

A Letter from San Francisco

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A LETTER FROM SAN FRANCISCO

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

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December, 2018

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ABSTRACT

Imagine North America, the year 1763. The British have just defeated the French in the Seven Years' War. Now imagine that, in the aftermath of the war, the British agree to a form of Benjamin Franklin's Albany Plan, creating the first Commonwealth nation. No Revolutionary War is ever fought, no United States are ever founded, no Manifest Destiny takes place. This thesis is a creative writing project and should be considered a portion of a novel that attempts to depict the North America where the aforementioned details were a reality.

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CRITICAL PREFACE

In his essay “Notes on an Unfinished Novel,” John Fowles describes the idea of a story as a seed, and that “once the seed germinates, reason and knowledge, culture and all the rest have to start to grow it.”¹ My seed was planted before I had even decided I was going to write a senior thesis. The seed came in the form of a question that popped into my head whilst watching an episode of *Game of Thrones*: what if feudalism had come to North America?

Authors like Fowles and Henry James have described their ideas coming in the form of images or specific characters they would go on to write. Instead of conjuring an image, I had this question I wanted to answer. The question had not come out of the blue. Feudalism has long been of interest to me due to its seemingly natural progression across Europe, Africa, and Asia. North America was more or less the lone area never to be dominated by a feudal society. Democratic nations had come to power by the time of the Revolutionary War, so I tried to think of a way such an archaic concept would arrive and endure in the New World. My conclusion was that the Revolutionary War would never have been fought.

I thought, what if the part of North America historically labeled the Colonies had remained fully loyal to the British and instead found a peaceful means of separation? What if the thirteen colonies had become the first Commonwealth nation? There is, in fact, historical basis for this given that Benjamin Franklin proposed such an act in the Albany Plan. If something similar, or the actual plan, had been ratified by the British, I thought it possible that those citizens in the Americas would romanticize their status as British citizens. While the historical Americans had a clean break from the British Empire, these New Britons would

¹ Fowles, John. “Notes on an Unfinished Novel.” *The Novel Today*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury, Fontana Press, 1990, pp. 149.

have desired a cementing of their allegiance to the Crown. They would show this in their provincial governors holding titles such as the Baron Boston or the Lord Penn; their Governor General would be called King. All would be non-hereditary titles democratically given power through the people but evoking memories of an ancient past of knights and battles. I had brought feudalism, or at least a form of it, to North America.

Following my mental creation of New Britannia, I started to ask myself even more questions. Fowles said that reason and knowledge have to germinate the seed. The only way I was going to figure out what the rest of this North America looked like was by asking myself questions and getting my imagination to create answers. The questions included, if the United States never formed, would Manifest Destiny still have taken place? How would the people of New Britannia have reacted to the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833? Would the numerous revolutions following the American one have happened without the original taking place? If so, what happens if no one buys the Louisiana territory from Napoleon? What effect does a Russian controlled Alaska have on the continent? What happens when gold is discovered in a Mexican controlled California?

That final question became the most interesting one in my creation of this counterfactual North America. While historians can argue the Mexican Revolution would not have taken place without the American Revolution, for the sake of the story I am assuming it did. At the time of the Mexican Revolution, the Viceroyalty New Spain stretched all the way from Oregon to Panama. These same borders made up the historical First Empire of Mexico. So I asked, what if the Empire had never failed?

The real life First Empire of Mexico lasted less than one year, capped off with the disposal of Emperor Agustin Iturbide. My way of guaranteeing the Empire did not fail was by having someone else ascend to the throne rather than Iturbide. He would be a figure that

would have been more sympathetic to the Mexican people and who possessed immense skills at leading soldiers. This man would have become a champion of the Mexican people where the likes of Iturbide failed. My Honors reader, who is also a professor on American history, introduced me to texts on Simon Bolivar for historical basis and I will admit to stealing bits of Bolivar's backstory. I created a figure born into the aristocracy, or a group of Mexicans that existed among the Spanish elite, and who went on to earn the love of his people.

I still struggled trying to figure out why this man was successful when the others failed. It was then my Honors reader informed me about the silver mines in Colorado, how Colorado has one of the biggest deposits of silver in North America. While the Colorado silver boom was not until 1879, I hypothesized what would have happened had this character I created stumbled on this deposit much earlier. What if he had fallen out with the Spanish, just as Bolivar did, and used the silver to fund the war movement. I had created a character that had risen from the ashes to free the Mexican people from oppression. That is why the character's name is Santiago de Salvacion, for he brought salvation to his people.

Yet once this Mexican Empire had been created, my mind drifted back to feudalism. That had been the seed which started everything. In New Britannia I had created a faux-feudal state that in reality was democratic, but in my mind the Empire of Mexico was always going to be a true feudal state. The Mexican people had been liberated, but it had been liberated by an elite group that was not about to give up the power they had just gained. In the course of writing the thesis, I wanted the Mexican nobles to be characters that had become corrupted with power, becoming just as cruel to the common man as the Spanish had been. Ironically, a new form of Manifest Destiny came around in the course of writing this. This time I labeled it One Mexico; a call for the Empire of Mexico to stretch its borders all

across the Americas. One Mexico is a propaganda tool to satisfy the people and a way of hiding the corrupt nobles seeking to expand their power and influence.

In the end, New Britannia and the Empire of Mexico became the two major players of the story. While I had created about six different countries in this counterfactual North America, those two would have the biggest influence over the plot. A rundown of the other nations include: the Kingdom of the Caribbean (the creation of an island-hopping campaign by a rogue Spanish admiral seeking to free the slaves); the Black Lands (the provinces of New Britannia that refused to abandon slavery in 1833 and who were forcefully seceded from the nation); Louisiana (the remains of the historical Louisiana Territory); the Province of Canada (which stretches into the Great Lakes and modern Midwest region); the historical Empire of Brazil; and Russian America.

When it came to actually writing the thesis, I wanted to be sure I was telling a story. While the history of the continent is of major importance, I did not intend for this to be a history detailing every event that had happened in this counterfactual setting since 1763 up to the present day. Rather, I wanted to write a narrative that would give the reader a grasp of this fictional setting while also explaining how such a place came to be. Keeping a connection to actual history, I chose the story to take place in 1850. I wanted to try and figure out how this world would react to the discovery of gold in California, what troubles that would create and how the other nations would be affected by it. This provided a clear dramatic point for the action to start, which was one of the questions that came to mind when editing the thesis.

Having all of summer 2018 to write my first draft, I wrote over 250 pages worth of material. My writing style is just to pound out pages until the story is finished, which is what I did. Ultimately this meant cutting over 150 pages, including the ending “chapter.” I did not

want to lose this chapter, so I included it with the prologue section at the start of the novel. This ended up working because the prologue is meant to drop the reader right into the thick of the drama going on in this continent, in what is really the climax of the story, before jumping back several months in order to slowly reveal how we reached that point. That way this world of the counterfactual North America could be revealed to the reader while also having them focused on the plot, trying to figure out how they come to what they read in the prologue. In the end, the real plot started in 1763 but I am putting the reader in 1850, so jumping back a few months is miniscule in comparison.

Everything previously stated is meant to show I prefer to have a map of what is going to happen in my story before I start writing it. For a historical comparison, I discovered Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev. Henry James brings up Turgenev in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, describing Turgenev's style as needing to "imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications they would be most likely to produce and to feel."² Turgenev wrote this way because he viewed his characters as subject to change and desired "architecture" for his story, to know what was going to happen next. I realized I had been writing like Turgenev. I knew the story I was creating was a huge world with numerous characters all acting and interacting simultaneously. Therefore I thought it crucial to write down a list of my characters, where they lived, and an outline of what was going to take place in the story and in what order.

In developing the thesis, I thought it would be a missed opportunity to write it as a straightforward prose narrative. This thesis was intended to discuss a North America with

² James, Henry. "Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady.'" *The Art of the Novel*, edited by R.P. Blackmur, Northeastern University Press, 1984, pp. 43.

various ethnicities, regions and political interests. To write it from a clinical third person perspective would have removed the personal effect of the various chapters. To write it from a first person narration would have allowed me to be very personal with one of my many characters, but limit the connectedness I desired for the chapters. I viewed this story almost as an ensemble play; there is no main protagonist. That mindset is how I ended up deciding on an epistolary format, a style whose chapters are written as journal entries, letters, newspaper articles and telegrams. Making it an epistolary novel would reinforce in the readers' mind that this is a historical document they are reading and not a novel. The epistolary style would allow me to jump around this fictional continent and be exposed to both the different settings and voices one would find.

In the second semester of this creative project, my thesis adviser introduced me to various works in order for me to better understand the craft elements I was working on. The aforementioned John Fowles and Henry James were among them, but the two most important craft elements I focused on were defamiliarization³ and dialogism. Defamiliarization is the process of rendering the world unfamiliar so that the reader can experience it anew. In essence, the reader is grounded by reading the names of locations they are familiar with, yet those places are made totally different by the setting of the story. New York City, Mexico City, San Francisco, St. Louis; these are all places a reader will be familiar with even if they have not visited them in person. Regardless, they know New York City and San Francisco do not have palaces and they know St. Louis is not a military fort. Features like these, both large and small, are meant to alert the reader right away that this world might seem familiar but it is nothing like they know it.

³ Hamilton. "Russian Formalism and Defamiliarization." *On World Literature*, 16 June 2015, onworldliterature.wordpress.com/2014/06/11/russian-formalism-and-defamiliarization/.

Dialogism is closer to what I hoped to accomplish through the epistolary format. A term coined by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, refers to the fact the novel incorporates “many different styles, or voices, which as it were talk to each other, and to other voices outside the text.”⁴ For the thesis, I did not want any one voice to sound the same. Vaughn, the kitchen boy from the Lower East Side of New York City, would talk in a totally different way from Isabella Serrano, an educated aristocrat from Mexico. The way these characters talked, or wrote in their journals, had to be different in order to showcase they were coming from different backgrounds and different nations. For the characters from Louisiana and Mexico, this also applied to their speaking in French and Spanish. If these “documents” are thought to be translated from their original language, I thought it still important to retain words of the original languages that would add flair to the text but also not distract the reader. Simple things like referring to father as padre, or rider as cavalier. It added something the text would not have if everything was in English.

In regards to dialogism, Bakhtin wrote “For the prose artist the world is full of other people’s words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear.”⁵ This played directly into the dialogue and the descriptions of the text. I had to imagine everything was being written in 1850, meaning there would be words and phrases that did not exist at the time. For this reason I was constantly checking Google Ngram to be sure I was not using a word that would take the reader out of a story. As John Fowles mentioned when discussing *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* in his essay “Notes on an Unfinished Novel,” modern dialogue cannot be put into Victorian mouths because it creates an absurd result. The presence of “other people’s words,”

⁴ Lodge, David. “Telling in Different Voices.” *The Art of Fiction*, edited by David Lodge, Penguin Books, pp. 128.

⁵ Ibid., 128.

as Bakhtin put it, also came into play with the headings of the journal entries. I thought it best to keep all the text in Times New Roman in order for accessibility on the reader's part; however, since this is also a creative project I wanted to do something to show the various hand styles of the characters. That is why the headings for a character with an educated aristocratic background will be more refined than the scribbles of an urchin boy or the stoic press of a military officer. I'm using as many ways as possible to present my characters as actual people.

This desire to make each character distinct in their words and writings loops back to Bakhtin once more as it relates to his concept of *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin saw the novel as being "constructed from a diversity of styles and voices, assembled into a structured artistic system which arranges difference in a particular way."⁶ Bakhtin saw the novel as social, being able to capture the different voices of the world rather than be restricted to the one voice of the narrator, as in poetry. Since I viewed this thesis as collecting records from various national groups across the continent, they had to be different styles and voices. The slave writing at his master's instruction is not supposed to sound like the Native American girl riding in from the countryside. Heteroglossia helps display the world with the voices that reside in it, even if the story is fictional.

One of the final things I was directed to in my preparing of this critical introduction was Henry James' preface to "The Aspern Papers" in *The Art of the Novel*. In it, James remarks "the merit of the tale, as it stands, is accordingly, I judge, that it has struggled successfully with its dangers."⁷ That led me to ask myself what dangers had I overcome. I had done my best to create a setting that was familiar and different at the same time, but not

⁶ Robinson, Andrew. "In Theory Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia." *Ceasefire Magazine*, 11 Jan. 2012, ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/.

⁷ James, Henry. "Preface to 'The Aspern Papers.'" *The Art of the Novel*, edited by R.P. Blackmur, Northeastern University Press, 1984, pp. 172.

too different to risk alienating the reader. I sought to mimic historical documents so that they appeared as if they belonged in the 19th century. I tried to make the characters human and avoid sentimentalizing them. I tried to make the writing styles distinct and illustrate the varying backgrounds. And I tried to create voices that a reader could understand but also gave a sense of the long ago. All this in more I hope to have accomplished in my writing of this thesis.

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PROLOGUE

29 July 1850 - 23 August 1850

Telegram: 29 July 1850 – 9 p.m.

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

URGENT MESSAGE. Explosion at peace talks. Repeat. Numerous casualties. Commandant's tent destroyed by bomb. Open fighting commenced.

-Caporal Philippe Louis

To Caporal Philippe Louis

Columbia Garrison

Clarification needed. Status of noblemen needed.

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

Mexican prince feared dead, cannot confirm. Fighting started post explosion.

-Caporal Philippe Louis

To Caporal Philippe Louis

Columbia Garrison

What of Governor General Timothy Fitzroy, called king?

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

Status unknown. Presumed dead. The Mexican duke rode west with troops.

-Caporal Philippe Louis

To Caporal Philippe Louis

Columbia Garrison

What of your men?

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

Caught in crossfire. Ten presumed dead. Have fallen back behind the fort walls. I rode ahead to deliver message. Fighting yet to cease.

-Caporal Philippe Louis

To Caporal Philippe Louis

Columbia Garrison

What of the men traveling with King Timothy?

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

All dead.

-Caporal Philippe Louis

Telegram: 29 July 1850 – 10 p.m.

To the Right Honorable Bridget Fitzroy

Fitzroy Palace, New York City, New Britannia

Peace talks between the Empire of Mexico and the Kingdom of California have broken down. King Timothy's men have all been killed in firefight. King Timothy missing. Prince Gabriel dead. Duke Rodrigo fled. Whereabouts unknown. We send this message in good faith to the people of New Britannia.

Louisiana is making our own preparations. We urge you to do the same. Tell your people what has happened.

