for Lord Roth – the ruthless and powerful Adept, gangster, and murderer that I know him to be – it is a location from which he can maintain a safe, low profile. He can pursue his prey at will, as the law doesn’t investigate deaths with any rigor on these ‘heathen’ streets.

As the carriage was only a few blocks from our destination, I felt that Jaz et al were on the move. My sense of others’ locations is not accurate enough for me to set an intercept course, so I decided to stop at the guesthouse to see what we could learn and to wait for the city guard to catch up. A footman helped me alight from the carriage, and López led us inside; the door was not bolted and the house was quiet. It was soon evident that there were four occupants, and all were dead. The footman who found the first corpse rushed past me back outside with an apology and emptied his guts in the gutter.

“All four occupants of the house are dead, Madame,” explained López, following his quick inspection of the entire property, which he conducted to save me from the experience. He had no idea I had seen many things that would drive him

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insane, but I appreciated his consideration. “All four have had their throats cut cleanly, in the same style. Oddly, there is no sign of a struggle or fight. They were not in bed asleep. They appeared to have been killed where they stood, to fall into a neat pile and bleed to their deaths without protest. What devil could do this?” Some male Adepts like Roth hunt by immobilising their prey. They overwhelm them with powerful projections of fear, then they can then take their time with their victims who are unable to move to defend themselves. Whereas Le Perjure takes great lengths to avoid killing to get what we need to survive, the likes of Roth kill and take pleasure in their dominance.

“López, I know you wish to save me from these horrors but tell me plainly,” I said, using my mind to reinforce my request. “Are any of the four men otherwise injured?”

“Yes, Madame. How could you know? One has had his skull opened, and his brain has been cut.” Adepts need mother’s blood to survive, but some Adepts believe that some parts of either gender can enhance other abilities. My concern for Jaz grew with this news. We needed to get moving.

“Let’s get outside and into the carriage. There is nothing more we can do here. Leave it for the city guard. Are they here yet?” We went outside and almost ran into the third footman that López had dispatched for the guard. He was alone, and in ragged breaths he explained why.

“I’m sorry, Madame, but there are riots starting. The guard has called in everyone who was not on duty and they are organising defences and attempting to quell the disorder. The captain said he had no one to spare.”

“Riots? Why are there riots?” I asked, nonplussed, although I didn’t really expect him to know the answer either. My clandestine involvement in the upper echelons of Montréal leaves me well informed of any brewing civil unrest, and I knew of no ongoing situation which would stimulate such civil unrest.

“It’s the convent at Hôtel-Dieu, Madame. There have been accusations of atrocities. Apparently, the Catholic priests have been murdering innocent children and raping women. A mob of

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protestants is attempting to gain entrance to the convent, but a larger group of Catholic immigrants have barricaded the approaches to the convent and there is a fragile stand-off.”

The powder-keg of religious politics I understood, but I could not fathom how such a story could have any substance. I reached out again to locate Jaz. She could not get caught in such violent actions. I was relieved at first to sense she was heading to the south, away from Hôtel-Dieu. Then I realised what lay in that direction: The docks.

“Everyone, into the carriage. Quickly. I believe Lord Roth has kidnapped Jaz and Timothée de Relieur. To the docks, with all speed.” To their credit, no one questioned my deduction, which was interesting because – in my haste – I had forgotten to use my mind to enforce my will.

It took an age to reach the docks and we were too late. *Ville de Paris* was several hundred yards downstream, under full sail and making good speed in the strong, growing wind.

“López, find horses and follow that ship. You’ve seen what Lord Roth can do so do not approach him. I want to know if Jaz and Timothée alight anywhere. If there is a chance to rescue them without Roth present, do so; but otherwise, information is more precious than wasting people.” This time, I used the full force of my mind to ensure compliance.

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By 9 am, the small council of the Legislative Assembly had been called together and John Molson presided as they heard reports from various sources and pieced together the picture. I sat alone, a few paces behind Molson in the closed meeting, but no one would remember my presence afterward.

The story the Assembly gathered together was that a Sister of some standing in the convent, a Maria Monk, had escaped enforced captivity and claimed that all sorts of atrocities had been committed in the cellars under the Hôtel-Dieu. She had been aided by a protestant man of means and the outline of an

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exposé was drafted and handed to notable community leaders. Maria Monk herself was unavailable, as she had been whisked to safety and said to be on route to New York. Various people had suggested that the exposé would be completed and distributed to bring pressure on authorities to ensure a proper investigation into these accusations and the Montréal Catholic leadership.

I was ready to use my powers to nip this nonsense in the bud but as the information rolled into the Assembly, it became apparent that this was more than just rumour mongering. There were accusations that Mary-Lumena had taken her own life – another mortal sin that built belief that she was capable of other greater sins – when it was clear the news would break. A statement, a confession of sorts said to be penned by Mary-Lumena from her death bed, was presented to the Assembly. It was said she wrote it after I sensed her death, and so I knew it to be a fake. There were counter claims that she had succumbed to The Blue Death, but a notable physician gave more credence to the suicide claim. That was my first indication that Adept influence lay behind these rumours. I could tell during the doctor's testament that his mind had been influenced by Mary-Lumena.

Such skewed testament led me quickly to one shocking conclusion: Mary-Lumena and Lord Roth had planned this whole episode. I could think of two reasons: Roth belonged to a group of Adepts who called themselves The Chord and they were notorious for creating strife that they could hide behind to kill at will and disguise their nefarious acts in the chaos. *Perhaps he was behind the recent Boston Riots, too?* The other reason was much closer to home. Mary-Lumena had taken steps to ensure that Hôtel-Dieu would be closed forever, freeing Angélique from a lifetime as a nun. The more I considered this, the surer I became that Mary-Lumena and Roth had manufactured this situation. But why was Jaz involved?

As I looked at the man in front of me, John Molson, the beginnings of a plan formed. Having spent many years with this Assembly, my thrall over them was complete, and I knew I could

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interact with the group without challenge or them recalling that I had done so.

“Monsieur Molson, may I suggest a course of action?” I didn’t wait for a response. Our skills work best if we position our orders as suggestions and use our minds to ensure they are well received. “There seem to be many contradictory aspects to this situation, and I am glad that wise and experienced men – such as those who make up this Assembly – have the presence of mind to slow down events and investigate diligently. I believe the crowds will be soothed if you appoint a non-partisan committee to investigate and take time to ensure such a committee has the buy-in from all sides before proceeding. A few weeks would ensure you have things right, don’t you think?”

John Molson didn’t reply to me, but he repeated these thoughts to his peers, as if they were his own. They proceeded to build a solid plan with minimal further influence from me. If Roth reached New York and stirred up matters there, the pressure to act could undo what I could accomplish here, and so it was important we act quickly to head off his plans.

“Perhaps it’s time to let the Assembly break to put your well-thought-out plan into action, Monsieur Molson. And, could I ask for a few moments alone with you?”

Molson had the ability to help me move quickly and perhaps catch up on the head start Roth had over me. Molson’s sons were now carrying the load from his brewing business, leaving him free to preside over several other useful assets.

In 1819, Molson had a bout of sickness that caused him to note that Hôtel-Dieu was overstretched with just 30 beds. He proposed to the Assembly that they commission the building of a larger hospital – some 200 beds – and the Montréal General Hospital has since been opened on Craig Street. This has been useful to the city, of course, but also allowed Mary-Lumena to be more selective in the cases her nuns accepted so that she could ensure we didn’t turn away those who could supply mother’s blood.

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Molson originally declined a partnership in the Montreal Bank in 1817, as such enterprises had recently failed in America. But he changed his mind when the American partners in the bank sold their shares and the British Government gave the bank its Charter in 1822. The bank was renamed as The Bank of Montreal, and Molson has presided over its affairs since 1826. As head of the bank, and the Legislative Assembly, he has been a useful, if unwitting, ally to Le Perjure for a decade.

Molson also has two other interests that I could leverage in this crisis. To make his business more effective, he has been investing in two technologies. He built the first practical railway in Lower Canada, which is complete but undergoing tests before being formally opened next summer. His plan is to portage his goods from the St Lawrence and across land by train to the Champlain Lake, across which he can import goods to the north-eastern American states. He has also been pioneering steamships on the St Lawrence and the Champlain. He built *The Accommodation*, the first steamship built on the St Lawrence, in 1809. Although that ship was a failure, it gave him the experience to build the growing fleet of faster vessels he could now provide for our use.

