A BROTHER'S LESSON

Marius and Georges Arnaud were brothers growing up in the town of Betton, in the Brittany area of northwest France. Betton -- with a population of just under 1300 souls, now in the year of Our Lord 1700 -- was about 8 km north of the larger cathedral town of Rennes. The River Ille bisected Betton, and the town was on the main road to both St. Malo and Mont Saint Michel. The boys’ father, Gaston, was the town's only blacksmith, and his hopes were that someday one or preferably both of his sons would follow him into that worthwhile trade. Their hard-working mother, Renee, was equally proud of her sons, who were robust and intelligent, and were both turning out to become fine young men. Marius was born in 1701. About 12 cm shorter than his brother, he was gregarious and muscular, a lady charmer with his ready smile and curly brown hair, and he excelled in hunting and fishing as an enthusiastic outdoorsman. Georges was born the following year. He was tall and slender, with piercing blue eyes, but his temperament tended to be more introspective and analytical than his older brother's. Despite their differences, they were very close and devoted to each other. The only year of concern so far in their young lives was in 1718, when France went to war with Spain. But that conflict was fortunately short-lived, and the boys were spared any involvement.

Like most boys, Marius and Georges were restless and craved adventure. They heard exciting stories from travelers passing through Betton about the colony of New France in North America, specifically about its wild, savage Indians and the fortunes being made in the fur trade. They secretly wondered what it would be like to go there, but never shared their fervent interest with their parents. Neither boy wanted to become a blacksmith, but they were reluctant to tell their earnest father, who was increasingly insistent that they begin apprenticing that trade. They feared his wrath and his disappointment.

“There are said to be many different native tribes in New France,” Georges shared one afternoon. “Some are peaceful and accept our civilized ways, but others capture and torture or even kill any white men who disturb them. Our brave holy missionaries in particular enter the dark forests to convert these heathens, but many never return if they fail to escape.”

“Meanwhile, trappers are taking beaver pelts in great numbers, then loading them into their canoes for sale in Montreal and other trading centers,” Marius added. “The pelts are eventually shipped to Europe to make those popular felt hats that only the rich can afford. A trapper can earn twice in one year what an average laborer or artisan can earn here in Betton. Even twice what our father earns at his forge. Just imagine!"

In December, 1720, a huge fire destroyed all the timber-framed houses in northern Rennes. Although the fire did not affect the lofty stone Cathedral de Saint-Pierre (where the Arnaud family attended Mass every Sunday), the rest of the city immediately began rebuilding its destroyed sections exclusively using stone. As a result, Gaston’s services as a trained blacksmith were in urgent demand to both create and repair the needed metal stone cutting tools and related equipment. With Renee in understandable agreement, he moved temporarily to Rennes for five days and nights every week while his wife and sons remained in Betton. The family reunited in church every Sunday, then Gaston went home with them to Betton until each Tuesday morning, when he returned to work in Rennes.

It was while their father was away in March, 1721 that Georges got the sudden urge to make his first pilgrimage. There was a Benedictine abbey at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, on the southern French coast. St. Giles, whose holy remains were venerated there, was the patron saint of blacksmiths, cripples, and infertile women. Coming originally from Greece, Giles lived in the late 7th- early 8th centuries as a holy hermit in the woods of southern France. According to legend, his main companion was a tame red deer. When the king’s archers were hunting for fresh game one day, they chased a red deer to the entrance of Giles’ cave and fired an arrow. As Giles moved to protect his animal friend, he took the hunting arrow in his own leg instead, crippling himself for the rest of his life. Years later, after Giles died and achieved sainthood (as prayers to him generated several miracles), the apologetic king ordered that an abbey be founded on the site of Giles’ grave. So it was here that Georges would journey. He would give alms and hence accrue blessings for the continued good health and the immortal soul of his blacksmith father. Meanwhile, Marius would remain in Betton with his mother.

The pilgrimage from home to the abbey in Saint Gilles would take twenty-one days, walking unfailingly eight hours a day, barring any injuries or mishaps. He would sleep rough outdoors -- using his cloak as a blanket -- on his route whenever village churches were unavailable. Georges knew that churches would also provide free, simple meals to all sincere pilgrims, seeing as this road was well-travelled, being a main route in the opposite direction to connect with the famous medieval Camino de Santiago over the Pyrenees into northern Spain.

Fortunately, Georges was blessed with mostly dry -- but still rather chilly -- weather. There were no surprise confrontations with any robbers or rabid mongrel dogs, and Georges welcomed the generosity of strangers who shared their fruit, cheese, bread, and wine -- their only request in return being that a prayer be said by Georges for their souls once he arrived at his destination.

Finally sighting the Romanesque abbey after walking for three weeks, Georges Arnaud's emotions were unexpectedly stirred into a kind of religious ecstasy. This feeling was only further heightened when he descended into the subterranean crypt which held the sacred bones of St. Giles. He ultimately sensed The Lord, Jesus, calling to his heart as he prayed in the upper chapel before a large hanging crucifix. Georges felt the unmistakable silent summons of a true religious vocation. And he was further drawn to the realization that he surely must now become a missionary in New France, and attempt to save the lost souls of its savages. Next, the young Arnaud found and placed several livres in the abbey's alms box, and prayed devoutly for both his father and for those who helped him on the road, as intended. Finally, Georges cornered a nearby black-robed Benedictine monk and proceeded to pour out his glowing heart. The somewhat startled man gently directed him to see the Head Abbott.

"I understand your new intentions, my son," the aged Abbott declared, after carefully listening to Georges' passionate realization. "The Holy Spirit has indeed blessed you. But you are not destined for monastic life here with us. Instead, I will write to the Jesuit seminary in Paris recommending your admittance. It is they who are sending zealous young men such as yourself into the wilderness of New France -- but only after two years of rigorous preparation. You must return home now and await their reply of either acceptance or rejection. If you leave tomorrow, you should be able to reunite in Rennes with your family by Easter Sunday on April 13. Go with God, my son." The kindly Abbott smiled and blessed Georges, who in turn kneeled, then kissed the Abbott's wrinkled hand in joy and respect.

The 800 km journey back home was more difficult, due to muddy roads after many rainy days. But Georges kept to his daily walking regimen, and he made it back to Rennes Cathedral by Easter. His family was happy and relieved that he had returned home safely. After Mass, on the way back to Betton for their modest holiday feast, Georges shared his new religious convictions. His mother was pleased, his brother was surprised, but his father was wary and critical.

"I had been counting on you and Marius to take on my blacksmithing trade," Gaston groused. "Now you are telling me that you are possibly leaving for two years of Jesuit study in Paris, followed by a missionary placement in New France?" he remarked, hurt and confused.

