

GUT

A historical gastrointestinal fantasia

by Alexander Utz

Time: 1822—1870ish

Place: Various, including: Mackinac Island, Niagara Falls, Prairie du Chien, Plattsburgh, Washington, St Louis

A note to directors:

This is a play about storytelling; how stories get told and who tells them. For this version of the script, I chose to have the storytellers be a group of voyageurs. This framing device is seen in all the *italic text*. If it suits your purpose and vision better to excise that text and frame the story with a different device, please do. The blank verse text is the core of the piece. Build around it in whatever way inspires you. I'm looking forward to seeing how you tell the story. For the purpose of the following draft, here is the character list for the framing device I've created:

Characters:

FRANCOIS XAVIER

The leader of the voyageurs; the guide. Narrates the story. He's been a voyageur for many years. He knows the waterways and routes like second nature. Warm, wise, in tune with the quiet of nature and the inner workings of people.

JEAN

Plays Beaumont in the story. Maybe a bit ambitious, doesn't quite connect with the others. More heady and intellectual, in a stoic way.

BERNARD
and EDOUARD

Rambunctious and fun-loving. The stereotypical idea of voyageurs as singing, smoking, drinking, hard-working folk. They're inseparable, like brothers. They poke each other, they hang on each other. When they fight, it's sharp, tender, and easily forgotten.

GREGORY (GIGI)

Plays Alexis in the story. The youngest, quietest member of the group. He's new to being a voyageur. He has to learn how.

A note to actors:

This is a play about storytelling; more specifically, about the joy of performative storytelling. So have fun outdoing each other, supporting each other, one-upping, surprising each other, all that great stuff. There's transformative power in sharing that collaborative joy. Allow the fun to make the quiet moments sneak up on you, to catch you off guard. The text will sweep you forward; let it. But most importantly: play!

Lights up.

Night has fallen.

The voyageurs enter.

FRANCOIS XAVIER.

JEAN.

BERNARD and EDOUARD.

Last, GREGORY.

FRANCOIS XAVIER points to where they'll camp for the night.

JEAN lights the fire.

BERNARD and EDOUARD pull up logs to sit on.

GREGORY watches, not sure of what to do yet.

They sit.

Food and drink are passed around.

Someone smokes.

The world shrinks.

It is only them.

FRANCOIS XAVIER opens a worn journal.

They share a story.

Like the first sip of coffee jolts you awake

FRANCOIS XAVIER

It was supposed to be a normal day
a day like any other
bright June morning
birds chirping
sun cresting over waves
the murmurs of Mackinac Island
shaking off another sticky summer night
rubbing sleep out of its eyes
coming once again to life

BERNARD

and another familiar sight
William Beaumont

JEAN

That's me.

BERNARD

Of course, of course.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

William Beaumont

EDOUARD

assistant surgeon at Fort Mackinac

BERNARD

Damn, I wanted to say that!

EDOUARD

Gotta be quicker than that.

JEAN

Let him continue.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

William Beaumont
rushing out the door with an empty stomach
save for the few gulps of coffee
now sloshing around his stomach
as he makes his way to his office
in the fort hospital
it was supposed to be a normal day on Mackinac Island

EDOUARD

supposed to be
whatever that means

JEAN

normal like the bateaux in the harbor
bobbing up and down

BERNARD

normal like the tents and lean-tos of indians and voyageurs along the water
swept in by the season to trade their pelts
with the American Fur Company Store

FRANCOIS XAVIER

normal like William Beaumont
assistant surgeon at Fort Mackinac
looking out the window of his office
at this small, remote corner of the world

JEAN

somehow America

FRANCOIS XAVIER

normal like Alexis St Martin
voyageur for the American Fur Company
standing hungover
in the morning sun

The others look to GREGORY.

BERNARD

at least he thinks it was supposed to be normal

EDOUARD

right?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he rubs his head

They all look to GREGORY again. He's supposed to say something? He makes an attempt.

GREGORY

headache

FRANCOIS XAVIER nods, smiles. The others clap GREGORY on the back, cheers him.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

bad one

BERNARD

he shouldn't have had that eighth

EDOUARD

ninth —?

BERNARD

tenth!

EDOUARD

drink last night

BERNARD

bad idea

GREGORY

bad idea
bad – headache

They cheer for GREGORY. He's getting the hang of it.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis St. Martin
voyageur for the American Fur Company

GREGORY

bad hangover
bad headache
bad sun
bad noise
bad job
bad idea
bad day

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but at least it can't get any worse
right?

GREGORY

at least it can't get any worse

BERNARD

he thinks about where he could be instead of here
thinks of the woods of Quebec
thinks of home
thinks of taking one of the bateaux off the beach
and paddling it all the way back

EDOUARD

far away from this damn island
from this damn headache

BERNARD

wouldn't that be nice?

GREGORY

can't get any worse than this
can't get any worse

GREGORY looks to FRANCOIS XAVIER. FRANCOIS XAVIER nods.

just get to the counter
hand over the pelts
pay them toward your debt
and then
and then you can go lie down
find a tree
and lie in its shade
yeah
that'll be nice
get through this
and you'll be through the worst of it

The voyageurs clap for GREGORY. They call him GIGI, (“There you go, petit Gigi!”) – a loving nickname. GREGORY smiles. He’s GIGI now. He’s learning.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and just as he steps forward
to join the other voyageurs at the store counter

JEAN

just as William Beaumont
settles his weight at the window

FRANCOIS XAVIER

just as Mackinac Island
steps forward to settle in
to another normal day
a deafening clap
a jagged rift of sound

ALL

CRACK!

JEAN

a gunshot

EDOUARD

Alexis on the ground
under a plume of smoke

BERNARD

shirt tattered
bloody
in flames

EDOUARD

Beaumont off and running

FRANCOIS XAVIER

it was supposed to be a normal day
not the day that changed these mens’ lives

but William Beaumont
assistant surgeon at Fort Mackinac
doesn’t have time to reflect on his life changing
as he runs down the hill from the fort to the harbor

JEAN

out of the way
there’s a life on the line

EDOUARD

sorry, excuse you

JEAN

where is he?
the man who’s been shot

EDOUARD

it was an accident
you know
shotgun loaded stupidly
and

JEAN

I don't care
where is he?

BERNARD

the boy's over here
doesn't look good

JEAN

nobody touch him

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont surveys the wreckage of the boy's chest

BERNARD

a hole the size of his palm
exposing the bright red flesh
splintered rib
a part of his lung

EDOUARD

it doesn't look good

BERNARD

is that — toast?

EDOUARD

smells strange, too

They smell.

JEAN

coffee
this is his breakfast
his stomach's been hit

GIGI

Ew.

ALL

Shh!

BERNARD

You're unconscious.

JEAN

give me some space
surely you all have better things to be doing

EDOUARD

We don't!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

okay, let's let him work

JEAN

cleaning the wound
removing pieces of fabric
clipping away charred tissue
extracting a splinter of bone

FRANCOIS XAVIER

in these moments
his mind isn't on what he'll write in his journal for the day
in these moments
he has to remind himself to breathe
in these moments
there are only two things in the world
the wound and his hands

JEAN

I need to move him to the hospital
I'll be able to take better care of him there

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he doesn't know who exactly he's talking to
but he feels it needs to be said
it is a universal, inarguable truth
yet, as always with universal, inarguable truths
someone comes to argue

BERNARD

Ramsay Crooks
manager of the American Fur Company Store

EDOUARD

Boo!

BERNARD

Shut up.
the boy's not going anywhere

JEAN

what?

BERNARD

I said the Frenchie's not going anywhere
we both know he won't make it to morning, William

JEAN

but if he does
the wound engages his stomach and lung
there'll be more to do in the morning
I'd rather manage that at the hospital

BERNARD

William, the company's not paying for a dying man's hospital stay
I'm running a business here
not a charity

JEAN

this is a special case

BERNARD

I have a cot in the storeroom
it's comfortable
I've slept there myself some nights
right next to my desk
so I can watch over the boy

JEAN

what if he needs —

BERNARD

here's the key
you can check on him whenever you'd like
but let's be honest with ourselves, William
I don't know how much longer he'll need checking-in on
thank you for your help
I'll send word if we need you again

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont can't argue anymore
Crooks' pathetic tight-lipped half-grin
like a stone wall

BERNARD

let's get him onto this cot, boys
right here next to my desk
I'll be praying over him
like he's my own son

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but would William Beaumont accept defeat?

ALL except GREGORY

no!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

not William Beaumont
raised by a Connecticut farmer
who fought in the war of Independence

ALL except GREGORY

no!

JEAN

not William Beaumont
who taught himself medicine by reading books

ALL

no!

EDOUARD

who was trained on the battlefield in 1812

BERNARD

That means amputations!

ALL

no!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

not William Beaumont
who believed in America
and its opportunity for greatness
for everyone who tried for it

BERNARD

even as he cut off the limbs
of his wounded brethren

JEAN

We get it, there were amputations.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

William Beaumont does not accept defeat
no
like a mountain goat
he climbs
ever higher up the mountain of greatness

EDOUARD

this man with tufts of hair
sprouting out the sides of his head
as if they had a life of their own

JEAN

Okay, very funny.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

this man who wants to help people
he will not accept defeat

GIGI

what does he do?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he's a mountain goat
he leaps
right into the company storeroom

BERNARD

William
what are you doing here?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he ignores Ramsay Crooks
goes instead to the boy
the boy whose chest
encased in now wine-dark wrappings
still rises and falls
he shouts to a nearby trapper

JEAN

you there!
help me get this man on a stretcher

BERNARD

Beaumont, we agreed that the boy would stay —

EDOUARD

yes sir
I can help

FRANCOIS XAVIER

they load the boy gently onto a stretcher

GIGI has fun playing “dead.”

JEAN

careful, careful

EDOUARD

he’s skinny
poor kid

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Ramsay Crooks staring daggers into Beaumont

BERNARD

what do you think you’re doing?

JEAN

my job

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and they carry the wounded boy
back up the hill to the hospital

EDOUARD

think he’ll make it, doc?

JEAN

we’ll see
we’ll see

FRANCOIS XAVIER

finally
out of breath after the climb
they lay the wounded young trapper on a bed

JEAN

now the real work begins

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the boy’s eyes flicker open

EDOUARD nudges GIGI. GIGI plays along.

JEAN
easy now, don't strain yourself

GIGI
je — j'ai —

JEAN
it's okay
you've been hurt
but you're in the hospital now

GIGI
j'ai mal —

JEAN
I know it hurts
I'm going to do what I can to help you get better
my name's Dr Beaumont
William Beaumont
what's your name?

FRANCOIS XAVIER
the boy
for a moment
just breathes
then
sound escapes his throat

GIGI
Alexis
Alexis St. Martin

JEAN
Alexis
it's nice to meet you
get some rest now
you need it
I'll be back to check on you later

GIGI
oui
merci

FRANCOIS XAVIER
the young trapper closes his eyes
and Beaumont lets out a breath

JEAN
now the real work begins

FRANCOIS XAVIER
*Yes, now the real work begins —
next time.*

FRANCOIS XAVIER closes the journal, the fire dims, and the voyageurs sleep.

The muscle memory of chewing, or not chewing, and other repetitions

Another night. The voyageurs enter, and set up their camp like before.

Food, drink, smoke.

FRANCOIS XAVIER opens the worn journal.

The others become attentive. ("Are we at the treatment?" "Shh, yes." "Drink every time something gross happens!")

FRANCOIS XAVIER

So Alexis St Martin's treatment begins

GIGI

He lives!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Of course, there wouldn't be a story if he didn't. But it's not an easy recovery.

JEAN

the wound has to be cleaned and dressed
multiple times a day
along with fevers
and shaking
and coughing

BERNARD

knock knock
Beaumont
it's Ramsay Crooks
I told Captain Pierce
your superior
what you did

EDOUARD

William, who authorized this?

JEAN

it was an emergency

EDOUARD

we can't be giving away hospital beds to commoners
who's going to pay for it?

BERNARD

the boy still owes the company
on his indenture

JEAN

my duty is to my patient
I was thinking of the boy's life
not his finances
why don't we have the town council
take him on as a charity case?

EDOUARD

that could work
until he recovers

JEAN

thank you, Captain

EDOUARD

but no more of these stunts, William
and if the council doesn't take him on
he's your responsibility
not mine
not the company's
yours
understand?

JEAN

yes sir

GIGI

is everything okay?