Molson is also something of a godfather to Timothée. Their joint love of innovation and technology keeps them up at all hours when Timothée is in town. Timothée keeps rooms in Molson's mansion in Sainte-Catherine's.

My plan depended on us reaching New York before Lord Roth. I would need to be there along with both Jane and Anna if we were to succeed against such a powerful adversary. I would need to move quickly, and intercept Jane, asking her to join me here.

The roads to New York are poor in winter. If you can make it to Québec City, the St Lawrence opens and, as long as the ice is moderate, a ship circumnavigating Newfoundland could reach New York faster than the overland route, especially if it doesn't stop in Boston. The other route is Molson's railway to Champlain, which I knew had been cleared from the recent

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snowfall to allow for his test runs. This railway connected to his lake shipping fleet, and a steamship fitted with an icebreaker – if needed – could take us over 150 miles south, where we could join warmer roads for the remaining journey to New York.

When Molson heard that Jaz and his godson Timothée were in peril, it took almost no mental persuasion on my part to get him to put these assets at my disposal. I made a mental note to ensure that if we survive this, Le Perjure would help ensure his enterprises thrived for his descendants as payment for helping to save mine. We left together and, after a brief stop at my house for clothing and supplies, we headed to his railway. The race was on.

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5: A DIFFERENT MAN

[Jaz] – The sun seemed to rise faster than expected. I put this down to the excitement of our escape, coupled with being in such a ship for the first time, and being with Timothée on this adventure. I had been on a small paddle-steamship belonging to the Molsons, but nothing with sails this large before. I felt thrilled when it tilted alarmingly with each gust of wind. It was amazing that we felt hardly any wind, as the ship was moving with the breeze, yet we could see it was blowing hard on the water and whipping the flags on the shore at the narrows of Île de Grâce.

With the wind and tide in our favour, we easily outpaced any shore-bound pursuit, but that would change when the tide turned in a few hours. Timothée estimated we would reach Québec City 17-20 hours after we set sail. A horse ridden hard on firm, dry ground could cover that distance in roughly the same time. Our advantage was that there was precious little dry ground this time of the year. If we could make it past l'Île-d'Orléans – an island just east of Québec City and the last narrow in the river before the St Lawrence broadens and runs out to the sea – we would have little to worry about from pursuers. At this time of year, we should outpace anyone taking the direct, cross country route to New York.

I wanted to get Timothée away from the others to discuss matters, but he was constantly ensuring the ship's trim was optimum and that we wrung out every knot possible. I had promised myself I would never use my Adept talents on him, and I wouldn't break that vow now, despite feeling distinctly ignored. I noted in previous meetings that when it is just the two of us, he is quite attentive, but if John Molson or anyone else is present, I seem to recede from his mind. I fight an internal battle: *What right do I have to expect his undivided attention when I will never fully commit to him due to my Le Perjure obligations?* As

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the morning wore on, excitement in being on this trip with him, despite the dire circumstances, rapidly waned.

I felt a childish jealousy of the *Ville de Paris* and its crew, so I drew my cloak around my shoulders more tightly and scaled the pitched deck to reach the door to the aft cabins where Maria Monk was being housed. I could use my time better by getting the truth of things from her.

I stepped off the main deck into a short, narrow passage with several hatches and doors leading to farther into the ship; the Captain's cabin was straight ahead, and he had generously put it at the disposal of the three women on board. He was bunking with Timothée elsewhere. There was a sailor on duty at the door, but I was not sure if it was to keep curious crew away, or to keep Maria inside. He made no effort to block me as I passed. In fact, he helped me open the hefty wooden door, made heavier as I had to lift it against the angle of the ship.

The Captain's cabin was the largest on board, we were told, but it was still smaller than most rooms in Grandmother's house. The most striking feature was the rear facing, decoratively carved, panelled windows that ran almost floor to ceiling and wall to wall, providing a magnificent view from the stern. A small desk sat in front of the windows; it had been cleared of charts and set with food and water. To the side was a small bed on which Maria sat with Angélique. Two small cots had already been erected on the other side of the space. Broad beams a foot deep spanned the ceiling, supporting the planking that formed the poop-deck above our heads and adding a sense of grandeur to the cabin. Most of the load-bearing wood was a light-coloured oak, and various panels and furniture were made of a darker, reddish maple which, together with many intricate wooden carvings in the shape of rope, added greatly to the décor.

"Would you like me to sit with Sister Maria while you get some air?" I ventured to Angélique.

"So thoughtful, Jaz, but no." The lack of explanation, as much as her tone, told me she was there to guard against my probing rather than for the health of the nun. I decided to

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continue to play the dupe, even though I felt sure Angélique knew that I was quite suspicious. I had told no one that I saw Grandmother at the dockside and that pursuit might be closer than they expected. At the time, I saw no sign that Angélique or Lord Roth had noticed Grandmother's mind reach across the water.

I ate breakfast, wishing Timothée had thought to come and eat with us and, with nothing else to do, I went topside again where I found it warmer now that the sun was high. Timothée saw me and walked over, leaning into the pitching deck as unconsciously as I would walk across a room at home. He was filled with boyish excitement, sharing tidbits about the wind changing as the sun climbing higher; how this design of the hull allowed us to maintain speed despite the changing angles; and something about the rigging design being new. It was sweet to hear, and perhaps some of my earlier rancour might have faded if I hadn't been aware that his thoughts didn't stray to *my* needs or the reason for, and consequences of, the voyage. It was clear Angélique had touched his mind and the jealousy I had for *Ville de Paris* earlier paled in comparison with the emotion that swamped me at that moment. *What else had she done with him?*

As I wallowed in my funk, I reflected on how just 24 hours ago, I had stood longingly on the rooftop of Grandmother's house straining for a glimpse of Timothée on this very ship. Yet now I was so full of negative emotions. The more I thought it through, I realized the true driver for my change of heart was seeing him for the first time in his true element. Seeing how happy this made him brought it home that he would always be away on adventures, while I stayed in Montréal. He would grow in ways that would leave me behind and I would rarely see him. My feelings of anger subsided but my stomach clenched with upset. *Have I already started to grieve the loss of him?* I returned to the Captain's cabin and lay quietly on one of the bunks, trying not to let Angélique see my tears.

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I must have drifted off to sleep because the flat, snowy farmland and choppy river I could see receding through the stern window was lit with the glorious reds and oranges of dusk. Shafts of soft light struck downwards through swaddled clouds to spotlight random features. I had awoken alert, sensing Lord Roth enter the cabin. A glance told me that his arrival had also awoken Angélique and Maria, the former appearing nervously smug, the latter somewhat terrified. I discovered I had readied myself, too, although I know not for what.

Roth took several paces into the cabin towards me. His gait had an air of disrespect for the fact that these were temporarily female quarters, and manners would dictate greater deference in here. His look was openly predatory. As easily as I can elicit lust in another, I can equally stimulate sexual insecurity and doubt, and I allowed an unbidden surge of such a feeling to emanate openly. But it had little visible effect on Roth. One corner of his mouth rose in a dismissive sneer.

“You and I need to walk and talk, Mademoiselle,” he commanded, plainly directing his attention to me. I stood and pulled my shawl around my shoulders, ensuring I stood tall and did not show any of the fear that I felt. He led the way out of the cabin and across the deck to the starboard rail. He stopped and studied me as a butcher might study a carcass before taking the animal apart. I pretended to survey the deck, trying hard to not look like I was seeking support – and Timothée’s protection in particular. Not that his physical prowess would assist under such circumstances. Perhaps it was as well he was nowhere in sight. I wondered briefly if his absence was why Roth had picked this moment to approach me.

“Do you know what I am?” Roth’s question had no preamble, but I knew exactly what he meant.

“I have some idea, sir.” I hadn’t planned to use such a term of respect and cursed myself for letting him get under my skin. “You are an Adept, and it feels like you are capable. Esmé has counselled me that male Adepts, and your faction in particular,

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have a tendency towards using your talents more violently and selfishly than Le Perjure.” I felt my frankness might set him back somewhat, but instead he smiled.

“Violently, probably, but if Angélique is an example of your kind, I am not sure we are more selfish.” His comment touched on my concern that Angélique might have seduced Timothée. I flushed with rage and stood at least an inch taller.