Marius quickly spoke up. "Forgive me for interrupting, Father, but if you allow Georges to go, I promise I will stay here and learn your trade for the two years he is in Paris." Renee demurely added that the arrangement seemed fair and reasonable to her.

This offer placated Gaston somewhat, so the matter went undiscussed for the rest of the day. Yet later that night as the brothers lay in bed, Marius revealed to Georges that after those two years, he likewise planned the leave for North America. "I will learn to become a *coureur* *de bois*-- a 'runner of the woods' -- who will trap the beaver and trade its pelts. I plan on becoming very rich! And I will send half of the money I earn home to our parents. I hope that will satisfy our good father."

Several days later, a folded, red wax-sealed letter came from the Jesuit seminary in Paris. Georges had been accepted! All he need do now was to walk for 70 hours from Betton to the capital city by June 1. His room and board would all be paid for by the Church, in return for his lifetime commitment as an eager young Jesuit missionary in New France.

Giving himself an extra day in reserve so as to arrive in Paris a day before the deadline, Georges said an emotional goodbye to his family on May 21, seeing as his journey would take nine days. He promised to write home every two months. Renee washed and packed his two best blouses, and wrapped a fresh quiche in a clean cloth for him to eat on the road. The weather was sunny and warming, and life was full of promise.

Paris was a marvel, the largest city Georges had ever seen. The stained-glass windows in Notre Dame Cathedral were especially stunning and much more impressive than those in Rennes. Before long, he found the formidable building of the Jesuit seminary. He submitted his formal letter of acceptance to the reception priest at the front gate.

The following two years of his instruction were challenging yet fulfilling, and passed rather quickly. Georges Arnaud, now age 21, was granted permission to be called "Pere ('Father') Giles" as his new Jesuit name, in honor of the saint in whose abbey he first became aware of his vocation.

Pere Giles was called into the Director's office one morning for final instructions before leaving the seminary. His name was Pere Auguste. He was a powerfully built man in his early 50's who had served several years in New France, both in Quebec and among the Mohawk Indians. He needed to realistically point out the many dangers that North American missionary work entailed.

"Pere Giles, your teachers tell me that you possess a fine, clear mind and that you are sincere in your determination to save heathen souls as a member of our Society of Jesus. Your health is strong, and you have proved yourself pious in observing all the strict rules which our order imposes. Normally, it takes a ten years to become a full Jesuit. But because of our urgent need in the New Colony for priests, we are sending you for just two more years of training to the Jesuit College in Quebec before you will be ready to work among the Mohawks. After mastering the various Indian languages, you will be sent to the settlement area called 'Kahnawake,' which means 'place of the rapids.' It was founded by us in 1719, and it's located on the south banks of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal, extending outward in a very large area about the size of Portugal," Pere Auguste explained.

Then the Director cleared his throat. "But you need to know, Pere Giles, that fully half of our priests are killed by the heathen during their first year of service. Other manage to escape back to civilization, but only after suffering horrible tortures and mutilations. Some even go mad and simply disappear completely from our priesthood. Others, however, return to France, like myself." At this, Pere Auguste extended both hands out of the cuffs of his robes, revealing a left hand missing two fingers and a right hand missing three. Then he pushed his thick, long grey hair aside, revealing a missing right ear and a burned-scarred right side of his face -- the flesh resembling hardened melted wax. "I assure you that my chest and back were likewise rendered...unattractive," he added. "True, the Mohawks are members of the Five Nation Iroquois League, and are pledged to being peaceful. But in the hinterlands of Kahnawake, there are those sub-groups who torture and kill any unarmed white men who intrude on their lands. Bringing them the Word of God is crucial to saving their poor souls from everlasting torment, so we continue undaunted in our missionary efforts, even if it means our own martyrdom, like that our beloved Pere Isaac Jogues. Our native conversion and baptism rate is pathetically only around 10%, most of those women, as best as we can determine. So it is this challenge -- this 'cross,' somewhat related to Our Savior’s burden -- that you have accepted," Pere Auguste concluded. After saying a solemn prayer together, Pere Giles was formally dismissed, and was allowed to head home to Betton, this time by horse-drawn coach. He was given papers to present at the port of Brest by the end of June, allowing for an official paid passage across the Atlantic to Quebec, in the colony of New France.

When Pere Giles arrived home, his family found that it took a little time for them (and the rest of the town, for that matter) to get used to seeing him in his black priestly robes. One afternoon after the mid-day meal, Marius asked to speak to his younger brother in private.

"Don't worry, Georges...I mean, Pere...I won't ask you to hear my confession, nor will I ask you how difficult it is to maintain your new vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. But I wanted to confide in you that I intend to leave with you when you sail to New France. I told you two years ago that I wished to become a fur trapper and trader. Well, the King of France signed an edict way back in 1681, which limited the granting of *conges* -- legal licenses -- to only twenty-five new fur traders per year. I learned that I must go to Montreal in person to apply and obtain one. I have earned a bit more than the cost of a ship's passage of 150 livres by working with our father these past two years as promised at his forge, as he continued his role in the rebuilding in Rennes. My real problem now is that I have yet to disclose my specific plans to our father and mother."

Pere Giles remembered their old conversation on this topic, and how Marius intended on sending half of his earnings back to his parents every year. He declared they should tell their father together about Marius' decision that very Monday evening.

Over a mushroom soup and pork roast supper with wine and fresh bread, the brothers informed their parents of Marius' plans. "We will take a coach to Brest, and sail together across the ocean on a merchant East Indianman. Then we will proceed up the St.Lawrence to the city of Quebec, where I will disembark and stay for two years of further study at the Jesuit College. Marius will of course continue on to Montreal, " Pere Giles explained. Marius then spoke up. "And I pledge to send half of my earnings back to this house, my father. This is a golden opportunity to make the Arnauds quite wealthy. I humbly ask for your blessing."

Gaston Arnaud pursed his lips and scratched his beard for several silent moments. "I see that your mind is made up, Marius. I sensed long ago that neither of my sons had a true devotion to my trade -- an honorable skill that my own father taught me when I was young. Well, you are a grown man now. I suppose you must make your own path in life, as your younger brother has already decided for himself. One of our neighbors, Marcel Aubert, has a twelve-year-old boy, Maurice, who has shown keen interest in apprenticing as a blacksmith. So it appears I must turn to him instead..." Gaston's voice trailed off as he looked down at his strong, gnarled hands resting on the wooden table top. "You therefore have my permission. Do you have enough money for this trip, my son?"

Overcome with emotion, Marius leapt up from his chair and embraced his father. "Oh, Papa, yes I do, and thank you! I will make us proud, as has Georges...I mean, Pere!" The family all chuckled at this reoccurring slip of the tongue from the older brother. Renee then stood proudly and gave all three of her men hugs and kisses. Pere Giles then led his family in a solemn prayer for God's guidance and safety.

