

A whole new world for the Huguenots
By Deanna Smid

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Characters:

Samuel Champlain

Hélène Boullé—wife of Champlain

Mary Catherine des Granches—widow of Jacques Cartier

Pierre Du Gua de Mons—leader of expedition

Nicolas Aubry—RC priest

Louis Hébert—an apothecary

Jean Chauvin—Protestant minister

Imogene de la Roque—parents killed in the St. Bartholemew Massacre

Marc Lescarbot—first farmer in Canada

Setting: The seventeenth century has just begun, and it looks like life is improving for the Huguenots. The Edict of Nantes has created an official compromise between Roman Catholics and Protestants in France, but both sides are still unsettled. Fearing that life might become difficult for her in France, orphaned Huguenot Imogene de la Roque consults with Mary Catherine de Mons, the widow of Jacques Cartier. When Imogene finds out that Hélène Boullé, the very young wife of Samuel Champlain, is going to Quebec to join her husband, Imogene seizes the opportunity to leave France. She must agree, though, to marry one of the settlers of New France once the ship lands. What is in store for the intrepid Imogene and the Huguenot faith in Canada?

Scene 1: The home of Mary Catherine des Granches

Mary: I am so glad that you have come to visit me again, Imogene.

Imogene: You have become like a mother to me, Madame des Granches.

Mary: Ah, but no one could take the place of your dear, departed mother.

Imogene: I will never cease to mourn her and my father.

Mary: How long has it been?

Imogene: Since they were martyred in the St. Bartholemew's Massacre? Surely no one can forget that day.

Mary: Who knew that when Protestants gathered to celebrate the marriage of the King, they would be trapped and murdered?

Imogene: The fury of the Romish church is unparalleled.

Mary: It has been a few years since Good King Henri took the throne of France.

Imogene: Good! The King was raised by a Protestant mother, but he gave up his Protestant faith when he became King.

Mary: I wonder, though, if he is Roman Catholic in name only. Think of the Edict of Nantes!

Imogene: Yes, the Edict of Nantes does give official freedom to Huguenots and Roman Catholics alike, but I fear it does not offer enough protection to Protestant Christians in France.

Mary: What do you plan to do, Imogene?

Imogene: I wonder how long the freedoms for Huguenots will last, Mary. I am not sure what the future holds.

Mary: Would you ever consider leaving the country?

Imogene: What do you mean?

Mary: You never met my late husband, did you?

Imogene: Jacques Cartier?

Mary: The very same. But surely you know his reputation.

Imogene: I know that he was a great explorer, and that he founded New France.

Mary: And you know, of course, that he was a Huguenot like I am.

Imogene: I would have liked to meet him.

Mary: He would have loved you, as I do, I'm sure. I am still in contact with one of his successors, Samuel Champlain. He, like you, is frightened about the future of Huguenots, so he hides his Protestant faith behind a veil of Catholicism.

Imogene: I cannot blame him for that.

Mary: Did you know that he is married?

Imogene: I thought he was a confirmed bachelor.

Mary: He was married two years ago, to one H el ene Boull e. Their marriage contract stated that they would not live together as man and wife until two years after the wedding date. That time

has passed, and Champlain has asked to have H el ene sent to New France to live with him. She needs a companion to take her across the ocean.

Imogene: Why would a grown woman need someone to take her? Is she ill? Is she looking for a servant?

Mary: She needs a companion because she is only 14 years old.

Imogene: Fourteen! That means that she was 12 when she married.

Mary: That's right.

Imogene: And isn't Champlain an old man?

Mary: Hardly that. He's only 45 years old.

Imogene: 45! So when he was 43 years old, he married a 12-year-old girl.

Mary: Yes, and now she needs a companion to take her to New France.

Imogene: And you think that should be me.

Mary: Well, you are worried about your future here in France, and you have been talking about needing a change.

Imogene: It does sound like an excellent adventure.

Mary: Of course, you would have to get married once you landed in New France.

Imogene: What?

Mary: Well, my dear, there are many men in New France, but very few women. The imbalance is causing some problems. So the only way you would be allowed on the voyage is if you agreed to marry one of the men in New France.

Imogene: But, but...

Mary: Wouldn't you like to be married?

Imogene: But would he be a Huguenot?

Mary: Most of the men in New France are Huguenots.