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut, St. Louis Garrison, Louisiana

THE NEW BRITON EXPRESS

KING TIMOTHY MISSING

COLUMBIA, LOUISIANA, July 30 – Fire filled the dark knight sky of the Louisiana countryside, fifty men of the Royal Cavalry were killed in combat with soldiers from the Empire of Mexico.

King Timothy Fitzroy had led the men westward to moderate a peace talk between nobles from Mexico, held at a neutral site in Louisiana ten miles south of Columbia. Unbeknownst to many, there has been a separatist movement in the Duchy of California. Duke Rodrigo Hernandez has declared his territory independent from Mexico.

A statement to *The Express* stated King Timothy was sent a letter in confidence some six months ago with Duke Rodrigo's intentions to declare California independent and asking for New Britannia's allegiance. The statement said Fitzroy Palace kept the information secret from all but the highest people in government in order to not cause a panic with the public.

While *The Express* had reported King Timothy was on tour visiting the numerous native tribes within New Britannia's borders, this information was a ruse. In reality, King Timothy had ridden west with a small party to speak with Duke Rodrigo. However, in the time it took them to reach California, Mexico had learned of California's treachery. Still, in good faith, Prince Imperial Gabriel de Salvacion proposed a meeting to discuss why California had declared independence and to try and find a peaceful solution.

The meeting appears to have been a trap. A bomb exploded in the tent where King Timothy was meeting with both Prince Gabriel and Duke Rodrigo, now calling himself King. Prince Gabriel was killed instantaneously and fighting broke out between their guards. All of King Timothy's men were killed, outnumbered by the Mexican soldiers. The details of the fighting are still unclear, though Duke Rodrigo may have exposed his culpability by having fled back to California. King Timothy has vanished.

Neither the Louisiana garrisons nor the Mexican Army has declared their possession of King Timothy, putting the entire nation in a state of limbo.

A telegram from parliament announced that Prime Minister Nicholas Baldwin, with the approval of Queen Bridget Fitzroy, has ordered the Royal Infantry to assemble and march west in search of King Timothy. The freshly commissioned graduates of High Ridge Academy will be receiving their orders within the next 48 hours. A state of war has yet to be declared, but a feeling of it has fallen over the nation on this morning.

Written by James Halifax, Editor in Chief

EL MENSAJERA

WAR DECLARED ON CALIFORNIA

CIUDAD DE MÉXICO, Aug. 23 – In a senate meeting given early this morning, Emperador Santiago has declared El Imperio Mexicano in a state of war with the Duchy of California.

Just yesterday, two million strong gathered to mourn the passing of Gabriel, Prince Imperial. Murdered at the very peace talks he proposed, his body arrived by ship at Veracruz and was escorted with great care by Duke Ferdinand Ortega de Nueva Mexico. Duke Ferdinand had been at the peace talks with Prince Gabriel and led the prince's men to victory in the firefight. It was he who sent the telegram from New Orleans informing Castillo de Chapultepec that the Prince had been killed in an explosion.

There was no private mourning for El Emperador and the Imperial family. Telegrams were sent to every city in the empire informing the people of Prince Gabriel's passing and that a service was to be held at the Catedral Metropolitana de la Asuncion de la Santisima Virgen Maria a los cielos. The Imperial family and the nobility were given preferential seating, but hundreds lined the walls and thousands more stood at the cathedral's exterior, filling the city square. Cries of injustice and simple crying filled the air. The people's beloved prince was dead, nothing would stop their weeping.

Slowly, as water over a fire starts as a simmer and turns into a boil, cries of sorrow transformed into cries of hate. People cried for the death of Duke Rodrigo de California, for the destruction of everything he has created. It took till this morning for Emperador Santiago to declare war, but we are certain his mind was made up the moment Duke Ferdinand's telegram reached his hand. What better way to get a nation to cry for war than with the funeral of its beloved son.

The Imperial Army has been in the capital for many months now, having been called home from a proposed campaign in the Colombian jungle. Now they will be called upon in service of their monarch once again.

Written by Miguel Esposito, Editor in Chief

Vaughn's journal - Date ? Somewhere in the Black Lands

I had to stop, I'd have killed the horse had I not. Everything is growing fuzzy. Haven't slept for two days. I don't know where we are. Some river at the bottom of a hill in some forest east of Louisiana. Or maybe we're still in Louisiana. I haven't had time to think. Had to get away. Had to get away.

The fire was so bright, so hot. I can still feel it on my face. Heat that had gone past the point of warmth, to that of pain.

The shouting. Chaos. The explosion. They all just started shooting. No one thought to figure out who or what had caused it. Each side thought the other was attacking, so they fired at every man who was wearing a different uniform than them. It was deafening. One after another bullets whizzed past my head. I lost track of how long I just stayed quiet and out of sight.

But then I thought about King Timmy. He had been at the center of the explosion. No one had rushed to see if he was alright. Their first thought was only to shoot. So I sat up, saw that the center of camp was more or less clear. All around me I could hear the gunfire, but I had yet to be noticed. The entrance flap to the tent was still flapping with the wind, the top evaporating in the remaining flames from the explosion. I saw a chance, so I ran inside.

The table was a shatter of splinters. The crates underneath had been blown away. There were two bodies on the floor surrounded by the ring of fire that was the tent. Neither one was moving. I didn't stop to think where the third was. I rushed over, keeping my head down to avoid the flames. I didn't think about myself, all I thought about was getting King Timmy away from the flames.

One body was the color of charcoal. His military uniform was soot black. Patches of his uniform had burned away and underneath was bright red skin that smelled like cooked beef.

It was disturbing; my mouth felt as if it was on the verge of watering. The man's face had this same bright red skin. His hair had been almost completely burnt away, leaving tufts in its place. I fought back the urge to empty my stomach the entire time I inspected the body. The smell filled my nose with a horrific scent. There was no question this fellow was dead. My heart clenched for a moment as I feared the person at my feet was King Timmy. Only when I recognized the medals on his chest did I realize it wasn't.

There before me was Prince Gabriel. The handsome gentlemen from just hours before had been stripped of every identifiable mark. Now he was no different than a piece of meat on a butcher's slab.

I went over to the second body. This one was covered in dirt that had been kicked up from the explosion. His hair and clothes were intact, though there were scorch marks from the flames. But they were intact enough for me to recognize the figure as King Timmy. Thinking fast I held my ear to his mouth. A small gust of wind came out. He was still alive. I pulled back and only then did I realize what had happened. In the light of the flames I saw both of King Timmy's eyes had been smeared black by the flames.

I heard more shouting and more gunshots from outside the tent. The shouting sounded like it was growing louder. I had to get King Timmy out. It didn't matter how, I just did. Seeing no other options I grabbed his arms and started pulling in the direction of the tent flap.

This took longer than I expected, King Timmy was just too large for me to pull him with any speed. I just pulled, there was nothing else to do. I was able to make it all the way back into the tent city, temporary cover. It appeared the soldiers were too busy fighting each other to notice me. Once I reached the tents I collapsed, sweat across my brow and breathing without relief. Off in the distance I saw the tents were starting to be lit aflame. A hell on earth.

More gunshots filled the air, though they were less frequent. In it all I thought I heard the familiar sound of horses neighing and assumed I had to be close to the stables. Taking a couple moments to catch my breath, I wiped my brow and resumed my pulling of King Timmy's legs.

I was right. Beyond all the tents was a makeshift stable. All the horses were strutting about, neighing and kicking the dirt. There were not as many as before but I did spot King Timmy's black steed.

I started towards the horse but a gush of wind from behind me knocked me to the ground and King Timmy's unconscious body with me. The dust had come from a horse dashing up from behind us. As I collapsed I looked up at my attacker. The figure was hidden in the darkness for a moment, but as it repositioned itself they were revealed by the fires. It was the Indian woman Lyonette riding atop her stallion.

"Help me," I said in an exhausted whisper.

I wanted to shout, but I felt as if no air was in my lungs.

"Help us," I said again, barely a whisper.

For several moments she just stared down at us, her startled gaze looking back and forth at myself and the unconscious king, who for all she knew was dead. I was helpless. All I could do was look her in the eyes and hope. Hope that she saw we were not at fault.

Lyonette glanced towards the fires and the gunshots, but in moments she was off her horse and helping me up with King Timmy.

"I have to...I have to get him out of here," I said with great struggle.

She didn't say anything. She didn't bother asking me what had happened, and I didn't take the time to ask her what had happened. It was as if we both realized neither had the answer to the question. Lyonette helped me saddle King Timmy's horse, giving me what

little provisions she had. She first helped King Timmy onto the saddle and then myself. Lyonette positioned King Timmy so that he rested against my back, going so far as to tie a rope between he, myself and the horse. She took my hand tight as she untied the horse and put the reins in my hand.

“Ride east, ride hard,” she said, looking into my eyes.

“Thank you,” I said as sincerely as possible, still trying to catch my breath.

She didn’t respond. She took three steps behind us and slapped the horse on the rear. Like a cannonball we shot off into the darkness. We were miles away from the garrison, miles away from any New Briton city, or a city of any kind. The light from the tent city disappeared behind us, leaving us shrouded in a night sky that was devoid of stars.

I did my best to keep the horse going straight, but without a compass or any defining landmarks I could only guess where I was going. It came to a point where I was not steering the horse at all. The beast just ran and ran. For it knew we had to get as far away from the shooting as possible. As we rode my mind raced back and forth, wondering what had happened to the King on the Coast, if any of King Timmy’s soldiers were still alive, what caused the explosion, who caused the explosion, what would happen to Lyonette or the rest of the garrison soldiers, how would the Mexican Army react to all this, what would I say to King Timmy when he wakes up, what would I do once he woke up. I couldn’t stop to consider what I would do once I got back to New Britannia, there was no guarantee I would even get there.

The horse stopped at this river without guidance. Feeling the eve of its death, it has stopped to drink, as have I. My back aches from King Timmy leaning against it for an entire day. He is starting to waken. I have wrapped a cloth around his eyes, forever shut from the sun. I must help wash his wounds. Once I’ve explained everything I imagine we’ll continue

riding further west until we hit the ocean. Once we hit the ocean we'll know how much further we have to go.

PART I

12 November 1849 - 9 January 1850

*The Diary of Isabella Serrano - November 12, 1849, Duchy of Oregon,
Imperio Mexicano*

It is a most deplorable day. The clocks say it is dos de la tarde yet the sun has not risen. A fog hovers over everything in this country, and when the fog is gone it rains with the force of a waterfall.

Padre's home is lavish but this place is little more than a fortress. A palace it is not. The town below is little more than settlement. Indians come to trade from time to time and leave within the day. The traders from the islands cannot make their way here, nor can those from America del Sud. The settlers struggle to sustain a crop with the inconsistency of the weather.

Nothing grows. An abundance of rain. Too little sunlight.

I would detail information on the rigidness of the army forts east of here, but with this weather I have been confined from even setting eyes on the place.

I long to return back south. I long to see the capital again. I long to feel the sun and to dance with elegant people. Here the days are never dry enough to dance and my soul is dampened in consequence.

But today my spirits were lifted higher than they were before.

I received a letter from La Emperatriz, much to my delight. She wished me well and spoke of how she misses me. She always enjoyed our talks on mi padre's frequent visits to the capital. In her words the ladies of court talk as if they were stuffed animals mounted on a wall.

I intend to write back thanking her for the letter; La Emperatriz's kind words always brought joy to my day when we talked. But in her letter she also brought up Gabriel.

She assured me that my betrothal to him was still a certainty. She said they are waiting for Gabriel to quell the rebellion in New Orleans and that after he has succeeded, I will join him.

This is the first time in many months I have thought of Gabriel. The dearest of friends since I was a child. When I first came to Oregon I often thought of him, thoughts to distract my mind from the sadness of the weather. But it has been so long since I was last in his presence that I struggle to remember the contours of his face.

Oh how I cried when I was first told of our betrothal, yet now I am afraid of seeing him again. Will he be the childhood friend who helped me in my time of need, or will he be El Principe.

THE NANTUCKET ALBATROSS

QUEEN APPROVES NATIVE AMENDMENT

NANTUCKET, Dec. 1 – A telegram from the governor’s mansion in Boston read “King Timothy’s mission a success, royal celebration in the works.”

An official statement to *The Albatross* elaborated that King Timothy’s royal attendance with Queen Victoria in London had gone without difficulty. On a misty winter day, the king had met with Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace to discuss the question of whether or not the aboriginals were to become citizens. Reportedly, King Timothy reminded Her Majesty of the Haitian revolt and how Jamaica, Barbados and other Caribbean nations had so easily joined the monarchy of David Mendoza in Cuba after he secured their freedom. The King also used the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 to his advantage, citing that the Crown has already made strides for a more unified people in the Commonwealth. He argued that the native tribes within New Britannia’s borders deserved citizenship more so than any other person.

The history between the Fitzroy family and the native tribes has been well documented. Ever since Henry Fitzroy fought against them with the Royal Marines in the Seven Years War the family has made it their business to understand these people. In those early years after the war, Henry Fitzroy left his home in County New York to live with the Iroquois. That knowledge proved vital when the Commonwealth was birthed and citizens were given permission to move into the Appalachian Mountains. It was Henry Fitzroy who was able to

barter a peaceful agreement between the two nations and avoid further bloodshed.

King Timothy has followed the legacy of his great grandfather. In his time as governor general, King Timothy has added insurance towards Iroquois lands, encouraged them to participate in New Briton society and has also welcomed many from the Powhatan tribe who have fled the economic desolation in The Black Lands for prosperity in New Britannia. This interconnectedness between the native tribes and the sons of colonials led King Timothy to propose an amendment to the constitution that would name them citizens.

His argument: “New Britannia is their parent. Like our prodigal sons we should welcome them into our household. To bring them into the greatness of the Commonwealth.”

We will not know the specific words shared between King Timothy and Queen Victoria, but we know that the amendment was approved and King Timothy has embarked on his return voyage. As we at *The Albatross* read the telegram we wagered that King Timothy was already out on the Atlantic. According to Fitzroy Palace, King Timothy is expected to dock at New York Harbor days before New Year’s Eve if not on the day itself.

Queen Bridget and Fitzroy Palace are planning a parade through Manhattan upon his arrival and all people throughout the country are encouraged to attend. Further details will be reported closer to the date.

Written by Jonathon Croft, Continental News

*The Diary of Isabella Serrano - December 15, 1849, Duchy of Oregon,
Imperio Mexicano*

Padre has been acting mas extraño the last few weeks. I have seen from his letters that he has been trading correspondence with Duke Rodrigo de California. But for why I do not know.