“The Chord and Le Perjure have coexisted for centuries and largely keep out of each other’s business. There is enough in this world for both factions, and we are too few to waste ourselves on each other. So, I have no desire to quarrel with you today. It is evident you are at least partially aware of what is occurring. It would be very unfortunate if, in ignorance, you tried to act against me and created a situation that would bring our respective factions into conflict. I am sure Esmé will have spared a delicate flower like you the details of what I am, so I will demonstrate. It is important you realise you are powerless here, and that your safest course and policy is one of non-interference.”

Without warning, he released a power like I have never felt before. Stronger than Grandmother’s fullest, and much colder and darker. I slammed shut my mental defences as a vast terror descended on the ship. Men stopped abruptly, and to a man, they looked not at us, but in the very opposite direction. It was as if they had become aware of a vast leviathan or giant squid suddenly surging from the river and threatening them and were so terrified by it, they had to avert their eyes and look everywhere else so as not to draw its attention down on themselves. They resembled frightened rabbits, frozen in the path of a fox. Then, some dropped to the deck, while others muttered prayers to gods that they may not have spoken to for some time.

As his power assailed my senses, I felt it shift subtly. The crew fell silent, some still, others swaying slightly, all trance-like. Roth turned and walked among them, and not a one seemed to register his presence. Near the far rail was the man who earlier today had guarded our cabin. He had been kind enough to help

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me with the heavy door. Roth stood in front of him and, taking the sailor's face in one hand, turned the man so his back was to the rail. The man could do nothing but look at Roth plainly, yet he didn't seem to see him at all. Roth pulled a slim, wicked looking blade from a hidden sheath in his coat and held it in plain sight, right in front of the poor sailor's eyes. Before I could react, Roth purposefully and obviously reached forward and placed the knife at the sailor's throat, but the man was so in Roth's thrall, the only reaction was that the man closed his eyes, and perhaps shrank into himself in terror. Roth pulled the blade across the man's throat and blood began to flow openly. Despite what must have been agony from a fatal cut, still the man didn't move. With a shove, Roth pushed the man backwards over the rail, sending him tumbling into the dark water. Roth turned and walked back through the crew, none of whom seemed to have marked the event or noticed a thing. He wiped his blade clean on the sleeve of another hapless sailor as he addressed me with a sickening smugness.

"We are like gods. We can do as we wish with these inferior creatures." I wanted to run from this monster and his arrogance, but I found I was rooted. Bile ascended in my throat and I gagged it back. He opened his coat and fingered the top of a document in his inner pocket before continuing. "This letter was written and signed by young Timothée. It instructs the crew of *La Caronette*, his transatlantic steamship, to fuel up and meet us just off the coast. It also tells them to recognise me and my party as having chartered them and, as they sail us to England, to obey my wishes entirely." He paused to let this sink in. "You know what this means, Jaz?" I hated that he used my name so casually; I felt the bile rise in my throat.

"You are unsubtle, Lord Roth. You are telling me Timothée is expendable on this venture. You are demonstrating both your control and untouchability. You are demonstrating your leverage over me and holding me in check by implying that Timothée, and I for that matter, could follow that poor sailor over the rail if you do not have my cooperation."

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Roth cocked his head slightly, and I intuited perhaps a slight rise in his respect for me.

“We understand each other; you are indeed your grandmother’s granddaughter. I will rely on your non-interference and expect you will even assist in keeping others in line while we are on this brief voyage together.” I did not reply, nor flinch, nor look away. It nearly killed me.

“Remember, I am sharing my intent openly to avoid misunderstandings that would have unfortunate consequences. For you. It is my plan to pause at New Haven, some twenty miles to the north of New York where Angélique, Maria, and you will disembark. You can do as you please, but they are bound for New York, where using their story and a copy of an exposé, they will instigate chaos and strife between the Catholics and Protestants. Timothée and I will rendezvous at sea with his new ship, and he will whisk me across to England where the exposé will stir up passion there, too.” I stared back at him soundlessly.

“I need to hear that you understand and will help ensure events flow smoothly – or at least you will stay out of my business,” he pressed, raising his voice and the power of his mind yet another notch. I shuddered at the thought that he had more reserves and that perhaps this was just part of his power. Still, I sensed things would not go well if I were too compliant.

“Lord Roth, sir,” I replied, keeping my tone as strong and even as I could. “I note your intent. I joined your party sensing something like this was afoot as Timothée is valuable to me personally, but more importantly, is someone Le Perjure has nurtured to play a part in our plans. I could not leave him to your thrall in Montréal and I can’t do so off the coast of New York. I will not interfere with your plan to flee with your exposé to England, but I will not leave Timothée’s side either. He can disembark with me, or you can allow me to escort him to England and return him to our clan once his task for you is complete.”

“You have some spunk, that’s for sure,” he laughed. Then he turned darker. “I could throw you over the side now, and none would even be the wiser.”

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“Except Esmé was on the wharf and saw me depart with you. And her man, López, was sitting on the first bridge we passed under as we entered Québec City. Grandmother has full knowledge I am with you, and will blame you should I not return whole, sir.”

Our eyes were locked tightly as if in a fierce battle of wills, but the reality was that we both knew that he had the upper hand. He was certainly not scared of me, and he was annoyed by my insolence. But he clearly had some respect for Le Perjure, and Grandmother in particular. After an eternity, he broke the deadlock and stalked away. He only walked three strides before stopping and addressing me.

“You will not go ashore when we stop to disembark, but you will give your clothing sizes to the bursar. He will ensure you have clothes and feminine supplies for the journey. You already smell like you have soiled your one outfit.” Without waiting for an answer, he strode off. Immediately the intense wave of mental pressure dissipated, and the crew reanimated. They were disturbed but had no knowledge of what had occurred. Timothée burst out of the cabin, a dagger in his hand, and ran to my side seeking some unseen threat.

“I was asleep, Jaz,” he blurted, “and woke with a premonition that you were in terrible peril. What has happened?” He continuously looked me up and down, confirming I was intact.

“It did feel like a fell-wind blew through. We were all disturbed, but there is no sign of danger, Timothée. But thank you for your attention.” The ‘at last’ was not said, but he sensed the silent suffix.

“I’ve neglected you, Jaz. The crew will take care of the ship for a while. Come and sup with me, please, and let me try to make amends.”

I let him lead me below decks. It took me at least an hour to quell the tremors from the cold breeze and my brush with a monster, of which I could not speak. I settled instead for the

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relief and warmth of being reconnected and intimately aligned with Timothée once again.

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6: A RACE TO NEW YORK

New York, December 1835

[Esmé] – The 170-mile railway journey and steamer portion of our dash to New York went faster than I had any right to expect. Molson’s steamer pushed right to the south end of Champlain Lake and down through the narrows as far as Whitehall in the state of New York in just over 30 hours. We were relieved to find the roads clear and dry. The remaining 240 miles to our destination took ten days by horse, which was still possibly a record for the overall journey.

As I have on many occasions in my life, I dressed as a man to ride astride a horse without drawing much attention, eschewing the slower carriage a lady of privilege would be expected to take. It was tiring continuously convincing John and his two employees travelling with us that my riding in the man’s style was not unusual. We rode an average of 30 miles per day so I was sore and exhausted.

As we travelled south, I sensed Jaz keeping pace with us to the east and suspected it would be a close race. As we set out on the final leg, my senses told me Jaz had stopped short of New York, to the north. Our plan had been to race directly to New York’s dock front, but instead I guided my group through the city’s northern suburbs and met the coast road to the north of Long Island. On arrival I was aghast when I realized we were still at least one more day’s hard ride from our goal. I knew my aging body would not press through the night on horseback, and so we quickly found stables and rented a carriage with drivers who could continue the journey on the better roads while we slept on the move.

When I awoke at dawn, I hailed the driver, who shouted down that we were approaching the outskirts of a small town called New Haven. I pushed out my senses again and knew at once we had just missed Jaz and Timothée. I could feel they were

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out to sea, just over the horizon but moving swiftly. I monitored them until I could tell they were not paralleling the coast, bound for New York, but instead were eastbound for Europe. I cried out in despair, worrying Molson greatly. With deep regret, I had the carriage turned around and we set out for New York at a slightly less urgent pace. Molson was anxious to locate Maria Monk, and get to the bottom of the scandal that we had left The Assembly to resolve but I had no sense of her, having not been close enough to her to build a bond.

We were spent when we arrived at my daughter's residence and after a bath and light meal, we retired to hastily made up bedrooms and I slept soundly until the next morning.