Imogene: And would I have a choice?

Mary: As I said, there are many men looking for a wife, any wife.

Imogene: But would he love me?

Mary: That I cannot guarantee.

Imogene: I cannot decide right now. It's a big commitment.

Mary: Yes, take some time to think about it. But don't wait too long—the expedition is leaving in just a few days.

Imogene: I shall give it careful thought and prayer. Thank you, Mary.

[Hélène bursts on stage]

Hélène: *[to Mary, excitedly]* Did she say yes? Did she say yes?

Mary: Hélène, I told you to stay outside!

Imogene: Hélène? This is the wife of Samuel Champlain?

Hélène: *[To Imogene]* Oui, mademoiselle. I am Hélène Boullé, well, Hélène Champlain, now. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance.

Imogene: And I yours, young madame.

Hélène: Did Madame des Granches ask you about New France?

Imogene: *[somewhat guardedly]* She did...

Hélène: And you said yes, yes? Oh, say that you will come with me? We shall be as sisters!

Imogene: I'm not sure...

Hélène: Oh, say yes!

Imogene: Alright then, yes!

Mary: *Incroyable!* Girls, let us go and make plans for the voyage!

[They exit]

Scene 2—On the ship, in the Atlantic. Hélène and Imogene are on deck.

Hélène: Will this ship never make it to land?

Imogene: We've only been at sea for a month, H  l  ne. Patience, my dear. You shall see your husband soon.

H  l  ne: Oh yes, him. But I also want to see those, what do you call them, meece?

Imogene: Mice? We have plenty of those in France.

H  l  ne: No, no, the big meece, with strange horns.

Imogene: Do you mean, moose?

H  l  ne: Yes, I want to see a moose. Lots of meece!

Imogene: We shall see many strange things, I am sure.

[Pierre, Nicolas, and Jean burst onto stage. H  l  ne and Imogen move aside, and watch their conversation raptly]

Nicolas: *[angrily, to Pierre]* Monsieur de Mons, I can take this no longer! Because you are leader of this expedition, I demand that you throw this man overboard.

Pierre: Pere Nicolas, what has made you upset this time?

Nicolas: *[gesturing to Jean]* This, this, "minister" insists on speaking with me.

Pierre: Is that not his right?

Nicolas: He wants to talk about transubstantiation, and the supremacy of the Word.

Jean: Excellent topics for us to discuss as we while away our time on board.

Nicolas: He is trying to make me a Huguenot! Me! A Catholic priest!

Jean: I am merely trying to save your soul, Monsieur Nicolas.

Nicolas: That's Father Nicolas!

Pierre: There, there, Monsieur Priest. I am sure that Pastor Jean meant you no harm.

Jean: No, none at all!

Nicolas: And why would you bring both of us on this expedition in the first place? A Catholic priest and a Huguenot minister—it is *stupid!*

Pierre: It's what the King wants. You know that with the Edict of Nantes, King Henry wants to see better relations between Catholic and Huguenot Christians. And that is why you are here, Monsieur Priest.

Nicolas: Don't you mean that's why *he's* here?

Pierre: I know what I said.

Jean: Maybe you are here so that you can see that the Roman church has led you astray. Let me tell you, brother, of the glories of the Protestant faith.

Nicolas: Stop! I mean it!

Jean: You could be free of the tyranny of relics, of the mass, of holy water, and saints.

Nicolas: That is enough!

Jean: You could read the Bible in French, and you could forget all about Latin.

Nicolas: That's it. I may be a man of God, but I will fight you, sir.

Jean: If you can't defend yourself with the Word, I guess you have to use your fists.

Nicolas: Thank you for the invitation! [*he lunges at Jean, and the two of them tussle for a while. Pierre looks amused for a while, but then alarmed*].

Pierre: Men! Stop! Stop, I say. [*He notices the women*] You are frightening the women. [*The two keep fighting. Pierre calls offstage to Louis*] Louis, Louis, come here! I need your help!

[*Louis enters*]

Pierre [*to Louis*]: Help me to separate these two.

Louis: The minister and the priest! How did this happen?

Pierre: We both know that it was just a matter of time. [*The two pull the men apart*]

Louis: For shame, gentlemen. [*Imogene and H el ene draw near*]

H el ene: [*to the two brawlers*] Is that blood?