Every time a letter arrives, Padre makes sure to read it at once regardless of what he may be doing. He never tells Madre nor I about the contents of the letters, nor has he let me open one for him. I believe he does this solely out of fear I may catch a glimpse of what is inside.

Last week Padre spent the day in San Francisco meeting with Duke Rodrigo. I was not allowed to go, I was forced to stay and suffer another rainy day.

When he returned he was in a frenzy. He nearly started to dance when he first arrived home, he even went so far as to twirl me around. He would not go into detail about what he experienced in San Francisco, but he said it was marvelous.

But the excitement did not last long. He quickly became reserved once again and started spending entire days in his office, speaking with the various personnel he would summon from around the county. Mensajeros from every city in California came to our home, some were simple servants while others were stately men. But the visits from members of the Imperial Army were the ones that disturbed me the most.

It would be foolish to say the situation is not the least bit frightening.

Vaughn's journal - December 20, 1849, New York City, New Britannia

At Momma's urging I have decided to start this journal to record my days. Though I fight to find the words to put down, Momma sees this as a crucial point in my life. She keeps calling it "a thing to look back on." I don't know what she means. I remember everything I've done since the day I was born.

Today was a very boring day, so perhaps writing in this will pass the time. Even with the King's absence we have been expected to wake up at first light every morning to receive our tasks from Matron Hathaway. This is never difficult as the clanking of the shipyards across the dock always wakes me up. Though on Sundays, when I'm allowed to return to my home on O'Connell Street, Momma always has to use her paddle because the shipyards don't work on the holidays.

Today Matron Hathaway told me it will be almost a year since I started working at the palace and I wager she's about right. I can't say she's wrong, I just know it's felt like a long time. Even with King Timmy's absence they've found chores for me to do. I've done everything from dust shelves to wipe windows to scrub floors to help carry fresh fish back from the docks. But I've also got to bring the Queen her letters and her daily meals. That's something I will always brag to my friends about.

THE PHILADELPHIA SCRIVENER

MENDOZA CELEBRATES 90th YEAR

HAVANA, CUBA, Dec. 22, – Like Zeus coming down from Mount Olympus. That is how the contemporary reports first described the figure of King David Mendoza.

This coming Wednesday marks the ninetieth birthday of King Mendoza and almost thirty-five years of his reign in the Caribbean. The man who launched a thousand ships may be past his seafaring days, but his word and his fleet still command respect throughout the Americas.

The descendant of slaves brought back from the New World to Spain, Mendoza learned maritime ways of life at an early age. From the age of five he was regularly in his grandfather's fishing boat, and eventually he made his way into the Spanish Navy.

Still with the brown haze skin that revealed his West Indies origins, Mendoza faced barrier after barrier. A weathered man by the time he was given his own command, his superiors made sure it took Mendoza twice as long to get there. Yet for someone with his talent to lead people, his high rank was only an inevitability.

Even so, Mendoza grew up being taught to remember his family's roots and to remember the horrors that slavery had done to the aboriginals of the island nations. That was why his fleet was dominated by men he single-handedly picked. Men who remembered their Caribbean heritage.

By the time of the Mexican Revolution, Mendoza, then a high-ranking admiral, was sent to support the Spanish nobles, only to take the opportunity to

enact an island-hopping tour of the Caribbean to break the chains of every slave he passed along the way. His actions in essence created two kingdoms: The Empire of Mexico and the Kingdom of the Caribbean.

With the reputation of himself and his fleet ruined in the eyes of Spain, Mendoza and his loyal crew took their seat in Cuba. There, by the will of the people, he was made king and from that day onward he has been ruler.

There is no talk of a grand parade, but the day is a national holiday throughout all the islands. Emissaries from both New Britannia and Mexico will be traveling to Havana to pay their respects to Mendoza, a beloved ally to both nations.

Mendoza's time on this earth may be nearing its end, but his acts will ensure his legacy lasts through the centuries, even more so with his continental foothold in Florida and the blockade surrounding the Black Lands. Mendoza is the one name unquestionably known throughout the Americas. A name that equates to peace and prosperity. A grand statement for one who started so low.

Written by Edward Burton, International News

From the private documents of Baron Frederick Kane of South
Carolina – December 25, 1849, Il Pallazzo, Kane Plantation,
Duchy of South Carolina

It is a most morbid Christmas Day indeed. On this day I learned my dear friend Emmanuel Johnstone has died at the age of eighty-two. It has been fifty years but I still remember he and I when we were young, riding bareback down to Seminole country, back before it was the property of King Mendoza, back when borders meant nothing and we could ride for weeks on end traveling up and down the coast.

Until recently Emmanuel and I were the only two left from that generation of landed sons who sought to take on the world and did so. We trekked every mile of Appalachia and rode as far west as Tejas. Yet now I'm the only one, my only memories are ghosts. The youths of this nation, men like Duke Angus Lee of Virginia have surpassed me in influence.

I've long left my mansion in Charleston and returned to Il Pallazzo, the place of my birth in the country. Here I will live out the remainder of my days, trying my best to right the errors of a lost generation. Both lost in that they have left this world and lost in that the world has forgotten about them because of their past decisions.

I am eighty-six now. Many a year ago I never expected to reach this age. Yet now more than ever, my days feel shorter. I can only hope that, as my life begins to set, I can right one wrong of my damned home. In these pages will my deeds be recounted, written by the hand of my slave Joshua. Here I remain to find some semblance of peace.

Vaughn's journal - December 31, 1849, New York City, New Britannia

I may have only been alive for 11 years, but I daresay today was the most wonderful thing I ever did see. There was a grand parade held in honor of King Timmy's return from England. Momma and Papa said he had gone to speak with the Queen, Victoria. I knew who she was. "The Big Woman," as I heard the other boys call her.

No one ever did get around to telling me what we were celebrating, but I don't think anyone actually cared. It was a party the likes I'd never seen. A parade of them cadet boys from High Ridge met King Timmy at Hudson Port just south of the Brooklyn Bridge. From there they marched up St. Charles Street, then to Huron Way before finally reaching Franklin Street. There the parade showed off its grandeur. Dancers twirled, soldiers marched, bands trumpeted and horses clacked against the stones of the longest street in the city. They would march on to central park before entering the upper west side and Fitzroy Palace.

The king was there for all to see, riding on a white stallion beside the queen. But while many cheered for them, much more paid very little attention to them. They were all so busy dancing and drinking and kissing and vomiting that I don't think they once set eyes on King Timmy. I know I couldn't stop staring. I had almost forgotten what the man looked like.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

FIREBRAND SEPARATISTS EXPELLED

TORONTO, Jan. 5 – Not twelve years have passed since we fought amongst ourselves in open rebellion. As a people we fought for political reform, to be governed as equals of the crown under one Canadian government. We succeeded. Yet there are those who have yet to cease in their fighting. Those who would enact terror for the benefit of the few.

The One France movement has instilled a period of terror on the country that has successfully been crushed by the government. Made up of diabolical French Canadians, the One French share the belief that all the lands formerly consisting of New France should again be under their own rule. Three months ago these “revolutionaries,” as they call themselves, set fire to the construction site of the new parliament building in Toronto and set off bombs at the homes of three different MPs. The act was meant as a response to the parliament buildings in Montreal. All of the perpetrators of this arson have since been arrested and their meeting places in Montreal and Toronto have all been raided.

It is the belief of the government that the threat of the One France movement has been thoroughly put down with these arrests. A statement from the most recent parliamentary meeting declared all members of the One France movement to be enemies of the Crown and that all members will be deported out of the country. Any who are found guilty of acts of violence or attempting to commit acts of violence will be executed for treason.

It is important to remind people the One France movement does not reflect the beliefs of all the French Canadians. They are a violent group looking to spread terror. Do not view them as your fellow citizens for their views are of a backward thinking world.

Written by James McGrath

Vaughn's journal - January 7, 1850, New York City, New Britannia

I can scarcely keep this pen straight long enough for me to write a word. I don't know why but my hands tremble. I fear if I don't use them for a task they will shake like this forever.

Today started like any other. I had returned to work Sunday night, sprinting through the streets and along the shipyards, getting called a darkie by some bum. I woke, washed and ate breakfast extra early that morning for it was King Timmy's second day back at the palace.

Me and several others had enjoyed our holiday for the parade, but now we were expected to work. Today, I was to bring the King his breakfast, his letters, and to accompany him unless told otherwise. I was to do what was told of me.

I was mighty afraid when I stepped into the royal chamber and opened the curtains. I've seen how Papa can snap like a sleeping dog when roughly woken from his sleep, never meaning harm but sometimes causing it. How was I to know how the king would act? King Timmy did nothing more than yawn once I opened the drapes. Yawn like a lion he did but nothing more. I left him his breakfast, and he told me to wait in his study with his letters.

I had been there plenty of times before to dust the shelves and count the books. Three windows opened bright onto the Hudson, steamers already blowing their horns. I did my best to stay still for as long as possible, but I will admit to having circled the room several times and often stared out those windows.

But when the door opened I was back at my spot where I stood at attention, the King's letters at his desk with the opener to his right, a tiny gilded saber that might actually have been a knife but I wasn't sure. To my surprise, King Timmy remembered my name and asked how old I was.

"11 going on 12," I answered.

“Why aren’t you in school?” he asked.

“I was, sir. I went till I was 10. But I needed to help my family in some way when Papa hurt his leg.”

“That’s very honorable of you.”

“Yes, sir. He’s gotten much better, but Momma’s unsure if he’ll be able to return to work.”

“What does he do?”

“Machinery, sir.”

“Ships.”

“Rifles, sir. Papa worked at the factory that built the ones they send up to High Ridge. Or, at least, before the injury he did.”

As the king questioned me, he opened his letters, skimmed through them and tossed them aside. They were too far away for me to read, but given who they were the King’s letters I knew they were from important people.

“And what does he think of us?” King Timmy asked.

“Us, sir?” I asked, confused.

“My family. The Fitzroys,” King Timmy replied with a booming voice.

King Timmy had an air of invincibility around him. The way he spoke it was as if he was pounding his chest every time he brought up his family. Who was I to judge? Every week the papers seemingly had something bright to say about King Timmy.

“Papa’s never stopped singing the praises of the Fitzroy family sir. Twas them that set his family free, allowed him to come to New York.”

King Timmy nodded his head as he cut open the letter.

“Thank you, Vaughn,” King Timmy said, still speaking with a voice as if he was looking out at a crowd of people. “I’ll admit my decision with the aboriginals has not been a universal opinion, no matter how much I believe it’s the right thing. So I’ll take all the support I get.”

The king then smiled at me before opening another letter that looked like all the others. But this one was clearly different. For when King Timmy was done reading, I dare say his face was whiter than his bed sheets. All the pride and confidence he expressed in the past few moments was gone in an instant. I approached the table to see what was the matter, but by the time I reached him, he had picked up the bell to his left and rang it.

The doorman burst inside upon hearing the call. King Timmy ordered the man to summon the Prime Minister and the Private Secretary. The king ran his hands through his hair. Before me was a shell of a man that they called king.

It was then I saw that the letter King Timmy was reading had dropped to the floor. I knelt down to bring it back to his possession, to be of service in some way. Yet when I placed the letter on King Timmy’s desk, there was a look of shock before which I had never seen on his face. It was as if he had forgotten I was there.

“Are you alright, sir?” I asked. “Should I fetch the queen?”

“Yes. No, I’m not sure,” he said, a vein visibly pumping on his left temple.

He grabbed onto my shoulder, pulling me close. It was not threatening, but the circumstances made me afraid.

“Tell me, Vaughn. Did you learn your letters while you were at school?”

“Yes, sir.”

King Timmy bit his lip at my answer. I could tell he was looking for the opposite response.

King Timmy then pointed to the letter. “Can you read that name?”

I leaned closer and read what it said. “Rodrigo Felipe Hernandez, King of California.”

The Private Journal of Prince Imperial Gabriel de Salvacion – January 7, 1850, Principado de Tejas, Imperio Mexicano

On this day I have received a most peculiar and most ill-advised letter. A man who I believed to be among mi padre's close friends has gone turncoat. Duke Rodrigo, for that is all he truly is, has the nerve to take an entire duchy and declare himself king. I write these words lest my blood boil and I strike a wall.

I remain calm despite this. This letter is nonsense, what validity is there to it? None. Were my mind not so preoccupied elsewhere I would have acted differently. These French resistance leaders have been trying my patience for weeks. Just two days ago an explosive was found inside one of our tobacco ships. If it had gone off it would have been a catastrophic loss of capital.

I had thought their gathering place was found today. Alas it was not so. Now I have this new problem before me. For now I can only sit and ponder what is going on. I have telegraphed Padre to receive his counsel. If he has received this letter then I know he will be in a rage. When I see him next I can only hope to quell his temper.

January 8, 1850

Padre responded to my telegraph in quick succession. His command was short. "Return to Ciudad de Mexico." Today my ship has been prepared, a vessel for myself and a small company of soldados and their horses. We departed in short order.

I left my lieutenants to continue the hunt for the rebels in New Orleans. I pray they do their job justly. Now I embark on this short sea voyage home, all the while wondering just how many people Padre shared that same message.

*The Diary of Isabella Serrano - January 9, 1850, Duchy of Oregon,
Imperio Mexicano*

The day has been a flurry.

Our home has been flooded with men both familiar and strange. All day I have been moved from place to place as men march back and forth transporting my belongings out of the fortress. I am at a loss of information in terms of what is going on. It was only an hour ago I was finally able to speak with Padre. I had to physically grab him to make him hear me.

“What is going on? What are all these people doing?”

“All will be explained in due time. Right now I need to get you out of here.”

“What? For weeks you have been keeping secrets. I want answers.”

“Isabella, something much greater than you or I is happening.”

“I am not moving another foot until you tell me where I’m going.”

“I am sending you to San Francisco. You are to boarder with the Duke.”

In that moment I had to quell my emotions. I was saddened and confused as to why I was leaving, but also excited to finally be freed of the damp of this country. Yet there was also fear, fear of not knowing what Padre and Duke Rodrigo may have been doing, and why. Fear of what my part in all of this was. Fear what the great consequences would be.

I lost control to fight what was happening around me. Now I stand at the bow of a ship sailing down to a future undetermined.