JEAN

it will be
now let's get you fed

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but when Alexis tries to eat
he chews
swallows

BERNARD *throwing some food at EDOUARD*

and the food falls out of the wound

EDOUARD

Gross — drink!

JEAN

Let's not do that.

GIGI

how am I supposed to eat?

JEAN

we'll keep the wrappings on
as long as it's open

GIGI

— okay

FRANCOIS XAVIER

weeks pass

JEAN

the wound continues to be cleaned and dressed
and begins healing itself
discharging abscess tissue
fragments of cartilage
remnants of charred flesh
and

GIGI

what's that?

JEAN

a button

BERNARD

A button! From his shirt!

GIGI

that was — in me?

JEAN

yes it was

EDOUARD

Drink!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

more weeks pass

JEAN

the wound shrinks
from the size of my palm
to only two inches across

GIGI

do you think it will close?

JEAN

I've been trying
it seems like the stomach acid is keeping it open
but we'll see

GIGI

is this the worst wound you've seen?

JEAN

there was worse in the war

GIGI

oh
oui

JEAN

once, after a surprise attack
I spent over thirty hours
operating, amputating

GIGI

thirty hours
mon dieu
we used to row
for some fourteen hour days
but never thirty

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont looks at his patient
sees the boy almost anew
a wild coyote pulled out of the wilderness
against his will
into this new world
where he cannot fend for himself

JEAN

being a voyageur is not an easy life
but hard work is what makes a man great

GIGI

— okay

FRANCOIS XAVIER

soon the boy begins receiving visitors
who often bring small tokens

BERNARD and EDOUARD actually produce small things to give GIGI.

EDOUARD

I made you a scarf

GIGI

Wait, really?

EDOUARD

I saw you didn't have one.

BERNARD

knock knock
it's Ramsay Crooks

JEAN

hello, Ramsay

BERNARD

my wife suggested I bring the boy a gift
and well wishes for a quick recovery
so — here
a bible
it's in English
but

GIGI

merci

JEAN

let's try to use English, Alexis
thank you

GIGI

— okay

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis making more and more progress

sitting up
swinging legs off bed
easing himself to the ground
always with Beaumont there to support

JEAN

I got you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

as he takes surer and surer steps
retracing the same circle around the same room
this room he's been in for months now
and little by little
venturing further
with surer steps
down the hallway one day
making it to the door of Beaumont's office a week later
then to the window of Beaumont's office a week after that
gazing out onto the world he used to know

GIGI

the harbor
the bateaux
the tents

FRANCOIS XAVIER

his fellow voyageurs packing up for the season
to head back north for more furs
back to Canada

GIGI

back home
— can I go outside?

JEAN

when you can stand on your own

GIGI

you promise?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

this doctor who writes as if possessed
this doctor who holds him up and walks with him
this doctor who brought him back to life

JEAN

yes
I promise

GIGI

if my brother Etienne saw me like this
asking to go outside
he'd laugh at me

JEAN

I didn't know you had a brother

GIGI

oui
Etienne
he's the reason I became a voyageur
we both loved the outdoors

JEAN

is he a voyageur?

GIGI

I think so
I haven't seen him in many years

JEAN

you could write to him

GIGI

I don't know how

JEAN

I could teach you

GIGI

— maybe

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and five months after Alexis' injury
the young fur trapper sits on the edge of the bed
staring at the floor
takes a deep breath in
why is he so nervous?
lets the breath out

GIGI

I can do this

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he begins to ease himself down
feels the floor flatten against his feet
tries to straighten himself up

EDOUARD

he feels the life flashing before his eyes

BERNARD

he feels the vomit rising in his throat

EDOUARD

it hurts

BERNARD

it really fucking hurts

GIGI

I have to do this

FRANCOIS XAVIER

his legs shaking
his heart racing
his entire body screaming
the wound feeling like a doorway to hell
but finally
he's straightened up

EDOUARD

He's erect?

JEAN

Stop.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

for the first time in months
Alexis finds himself on both feet
unsupported
wavering a little
but definitely
standing

GIGI

c'est fait!
I did it!

BERNARD and EDOUARD jostle GIGI excitedly, tousle his hair, etc.

EDOUARD

the excitement
almost causes him to lose his balance

BERNARD

to lose his lunch

JEAN

What is it with you and vomiting?

BERNARD

I think it's funny.

GIGI

doctor, look
I'm standing!

JEAN

look at that!
how do you feel?

GIGI

still hurts
just a little
can I go outside now?

JEAN

I promised, didn't I?

GIGI

merci, doctor
thank you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont watches from the window
as Alexis makes his way outside
into the spring sunlight
turns his face to the sky
outstretches his arms
and allows a smile to spread across his face

EDOUARD

then
a howl of joy
released into the air
as if it had been bottled up
in the coyote's lungs
during all these months stuck in bed

BERNARD

a howl that
for a moment
seems to lift him off his feet
toward the clouds

*GIGI howls joyfully.**JEAN*

Alexis begins spending more and more time outside
sitting in the grass
waving to passerby
pacing laps around the fort green

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and it isn't long before his progress
is noticed
by who other than

BERNARD

Ramsay Crooks
knock knock
congratulations, William
it seems you've healed the boy

JEAN

hello Ramsay, captain Pierce
there's still work to be done
the wound isn't closed yet

EDOUARD

it's been nine months
will it ever close?

JEAN

I don't know
I'm waiting to see

BERNARD

he's up and walking around
surely he can work

JEAN

he's not ready to work yet

EDOUARD

there is another option
that's been discussed

BERNARD

seeing that he can't work
and the town can't keep up
an endless charity case —

EDOUARD

yes, Ramsay, thank you
we think it may be best
to send the boy back to Canada
to finish his recovery

JEAN

you mean —

EDOUARD

it's what's best for everyone
he'll be off our hands
and in a familiar place
to heal

JEAN

you're suggesting we plop him in a bateaux
and send him off across hundreds of miles?
he'll never survive!

BERNARD

he's a voyageur
he's made the trip many times

JEAN

yes, in full health
who will change his dressings?
who will monitor his diet?
what if he falls ill?
with a wound like this
an illness could be a death sentence

EDOUARD

William, you need to see this
from our perspective —

JEAN

no, you need to see it from mine
and his
I won't allow him to be shipped off like cargo
with a get well soon note and a shrug

BERNARD

I'm not writing a note

EDOUARD

the council can pay for one more week
after that, he goes back to Canada

JEAN

but —

EDOUARD

you've done good work with the boy
you saved his life
you should be proud of yourself

JEAN

captain, please
don't send him off to die

EDOUARD

we all know you're a man of character
you've done what you can
now it's time for the boy
to take his fate into his own hands
one week, William

JEAN

damn it

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the next day
Beaumont is quieter than usual
as he changes Alexis' dressings

GIGI

is everything okay, doctor?

JEAN

hmm?
yes
yes

GIGI

you're quiet

JEAN

just thinking
sorry

GIGI

Ramsay Crooks said I might be going back to Quebec

JEAN

of course he told you that

GIGI

is it true?

JEAN

I don't know
maybe
would you want to go back?

GIGI

it might be nice
but I like it here
I'd miss it if I left

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont has the old bandage completely off
and is about to start with the new wrapping
when he sees something
and everything stops

JEAN

Alexis
have you noticed anything different
about your wound?

GIGI

no, why?

JEAN

look

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont points to Alexis' side
instead of the familiar cavity
now a patch of skin covers the wound

EDOUARD

Drink.

GIGI

is it closed?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont gingerly places a finger
against the skin where the hole had been
and presses

BERNARD

Drink.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

it gives way
the layer of flesh
opening into the dark recess of Alexis' stomach

EDOUARD

Drink!

JEAN

I can't believe it

GIGI

what is it?

JEAN

it looks like your wound has healed in such a way
that the hole to your stomach has covered itself
with a valve of sorts

GIGI

— oh

JEAN

do you know what this means?

GIGI

I'm healed?

JEAN

not fully
but this is certainly promising
your body is adapting

GIGI

wow

JEAN

but even more
this gives us direct access into your stomach
it's a huge opportunity, Alexis
to learn about the process of digestion
as it's happening!
do you understand?

GIGI

so you're saying
I'm special?

JEAN

yes, Alexis
very special
one of a kind

GIGI

okay
so
what happens now?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but Beaumont doesn't respond
instead peers into the hole
all that way down
cannot see the bottom
realizes it is not just a hole

JEAN

no
it is itself and its opposite

it is both hole
and mountain
towering mountain
reaching up
gut to heaven

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and it is his
Beaumont's
the mountain goat's
to climb

JEAN

Alexis
what would you think of staying on Mackinac?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

*Well, we'll hear his answer —
next time.*

*FRANCOIS XAVIER closes the journal, and the voyageurs start preparing to sleep.
Except GIGI, who turns to FRANCOIS XAVIER.*

GIGI

What does he do?

*FRANCOIS XAVIER looks around. The others have drifted off.
FRANCOIS XAVIER puts a finger to his lips, and continues.*

The quiet movement of digestion

FRANCOIS XAVIER

What does he think of staying on Mackinac?
is the question paddling around
Alexis St Martin
the coyote's
mind
as he carefully makes his way
through the woods of the island

GIGI

this tiny faraway place
supposed to be a brief stopover
has turned into over a year of his life

FRANCOIS XAVIER

after
that is
nearly taking it from him

he steps over a fallen branch
he's still relearning the weight on his feet
but the slowness of his movement
seems to open the world to him anew

GIGI

he had become so numb to it

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he sees the lake through the trees
moves toward it

what does he think of staying here?

GIGI

he certainly can't afford it
he owes too much on his contract
and he can't work in this condition

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so what does he think of going home?

GIGI

he misses his family
but doesn't know how he'll weather the journey
besides
who would help with his wound?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he emerges from between trees
and is met by shining water all around
how could one ever get used to this view?

GIGI

he doesn't know what he thinks
nobody's ever really asked him that before

he's told to do
and he does

FRANCOIS XAVIER

his eyes come to rest on a large rock formation
emerging from the trees a little off to his left

a circle of rock with a hole in the center
leaving a bridge of stone seemingly floating in midair
he can see the water through the center of it

GIGI

like someone had shot a hole in the island's side
a hole that would be there forever

FRANCOIS XAVIER

what does he think of staying here?

he looks out at the horizon
water meeting sky
blue meeting blue
and he spots something
a small blip
slowly approaching

a bateaux
those familiar oars

GIGI

the first of the voyageurs
landing for the season

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis turns his back on the water
and begins the trek back toward the harbor
he wants to be there when they arrive

he used to be able to do fourteen hour days
of rowing
lifting
hauling
now a thirty minute hike exhausts him

he should've brought his cane

he makes his way past the fort, the hospital
down the hill and up to the harbor
just as the bateaux pulls to shore

somehow it feels right that he's here for this
like a reminder that the world he came from still exists
like it hasn't missed a beat without him

and out of the bateaux steps a voyageur
who causes Alexis' heart to leap into his throat
it can't be — after all these years

GIGI

Who is it?

FRANCOIS XAVIER holding up a finger
the man sees him
and calls his name
his voice carrying through the air
as if reaching out across time

— Alexis?

GIGI

Who is it?

FRANCOIS XAVIER
Goodnight, Gigi.

FRANCOIS XAVIER goes to sleep. GIGI stays awake for a while.
Night sinks in.
Transition.

Like a swill of gin springs you to action, to a leap of faith

*Another night. The voyageurs enter, and set up their camp like before.
Food, drink, smoke.
FRANCOIS XAVIER opens the familiar journal.*

FRANCOIS XAVIER

*Where were we?
ah, yes
Alexis has seen a familiar face
among the arriving voyageurs*

EDOUARD

Alexis?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis runs to the man
their paths crossing after all this time
his brother

GIGI

Etienne!

EDOUARD

look at you
little Alexis
all grown up

GIGI

I have so much to tell you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and after how-have-you-beens
and where-have-you-beens
and showing off scars
Alexis brings his brother
to Beaumont's office door

GIGI

doctor
I'd like to introduce you to my brother Etienne
this is the man who saved my life

JEAN

Etienne, a pleasure
you're here for the summer?

EDOUARD

that's right
then back to Montreal again

JEAN

I'm sure Alexis is glad to have you here

GIGI

I am
I sure am

JEAN

well
it was nice to meet you
but I have to get back to work

GIGI

actually, doctor
I thought about what you asked
and I would like to stay for a bit
I don't want to go back to Quebec
not yet

JEAN

you're sure?