My daughter Anna had sent out men to make inquiries of Maria Monk, and as expected she was located with Lord Roth's cousin at his estate on the Upper East Side of town. Word had already begun to spread alleging atrocities in Lower Canada and stirring up religious unrest here. In the late afternoon I accompanied Molson to visit New York's Governor, and our redacted explanation, with a little mental massaging from me, persuaded him to turn out the guard to assist us to bring Maria into custody. I sensed Jane was nearly back in New York, returning from her aborted dash north, and so we elected to delay until she could join us knowing that when I partnered with my two daughters we were a formidable force.

The next morning a guard of 40 men, accompanied by John and three Adepts, arrived at Roth's cousin's residence. The Chord had two Adepts at the estate, and could possibly fend us off, but they already had the exposé and the testament of several prominent protestant figures and journalists who had interviewed Maria. It was probably now to their advantage that she disappear from New York so that she could not be interviewed by Catholics, so they did not resist as we took her in to custody.

Within three hours Monk, Molson, Jane and I were aboard the same ship that brought Maria to New York, bound to face the music back in Lower Canada.

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7: CAPTAIN SWING

Northern Atlantic Ocean, December 1835

[Timothée] – Through the porthole I could see that the skies were overcast, there was no wind, and the sea was glassy despite the undulating eight-foot swells. The fact that *La Caronette* rode confidently over the rollers – with none of the deck-tilt of sail or the noisy-threshing of paddle-steaming – accentuated the sense of grief I was already filled with for what I must do. This moment, which should have been the crowning achievement of my life, was filled with both pride and with dread; I knew in my heart I was about to lose something I loved dearly. A part of my soul.

My stateroom table was laid for dinner. A robust spread of seafood, along with some fruits and dried meat. The meal was suited for what was essentially a working prototype of a vessel still being invented, and not the elegant fare Jaz and Lord Roth might have expected. Yet their demeanours could not have been more different. Jaz sat to my left and was beautiful in the modest and practical wardrobe we had acquired for her on our brief moorage at New Haven, a thriving port and mercantile centre to the east of New York. I didn't know if it was her straight posture, her skin's glow, her striking countenance, or confident air, but to me she is more radiant than any woman, no matter what she wore. She sat brimming with child-like curiosity, her intelligent questions revealing her innate wisdom. She was genuinely enjoying our astonishing adventure and savouring each new experience, even if it was made for more utility, and less comfort, than she was accustomed. She had even enchanted the crew, who like all sailors are reluctant to have women onboard due to their superstitions. The only wrinkle was her barely veiled dislike for Roth.

Roth, by contrast, was surly and curt, with an air that all things were beneath him. Although slow to share his thoughts and opinions, rarely did his countenance suggest anything other

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than disdain, avarice, arrogance, and, for one moment – which almost caused me to strike him – a lustful glance at Jaz. His words mostly echoed his expression in this regard, unless of course he deemed it worth the effort to strive for a compliment to encourage us to follow his course. These rare occasions felt most disingenuous.

As much as I was not enjoying Roth's company, I dreaded the meal ending. I had asked Jaz for a private moment after dinner, and the thought of the impending line I must soon cross had severely dampened my appetite for the fresh, braised cod on my plate. To distract myself, I asked Roth about his plans once we reached Portsmouth, England.

"I have two pressing matters." He paused to suck the meat of an oyster from its shell and wash it down with a healthy swig of claret. It appeared that Roth's performance was to delay his answer, therewith confirming his self importance by making us hang in attendance for his reply.

"Firstly, I need to put Maria Monk's story into the hands of the newspapers. The people of England and Ireland need to hear about the atrocities and bring pressure on the crown and government." While he attacked his next aquatic victim, I took advantage of the silence to challenge his rationale.

"But sir, surely you have many contacts and much leverage directly with parliament, and with King William himself. If I am not mistaken, don't you know Lord Melbourne, the new Prime Minister, personally? It seems to me Mademoiselle Monk's allegations will just stir up trouble within a populous already filled with unrest. I agree investigation is warranted, but I question the need to sow discord."

"Nonsense. The King is too removed from his people and overly reliant on a government filled with the lazy, the pampered, and with damned reformists." I frowned at his use of bad language in front of Jaz, but he continued oblivious or uncaring; I could not discern which. "It's almost fifty years since the War of Independence wrested America from British control. If Britain is ever going to become an empire, we need to exert stronger self-

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governance and far greater control over our territories. For instance, as we left Montréal, I received news that two men were sentenced by Baron Gurney, who is presiding as judge in their sodomy trial. About now they will be hanging from a rope outside Newgate Prison. We have had strong laws against such disgraces since 1533. By contrast you saw the neighbourhood I roomed at in Montréal, and how such disgusting behaviour is tolerated in the colonies? What worries me the most is the talk from the Progressives that might result in a stay of execution; calls for us to strike buggery from the list of Capital Offences. Government needs to hear from the people that maintaining good order and ethics is a priority. Which brings me to my second task on my return.” He paused for effect again, and I sensed that such pauses were habitual. This time, however, he showed less enthusiasm for his meal.

“Since Waterloo in 1815, we demobilised two hundred and fifty thousand troops, which has flooded the labour market. Many of us landowners see the benefit of embracing technology such as steam engines, threshers, and powered mills. This too is adding to unemployment. There is a risk of hardship, of course, but the timing is exceptionally good. The colonies need to be populated. They have resources in abundance, but no farmers or miners to exploit them.”

“Your task is egalitarian then? You will set up supportive structures to help the displaced workforce prosper for themselves abroad, sir?” inquired Jaz, with an uncharacteristic air of sarcasm.

“Indeed, I will, of course. I have already started companies in Ireland to transport people without cost in return for three years of their labour on arrival. Indenture is good for them, for us, and for Britain. But more pressing is the matter of Captain Swing.”

“I am not familiar with that name, I’m afraid,” I said.

“It is understandable that the displaced workforce is protesting. Who wouldn’t under the circumstances?” In a movement that felt rehearsed, Roth raised his eyebrows and

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spread his arms widely outwards, expressing a warmth that would be quickly blown away by his cold nature. “Protests have been largely peaceful to date, with just a few contained riots. There was some regrettable loss of life and injury to protestors, but no significant damage. But that is changing.” I wondered what significant damage could be if loss of life did not qualify as such. “This Captain Swing, if there is such a person, has been threatening judges, justices, and prominent landowners, as well as inciting the rioters to violence.”

“Do you mean to say that the loss of the rioters’ lives is not significant, but the loss of the lives of the privileged is more of a cause for concern?” Jaz and I were thinking alike, but she was expressing our views more pointedly.

“Mademoiselle, I believe the lives of both factions are equal, I assure you, but I was referring to the risk to property. Arson. I believe that this Swing and his cohorts are behind several arson attacks of late, and that cannot continue. When we land, I mean to get to the bottom of these matters and restore order.”

*

As Lord Roth departed, the air seemed to clear of something foul. Not because he had left the door open behind him to maintain appropriate etiquette, but because his troubling aura departed with him. Jaz and I sat alone in the compartment, which under other circumstances would have been thrilling, yet my heart was heavy. I was about to begin my daunting task when the steward entered to clear the plates. He left some coffee, which I poured to expedite his departure. I considered delaying by asking Jaz her thoughts on Roth but I had had enough of the man for the night. With a deep breath I pulled myself straight and dove into a speech that would create ripples, if not waves, in our lives.

“Jaz, when I requested a private moment, I indicated it was a matter of import, and...well, now I find my prepared speech unacceptable. It is too contrived and thought out, and I would

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prefer to speak plainly. I ask that you don't mistake my simplicity of approach to this topic to imply a lack of gravity. To the contrary, I think this will be one of the most important five minutes of my life."

"Timothée, are you unwell? Tell me you are not dying." Jaz's tone indicated she believed no such thing and her comforting smile helped me focus, so I continued.

"No, I am not dying. I am physically well but my heart aches; I have loved the sea and designing engines and hulls like *La Caronette* for all my adult life with a passion I have never had the opportunity to devote to a woman. But I have undoubtedly reached a crossroads from which there is no turning back. There are two directions I can take; I know which I would choose, but the choice is not mine to make. But either choice results in the end of my lifelong, passionate, nautical relationship. That much is clear to me now."

"I can't think why that could be, Timothée. Please explain. You are worrying me greatly." Jaz looked pained on my behalf, which strangely comforted me, given what I had to say next.