PART II

11 January 1850 - 30 January 1850

THE NEW BRITON EXPRESS

On the Move Yet Again

King Timothy Marches West to Speak with Native Tribes

NEW YORK CITY, Jan. 11 – Not two months after his triumphant return from England, King Timothy is once again on the move. In a seemingly spur of the moment decision, the King has decided to make a trip around the country visiting the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

A dispatch to *The Express* said, “In honor of the King’s historic agreement with Queen Victoria, his heart wills him to congratulate every member of the respective tribes in person and in their respective homes. King Timothy is aware of the hardship faced by those who have fled north from The Black Lands, people like the great Powhatan, so rather than summon them to the capital he is stepping down from his palace to greet them as an equal. The King will not even ride wearing the royal standard. This is to be a symbolic gesture now that the aboriginals are full citizens.”

Anyone who knows this country’s history knows the Fitzroy family has had close ties with the natives ever since they entered the forefront of national politics. It was Henry Fitzroy, the great military leader, who fought them as well as the French in the Seven Years War. It was also Henry who worked to barter the peace between the confederacy and New Britannia. He was a man who understood suppressing these people through brute force would accomplish nothing in what was then a new nation.

Now his grandson Timothy is carrying on that legacy of being bearers of the peace.

The journey will be at a leisurely pace as the King wishes to speak to aboriginal and New Briton alike. In the end, this tour will likely consume many months as King Timothy makes his way through the lower provinces before returning safely to New York City with his company.

Written by James Halifax, Editor in Chief

Letter to the Superintendent of High Ridge Academy – January 11,
1850

My good sir, I wish to apologize again for being unable to attend the commissioning of the most recent graduating class of cadets. I can still remember what it felt like on my own commissioning day, the sense of achievement after four grueling years at the academy. Even with no wars to fight, I relished knowing I would become a guardian of my nation. I would have wished to bestow those same feelings on the boys; alas this letter is all I can do. Had I been summoned by anybody but the King I would have refused their call, our boys are the future of this country after all. I do digress. I'm writing this letter to let you know of my impending arrival at High Ridge. I plan to stay there indefinitely, and give the boys my own ounce of wisdom. I would also like to speak with you upon my arrival. Until then, be sure to advise the instructors to ramp up the pace for the weekly training sessions. It may do the boys more good than they realize.

Your humble servant,

Lionel Smith, Commander of New Briton Forces

Vaughn's Journal - January 12, 1850, West County New York, New Britannia

If any of this is hard to read, know that I write it on the back of a carriage. We left in the midnight hour, before the shipyard workers had even started working. There are 50 of us in total, well, 51. I'm not an official member of this group. King Timmy rode near the front of the group, but not at the very front. He was dressed like all the others. No formal dress, no frills, no medals. He looked like a regular officer. They all rode black horses and wore caps that hid their faces. I only knew which one was King Timmy because I was with him when he mounted.

I had seen too much back when King Timmy got that letter from the California duke, now calling himself a king. King Timmy wouldn't let me leave. He had me stay; the queen and the prime minister joined him. And there I was, just some boy from the lower east side with the most powerful gentlemen in the country.

They talked about the letter, talked about what it meant and what would happen. They talked of people and places I had never heard of with names more colorful than any you'd find on the streets of Manhattan. But they did bring up Mexico quite a lot. They talked about so many things so quickly that I just couldn't keep track. And then, all at once, they all looked down at me. As if they had forgotten I was there.

"What did he see?" Queen Bridget asked.

"Enough," King Timmy said, flustered.

"What are you going to do with him?" the prime minister asked.

King Timmy heaved a sigh before taking me by the shoulder and leading me out of the room.

“What...what’s going on, sir?” I asked.

“Vaughn, there’s nothing for you to worry about,” King Timmy replied. “Right now, I need you to return home.”

“This early?”

It was not even noon at the time.

“Yes. Go home, spend the rest of the day and all of tomorrow with your family. Tell them we’ve given you rest because you’ll be traveling with me to visit the tribes in the countryside.”

Of all the things they talked about in that room, the Indians didn’t come up once.

“But I need the work, sir,” I said.

King Timmy then walked me over to a cabinet where he pulled out a sack that jingled as he dropped it into my hand. I opened it and saw that it was full of silver.

“Sir...”

“I understand your family looks to you for their income, but you’ll be gone awhile on this trip. That should be enough to support them until you get back. Now you go home now and tell your parents I have personally asked you to accompany me on this trip. In medieval times they would have called you a cupbearer. It’s a great honor.”

I nodded my head, confused, frightened, still shaking, wanting to ask for an explanation but not knowing what to say. I stuffed the bag into my coat when I left. I could no longer sprint my way back to the lower east side; it would draw too much attention what with the jingling. But I made it home, told my parents why I had been let off early and where I was going. I still didn’t understand it, not the letter nor the lie about the Indians. Yet all the while I thought about being a cupbearer. As if with a word, King Timmy had made me an official part of the Fitzroy household.

The rest of the day I spent with Papa out on the docks. I acted as his cane as we hobbled out over the water to watch the ships. There were a few men fishing but Papa said they were idiots for fishing in such filth. Papa said he wanted to take in a moment with me, saying I'd be a man by the time I got back.

The next day we went up to Central Park. Momma had prepared a meal for us with the meat Papa had been able to buy from the butchers on Nelson Street. It was quality meat we wouldn't have been able to eat without the money King Timmy gave us. Still, Momma made sure we weren't frivolous, or at least that was the word she used. On the way back we saw some of my friends who worked as newsies. They showed us the front page of *The Express*. In it was the story of King Timmy traveling to see the Indians. I will admit a part of me felt thrilled knowing I would be on that journey, even if the true journey was a lie.

I knew I had to go back to the palace that night, so I went to sleep once we returned home. When I awoke I found Papa asleep at my side. I could tell from his slumped position that he had been sitting there watching me as had Momma, who had fallen asleep in her chair. They both didn't want to miss my departure, but I couldn't dare wake them up.

I had packed as many clothes as I had into a sack and hopped my way off to Fitzroy Palace. There in the courtyard were the 49 soldiers and King Timmy in their identical gear. Each man had a horse and a large carriage with provisions rode to the rear, which is where I was put. Matron Hathaway was nowhere to be found. A soldier, whose face was hidden in the shadows, handed me clothes to change into and saw me to the carriage. I did not spot King Timmy until the gates were called to be opened and we trotted out into the road. King Timmy had been dressed like all the other men on horseback, hiding in front of everyone.

From there, we rode down the street before circling back over the Van Niejkerk Bridge, the rickety bridge that led into the Dutch boroughs. I watched for as long as I could as my

home disappeared behind us. A place I had never left, now I was unsure when I would get back to it.

The Private Journal of Prince Imperial Gabriel de Salvacion – January 15, 1850, Duchy of Veracruz, Imperio Mexicano

Our ship arrived at the Veracruz coast without any issue. We arrived at night and were housed at an inn, both because it was too late to travel and to allow our horses to feed. At first light, our party was on horseback and making our way west toward the capital.

By mere chance, our path took us to a cross roads where we encountered Duke Ferdinand of Nuevo Mexico and his entourage.

“Buenos Dias!” he called to us.

The sight of him caught me so off guard that I was forced to stop the caravan as his horse and mine came up alongside each other.

“Fair travels, my Prince,” Ferdinand said.

“And to you, Duke Ferdinand. What brings you this way?”

“Why, tu padre El Emperador. I’ve come to answer the call.”

It was as I feared. Padre's anger had gotten the best of him. I wasn’t being summoned to counsel mi padre, I was attending a gathering of the lords from across the empire.

“I thought as much, but how have you come by this route?” I asked.

“Ah. You see I was in Panama checking with mi soldados stationed there. As you may have guessed the fighting was delayed, I hoped my presence would lift their spirits.”

The last three days had gone by in such a blur that I had totally forgotten about Padre’s latest plan on the war front: an invasion of the Empire of Brazil.

The French rebels had drawn all my attention in the recent months, but now I saw Padre was still fixated on this great war. Some one thousand men from every duchy were commanded to meet at the capital and await their orders. Padre had told me in confidence the plan was to storm through Colombia and into the Amazon before the Brazilians could take

notice. An idiotic plan that had not taken into account the ferociousness of the Amazon. A jungle that swallowed men whole, that made no promise one would reach the opposite side. The Amazon was an army greater than anything the Brazilians could produce.

I knew this plan was doomed to fail, his advisors knew it, but none dared challenge him to risk his anger. Brazil was the goal, but it would be impossible to overwhelm the Colombians in such a fashion. Padre's plan to get into Brazil before Emperor Pedro noticed was not practical.

The use of naval forces would have simplified things, but that would have demanded a response from the Caribbean Armada. The would-be invaders appeared to have been in their final stages of preparation, yet now it appeared the invasion would not happen, at least not in America del Sud.

"Let us ride together," Ferdinand said as he rode up a few lengths.

I followed suit.

"I can tell something ails you, Prince," Ferdinand said.

"Is everything so peaceful in Nuevo Mexico that you are without worry?"

"Of course not, be thankful you do not have to guard against the Apache every day."

"Last I checked the Apache do not possess explosives."

"Regardless. I have accepted I cannot do anything about the Duchy now that I am here and I trust I have left the proper people in my stead."

We rode on in silence for a few moments, glancing at the hills in the distance as we took in the lush green hills and trees that surrounded the dirt road we strode upon.

"When I was in Panama," Ferdinand said, "I heard the Duke had received the most curious letter."

Ferdinand glanced in my direction. The rogue action of Duke Rodrigo was still troubling me. Such a good friend to my family to do something seemingly so random.

“I thought as much,” Ferdinand said in response to my silence. “I imagine that is why we are here.”

“Yes. There is no telling what Padre intends to do to us.”

“I imagine he will want us to fetch his head.”

“It is not out of the realm of possibility.”

“Though if I were you,” Ferdinand said “I would be more concerned with how Duke Marcos is being affected by all of this. Or more importantly, his daughter Isabella.”

I could not conjure the words for a response.

*The Diary of Isabella Serrano – January 16, 1850, San Francisco,
Duchy of California, Imperio Mexicano*

There was a cool breeze in the air but I remained stationary at the front of the ship. I kept a blanket wrapped around me and watched as the veil of ocean mist subsided, and the sun illuminated my face for what felt like the first time in a century.

I had heard very much about San Francisco and, at the same time, very little. Recently it had become a place of great excitement and gossip, yet at the same time a place of secrets.

All I did know was that it was a bustling port town. The silver mined out of the Colorado territories was brought to the port at San Francisco and then transported down to the mainland. As I stood at the bow of the ship, I recognized that description was much too general.

What was once a series of tents and huts had boomed into a metropolis. As we moved further into the bay, the land around the water continued to expand and expand. The crescent was a golden brown in the emerging sunlight. Not one foot of which was untouched.

Where the water ended, the boardwalk formed. Along the boardwalk were shops, inns, clothing stores, banks and numerous other trading centers. From the ship, I could see thousands of people bustling about as if they were little more than dolls in a play house. One massive marketplace bringing in and shipping out items of an unquantifiable amount. Beyond the marketplace, tall buildings sprouted like trees, forming a city that only ended where mountains formed.

Ships upon ships were waiting at the docks. Thirty by my count, though the swaying of the ship prevented me from gaining a true total. At least twenty more were anchored in the bay waiting for an opportunity to dock. One in particular caught my attention. Made from a dark orange oak, it appeared red in the sunlight. Not as large as some, but just as imposing.

Several slots along the sides indicated the spacing for one dozen cannons on each deck.

Whatever cargo the ship was carrying, it must have been very valuable.

Yet as we crossed its path, I could see the red, blue and white crossed flag that flew across its mast. I recognized it from my tutoring lessons on the nations of the world as that of the Russian Empire. The presence of such a ship only led to more confusion on my part.

A Russian ship in California meant they would have come from Russian America. A place never looked upon by American eyes. A place far to the north, inaccessible by land. A place of ice and terrible beasts. Still, it was a land owned by the Russians and that made it a territory of much heated discussion. Even in Ciudad de Mexico, the Emperor would often ask his advisors what news they had of the Russians in Alaska.

Their presence made me question what Duke Rodrigo was up to in his booming port city.

The ship docked in short order, and I disembarked along with my belongings. A carriage had been sent by Duke Rodrigo, and I entered without a second thought. I watched from the window as we passed by the city streets.

Several onlookers stopped and cheered as we passed by. Many of them loving citizens of Mexico, but just as many had the scrunched faces and long hair braids that marked them as foreigners. Oriental. I had met a few of these people in Oregon but it appeared in California they were in much greater supply.

They must have assumed I was the Duke. I was happy they were cheering and not cursing. Still, it did startle me how boisterous they were. The only place I had seen a reaction like this was in the capital when I rode with La Emperatriz. With as many shouts of “hooray” that I was hearing, I was not sure that La Emperatriz was not in San Francisco herself.

I had grown quite hypnotized by the passing images that I failed to notice our arrival at Duke Rodrigo's castle. It was marvelous. Built against the very side of the mountain, the pale stones meshed with the earth so that where castle ended and mountain began was indeterminable.

Only then did I stop to think why Padre had sent me to join Duke Rodrigo. He had been so secretive about their talks over the last several months, but, if Padre wanted me here, he must believe it the safest place for me. Whatever assignment Padre had been given, wherever he had to travel to, I was always at his side. So, for him to send me away, it could not have been on a whim.

The interior of the castle was vast. The halls of the ceiling were almost too big as light struggled to fill the space. It was as if the home was built for a man who had aspirations of grandeur but had yet to accomplish them.

My things were sent to a room while a servant guided me into a dining hall. There I was given a tall glass of red wine and a tray of grapes and oranges to eat while I waited for the Duke. The longer I waited, the more I worried. The excitement of leaving Oregon had long subsided. Now I was starting to fear for both mi padre and myself. What was Duke Rodrigo up to? What was so important that he needed me here? And what part did Padre play in all this? Though I suppose I should have been more concerned with what my part was.

Eventually the adjacent door did open and I was so startled that I stood up in reaction. I pushed back my hair and straightened my skirt, so preoccupied that I almost missed the Duke's entrance. I was quite surprised when I finally laid eyes upon him. The Duke was in his early forties. He was not very tall, but his uniform was good and trim, as was his auburn beard. It would be appropriate to say the Duke was handsome.

With his worn exterior it was easy for me to imagine this was the same man who found fame on the battlefields in Tejas.

“Hello,” he said.

I curtsied from my position opposite him.

“Duke Rodrigo,” I said.

The Duke paused, almost as if he was surprised to see me. He came over and took a seat and we commenced with a meal of lobster, soup and an assortment of vegetables. I was not expecting him to be this shy. He asked me simple questions about whether my journey was well and how I found the city, a lot of things I did not rather care for, or at least were not at the forefront of my mind.

