

This is a preview of *Journey to Michipicoten*, a novel by Patricia Kay Lucas.  
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*Province of Anjou, France*  
1689

Late in his nineteenth year, Jean Garamond stood propped against a wall in the corner of his Uncle Romain's room, safely tucked in a wing of the Jesuit college in La Flèche. The stone was rough and cold, but it felt good to Garamond. He was dark-haired and, except for one lazy eye, good looking, and immensely strong for his age. Though his stance was nonchalant, he was listening intently to the conversation between his step-father Auguste Michon, his mother Andrée, and her brother, Romain, for they were deciding his future. Or so they thought.

His mother's voice was rising now, afraid that Romain would refuse the seriousness of their plight. After all, he'd found his own refuge here, long ago. Why should he risk disturbing anything, family or no?

"I tell you brother, the wolves have come! I know you know this." She forced him to hold her stare. "The King's men are pounding every door, looking for recruits, our poor boys to throw before the bayonets of some enemy, we know not who. I'll allow, our Garamond mayn't be quite ready to begin his novitiate, but could you not speak for him?" She was pleading now, her fingers squeezing the edge of her brother's desk. "He looks up to you! He adores you, Romain!"

Garamond remained still, his face showing a noncommittal earnestness, an expression he'd perfected as a way to keep his options open without offending. He didn't adore Romain, but he didn't dislike him either. He actually didn't mind the prospect of soldiering either—he pictured himself riding mounted into battle, wearing a uniform, carrying a pistol—though he knew that was a foolish dream. With some amusement, he thought of all the things that were being left unsaid in this meeting.

Uneasily, Romain glanced at his nephew, then down at his own hands folded on his lap. I've neglected my sister's son, he admitted silently, and now King Louis calls us to account. But my life's work is arduous! My duties intrude, my health fails, and he is bright but interested in girls and boats, not Latin—I did the best I could.

"If only you'd brought him here earlier, Andrée."

She shot a reproachful look at her husband.

Auguste shrugged and said, "He is good with the beasts." Though he loved his wife's son, his first concern was his other son—his *own*—who was older than Garamond, and ardently wished to marry and take over the farm. His second concern was his daughter, older yet and marriageable, but spurned by a flighty suitor. Auguste's house had simply become too crowded. Five adults on fourteen acres could only be a temporary state of affairs; it was time for Garamond to go. If the boy could find a place with the Jesuits, rather than wandering off to war or the highway, all the better. Such connections, thought Auguste, would pay off eventually.

"He is good with beasts but even better with books, eh Garamond?" Auguste wagged his finger at Garamond, pumping his brows up and down.

All this was beside the point to the young man. What *he* really wanted was to be a fisherman on the sea, which he'd heard was wide and blue and without demarcations of property, without landlords or haughty *seigneurs*. Each time he and his stepfather and brother had gone to the nearby city of Angers, Garamond would sneak down to the docks to watch the flat-bottomed boats and barges toiling upstream from the Atlantic. Sometimes they were towed by horses, sometimes sailed before a brisk wind. He studied every detail of these emissaries, ignored the jibes of their seasoned crews, and plotted his escape from the lush, ordered land of Anjou. Now it seemed this escape might take an unforeseen turn, deflected by war and his mother's power of persuasion. He held steady and waited.

Andrée leaned forward and clasped her brother's thin hand with her gnarled one. "Anything you want him to do, he will do, I promise."

Romain smiled faintly and withdrew his hand. I have no time for this boy, he decided, and said, "I will speak to Father Marcel about it. Come back in a fortnight and see he goes to Mass in the meantime."

"Shall I come next Thursday as usual?" Garamond asked.

"Yes, yes!" Auguste stood abruptly. "We need him for the sowing, of course, but he may come to do chores for you, and we'll see he goes to church, depend on it! You won't be disappointed in our Garamond, Monsieur, he is a fast learner when he decides he must be."

Romain nodded once, thus ending the interview on a condescendingly tepid note.

The three peasants took their leave. As they started down the path to their farm, a light drizzle started, softening the already fuzzy outlines of a landscape tinged with green and filled with the birds of spring. Garamond stepped lively, unaccountably optimistic in the way of those lucky few blessed with utter confidence in themselves and their futures. He was, he felt, indestructible. He put an arm around his mother's waist and said, "The Jesuit brothers go everywhere —"

"Never mind that," she snapped. "God willing you'll teach right here at La Flèche with your uncle."

Auguste hid a smile and deadpanned, "Or perhaps you'll be right here, mucking the Jesuit stables." Then he laughed good-naturedly as Andrée cuffed him.

Garamond laughed too, but persisted, "To be accepted with them, you must always obey—it is part of the oath. They may order you to go anywhere, and you have to go, you know? Whether it's to save souls or muck stables, you have to go."

Andrée frowned and tightened her grip on her son's encircling arm. For a moment, no one spoke; only their breaths puffed in the cool, humid air.

"We'll see about that," she said.

Auguste changed the subject. "Well, you can't go away just yet, Garamond. I need you to take the colt to sell in the Poitou. It was bad luck we couldn't spare it last fall, and the creature ate more than its share this winter, greedy wretch; it's been a near thing this spring, bones showing on every beast. The colt has got to go," he finished, unconsciously echoing the lot of his stepson.