Arrangements were made for the Church to pay the coach fare to Brest for the priest and his 'guest.' After the brothers said an emotional farewell to their parents, they departed. Who knew when -- or if -- they would ever meet again as a whole family?

The westerly trip by mail coach to the Brittany coast took four days -- saving them fifteen long days of walking. The brothers arrived at the harbor in Brest on June 13, 1723. There were several merchant ships ready to set sail, while others were just arriving with their cargos from ports throughout Europe. A sturdy, Dutch-made, three-masted, forty-five-meter long East Indianman immediately caught their eye.

She was called Le Renard, and a large, brown fox was suitably carved on its bow as a figurehead. She ran the French flag, was manned by a crew of twelve, and was under the command of Captain Jacques Soubret. After proper introductions and the presentation of Pere Giles’ documents and Marius' cash payment, Soubret showed them to their tiny shared cabin. The vessel's cargo hold was loaded with 200 barrels of fine Bordeaux wine and another 100 barrels of brandy, as well as 75 barrels of hard cheese and 50 of dried peas. The 2614 nautical mile trip to Quebec would take 25-30 days, depending on the winds and the weather. The Captain hoped to cover 160-225 kilometers a day at a speed of 4-6 knots. On his return run from Montreal, he would load up his ship with as many bales of North American beaver pelts as he could pack. Such was the fur's value and demand back in France and the rest of Europe that a handsome profit was thus assured for the ship owners -- not to mention a hefty bonus for both Captain Soubret and his crew upon successful and timely delivery.

Le Renard weighed anchor on Tuesday, June 15. The brothers took their meals with the Captain and his First Mate, Jean-Baptiste, and were enthralled with their tales of adventures from around the world. Every Sunday at sea, Pere Giles said Mass and distributed Holy Communion to the faithful. He used a compact 'traveling altar kit,' which included a small stand-up silver crucifix, a modest silver chalice, a leather flagon of blessed wine, a simple white altar cloth, and a silver container for the blessed wafers. The altar was always set on a long wooden board positioned between two large empty barrels. In his concise sermons, Pere Giles preached passionately about the necessity of forgiveness and mercy in this imperfect world, and for compassion, and for loving one's enemies as Christ decreed. The crew was attentive and respectful, because the Captain had chosen his twelve sailors carefully. They were all disciplined family men -- not the usual dregs of humanity who drifted from port to port and ship to ship as their fancy or needs dictated.

Luck was with the ship as she made steady progress westward, for the weather was favorable. After twenty-six days, the Gaspe peninsula and Perce Rock came into view, leading into the entrance of the St. Lawrence River. Three days later -- Tuesday, July 13, 1723 -- the two brothers arrived at the fortress city of Quebec, high and imposing on an immense cliff above the water. After carefully docking, while some of the ship's supplies were being unloaded, the brothers said their emotional goodbyes, kissing both sides of each other's clean-shaven cheeks.

"Because I will be out in the wilderness trapping most of the time, I cannot promise to write regularly," Marius confessed. "But whenever I send money home to our parents, I will let them know how I am doing, then they can relay any news about me to you here in Quebec." The black-robed priest agreed that it was a good plan, at least for the next two years. Then they shook hands one last time. Pere Giles said, "Go with God, Marius," then finally turned and walked down the gangplank with his modest luggage, returning a final friendly wave from Captain Soubret. He immediately asked for directions to the Jesuit College from the nearest bystander once his sandals touched the land of New France.

Two days later, Le Renard arrived by mid-morning at the docks in Montreal. The summer winds from the north brought the sweet smells of the New World -- North America! After asking directions, Marius Arnaud made quick time to the Governor's Office, so as to obtain his all-important conges, his legal fur trading license. But he was dismissively given an appointment time of tomorrow afternoon at 3:00 p.m. instead by a snobbish clerk at the department in charge of such matters. After an evening meal, Marius found an inn nearby for the night and waited. He wondered how long his 73 livres would last, for both expenditures thus far were more than he would have thought.

But when Marius arrived at his appointed hour the next day, he was stunned to discover that all twenty-five conges had already been assigned for the year! Suspecting that this was a classic ploy by the administrator to casually obtain a bribe, Marius offered 20 livres as a 'gift' to the bureaucrat for his checking a second time to see if there was a chance that "just one conges might still be available." But the man simply frowned wearily and shook his head.

"Monsieur Arnaud, I assure you that you must return next January, with 300 livres, and wait in line like the others to purchase your conges. They will all be sold in a matter of hours, I warn you, such is the high demand," the man advised him coldly. "Please, put your coins away and go now."

Marius was crestfallen as he left the grey stone government building. His dreams of freedom, adventure and wealth were shattered! He had failed before he had even begun! It would probably take two years to earn the required amount just to purchase his conges. Depressed, he entered the first tavern he spied for a glass of wine. He needed time to focus and consider his grave circumstances.

Sitting alone at a corner table with his drink, Marius was approached after several minutes by a short but powerfully-built stranger, perhaps ten years older than himself. He was darkly bearded and long-haired, with a weather-beaten face and rough, strong hands. His brown eyes, however, were alert and intelligent. He was dressed in greasy, dirt encrusted buckskin with fringes to wick off any moisture, and he carried a musket, a powder horn, and a large knife in a leather scabbard on his waist-belt. On his feet were soft deerskin moccasins. His head was topped with a bright red wool toque. He grinned with stained teeth and then introduced himself as Claude LaBoeuf, originally from Marseilles. He declared that he was a premier beaver trapper. He carried a half-empty bottle of cognac and a pewter tankard.

"You look new in town, young man! If you prefer to drink alone, just say so and I'll leave. If not, I'll stay and we can a nice sociable chat. What's it to be?"

Marius politely offered Claude a chair. He was intrigued to meet an actual fur trapper. He introduced himself and told Claude about his family and where he grew up in France. Then he told him about his bitter disappointment upon not being able to buy a conges this year.

"Well, my friend, many have been stuck in your position. The selling of those damn licenses is just a lot of *merde*, a crooked way for the government to tax our hard work. But there is still a way to trap furs and sell them for much money," he winked, then lowered his voice. "You can sell them illegally. I've done it for several years now. I know all the tricks," he confessed, his cognac breath wafting in Marius' face. "If you care to team up with me, I'll teach you everything you need to know. I learned from Pierre de La Verendrye himself. Perhaps you have heard of him? Anyway, my companion of the past five years just returned to France unexpectedly with his substantial earnings, so I am looking for a new partner. You look willing and capable. And you say you can use a musket, and that you can hunt and fish, and that you thrive in the outdoors -- all the better! I sense you are honest, smart, and trustworthy. Think it over and let me know. But do it fast before I head out next week for the woods again. I know where all the beavers hide!" he roared boastfully, pouring some cognac into Marius' empty wine glass.

