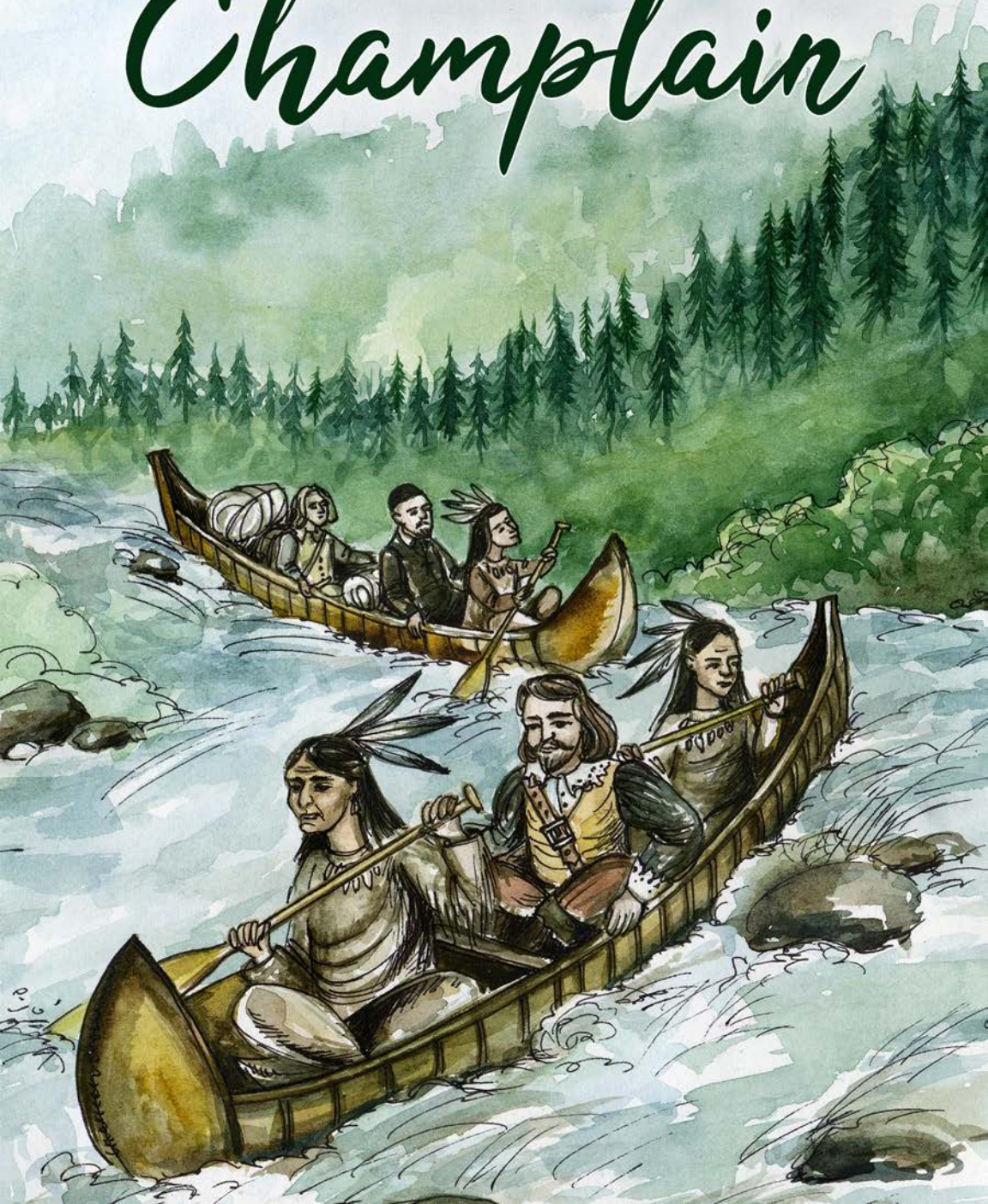


LOUISE ANDREWS KENT

He Went With
Champlain



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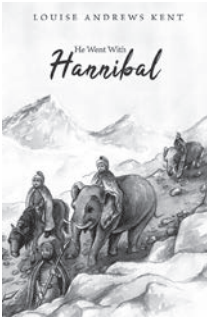
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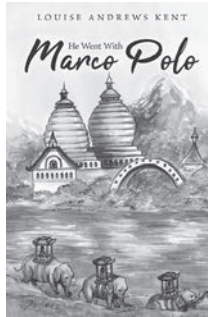
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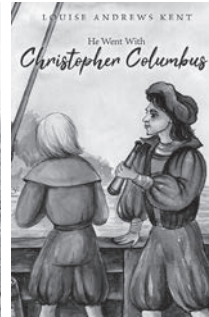
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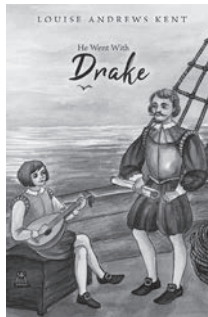
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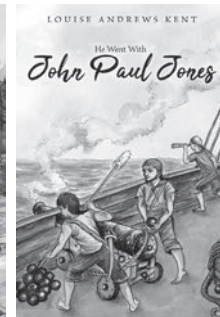
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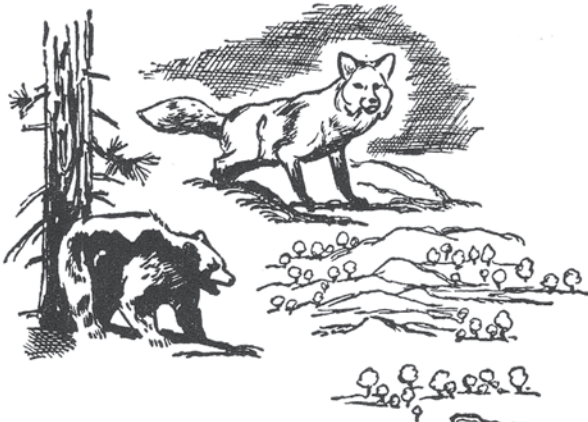
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L. Superior



L. Huron



L. Michigan



L. Erie



A. D'Adamo





1673



Atlantic Ocean

CHAPTER 1

MEETING IN FRANCE



TOM LEE ran along a busy French wharf in Havre de Grace. He was a small, quick-moving boy, so small that he slipped through spaces that seemed too narrow for anything wider than a squirrel, so quick that the sun flashed on his silvery-blond hair as if he were in several places at once. He dodged past rolling casks of butter and cheese, dashed under a door carried by two tall men, darted past another pair who were lugging a stack of diamond-paned windows, jumped over a heap of sacks filled with peas.

Little peas, Tom thought, to plant in Canada. Lucky little peas! Then he smelled fish. He heard a loud miaow. A white cat pushed her head out of a bag slung across Tom's shoulder. Her head was about at the level of his belt as she looked out at a basket full of shining fish.

"It's not our fish, Minette," said Tom, patting her head.

Minette twitched her pink ears and yawned, showing an even pinker tongue. She purred politely for a moment and shut her green and yellow eyes. She knew that Tom would give

her the fish when he had some. He always shared whatever he had with her. Lately they had both been hungry a good deal of the time.

Tom was moving more slowly now. He knew that if he were going to get on board Captain Pontgravé's ship and speak to the Sieur Samuel de Champlain, he must be careful. Etienne Brulé and Nicholas Marsolet had laughed at him and told him that he would never get on a ship bound for Canada. Especially not on Captain Pontgravé's ship.