“If I may speak, Duke Rodrigo.”

“Certainly,” he said.

“What is going on here? I sit in complete seclusion as you and mi padre commence with these oh-so-secret conversations. Then out of nowhere I’m sent here to boarder with you, for a reason I was never given. Now we sit here as if everything is normal. I want to know what is going on, why I am here.”

The Duke paused for a moment, wiping his mouth with a handkerchief. He stared down at the table and then looked at me, hesitant. But speak he did.

“I met with tu padre to discuss something I have spoken about to all the Lords of California. We have made a great discovery in the mountains here, I dare it will change our future.”

He did have a way with words this one.

“However, a decision was made in secret that this discovery would go towards the benefit of California, not the Empire. I was meeting with tu padre to discuss independence and whether he would join me.”

This man was talking treason. Independence from the Empire. I had never heard of such talk. I know very little of politics, but even I understood the cataclysm of something as drastic as California declaring independence.

“How could you even think of such an act?” I asked in shock. “One Mexico. That is the belief we all stand by. A country that touches every ocean on the continent. It is the nation’s dream, it’s goal.”

“It is the goal of one man seeking to appease his people,” Rodrigo said. “A man who has since lost his ways and become corrupted by power.”

“You speak treasonous words Duke Rodrigo. El Emperador would bring the might of the Imperial Army upon you before giving up California.”

“That is something I have been aware of from the very start. Yet in times of great crisis, even greater action is required to oppose it. I have made the first move.”

My mind was in a swivel, constantly turning. Perhaps the wine was starting to affect me. Or perhaps it was the stress of being ferried out into so strange and foreign a place as this. And to hear such horrible things said of the Empire ...

But now I understood why all the people we passed by were shouting. They were not shouting at their Duke, they were cheering for El Rey.

“As to the reason you were sent here,” he continued.

I steadied myself. Taking a deep breath as I waited to hear what he had to say. Somewhat off balance by everything being revealed to me.

“Tu padre sent you here with the hope that you would accept my offer of marriage.”

At that moment I remember a glass shattering and nothing more.

TELEGRAM – January 20, 1850

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

URGENT. Français Canadien exiles arrived in morning. Fifty total. More reported coming

-Commandant Guillaume Sorrell

To Commandant Guillaume Sorrell

Dubuque Garrison

Reply. Sending escort. Hold fast. Arrival two weeks.

-Commandant Bernard Truffaut

*Letter from Thierry Ricard to Santiago de Salvacion – January 21,
1850, St. Louis, Louisiana*

My dear friend Santiago,

I write this letter hoping it finds you in good health and in good fortune. I wish to remind you of the cordial relationship Louisiana has shared with the Empire of Mexico since the latter's founding. Our shared trade has helped both of our nations thrive and we are forever grateful for that partnership. I say in confidence as Gouverneur of Louisiana that trading with the Mexican people has always been more beneficial than with those to the east.

But I must remind you of your nation's transgression against our border and our great city of La Nouvelle-Orléans. I do not criticize your soldiers for wanting to push back the Anglo settlers who entered into Tejas and sought to make it their own. They were within every right to drive them out of your country. But your army failed to control themselves and has made do with our port city, a place unlike any other we possess.

I do not know which general or captain went against your orders to stop at the Louisiana border, but I urge you to continue our fortunate friendship. Be the great ruler I know you to be and return La Nouvelle-Orléans to its rightful possessor. After all...

(The rest of the letter has been destroyed due to burns)

Letter from Bernard Truffaut to Lyonette – January 23, 1850, St.

Louis, Louisiana

Remember to proceed with caution when escorting these exiles. They have been escorted out of Canada by those loyal to the One France movement. It is possible some or all were involved in the plot to blow up the parliament building. If it were my decision, we would not be housing them, but this is the order given to me. Commandant Sorrell will give you men to escort them out of the region; after that, we will send a riding party to help you.

Fair Travels

Bernard

Commandant Bernard Truffaut's Log – January 25, 1850, St. Louis, Louisiana

It has been two days since Lyonette left to retrieve the exiles from Quebec. More so than ever, I feel a need to write my logs with detail no matter how much it pains me.

Whatever migraine I possessed when the task was first handed to me, it has yet to leave my system. Just this morning Gouverneur Ricard was in another frenzy.

He has yet to receive a response from his letter to Emperor Santiago of Mexico, the one he writes every three months cordially requesting a return of La Nouvelle-Orléans.

This happens every time. After Santiago, most likely, burns the document, the Gouverneur goes into a rage about how he has the blood of the Roi Soleil (*Sun King*) in him, that his very presence in Louisiana legitimizes it as a country and that he deserves an answer.

Now I cannot prove that Gouverneur Ricard doesn't have the blood of the Roi Soleil in him, but I would wager my year's salary that it's the same amount in his blood that it is in every Français.

"I have told you before, Bernard, if this Santiago doesn't make a peaceful agreement with us, he will come to regret it. Already those loyal souls in La Nouvelle-Orléans are spinning their webs."

"Gouverneur," I said, "I urge you to cut your ties with those people. Encourage them to come to Louisiana, yes, but to act against Mexico is a dangerous affair."

"Nonsense. How could I ask these men and women, true patriots of France, to stop their work? I could not bear the thought of giving the order to abandon the crown's prized pearl in the New World."

"Then don't, but do not send any financial aid. Those rebels are an enemy of the Empire, we have survived as a country by being an equal partner between every nation we

border. It would be unwise to throw that off balance. Such would be the case if our actions can be traced to those in La Nouvelle-Orléans.”

I never cherish our talks. Thierry Ricard was a man whose mouth was never without its silver spoon. He seemed to bleed that aristocratic attitude toward the world, a desire to put everything under his boot simply because he was born into a better station than them. A man who benefited from the monarchy's return following Napoleon's exile. Thierry Ricard was supposed to be the face of a new and prosperous Louisiana.

An utter joke. Not only did he lose La Nouvelle-Orléans, but his whole source of power, the monarchy, is now gone too. Last I heard, a new Bonaparte is running France and he's not doing any favors for us in the New World.

It was at times like these that I thought back to when I was a boy running the streets of Rouen, full of hope of something greater to come. I first thought it would come when I enlisted; I thought it arrived when I received the post of garrison commandant in St. Louis. I am still waiting for it. I prayed it wasn't war with the greatest Empire on the continent.

I had to calm my thoughts, so I left and went to pray in the chapel.

Letter to James Halix, editor of The New Briton Express - January 30, 1850, New York City, New Britannia

~~James. Mr. Halifax.~~ Sir,

I would like to reiterate how grateful it has been to write for *The Express*. ~~It's not easy for a girl to find any work, let alone work they enjoy. Writing for The Express has long been a dream of mine and it has been most enjoyable.~~ You might not be aware of who I am. I cover news in the city. ~~I wrote that piece about the series of pub brawls that occurred after King Timothy's parade. I digress. I realize this reads like a notice of leave, well it is, in a sense. No.~~ I am writing to let you know I am leaving on assignment. I will be traveling to South Carolina to view the relationships between the slaves and their masters. No one has given me this assignment, I have taken it upon myself because I believe the atrocities occurring in The Black Lands need to be exposed. It is time for this nation to act rather than let history play its course. If none of this is agreeable to you then I will understand if the door is slammed in my face upon my return. Regardless, I will be in South Carolina for the foreseeable future.

Cheers

Jessica Ives

PART III

1 February 1850 - 18 February 1850

EL MENSAJERA

A Day for the Ages

Thousands Gather in Capital for Holiday

CIUDAD DE MEXICO, Feb. 1 – Su Majestad El Emperador has seen fit to deem this month a holiday for all people. The news came without warning or any clear motivation, yet citizens have driven towards the capitol in thousands. Many have come from the countryside, others just from outside the city, but all are in a commotion of song and dance that has yet to stop since it began two nights ago.

To visit the city center is to enter a multicolored ocean. People have donned their very best clothes for this celebration. Shades of morado and azul, rojo and verde, naranja and oro enrapture everything they pass by. To buy fruit at a market means to become one with the horde for the day.

One fruit vendor confessed surprise over the occasion, but admitted the origin did not matter since people were in such good spirits.

El Mensajera talked to several citizens, and they were all jolly. Some were delighted to have time to converse with good friends, while others had family members from the provinces come home for the first time in many months. One woman had traveled from San Jose in Costa Rica to visit her mother and said this holiday was for the people to celebrate as one body.

The festival was meant to celebrate El Emperador's goal of One Mexico. Today the people who gathered were not citizens of Durango or Oaxaca or Guatemala. Today they were reminded they are Todos Los Mexicanos and should be proud of the fact.

There was a great stir in the crowd the day prior when soldados started to march into the capital. Their colors bore the markings of men from as close as Guerrero and as far as Panama and Colorado. These were not invaders; these were brave sons of the Empire come to bask in the celebrations.

This holiday is such a marvelous occasion that our great Emperador has even called our soldiers away from the warfront to partake in it. Far from the jungles of Colombia, they are safe at home with friends and family.

Among those who have been spotted are Lord Andres Navarro de Nicaragua, Lord Matias Rodriguez de Guatemala and even Duke Ferdinand Ortega de Nuevo Mexico. More and more soldiers are arriving by the day with their lords and generals. Notably Duke Rodrigo Hernandez and Count Marcos Serrano are absent, but they have the longest journey of any.

One whose face everyone in the Empire recognized was Prince Gabriel. He rode in along with Duke Ferdinand, and the swarm of people mobbed him for handshakes and kisses the moment they spotted him.

“I am just happy to be home,” El Principe said when asked for a comment. “It has been too long, and I’d quite forgotten what the place looked like. My wish is that everyone has a pleasant evening.”

Prince Gabriel and the other nobles are likely riding to Castillo de Chapultepec this very moment to meet with Emperador Santiago.

Written by Miguel Esposito, Editor in Chief

*The Private Journal of Prince Imperial Gabriel de Salvacion –
February 1, 1850, Ciudad de Mexico, Imperio Mexicano*

Castillo de Chapultepec. My childhood home. I had lost count of the numerous times I had walked through the halls of marble floor or peered out the stained glass windows. As had I forgotten how many times I had made my way about the garden and maze or accompanied mi padre to the adjacent military barracks.

Mi padre El Emperador loved to tell the story of how the castle was taken. It was one of the last few battles of the revolution, a last bastion of those loyal to Spain were dug in at the top of the hill which earns Chapultepec its name. It took mi padre and his men seven days to both climb and uproot them from their position, but they were victorious.

The Spaniards who resided here had long since fled, but for the Mexican people, who long saw Chapultepec as the seat for all their troubles, taking it was the most glorious accomplishment.

All those thoughts filled my head as I rode up the hill along with Duke Ferdinand. Some say one could still see the scars on the earth of where cannon fire burst trees from their roots. All I saw was the place that filled my imagination growing up.

“I imagine it’s been many years since you have been back here,” Duke Ferdinand said.

“Yes, but one does not quite forget a place like this,” I replied.

We reached the top of the hill just at that moment and laid eyes upon El Castillo. At three stories in height, the rectangular structure towered over everything in the capital. A watchtower stood to the far side with our nation’s flag flying proudly. All the exterior walls were a freshly painted white. In my youth, mi madre had taken me with her to Europe to see

her family in Austria. She showed me many of the great European castles and palaces. Chapultepec was a worthy rival to them all.

The only thing blocking our path was the gated entrance, which was standing even during the time of the Viceroyalty. Metal bars three inches thick; two guards stationed every fifty meters. I knew by my uniform they would recognize me, but Duke Ferdinand played up to the situation.

“Hail to El Principe!” he shouted.

The men in his entourage all shouted hail, as did the soldiers on guard.

“Welcome home, Prince Gabriel,” one of the guards said.

“What are you standing around for?” Duke Ferdinand shouted. “Open this gate, the Prince has business to attend to.”

Flabbergasted, they hurried to the gate and opened it. The guards kept their heads bowed as we passed them by.

“Muchas gracias,” I said as we passed.

There was a large green and a stone pavilion just beyond the gate. Together we rode to where attendants were stationed and disembarked, handing our horses to them.

“Was that really necessary?” I asked Duke Ferdinand.

“Come now, my prince. What is a life if one does not have a little fun?”

“These men do not understand you jest, Ferdinand. You should not play with their emotions. They, above all people, are most loyal.”

“Ah, but do we know that? They have not had to test that loyalty for some time. It’s best to show you are above them now than when the time comes when you need their help.”

“A thought for another day. Come.”

We passed through the adjacent courtyard and through the arches of the connecting building. Along the way we saw several horses bearing the symbols of various lords of the realm. California was a notable omission.

We entered the castle and found ourselves at the bottom of a staircase that went in two directions. We went to the right and found ourselves in the east wing. No matter how long the interim since my last visit, I could never forget the path towards Padre's study.

Growing up, in between tutoring lessons, most often mathematics, I would wander up to Padre's study. The walk upstairs was itself a journey as I tried to figure out who all the people in the portraits along the walls and in the stained glass were. What I remember about his study was that a map of the entire world was painted on the entirety of one wall, twelve feet in height and twenty in length. It was originally painted by the Spanish in the 1760s, and the last time I was there, Padre was commissioning an update. I was interested to see how it had changed.

Ferdinand and I stepped through the door and into the waiting room. There, to my surprise, was mi madre. She turned at the sound of the door opening and stood up from her seat. She was dressed in the finest of purple gowns. Like all the others, it bloomed like a flower as it expanded the closer it reached the ground. Her face was a mixture of startlement and excitement.

"Gabriel," she said as she approached, "my, how it brings joy to my heart to see you here today."

I took her hands, and we kissed each other on the cheek. Madre had been in the country for twenty-five years now, but she still spoke with her Habsburg accent. No matter how much she let her skin tan, it always reverted to her native blanco. Alas, she was mi madre, and I loved her. More importantly, she was La Emperatriz, and the people loved her.

Padre always said she was his most prized possession. Their marriage was a historic occasion as it brought legitimacy to what was then a young and fledgling nation. He always said without her he would never have lasted as Emperador.

“Madre, I’m glad you are well,” I said.

“In times like this, we must keep up our appearances. How fared your travels?”

“I daresay the only troubles we faced came from the citizens in the Ciudad. I lost track of all the hands I shook.”

“The people are in good spirits.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Thank goodness.”

It was then she noticed Duke Ferdinand was with me.

“Pardon me, Duke Ferdinand, it has been so long since I have seen my son,” she said.

