

*This is a preview of Journey to Michipicoten, a novel by Patricia Kay Lucas.
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*Northwest Shore of Lake Superior
1869*

Out of the corner of his eye, Edward Hopkins was dismayed to observe his wife huddled on the shore like a common waif. It was an uncharacteristic pose, to be sure. Pretending not to see, he resumed his inspection of the bales and boxes heaped on the wharf. As if it were necessary. Everyone there—the laborers, clerks, sundry voyageurs—accorded him the deepest respect, but their eyes said clearly, “Sir, you’re no longer in charge.” How vexing. He glanced over his shoulder. Frances had straightened into her usual elegant self and now held her pencil poised delicately over a sketch pad. Thank Heaven, he thought. Perhaps she will draw a view of the river.

Graves, the bow-legged, quick-witted proprietor of Fort William, soon came down, unable to pass up a chance to gossip. For Edward, it *was* diverting to dissect the petty lunacies of the trade without feeling, for once, responsible for their resolution. Thus, he whiled away an hour or so, as the heat of the day waned and the colors deepened.

By six o’clock, Graves, in his excitement at having guests—especially the Hopkinses—went off to bother the cook, leaving Edward alone. The wharf by then was nearly deserted, the only sound, laughter from a handful of Indian wigwams at the end of the palisade. One last clerk walked away, writing diligently in his book.

Edward meandered back to Frances, who had not stirred. He could see that her hair, a dark amber gold, had been mussed by the breeze. This pleased him, though he could not say why. “My dear, Graves tells me we shall dine at eight. I hope you can carry on, though it’s hours yet, I know.”

She looked up at him and smiled faintly. “Of course.” He noted the paper was blank.

How tiresome that she was still encased in full mourning crepe. Black upon black upon black. How he wished she would wear the lighter gown that evening, the one he’d insisted she bring, still black of course, but lighter and relieved with gray stripes. He was not sure how to broach the subject; he knew it would not do to push. “What about that pretty collar of yours, have a bit of white lace under your chin tonight? What do you say to that?”

“It would hardly be expected just yet, Edward.”

“Ah.” He cleared his throat. “I shall just go for a smoke, all right?”

“Yes, of course.”

The pipe helped, though it was filled with cheaper tobacco now. A shame, but he might as well economize where he could, he thought, for he was retired. Retired! Retired, the little child dead, and his wife inconsolable. Edward heaved a great sigh, the kind of thing he never did unless alone. He could not deny that her sadness prolonged his own, but there was no help for any of it, was there? He was old enough to recognize his old ploy—impatience, which he used to cover

sadness, remorse, even wrath, depending. He was old enough to know his own wily ways, and, he thought, To keep them hidden. He must not let out the awful *impatience*. In the still of the early evening, he could just hear the steamer far out on Thunder Bay, making for Isle Royale. He sighed again and muttered, "Damned dismal trip so far."

It had begun well enough. Agreeable, decent people, some old friends, all of them gathered for a pleasure trip on the Great Lakes. The Falls, Erie, Huron. At Collingwood they'd taken on business passengers and a band of hardy settlers returning to their homes on the upper lakes. Frances got on famously with all, as usual. But she'd quieted when they reached the Sault and had not recovered. Dutifully, they'd called on officials at Fort Brady and the Company's little post; she'd performed flawlessly, but without warmth. He supposed the sorrowful memories of the earlier trip had caught up with her, but what could he do? Hadn't she leapt at the chance for this voyage, this last adventure in the north? And here they were. At the Sault, he'd tried to interest her in the Indians fishing the rapids, surely an exotic sight and perfect for painting, but his wife was unmoved. This worried him more than anything; she had not made one sketch, much less a picture, yet, on this trip. It had always been what she *did*, and now she did *not*.