"Jaz, it's so simple and yet so complicated. I love you and want us to be together. My passion for ships is nothing compared to my feelings for you. I don't want to be away at sea for months at a time; I want to be in your bed at night. I want to be a father to your children. *Our* children. I want to grow old *with* you, not apart from you. I'm sorry I neglected you as we left Montréal. I think I was saying goodbye, in some deep way, to my past. But Jaz, I must ask you. Could you ever consider me as a husband? Will you do me a great honour and marry me?"

I wasn't sure what I expected. A delighted yes, or an awkward no, perhaps. But instead, Jaz just sat unmoving, but not unmoved; upright with her head hung forward. After a few seconds, each a year long to me, tears streamed down her flushed cheeks. I reached forward and touched her arm, but she just stared at the table. Whatever her internal struggle, it was agonising to watch. It was clear she thought my proposal had some merit. Her expression was not one of rejection, ridicule, or

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disapproval. It was as if...perhaps she was interested but had another man in her life and I had forced her to confront the choice.

“Jaz, if there is another...”

“No! No! It’s not that. Well, not in the way you are thinking.”

“Then what? I know you have secrets from me. I sense there is more to you than you share. Can’t you trust me? Let me inside? Can I help you resolve them either way, even if not in my favour? I hate seeing you in such distress and I am sorry I have caused it.”

“I’m crying Timothée, because of what you are prepared to sacrifice to be with me. You would give up your whole life’s work. For *me!*”

“But I would gain so much more, Jaz. So *much* more.”

“What you propose, I dearly want, my love. But for me to obtain it, I must also give up something, and I am tested. Yes, there is a secret - or perhaps it is a curse, I’m never quite sure. I hope to be as brave and selfless as you have proven yourself to be.

“In truth my secret is more of a duty than a passion, but it is one I have been raised to take on. Only in my wildest dreams have I considered turning away from it. It means more than shirking my *raison d’être*, my purpose in life. It means leaving my family and all I know, too. Until you spoke your simple words, despite wanting you desperately, I don’t think I considered such a course seriously. I wanted you, but felt you were destined to adventure, and, in turn, I had my duty. But now that you have said the words, it is all I want to do. I do want to marry you, Timothée.” I started towards her, to bring her into my embrace. My heart had already leapt across the gap that separated us physically. But then she held up her hand. Stop.

“But I’m terrified, Timothée. My secret is something you could never imagine. It will shock you, and it will certainly change how you feel about me.” I couldn’t comprehend what such a thing could be, and I said so. I reached for her again, but she put her hand on my chest and held me away.

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“I won’t care, Jaz. Whatever it is. If you are poor. If, God forbid, you are sick or infertile. If you have been married or with a man before. None of it will matter if we are together. It can’t.”

“Timothée, stop! Please. Even if it means you will hate me, be horrified with me, I need to tell you. It cannot be otherwise, please trust me on this, I fear it will be the end of us. But here we are. Let me catch my breath.”

Watching Jaz compose herself was fascinating and heartbreaking; the slew of emotions washing through her, terrifying.

“Before I begin, Timothée, I must solicit a promise from you. A pledge that it is unfair of me to ask of you, without your knowing fully what you are pledging. But you must swear to me anyway, as this impacts others, most of whom I hold in great esteem. It is a joint secret, shared by people who are committed to a proud duty; exposure would hurt them grievously. What I am about to tell you, whether you end up loving me or abhorring me, you must take to your grave. You must swear this to me on all you hold precious, and despite any duty or law you recognise.”

I didn’t hesitate. “I so swear. No one will hear your secret from me, Jaz. No one.” She seemed satisfied and sat a little straighter, with her head tilted back and her shoulders squared. With a long breath she began.

“My family is one of several secret clans. Our clan members have dedicated ourselves for over four centuries to the betterment of humanity. We are agnostic to countries or flags, wealth or creed, the educated or the ignorant. We work in secret for the world’s health, prosperity, and general betterment.”

“That doesn’t sound awful at all, Jaz. How could I help?”

“Well it’s not that simple, of course, Timothée. There are lots of secret societies in the world, serving good causes and bad. Most are what you imagine them to be; normal men and women acting covertly towards some end. But my clan shares something with a very small number of others that is unique and frightening. And in some ways abhorrent, even to us. We have a special power. It sets us apart. Some use this power for good, or

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at least try to. My clan would be an example. Others use it for selfish pursuits, and often evil purposes. It gives us such an advantage, any normal person discovering it will, and should, be fearful of us. Fearful to the point it may cause our incarceration or, more likely, extermination.”

“Now you are worrying me, Jaz. What do you mean, a power?”

“I mean I have a skill, or ability. I could explain it, but it might be easier to demonstrate. If you permit me, my demonstration will not be unpleasant, but...it will change how you see me.”

“Go ahead, I’m fascinated. I can’t imagine what could be so worrying. If you suddenly sprouted two more heads, I would love those as much as the original, I’m sure.”

“*Don’t* be so sure, please. Take this with all seriousness. Our future is at stake, trust me on this. Now, I want you to be conscious of how you feel. Right now. Take a moment to catalogue your emotions. I suspect you are filled with trepidation, some hope, some concern – correct? I doubt in this mixture of emotions there is anything, and please forgive my directness, of a sexual nature. Would I be correct? The oddness of my words will be explained shortly.” I quickly took stock and felt in the main as she described.

“I think we could add puzzled to the inventory, but you are largely correct. Why?” I queried.

“What about now?” As she said those words, everything changed. She seemed to fill the room more, her eyes looked deeper somehow, and I felt I could smell and taste her every particle. I moved in my chair, quite uncomfortable with the astonishing erection that inflated suddenly and determinedly in my breeches. I realized I was breathing faster and my mouth was dry. I wanted Jaz so much, I would do absolutely anything for her. How could she worry I would be put off? Quite the contrary; it was all I could do not to ravage her. It was such an awful thought, that I would entertain the thought of rape at all, that belatedly it occurred that it was amazing I could take stock of

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these changes, because my mind was conjuring up images so explicit that I shocked myself. The desires I felt were primal, but there was more. As filled with lust as I was, there was love. A mountain of it. A world of it. Then as quickly as it had begun, the feeling vanished. I felt hollow and empty, and as realisation dawned, alarmed.

“Jaz, are you...a siren? A creature who can touch the minds of men and drive them mad?” I clamped my lips together, appalled at what had slipped out. She had been staring at me intensely, to analyze my reaction. She suddenly laughed, but it wasn't a wholly happy sound.

“Oh, Timothée. Perhaps I am, but I had never made such a connection. A siren? Perhaps if there are really sirens in the world, then they are my cousins, in nature if not in lineage. My secret is that I can project emotions onto others. Either what I feel truly or, if it suits my purpose, a contrived emotion. I can make you happy or terrified. It is an ability that gives me, and those like me, great power over others. To be used for good or for evil. Now, Timothée, tell me truly: Could you contemplate marrying someone this different? Someone who, perhaps without your knowledge, could control you?” She deflated. This was something she had dwelt on for many years, I felt certain. Evidently, she had determined anyone's answer would be negative.

I pulled my chair nearer and took her hand. I was shocked, but my instinct was that this didn't matter to me. Some people have charisma and influence. Is this so different? I certainly trusted her. I was about to say so, when she spoke, in a whisper. A sad whisper that conveyed how inconsolable she felt. I sensed that the worst was about to come.

“Timothée, there is one more thing and it is the gravest. Worse than who or what I am; it is what I must do to survive.” She stopped short, unable to continue.

“Go on, Jaz. Please.” I prompted gently, squeezing her hand.

“Trust me, I take no joy in satisfying this need. It is purely survival. Something that if avoided will cause me to fade and die.

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Something that I detest each month, when forced to partake. In this, I am perhaps more like a vampire than a siren. To live, I must consume blood from a pregnant woman or one that has recently birthed. There are other, more abhorrent options, but this is the least terrible.” She went on quickly, “I ensure no one is ever hurt; I could never live at the expense of another. It is most important that you believe that, at least. But at its basest, I have a biological need that is cannibalistic.” She fell silent, dejected as she let me process the information.

We sat. Time flew for me; I suspect it was an eternity for Jaz. I knew my instincts and what was in my heart, and her secret and needs made no difference. Not to me. Perhaps it should, but it didn't. However, I knew if I were to ever assuage Jaz's belief that I must now hate her and have her accept my heart's true course, I needed to think this through and demonstrate to her that this was my considered opinion, not just my emotional reaction. So, I sat quietly. I took inventory of the situation, my emotions, and the facts as I knew them, and purposefully organised my thoughts. I don't really know how long this took, but we sat in silence together, hand in hand. When I had considered every option I could, I turned and spoke with confidence.