GIGI

I owe you my life
I'd like to pay you back
however I can

JEAN

thank you, Alexis

EDOUARD

alright, let's not keep the good doctor too long
anyway, we have to get you drunk!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

before they're even out the door
a thought has begun to crystallize in Beaumont's head
an impulsive thought
a fateful thought
the mountain goat preparing himself
for the biggest leap he'd ever taken

JEAN

Ramsay
how much does Alexis owe on his indenture?

BERNARD

William, nice to see you too

JEAN

how much?

BERNARD

forty dollars, why?

JEAN

we're not sending him back to Canada

BERNARD

we've already had this conversation

JEAN

if his indenture is paid
he's a free man, correct?

BERNARD

yes, but —

JEAN

then I'll pay it

BERNARD

hold on a minute, William

JEAN

here
take it

BERNARD

he can't be worth this much to you

JEAN

his stomach is

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont doesn't care to find out
what Ramsay will sputter out next
so he turns and walks out
into the bright daylight

he finds Alexis and Etienne
hunched over the tavern bar
each cradling a drink

GIGI and EDOUARD are actually getting a little drunk.

JEAN

Etienne
do you mind if I have a word with your brother?
alone

EDOUARD

of course, doctor
he's all yours

GIGI

where'd Etienne go?

JEAN

he'll be back
can I talk to you about something?

GIGI

have a drink

JEAN

no thank you
I abide by temperance

GIGI

I don't know what that means

JEAN

I don't drink

GIGI

oh
what do you want to talk about?

JEAN

Alexis, I've paid off your indenture
you're a free man

GIGI

you what?

JEAN

you're free
you don't owe anything to the company anymore

GIGI

why?

JEAN

I think we have a real opportunity here
an opportunity to do something special
and I don't want you being shipped off to Quebec
or worrying about going back to work
or running out of money

GIGI

but
what will I do?

JEAN

you'll allow me to study your stomach

GIGI

you think it's that interesting, eh?

JEAN

I do

GIGI

how will I make money?

JEAN

you'll stay with me and my family
your food and shelter will be paid for
and you'll receive a small allowance
for helping around the house

GIGI

sounds better than being a voyageur

JEAN

what do you say?

GIGI

what do I say?
you saved my life
and then gave it back to me
by paying my debts
all because of this hole in my stomach

JEAN

you're a free man, Alexis
I don't want you to think
you owe me anything

GIGI

it's almost
how do you say
too good to be the truth

JEAN

too good to be true

GIGI

so
when do I begin?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont stands
places a coin on the bar for Alexis' drink
and extends his hand out to the young man

JEAN

end of this week?

GIGI

doctor
we have a deal

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the mountain goat and the coyote
regarding each other for a moment
before the coyote returns to his brother, his pack
and the mountain goat emerges
into the wide world once again
feet firmly planted on the first new ledge he'd leapt to
in a long, long time

BERNARD

He's moving in!

EDOUARD

He's moving in!!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

soon, the talk of the island
is the small but seismic shift taking place
the boy with the hole in his side
is moving in with the Beaumonts

EDOUARD

I hear Beaumont paid off his indenture

BERNARD

I wonder what Deborah thinks of it

EDOUARD

she can't be happy with him
spending all that money

BERNARD

another mouth to feed

EDOUARD

two more hands to help around the house

BERNARD

it's a little strange

EDOUARD

yep, a little strange

JEAN

this will be a good thing, Debbie

All except EDOUARD touch their noses. EDOUARD has to be Deborah. He's not thrilled.

EDOUARD

I'm only agreeing
if you promise to write your friend Joseph Lovell
the surgeon general
he could help you

BERNARD

No, no, she's more like
if he sees the work you're doing
how valuable you are
you could push for a better assignment
maybe in St Louis?
I've always wanted to live there

EDOUARD

Do you want to do it?

BERNARD

No, you're doing great
I'll be the daughter, Sarah.

EDOUARD

You're always Sarah.

BERNARD

can you really see into his stomach?

EDOUARD

Sarah, don't be rude

BERNARD

please??

JEAN

you'll have to ask him

BERNARD

I'll ask him every day

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and only a week after the mountain goat and the coyote
had shaken hands
Alexis stands at the Beaumonts' door
pausing a moment
before a world swings open to greet him

JEAN

Alexis
welcome
we're so glad to have you
here, make yourself at home

EDOUARD

we'll have dinner ready soon

BERNARD

can I see the hole in your side?

JEAN

Sarah, not now

BERNARD

but dad
you said I could

GIGI

I have my wrappings on now
but maybe another time

BERNARD

promise?

GIGI

promise

BERNARD

yay!

EDOUARD

Sarah, help me set the table

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the Beaumonts retreat to the kitchen
allowing Alexis to look around the small house
the bustle and scent and sounds of a meal being prepared
carries his thoughts to Quebec

GIGI

to home

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and his heart momentarily pulls
before

EDOUARD

dinner's ready

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so they sit down
a family and a fur trader
none of them quite sure what to say
this first day of their new lives
no words come forward to meet the moment

BERNARD

until Beaumont slaps his forehead

JEAN

we should have had your brother join us
Edgar

GIGI

Etienne

JEAN

right
Etienne
I should have mentioned you could have
you know
he's welcome

GIGI

oui, thank you

EDOUARD

you must be happy
to have your brother here

GIGI

I am

EDOUARD

I know what it's like to miss family

FRANCOIS XAVIER

there's nearly that moment of recognition
of two lonely people really seeing each other

GIGI

your family is here

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and silence hovers over the table once again
shadow of a vulture

JEAN

well
I'll let you get settled, Alexis
I have some writing to do tonight
again, welcome
we're glad you're with us

GIGI

thank you for dinner
I'm going to meet Etienne for a drink

EDOUARD

not yet
you're helping me clean up first

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so he does as he's told
and hours later, awaiting Alexis' return
Beaumont rereads the letter
he's drafted to surgeon general Joseph Lovell

JEAN

to surgeon general Lovell
my friend
I hope you're well
I'm writing from Mackinac with a unique case
that may interest you

GIGI

hello doctor

JEAN

Alexis, welcome back
how was your night?

GIGI hiccups

bien
I'm going to bed

JEAN

I suppose he's settling in quickly

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he does
they all do
over the course of the next few weeks
the entire makeshift household
settles into a routine
uneasy at first
but gradually worn in
like a new pair of shoes

EDOUARD

Alexis, wake up
time to start breakfast

JEAN

I'm off to the hospital

EDOUARD

Alexis, wake up

GIGI

I'm up, I'm up

EDOUARD

Sarah, we're reading our histories today, right?

BERNARD

do we have to?

GIGI

I'll go chop some wood

EDOUARD

be back before lunch
to help with the wash

GIGI

okay

FRANCOIS XAVIER

sometimes he and Sarah take walks through the woods
sharing with each other their favorite secret pockets of the island
Alexis teaching her Quebecois curses

BERNARD

calice

GIGI

oui, bien, bien
sacrament

BERNARD

sacrament

GIGI

sacrament!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

later on
preparations for dinner
side by side in the kitchen with Deborah

EDOUARD

hand me that knife?

GIGI

oui

EDOUARD

thank you
and please get William from the hospital

if he isn't reminded
he'll get distracted by his work
and come home late

GIGI

excusez-moi, doctor
but dinner's nearly ready

JEAN

is it already?
where does the time go?
thank you, Alexis

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the hesitance of the early dinners
slowly giving way to livelier conversation
stories traded across the table like currency
life's little similarities
recountings of childhoods on the farm

GIGI

the work

JEAN

the difficulties

GIGI

the hours rowing

JEAN

the amputations

GIGI

the poverty

JEAN

the war

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the friends never to be seen again

GIGI

I need a drink

JEAN

remember, Alexis
temperance is an immeasurable benefit
to the health of your body
and your spirit

GIGI

if not drinking is such a benefit
then why does it make me feel so good?
goodnight, doctor

JEAN

goodnight, Alexis

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the young fur trapper
this once-wild coyote
feeling himself become reigned in
a bit
tamed

until
a wrinkle in the routine
a letter arrives addressed to Beaumont
from the surgeon general
his friend Joseph Lovell

EDOUARD

what does it say?

BERNARD

dear doctor Beaumont
it is good to hear from you
what a fascinating case you describe
I encourage you to use this opportunity
to discover what you can about the process of digestion
and please send me an account of any experiments you pursue
they'll certainly make for an interesting paper to publish
or maybe a book
yours as ever
surgeon general Lovell

JEAN

it can't be real
a full endorsement

GIGI

so what does it mean?

JEAN

Alexis
my dear boy
it means that
as long as it's alright with you
we're going to do some experiments

GIGI

well
when do we start?

BERNARD

The experiments?

EDOUARD

You all know the rules. Drink every time something gross happens.

GIGI is already pretty drunk, but he follows this rule. He gets sicker throughout the scene.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

The very next day
Alexis watches as Beaumont flurries around the room

laying bits of food out on a table
opening his notebook to note the date
the time
the temperature

GIGI

what should I do?

JEAN

oh
yes
you can sit
make yourself comfortable
and you can take your shirt off

EDOUARD

Take it off!

GIGI

bien

JEAN

so how are you feeling?

GIGI

good
and you?

JEAN

good
what have you eaten today?

GIGI

breakfast

JEAN

what did you have for breakfast?

GIGI

oh
same as you
eggs, toast, coffee

JEAN

good
that's good

GIGI

what are you writing?

JEAN

I have to be diligent
and write everything down

GIGI

diligent?

JEAN

oh
um
doing things right

GIGI

I see

JEAN

so, are we ready?

GIGI

I think so

JEAN

let's start by having you lie on your side

GIGI

okay

JEAN

are you comfortable?

GIGI

yes
um
what are you going to do?

JEAN

we'll be measuring digestion times for different foods
individually and together

GIGI

okay

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont retrieves the bits of food
and ties them one by one to a length of string
attached to a small piece of wood
Alexis' eyes following as he presses open
the skin covering the hole
before gently dropping the food in
like casting a fishing line
the piece of wood resting against Alexis' side

JEAN

that's there so the string doesn't fall in
and it keeps the opening
well
closed

GIGI

now what?

JEAN

now we wait

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont resumes writing
muttering to himself

JEAN

raw lean beef
seasoned beef
salt pork
yesterday's bread
cabbage
entered stomach at
eleven thirty in the morning

GIGI

how long do we wait?

JEAN

I'll check on it in one hour
you can go about your day like normal
then we'll see how each type of food is being digested

GIGI

and I'll have lunch when we're done

JEAN

my boy
I've just dropped most of a lunch into your side!
but yes, if you're still hungry when we're done
you can eat

GIGI

thank you, doctor
I'll see you soon

JEAN

we'll be making great discoveries soon enough, Alexis!
the mysteries of the stomach will be unveiled!

GIGI

— oui

FRANCOIS XAVIER

an hour passes
and Alexis returns

GIGI

doctor
my stomach's making a lot of noise

JEAN

you probably need to sit down
here, let's have a look

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont takes the string
and gingerly pulls it

JEAN

interesting
the bread and cabbage nearly fully digested
the pork has turned grey

BERNARD

Grey!

EDOUARD

Drink.

JEAN

the lean beef and seasoned beef —
nothing yet

GIGI

so the meat takes longer

JEAN

yes
which is odd
most theories of digestion
say that meat is digested fastest
then bread
then fruits and vegetables

GIGI

are they wrong?
or is something wrong with me?

JEAN

nothing's wrong with you
you're doing wonderfully

GIGI

I don't feel wonderful

JEAN

let's put this back in, and you can rest for a moment
we'll check again in another hour

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so back in goes the string
and another hour passes

GIGI

doctor
I really don't feel well

BERNARD

Alexis hunched over
face blanched
holding his side

JEAN

come here, lie down
let's take a look

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont draws the string out once again
the pork is gone
but the two pieces of beef still remain

GIGI

why are they taking so long?

JEAN

I don't know
we'll check in another hour

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so back in goes the string
and a third hour passes

GIGI

doctor, I want to vomit

JEAN

you can't
there's hardly anything in there

GIGI

my stomach hurts
and my head

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont draws the string out a third time
the two pieces of beef stubbornly cling to it

GIGI

please don't put them back in

JEAN

why aren't they digesting?
maybe too much variety?