Imogene: You are both completely bruised.

Pierre: [*to Louis*] You are an apothecary. Can you draw up a potion for their wounds?

Louis: Of course. Come, gentlemen. [*Louis, Jean, and Nicolas walk offstage*].

Hélène: What an adventure! I did not think we would see violence until we reached New France.

Imogene: I must confess that my nerves are shattered.

Hélène: Well, then, we must sing a song.

Imogene: Now?

Hélène: Oh yes. That always helps to calm me. I shall begin: [*She sings Psalm 2:1, Genevan Psalter. Imogene and Pierre join in*]

“Why do the restless heathen madly rage?
What haughty schemes are they in vain contriving?
The kings and rulers of the earth engage
In rash attempts to plot their empty striving.
They stand prepared, they all conspire together
Against the LORD and His anointed King.
“Let us,” they say, “tear loose and break their fetters,
Cast off their chains, their shackles from us fling.”

[*As soon as they complete the Psalm, Nicolas runs back onstage*]

Nicolas: Was that a Genevan melody? Were you singing a Psalm?

Pierre: Why yes.

Nicolas: You Huguenots and your bloody Psalms! ARGH! [*He covers his ears and runs offstage again*]

Imogene: [*giggling*] Poor Monsieur Priest.

Pierre: He came on the expedition to convert Huguenots, but he is not finding it easy. But should we go below deck? The seas are becoming choppy, and I would not want you ladies in any trouble.

Exeunt.

Scene 3—On shore in New France.

[*Louis, Imogene, and Hélène enter*]

Imogene [*to Hélène*]: Is this the spot?

Hélène: Yes, I am to meet him here.

Imogene [*to Louis*]: Thank you, Monsieur Hébert, for accompanying us off of the ship.

Louis: It was my pleasure, *mesdames*.

[*Samuel and Marc enter*]

Samuel: Ah, my little Hélène. How happy I am that you have arrived safely.

Hélène: Indeed I have, Monsieur.

Samuel: Monsieur? Why so formal? I am Samuel.

Hélène: Yes, Monsieur Samuel.

Samuel: [*to Imogene*] And you must be Imogene, who has so faithfully taken my little wife to New France.

Imogene: I am pleased to meet you, Monsieur. I have heard much of your successes.

Samuel: And I hear that you are to marry one of our French settlers—I introduce to you your future husband, Marc Lescarbot.

Imogene: [*to Samuel*] My future husband? Am I to marry so quickly?

Samuel: A woman cannot live in the colony unmarried, mademoiselle. It would be unseemly.

Imogene: And am I to have no choice in the matter?

Samuel: Why would you not want the good Marc Lescarbot? He is a faithful Huguenot, and probably the first farmer in New France.

Marc: Indeed, Madame, and I am writing a book about my doings in New France. [*He clears his throat, and is clearly quoting:*] “We being, of a long time, informed of the situation and condition of the lands and territories of Acadia, moved above all things, with a singular zeal, and devout and constant resolution, which we have taken, with the help and assistance of God, author, distributor, and protector of all kingdoms and estates, to cause the people, which do inhabit the Country, men (at this present time) barbarous, Atheists, without faith or religion, to be converted to Christianity, and to the belief and profession of our faith and religion: and to draw them from the ignorance and unbelief wherein they are.”¹

¹ Marc Lescarbot, *Nouva Francia: or The description of that part of Nevv France, which is one continent with Virginia Described in the three late voyages and plantation made by Monsieur de Monts, Monsieur du Pont-Graué, and Monsieur de Poutrincourt, into the countries called by the Frenchmen La Cadie, lying to the southwest of Cape Breton. Together with an excellent seuerall treatie of all the commodities of the said countries, and maners of the naturall inhabitants of the same. Translated out of French into English by P.E. 1609. 2.*

Imogene: I am sure that you are a good man, Monsieur Lescarbot, but do I have no choices here?

Hélène: You do have choice, my dear Imogene. [*she nudges Louis forward*]

Imogene: Monsieur Hébert?

Louis: Ah, Mademoiselle, um...Imogene...I assumed that you would marry me once we landed in New France.

Imogene: Marry you?!

Louis: Well...yes?

Samuel: No, no, mademoiselle. You must marry Marc! [*he pushes Marc forward*]

Imogene: I cannot make such an important decision so quickly!

