

The Plains of Abraham
an epic poem for Canada

by

Jack Mitchell

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The double death in warlike strife • of red-haired Wolfe and dark Montcalm:
Look to that tale, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky
How once, in days gone by • with sturdy pride • they fought before Quebec
Amid the bitter musket smoke • upon the Plains of Abraham
And both were stripped of life • by Heaven's power • and hurled beneath the earth
Where in the darkness rest the dead • unmindful of the mortal day.

For many weeks the siege had stood • about impregnable Quebec
Though now the city lay in ashes • pounded by the rumbling guns
For all the southern shore • and Point Lévi • and th' Isle of Orléans
The English took; but to the north • atop the cliffs the French held fast:
Those insurmountable defences • stood along St. Lawrence's banks
The work of God; and cross the river • ever crashed the cannonballs
And now the city lay in ashes; • fearless still the French held fast
And in the thick of night • beneath the stars • they loosed the fireships
Against the fleet that lay at anchor • belching sheets of sudden flame
But all in vain, and soon enough • they settled for a stubborn siege.

The soldiers clad in red • the English troops • were routed from the field
Beside the thundering waterfall • of tireless Montmorency
And many trophy-scalps • the spoils of war • the northern nations took.
So then the red-haired General Wolfe • grew angry at New France's folk:
He burned the parishes' long fields • that stretched unto St. Lawrence's banks
He wrecked the barns and homes • and broke the ploughs • and torched the winter crops
Until at last his soldiers sacked • a sacred church, and slew its priest:
Joachim's consecrated temple • echoed with his dying cry
That Heaven should avenge his death • and smite the English general
And thus it came to pass • as Heaven's power • afflicted General Wolfe:
For weeks he lay asleep • and tossed and turned • as sickness burned his cheeks
And so the army lost its hope; • the doctors said his fate was fixed.

But tell me this, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky:
Which of the English brigadiers • was first to go to General Wolfe
Before the 13th of September • shivering in the early morn?
No one was first: they went together • gathering in the army's camp
And they were three: the beardless Murray • reckless in the art of war
And frowning Monckton followed him • accursed in lost Acadia
And smiling Townshend led the way • unscrupulous in his deceit
Who on the paper used to sketch • his caricatures, grim designs;
They picked their way now through the army • shivering in the early morn;
They passed into his tent • with silent step • and found him there in bed
The red-haired General James Wolfe • the captain of the English king
And there he lay asleep • and did not wake • for sickness burned his cheeks
And there they sat beside his bed • upon the well-upholstered seats
Yet no one dared to raise a hand • and stir him from enchanting sleep
But there he lay like one deceased • unmindful of the mortal day.

Yet now there came a summer breeze • though tempered with the autumn chill
As though indeed it blew • from distant lands • across the pathless woods:
It brushed the red-haired General Wolfe • who opened up his pale green eyes
And yet he did not speak: • on each in turn • he turned his restless gaze
And terror filled the brigadiers • the captains of the English King
And smiling Townshend's hands • were damp with sweat • as he addressed Wolfe thus:

Dear General Wolfe, can it be true? • Have you awoken? Happy news!
For weeks you've lain asleep • within this tent. • The army's mood is bleak
For many fell beside the falls • of tireless Montmorency
And many more are sick with fever; • many fear the winter frost;
Some, liable to superstition • ponder if the wrath of God
Has fallen since the soldiers sacked • that sacred church— the mood is bleak.
But still there's none so sad • of all the troops • whose sadness can compare

*To ours as we behold you thus • the captain of the English king
And if you were to die • within this tent • our fate would then be fixed.
Let us go back across the sea • and reach again the English shore
Before you die, before the season • slays us with the winter frost;
Some day, perhaps, we may come back • to fight before this citadel.*

Thus smiling Townshend spoke • within that tent • and then he held his peace
And both the others raised their faces • muttering that they concurred;
But now in answer came the voice • of that red-headed General Wolfe:

*My friends, I'm happy that you've come • but now I think your words unfit:
I never shall renounce my vow • to seize impregnable Quebec;
I know I shall not die • within this tent • although my fate be fixed.
My friends, I've dreamed a dream: • with silent step • it passed beside this bed
As here I slept and did not wake • and I beheld it while I slept
And thus I saw it had the shape • the willfulness, the restless gaze
The frowning face of General Braddock • whom the swift Langlade destroyed
And here indeed he spoke • and damp with sweat • I did not seem to breathe:
“Now listen to me, General Wolfe • from Heaven I have come to speak
Indeed you lie in bed • and toss and turn • as sickness burns your cheeks;
You'll nevermore behold your home • across the cold Atlantic sea
For now it comes to pass • that by your deeds • the fort of Frontenac
Shall fall at last with fearful slaughter • as was prophesied of old.
But there is one more thing • I must reveal • endowed with second sight:
You shall assemble all your men • and cross the great St. Lawrence' stream
And I will guide you to a cove • that lies beneath a lofty cliff:
L'Anse au Foulon that cove is called • which keeps a steep and secret path
And at the top you'll find those fields • men call the Plains of Abraham
Though by the blessed saints • of Heaven's realm • they're named the Fields of Grief
And there you may fulfil your vow • to seize impregnable Quebec.”
Just so the dream before me spoke • and then into the night it fled*

*And then there came a summer breeze • though tempered with the autumn chill;
Which brushed across me: thus I woke • and opened up my pale green eyes.
But come, my friends, we must embark • the army of the English king
L'Anse au Foulon we shall approach • attacking ere the break of day
And I will die before the season • switches to the winter frost
For I am doomed, and as I slew • the sinless must I too be slain
For that, I think, is what I dreamed • and dreams can be the will of God
Yet though I die I'll keep my vow • and seize impregnable Quebec.*

Just so he spoke, the red-haired Wolfe • astounding those three brigadiers
For now it seemed his limbs were strong • and vigorously now he breathed
As up he rose from bed • though nonetheless • that sickness burned his cheeks.

First he put on his woollen trousers • after that his linen shirt
And then he found his leather boots • and pulled the silver buckles tight
He clothed himself in red • within that tent • and donned his tricorne cap;
He seized his sword from off its peg • and slipped it to its golden sheath
The sword by which he'd made his vow • to seize impregnable Quebec
And last he took the cane of oak • he once had borne at Louisbourg;
And yet he did not speak: • on each in turn • he rested his green eyes
And terror filled those brigadiers • who did not dare to meet that gaze;
For in his pallid face • beneath his brows • there gleamed a ghastly light.
As when the sun runs south • in winter months • and yet the snow is slow
And clouds let fall a rain of ice • which thickens on the naked wood
And one by one the branches drop • and some are smashed and some are snapped
And from the broken limbs • across the plain • there gleams a ghastly light
And men and women both lament • the ruin of the long-lived wood
Just so the English brigadiers • lamented for the red-haired Wolfe
As he alone went forth • with silent step • unto the army's camp.

He picked his way then through that army • marshalling the English troops;
To every colonel he declared • the duties of his regiment
And thus the English labored long • preparing for the field of war.
At last the sun was sinking back • behind impregnable Quebec
And regiments came forth • beneath the stars • from shady Etchemin;
They soon embarked upon the boats • and drifted with the flowing tide;
The great St. Lawrence softly gurgled • as they passed across the stream.
And in the foremost of the boats • there sat the red-haired General Wolfe
And there beside him sat young Jervis • loyal to the English crown
Who later in the days that followed • triumphed at St. Vincent's cape.
Now with an enigmatic glance • the red-haired Wolfe addressed him thus:

*My friend, no man can know what waits • upon the Plains of Abraham
No man but me, for as I slew • the sinless must I too be slain.
Now many men indeed • will follow me • unto the door of death
For many hope to win great glory • 'mid the smoke and blood of war;
Yet as the poet says • in simple words • of unforgotten rhyme:
'The boast of arms, the pomp of power • and all that love or wealth e'er gave
Awaits the fearsome hour • when paths of glory lead us to the grave
Let not the proud with us find fault • if Memory no trophies raise
Where through the fretted vault • the pealing anthem swells the note of praise;
Can monument or marble bust • restore a mortal's fleeting breath?
Can verse provoke the dust • or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?'
Just this the poet says • for Heaven's power • inspired his design
As Heaven now designs my death • amid the smoke and blood of war;
Yet I had rather wrote those lines • than seize impregnable Quebec."*

Just so he spoke, the red-haired Wolfe • the captain of the English king
And Jervis marveled at his mood: • he seemed to be some other man;
But quickly that was changed • and now again • there gleamed the ghastly light.
The great St. Lawrence softly gurgled • as they passed across the stream.