“Emperatriz Cecilia, there is no need to apologize. Were I away from my own son for so long, I would ask the same. But might I add, the Prince is the most helpful travel companion.”

“How is Padre?” I asked, getting on with business.

“One week ago, he was in an unstoppable frenzy,” Madre said. “I had not seen him so angry since the Tejas conflict.”

She did not need to explain to me the origins of his frustration. I knew Padre had received the letter from Duke Rodrigo just as I had. The idiotic letter, even now it made no more sense to me than it did then. What would Rodrigo hope to gain from telling us of his defection when he could have kept it secret for months, making plans for an official split all the while.

“Is he in there?” I asked, pointing to the doors.

Mother turned and looked back at me.

“He has been in there for hours,” she responded. “I have been here welcoming all the lords and their companions from around the realm. I thought they had all come and was planning to retire. I was glad I had not for I would not have seen you.”

“I am glad for that,” I said. “But I think it’s time I see Padre.”

“I think you are right.”

I stepped through the doors, which creaked as I pushed it open. The room was dark, lit only by candlelight. Despite the large glass doors that opened onto the balcony, Padre had closed them. This was a meeting for only those who were summoned.

A large rectangular table had been carried into the room. Padre’s desk was nowhere to be seen, but he was the first person I saw.

He stopped himself in mid-conversation and stood up the moment he saw me enter. He wore his military uniform, the one with the gold colored shoulder pads that made him appear larger than he would like to admit. His hair was closely cut, still black but graying at the edges. His right forefinger was extended in a pointing direction; I imagine he had been chastising whoever was sitting to his right. But I watched as it softened to a flattened palm, and a smile reached his face.

“GABRIEL!” he shouted.

All the lords who were seated around him turned to my direction. They all stood up as well, not wanting to risk further chastisement.

“Come here, my son.”

I did as I was told and embraced mi padre.

“It is so good to see you home.”

“I am glad I find you well, Padre.”

Padre thanked me and greeted Duke Ferdinand as well. I took my seat to the right of Padre and Duke Ferdinand sat further down the table. From my seated position, I noticed a man standing in the opposite corner. His face was covered in shadows, but, from his clothes, I could tell he was meant not to stand out. There were no medals or emblems, and the hilt of his sword was a solid black.

“Gabriel, we were discussing the state of los soldados in Panama,” Padre said.

It appeared Padre was taking a more conservative approach than I thought. I imagined he would have been discussing the letter by now.

“What were you discussing?” I asked.

“By the reports I have been given, we had a force of eighty-thousand stationed in Panama, all armed and ready to march into America del Sud.”

“As you requested.”

“As I requested.”

“We were just explaining to Majestad that the terrain will not make the march easy for the soldiers,” a voice said two seats down from where I sat. It belonged Emiliano Cordova, Lord de Panama y Costa Rica.

“Which frustrates me greatly,” Padre said.

“Majestad,” Lord Andres Navarro de Nicaragua said. “Our own journey was not much farther than Panama. We were able to arrive swiftly due to our small party, but the distance alone will force los soldados to take their time.”

“The ground may be flattened by the time eighty-thousand pairs of feet that have crossed over it,” Duke Ferdinand said.

“Could we not send ships to retrieve the men?” I asked.

Padre heaved a sigh, rubbing his temple as he looked at me.

“I have already ordered what ships we had to spare,” he said. “But the majority of the fleet is currently northeast of Cape Horn.”

I leaned my head in mi padre’s direction; he must have seen in my eyes I already knew what he meant. Brazil. This man’s mind was always on Brazil. He wanted so desperately to be the only emperor in the Americas. So much that he would send the entirety of the fleet to bombard the Brazilian coast while the infantry attacked from the land.

I had hoped he knew better. It would be foolish to test the might of Mendoza and the Caribbean fleet. Mi padre would have left us without a fleet and risk being blockaded were Mendoza to find out what we were up to.

A part of me grew thankful for Rodrigo’s letter at that moment.

“Now my army, when it finally reaches the capital, will be tired from the long journey, only further delaying our moves,” Padre said. “But it matters not.”

Padre stood up from his chair and marched in the direction behind me. I turned to look at where he was going, and there I saw it: the map. Drastically changed from what it was before. The entire wall was dedicated to North America. The boundaries were all correctly drawn; no line was misplaced. All the borders were in their proper locations, as were the cities and the names of the countries. Notably there were no sea monsters bursting out of the Gulf, something that had been present during the Viceroyalty’s time.

Padre approached the map and stood there looking at it, his back to us.

“Between the time it takes for the army and the fleet to arrive, Rodrigo will have had time to make preparations,” Padre said. “He will have fortified everything from Baja to San Francisco, if he hasn’t commissioned his own fleet. And if we go by land he will have had even more time to prepare. Damn it all!”

“Majestad, your worries are misguided,” Matias Rodriguez, Lord de Guatemala said. “Duke Rodrigo has nothing but a nation of captives. Yes, he has his own soldiers, if they are loyal, but they are a miniscule number compared to ours. If you send a force eighty-thousand strong, the good people of California will hail you their Emperador once again.”

“It would be a way to see if Rodrigo’s actions are of his own will or of the will of the people,” Lord Navarro said.

“But what if that is what Rodrigo desires,” Padre said. “Send a massive force into the continent and leave Mexico defenseless. He has access to the sea, and we have no details on the number of ships he may possess. Nor which nations call him ally.”

It was clear to me Padre was thinking further ahead in this venture than I had, or at least down more possible outcomes.

“Duke Ferdinand,” Padre said. “You know this country better than most. What would you advise?”

The rest of the nobles looked at Duke Ferdinand, who was twiddling his thumbs. He stood up, nonchalantly and approached the map.

“You see your grace,” he began. “If we go through Chihuahua and Durango and directly into California, we risk marching straight into the Sonoran Desert. A desert for which we have no clear map. A desert where we do not know where the sources of water are. If we enter my land, go through Nuevo Mexico, you will face a tough road of plains, tall mountains, canyons and river valleys deeper than any you have ever seen. And then you’ll have to worry about the Indians looking to shoot an arrow through your back.”

I was certain someone muttered *savages* under their breath when they said this.

“Those are merely the facts your grace, I will not act as if I know the proper course,” Duke Ferdinand said before returning to his seat.

“What about you, Gabriel?” Padre asked. “You have come all this way. I would hope you’d have something useful to contribute.”

Unlike Duke Ferdinand, I did not stand up when called. I faced mi padre, but I remained seated.

“What I would like to ask all in attendance is: Is war the necessary option?”

There was a silence after I spoke. Even Duke Ferdinand kept his mouth shut and his eyes down. No other lord said a word as mi padre returned to his seat at the head of his table, his heels clicking against the stone floor and growing louder with each step; as if death itself was approaching us. I turned my seat so that it was in its proper position and watched as mi padre return to sit at my left.

“Would you care to elaborate?” he asked in almost a whisper.

I noticed his left hand was in a fist.

“You have made it clear going to war in California will be a feat of great time and effort. Now I understand wanting to utilize this army that has been assembled, but this was not its purpose. I am not here to criticize the front in America del Sud, but think of the people of California. As one suggested, they may not yet be aware of what Rodrigo has done. How can we curse a man in San Diego for what another has done in San Francisco?”

“So you are saying we should not go to war?” Padre asked.

“No.”

“You are saying we should just let Rodrigo have California?”

“No! Listen to me. This is not a foreign nation we are invading. These are people who, one week ago, we all saw as equal citizens of the empire. They have gone there by their own free will to settle in a former Spanish territory, as have millions of others. As we sit here, we are not informed enough to start a war with those people.”

No one said anything immediately after. Just silence. I presumed that meant I had their attention.

“Well then, mi hijo, what would you have us do?” Padre asked.

I hesitated, even a little unsure myself of what to do. But then I caught the idea.

“As to everyone’s frustration, it is going to take time for the army to arrive, even more time to transport them. In the interim, I propose a meeting with Duke Rodrigo.”

The nobles all started to gawk at the idea, citing that he would never come or that we should not bother. Everyone except Padre, who just looked at me with those cold eyes of a man who’s seen everything there is to see.

“And do what?” he asked.

“Simple,” I responded. “Find out why he has chosen to declare independence. I say we do everything we can to talk this out like gentlemen in the hope of finding a peaceful solution. I want to believe there is something material Rodrigo desires, something that we can satisfy him with.”

I knew this was far from factual; the letter itself made many attacks on Padre's regime without explicitly naming him. I just wanted to find a way to avoid war. Both for the sake of the country, and for the legacy of mi padre.

“Send a telegram...”

“No telegrams have gotten through to San Francisco,” Padre said. “We’ve tried many times.”

“Then send a mensajero,” I said. “One man, by sea or land, can travel faster than an army. We should have a response by the time the army arrives.”

Padre sighed, looked at the table, then up at me, and then at all of his nobles.

“Very well. I will send for a mensajero, in hopes we can find a peaceful solution. However, I still demand an answer from you.”

I sighed and in a moment thought of Isabella. “If we can’t agree to peace, you invade Oregon by sea.”

TELEGRAM – February 5, 1850

To Commandant Bernard Truffaut

St. Louis Garrison

Exiles safely transferred. Escort granted to scout Lyonette.
Will escort out of Iowa region. Expect arrival within three
days.

-Commandant Guillaume Sorrell

From the private documents of Baron Frederick Kane of South Carolina – February 13, Il Pallazzo, Kane Plantation, Duchy of South Carolina

Master Frederick has been in poor spirits for some two weeks now. Young Master Tobias has not lost the fire in his spirit that possessed him as a young boy. Then, we had all assumed his actions were those of a rotten child. Now we know his actions are as ingrained in him as the soil.

The evening hours are no longer spent reading the newest almanacs to Master Frederick in his study. Nor has he asked me to detail any entries into his journal. Every waking moment is spent in argument with Master Tobias. Master Frederick desires for Master Tobias to make his return to Il Pallazzo permanent, to continue on the Kane family's farming legacy. This has been met with deaf ears from Master Tobias.

The young master returned to the plantation unannounced and uninvited. Having been away in the north for some ten years, Master Tobias returned destitute and in need of assistance. It would appear they have met a stalemate. Just last night Master Frederick crushed a wine glass between his hands in anger during yet another argument with Master Tobias. I had to take care when picking out the glass that night.

It frightens me seeing Master Frederick this way. Ever since he rode west with all those other lordly gentlemen, he has never been the same. Master Frederick has never talked about what he saw in Tejas, but his dreams say enough. Upon his return to Il Pallazzo, he was wrecked with terrors in his sleep for many of those early nights. They have subsided in the years since, but every so often I hear him mumbling in his sleep.

Since Master Tobias' return those demons have become a nightly occurrence once again.

The terrors were just one of many things different about Master Frederick. No longer were any dinner parties hosted, no more gentlemen from Virginia or Georgia were invited to visit. Master Frederick never went into the cities. On certain days I would hear him cursing those same gentlemen under his breath. It was clear he wanted nothing to do with them.

Then there was his treatment toward my brothers and sisters. Now we were all expected to actually read the Bible for Sunday prayer. Before, we had all pretended to understand what it was we were looking at; now Master Frederick wanted to hear us speak. It took time, but I was able to learn the words, one of the few who did. I think that's why I was given more tasks in his study, in terms of reading papers on agriculture.

Master Frederick even hired entirely new overseers as part of his transformation. His stern reprimands and the whip did not vanish, but they were in less occurrence than the decades prior. I know for us who worked in the house, we started to appreciate our work at times as a result.

Were my father and his grandfather to still be alive, and to have seen what Kane Plantation looks like now, they would believe themselves in another world.

I have felt the need to write this down because I struggle to believe what I have discovered in Master Frederick's study. After helping Master Frederick to bed, I had remained in order to clear the clutter of papers filling his desk. I know I was never to have discovered such a document, but I found a pamphlet titled *The Last Will and Testament of Baron Frederick Kane of South Carolina*.

In it was a section detailing the inheritance of Master Frederick. I read this section multiple times, not wanting to risk my knowledge with letters failing me at this moment. For in it was stated that all lands and produce would go to Tobias Kane as Master Frederick's

only child, but that all slaves under the ownership of Kane Plantation were to be set free upon the reading of the will.

Again and again I read the document. An unimaginable possibility. Such dreams had long been extinguished among my brothers and sisters, no one wanting to have false hope. Yet there it was in my hands: the dream itself.

Understanding I would accomplish nothing by staying there, I departed the manor house.

The path to the slave quarters had no path for me to get to it. Or at least no path that was purposefully made. What was once a simple stretch of dirt had since sunken an entire half foot in the many years my brothers and sisters had marched back and forth between the house and the fields. Once I found the grooves in the dirt I had no difficulty making my way, even if there was almost no moonlight in the sky.

The quarters were a two floor shack almost one hundred feet long. We were almost certain it was once a barn and had been converted once Master Frederick acquired the hundred plus souls that made up our company.

The bottom floor contained a series of wooden tables that seated about twenty people each. Here we would eat our meals, no matter the content or quality. We ate what we were served and trusted it was enough to get us through the day. There was also a meal at night, but we always wondered if this was the case on other plantations or an example of Master Frederick's new generosity.

The upper floor was where we all slept, though the restless souls were sent to sleep on the benches. Still, those who slept on the bottom floors were assured a quick meal once the chefs arrived. They also avoided the chance of stepping on or being stepped on by their neighbor. For on the upper floor we all slept on the wooden surface with the blankets that

were provided for us, however torn some of them might be. We slept shoulder to shoulder, no space to be shared. We were all the children of slaves and this is how they taught us to sleep. It was the same manner in which they were ferried to The Black Lands, back when they were still called New Britannia. Some of us could trace our roots back to when they were the Colonies. The masters never wanted us to forget how we came there. Only I knew how much was about to change.

“Wake up,” I said when I reached the top floor. “Everyone wake up!”

The entire company started to rouse themselves. Many questioning what was happening, others already cursing me for waking them up.

The first one to reference me directly was Samson. A titan of a man. The tallest, largest, strongest and indeed darkest of all of us. A goliath of fifty years, highly regarded for his ability to pull the team of bulls single handedly. Once it was said he picked 500 pounds worth of cotton. When Samson spoke, we listened, and when someone like me spoke, Samson always had an opinion.

“This better be good, Joshua,” Samson said.

“Yes, it was quite a long day,” David said, another one of the field workers.

“Couldn’t this have waited till morning.”

“I’m not a fool,” I said. “I wouldn’t have woken you all up if it weren’t important.”