“Jaz, dear. I love you, and in the future promise you a million questions as I am so curious. But for now, I have but two.” She looked up, expectantly, with the merest glimmer of hope.

“My first question is simple: For this demonstration, why did you choose to project to me the feelings you did?”

“The simple answer is I projected what I felt. No, wait...that's not quite true. I am filled with fear. Fear that you will hate me. I filtered out the fear and sent you the remainder. The positive emotions.”

“My God, Jaz. I felt such lust. But stronger still, a vast, deep love.”

“Yes,” she said simply. “That is how I feel about you. Your second question?”

“The other day, as we sailed up the St Lawrence, the crew and I were gripped in an unnatural fear. So overwhelming I was

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incapacitated. When it subsided, I rushed to find you and witnessed Roth leaving your side. You had a look of disdain for him that scared me more than your revelation today.” I felt my anger growing as I talked, hearing it creep into my tone. Jaz flinched. “What did Roth do to you that caused you to douse him in such disdain? I’ve felt the tension between you two, and now I know he must have tried to take some advantage of you and you fended him off with your skill. For your honour, and that of anyone else he may abuse, I will have it out with him.”

“Oh, Timothée, no!” Jaz exclaimed, panicked. “You must never take him on. I’m not much more than a novice Adept, with little practical experience, restricting myself to using my skill for good. But Roth is evil incarnate. He is an Adept of a different clan, who use their power for only their own diabolical purposes and to the joyful detriment of others. He is an Adept in his prime and a ruthless, cold killer. A monster like you have never imagined. But our clans have a form of truce. If we stay out of his way, we will be rid of him as soon as we dock.”

I took stock and pushed Roth out of my thoughts. I would have it out, or I wouldn’t. Whatever he was, I had more important things to attend to in this room, in this moment.

I let go of Jaz’s hand and stood. I took her elbow and drew her up with me. She complied but seemed despondent; convinced I was horrified. I quickly stepped closer, placing my left hand gently on her cheek, encouraging her to raise her eyes to mine.

“Then I must beg a third question, my love,” I whispered tenderly. “Are you still filling me with love and lust? Or is this natural? Either way, please marry me, so I can enjoy this bliss forever.”

Her answer wasn’t verbal. She looked shocked for a fleeting moment. A look that was swept away by a tsunami of joyful relief, closely followed by longing and passion. She pulled me down to her vigorously and we kissed, our hands touching each other frantically. As blissful as the kiss was, we were both crying so much it was hard to breathe. I think we both welcomed a brief

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respite while we broke apart just long enough for me to close and bolt the door.

We drew back together at the foot of my bunk. Of the twin sensations of lust and love, for the moment lust was the victor. We were hungry for each other's touch and determined to take sate ourselves.

This time I kissed her with barely contained patience. I started at her neckline, an inch above where her dress sat impatiently stretched on her shoulder. I nuzzled my way gently upwards to a spot just behind her ear that caused her to tremble. Jaz's back arched gently as she turned her head slightly, encouraging me closer, and to harden my pressure in that spot in particular. I bit lightly and, in response, her hand crept down my side and pulled my hips towards hers.

With her other hand, Jaz undid my tie and ripped off two of my shirt buttons as she frantically opened my shirt. Her eyes were closed, her face flushed, her breathing heavy. I sought her mouth again, which opened eagerly. She had my shirt untucked and as I gasped for breath, she whispered hot breath into my ear.

"Hurry, I need you deep inside me."

I had been so intent on tasting her that I hadn't noticed my manhood so swelled with blood that it strained in my breeches, which she was intent on releasing.

"Jaz, I have fantasized of undressing you often, but find myself at a loss now of where to start on your corset; it needs to come off swiftly, no?" She pushed away from me for what seemed only enough time for me to kick off my boots, throw my braces from my shoulders, and step out of my breeches. But when I looked again Jaz had on only the thinnest shift. I could feel the heat from her body wash over me as we threw ourselves back together.

I wanted to explore her, but she was filled with such impatience that she pulled me down onto the bunk. With one hand she hitched up her shift, and with the other she grasped my shaft, pulling me near. I found myself above her, my weight on my left arm while my right hand ran up from her hip to gently

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caress the lower part of her breast. As I cupped her, she sank her shoulders back into the bunk and pushed her hips longingly upward.

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8: FADING LIGHT

Monterey, Alta California, March 1837 (15 months later)

[Jaz] – I lay back and steadied my breath to conserve my strength. Memories from the past years flooded my mind, chief among them that first intimacy with Timothée. Partly the sex, but mostly how his willing sacrifice of all things nautical, in exchange for my love, enabled me to let go of *Le Perjure*. All I can remember from the remainder of the voyage was our closeness, the stolen assignations – which I am convinced the crew noticed but Timothée denies – and one other thing: Timothée’s determination that we must kill Lord Roth.

When I recounted Roth’s ruthless demonstration of power, killing the luckless seaman, we both suspected this act was like the tip of the icebergs we had seen. Timothée was adamant that such a monster could not be allowed to murder others at whim. After considering and deciding against approaching the authorities for help – they would think us mentally disturbed and themselves be powerless against Roth anyway– Timothée was obsessed with thoughts of assassination.

Even so, I may have been able to turn him away from such a risky course had the sailor’s murder been the only evidence. Throughout the remainder of the sailing, Roth’s predatorial arrogance was with us daily, but there was no evidence of more murder until the eve of our arrival in Plymouth. After we had retired for the night, a wave of terror briefly gripped us again. The next morning, Timothée determined that a cabin boy, the waif that the Chef employed as his help, was missing, presumed lost overboard. I had met the wretch several times and shared a kindness with him, and Roth’s act turned my heart to stone.

When we berthed in Plymouth the next night, it was late. We all three took rooms at the same inn, keen to be free of the confines of the ship. Roth met with several people that same evening, to whom we learned later he had passed on Maria’s

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exposé, which was taken to be distributed in the morning dispatches.

When Roth met with his accomplices, Timothée had taken the opportunity to reconnoitre his room. In addition to familiarizing himself with the layout, he applied some duck grease to the door's latch and the hinges. As dawn hinted its approach in the eastern sky, Timothée and I crept to the door of Roth's room. The lock was a simple affair offering no resistance to someone of Timothée's mechanical bent, and we were soon across the threshold and could see Roth sleeping, his chest rising and falling for the last few moments of his vicious life.

Our plan was simple. If we had a pistol, we would have shot Roth from the doorway, but all we had was Timothée's knife, drawn earlier from the toolkit he kept onboard *La Caronette*. If Roth awoke, we would probably die, although my role would be to use my limited ability to distract Roth as much as possible. We were relying on stealth and Timothée's steady hand.

We worried greatly but needn't have; Roth's arrogance allowed him to be a sound sleeper. With three confident strides, Timothée reached the bedside and drove his blade quickly up under Roth's chin, deep into the brain. Striking for his heart, or cutting the throat left the possibility of a partial injury and us at the mercy of Roth's terrible mind so the brain was our target.

Roth didn't jerk. His eyes didn't open. He just stopped breathing and perhaps sagged a little. But mentally I felt his passing so strongly I staggered, gripping the doorframe to break my fall.

We left the inn with stealth and walked in the shadows for several blocks to a carriage we had arranged earlier. I had used my powers on several 'witnesses' at the inn. They would now recall that we had left several hours before the murder, and the carriage driver would recall the trip was earlier too, and that he had deposited us at a location which was miles from where he actually left us.

We took the morning coach to London and were with my mother's cousin – head of our London clan – by supper. We

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passed on the news of Maria Monk, Lord Roth, and our journey, and left the matter of quelling the exposé's impact to them. We believed strongly that Roth's clan members would suspect us and so we didn't dally. The next morning, we were at Dover and on a ship to Calais, France.

Our eventual destination was Fort Langley in British Columbia, but we chose a circuitous route. We avoided the direct path through Montréal, to avoid Esmé. From France we sailed to the Spanish West Indies and from there to Orléans in the United States territory of Louisiana. Louisiana had been purchased from the Spanish in 1803, and had been French until 1763, and the mix of cultures was evident everywhere we turned. In fact, our inn still retained a La Nouvelle-Orleans sign on its wall. It was here, eight months after we murdered Roth, that I first learned I was carrying Timothée's child. Timothée was delighted and made some of the most ungentlemanly movements and noises I have witnessed. We didn't know it was our highest point, also making it the beginning of the path to our lowest point.