GIGI

doctor
what should I do?
I feel so sick

JEAN

here, take a few calomel pills
these should help
you'll feel better soon

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and within a few minutes
Alexis runs out of the room
to empty his stomach into the bushes

GIGI actually goes off to vomit.

EDOUARD

Drink.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis finally stumbles back in
still holding his side
and a letter

GIGI

doctor, this came for you
and
um
I noticed something coming out
out of the hole

JEAN

what?

GIGI

this liquid

BERNARD and EDOUARD

Drink.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont holds his finger to it
smells it

BERNARD and EDOUARD

Drink!

JEAN

gastric liquor

GIGI

I haven't drunk today

EDOUARD

Sure you haven't.

JEAN

not alcohol
it's a natural part of your stomach
thank you for showing me
this will be helpful

GIGI

okay
I'm going to go lie down

GIGI lies down. BERNARD and EDOUARD laugh at how unwell he's feeling.

JEAN

I can't believe I hadn't thought of it
pure gastric liquor
directly accessible
maybe I can extract it
run experiments to determine
if it can digest food outside of the stomach —

FRANCOIS XAVIER
lost in thought
he opens the letter
from surgeon general Lovell

JEAN
— assigned to Fort Niagara?

FRANCOIS XAVIER
the letter falls out of his hands
and just like that
their time on Mackinac
would be coming to an end.

*FRANCOIS XAVIER closes the old journal, and one by one they all fall asleep.
Transition.*

The Mackinac ball, or the extra asshole

*Another night. The voyageurs enter, and set up their camp like before.
Food, drink, smoke. GIGI is drinking more.
FRANCOIS XAVIER opens the journal.*

FRANCOIS XAVIER

The Mackinac ball
the island's annual tradition at the end of the summer
a celebration before the fur traders pack up their tents
and leave for the season

EDOUARD

Party!

BERNARD

Beaumont
it's like you get a farewell party
here, have a drink with me

JEAN

thank you, Ramsay
but I can't, I —

BERNARD

yes, you're a teetotaler
I know, William
just this once

JEAN

I really can't

BERNARD

I'm going to miss you
you stubborn bastard

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Crooks pulling Beaumont into an unexpected hug
Deborah escaping to a conversation with
Captain Pierce's wife Elizabeth

EDOUARD

Sarah, what have you and your mother
been reading recently?

BERNARD

uh
a book?

EDOUARD

cheers to that

GIGI

I'm going to find Etienne
and a drink
maybe a drink first

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the evening thrums
soldiers, officers, voyageurs
women and children
intermingle
drink
play cards
dance

the music picks up tempo
and the late-summer-evening glow
buzzes around them

EDOUARD

good luck at Niagara
you'll do well
we'll be praying for your safe travels
and for many great achievements

JEAN

thank you, captain

BERNARD

you better pray for a sober Alexis St. Martin
your great achievements may depend on it!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont scans the gathering
wondering where Deborah went

BERNARD

look at him
he can't wait to get away from us

JEAN

no, no
sorry, I'm just —

EDOUARD

distracted
yes, we know

JEAN

what?

BERNARD

William, we've known each other for five years
don't be so surprised that we know how you operate

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont takes in Crooks' warm smile
maybe he'd been too single-minded in observing the world
he'd forgotten he was being observed just the same

JEAN

gentlemen, Mackinac has been a home to me
and it wouldn't have been the same without you

whatever our differences have been —

BERNARD
they're past now!

JEAN
I'll write you all
this isn't goodbye
I'll write

EDOUARD
Alexis!
what are you doing drinking by yourself?
come here!

GIGI
Etienne
there you are

FRANCOIS XAVIER
Alexis notices Etienne has surrounded himself
with other fur traders
men Alexis doesn't recognize

EDOUARD
this is my little brother, gents
these men are passing through from St. Louis

BERNARD
is this the one with the hole in his side?

GIGI
I see I have a reputation already

BERNARD
I think it's bullshit
no way a man gets a shotgun blast at five feet and lives

GIGI
it was three
three feet

EDOUARD
really?
I thought it was five

BERNARD
see?
they can't even get their story straight

GIGI
it's true
I can show you —

EDOUARD
wait!
sorry, gents

but no one gets a freak show for free
that'll be ten cents apiece
up front

BERNARD

that's a scam if I've ever heard one

EDOUARD

excuse me, Dr Beaumont!
Dr Beaumont, over here!

JEAN

yes, hello Etienne
gentlemen

EDOUARD

this is the doctor who saved his life!

BERNARD

how far was he shot from?

JEAN

three feet
Alexis, Deborah and I have to get Sarah into bed

EDOUARD

already?
the night's just begun!

BERNARD

doctor, wait
is it true that food spills out of the hole?

JEAN

not anymore
I wouldn't be much of a doctor if it did
goodnight everyone

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Etienne outstretches his upturned hat
to the growing crowd

EDOUARD

twenty cents
who wants to see?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and Alexis watches as the hat fills

GIGI

I think I need another drink

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he doesn't know how
but one appears in his hand

BERNARD

take your shirt off!
let's see it!
what are you waiting for?

GIGI

alright, alright

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he lifts his shirt over his head
the crowd goes silent
before erupting

Alexis losing himself
in a sea of hands

BERNARD

let me see

JEAN

that's disgusting

EDOUARD

you can fit your finger in there!

BERNARD

out of my way!

JEAN

a shotgun, you said?

EDOUARD

it's a miracle

BERNARD

I'm not impressed

EDOUARD

you haven't gotten a good enough look

BERNARD

I've gotten a look
and I want my money back

EDOUARD

sorry, my friend
but you got what you paid for

BERNARD

what, an asshole on a man's side?
everyone knows Frenchies have two assholes
it's just that normally
the second one takes the place of the mouth

EDOUARD

you don't talk about my people like that

BERNARD

I talk however I want

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis notices that the crowd has split
between the St. Louis men and the voyageurs

GIGI

it's okay, Etienne
give him the money —

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but it's too late
and the factions fall on each other
scuffling
kicking
slapping
biting
shouting

Maybe BERNARD and EDOUARD actually fight?

If they do, FRANCOIS XAVIER and JEAN break up the scuffle.

and then
as suddenly as they began
they disperse
a blur in Alexis' mind
and once he's able to properly look around
all he sees is a man on the ground
bleeding

GIGI

what just happened?

BERNARD

hey!
don't move!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the brothers take hazy note
of uniformed figures running toward them
before Alexis' world
spins around him
and goes dark

GIGI, very drunk by now, passes out.

The other voyageurs hover over him. He starts to come to. JEAN gives him some water. He drinks, but waves it away. He points to the old journal in FRANCOIS XAVIER's hands.

FRANCOIS XAVIER hesitates, then continues the story.

it was supposed to be a normal day
at least he thinks it was
he thinks it was supposed to be normal
right?
he rubs his head

GIGI

headache

FRANCOIS XAVIER

bad one

he ventures his eyes open
manages a squint
sees some dark
slats of wood
closes his eyes

GIGI

headache

BERNARD

he shouldn't have had that tenth

EDOUARD

eleventh —?

BERNARD

twelfth!

EDOUARD

drink last night

BERNARD

bad idea

GIGI

bad idea

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he tries to remember what happened
amidst the drinks and the darkness

images of Etienne
and a group of men
and shouting
and blood —

BERNARD

it's no use
his skull hammers at him

GIGI

it's no use
can't remember

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he pries his eyes open again
just a peek
still finds darkness
and wood

GIGI

where am I?

EDOUARD

there he is

GIGI

where are we?

EDOUARD

you don't remember?

ha

we're in the brig

GIGI

brig?

EDOUARD

jailed, Alexis

GIGI

what did we do?

EDOUARD

nothing

we didn't do anything

wrong place wrong time

GIGI

oh

EDOUARD

you've been out like a log

GIGI

are we free to go?

EDOUARD

not until our bail's paid

GIGI

sacrament

you have any money?

EDOUARD

no

you?

GIGI

no

I thought you had the —

EDOUARD

it's gone

maybe your rich doctor will come save us

GIGI

he's not rich

but maybe

EDOUARD

he pay you well?

GIGI

well enough
they feed me

EDOUARD

think it'll ever close up?

GIGI

I don't know

EDOUARD

maybe you're better off if it doesn't
join a freak show
probably pays better than being a voyageur

GIGI

Doctor Beaumont says we have a duty to science

EDOUARD

so you're going with him to Niagara?

GIGI

I think so

EDOUARD

at least you'll be close to home

GIGI

home

EDOUARD

Canada's right over the river
aren't you a voyageur?
don't you know your waters?

GIGI

it's been so long —

EDOUARD

I know
it's been a long time
two years since the accident?

GIGI

oui

EDOUARD

I've been a voyageur almost ten years now
can you believe it?
ten years
I'll sign my fourth contract soon
just for a bit of money that'll be gone too fast
can't buy food without money
can't have a wife
can't settle down
can't do damn near anything
god gives us one life

and I'm damn well wasting it
 and for what, some furs?
 when it's all said and done
 there'll be no mark left
 not of me
 I'll be a spilled swig of beer
 soaking into the ground

I know you followed me, brother
 ever since we were young
 you've been fitting your feet
 into my tracks in the snow
 I'm telling you this now out of love —
 make your own tracks

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the cell door swings open
 a soldier carrying keys looks down at them

BERNARD

your bail's been paid
 time to go

FRANCOIS XAVIER

on the dock
 Beaumont
 hands stuffed in pockets
 he nods at Etienne
 glances at Alexis
 then turns
 and strides away

Alexis looks over to his brother
 who inspects the boards beneath his feet
 the coyote feeling like a pup again
 unable to grasp at the right words

instead he pulls Etienne into a hug
 and they tremor suspended
 there on the dock
 two brothers
 far from home
 having found each other
 briefly
 in the wilderness

EDOUARD

then Alexis turns and follows the doctor
 to make his own tracks

FRANCOIS XAVIER

these tracks, however
 still not entirely his own

as the coyote finds himself
 making a mountain goat's leap
 to a new ledge

JEAN

a new corner of the world

GIGI

a new wilderness to learn

JEAN

Mackinac receding
like the memory it had become

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and a new life emerges

JEAN

Niagara

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the whirlwind of
starting over

Beaumont takes Deborah and Sarah
to see the great falls

Alexis goes with them
but ventures off on his own

so Beaumont
with his wife and daughter by his side
breathes in the mist
as it rises from the falls
to envelop them

JEAN

the unknowability of nature
world of wonders

EDOUARD

beautiful, isn't it?

JEAN

I was just thinking about the mysteries of nature

EDOUARD

yes indeed

JEAN

what?

EDOUARD

William, I'm pregnant

FRANCOIS XAVIER

meanwhile, Alexis finds himself downriver of the falls
descending into a gorge
until the water is nearly at his feet
a wall of trees rising behind him

he walks with the water
looks across it to the land on the other side

GIGI

Canada

FRANCOIS XAVIER

close enough, it seems
to touch

he weaves in and out
of the trees'
shadows

until he comes across
something that makes him stop in his tracks

GIGI

an opening in the side of the earth
like a mouth yawning out of the rocks
threatening to swallow all that approaches

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Alexis stares into the cave
cannot see anything but darkness
an empty, angry void
like when he tries to peer into his own side

GIGI

the unknowability of this world
nature of terrors

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he feels himself disappearing into the hole
transfixed by the nothingness

GIGI

where does it end?
or will it go on until he is no more?
past even that?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he touches his cheek

GIGI

wet

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he's been crying

the coyote tears his eyes away from the hole
and walks back into the wilderness

GIGI exits, carrying a bottle. The others watch. He's probably going to relieve himself.
the next day

Beaumont is up early
preparing for the first of many planned experiments
on Alexis' gut and the gastric fluid within

JEAN

journal ready on the desk
extra pencils
thermometer
test tubes
food

EDOUARD

the only thing missing is Alexis

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he hopes the boy isn't hungover
he was out late last night
wasn't back by the time Beaumont turned in
who knows when he got back

JEAN

Alexis?

BERNARD

no answer

JEAN

probably still asleep
Alexis, wake up

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but still no answer
instead of a response
he finds an empty room

JEAN

— Alexis?