There was more grumbling from the masses as they all questioned what it was I had to say.

“Quiet!” Ethan shouted.

Ethan was the one among us that everyone took pity upon. Ethan had been born with a gimp leg, unable to walk without splints and crutches. His daily task was to ride on the back of the carts and spread seeds throughout the fields. He was more overseer than slave,

always keeping up the field workers' spirits and pointing out areas that needed more work done.

"If Joshua has something to say, then let him speak," Ethan continued. "The more you all complain, the longer it'll take for us to fall back asleep."

They all quieted down shortly thereafter and turned to me.

"Go on then, Joshua," Ethan said.

I paused for a moment, breathing heavily, unsure about what it was I was going to say next or how they would react. I realized I couldn't think about it. I just had to say it.

"I found a document in Master Frederick's study," I began. "In it was a declaration that on the eve of his death, all slaves in his possession are to be set free."

There was a long period of silence. It was clear to me that these were words none of them ever expected they would hear. Those who believed me had been turned to stone upon hearing the impossible. However, the vast majority had annoyed expressions. For they too knew it was an impossibility, so impossible that it could never be true.

"I don't know what the old master has been saying to you up in his house," Samson began," but we will never be set free."

"You can't believe it, Joshua," David said.

"Why wouldn't I?" I asked.

"Because they're just words on a piece of paper," David said. "Yes, the master has been generous, but we know what he was like in the past. We cannot live our lives off of every good word said."

"This paper could be torn apart as easily as it was written," Samson said.

There was more commotion, so much that I worried the masters would be awoken in the manor house. I tried to get a word in, but I was overpowered each time. It was Ethan's pounding of his crutch on the wooden floor that caused them all to silence.

"I don't know much about what the masters do in their houses," Ethan said. "But I know they have a fondness for putting things to paper. It's their way of making things official. So if Joshua indeed read this declaration, then I, for one, believe it to be the truth."

"So then?" David asked.

"We're all to be set free," I said.

One by one the many faces of my brothers and sisters took on this realization and let their faces turn to smiles as they all embraced one another. That next morning was filled with the loudest and most joyful song I ever did hear. It lasted through the morning meal and long into the midnight hours.

Commandant Bernard Truffaut's Log – February 18, 1850, St. Louis, Louisiana

The scout's horn woke me in the early hours of the morning. Too early to be reveille. Horses approaching. Recognizing the tune as a friendly alarm, I donned a jacket and headed to the battlements, not even bothering to properly button my shirt.

I glanced at the homes around me and peered down the street; few souls, if any, were in sight. The sun was only just emerging on the horizon, the night breeze still lingering in the air. The signal came from the north entrance, four blocks from the Gouverneur's Mansion.

It was so early that the two guards stationed on the walls were far from at attention. I caught them yawning as I joined them, their rifles cradled in their arms like the plainest of bean sacks.

"How many?" I asked.

The two jumped to attention as if awakening from a dream. I gently pushed away the one's rifle that leaned too close to my face.

"One cavalier, two carriages by the look of it, Commandant. Possibly three," le soldat said.

I peered out at the almost perfectly flat plains in front of me. La cavaliere I could make out clearly. A brown haired stallion guiding the pack, kicking up dirt every time its hooves hit the earth. Les soldats were right; it was hard to tell exactly how many carriages there were. Each carriage had a four-horse team, and the resulting impact of both the wheels and the dozens of horse shoes created a cloud shrouding those behind the lead carriage.

I didn't care how many carriages there were. What I did care about was how many people were in the carriages.

"Are they friendly, Commandant?" le soldat asked.

"Yes," I replied. "Rouse the rest of the garrison. We have guests to attend to."

I took one last glance at la cavaliere leading the pack. Bareback, the figure stood tall on their cheval as if they were an embodiment of nature itself. An unstoppable force coming to meet us all. I smiled knowing who was about to enter our gates.

I stepped off the walls just as reveille began. I could hear the rumbling from inside the barracks as all five hundred of my men roused from what was supposed to be a morning to sleep in. There was so much commotion that I heard everything from pans clattering to a cow mooing.

I headed straight toward L'hotel Jolene to speak with the manager. I told him the garrison would be commandeering the hotel for the day. The manager was quick to protest, but I silenced him just as fast with the information that the Français Canadiens were coming and that it was his duty as a Français to give quarter to the impoverished.

“So, for the time being they’ll be here until we can find a place for them,” I said. “Be a patriote for a day if you must.”

I then went straight to the mess hall and informed the chefs of the situation. I told them to put aside what food they had prepared for les soldats and start preparing meals for the exiles. Within ten minutes I had people lined up at the north entrance ready to take the horses and escort the exiles to where they needed to go.

A voice called out “Open the gates” from atop the ramparts. Standing by the stables I watched as the gates opened and in strode la cavaliere on their stallion. Their long dark hair blew back as le cheval drew to a stop, circling to steady itself. Le cheval neighed at the sight of all the people but la cavaliere kept the stallion calm.

In rode the carriages at such a speed one would think they were running from a pack of wolves. Yet they too stopped once they were inside and out started to pour the passengers. There were indeed three carriages, and there were definitely more than the fifty Thierry

Ricard said were coming. I was glad I told the manager to prepare for possibly a hundred civilians.

Men, women and children poured out. Every last one of them had sunken cheeks and soot filled faces. Their hair was greasy and their eyes sagged. These people were not prepared for the winter months. What thick blankets, wool cloaks and elegant blankets they may have owned in the frigid north had been left behind. Thrown from their homes, their belongings either taken from them or abandoned in hasty flight. Now they came to us in thin cotton layers and blankets little more than prayer shawls. They would welcome the summer heat in due time.

One by one they all stepped out of the carriage and were taken hand in hand by either a soldier or a volunteer. My heart swelled at those who embraced a settler with open arms as if they were family reunited after a long voyage.

“Dieu Soit Loué,” one woman said, raising her hands in the air after she kissed the ground, fighting back tears.

At that moment I cursed myself for my prejudice. Even if there was a firebrand among them, I saw that the vast majority were scared people forced to leave their homes. It made me proud to think we could offer them sanctuary, but it also made me weep for who was unable to make the journey or those who still had a long journey ahead of them.

La cavaliere remained by the carriages, watching as the exiles were each escorted into the mess hall or to a connecting building. Only once every person was attended to did la cavaliere and le cheval appear to calm down. They turned toward the stables, toward me, and slid the bandana off her face.

Lyonette was breathing heavily as she trod her stallion to the stable. She ran a gloved hand through her long dark hair, wiping away the sweat that had seeped into her green eyes.

Her mouth agape, sweat trickled down from her forehead, etching lines in the dirt that had been blown up onto it. The dirt had only further blurred the lines of her heritage. Skin that did not know if it was French or Osage.

Despite the long journey it looked like she had been the one sprinting across the plains and not her horse. Le cheval was calm as she led him up to the stable. I went to take the reins from her, but before I had a chance she had slid off the side of her steed and had roped him herself.

“A pleasure to see you too,” I said in response.

Lyonette didn't reply. She pulled le cheval's head in the direction of the water trough and he started to drink. Lyonette then plunged her head into the trough, soaking her face and hair, washing off all the dirt before drinking from it herself. I stood there for a moment watching as the two mirrored each other's actions.

“You sure that's healthy?” I asked.

Lyonette stood up, pulling her hair back in a liquefied braid, squeezing it of whatever water remained. She procured a rag from her breeches pocket and started to wipe her face.

“Of course it is,” she replied. “Cimarron and me, just as we're one mind, we are one body. What is good enough for him, is good enough for me.”

I thought to myself why I ever tried to understand this woman.

“Very well,” I said. “How was the journey?”

“You're in a hurry to talk,” she said. “Don't your eyes tell you what you need to know?”

I glanced back at the hundred plus exiles who were each being taken care of.

“I can see the exiles were well taken care of. You have my thanks for that, I know you took a great risk going north, away from your tribe and the fort. But I asked about the journey.”

Lyonette took another drink of water and then stared at me for a few moments, heaving a couple breaths.

“Is the Gouverneur awake?” she asked.

“Probably not,” I replied.

“Then let’s go wake him,” she said.

I had no chance to stop her. Just like Cimarron, she barreled over the post and started marching towards the gouverneur’s mansion, the heels of her boots thudding against the ground as she marched.

“I don’t think that’s wise,” I said.

“You said it yourself that I did him a favor; the least he can do is give me an audience.”

“It’s me you were doing the favor.”

“I seem to recall you disagreeing with taking on the exiles in the first place. That it was the Gouverneur who instigated all of this.”

“True, but I was the one who asked you to go.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ve got something to say.”

“Did something happen in Iowa?”

“Nothing happened. Some tribesmen tried to intimidate us as we were leaving. They weren’t effective. Hurry up!”

I tried to grab hold of her arm, but Lyonette was constantly just a few feet in front of me. Before I knew it, we had burst through the doors of the Gouverneur’s greeting room. The personal guards stationed there were quick to block Lyonette’s path.

“Let me through,” she said, only just acknowledging the guards.

I took this moment to finally grab hold of her and pull her away from the door. Her father must have had divine influence when naming his child, for she did have a lion’s spirit. I pulled her a few feet away from the guards.

“Is the Gouverneur awake?” I asked as politely as I could while trying to restrain the lion.

“Not yet, Commandant,” one of them replied.

“Well wake him if you’d please,” I said.

“That will be quite difficult. The Gouverneur does not like being woken up before his time.”

“Tell him it’s urgent!” I replied. “The exiles from Quebec are here, and I demand an audience.”

The guard looked at his companion, and both nodded to each other. One went off to fetch Thierry Ricard and we stepped into the study room. I was not prepared for the morning to be this tiring. I relieved Gouverneur Ricard of a glass of the whiskey he kept on a tray with several near identical bottles. I poured a glass, drank it and then poured another.

“Care for a drink?” I asked Lyonette.

“I’d prefer rainwater if you have it,” she said as she plopped down in one of Ricard’s leathered chairs, surely layering it with dirt. “That stuff,” pointing to the whiskey “weakens your mind.”

I thought that was the point if I was being honest. This girl would rather drink evaporated urine than what was probably the best alcohol in all of Louisiana. I downed the drink and returned the glass to where I found it.

Our wait was shorter than I expected. Thierry Ricard burst through the doors of the stuffy dim lit room and approached us. I was standing behind the seat Lyonette had taken up.

“You,” he said, pointing at Lyonette, “get out of that seat.”

“It’s been a long three days. I don’t think I will.”

“You’re ruining it.”

Shuddering internally as I thought about what I was going to say next, knowing I too wished to speak to the Gouverneur without any censor.

“Forgive her, Gouverneur, she only wishes to sit.”

“Very well,” he replied. “What is it you wanted to say?”

Lyonette opened her mouth to speak, but I spoke first.

“The exiles from Quebec arrived not half an hour ago. We count a little over one hundred.”

Thierry Ricard looked at me, and then he looked at Lyonette. With his rumpled hair and tight fitting robe, his belly looked like it was about to explode in front of us. His expression was dull and he held out his hands as if waiting to hear something.

“Is that it?” he asked. “I pray you have something more to say, Bernard, if you *insisted* I be awoken at this hour.”

I sighed. “Because this was a request of yours, I thought you would like to thank Lyonette for her service. It was she who safely escorted the exiles.”

“I assume you’re talking about *her*,” Thierry Ricard said. “This girl who burst into my home like a common thief. It seems to me she’s done little to earn my thanks, Bernard. And am I supposed to thank every civil servant that does their duty? If that’s what you think, then think again.”

Lyonette leaped up from her seat at that moment, not even using her hands as she did so. The movement startled Ricard so much that he almost fell over a chair he was standing in front of.

“I didn’t come here to receive a thank you, as much as you may think, Bernard,” Lyonette said. “There’s a more pressing issue, and it has to do with your exiles.”

“It can’t wait?” Ricard asked cautiously, uncomfortable with how close Lyonette was.

“No, it can’t wait! I know for a fact you didn’t take these people out of the goodness of your heart. They’re your pawns.”

“Lyonette,” I responded. “What are you talking about?”

“I covered many miles escorting these people,” she began. “There’s very little to do except talk in that time. Many of them didn’t. But there were a few who talked. They talked about their military experience. Some with the French, others with the British. The same topic kept coming up: incendiary explosives.”

She had caught our attention.

“So I wanna know what business you have bringing military veterans with a grudge on their minds into St. Louis.”

“I promise I was not aware of this,” Ricard said.

Lyonette audibly guffawed at his response.

“A telegram from the Français Canadiens was sent to me asking if Louisiana could take in those displaced from the infighting in Canada. I did not hand select these people.”

Lyonette cursed Thierry Ricard in the Osage language. Something about the genital regions of a horse.

“They’re not in Canada anymore, Gouverneur,” Lyonette said. “You are responsible for Français and Aboriginal alike in this country. I hold you responsible if something happens because of those people.”

Lyonette barged out of the mansion. I glanced momentarily at Ricard. I had my own questions about this news; I sincerely doubted Ricard had no knowledge of who was coming. But I wanted to calm Lyonette down first.

She was nearly all the way back to Cimarron by the time I caught up with her.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“To my village. I want to see my father. Don’t try to follow me, Bernard.”

“Don’t leave like this. You have a right to be angry, but I need to know what you heard about these people.”

Lyonette, in what looked like one action, untied Cimarron from the post and slid onto his back. By the time I had freed my own cheval, she was already sprinting out of the gates. I cursed myself; this seemed like a fool’s errand.

I saddled my cheval, far from secure but just enough so that it was rideable, and headed out the gates. I sped westward in the direction of the Osage territory but was relieved to see Lyonette had not ridden far. Perhaps Cimarron was not yet recovered from the journey.

As I got closer, I saw they had stopped at the top of a nearby hill. Relieved, I slowed my cheval down so that I came up right alongside them. I opened my mouth to speak, but quickly shut it.

One hundred meters or so away from where we stood was a party of some fifty men on horseback. All plainly dressed but armed with both musket and sword, a carriage accompanied the rear. Their clothes were grey. No flag or symbol marked their allegiance.

Apart from the one at the front. He rode with a pomp that befit someone of high status. There was a boy belong side him too, a boy who looked much too young for the journey.

They were strangers, every one of them. Nonetheless, it was my duty to approach them.

Vaughn's journal - February 18, 1850, St. Louis, Louisiana

The soldiers at the head of the caravan nearly shot the Indian woman when she appeared alongside us. No one had heard her approach until she was on us, which gave us a spook. Were it not for King Timmy's call not to fire, they may have shot her dead. The more I looked at her, I wasn't sure if she was Indian. That was my first thought because she rode without a saddle, but her face was lighter than I thought it should be.