Not knowing what else to do other than trying to find work somewhere as a blacksmith's assistant, Marius agreed to Claude's intriguing offer. They toasted their new partnership, then shook hands on it. Marius then collected his belongings at his inn, and joined Claude at his ramshackle lodgings down near the river. "True, it could use a woman's touch," Claude explained as Marius settled in amid the dirt and clutter. "I have two squaw wives and two mixed race children out west, plus a wife and three children back in France whom I last saw eight years ago. But I am so rarely here that the mess doesn't really bother me."

Next, Claude got down to specifics. "The first year, we must split our profits 25% for you and 75% for me. This is only fair, seeing as I will be training you and hence doing the bulk of the planning and supplying. But in all the following years, the split will be even, 50-50. I can tell you have never paddled a canoe or set a beaver trap or portaged two 40 kilogram pelt bundles at the same time. And you certainly can't speak any Indian dialects yet. But your short, strong body build is perfect for the main task you will need to do, like kneeling in a canoe and paddling 12 hours a day at 50 strokes a minute with me. I'll show you how to set beaver traps, and how to trade cleverly with the Indians for their finished 'made' pelts."

"Speaking of the Indians, they come in all temperaments. Some, like the Algonquin, are peaceful and cooperative, as are the Oneida, the Onondago, the Seneca, and the Huron. But the Mohawk and Iroquois are mostly murderous bastards who will slit your throat if you ever let your guard down. They prize bravery and physical strength above all things, so be prepared to fight hard or even kill without hesitation if we ever have to. Never, ever show them fear! They torture, then slowly kill any unarmed white men who come uninvited into their hunting grounds -- especially missionary priests, the 'black robes,' whom they believe bring a bad magic which upsets their nature gods. Their butchery is done merely for their own twisted amusement and to test the courage of their captives. (Upon hearing this, Marius shuttered, instantly thinking about his younger brother.) They will trade their furs, however, if you have something they really want, like guns and liquor." Claude remarked. He paused and took out a pouch of tobacco and a clay pipe, filled then lit it, puffed contentedly for a few draws, then continued.

"Tomorrow, we will enter the wilderness to begin your training and to collect the remainder of this year's pelts before the rivers and lakes freeze in late September. Our season usually begins in May. We will go west then north down the Ottawa River, then turn left at The Forks and proceed into the *Petite Riviere,* the Mattawa. That will next take us through 14 kilometers of *La Vase Portages* to Lake Nipissing. All the greats took this same route from Montreal into the interior: Champlain, Lallemant, Radisson, and Groseilliers. But we will proceed to my new trapping grounds to train you for a month, then see to my stored furs with my Nipissing Indian friends. You will meet my wives and my two Metis children at their village before we head back to Montreal next May to begin our new season." La Boeuf went on to explain that by staying the winter with his Indian family and tribe, they would save much money, rather than spending a more expensive several months in the big city. "The winters are much more brutal here than back in France, however," Claude warned. "But you'll get used to it -- you'll have no choice!" he laughed. "Remember: soon you'll be earning 500 livres or more a year!"

Marius contributed his share of 25 of his remaining 73 livres to help purchase supplies with Claude. They bought sugar, salt, dried peas, dried beans, salt pork, and dried hard biscuits. To this, they added gunpowder, two dozen steel fish hooks, and brandy. For his squaws, Claude selected some colored buttons, ribbons, sewing needles, spools of thread, and beads of various sizes. La Boeuf already had a large, six-man birch bark canoe and twenty-four beaver traps. "Next, we need to buy you a *capot* -- a thick hooded coat made of wool for the winter, a waist sash, and a red toque cap," Claude announced. "We will make your first buckskin outfit and moccasins in the field. You already have a good musket and a knife. But you need to stop shaving and grow out your beard beginning now, *mon ami*, to protect your face from sun, cold, and insects."

At first light the following morning, they carried their canoe with their supplies across the city to the Ottawa River. With Marius in the bow and Claude steering in the stern, they set out. La Boeuf taught Arnaud his three favorite French paddling songs, which helped them keep the rhythm for their required fifty strokes per minute -- "A La Claire Fontaine," "Voici Le Printemps," and "La Belle Lisette." Marius confessed that the third song had special significance for him, for Lisette was the name of the pretty blonde milkmaid whom he had lost his virginity to a few years ago in a haystack back in Betton -- a sin he had never openly revealed to anyone. Claude bellowed with laughter at Marius' admission, remarking, "You must then sing out lustfully and with fond memory whenever that one comes up! Making love is always a delight, *n'est-ce pas*? And where we are going, the Nipissing women are ready and willing!"

Hour after hour they paddled in the hot summer sun. Soon they were sweating and stripped bare to the waist. Claude showed Marius how to rub bear grease on his skin to thwart sunburn. Marius' hands were sprouting painful blisters too, but Claude promised that calluses would form eventually. The pair avoided the river banks in the early morning and evening hours to dodge the persistent plague of mosquitoes and biting black flies. By staying in the center of the water current, they were granted relief. At nightfall, they slept under their canoe, but had to keep a smoky fire going to help keep flying insect pests away.

Often, the men paddled in silence for long periods when they were not singing, each lost in their own world of thoughts or in the observations of their surroundings. At other times, they would talk about everything. Marius found out that Claude had a rough past.

"My mother was a whore in the slums of Marseilles," he revealed one day. "I never knew my father, so technically I'm a bastard. I grew up near the docks, and learned to fight and steal. I have killed men too when I had no other choice. I probably have some brothers and sisters, but who knows? I chose the name La Boeuf because I liked the sound of it. I eventually found work by becoming a sailor, and later I got married to a plain, simple woman named Claire and sired three children. One day, I heard about a merchant ship sailing for New France. I was told that I could make a fortune as a fur trapper and trader there, so I jumped at the chance. I told my family I would return within three years. But now it has been eight and I'm still here. Of course, I send them money and write once a year. But I like the freedom here, and the adventure. To be honest, I can't say if I'll ever leave. I love the challenge and I love the life of being my own man. I believe in God but not in the Church, so maybe someday I'll wind up in Hell."

Marius had listened intently to Claude, but offered no judgment on his remarks. "We are partners and friends, and I trust you, and that is all that counts in the end," young Arnaud finally proclaimed, with sincerity. Claude nodded and smiled.