Samuel: But you must!

Louis: You must pick me, Mademoiselle.

Marc: Non, mademoiselle, I am your choice.

Louis: But I just spent months on board a ship with her!

Marc: But I have lived for years alone already!

Louis: But she already knows me.

Marc: She will grow to know me.

Imogene: Gentlemen, please. You are not making this easier for me. Monsieur Champlain, may I not have a few weeks, even a few days to consider?

Samuel: Not even a few hours, Mademoiselle Imogene. An unwed woman would cause havoc in the settlement.

Imogene: But what shall I do?

Hélène: I have a solution, mademoiselle. [*To Marc and Louis*]: You both want her, non? [*They both nod*] So you would be willing to fight for her?

Marc: Well, within reason.

Louis: I wouldn't kill a man for her, if that's what you mean.

Hélène: Oh, surely not. But would you be willing to participate in something I like to call...Marriage Olympics?

Samuel: What are these... Olympics?

Hélène: An ancient Greek game filled with all sorts of competitions.

Samuel: Ah, my *petite chou-chou*, you are so clever.

Louis: What do you mean? Do you want us to demonstrate our physical prowess?

Marc: I can milk a cow in under two minutes...

Imogene: Hélène, I'm not sure this is a good idea.

Hélène: But no, Mademoiselle Imogene, it is an idea *merveilleux*!

Imogene: Well, I guess I have no choice in the matter.

Hélène: None at all!

Samuel: What is their first task, little one?

Hélène: First, they must obey all of my instructions. There will be four challenges all together, I think.

Marc: Of course, Madame Champlain.

Louis: We shall be your humble servants in this...romantic Olympic.

Hélène: Marriage Olympics! First, both of must close your eyes immediately. [*Marc and Louis do so.*] Now, Monsieur Lescarbot, can you describe what Imogene looks like?

Marc: [*confidently*] Her hair is brown, and... [*he says the rest hesitantly*] her skin is white, and her eyes are...brown. She is wearing a green dress and a white bonnet.

Hélène: And now, Monsieur Hébert, it is your turn.

Louis: Her hair is brown, her eyes are blue, and she is wearing a blue dress and a yellow bonnet. [*He is closer to the truth*]

Hélène: And now, you may open your eyes.

[Louis and Marc open their eyes]

Louis: I am victorious! Imogene, you shall soon be mine.

Marc: Don't forget that there are three more challenges.

Hélène: Indeed. And now for the second challenge. Monsieur Louis, since you won the last challenge, you shall go first. Monsieur Marc, you may go and stand over there. *[she gestures to a spot down stage, to which Marc moves]*. Now, Louis, you have demonstrated that you can pay attention to Imogene, but now you have to demonstrate that you can be romantic. On the spot, you have to compose a love sonnet to her.

Imogene: Hélène, I won't need love sonnets.

Hélène: You don't know that.

Louis: I can do this: *[he clears his throat, reflects, and begins]*:

Oh Imogene, Imogene,
Let me...begin again.
You are so beautiful and dear,
You bring me plenty of cheer.
You are as fresh as a newly picked orange.
Ah... orange, orange...
And you brighten my day like the bright...colour of orange.
How shall I describe my love for you?
I love you as much as I love a new shoe.
So say that you will be mine, dear heart.
And from you never will I depart.

[The rest of the characters on stage stifle their giggles]

Hélène: Thank you, Louis. Now go and bring Monsieur Marc back to us *[he goes to Marc, gestures to send him back to the other characters, and then they both rejoin the other actors]*.

Samuel: Marc, there is nothing to fear.

Hélène: Monsieur Marc, you failed to demonstrate that you can pay close attention to Imogene, but you can demonstrate that you can be romantic. On the spot, you have to compose a love sonnet to her.

Marc: How wonderful. Give me a moment to reflect. *[He pauses, thinks, and then walks to Imogene. He holds her hands, looks into her eyes, and says]*:

When I look to the fields, to the land God has made,
I marvel at his goodness.

When I look to the skies, to the beautiful expanse,
I marvel at his glory.
When I look to the sea, to the mighty waters,
I marvel at his greatness.
When I look to you, my dearest wife.
I marvel at his grace.

Imogene: Oh, Monsieur. I am blushing.