*The voyageurs realize they should look for GIGI. Something about his walking off wasn't right.
They disperse, calling out.
Blackout.*

End of Act One

Like the second sip of coffee reminds you of the first

*FRANCOIS XAVIER, JEAN, and BERNARD are gathered around a fire.
BERNARD chews at his fingernails. JEAN paces. FRANCOIS XAVIER flips through the old
journal mindlessly. It's clear that GIGI has still not been found.*

JEAN
Maybe if you hadn't been encouraging him to drink —

BERNARD
Maybe if you weren't so strict —

JEAN
There's a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things. That's all.

FRANCOIS XAVIER decides to continue the story, to distract, to lighten the mood.

FRANCOIS XAVIER
It was supposed to be a normal day
a day like any other
at least since the boy disappeared
bright April morning
sun cresting over waves
the murmurs of Prairie du Chien

BERNARD
Prairie du Chien?

JEAN
Yes. Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

FRANCOIS XAVIER
shaking off another chilly spring night
rubbing sleep out of its eyes
coming once again to life

BERNARD
and another familiar sight

FRANCOIS XAVIER
William Beaumont
surgeon at Fort Crawford
writing a letter

BERNARD
the seventh letter this month
who knows how many this year
where does he send them all?

JEAN
dear Ramsay Crooks
is there any word on the search for Alexis?
have any of the Company's agents
been able to locate him?
please let me know as soon as possible

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he's only received one letter in return so far

BERNARD

you scared him off, eh?
don't worry
the Company has agents all over
we'll sniff him out for you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but it's been longer than he can remember
since he received that letter
and still no word

so what can he do but write?

JEAN

and wonder what could have been
and dream of new experiments
and envision the acclaim that would follow
and imagine a different life
and curse fate
and write another letter

FRANCOIS XAVIER

handing today's over to an annoyed postman

BERNARD

another?

JEAN

another

BERNARD

you're never finding that Frenchie

JEAN

at least I'm trying

BERNARD

oh, I have something for you

JEAN

really?
you never have something for me

BERNARD

today I do

JEAN

from Ramsay Crooks

EDOUARD enters, with GIGI.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the world crumbling away

BERNARD

we found him

The other voyageurs stand, greet GIGI, help him to sit. They take the bottle out of his hands.

GIGI

What did I miss?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

it was supposed to be a normal day
not the day that changed William Beaumont's life again
so
following some back and forth
letters sent
costs negotiated
headaches suffered
the day of Alexis' arrival finally comes

Beaumont strides past the new Fort Crawford
still under construction
as he makes his way to the mighty river
the Mississippi

where he can see
a small gathering next to a bateaux
and a familiar face

JEAN

Alexis!

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the months spent in this prairie outpost
tumbling quickly into memory
the past three years without Alexis
like they barely existed

GIGI

doctor!
you look old

JEAN

how are you?
how was your trip?

GIGI

bien
long but good

JEAN

and this must be your family

FRANCOIS XAVIER

a small woman in a simple dress

All except EDOUARD touch their noses again. EDOUARD has to be Marie. He's not thrilled.
and a young child
peeking from behind her legs

GIGI

oui
my wife Marie
and my son Charles

JEAN

nice to meet you both
welcome

GIGI

I'm sorry
their English is not very —

JEAN

that's alright, that's alright
Deborah and I are happy to have you here

GIGI

merci

JEAN

I'll show you to your lodgings

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the mountain goat
leading the small group across the prairie
feeling as though he is finally coming unstuck
from this ledge he's been trapped on

JEAN

after Niagara I was assigned to Fort Howard
in Green Bay

GIGI

oui

JEAN

then I was assigned to St Louis
but we were stopped here instead
the surgeon was on leave
and they needed someone to fill the post
we didn't expect to be here for long
but it's been
let's see
eleven months now

GIGI

a long time

JEAN

don't get Deborah started on it

EDOUARD

you don't
like it
here?

JEAN
well Marie, it's —
it's not what we were expecting

GIGI
how is Deborah?
and Sarah?

JEAN
they're both well
I can't believe how fast Sarah is growing

GIGI
I feel the same about Charles
we had another son
but it was not to be

JEAN
I'm sorry to hear that
the same happened to us

FRANCOIS XAVIER
the earth moves beneath their feet

JEAN
but we just welcomed a new baby son
young Bud

GIGI
I will be happy to meet him

FRANCOIS XAVIER
they come to a stop in front of a small home

JEAN
you'll be staying here
Deborah and I are just down the way

EDOUARD
can we?

JEAN
go ahead

EDOUARD
merci

GIGI
do you want to see it?

JEAN
now?

GIGI
that's what I'm here for, no?

JEAN

okay
let's see it

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and a few minutes later
they're in Beaumont's office at the hospital
settling into a familiar rhythm

Alexis lying on his side with with his shirt off
Beaumont holding a notebook that hasn't been opened
since the day Alexis disappeared

JEAN

it looks the same

GIGI

oui

JEAN

do you still wrap it?

GIGI

sometimes
I don't always need to

JEAN

does it give you any pain?

GIGI

no

JEAN

may I?

GIGI

oui

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont presses his finger into Alexis' side
peers in
the same darkness he remembered
all this time and distance
and yet it was like nothing had changed

GIGI

well?

JEAN

you can put your shirt back on

GIGI

we're not starting yet?

JEAN

soon
get yourself and your family settled in

we have time

GIGI

merci, doctor

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont watches Alexis go
and smiles to himself
he can start new experiments soon
the mountain goat will leap
once again

BERNARD

but Prairie du Chien has other plans

JEAN

Are you taking over now?

BERNARD

I just like this part.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Go ahead. Prairie du Chien has other plans.

BERNARD

including a severe cholera outbreak
among the soldiers of Fort Crawford
Beaumont pushing himself to the brink
to stave off the illness
but despite his efforts
the disease takes one hundred lives
in two weeks

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he comes home late each night
finds that he can hardly sleep
terrified of waking up with a fever
or not waking up at all

EDOUARD

how was the day today?

JEAN

six more dead
I feel like I'm not doing enough
but I don't know what more I can do

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so Alexis and Marie are left
to fend for themselves in this new place

EDOUARD

you still haven't started?

GIGI

what does it matter?
he still pays me

EDOUARD

and you drink half of it away
we need that money

GIGI

we have enough left

EDOUARD

we need curtains for these windows
we need clothes for Charles
we need a broom to sweep —

GIGI

we have a broom

EDOUARD

it broke

GIGI

then we'll borrow one

EDOUARD

borrow from who?

GIGI

doctor Beaumont

EDOUARD

fine
when you ask for the broom
ask for more money too

GIGI

Marie —

EDOUARD

we need it
I'm trying to make a home here
you dragged us from the life we'd built
to the end of the world
to do what?
sit around and drink yourself to death?

GIGI

fine
I'll ask him

BERNARD

which he does
leading to

JEAN

he drinks through his allowance each week
and has the nerve to ask us for a broom?
it's like I'm paying him for nothing

EDOUARD

you are paying him for nothing
you haven't started your work with him

JEAN

as soon as I get things under control at the fort —

EDOUARD

you've said that for weeks
months even

JEAN

these things take time

EDOUARD

you told me he's our ticket
out of the wilderness and back into society
yet here you are letting him rot

JEAN

I know you're unhappy
I know you've been unhappy
I'm working to make you happy

EDOUARD

are you?
or are you working to make yourself happy?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the gummy air of the summer night
swells into the corners and crevices

BERNARD

just as news of conflict between Indian tribes chokes the region
swelling into the life and conversations of Prairie du Chien

EDOUARD

I hear that twenty five men were killed
by the Fox and Sauks

BERNARD

I've traded with the Sauks before
they're good people
they're right to be upset about their land being taken

EDOUARD

their land?
it's ours now
they signed it over in 1804

BERNARD

I heard Black Hawk's coming to take it back

EDOUARD

if he tries
we'll be ready for him

BERNARD

even if he brings a thousand men?

EDOUARD

we have to protect our families

BERNARD

they killed a man just a mile away last week
you can't protect shit if you're dead

JEAN

Deborah
I've heard the military is sending more troops
to station at Fort Crawford

EDOUARD

what are they expecting to happen?

JEAN

I don't know

EDOUARD

I can't live in a war zone, William

JEAN

I'm afraid we already are

EDOUARD

then we need to get out

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the summer air only getting gummier
until finally
six months after Alexis' arrival
the mountain goat and the coyote begin their work

BERNARD

Beaumont
in silence
eases meat into test tubes
filled with Alexis' gastric fluid
and the same meat into the hole in Alexis' side
makes a few notes

GIGI

doctor?

JEAN

yes?

GIGI

Marie wants us to leave this place
she doesn't feel safe

JEAN

I'm not surprised
Deborah feels the same

GIGI

what are you going to do?

JEAN

I don't know

GIGI

we knew it was going to be hard
to come and live here
but we didn't expect this

JEAN

you can put your shirt back on
we'll take another look in an hour

GIGI

bien

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont watches him
the mountain goat feeling the ground become shaky
on this ledge he's fought so hard for
sees a different ledge in a new direction
sizes up the jump

JEAN

Alexis
what would you think
of going to Paris?

GIGI

Paris?

JEAN

yes
I could request a leave of absence for a year
so we could go to Paris and tour Europe
showing my work on digestion
our work on digestion
Europe is where the truly great medical minds are
that's where we should be

GIGI

what about our families?

JEAN

it's only a year
I'm sure Marie will be happy to be back in Quebec
and Deborah will be happy just to get out of Prairie du Chien
they'll be better off
what do you say?

GIGI

if you think it's for the best
then I am at your service

JEAN

wonderful, Alexis
thank you

GIGI

oh
and
can I have next month's allowance early?
the broom broke

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the door is hardly closed behind Alexis
as Beaumont begins writing a letter to his old friend
surgeon general Joseph Lovell

JEAN

requesting a year-long leave of absence
to travel to Paris
and share my findings with the world

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and the ink is hardly dry on the page
as Beaumont seals the envelope
and sends it

BERNARD

and once the wait begins
it's like a valve has opened
the mountain goat's restlessness
launches him into action
into a new flurry of experiments

JEAN

Alexis, hold this in place

GIGI

why?

JEAN

we have to drain out more gastric fluid

EDOUARD

Drink.

GIGI

bien

JEAN

Alexis, eat your lunch
and come back in one hour

Alexis, how is your lunch digesting
in the rain?
in the heat?
in the humidity?
in the morning?
in the evening?

GIGI

I don't know
what am I supposed to say?

JEAN

there's no right answer besides truth
we must learn if the weather affects digestion!

GIGI

oui
bien

JEAN

just think
sharing our work with the world
we'll never have to live on the frontier again
we'll be invited around the globe to share our knowledge
our names will be known

GIGI

by who?

JEAN

everyone, Alexis
everyone

GIGI

when this all started
you wanted only to save my life
to heal me

JEAN

of course
but now —

GIGI

I thought I would be healed
and that would be the end of it
I'd go back to my life
then I thought the experiments
would be a way to make some money
and repay my debt to you
now you want to travel around the world
which I will do if you ask
but —
don't you ever get tired?
when will you stop moving?

JEAN

Alexis
when fate calls you
to *contribute* something
you must run to meet it
and not stop until your duty is fulfilled
I cannot imagine living any other way

GIGI

but what if you run and run and run
but the duty is never fulfilled?

JEAN

I don't know
but better to try
than to sit and idle
right?

GIGI

I don't know, doctor
I was only curious

JEAN

right

GIGI

should I come back in an hour?

JEAN

no, that's alright
you can take the rest of the day to yourself

GIGI

merci, doctor

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont runs his hand over the notebook pages
these years
this work
this accumulation of pages
feels too small for the discoveries within
just as Prairie du Chien feels too small
for his ambition

so the mountain goat feels only relief
when after nearly eight months
and fifty six experiments
a reply to his request comes

JEAN

approved
it's approved
Deborah — we're leaving Prairie du Chien
Alexis — we're going to Paris!

*BERNARD, EDOUARD, and GIGI cheer and drink. They dance around and end up dancing
offstage, maybe chanting "Paris! Paris!"
JEAN and FRANCOIS XAVIER watch them go.*

JEAN

You're letting them take over the story like this?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Take over? There's no such thing.

JEAN

But —

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Listen:

the Mississippi river yawns forth
expanding in seemingly every direction

from where Beaumont stands
the water appears still
but he knows it's only a trick of distance
he knows the gray-blue serpent
breathes
undulates
lists forward
always forward

he breathes in the air
he has to remind himself it's real

JEAN

the river seems like a painting
distant and untouchable
imagined

FRANCOIS XAVIER

a feeling that no other place has provoked in him
it permeates the air

somehow
four of his years have spilled away

JEAN

the river looks still
but it churns on

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he allows himself to feel
the uncertainty of the coming year
the opportunity
for the first time
the mountain goat jumping to a ledge he cannot see
he feels the emptiness before him

he allows his heart to quicken at the thought of it
and his feet to turn and carry him
churning
to what comes next.