"He'd eat two English goslings like you for his supper," Etienne had said, twisting his thin lips scornfully. "He wants only French in his crew."

"I'm half French," Tom Lee had said. "You know that. And France is my country."

"Half French—what good is that?" drawled Nicholas. "He'll take us to Canada—not you."

Etienne began dancing around Tom, saying, "We'll see rivers as wide as the ocean, waterfalls like mountains, mountains shining with gold and diamonds. We'll buy beaver skins for a string of beads and sell them in Paris for gold pieces. We'll see the Indians dance. We'll shoot deer and eat venison for our supper."

He stopped, out of breath, and Nicholas went on: "And you and your white cat will see nothing more strange than the coast of England and then the coast of France. Back and forth, carry wine to England, carry wool to France. Or have no ship at all. Plant cabbages. Kill a rabbit for supper and find yourself in prison while we are eating venison pie like dukes."

Just then a sailor had ordered Etienne and Nicholas to move

some casks. Nicholas had narrowed his pale blue eyes and had said, "I'll bet you the first beaver skin I get that you'll never get to Canada. Never get on the ship even."

"And don't let me catch you trying. I eat goslings," Etienne had said. The two braggarts swaggered off laughing.

Tom Lee had stood looking up at the ship. Gulls were sailing above it. They sounded like Minette when she mewed for fish. Through the cabin window Tom could see a man sitting at a table. The table was covered with books, papers, paints and brushes, pens and ink. The man was the Sieur de Champlain. Everyone on the wharf knew him. He was a famous man along the wharves of many French ports. He had sailed to the West Indies and visited Mexico. He had been to Canada and sailed up the St. Lawrence. He had fought for King Henry IV in the wars. The King had given him a pension and a place at court. Lately he had made him Royal Cartographer and Geographer. Another old soldier of the King's, the Sieur de Monts, was going to Canada to explore and found a colony. Champlain was going with the expedition. He would draw maps and find gold mines and look for a northwest passage to the great ocean on the other side of America. And whoever went with him would see wonderful things!