Samuel: Aha! We have a clear winner!

Louis: [*to Marc*] Sir, your poetry skills are remarkable.

Marc: [*to Louis*] Perhaps I shall take up writing! [*to Imogene*] Mademoiselle Imogen, you are soon to be mine.

Louis: Monsieur, there are still two more competitions.

Hélène: And the third competition is a demonstration that you can provide for her.

Samuel: My little darling, may I propose this challenge?

Hélène: Why, of course.

Samuel: Marc, Monsieur Hébert, I am going to ask both of you a question about farming. Whoever answers their question correctly wins the challenge.

Marc: [*to Louis*] I am sorry, Monsieur, but I shall win this one.

Louis: Perhaps, but there are four competitions all together.

Samuel: Marc, a farmer had twenty sick sheep, and one died. How many did he have left?

Marc: What a simple question. Twenty-five, of course.

Samuel: *Non!* He had nineteen.

Marc: Can't you count? If he has twenty-six sheep and one dies, he has twenty-five. Twenty-six minus one equals twenty-five.

Samuel: But he did not have twenty-six sheep. He had twenty *sick* sheep.

Marc: *Pardon?*

Samuel: He had twenty *sick* sheep. When one of those sick sheep died, he had only nineteen. Twenty minus one equals nineteen.

Marc: The question was *stupide*.

Louis: The question was simple.

Samuel: Ah, Monsieur Louis, here is your question: A farmer has thirty cows and twenty ate chickens. How many didn't?

Marc: Another question that makes no sense! Have you no grammar as well as no math?

Samuel: Marc, let Louis answer.

Louis: [*to Samuel*] Can you repeat the question?

Samuel: A farmer has thirty cows and twenty ate chickens. How many didn't?

Louis: [*under his breath*] A farmer had thirty cows....twenty-eight chickens. How many...didn't? Thirty cows. Hmmm. Twenty-eight chickens. Hmmm. How many didn't. Twenty-eight chickens. Twenty-eight. Twenty....ate! [*To Samuel*] Ten cows did not eat chickens.

Marc: Huh? That makes no sense! And besides, cows don't eat chickens.

Samuel: I'm sorry Marc, but Louis is correct.

Marc: But, but...

Hélène: The round goes to Louis. He has solved Samuel's riddle! And now there is only one more competition. Louis, you have won two challenges, and Marc, you have won one. The last competition is about the purpose of a wife. What do you think Imogene should do as your wife? Louis, you may go first.

Louis: I would want my wife to be a companion to me, to have my children, to love me, and to be a beautiful ornament in my home. She should wear lovely clothes and always be ready to support my opinion.

Hélène: And you, Marc, what do you think Imogene should do?

Marc: She should buy goods for the children and I, she should make warm clothing for winter, she should wake up early to make food for the family, she should knit blankets and sew quilts, she should make shirts to sell in the market, and she should care for our land transactions. She also should host a Bible study in our house.

Hélène: Imogene, which one has won?

Imogene: I know that Louis's answer sounds better, but I think that Marc has won. He clearly knows Proverbs 31.

Marc: Again, I am the winner!

Samuel: But H el ene, now we have a problem: we have a tie between Louis and Marc.

H el ene: We must have a tie-breaker, of course. We can only have one winner. But what challenge shall we propose?

Imogene: May I suggest a challenge? Marc, Louis, you have both proven, with varying degrees of success, that you can pay attention to another person, that you are romantic, that you can answer riddles, and that you know what to expect from a wife. But I want to be sure that my husband is a knowledgeable Reformed man, who understands the Protestant faith. Therefore, I want you to recite all of Martin Luther's ninety-six theses.

Louis: But of course, dear Imogene. [*He recites*]:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Matt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope...the pope...cannot...

Argh! That is all that I can remember.

H el ene: Five of the theses. Marc, can you top that?

Marc: I cannot recite all of the ninety-six theses.

H el ene: Why not?

Marc: Because there are only ninety-five!

Imogene: Ha! Marc, you have broken the tie, and you are the winner!

Marc: Let us be wed at once, my bride. [*He swoops her up and runs off stage*]

Samuel: Let us go with them to celebrate their marriage. And don't worry, Louis. Perhaps in a few years the King will send more Huguenot women for the men of New France.

Exeunt