Timothée felt sure I would have a son and insisted we name him Louis, after Louisiana. He often talked to the unborn babe in my womb, and addressed him that way, or when he thought I was asleep, even Lou. Louis now slumbers here in my arms, suckling at my breast whenever he approaches wakefulness. But I get ahead of the story.

We struck out west from Orléans and the progress was slow. We were with a wagon train and moved at its plodding speed. We were in the centre of the continent, camped on the outskirts of a small town called Mercy, when disaster struck. This region was renowned for great winds, which the locals called 'devil-winds' but we called tornados. A funnel of cloud, fascinating in its deadly beauty, grasped our wagon and flung it like a child's toy. We were not hurt as the locals had kindly hosted us in the cellar of their home, but our goods were scattered and something most precious to me destroyed.

I had left Montréal suddenly, with no way to acquire mother's blood. I was tired by the time I reached London but was

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healthy and resupplied quickly. From London, and again in France, we took supplies from Le Perjure. Not just of prepared blood but, more importantly, the rare herbs and treatments required to change the raw blood to something more consumable. The tornado destroyed both.

Since that night, we have searched for replacements. We have acquired blood – a tale I won't recount here, except to say no injuries were caused in the acquisition – but without the treatment, it is less effective and does not keep long. Its poor quality and constrained supply took its toll on me over the succeeding months.

We crossed into the Mexican territories heading steadily west. Mexico wrested Las Californias from the Spanish in 1821 and since then, the northern portion, Alta California, has become a separate district of the Mexican regime. They have no knowledge of western medicine, let alone what I require for survival, but we met a man who offered us some hope. John Marsh arrived in Alta California this year and has become the first man to practise modern medicine in these parts. He told us that when he handed his Harvard Degree to the authorities, they were perplexed as it was written in Latin. They gave him licence to practise in any event.

Marsh's prices are steep, and at first, we could not convince him to just provide us with blood and the herbs I required. He wanted to examine me, and we wasted a great deal of time negotiating with him for what I needed. Even if they turn out not to be Adepts, our babies feed hungrily in the womb, more aggressively than a normal child. Louis left me so depleted, that my mind could stir no more persuasion in John than a stallion looking at a bull in heat might experience, so we were left to try to convince him by conventional means.

Oh, the pain. A sharp, fiery jolt in my bowels reminds me of my current circumstances as I look up at the window at the Alta California hills. It's past dawn and sunny, yet the light in the room is fading. I know it is my body beginning to shut down

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anything it deems strictly unnecessary, to keep me alive as my essence seeps away.

I look at my journal on the table beside the bed. In the last few pages I have documented my fate, in the hope it will give Timothée some peace. He will find it shortly when he returns from his daily search for herbs. It explains how, for the past few days, I have felt the connection to my unborn son waning as he struggles for sustenance. It explains that I have tried what inducements I know to start off labour. Two months too early, but what choice do we have? Only one other choice, I decided, when the toxins I swallowed to bring on birth failed. My last resort is a knife.

The journal will affirm that I have willingly opened myself up with this knife to save our child. I know enough medicine from helping at the convent in Montréal to say that even with John Marsh's knowledge and help, I won't survive long. I have been blessed with the strength to cut Louis free of the anchor I've become to him, and to have been further granted this past hour, painful as it has been, to dote on our son and allow him to suckle at my breast. But the light is fading, and I feel sleep approach.

The journal documents, in my most intimate words, how happy I have been in these last 15 months. My deep love and gratitude to have been part of Timothée's life. My wishes that he does not grieve so deeply he cannot be the father Louis needs. My promise to wait for him on the other side of the curtain I can see so clearly now, so we can start the next adventure together.

I look once more at my child, and make sure he is snuggled safely to await his father. I kiss his soft head, unable to see it now, as the light fades completely.

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9: FORT LANGLEY

[Timothée] – I would forever be in John Marsh's debt for saving Louis in those first few days, because God knows I was so distraught that I was useless. After months of frantically seeking solutions to our predicament I had convinced John to come to our rooms with the intent of forcing Jaz to confide in him and gain his support. We discovered Jaz's fate at her own hand together.

I recall little, other than both Louis and Jaz both appeared to be sleeping at first, until the ominous smell and growing stain on Jaz's blanket alerted us an instant later. My elation from seeing my son for the first time turned to dust.

John's experienced eye soon determined the facts, which were later borne out when I read Jaz's journal. Acknowledging in my saner moments that she felt there was no other choice, I remain angry at her for leaving me in such a manner.

John arranged a wet nurse for Louis, a sweet girl of 19 years named Peggy. Recently, Peg had a son who was still born and Marsh had saved her life by staunching the hemorrhaging. John moved us into his house and the following night, he helped me find a quiet spot by the river to lay Jaz down, to sleep the long sleep, in peace. We agreed it best not to inform the local authorities and so it was John, Peg and Louis and I who said words of love, sadness, and grief over Jaz's grave, though I can't recall those words now.

In a few days I found the strength to pull myself together, and after one last visit to Jaz's resting place, I struck out towards Fort Vancouver with Peg, Louise, and John's foreman Art, which was short for Arturo. I was bound eventually for Fort Langley in the British Territories of New Caledonia. Like all of Columbia it was truly the Hudson's Bay Company who controlled things there, too. Peg had agreed to go with me as she had become attached to Louis. Her attachment worried me a little for the future but I saw no other course. Art accompanied us as I

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intended to repay John's kindness by asking my father to provide medical supplies and other goods John couldn't obtain locally. Art was to return with them and our transport to Alta California.

We left town on a small buggy borrowed from John, pulled by an old donkey aptly named Cinder. She was always smouldering and was liable to hurt you if you touched her. Peg sat with Louis beside our supplies on the small luggage shelf at the rear of the buggy, facing back the way we had come, and Art and I sat high on the two seats in the front.

At Cinder's plodding speed it took four days to reach the border of Oregon, a demarcation point signalled only by signpost at the roadside. In another three days we reached Fort Vancouver on the Columbia river, which was The Hudson Bay Company's centre of operations for the whole west coast, including their outposts in New Caledonia.

As we made our way toward the two saloons in the centre of the small town, I thought I recognized a man leaving the bank, but it wasn't until he answered my hail that I could trust my tired eyes were not deceiving me.

"Uncle Frank?" At first Uncle Frank didn't recognise me either as I was dressed in a strange array of clothing acquired since losing our belonging in the tornado months earlier and I was covered in trail dust from head to toe. No word had reached him that I had left with Jaz in what seemed like a lifetime ago, and so he was momentarily dumbstruck to see me after some five years and thousands of miles.

We agreed to save the bulk of the explanations of my unexpected appearance for dinner. He was quite taken with my son and when I explained Peg was Louis's nurse, and in a cracking voice explained I had lost Jaz, he hugged me closely.

Uncle Frank drew funds from the bank immediately for Art to buy supplies. We said our goodbyes to John's foreman, who would make the trek south with Cinder the following day with a final note of thanks that I hurriedly penned for John. Uncle Frank led Peg, Louis, and I down to the docks where we boarded his clipper, *La Bonne*. We ate and began to catch up on our

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respective stories while Peg put Louis down in the small cabin they would share for the trip up to Fort Langley.

Uncle Frank sent his quartermaster to town for some new clothes, and when they appeared, we adjourned to a nearby bath house where we all washed off our trail-dust. That night at dinner, which Uncle Frank and I shared alone on the foredeck under the stars, I told him the whole tale. To his credit, he believed it.

In return, I learned that Uncle Frank and my father had done very well indeed. Working partly for The Hudson's Bay Company, and partly for His Majesty's Government, they had acquired significant land and trading rights to the north of Fort Langley. It had been a tough few years, but the risks had paid off as Father was now a leading figure in the governance of the district of Caledonia.

We had favourable winds and the spry clipper bore us north briskly. We sailed past the mouth of the Fraser, the route to Fort Langley, and Uncle Frank explained that the family estate was in a separate inlet just to the north. The clipper was laden with supplies for the estate so it was there we would alight and then travel to the Fort on horse back where Father would almost certainly be found conducting business.

As we swung into the northern inlet, I marvelled at how much land the family had acquired. In addition to a large tract of southern Vancouver Island, the family owned all of the northern side of the inlet except for that owned by the wealthy Guinness Family.