The men stopped to fish and hunt when they needed fresh meat. They spied foxes, martens, minks, bear, muskrats, and even an elusive lynx in the dark forests beyond the river, but didn't take them. ("Another time," Claude advised, "because their fur is also valuable.") They shot three deer, skinned them, then dried the hides after scraping them clean. Claude showed Marius how to make a buckskin shirt, pants, and leggings, as well as moccasins. He taught his young partner the names of various useful plants and trees, and which roots were edible, and which leaves could be brewed into tea, and he explained how to identify different species of birds by just their song, and also how to read the sun and the stars to find directions. Then he outlined the all-important survival necessity of making pemmican.

"To stay healthy and keep up our strength, we need to eat about 3-4 kilograms of meat or fish every day, along with our peas, cornmeal, beans, and hard biscuit. Yet just one fourth of one kilogram of pemmican will provide equal nourishment to all of that fresh meat. Made properly, good pemmican can last a whole year. If you take about 180 kilograms of fresh meat -- deer, bear, elk, or caribou -- it will render down to about 25 kilograms of pemmican and about 20 kilograms of dried meat."

To show Marius the technique, the pair set up camp in a clearing for several days. First, they shot two deer and a black bear. After dressing the animals, they made drying racks for the meat, with smoky fires underneath to discourage the flies. Then Claude instructed Marius in the art of pounding the meat between two flat stones while pouring melted fat into the mixture. Next, bones were cracked open and the marrow was extracted, then melted and added. Finally, various wild berries that the men collected were blended in, until, when hardened, the pemmican was cut into regular sized and weighted bars. Marius was allowed the first taste, and found their rich creation satisfying and filling!

Meanwhile, over time, Marius was hardening in both muscle and in his determination to become an expert woodsman under the skilled tutelage of Claude La Boeuf. Young Arnaud's skin was darkening to the color of walnut shells from his long days in the sun and fresh air. He even began sampling Claude's clay pipe, finding the tart tobacco refreshing. His soft brown beard was coming in too, matching his curly brown hair.

When they arrived at The Forks and turned left into the Petite Riviere of the Mattawa, the men had been gone for more than a month from Montreal. Now, Marius would be taught the tricks of trapping the wily beaver as they gradually approached the La Vase Portages -- the connecting series of streams, small lakes and ponds, and three portages which led for 14 kilometers to Lake Nipissing. Even though they had yet to see any other trappers, they set up a hidden camp about a kilometer to the west, and there they would stay for about a month until finally ending their journey at Claude's Nipissing family's longhouse village.

Taking out his two dozen well-used steel traps, Claude explained the procedure: "It takes 44 adult beaver pelts to make one 40 kilogram bale, known as a *piece.* We will stay here long enough to make one bale and construct one fur press to make the bundle tight. Beaver fur is thickest in the Spring after the long cold winter, but trapping is still good now in late August. We will look for dams and lodges in watery, marshy areas where the beaver work and live."

With six traps at a time, the pair went out every day. Claude showed Marius how to place the traps.

"The key is in this bottle. It is taken from the sex gland of the female. It's a liquid called castoreum, or just 'castor' for short." He gave Marius the uncorked bottle to sniff. "Ugh, that's awful!" young Arnaud exclaimed, gagging in disgust. Marius grinned, then continued. "You carefully place your open trap 50 centimeters under the water near where beavers travel. Mark it with an upright stick. Pour a few drops of castor on the stick. It attracts the male, who thinks a female is near and ready to mate. He goes underwater to investigate. Ideally, you hope he triggers the trap with his larger rear foot, because if it gets him by the smaller front paw, he will often twist and rip out his own paw to escape. But if the trap works well, the beaver quickly drowns underwater. We come and collect him the following day. You can also set your traps near their dams at the point where a trail is worn by them going back and forth. Lastly, you can also set your traps by a 'castor mound,' which is a small hill made of sticks in front of their water lodge. The beavers spray these mounds with their own castor so as to warn rival beavers away."

Marius interrupted and asked a question: "Why don't we just storm the beaver lodges and shoot them? Wouldn't that be quicker and easier?"

"A fair question, *mon ami*," La Boeuf replied. "But there are two problems there. One is you put a shredded bullet hole into the pelt, mostly ruining it. Secondly, the beavers would quickly escape through their underwater entrance tunnel at the first sign of any danger or attack. Thus, we must trick and trap them instead."

The two trappers systematically went about their task each day -- setting their traps, checking their previous traps, and recollecting their traps. Marius was warned to be extra careful setting the vicious, sharp, steel-toothed traps, for Claude had seen trappers lose fingers or even whole hands if they had an accident. Sometimes the traps were empty, so they were moved and re-baited with the pungent castoreum. But the majority of the traps did their intended job, and soon the men were skinning and 'fleshing' (scraping any flesh off of the pelt) and stretching the furs on circular, woven tree branch frames, and leaving the pelts to dry in the sun. The pair rarely ate the left over beaver meat, both finding it too unpalatable , so they merely left the denuded carcasses in a pile far away from the camp for scavengers to consume. But they saved most of the special glands which contained a fresh supply of castor.

By now, it was mid-September, and the early mornings and evenings were increasingly getting colder. The men had built a crude wooden fur press, for they had collected their forty-four pelt goal. The furs were stacked fur end to fur end, then squeezed, wrapped in deerskin, and tightly tied into a 'piece' bale. Marius felt very proud of what he and Claude had accomplished, and Claude was likewise proud of his new, very capable partner. Claude had Marius hoist the heavy bale on his back for practice. "Now remember, you will need to carry two of these bales stacked on your back at the same time, for miles at a stretch, with a leather forehead strap on the top one for stability, when we go out next season," he warned.

They broke camp the next morning and loaded up their canoe, and paddled the remaining distance to Lake Nipissing. They carried their canoe over the three portages, then went back each time for their supplies and their fur bale. Soon, the streams and ponds would freeze up, for up north, winter could never be stopped from coming.

Upon arriving in the Nipissing village, Claude was greeted with familiar warmth and excitement. The whole 63-member tribe assembled as he introduced Marius to the group, using their native tongue, which he promised to teach his companion in the months to come. Of course, they were welcomed to spend the winter! the tribe exclaimed. Claude presented the keg of brandy, the keg of gunpowder, and the steel fish hooks to the village elders as gifts. They, in turn, showed him his three fur bales which they had stored in trust since his last visit -- when Claude's former partner had unexpectedly quit in mid-season and left early.