Tom had never seen the King but he had seen his picture. He thought the Sieur de Champlain looked a little like it. His brown hair was brushed up from his sunburned forehead. His horsechestnut-colored beard was trimmed like the King's. He was dressed in brown, the color of his beard, with a starched white ruff and sleeves puffed at the shoulders. His great beaver hat with the shining buckle and bunch of pheasant's feathers



lay on the table beside him. He was writing. The feather of his pen twisted fast through the air.

Tom saw Etienne and Nicholas, each with a cask on his shoulder, go below into the hold.

Now, Tom thought, I can get aboard. Only there are too many people on deck. The best way will be to climb to the masthead of that next ship there. The yards are almost touching. I'll cross over, drop to the deck when I see a good chance... get to the cabin before Etienne and Nicholas see me.

He was already doing it as fast as he thought.

The Sieur de Champlain looked up from the map he was lettering and glanced out of the cabin window. His eye caught the flash of sunlight on a small boy's blond head and on something white near his belt. It looked like a cat's head. Champlain watched with interest the boy's progress up to the yardarm. Every motion he made was the right one.

Champlain liked to see people move with purpose and decision. He himself was a lightly built man, wiry, able to sit quiet in thought but quick and decisive when the time came to move. The roof of the cabin soon cut off his view of the climbing boy and he went back to his lettering. He had forgotten all about the boy when, a few minutes later, there was a light firm tap on the cabin door.

"Come in," Champlain called, laying down his pen.

The door opened. The boy he had been watching stood there, a pink-cheeked, blue-eyed small boy, twelve years old, perhaps, Champlain thought. He seemed somewhat out of breath, but he stood straight and looked straight at you. The cat, Champlain

noticed, was looking at him too. Or perhaps at the half-eaten plate of fish that he had forgotten and pushed aside.

“I can do something for you?” Champlain asked. He did not smile but his deep voice was kind as he added: “Perhaps you will tell me your name and where you come from—besides down the mast from the sky.”

Tom bowed.

Champlain was pleased with the bow. There was no grace, no flourishing elegance about it but no stumbling clumsiness either. The boy put his hand properly over his heart, not over his stomach like a peasant. He spoke clearly too and his accent reminded Champlain of Brouage, where he was born. He thought of an old house with stone arches and a hall with beams of dark oak, of the Brouage marshes where salt used to be made, of apple orchards pink and white in spring sunshine.

“My name is Thomas Godfrey Lee,” the boy was saying. “My father, an Englishman, was captain and owner of a barque that carried salt from Brouage to England. My mother was Anne Tremblay of Brouage.”

Champlain moved slightly in his chair but he did not interrupt. It was his way to give his whole attention, to say nothing until the speaker had finished what he had to say.

“I went to school in Brouage,” Tom went on. “I was taught by the Recollets, the Franciscan fathers there. I learned to read and write French, also a little Latin. My mother often crossed to England with my father. Three years ago their ship was lost in a great storm. The mate, a cousin of my father’s, clung to a floating spar and was picked up by a French ship the next day. He was a kind man and he did his best for me. When

he became mate of another cross-channel ship, he asked the Captain to take me as a cabin boy and I have been going back and forth across the Channel ever since. Dieppe is usually our French port. I have been useful, I think, because I speak both French and English. My cousin used to say that I would be a mate someday, perhaps even have a ship of my own, but he died last month of a fever. The Captain would have kept me on but I would like to see something more of the world than the coast of England and the coast of France. Besides," Tom added, "the Captain would not let me take Minette again. He says there are too many white cats on the ship already. Would you take us with you, sir, to Canada? Minette is a very good mouser."

Champlain said gently, "I am sorry about your parents. I never knew your father but I remember your mother well. Such a pretty girl and a cousin of mine, I think. In Brouage we were all cousins, more or less. Anne Tremblay—yes, a cousin of my mother's. I remember."

"She used to tell me about you, sir. Of how you fought for the King and of your journeys across the sea. How you painted pictures of Indians in Mexico and wrote books. They are very proud of you in Brouage."

"I would like to do something to deserve it," Champlain said quietly. "Perhaps some day I can. Now I would like you to answer a question."

"I'll try, sir."

Champlain moved his hat. It was a very grand hat, Tom noticed. He knew that a beaver hat was so valuable that when a man made his will, he would state which of his sons should inherit his hat. Monsieur de Champlain's hat was quite new.