But now the boats approached the shore • and all the soldiers disembarked;
L'Anse au Foulon that cove was called • which kept a steep and secret path;
A few brave men went up ahead • and met the sentries at the top
The sentries who held quiet watch • upon that steep and secret path
And then indeed it seemed • that all was lost: • their fate would soon be fixed
For now the sentries called aloud • they asked their names, and why they'd come;
But some among the Highland Frasers • raised among the Scottish clans
They answered in the tongue of France • they spoke it with a living voice:
They said that they were troops of France • and loyal to the dark Montcalm
And thus they went ahead • and up the path • that climbed the lofty cliff
And when they reached the top • now damp with sweat • and gasping for their breath
They slew the sentries with their swords • and beckoned to the men below.
The soldiers clad in red • with silent step • were climbing all that night;
And thus the English regiments • arrived upon the field of war.

Now at the morn there rose • towards the east • the soft pink palm of dawn
And then those English regiments • were seen at last in tall Quebec.
As when the nightly dew • at break of day • reflects the rising sun
Before the hand of God • in Heaven's realm • will lift it far aloft
And girls that walk to milk the cows • will marvel at the gleaming grass
The dewy grass upon the Island • sprouting in the rich red earth:
They dream of diadems and dandies • far across th' Atlantic sea;
Just so the English bayonets • were sparkling in the morning light.

Now on the wall the sentry saw them • from impregnable Quebec
The wall of chiseled stone • the sturdy work • of fearless Frontenac
Unsmiling Louis Frontenac • who'd held his sway o'er all New France;
So from the wall the sentry saw • the sparkle in the morning light
And straightaway he mounted up • and took in hand the shining reins:
His duty was to take the tidings • quickly to the dark Montcalm

And through the city's streets • at break of day • he cantered on the mare
And there, indeed, upon the left • he passed the holy convent's door
The sacred order of the sisters • founded by the blessed Marie
And underneath the Porte St. Jean • he galloped like the northern wind:
The archway cold and smooth • now echoed back • the clatter of the hoofs;
Then down the slope he rode • until he came • unto St. Charles' stream
And now he rode along the bridge • which cut across the current's flow
The bridge of boats that joined the banks • of tall Quebec and bright Beauport
For on the other side • upon the grass • were all the troops of France.
As when, across the mountain meadows • where the rivers run with gold
In spring the flowers rise • amid the rocks • in many subtle shades
Pyrola, Larkspur, Potentilla • with the hardy Fireweed
And hikers at the pass • will gaze below • upon a sea of pink
Just so the sentry gazed • across the grass • upon the soldiers' tents.

He picked his way now through that army • looking for the dark Montcalm;
The regiments had just awakened • shivering in the early morn;
And soon the sentry found • amid the tents • the house of dark Montcalm
For there he stood awake • before the gate • and spurned enchanting sleep
The dark-haired Marquis of Montcalm • the captain of the King of France:
He held his telescope aloft • and ceaselessly he scanned the stream;
The British Fleet was there at anchor • threatening the Beauport shore
And so he stood awake • before the gate • and spurned enchanting sleep.
The sentry left his steed • and made his bow • and then addressed him thus:

*Monsieur, I come with urgent tidings • from impregnable Quebec
Alas, there are some English soldiers • on the Plains of Abraham
There many English bayonets • are sparkling in the morning light.*

So spoke the sentry, blameless man • and then indeed the dark Montcalm
He gave a silent sigh • for in his heart • he missed his friend Lévis.

He picked his way then through the army • through the ranks of fighting men
And straightaway he gave the signal • marshalling the troops of France
And straightaway they found their places • veterans of five campaigns
The regiments and volunteers • whose name must live for evermore.

Give us the list, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky:
Say first who were the native nations • warriors of the silver age
Who did not fail their friends • upon that day • before the door of death:
Indeed there were the seven peoples • leagued against the English crown
The Mohawks of grand Kanawake • right above the rapids' teeth;
The Hurons from Lorette • from Wendake • the allies of Champlain;
The eager Abenaki too • of Odanak and Wolinak
Bright Odanak which rangers burnt • unmindful of St. Francis' wrath;
There were Algonquins too • and Nipissings • and Mohawks from the hill—
Kahnesatake was that hill • where three brave nations pooled their strength;
Those were indeed the seven peoples • leagued against the English crown
With Innu from the north • from distant lakes • who ruled the pathless woods;
And from the west the merchant peoples • Council of the Triple Hearth
Potawatomi and Ojibwe • with the righteous Ottawa:
Their guide was swift Langlade • a crafty man • the reckless Braddock's bane;
Such were indeed the native nations • warriors of the silver age
And thus they kept their sacred promise • mindful of the days of yore;
And many were the native princes • ranked beside the dark Montcalm
And far indeed they'd come • o'er land and wave • unto the door of death.