The thriving village consisted of six large longhouses, made of wood and bark in the style used by most of the Five Nation League tribes. Claude had Marius follow him into the nearest one. "Come...I want to introduce you to my wives and children!" he added eagerly. Marius then met Laughing Turtle and Moon Woman, followed by Claude's four-year-old son, Running Fox, and his three-year-old daughter, Asking Sparrow. They rushed to happily hug and kiss Claude over and over. He then formally presented both wives with his gifts of beads, buttons, spools of thread and sewing needles. To his delighted children, he allowed each the rare treat of a handful of sugar apiece. La Boeuf explained that his children would always remain with the tribe, and never be taken by him to Montreal. "The Nipissing prize and treasure Metis children, so they are best simply staying in the Indian world. In so-called 'civilized' society, mixed-race children are merely sinful outcasts in the eyes of the government and the church, and are frowned upon, as are mixed marriages. But, my friend, it is a good practice to take a squaw or two in our business, because it helps to build peace and trusting relationships when we come each year to trade for furs."

Marius noticed a shy Indian maiden staring at him from around a corner. She seemed amazed at seeing a white stranger, yet was smiling. She was perhaps fifteen years old. She had clear eyes and a fine, ripening body, long dark hair, and an open, eager expression.

"Ah, *mon ami*, I think she likes you already!" Claude remarked, noticing her interest in his companion. "Her name is Singing Wind. I think maybe you will take her to wife during our upcoming long and cold winter nights!" he laughed.

The next seven months were a revelation to young Marius. He learned all about the Indian way of life and found that he enjoyed it. He marveled at how cleverly the tribe both used and respected the natural world around them. Everything was so different than in France! Over time, he grew to appreciate the native foods and how they were seasoned and cooked. The winter's frigid cold and winds were -- as Claude had warned -- harsh and bitter, as were the periodic snow blizzards. Marius met each morning with Claude for language lessons -- beginning with universal Indian sign language, then proceeding to the spoken languages of various Indian groups after he mastered the tongue of the Nipissings. Marius then learned how to make a new canoe out of wood and birch bark, and how to repair one if it suffered a hole or leak. Next, he went on hunting and fishing forays with the young braves of the clan. They likewise taught him new winter skills (like how to walk using snowshoes, and how to fish by cutting holes in the ice) and new techniques in both stalking game and in reading animal tracks and spoor. Although the tribe had several muskets, they still relied mostly on their traditional bows and arrows and spears for both hunting and protection. So Marius practiced with them too.

Young Arnaud also got to know Claude's family better, finding his two children delightful, and both his wives charming and industrious. (Claude slept with each of his wives, alternating each week, and Marius noticed neither rivalry nor jealousy between the two women, who acted almost like close sisters to each other.) And not surprising -- as Claude had foretold -- Marius was soon sharing the warm fur bed of the attractive and energetic Singing Wind, though making love with a dozen other people in the longhouse noticing and murmuring took some getting used to! By January in the new year 1724, she joyfully announced that she was with child. Marius proudly married his Indian maiden in a festive Nipissing ceremony and joyful feast, and he already looked forward to returning in September to see both his bride and their new baby.

When May arrived and the streams and ponds were once again free of ice, the two trappers set out with their now four fur bales to return to Montreal. Singing Wind had made her husband a surprise additional complete buckskin outfit plus two extra pairs of moccasins to take with. After an emotional farewell to their families and to the entire village, the men headed over the three strenuous portages and made it back to the Ottawa River. It would take a month from here to get to the city.

Claude La Boeuf explained to Marius about their next steps when the church spires of Montreal finally came into view. "Because we have no conges, we must beach our canoe and goods just outside the city. You will guard both while I fetch my illegal trader friend, Francois Tremont. Under cover of darkness I shall return, and he will bring his helpers and a wagon, retrieve our bales, and pay us our cash. Now, *mon ami*, you need to know that while you are alone guarding our pelts, there may be robbers and bandits lurking about, just waiting to steal our treasure. So if you must fight to protect our goods, you must fight to kill. Use your knife like so," Claude demonstrated, unsheathing his large blade, "and go for the throat or slash at the sides of the neck. If you are in close to the body instead, slab deeply between the ribs so as not to hit bone, then twist your blade sideways before pulling it out. This will make your enemy bleed out faster because the wound won't close up so quickly. I've only had to fight and kill once in my eight years doing this work, so odds are unlikely you will be bothered this time. But be on your guard at all times until I get back."

When they arrived at the designated spot, Claude left once it got dark. Marius watched and listened, but no other souls were around for the two hours that his partner was gone. La Boeuf returned with Francois and three of his helpers, along with their horse and wagon. After introductions, the deal was smartly concluded and the agreed upon money was exchanged. The illicit trader and his crew skillfully slipped back into the darkness.

Carrying their canoe, the men made it back across the city to Claude's unkempt lodgings near the St. Lawrence. The money was divided between the partners according to their prior arrangement. Both men then wrote letters back to their families in France. The next day, bank drafts were likewise written up and added to the letters, which were then posted for delivery on the next outbound ship. Marius sent his promised half-earnings, but neglected to say that he was now trapping and trading illegally, and excluding the fact that he was now married to an Indian squaw who was expecting his baby -- their first grandchild. He ended his letter saying that he was in good health and that he would be earning and sending much more money this new season. Writing to his parents made Marius wonder how his younger brother was doing with his studies at the Jesuit College in Quebec. What stories he could tell Georges if they could meet now!

The regular routine now for the duo would be re-supplying, then traveling, trading, and trapping from late May to late September, then wintering near Lake Nipissing with their families until the following early May. The men loaded up their canoe first with their required foodstuffs, then with trade goods -- bolts of broadcloth and linen, wool blankets, knives, kettles, hatchets, gunpowder, glass beads, mirrors, liquor, ammunition, and assorted firearms. New Indian settlements of various tribes in different locations would be carefully approached to trade these goods for 'made' beaver pelts. The men would of course trap their own furs as much as possible, because that was the cheapest way.

Claude and Marius did well in their first full season together. Before the first freeze, they were back with their Indian families near Lake Nipissing. Claude's children were growing strong, and Marius had a new daughter named Starlight on the Water. The wives were happy that their husbands were back healthy and safe, and life was good.

For the next three years afterward, the routine was unaltered. Much money was earned, and a sizeable portion was sent back to France with a yearly letter. During this time, Laughing Turtle gave Claude a new daughter, Blue Flower, and Singing Wind gave Marius his first son, whom they named Flaming Sunset.

It was now May, 1727. The two trappers had returned to the outskirts of Montreal yet again, this time with six rich bales of pelts. But as they were unloading their canoe in the dusky evening, they were suddenly attacked from behind by five land pirates. In the fight that ensued, two robbers were killed by Claude and one by Marius -- the first man he had ever killed. The other two attackers, badly wounded, fled. In the dim light, Marius saw that one of the men fleeing was missing his upper two front teeth, while the other had a thick scar on his clean-shaven chin. He would remember them both. But Claude had been mortally struck in the back of his head by a large rock. Marius went gently to his old friend and partner. There was nothing to be done. Claude La Boeuf could say nothing in farewell with any last words. Instead, he looked at Marius helplessly with his eyes, then slowly closed them, groaned deeply, and died.