*FRANCOIS XAVIER closes the journal, looks at JEAN. FRANCOIS XAVIER lifts a drink to
cheers, and drinks. JEAN nods. FRANCOIS XAVIER turns and sleeps. JEAN leans over to take
the old journal, and flips through it. Sees what's inside. A realization.
Transition.*

Like dinner from an unfamiliar plate

*Another night. The voyageurs enter, and set up their camp like before.
Food, drink, smoke. FRANCOIS XAVIER opens the journal.*

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Next comes Plattsburgh

BERNARD

Why Plattsburgh?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

where Marie and Charles depart
heading straight north home to Quebec

GIGI

au revoir, Marie

EDOUARD

au revoir

FRANCOIS XAVIER

where Deborah, Sarah, and Bud
can stay with Beaumont's cousin Samuel

JEAN

thank you, Sam

BERNARD

happy to help, cousin

JEAN

goodbye, Deborah

EDOUARD

goodbye

FRANCOIS XAVIER

then to Washington City
the mountain goat and the coyote
emerging from the wilderness into the capitol
where grandiose new buildings dot the landscape

BERNARD

William Beaumont
welcome to Washington!

JEAN

doctor Lovell

BERNARD

William, please, call me Joseph
we've known each other for how long now?

JEAN

twenty years since the war
nearly

BERNARD

hard to believe, isn't it?

JEAN

it's good to see you, Joseph

BERNARD

you too, William

I'm glad to see you're still the same ambitious man I knew
has the frontier been treating you well?

JEAN

it has

it's difficult sometimes, of course
but can also be rewarding

BERNARD

yes, you've certainly been rewarded
to get a case like this!
I can't wait to meet this Alexis

JEAN

I've been looking forward to introducing him to you
and the physicians in Europe

BERNARD

right, on that subject

I should tell you

I was only able to secure six months for your leave

JEAN

six months?

BERNARD

I know you were expecting one year
but our personnel is already spread thin
and funds are hard to come by
especially with the conflicts on the frontier

JEAN

but six months isn't enough time to go to Paris

BERNARD

I understand how disappointing this must be
however if you'd like to stay in Washington
I've already made arrangements
for you to have a place to stay and work —

JEAN

thank you, Joseph

you've done too much for me already
without your support, I could very well be
selling snake oil from the back of a wagon

BERNARD

I'm glad you aren't
for the sake of science

FRANCOIS XAVIER

so Beaumont and Alexis settle into a new routine
among the foreign rhythms of Washington City
they had never had this much time before

here, the hours stretch open with possibility
and Beaumont is there each morning
to meet them

JEAN

Alexis, wake up
it's time

GIGI

so early?

JEAN

we have a full day

GIGI

we always have a full day

JEAN

ten minutes
I'll see you in the office

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the next ledge he'd envisioned
Europe
had disappeared
so he pours his energy
into the only leap he can now make
his book

JEAN

I must finish writing it here

GIGI

are you ready for me?

JEAN

Alexis
yes
come in

FRANCOIS XAVIER

they work like a clock
by this point so accustomed to the rhythms and repetitions
that they hardly need words

BERNARD

Alexis on his side
Beaumont inserting a thermometer into the hole
then an elastic tube to extract the gastric fluid
distilling it into vials
placing some in sand baths

EDOUARD

Alexis eating breakfast
Beaumont taking measurements of the food
sometimes dropping a piece into the hole
sometimes not

BERNARD

Alexis going out to perform chores
Beaumont staying behind to read and write

EDOUARD

Alexis coming back tired
or lazy
or boisterous
or short-tempered
Beaumont recording his shifting moods
and noting changes in his digestion

JEAN

there is something to be learned
from everything

FRANCOIS XAVIER

a handful of weeks into this routine
Lovell appears with an unfamiliar face in tow

BERNARD

William
it's my pleasure to introduce you to Dr Robley Dunglinson
from the University of Virginia

JEAN

Dr Dunglinson
it's an honor
Jefferson's own physician in my office
I'm humbled

EDOUARD

Joseph here told me of the work you've been doing
I decided I had to see it for myself

JEAN

here, I'll show you some vials
some samples that may interest you

EDOUARD

gastric juice?

JEAN

exactly
this vial was distilled two weeks ago
and it hasn't putrefied
it's the same as when I extracted it

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont uncorks the vial
smells it

dips a finger in
and touches it to his tongue
Lovell and Dunglinson each take a turn
to do the same

BERNARD

Drink up!

EDOUARD

acidic

JEAN

and look at this

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the second vial
clear liquid
with brown sediment settled at the base

BERNARD

what is that?

JEAN

chicken breast
wheat and corn bread
and no putrefaction

EDOUARD

how long have you had this?

JEAN passes the old worn journal to EDOUARD

since last month
it's clear that the chemical process exhausts itself
but once new gastric fluid is added
digestion resumes

BERNARD

incredible

JEAN

I'm planning to publish a book of my findings

EDOUARD

out of Washington?

JEAN

Plattsburgh
my cousin Samuel has connections there

EDOUARD

ah
well
may we meet the Frenchman now?

JEAN

of course
Alexis?

GIGI

oui
une moment

JEAN

English please

GIGI

désolé
bonjour
hello

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and as though through muscle memory
he has his shirt off
and lies down

the three other men hunch over the hole in his side
crows over meat

EDOUARD

so what exactly is your hypothesis?

JEAN

my hypothesis?

BERNARD

what you wish to prove

JEAN

that digestion is a chemical process

BERNARD

you've proven it
even with your Mackinac experiments
all those years ago
brilliant work

JEAN

thank you

EDOUARD

but have you considered standardizing your methods?
I take it you're new to this sort of thing
I see you note which foods he takes
but you hardly ever note the amount
it's a good record of diet and digestion
but to what purpose?

JEAN

to show digestion as a chemical process —

EDOUARD

yes, but what chemical?
what makes this process possible?
do you see?
if you publish what you have

I worry the essential message will be missing
and you'll have put yourself
and Mr St Martin here
through all of this
for a novelty book
I'm sure that's not what you want
so, I urge focus in your work
always focus
and lead to the light of the truth

BERNARD

well said

JEAN

thank you for your suggestions, doctor
I admit I have neither
the training nor the stature of yourself
but I will do all I can to find the truth

GIGI

sacrament
it's bullshit

EDOUARD

excuse me?

GIGI

you haven't seen the whole of it
the doctor Beaumont saved my life
he healed me
he is deliberate
he takes many notes
he treats me well
he will write a good book

EDOUARD

I understand
but when the book is finished
would you like your mark in history
to be as a pioneer
or as a circus freak?
the answer will only come from
how Dr Beaumont is able to turn this book he's writing
into a scientific study rather than a frontier journal
by a frontier doctor
thank you for the invitation, Joseph
I wish you'd brought me sooner
perhaps the doctor and I could have worked together

FRANCOIS XAVIER

with that
Dunlinson exits into the night

BERNARD

I'm sorry, William

GIGI

you should have hit him
for insulting you

JEAN

it was a scientific conversation
no need to come to blows

GIGI

it would've made him shut up

JEAN

well
maybe

GIGI

I'm going for a drink

JEAN

I'll see you tomorrow

GIGI

can I have some money?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

frontier doctor
Dunglinson's words echo relentlessly
in Beaumont's mind

EDOUARD

frontier doctor

BERNARD

frontier doctor

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the mountain goat surveys the ledge around him
the nation's capitol
sees ledge after ledge above him
realizes there's no better time or place than now
to leap

JEAN

Mr Congressman
so nice to meet you
I'm told you fought in the war as well?
well, you'll never believe
the wound I began treating
while on Mackinac
what's that?
yes, I'd love to be put in touch with him

Mr Ambassador
a pleasure to meet you
let me tell you
about the work I'm doing
on digestion

what's that?
yes, we'd love to visit Stockholm

Mr Secretary
thank you for meeting me
that's right, I'm proving that digestion
is a chemical process
but there's much more work to be done
what's that?
you think I should ask Congress for funding?

FRANCOIS XAVIER
and one day

JEAN
Alexis
I've been invited
to the President's Christmas ball!

GIGI
felicitations
what about me?

JEAN
I'm sorry
but it doesn't say —

GIGI
that's alright
I'll take myself out somewhere
say hello to the President for me

JEAN
Mr Vice President
an honor to meet you
what a lovely celebration

BERNARD
yes it is
I see by your badges
you're an army man
thank you for your service

JEAN
it's my duty
I'm William Beaumont

BERNARD
are you the surgeon
treating the man with the hole in his side?

JEAN
I see my work precedes me
yes, I'm completing a study on digestion
here's my card

BERNARD

thank you, Dr Beaumont
I'll be interested to see your study when it's published
scientific progress is essential to American progress
please stay in touch

FRANCOIS XAVIER

leaving the ball that evening
Beaumont's hands shake
not from the chill of winter air
but from the vice president's calling card
resting between his fingers

JEAN

the vice president knows my name
mine, William Beaumont

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he keeps leaping
stealing every possible moment to work on the book
the great study of digestion
the written record of his work
that would put the words frontier doctor
far, far behind him

sometimes he's still working
when Alexis returns from a night of revelry
in the hours before dawn

GIGI

bonjour, doctor
still awake?
still writing?

JEAN

yes, Alexis

GIGI

is the book nearly
ah
complete?

JEAN

it is

GIGI

bien
for the best, non?
before you disappear into it?

JEAN

what was that?

EDOUARD

but Alexis doesn't answer
already passed out in the chair

JEAN

you disappear into a bottle every night
and I hardly mention it

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he sits back a moment and thinks
despite all the time
and travels
and difficulties with Alexis
he's made it this far

JEAN

and who knows what the future holds

BERNARD

and before he realizes it happening
he, too
falls asleep in his chair

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the day finally comes
when Beaumont finishes the manuscript
pens the last page of revisions
and adds it to the stack
the last ten years of his life
collected in these pages

JEAN

Alexis, come look
it's finished

GIGI

it's done?

JEAN

see for yourself

GIGI

I wish I could read it

JEAN

don't worry
you'll hear plenty of it
when we're traveling the world together
to promote it
London, Stockholm, Berlin —

GIGI

last time you said we were going to Paris
and it never happened

JEAN

this time is different
this time we'll have a book to share
and proper funding from Congress
and more than six months

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont packaging up the manuscript
addresses it to his cousin Samuel in Plattsburgh
from there to be printed in Burlington
and after that
after that it could go anywhere

JEAN

yes, this time is different
it has to be

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and soon the months in Washington
come to an end

JEAN

goodbye Joseph
thank you for everything

BERNARD

it was a pleasure having you here
you've done good work

JEAN

I'll send you a copy of the book
when it's done

BERNARD

please do

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and they follow the manuscript's journey
back to Plattsburgh

BERNARD

welcome back, cousin
how was the trip?

JEAN

Samuel
good to see you
it was more than I could've imagined

BERNARD

bonjour, Alexis
welcome back

GIGI

bonjour

BERNARD

William, I have a surprise for you
back at the house

JEAN

is it —?

BERNARD

you'll be happy with how it turned out
Deborah hasn't been able to put it down
and Alexis — I nearly forgot
a letter came for you too

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont returns to the house to find Deborah
with the book by her husband cradled in her hands

JEAN

Deborah

EDOUARD

William

FRANCOIS XAVIER

a hug that feels slightly distant
as if over a fence

EDOUARD

have you seen it?

JEAN

not yet

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Deborah hands the book to him
watches as he opens it
runs his finger over his name

EDOUARD

I'm so proud of you

JEAN

thank you, Debbie

EDOUARD

I know there were
unhappy times
when I watched you getting lost in the work
and my unhappiness would cloud me
and I'm sorry for that
but

JEAN

Deborah —

EDOUARD

listen to me
but there were times I needed you
and you were blind to it
a marriage is two people

JEAN

Deborah, you've been nothing but the perfect wife
and I promise I'll be a better husband

EDOUARD

you're a great man, William,
just — don't be *only* a great man

GIGI

doctor
I received some news
my son Charles
he's sick
I have to go home

JEAN

now?