Perhaps he had brought the skins for it from Canada himself. There was a book under the hat. Champlain opened it and began to read aloud from it.

Men travel—the author said—for many reasons. They are restless. They are criminals running away from punishment. They are poor and think it will be easier to get a living in a new land. They are greedy and expect to find gold and diamonds and swagger home in fine clothes. Some have a holy mission. They go to carry the cross among the savages. Others want power and think they can get it where the natives are wild and ignorant.

“What do you think of these reasons?” Champlain asked. “Is any of them yours?”

“No, sir. All I want is just to know, just to see what is there, on the other side of the world.”

“Then, Thomas Godfrey Lee, my cousin who speaks two tongues—and a little Latin besides—you shall go with me to Canada—you and Minette. You shall learn to speak the language of the Indians and tell me what they say. You shall speak to them for me. I could never twist my tongue to a new speech and it is too late for me to learn now. You shall help me make a colony where the priests will come and bring Christianity to those poor savages. We’ll win a new empire for France and find a passage through great lakes and rivers to the waters of the South Sea, the Pacific, as some call it. You shall learn to drive an Indian canoe through white water and track the moose in deep snow. You shall carry the French tongue far into deep forests. You shall be my servant and I will be your friend.”

He must have seen that Tom could not speak because he

added, smiling: “Minette shall be the mother of many kittens who will purr with a Canadian accent. And now let’s give her what’s left of my dinner. I see she is looking at it with interest. And you, my cousin, Thomas Godfrey, shall go to the galley and ask the cook for some hot fish and good French bread and whatever else he has. Say I sent you. Do I speak your name right? Of course not. How should I—since it’s English.”

“I like the way you say it,” Tom said.

He went off to the galley with Champlain’s deep voice saying “Tom-a Go-de-froy” still sounding in his ears like a great bell chiming.

Nicholas Marsolet was being chased out of the galley by the cook. He ran into Tom and nearly knocked him over.

“Out of my way, gosling!” Nicholas said, scowling so that under his dark brows his eyes were only blue slits in his fat white face. “What are you doing on this ship?” he added as Tom dodged briskly around a coil of rope. “Perhaps you’d like a swim in the harbor.”

“I’ve just come for the beaver skin you owe me,” Tom said, slipping neatly out of Nicholas’ reach. “And to take an order to the cook from my master.”

“And who’s your master?”

Nicholas’ voice was changing and it squeaked like a rusty hinge.

“My cousin, the Sieur Samuel de Champlain of Brouage,” Tom answered. He bowed politely and stepped quickly into the galley, leaving Nicholas with his mouth hanging open, showing his crooked teeth. They always made Tom think of

the fangs of an old wolf that he had found dead near the church at Brouage one cold winter.

Minette had licked Champlain's plate clean and was sitting on his lap purring her thanks. She jumped down when Tom came into the cabin and made figure eights between his feet, caressing his legs with her tail, purring louder than ever.

"*Ron, ron, ron,*" she said, and Tom answered, "*Ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,*" for since Minette was a French cat, they naturally spoke French to each other.

Minette then carefully washed her already clean paws. They looked like sea shells underneath and above like dandelion fluff. She also did her face and ears and hind legs. When she had finished and was humping her back, making a white marble arch of herself, Tom held out her bag. She got into it and turned around, purring, while Tom fastened the strap that went around her neck.

Champlain said, "Why, she is like an Indian baby. They are strapped to little boards and ride on their mothers' backs. See—like this."

He found his box of colors, took up his brush, dipped it in water and started painting. In a few moments it was all there—the black-haired, brown-faced papoose wrapped in a beaver robe, the board with its corners trimmed with bright beads and colored porcupine quills, the mother in her deerskins.

"And I shall see them like that?" Tom said.

"Yes. Only sometimes the mother takes the board off her back and props it against something, papoose and all. You go into an Indian cabin and you may find a row of babies look-

ing at you out of their black eyes. You'd think they were dolls. They don't wink. Here, take the picture if you would like it."

"Thank you, sir. I will keep it, always."

He went towards the door, turned and made another of his quick bows.

"Where are you going?" Champlain asked. "You must sleep on board. We sail tomorrow if the wind is fair."

"I have been living with a farmer's family since I left my cousin's ship, working for my food and lodging. I still owe them some hours of pulling weeds out of the cabbage patch. If I never saw another cabbage, it would be such a pleasure."

Champlain laughed. "You are right to pay your debt but wrong about cabbages. We'll need to plant them in Canada. We must have French gardens there. And Canadian weeds are twice as tall as weeds here."

"It will be a pleasure to pull them out of your garden, sir," Tom Lee said.