Father had several houses built for the family near the inlet's second narrow point. We alighted there and confirmed Father had left early for Fort Langley. I couldn't wait to see him, so we settled Peg into a room at Uncle Frank's home, and met Layla, my uncle's wife of just a year, who immediately warmly attended to Louis as if he were her own.

Uncle Frank and I boarded a small ferry to the south bank and took fresh horses from the family stables and rode along the northern bank of the Fraser River. Sir George Simpson,

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Governor of The Hudson Bay Company, realized that the border between British Caledonia and the United State's Oregon had not been finalized – it could follow the Fraser River, or the 49th Parallel – and so he ordered that Fort Langley be built strategically on the south bank of the Fraser to secure Hudson Bay Company's interest north of the border in either event. This meant we had to leave our horses again on the north bank and were rowed across the Fraser to the fort. From there it was a short walk to where the family kept rooms.

I had not seen my father for five years and the reunion was emotional. As my tale was retold, the tears flowed on both sides. Father remembered Jaz fondly from his transit through Montréal. Like my Uncle, he accepted the strange tales of Adepts as facts, but I was still peppered by many questions by these two inquisitive men.

“So, The Chord or Le Perjure could come looking for you?” It was more a statement from Father than a question.

“It's possible,” I replied anyway. “Jaz and I discussed this often. We concluded it was possible they would send people looking for us but were unlikely to come themselves. There are only a few Adepts on each continent in their clans, and they each have their own priorities. We felt Esmé might send one of her daughters to find Jaz, using their ability to locate each other, but since Jaz died, I think it unlikely I am worth an Adept's attention.”

“Well let's not make it easy for them, son. If you mean to make a home here for you and Louis, you will need a new name. Have you given any thought to this?”

“Yes, in fact Jaz and I had the same thought and had already picked one out. We planned to marry and take the name when we arrived here. As you know the name de Relieur stems from your grandfather's trade in France of book binding and manufacturer. It was our intention to adopt the anglicised version, Booker.”

Father stood, marking the end of the evening and signalling we should turn in. We embraced again.

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“Well then, let’s get some sleep,” he said. “We have an early start tomorrow, as I want to meet my Grandson, Louis Booker.”

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HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The first historical item that caught my fancy concerns King Louis XIV's ambitious attempts in 1663 to shore up New France, a failing colony in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in what is now North America. New France stretched from Newfoundland in the north to New Orleans in the south and was eventually ceded to Great Britain and Spain under The Treaty of Paris (1763). The most northern areas around Québec City, Montréal, and Trois-Rivières later became part of The Province of Canada (1841) before expanding westward and eventually, through confederation, became Canada as we know it today.

Between 1663 and 1673, Louis the Great – whose reign of 72 years and 110 days remains the longest in European history – sponsored roughly 800 unmarried women aged between 12 and 25 to immigrate to New France. Eighty percent of these women emigrated from Paris – most from poor circumstances, often orphans – to land in the cities mentioned above to marry and increase the French population. They were held to scrupulously high moral standards and provided with generous dowries from the King's coffers. The women were empowered to choose their partners and were allowed to break prearranged contracts if they found their intended not to be to their liking. They were much in demand.

They were known as The King's Daughters, a term intended to denote state patronage, not noble lineage. Wikipedia lists nine notable descendants, including Hillary Clinton, Angelina Jolie, and Madonna.

The second historical episode is about the book *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*. While the King's Daughters' emigration appears to be well documented and historians broadly agree on the facts, Maria Monk's tale is highly contested. The only uncontested part of her story is that an exposé was published – purporting to be her memoirs – which historian

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Richard Hofstadter called, in his 1964 essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, “probably the most widely read contemporary book in the United States before Uncle Tom's Cabin.” Some historians estimate approximately 300,000 copies were circulated in Canada, the USA, and Britain. You can still find the book, and its later, updated, online version. Facts and debate aside, I found it an insight into the period, although not a literary masterpiece like her near-contemporary Jane Austen's works.

To summarise, the memoir claims that at an early age Maria was inducted into a nunnery in Montréal, Canada – Hôtel Dieu – where the more senior Catholic nuns and priests treated the novices and nuns in a horrific fashion. It claims some nuns were impregnated by priests, who arrived from the adjacent monastery through a secret tunnel. Any progeny that resulted were given the last rites and strangled at birth to avoid scandal. The nunnery's inhabitants supposedly accepted this treatment due to the divine right of priests acting as God's representatives here on Earth. The book goes on to claim that Maria became pregnant and managed to escape in the night to save her unborn child. She then, with some help and further adventure, fled to New York and published her exposé. That any of her claims had substance is hotly contested, even today.

What is widely agreed upon is that 1830s New York was a city under siege. In 1832, the world-wide cholera epidemic arrived in this city of 250,000 people causing 100,000 to flee to the surrounding countryside. While still recovering from the 1823 recession, Andrew Jackson ordered the withdrawal of the city's federal funding in 1832, a move that put in motion events that led to The Panic (another crash) of 1837. In the first half of that decade, the mostly Protestant community faced waves of Irish- and German-Catholic immigrants; in a 20-year period, the foreign-born population of New York grew from 9% to 46%. There was an anti-Catholic backlash typified by events such as the Ursuline Convent riots, where rumours of abuse resulted in Protestant rioters razing the convent to the ground.

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Into this powder-keg dropped Maria's *Awful Disclosures*, perhaps by design, and it appears to have been seized upon – if not created by – the anti-Catholic propaganda machine. This perfect storm probably accounts for the massive interest in the story and subsequent sales. Eventually, Maria's claims were investigated – in one case by a respected Protestant – and deemed to be fictional, and that there was even little chance that Maria actually entered the nunnery at all.

I have no insight into the truth of her story and, in fact, reading various articles online demonstrates that there is still significant, opposing, passionate beliefs on all sides. What fascinated me was that this 'fake news' – if indeed it was – became one of the time's biggest selling books and no doubt influenced world opinion.

In this same time period, John Molson of Molson Breweries was just reaching the end of his life. I learnt so much about his achievements, and what a force he was in his day. I've included some of them for interest, too, but stress to my knowledge, he had no connection to the Monk affair.

The last piece of history that inspired me was the Swing Riots and the *Swing Letters*. In England during the 1830s, landowners had realised the potential of mechanical farming. Threshers were taking the place of labourers, resulting in massive job losses and poverty. Farm workers petitioned for a raise in wages, and sabotage of the new technology was common during riots. Following arrests throughout England, 644 rioters were imprisoned and an additional 505 transported to Australia; 19 others were executed. The violence at the Swing Riots was reported to be relatively moderate, but the real fear was from arson attacks that coincided with the protests. The Great Fire of London (1666) was devastating and remained a strong reference point for England. But I also read Mary Anne Poutanen's academic account of prostitution in the early nineteenth century Montréal called *Beyond Brutal Passions* which documents that in Montréal in that era it was not uncommon for rival sex

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workers to inform the authorities that their competition's operation created fire risks, to have them shut down.

The *Swing Letters* were represented as being written by a real – if unknown – arsonist. Addressed to magistrates and wealthy landowners, the letters' tone is chilling; Here is an example:

“Sir, Your [sic] name is down amongst the Black hearts in the Black Book and this is to advise you and the like of you, who are Parson Justasses, to make your wills. Ye have been the Blackguard Enemies of the People on all occasions, Ye have not yet done as ye ought,... Swing”

In researching this section of the story, I admit I became wrapped up in a history we didn't learn in school, and it was fascinating. I hope you enjoy how I have wrapped my tale around these factoids and forgive me for taking much artistic licence in the process.

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THE NUDE DETECTIVE SERIES

As I wrap up this novella, Books One and Two of the series are published on Amazon, Apple and Kobo. Book Three is over fifty percent complete. The series is set in 2018-2020 and follows Ethan and Marcy's adventures as they jet around the world, sometimes chasing, and sometimes fleeing from, deadly criminals.

Ethan Booker's great wealth was inherited down through the generations from his ancestor, Louis Booker. That may not be all he inherited. Something of a philanthropic cross between James Bond and Magnum P.I., Ethan's favourite pastime is putting his money to work to solve problems for people through his private detective agency.

In Book One, Ethan reunites with Police Detective Marcy Stone, an old flame, as she faces down a gang of human traffickers in Vancouver, Canada. Over the course of the series, Ethan and Marcy discover that humans are not necessarily the single species that we appear to be. Interwoven with the relationships they develop with the band of strong characters they gather to achieve their objectives, is the story of Ethan and Marcy's unusual sexual relationship.

You can find more information at www.melissajaneparker.com