GIGI

I have to be with my family
I've been away so long

JEAN

they need you

GIGI

yes

JEAN

then go
be with them
write me when you get there
and we can arrange your return
there's still work to be done

GIGI

merci, doctor
thank you

JEAN

and Alexis?

GIGI

yes?

JEAN

wish Charles a speedy recovery for me

GIGI

I'll see you soon, doctor
I'll see you soon

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and is gone.

*FRANCOIS XAVIER closes the journal for the night. The voyageurs prepare to sleep.
Transition.*

The muscle memory of selling, or not selling, and other repetitions

*Another night. The voyageurs enter, and set up their camp like before.
Food, drink, smoke. FRANCOIS XAVIER opens the journal.*

FRANCOIS XAVIER

After Alexis' departure
more disruptions follow close behind
like the arrival of a letter
from surgeon general Joseph Lovell

BERNARD

ordering Beaumont on an inspection tour
of forts across New England

EDOUARD

what do you mean you're leaving?

JEAN

I've been ordered

EDOUARD

you've only just returned

JEAN

from a six month leave of absence, yes
now I need to return to my duties

EDOUARD

William —

JEAN

there's no arguing it, Deborah
I have to go

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and so he goes
with a small suitcase
his notebook
and a crate of books bearing his name
to sell

JEAN

to fort Nathan Hale in New Haven
fort Trumbull in New London
fort Griswold in Groton

FRANCOIS XAVIER

losing himself in the work
sending twenty page reports back to Washington

BERNARD

wow, these are thorough

JEAN

fort Adams in Newport
fort Independence in Boston

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the reports swelling
as if instead of their descriptions of diet
routine
cleanliness
medicines
Beaumont was writing
I'm still here

JEAN

I'm still here
I'm still here

fort Constitution in Portsmouth
fort Preble in Portland

FRANCOIS XAVIER

sometimes he fears he could float up and away
tethered to the earth by only this crate of books
bearing his name
and so he sells
or tries to

fort Trumbull

JEAN

I'd love to speak to the fort surgeon
I recently wrote a book
that will be a valuable addition
to the fort's collection

BERNARD

the fort doesn't need any more books

FRANCOIS XAVIER

fort Crawford

JEAN

it's called Experiments and Observations
on the Gastric Juice
and the Physiology of Digestion

EDOUARD

we're digesting things just fine here
thank you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

fort Adams
fort Independence

JEAN

it's only three dollars

BERNARD

who can afford three dollars?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

fort McClary

JEAN

perhaps we could arrange
a meeting of town leaders and citizens
and I could read to them

EDOUARD

how long of a meeting do you propose?

JEAN

only one hour

EDOUARD

let's make it thirty minutes

FRANCOIS XAVIER

fort Preble

JEAN

truth, like beauty
when unadorned
is adorned the most
and in prosecuting these experiments
I believe I have been guided by its light
the light of truth

Applause from the other voyageurs.
and that's just a small sample from the book

EDOUARD

I have a question
my wife complains of stomach pain
when she eats cheese
do you know what the cause could be?

JEAN

without interviewing her directly I'm not able to say
but she'll be able to find answers to all her questions
in this book

EDOUARD

all of our questions?

JEAN

this is the result of over ten years of work
honest scientific work
the likes of which have never been done before
I've watched the digestion of every food you can imagine
in every condition
besides, I believe in humility
I would not boast if it were not true
this book can answer your questions

EDOUARD

how much is a copy?
I'll take one

JEAN
three dollars

EDOUARD
— I only have two
can I pay the rest in the morning?

JEAN
I leave town at noon
please have it to me before then

FRANCOIS XAVIER
that night
alone
Beaumont flips through a handful of worn pages
clippings of reviews for the book
he's taken to keeping them tucked
in his breast pocket

EDOUARD
a work of most surpassing interest

BERNARD
essential reading

EDOUARD
curious and valuable

BERNARD
the work of a great scholar

EDOUARD
the science of diet and digestion
has entered a new era

BERNARD
perhaps science has benefitted
even by Dr Beaumont's errors
but in the haste of his frontier zeal to experiment
he seems to have forgotten he was operating on a living human

JEAN
errors due to frontier zeal?
I worked honestly
I studied
I paid the man a salary
I let him live in my house!

EDOUARD
knock knock

BERNARD
Hey, that's my thing.

JEAN
come in

EDOUARD

sorry to bother you so late
but I spoke to my wife
and we can't afford your book
would I be able to get my two dollars back?

JEAN

I'm sorry to hear that

EDOUARD

I think it's best that she doesn't eat cheese
don't you?

JEAN

yes, that seems wise
good evening to you

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont adds the book back to the crate
all the covers staring back at him
William Beaumont
William Beaumont
William Beaumont

he sits down at the small desk and writes

JEAN

dear Ramsay
I'd like to get in touch with Alexis
please have your agents relay this message to him
I will be back in Plattsburgh soon
please let me know if you are able to travel
and meet me with all haste
our continued work awaits

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he lets the candle burn through
and lies awake in the dark for a long time
before he knows it, his carriage is pulling through Plattsburgh
toward the home of his cousin Samuel
Beaumont allows himself to imagine
his children Sarah and Bud running up to greet him
pulling at his hands so he can wrap them in a hug

BERNARD

but they don't

FRANCOIS XAVIER

instead, they barely glance up
when he enters the room

JEAN

I'm back

EDOUARD

how was the trip?

JEAN

good

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and the letters
awaiting him on his return
no more encouraging

The voyageurs have fun throwing "letters" back and forth at each other during the following.

BERNARD

William
Ramsay Crooks here
one of our agents has located Alexis
he sends this message

GIGI

I received your letter
Charles is well
but now my wife Marie is sick
I also don't have the funds to travel
so if you could send a little money
I will travel to Plattsburgh as soon as I am able

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and

BERNARD

to surgeon William Beaumont
this notice is to inform you
of your transfer to Jefferson Barracks
please make all haste and report for duty
surgeon general Joseph Lovell

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont feels his plans slipping through his fingers
the mountain goat ledge he's perched on
crumbling beneath his feet

JEAN

dear Joseph
I'm awaiting Alexis' return from Canada
would it be possible to delay my transfer
until he returns?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and another sheet of paper

JEAN

dear Alexis
I'm sending money
enough for your trip to Plattsburgh
as soon as Marie's well
please come

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he sends both letters

and spends the following weeks waiting for responses
 he begins waking up earlier and earlier
 surrounded by dark
 feeling as if he's been holding his breath through the night
 until the responses trickle back

BERNARD

apologies for the delay, William
 Alexis has been difficult to get a response from
 but here's what he says

GIGI

it's not enough money
 if you send more I will come immediately

BERNARD

careful, though
 he'll likely keep swallowing any money you send
 let me know if you want us to keep trying
 he's a difficult one to deal with
 but we will if you ask

JEAN

I should have never let him slip away

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the next response is not long behind
 from surgeon general —

EDOUARD

Thomas Lawson!

JEAN

Thomas Lawson?

BERNARD

Who's Thomas Lawson?

EDOUARD

The surgeon general, duh.
 dear Dr Beaumont
 I regret to inform you
 that surgeon general Lovell has passed away
 I'm aware of how he supported your gastric experiments
 but it seems to me that with your book published
 and the Frenchman back in Canada
 your work has reached its natural conclusion
 please report immediately to Jefferson Barracks
 this is not a suggestion but a command
 surgeon general Lawson

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont nearly hurls the letter against the wall

EDOUARD

William?
 are you alright?

JEAN

Joseph Lovell is dead

EDOUARD

oh, William
I'm so sorry

JEAN

he would've been forty eight in only a few weeks
I'm fifty

EDOUARD

I know how much he meant to you

JEAN

more than I can describe
Deborah, I've decided
I'm going to tender my resignation
I'm leaving the army

EDOUARD

— you are?

JEAN

I think it's time
we can move to St Louis
like you've always wanted
what do you say?

EDOUARD

what do I say?
I would love that
but what about Alexis?

JEAN

I've spent too long making him my priority
I want to make you and the children my priority
after all you've done for me
I owe it to you

EDOUARD

thank you, William
thank you

GIGI coughs, raspy.

GIGI

I don't feel so well. Does anyone else not feel well?

*The others attend to GIGI, give him water, let him lie down. He coughs more.
They don't know what he needs. He points to the journal. FRANCOIS XAVIER offers it to him.
He shakes his head. He wants the story to continue.*

The whirlwind of starting over

FRANCOIS XAVIER

The Beaumonts settle quickly into life in St Louis
building a home
knowing it won't be temporary

JEAN

this place is ours

EDOUARD

finally our own

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont opens a private practice
which flourishes
the recognition of his name
bringing the city's prominent citizens to his door

BERNARD

are you the same William Beaumont
who worked on the man with the hole in his side?

JEAN

the very same

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he watches his children grow
they smile at him
they talk less and less
of the other places they've lived

the mountain goat
looking at his life
feels as though he's leapt to a different mountain
he starts to wonder if he'll ever want to leap again

BERNARD

he stops sending letters to Alexis

FRANCOIS XAVIER

but some nights
he still awakes in the dark
gasping for air

JEAN

years pass

FRANCOIS XAVIER

in 1849, a scandal engulfs St Louis

EDOUARD

Everyone loves a scandal!

BERNARD

you! Andrew Davis, newspaper editor!

EDOUARD

yes, politician William Darnes?

BERNARD

stop publishing bullshit about me!
it's not a good look!

EDOUARD

I will not!
free speech!

BERNARD

in that case, I'm going to bludgeon you
in the head
a lot

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont is called to operate on Davis' skull
in an attempt to save the man's life

EDOUARD

but Davis dies
Darnes is put on trial for murder

FRANCOIS XAVIER

and Beaumont finds himself on the stand
called as a witness

the prosecution rises

EDOUARD

Dr Beaumont
we'd like to find the facts behind Andrew Davis' death
you were the physician who operated on him
would you tell us your background?

JEAN

I started as an assistant surgeon in the war of 1812
then continued my service in the corps on the frontier
in Mackinac, Green Bay, Prairie du Chien
and for the past nearly fifteen years
have been operating a successful practice here in St Louis

EDOUARD

a distinguished background
you have experience with head wounds
and the operation you performed on Mr Davis?

JEAN

trephining, yes
a procedure to relieve pressure on the brain
I've performed it before

EDOUARD

in your opinion
this was the best course of action?

JEAN

based on the injuries sustained
yes, beyond a shadow of a doubt

EDOUARD

thank you, doctor
that is all

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the defense rises

BERNARD

Dr Beaumont
first, thank you for your service
I only have a few questions

we know that William Darnes is guilty
he struck Mr Davis on the head
in self defense against attacks
on his character and reputation
made in writing which will live forever
so I wanted to examine Dr Beaumont's character
at least his character in writing
so I looked to this book
Experiments and Observations

JEAN

my book

BERNARD

your book
this book and the experiments within
on the man with the hole in his side
which brought you fame

JEAN

what about it?

BERNARD

I find it interesting
that instead of healing the hole in this man's side
you chose to keep it open

JEAN

it wouldn't close
so I took the opportunity to learn about digestion
for the sake of science

BERNARD

yes
a curious mind
and in these experiments
you what —
dropped food in and took it out?

JEAN

that's just one example —

BERNARD

what did you learn from this?

JEAN

that digestion is a chemical process

BERNARD

what chemical?

JEAN

we don't know yet

BERNARD

you don't know!
that makes sense
as you only worked on the man
for, remind me how long?

JEAN

ten years

BERNARD

ten years!
where is he now?

JEAN

alive and well in Canada

BERNARD

I bet he wanted to get as far as he could from you

JEAN

his family is there
it was important work

BERNARD

yes
a curious mind
a famously curious mind
thinking only of discoveries to be made
with little regard to anything else
the operation you performed on Mr Davis
trephination
involves drilling into the man's head?