Arnaud dragged the three outlaw corpses to the river and dumped them in the swirling current. Next, he hid Claude's body in a nearby grove of trees away from the bank, along with the six fur bales. He carefully removed and saved his companion's musket, power horn, knife, and red toque. These he would present to Claude's young son, Running Fox, the next time Marius would return to the Nipissing village with the awful, sad news.

Recalling that their illegal trader contact frequented a tavern in town called the Old Cannon, Marius waited, in exhaustion dozing on and off until dawn. At first light, he noticed a teen-aged boy baiting his hook to fish at the riverbank, a relatively short distance away. The trapper casually walked over and made a simple but lucrative request.

"My friend, I have 5 livre coins for you this lucky morning if you go to the Old Cannon tavern and ask for Francois Tremont. Tell him that Claude is ready for him at the usual meeting place and to come at once. Leave your fishing gear here with me and I'll wait," Marius directed.

The boy, happy with his unexpected good fortune, readily agreed. Two hours later, he returned with Tremont and his crew and their wagon. The boy was paid and told to leave right away -- and to tell no one what he did or who he saw. He obeyed. When the lad was out of sight, Marius explained all that had happened the turbulent night before.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a tragedy!" Francois wailed. "Claude was such a fine and trusted friend for the last twelve years. We must bury him here in secret so as to avoid a lot of questions by the Montreal authorities. Then you will paid for the six bales right here now. Think about if you still wish to continue to do business with me on your own, or maybe with a new trapper partner someday. You know where to find me. You are an honest man, Marius, and I believe in you."

The grave was dug and Claude La Boeuf was solemnly laid to rest. No marker was left, for obvious reasons. Marius said goodbye to Tremont and his men and said he would be in touch -- explaining that he needed time to think about his future plans. With his new payment, Arnaud carried the canoe and the remainder of his belongings back to Claude's ramshackle lodgings. Upon entering, it was odd and sad to think that Claude would never be there again with him.

Finding an old letter in the dusty clutter with La Boeuf's wife's address in Marseilles on it, Marius wrote a brief note explaining the tragedy, then added a bank draft for the remainder of all of Claude's money -- including his past savings, which Marius found hidden in a secret cache in a discarded moccasin under his bed -- and posted the packet the following day. (He similarly sent his own parents their annual 'half of his earnings' bank draft, but excluded adding any updated personal news.) Then, Arnaud thought about how he would tell his Indian family the bad news when next he went to Lake Nipissing. How he wished he was with Singing Wind, and his adorable son and daughter, right now! What should he do next with his life? Continue trapping and trading alone? Try to find a new partner? Move to the Nipissing village permanently? Go back to Betton? Somehow get in touch with his brother, Georges -- Pere Giles -- and ask for his advice? Marius was sick at heart. He went to sleep in sheer exhaustion. He dreamed fitfully about the recent attack and the killings at the river, and about Claude's dying eyes looking at him. When the sun finally rose, Marius Arnaud was a changed man -- but not in a good way. He was severely depressed and angry and bewildered at life's sometimes senseless and unfair ways. And he wanted to strike out at somebody. How could God allow this evil to coexist with all that was good in His Creation? The absurdity was too much to fathom. Marius became mean with black hate, his heart numb. He wanted revenge. He would find the two wounded bandit bastards that escaped the fight. And he would kill them.

Arnaud soon started drinking heavily at various taverns in Montreal, day or night, it mattered not. He started gambling at cards and dice, and picked fights when he lost, which was often. He often slept with whores when he got drunk enough and needed release. He was becoming familiar to the city police for his assorted trouble-makings. He forgot about his Indian family. He forgot about trapping and trading. He forgot about many other things -- except about his revenge for his friend's death.

About five weeks after the deadly attempted fur robbery attack, Marius unmistakably noticed the clean-shaven man with the scarred chin exiting a well-known brothel one night. He quietly followed the man down an alleyway. Waiting until he was sure he was unnoticed, Marius carefully slipped behind the man and slit his throat, muffling his cries until the victim stopped moving. Dragging the body to a trash pile, he crudely piled assorted refuse on top of the victim, after taking the man's paper money so as to make it appear that a random fatal robbery had occurred. Marius then discreetly cleaned his murder knife and walked home by a longer route, casually tossing the small handful of worn livre notes onto a nearby conveniently burning trash fire.

Four days later, Marius spied the second robber, the one missing his upper front teeth, as he staggered one night drunk out of the Wharf Rat tavern. Arnaud secretly followed the man as he wandered unaware down by the shadowy docks area. Hiding behind a stack of wooden cargo crates, Marius waited patiently until just the right moment. He grabbed the surprised man from behind by the throat, first choking him into weakness, then sharply snapping his victim's neck sideways then backwards with his muscular arms and hands. Making sure he was unseen, he then dumped the body into the rushing St. Lawrence. The corpse, if ever found, would probably be seen as a typical accident by yet another unfortunate drunkard.

Because Montreal was still a rather rough and wild place and not yet a peaceful metropolis, unexplained disappearances, unidentified corpses, and unsolved crimes were not uncommon. Marius felt his two murderous deeds would probably go officially nowhere and be dropped from any serious lengthy investigations after just a few days. So now I have killed three men, he mused. One was necessary in self-defense, but the other two were deliberate and done in cold blood. Maybe I'll go to Hell if it exists, like Claude, he briefly thought. But in reality, he really didn't care anymore. Life was an empty, meaningless wallow of *merde*!

Going back to his now favorite tavern -- The Raven -- the following day, Marius sat alone as usual at his corner table with his bottle of brandy, puffing on his clay pipe between drinks. Both the regular customers and the proprietor learned to leave him be, due to his erratic temperament and his willingness to fight anyone, anytime, over anything.

A strange trapper, however, came in, and peering carefully at Marius from afar, eventually made for his table, carrying a large glass of cognac.

"Mind if I join you? My name is Guy DuChamp. I bet you are Marius Arnaud. I heard about what happened to your partner, Claude La Boeuf. I met him out in the wild northwoods a few times when we were both trapping beaver. He was a good man and he will be missed."

Marius stayed silent, looking at Guy without much interest. He gestured apathetically to a chair. DuChamp took it. The man wanted company and to talk, but he picked the worst choice in Marius for both. Guy covered many topics for about twenty minutes, with only a few grunts in reply from Arnaud. Suddenly, the trapper's talk turned to the recent killings of several Jesuit missionaries in the vast Kahnawake settlement area south of Montreal. Marius perked up.