"State your purpose!" she called from atop her horse.

"We just wish to pass through," King Timmy replied. "We have a long journey ahead of us."

"I don't like that answer," she replied, a fire in her voice. "Fifty armed men on horseback just passing through. Not likely."

There was a pause in King Timmy's reply, in that time I saw several of the soldiers sharing glances, a few even went so far as to cock their rifles. King Timmy saw this and waved them to cease.

I had to be told what was said between King Timmy and the Indian woman after the fact, it happened as follows.

"I promise you we mean no harm," King Timmy said, in French.

This seemed to catch the woman off guard. Her expression lightened and her horse's trotting slowed a tad.

"You speak very well for a Briton," she replied, still in French.

"My father made sure I learned all the languages of the continent."

"All of them."

"Yes."

King Timmy then spoke in a language I couldn't recognize. It was rhythmic. Almost as if the two were clicking their throats. It reminded me of the humming of the bums by the South docks.

It was the tongue of this woman's people. If King Timmy knew it, then it must have been similar to that spoken by the Indian people back in New York.

They spoke in this tongue for several moments, leaving everyone in the caravan to hope they were saying favorable things. Eventually the woman shouted to her horse and started riding off in the way we had come. She stopped when she was about ten lengths past and looked back at us. So we all turned to King Timmy.

"Men, we're to follow her," he said. "Tonight we're to be housed by the good men of the St. Louis garrison. We'll rest up and get moving in the morning. Come on."

This was not up for debate. King Timmy immediately started riding toward the woman, and we followed. She led us over a hill that led to a large clearing. To the northwest were fields of corn, but to the east was a massive walled settlement so large that we couldn't see the buildings inside or guess how wide the walls actually were.

The woman called for the gates to be opened, and they were. What we found inside was a city. A fully functional city with street blocks, hotels, apartments, business offices and homes, akin to any we might find back east. St. Louis was defended by a retinue of five hundred men; they were the first to greet us. They inspected the carriage and all of our persons and horses before taking said horses to be shod and fed.

A man in a matching uniform to all the other soldiers but with a thin chin beard approached us.

"Gentlemen," he said in English, "welcome to St. Louis."

"Thank you," King Timmy said. "Who do I have the honor of addressing?"

“Commandant Bernard Truffaut,” he replied. “These are my men. I believe you’ve already met Lyonette, one of our scouts.”

“Indeed we have,” King Timmy said.

The two glanced at Lyonette, who still rode tall on her stallion, her long hair pulled back in a way that mirrored her steed’s mane. She stared back at us with fire in her eyes but rode off to tie up her horse.

“She’s the best we have,” Commandant Bernard said.

Commandant Bernard held a stare longer than the others, as if he didn’t want to break his gaze. Even his phrase came off as if he wanted to say more but couldn’t. Bernard then addressed his men, both deepening and raising his voice as he spoke to them.

“Men! See to it our guests are welcome here! See them to the mess hall and find beds for them, we know they’ve come a long way.”

In an instant, the soldiers under Commandant Bernard started shuffling their feet and guiding King Timmy’s forty-nine men about the compound-city. I saw them all go and glanced up to King Timmy, wondering if I too should go even though I wanted to stay.

“Bernard, this is my servant, Vaughn,” King Timmy said to my surprise.

I made eye contact with Commandant Bernard and, without thinking, I extended my hand as if to shake it. Bernard looked down at me and shook it.

“How do you do?” he asked.

“It’s my request that Vaughn be with me at all times,” King Timmy said.

“Is this really necessary? Surely he wants to eat something,” Commandant Bernard said.

They both looked at me, waiting for my response.

“No. No I’m alright,” I said. “I’ll eat later.”

“Can I ask why you need him?” Commandant Bernard asked.

“Well, Vaughn you see has impeccable memory. It’s as if his mind can etch portraits in just moments. It’s my belief that we’re in the middle of a very historic moment, so every night I have Vaughn write in his journal the events of the day. So I ask Vaughn to be my second pair of eyes and ears on our travels.”

I knew this was a lie. I could remember many things, but I couldn’t say my mind painted portraits. Perhaps King Timmy had seen me writing in my journal, but I wasn’t doing it out of any royal decree. King Timmy felt responsible for me and he didn’t want to let me out of his sight. The only reason I was there was to avoid telling anybody in New York what King Timmy was actually scheming. I knew King Timmy wanted to keep an eye on me because I imagined Papa would have behaved the exact same way.

In the few moments where Commandant Bernard stood there, taking a hold of what King Timmy was saying, the woman called Lyonette returned. She quite literally bumped into the conversation, sticking her head in to speak.

“Is there a reason we’re standing here?” she asked, slightly annoyed.

“No, no reason,” Commandant Bernard said.

“Then shouldn’t we be going?” Lyonette asked.

“Yes,” Commandant Bernard said, glancing down at me “the boy can come along.”

King Timmy smiled and then pressed me forward with a slight tap of the shoulder. We passed through the city streets, much denser than I had imagined. The streets kept going and going. One would never have imagined this was inside the walls of a military garrison, St. Louis was a fully functioning city.

We petered out onto the right side of the garrison and passed one building that was slightly taller than the others. The bright red stone walls and clear windows made it look like

a hotel, but the dozens of people with dirt on their faces and torn skirts eating from chipped soup bowls made it clear that these were not people on holiday.

One woman in particular caught my attention. She wore a bright red dress that had several cuts along both sides. But several patties of mud had caked her dress so that it stuck to her legs like trousers. Her unwashed black hair covered her backside like cobwebs. I stared for too long because she made eye contact with me. It was then I noticed the scar that ran down her left cheek.

I tripped over a rock that had gotten stuck in the mud and slammed hard against something to my right. There was a curse from someone nearby, and I looked to see a wooden barrel falling to the ground, only to be caught by one of the Louisianan soldiers. I recognized the barrel as similar to those I'd seen in the cellars at Fitzroy Palace; those were filled with red wine from France. I imagined what was inside this barrel was just as precious as the soldier started cursing at me in French for knocking it over. Perhaps thankfully, I had no idea what he was saying.

I felt King Timmy grab my shoulder, but it was the woman Lyonette who stepped forward. The scout stood tall before the soldier, despite a clear height differential. But the power in her voice seemed to raise her by two entire feet. King Timmy whispered in my ear that she was explaining it was an accident to the soldier, though I could tell she was saying much more than that. Even though I didn't understand it, I was happy she was speaking on my behalf. By the time she was done, the soldier had cowered back to his barracks and returned the barrel to its place of rest.

"Thank you," I said as Lyonette turned back to look at us.

She peered down at me and smiled, ruffling up my hair which was stuck in spiked formations thanks to all the grease inside.

“That barrel was full of gunpowder, boy,” she said. “You could’ve blown us all away.”

And without another word, she started walking again, leaving me to follow with a thousand thoughts running through my head about how I had nearly blown up the king and a garrison of Louisianan soldiers. Here I was thinking the barrel was full of drink, no wonder the soldier was shouting the way he was. Regardless, I had to put it behind me as we continued onward.

I couldn’t take my eyes off Lyonette. She didn’t look like anyone I’d ever seen. She was stronger, more confident, and her race was a mystery even though the way he carried herself said she was Indian. I walked alongside her.

“What do you do here?” I asked.

She looked down at me, a grin on her face. “I’m a scout for the garrison. I can get to places faster by myself than with a whole company behind me.”

“Why you?”

She smiled again. “Because I’m the best cavaliere in the Osage, and the garrison needs scouts.”

“Do all the garrisons have Indian scouts?”

“Of course. Although we don’t live inside the walls, we’ve worked together long before I was born. The garrisons are so spread out that they need us to keep them updated on news around the country. We keep each other safe and ensure the trade routes are protected. Why do you think I was so quick to stop a battalion of Britons who appeared out of nowhere?”

She said this with a smile, but I knew she was right. She was only doing her job. Regardless, I’d say she was braver than any of the soldiers in King Timmy’s guard.

We made our way to a house on the northwest side of the city. It was a decent size, two stories of white walls and a pillared front. In comparison to the other homes, I imagined it was a mansion, but I had seen bigger.

We were escorted into a large circular study with a hearth to the left of the room, a pair of windows that looked out to the street, some bookshelves and a pair of chairs. Commandant Bernard helped himself to a glass of the brown liquid in the decanter. He chugged it back in one go, and Lyonette sighed in response.

“It’s been a long day,” he said to her.

Bernard then looked over at King Timmy.

“You’re welcome to take a seat, Your Excellency. I don’t know how long the Gouverneur will be.”

“There’s no telling what urgent matters he’s attending to,” Lyonette said in a voice that did not sound sincere.

“It’s alright,” King Timmy said. “After being on a horse for so long, I enjoy having the earth under my feet.”

I had already taken a seat by the window but no one heeded me any mind.

“And there’s no need for the ‘Your Excellency’,” King Timmy said. “The people call me ‘King’, but it is only decorative. As Governor General I am the Queen’s representative in New Britannia.”

“You look after your people, don’t you?” Lyonette asked.

“Yes,” King Timmy replied.

“You love and respect them, see that they are prosperous and no harm comes to them?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are a King to them regardless if it is in name only or otherwise.”

I allowed myself a grin. I liked this woman, she spoke without fear, said things people may think but would never dare say for fear of being rude. She was right about King Timmy

“Well, Queen Victoria referred to me as Your Honor, nothing more,” King Timmy said. “Sir is comfortable, anything more is too much.”

Lyonette smirked. “A humble aristocrat,” she looked over at Commandant Bernard, “never thought I’d see the day.”

The door then opened and in walked a short man with a large belly. He wore a blue coat that struggled to stretch past his waist, and a hat that was angled in a way that reminded me of duckbills. He took one glance at King Timmy and approached him with open arms.

“Timothy Fitzroy. How are you, Your Honor?” He asked exuberantly.

“Thierry Ricard, I am well, Governor,” King Timmy replied.

The Governor stepped forward with open arms but King Timmy stretched his hand outward, clearly wanting to avoid embracing this man.

“But it’s Your Excellency, Governor, Queen Victoria said as much.”

I was glad I was behind the Governor because I couldn’t stop smiling when King Timmy said that. Whoever this man was, he definitely wasn’t respected.

“Well,” the Governor said, “then I shall call you as such. I see you’ve already met Commandant Bernard.”

“Yes,” King Timmy said, looking back, “your scout Lyonette was quite persistent in our stopping.”

“Yes, that’s one way to describe her,” the Governor said with contempt. “But of course, a man like yourself, traveling so far from home, we couldn’t let you go without a stop.”

“And my men are most grateful for the recuperation.”

The two then sat and shared drinks. I don't think the Governor ever noticed my presence, and I didn't mind that. But to my surprise, everything that came out of King Timmy's mouth was a lie. He told the Governor that we were traveling to Mexico City for a private meeting with Emperor Santiago. That the Emperor had requested it as a way of assuring his friendship to New Britannia and via proxy, the Crown. The Governor smiled and nodded his head as they drank and never appeared to question the story.

The Governor made a request of King Timmy to remind Emperor Santiago of the letters the Governor had sent to him. He wished to open a discussion about the peaceful return of New Orleans to the people of Louisiana. They talked some about rebels in the city terrorizing the Spanish governors and how the Governor wanted to end the fighting.

Words were shared, they drank and they shook hands before departing. But that night, we were taken to a backroom in the army barracks and were given a warm stew of meat and beans to eat; they called it chili. It was obvious what was going on. We were in a place where Commandant Bernard was sure no one could overhear, or else he could trust the people who would hear.

"With all due respect, Your Honor, Your Excellency, whatever the hell you want us to call you," Commandant Bernard said in rapid succession, "what are you doing in Louisiana?"

King Timmy looked at me with a grin that seemed to assure me these were people we could trust, because unlike with the Governor, King Timmy spoke the truth.

"We are traveling to California to meet with Duke Rodrigo Hernandez," King Timmy explained. "The Duke wrote to me declaring California independent of Mexico, and is asking for the allegiance of New Britannia."

Commandant Bernard and Lyonette both just stared at King Timmy once he said that. Bernard may not have noticed it, but I saw Lyonette squeeze his knee when she heard this.

“I assume you haven’t heard anything of this?” King Timmy asked.

“No,” Bernard said. “Nothing of the sort. And this is something the Gouverneur would not have been quiet about learning. So what are you going to do? You can’t be thinking of agreeing?”

“I’m going in without prejudice toward one party or another,” King Timmy said. “All I want is to avoid a fight.”

“A fight may be coming regardless of what you say,” Bernard said. “I don’t have to tell you what happened in Tejas and how Louisiana suffered as a result.”

“No, of course not. But I have to try.”

“Why didn’t you send one of those telegraphs?” Lyonette asked. “Aren’t you taking an unnecessary risk?”

“I didn’t want to risk being intercepted by anyone unaware of the situation in California, most especially Mexico,” King Timmy said. “And my hope is that my presence alone might sway a person where a minister could not.”

“Sway towards what?” Lyonette asked.

“Towards a peaceful solution. Whatever has happened to Duke Rodrigo to cause him to do this, I need to know. This continent cannot risk a Mexican Civil War. That is what will happen if California leaves the Empire; Santiago will fight to get it back.”

“Just like New Orleans,” I said.

King Timmy turned to me, “Just like New Orleans. Yes.”

Commandant Bernard sat there with his hand covering his mouth as he pondered what was being said. The possibility of a war that would consume the entire western half of North America. The more pressing matter for him was the unknown risk this war would pose to Louisiana and its miles upon miles of unguarded land.

“Who controls the telegraph systems here?” King Timmy asked.

“We do,” Commandant Bernard replied. “The garrison.”

“I’d urge you to make sure no one outside St. Louis knows I was here.”

Commandant Bernard nodded his head. He wasn’t going to let the fat governor give away our location.

“One other thing, how many men do you have?” King Timmy asked.

“About five hundred,” Commandant Bernard said.

“And the other garrisons?”

“About the same.”

“And who do you all report to?”

Commandant Bernard uttered a laugh after that question. “No one,” he answered.

“There is no commander in chief. Louisiana is an abandoned nation. All the garrisons are only on the lookout for themselves.”

“Well you might want to change that,” King Timmy said. “I’m going to California. That is a fact. But whether I’ll be able to prevent a fight is uncertain. So maybe you all might want to start organizing before a fight is at your gates.”