JEAN

to relieve pressure —

BERNARD

well, Dr Beaumont
part of me has to wonder
if you chose this risky operation
of drilling a hole into Mr Davis' head
not for the patient's benefit
but because your curious mind
wanted to see what was inside
just like your man with the hole in his stomach

JEAN

it was the best choice
given Mr Davis' wounds

BERNARD

Mr Davis dead
not directly after the attack
but seven days later
seven days after your little experiment on him
it seems to me that his death falls not at the feet
of William Darnes
who was protecting his reputation
but at the feet of his physicians
who were looking to boost theirs
thank you, doctor

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont
through the commotion of the crowd
sees Deborah
weeping

JEAN

later, William Darnes is found guilty
not of murder
but of manslaughter
for which he pays the fine
of five hundred dollars
and walks free

FRANCOIS XAVIER

that night
Beaumont sits awake at his desk for hours
and writes his first letter to Alexis
in many years

GIGI coughs even more violently. JEAN stands, goes to him, gives him water. GIGI points to the journal again. JEAN looks to the others, who don't know what to do. FRANCOIS XAVIER nods to him, to continue.

JEAN

dear Alexis
I am writing with a new offer
to ensure your return to me
not only for the benefits of science
but also for your own benefit
and your family's
I'm offering you the following
three hundred dollars for your salary
to come to me for one year
and two hundred more
for the support of your family
to remain in Canada
this is my final offer
I can say no more
you know what I have done for you over many years
you know what I have been working hard

to accomplish with you and for you
so that our names and work might not be lost to history
don't disappoint me more
or throw away everything we've done together

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he doesn't send the letter for weeks
deciding what to do

JEAN

I can't trust him to respond by mail
he needs to be convinced in person
man to man
but I can't be away from my practice
not for so long

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he slowly realizes that his best option
is beneath his own roof

JEAN

Bud, come here

BERNARD

yes, father?

JEAN

son, you're growing into a fine young man
I have something I need done
and there's no one I'd rather ask than you

BERNARD

what is it?

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont presses the letter into his son's hand

JEAN

bring him back

FRANCOIS XAVIER

after Bud's departure
Beaumont's sleeping worsens
waking up multiple times a night
gasping for air

the snatches of rest he manages
filled with vivid dreams

JEAN

mountains
and water
and words
and wounds

BERNARD

but most frequently

he dreams of Alexis
out in the backwoods of Quebec

EDOUARD

and Bud
his son
going to meet him

JEAN

the man with the hole in his side

FRANCOIS XAVIER

he awakes
gasping for air
and lies there in the dark
waiting
sometimes in vain
sometimes not
for unconsciousness to envelop him again
and bring him visions.

GIGI has drifted off into sleep; he tosses and turns. Everything goes dark.

What is and is not supposed to be

In darkness.

BERNARD

Alexis?

Alexis, are you there?

GIGI

who's that?

BERNARD

it's Bud Beaumont

We start to slowly be able to see again. BERNARD is not wearing voyageur clothes anymore; none of the voyageurs are. They're dressed as the different characters in the story. GIGI is lost.

GIGI

Beaumont?

BERNARD

Bud

I don't know if you remember me —

GIGI

you finally came to retrieve

your Alexis

eh, doctor?

BERNARD

you're mistaken

GIGI

where's Marie?

the doctor is back!

BERNARD

I'm not the doctor

I'm his son

GIGI

son

ha

I had a son

he died

two sons

BERNARD

I'm sorry

I didn't know

GIGI

well

I have others now

how many sons did you have, doctor?

cJEAN appearing as Beaumont

just the one
young Bud

GIGI

oh yes
I remember little Bud
running through the grass at Prairie du Chien
how is he?

JEAN

he's on his way to bring you back
for more experiments
more travels
more work

GIGI

I didn't ask for this
you know
I didn't ask to have this hole in me
I didn't ask for —

JEAN

lie down
how are you feeling?
we're testing pork today
have you been drinking?

GIGI

all I wanted
was a normal day

JEAN

help Deborah with dinner

EDOUARD appearing as Deborah

I never asked
to have this Frenchman living in our house

GIGI

Deborah —

EDOUARD

this is not how my life
is supposed to go

JEAN

come to Prairie du Chien
Washington
Paris
St Louis

EDOUARD is Marie now

I never asked
to have a husband who's always away

GIGI

Marie —

EDOUARD

away when my children die
when we go hungry
when we have to beg for money

GIGI

Marie
I'm sorry

EDOUARD

this is not how my life
is supposed to go

GIGI

I'm sorry

EDOUARD is Etienne now

a spilled swig of beer seeping into the ground

The words start to come on fast now, almost blending together.

JEAN

you were supposed to bring me greatness

GIGI

I owe him my life

FRANCOIS XAVIER is there

surrounded by all this blue

JEAN

do you want to be
lost to history?

GIGI

I was supposed to be
lost to history

BERNARD

I'm supposed to
bring you back
with me

EDOUARD

no more
fitting your feet
into my tracks

JEAN

there's still work to be done

BERNARD

the man with
an extra asshole

JEAN

bring me greatness, Alexis
bring me into history

BERNARD

he won't last the night

GIGI

I owe him my life

JEAN

come back

GIGI

I was supposed to be lost

JEAN

come back

GIGI

I was supposed to be nobody

FRANCOIS XAVIER and JEAN

Alexis —

GIGI

I stood at the edge
of that black hole
in the side of the earth
and I was consumed by it
I could see all the way in
to the center
to that churning
grinding
darkness
it called to me
it told me I belonged there
I had been pulled from the void
but the void still clung to me
I carried its darkness
its emptiness
I carried it as a part of me
peering out from my chest
waiting to claim me again
I dared not look
I knew I would be lost
consumed
I got lost in other things instead
drink
travel
Beaumont
it took me so long
to find a part of me
not lost
not touched by this void
I carry with me
I have found my peace

it is quiet
it is enough
I will not get lost again
I will not go back to you, Beaumont.

*GIGI gasps awake, sweating. The others are there. They're voyageurs again.
FRANCOIS XAVIER puts out the fire. Darkness.*

Wholly incomplete, or holy and complete

Another night. The voyageurs enter, set up their camp like before. They're more somber now. GIGI seems to be better, recovered from his illness.

FRANCOIS XAVIER clears his throat. It sounds a little raspy. He opens the old, worn journal. Looks at its pages.

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont awakes from the dream that night
and doesn't gasp for air

JEAN hears the rasp in FRANCOIS XAVIER's voice, and steps in.

JEAN

he prepares for the day
washes
shaves
dresses
makes breakfast
as a surprise for Deborah

and is sitting at the table
with the newspaper
when his son Bud returns

BERNARD

father —

JEAN

he's not coming back

BERNARD

no
he sends you this message

GIGI

dear doctor Beaumont
I regret that my farm keeps me from travel
because I would go to see you
I miss you and your family
and would welcome the journey
and the reunion
but my land keeps me
and I am poor
and I am sick
your loyal servant
Alexis

BERNARD

I'm sorry father
I tried

JEAN

Bud, sit
have breakfast with me
I'm glad you're home
tell me about your travels

BERNARD

a year of breakfasts drifts by

JEAN

Sarah and Bud move out of the house
begin building their own lives

FRANCOIS XAVIER

Beaumont and Deborah sit together
in the mornings
watching the sun come up
golden over the city

JEAN

beautiful, isn't it?

EDOUARD

yes
sometimes I think
this must be my reward
after all those years of hardship

JEAN

I can't believe it's been
twenty years here
nearly

EDOUARD

I'm glad for the life we've made here

JEAN

you know
if I had been able to go to Europe
I would've wanted you to come with me

EDOUARD

you still think of him?

JEAN

no
not anymore

EDOUARD

you regret everything you weren't able to do

FRANCOIS XAVIER

the mountain goat considers this ledge he's landed on
realizes he'd stopped leaping long ago

JEAN

no
I don't regret anything

FRANCOIS XAVIER

they take in the city's bustle
in the morning's winter glow

the next day
returning home from a call to a favorite patient
placing one foot in front of the other
on the slick ice-covered street
Beaumont slips
falls
hits his head on the pavement
and does not get up.

FRANCOIS XAVIER, who has been struggling with clearing his throat and the occasional cough throughout this scene, lets out a violent cough, shivers, and collapses. The others stand and rush to him.
Transition.

The dance of passing on

*Later. The voyageurs enter, set up their camp.
It's only JEAN, BERNARD, EDOUARD, and GIGI now. They're silent.
JEAN holds the old journal. They sit. Almost out of habit, they look to JEAN.
He reluctantly cracks the journal open.*

JEAN
Life goes on

EDOUARD
St Louis pauses to mourn the loss of a prominent citizen
then continues along the march of time

BERNARD
the city grows
the Beaumont home empties
an eggshell for dimming memories

JEAN
Sarah and Bud sit on the porch
watching the street
waiting for a visitor

BERNARD
you're okay with me selling this place?

EDOUARD
it's for the best, Bud

BERNARD
it's just
it's too big
I can't keep up with it anymore

EDOUARD
it's for the best

BERNARD
I found more of dad's papers
there are so many diaries, notes
I don't know what to do with them all

EDOUARD
the man could write

BERNARD
yes he could

EDOUARD
I remember when we lived on Mackinac
mom and I would go to bed
and he'd keep writing
even after the candle went out
he would move to catch the moonlight
and write in the dark

BERNARD
sounds like dad

EDOUARD
I miss them

BERNARD
so do I

JEAN
they watch a carriage pull up the drive
an old man steps out

EDOUARD
Alexis

GIGI
Sarah
Bud
it's good to see you again
you look like your parents

BERNARD
how are you
how was your trip?

GIGI
bien
more difficult when you're my age

EDOUARD
you look well

GIGI
thank you
I stopped drinking
your father would be proud
always going on about temperance

BERNARD
he certainly stood by his morals

GIGI
and look where it got him
this is a lovely home
you Beaumonts have done well

EDOUARD
we were lucky

GIGI
lots of trees here
remember how we'd explore on Mackinac, Sarah?

EDOUARD
I taught Bud to curse in these trees

BERNARD

sacrament

EDOUARD

sacrament

GIGI

I wish I could have come sooner
I would've liked to see your parents again
they were good to me

EDOUARD

they talked about you sometimes
father would talk about
how he'd planned to take you to Europe

GIGI

I remember those plans
I've wondered if he and I would have gone
if I'd come back with you, Bud
twenty years ago

BERNARD

twenty four

GIGI

is it twenty four?
time passes

BERNARD

why did you come, Alexis?
after all this time?

GIGI

I spent a lot of my life doing things
because I felt I owed your father
my life
my living
I felt my own self disappearing
I realized the best thing I could do
was take this life I'd been gifted
and live it the way I wanted to
deliberate
so I did
and I came back
not because I owe
but because I wanted to

EDOUARD

he wanted so badly to be great
he pushed everyone around him to be just as great
even if it pushed them away

BERNARD

I think he learned
after I came back without you, Alexis
he stopped pushing us

GIGI

I'm glad to hear that

EDOUARD

I wonder
since he was so caught up in being great
if it took him longer to learn how to be good

GIGI

I suppose history will decide

BERNARD

we have all these things
diaries, letters, records
he kept everything
I think we should send it all to the medical society
for posterity
I think that's for the best
don't you?

BERNARD takes the old journal from JEAN and hands it to GIGI. GIGI looks surprised, takes it. He opens it, flips through the pages. They don't contain what he expected. They don't contain anything. He shows the others the blank pages, flips through them. Smiles to himself.

JEAN

Alexis' gaze is distant
lost somewhere in the past
a smile forming on his lips

GIGI

yes, that's a good idea

The voyageurs share the story. Maybe to each other, maybe out to new groups. GIGI holds the old journal.

JEAN

Alexis travels home
taking the old familiar routes
over rivers, lakes
surrounding himself with blue once again
these places he knows like old friends

BERNARD

he arrives on Mackinac Island
sometime in the morning

EDOUARD

he walks around
he listens to the birds
he sees the wind
brush through the trees

BERNARD

he notices the changes
the new buildings
the unfamiliar faces
the bigger boats in the harbor

JEAN

but so much stays the same
the crystalline blue water shimmering
the lush green stretching upward
the expanse of sky
the feeling of having disappeared
into this gap in the blue

EDOUARD

Alexis can't stop the lump
rising in his throat

BERNARD

he stops in front of the American Fur Company Store
this place where his life changed

EDOUARD

people pass by
new tourists in carriages
talking
laughing

JEAN

none of them seem to notice
the wiry old man
standing as though rooted to the ground
with tears streaming down his cheeks

GIGI

it was supposed to be a normal day
it was supposed to be a normal life

JEAN

eventually he turns away
takes in a deep breath of the ancient air
and leaves it behind
to make his winding way
home.

*They put out the fire. They go their separate ways.
Night falls. The sounds of nature thrum.*

*It's the end of the story.
Until it's told again.*

End of Play.