"It was pretty brutal, from what I heard. None of the priests escaped. It was the Mohawks that did it. Tortured then killed six...or was it seven? I remember one telling that was particularly savage. The priest had each of his fingers chewed down to the bone after his fingernails were torn out. Then he was stripped of his black robes and made to run The Gauntlet, beaten with clubs and sticks between two long rows of the assembled tribe. Next, the poor priest was staked to the ground and hot coals were applied to his face, chest, stomach, and cock. All the time he stoically said nothing except the words "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...' again and again, but soon his prayer grew weaker and weaker. Then small strips of his skin were peeled off one at a time -- hundreds of them. It takes about three days to die like that, in horrible, terrible agony. After he died, the Jesuit's body was hacked into bits and fed to the dogs. It was all supervised and encouraged -- and most acts specifically done -- by a sadistic Mohawk warrior named Fearless Wolf. The trapper who told me all of this got there the day after the killing took place, when some of the Mohawk braves shared the grisly details with him. Said the priest's name was something like Pere Gilbert, or Pere Gerard...something like that. Oh, and I think he was young and had blue eyes."

Instantly alert now, Marius slowly asked, "Could the name have been Pere Giles?"

"Giles...Yes! Now I remember...that was it...Pere Giles," Guy replied.

Marius was stunned. his mind in a daze. His only brother, Georges. Dead! Martyred. Killed by a butchering Mohawk savage named Fearless Wolf. This appalling news pushed Marius into a boiling rage, then over the edge. He would find this monster and rip the life out of him with his bare hands if it was the last thing he did in this miserable world. His teeth clenched and his eyes on fire, Arnaud quickly thanked DuChamp and paid for the trapper's drink and his own, then abruptly got up and left The Raven.

Marius left Montreal and went south the next day. Over the next three weeks, he traveled throughout the Mohawk settlement lands, asking villages the whereabouts of a warrior named Fearless Wolf. Because Marius showed no fear -- and was apparently completely willing to fight or kill anyone who challenged or impeded his quest -- the braves he encountered did not molest him. Instinctively, they knew he was very dangerous. Bad medicine. Maybe even crazy.

The day finally came when Marius got the news he had been relentlessly searching for: by following a nearby stream, some helpful but suspicious Mohawk villagers explained, he would eventually find the tribe of Fearless Wolf. With black hate and the thirst for revenge in his heart, Marius set out to fulfill his destiny. He cared not if he lived or died by this day's end -- only that he be allowed to kill the Mohawk who had orchestrated the killing of his beloved only brother.

Arnaud soon found the village, and his surprise appearance shocked the Mohawk tribe living there. Marius was quickly surrounded by a band of hostile braves ready to fight, but he boldly and fearlessly shoved them aside and shouted out loudly in their tongue so everyone could hear: "I would see Fearless Wolf alone and do battle with him, for he killed my brother, the Jesuit priest called Pere Giles!"

From the central longhouse, a tall, bronzed, muscular Indian emerged in a deerskin loincloth, wearing feathered leather bands on his biceps and calves. His hair had been plucked from his scalp, with the exception of a tuft still growing on the crown of his head, from which three dark hair braids extended. He looked mean and fierce, his eyes dull from many killings. "I am he," the Mohawk proudly proclaimed.

The tribe immediately formed a large circle, with Fearless Wolf and Marius in the center. Marius declined the use of lethal tomahawks as weapons when offered. Seeing as he was the formal challenger, his choice of knives in this fight was permitted. As a result, Fearless Wolf casually tossed his tomahawk aside and was given a knife instead. The formidable Mohawk then loudly decreed that should he fall, the white man trapper would be allowed to leave unharmed as a matter of tribal honor for his courage. Marius stripped off his buckskin shirt. And so, the deadly battle began.

Circling each other, the men entered into fierce combat. The shorter Marius was quick and agile compared to the Mohawk, yet both successfully slashed each other's chests and arms with deep, bleeding results. They grabbed each other and wrestled to the ground, rolling in the dust and dirt, then got up again, over and over, up and down. The tribal observers were silent in their concentration at and knowing appreciation of the bloody, gruesome spectacle. Both men emitted grunts of effort and groans of pain.

Although Fearless Wolf was powerful, he was also perhaps ten years older than Marius. Thus, his strong energies were slowly getting tapped out as the minutes passed, his breathing becoming more labored now and heavy. His attempted slashings were missing more and going wide, so Marius calculated and waited until he saw his opening. When the Mohawk moved forward suddenly in a desperate lunge to stab, Marius dodged and swung around and slashed his opponent's back, then immediately kicked his opponent's legs out from under him, knocking the warrior down hard backwards. Caught unawares, Fearless Wolf's knife flew out of his hand when he landed. Marius, like a man possessed, instantly went in for the kill, diving atop the Indian's heaving, sweating chest, his own knife in both hands at the defeated Mohawk's throat. Fearless Wolf knew he was done, and his eyes stared wide at the strange and wild trapper who was about to take his life.

Suddenly, a lone woman screamed. The tribe of spectators turned to see the wife of Fearless Wolf running toward the combat circle, holding a silver crucifix. She yelled, first in her own language and then in French: *Misericorde au nom de Jesus!* Mercy in the name of Jesus!

She was weeping as she approached Marius with the crucifix, the shocked crowd parting for her. Marius froze as he recognized the silver object with its attached stand from his brother's traveling altar kit that he had used whenever he had said Mass on Le Renard as they sailed to North America. The squaw whispered her plea again and again, looking down at her helpless husband under Marius' killing blade. She then offered the crucifix to Marius with her left hand, kneeling before him as he still sat atop Fearless Wolf. Looking down in supplication, she carefully and slowly made the Sign of the Cross with her right hand.

A powerful light seemed to be triggered inside of Marius during this supremely dramatic act, a distant light of remembrance and recognition. He remembered his brother Georges --Pere Giles -- sermonizing aboard ship about forgiveness, and mercy, and compassion, and about the need to love one's enemies as Christ had taught. This realization made Marius slowly lower, then drop his knife and grab instead the crucifix with both of his hands. He pressed its cool silver against his flushed forehead, and felt all of his hate and anger and lust for revenge melt away. His brother was right. Marius then got off of the beaten Fearless Wolf and stood up, holding the silver crucifix high overhead so all could see it.

He repeated the Indian woman's phrase in a loud, clear voice, his heart and mind finally at peace, with tears streaming down his face. "Mercy in the name of Jesus!" He circled the crowd with the sacred object depicting the suffering Savior. "Mercy in the name of Jesus!"

One by one, every native fell to their knees in respect, understanding what Marius had incredibly done. A stunned Fearless Wolf then covered his face with his hands, and -- kneeling too -- realized the awesome, true power of this God. The Mohawk warrior went on from that position, and humbly prostrated himself, and even pressed his brow low into the dust...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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