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THE COUREUR DES BOIS

Ulysse Boismenu was a seasoned merchant and coureur des bois who knew New France's forests like the back of his hand – from mountain to river and valley to clearing. From his home base in the St. Lawrence Valley, the “bas-pays” or low country, he made some thirty canoe trips a year upriver to the wild forests of the “haut-pays.” Dancing with wolves and all forest inhabitants, he celebrated every bird call, studied every animal track in the snow and, above all, honoured every majestic tree, particularly the conifers. It is said that he distilled his own balsam fir essential oil, chewed spruce gum and drank its distillate, which he mixed with malt beer and sold to the Iroquois.

One day, after too much spruce beer, he wooed Eyota, the daughter of Chief Paco of the Haut-Pays and the most beautiful girl in the Iroquois village. They ran off into the forest and consummated their passion. Not long after, Ulysse, more woodlands runner than skirt chaser, returned to the Bas-Pays to continue his trade, abandoning Chief Paco's daughter. The entire rainy season, beautiful Eyota cried tears of rage and sorrow. She gave birth to the fruit of their brief union, a girl named Huyanna, meaning “falling rain”. In his fury, Chief Paco ordered Ulysse to be put to death, but he was never seen again.

Years passed and Huyana grew. One day, she carelessly wandered away from the camp. After a night of despair that had her mother sure she had been devoured by wolves, little Huyana returned, an unusual glint in her eyes. She told her mother that a strange long-bearded coureur des bois smelling of fir had cradled her all night.

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