And many were the regiments • of soldiers of the King of France
And they had also left their homes • across the cold Atlantic sea:
The regiment La Sarre was there • the scarlet and the black they bore
And they were led by Sénezèrgues • the noblest of the brigadiers;
And bold Béarn was there • that led the charge • across the bloody snow
When later in the days that followed • battle came at cold Ste. Foy

And they were led by old d'Alquier • unshaken by the rumbling guns;
And Languedoc in turn • in blue and white • Ft. William Henry's bane
And they were led by tall Privat • a gentleman of stainless name;
There next unbendable Guyenne • the veterans of Carillon
And they were led by bold Fontbonne • who fell amid the foremost ranks;
And Royal-Roussillon was there • the regiment of Mazarin
They bore the fleur-de-lis • in gleaming gold • upon a cross of white
And they were led by old Bernetz • a knight of the unconquered isle;
Such were the regiments of France • which shivered in the early morn
And with them stood that famous force • whose name must live for evermore
The Compagnies de la Marine • men raised upon St. Lawrence' banks
A thousand men with toques of blue • the masters of the pathless woods
Canadian troops: and there among them • handsome as the rising sun
Stood that relentless Boishébert • together with proud Beausoleil
And they had brought Acadian rangers • with the Mi'kmaq sentinels;
Such were the Troupes de la Marine • men raised upon St. Lawrence' banks.

But lastly now, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky
Recall the fathers and their sons • the bold Canadian volunteers
For they were there as well • not clothed in white • not bearing famous flags:
The men of Trois-Rivières • a sturdy folk • who'd left the autumn crop;
The men of Mary's town • of Montreal • with hunting muskets stout;
The men of tall Quebec • who in their hearts • remembered Frontenac
Unsmiling Louis Frontenac • who'd held his sway o'er all New France;
Those were the fathers and their sons • the bold Canadian volunteers.

So now when all had found their places • by the town of bright Beauport
Indeed the Marquis of Montcalm • now brought them to the field of war.
As when, towards the west • where in the hills • the wild roses blow
A warm wind from the rocky heights • descends to melt the crackling ice
A winter wind, and yet to many • welcome as the breath of spring

And girls untie their braided hair • and on the grass the brothers box
Just so the regiments of France • descended from the Beauport shore
Behind the Marquis of Montcalm • the captain of the King of France;
And in their midst the singers then • began to chant a cheerful song
And they themselves had made the song • to glorify their generals
The dark-haired Marquis of Montcalm • and Bourslamaque, and good Lévis
And so they gladly sang • upon that day • before the citadel
Of how the padre gave a speech • and cleansing absolution preached:
His children could advance with pride • with Lord and Virgin on their side;
How all were heroes on that day • or if there was a man to say
The general had a tragic flaw • they'd break the dirty rascal's jaw:
Just so they gladly sang • upon that day • before the citadel;
And so the Marquis of Montcalm • now brought them to the field of war
His handsome face was glad • for in his heart • he knew the hour had come
When destiny would be decided • 'neath impregnable Quebec.

And down the slope they went • until they came • unto St. Charles' stream
They marched along the bridge of boats • that cut across the current's flow
The bridge of boats that joined the banks • of tall Quebec and bright Beauport
And there, indeed, upon a steed • was Governor Vaudreuil himself
The Chevalier de Cavagnal • who held his sway o'er all New France
And there he sat upon a steed • and signaled to the dark Montcalm
And when the Marquis came • he made his bow • and then addressed him thus:

*My dearest Marquis of Montcalm • commander of our troops from France
I see you've heard the news! • But listen now • before you rush to fight
For I was born in this cold land • and raised upon St. Lawrence' banks
And well I know that war is different • here across th' Atlantic sea;
I beg you not to fight • the English troops • upon the open field
But let us use our skill • in bloody war • amid the pathless woods:
For many months we might harass them • firing on the English flanks*

*But if we meet the foe • upon the plain • well disciplined in war
I tremble at the thought! • When I was young • we did not rush to fight.
Monsieur, I beg you, heed my words • for I hold sway o'er all New France.*

Just so he spoke, and held his peace • the governor, Vaudreuil, himself
But now in answer came the voice • of that brave Marquis of Montcalm:

*Monsieur, I'm glad that you have spoken • yet I think your words unfit:
As for myself, I do not tremble • at the thought of deadly lead.
Full well the regiments of France • can fight upon the field of war
As well you know, for you were there • before the walls of Carillon:
Behind the wall of wood • upon the hill • we ranged troops of France
La Sarre, then Languedoc, Berry • and Roussillon, and then La Reine
And bold Bearn was there • and at the right • unbendable Guyenne.
The soldiers clad in red • at morn appeared • as countless as the trees
And they were led by Abercrombie • reckless in the art of war;
Yet by the time the sun sank back • his men lay dead upon the field
For seven times that day • the English charged • across the open field
But none won through, except the madmen • raised among the Scottish clans
For there our soldiers stood • discharging guns • at less than forty yards
And slaughter stood on every hand • before those walls of Carillon;
Full well the regiments of France • fought thus upon that field of war.
Yet still, Monsieur, I say • if all were lost • except the pathless woods
I still would seek the foe • upon the plain • and rush into the fight
Nor would I stoop to scalps • and spoils of war • amid the pathless woods
For destiny must be decided • 'neath impregnable Quebec.*

Just so he spoke, the dark Montcalm • and thus indeed his fate was fixed.
The Chevalier of Cavagnal • was filled with wrath and turned aside
But dark Montcalm rode off • and joined the troops • across St. Charles' stream
And up the slope he rode; • the marching ranks • now followed close behind:

Some took the route of Sillery • and some the route of cold Ste. Foy.
And there away upon the right • they passed the peaceful Hospital:
Within it were the wounded soldiers • nursed by gentle Augustines
Together with that famous order • founded by the blessed Marie
The sisters Ursuline • who made the vow • to be the brides of Christ
For their own convent lay in ashes • pounded by the rumbling guns;
So both were tending wounded soldiers • in that peaceful Hospital;
And now, indeed, upon the right • were seven ladies clothed in black
All sisters Ursuline • who made the vow • to be the brides of Christ
And thus the Marquis of Montcalm • perceived them there upon the hill
And straightaway he checked his horse • and left the marching regiments
And soon he reached the little group • and handed off the shining reins;
He took his cap from off his head • and gracefully he make his bow
Before the convent's chief • advanced in age • a venerable dame:
Seventy-four long years she'd spent • upon the great St. Lawrence' banks
Unyielding was her will • and stern her glance • and potent her command
And she by far surpassed the rest • for skill in every healing art
The Ursuline Superior • Migeon de la Nativité;
And so the Marquis of Montcalm • politely now addressed her thus:

*Madame de la Nativité • O you who rule the brides of Christ
I beg you to provide your blessing • calling on the Virgin chaste:
Often before indeed • by Heaven's power • the royal fleur-de-lis
Has triumphed o'er the foe • before this town • the fort of Frontenac
For in the days of Frontenac • who held his sway o'er all New France
The fleet of Phips was smashed at anchor • pounded by the rumbling guns;
And then again, I think • when you were young • you saw the second siege
When Walker's fleet was sunk • in one great storm • at th' Isle of Orléans.
Against this third attack • of English troops • I know we shall prevail
For all these things have been foreseen • by that good Chevalier Lévis
My second-in-command • a noble man • endowed with second sight:*

*Before I sent him forth • to Montreal • to watch the southern flank
He prophesied two things to me • and carefully addressed me thus:
“My dear Montcalm, I now foresee • that on the Plains of Abraham
We’ll triumph o’er the foe • before this town • the fort of Frontenac
And you, Montcalm, you shall not live • to see the English take Quebec.”
So spoke the good Lévis • a noble man • endowed with second sight;
So now, ma Mère, provide your blessing • ere I reach the field of war.*

Just so he spoke, and bowed his head • the dark-haired Marquis of Montcalm;
He kneeled before that pious lady • shedding his three-cornered cap
And now upon his curly locks • there seemed to be a golden light;
But in her ancient eyes • the tears appeared • when she had heard him speak:
She answered with a weary voice • for long had she been labouring
In tending to the wounded soldiers • at the peaceful Hospital;
So it was with a weary voice • that she indeed addressed him thus:

*My dearest Marquis of Montcalm • what blessing is it you would wish?
It cannot be a easy thing • to call upon the Virgin chaste:
How easily we rise • by Heaven’s power, • how easily we fall!
For every soul must pass away • whenever its dark fate is fixed
Or such was the philosophy • once uttered by the blessed Marie
When she was first to speak • and mourn her friend • Madame de la Peltrie;
For they were like two sisters here • across the cold Atlantic sea
Instructors of the native nations • teachers of New France’s folk;
Yet now her friend lay dead • within the earth • Madame de la Peltrie
And so she truly saw • that Heaven’s power • decides our rise and fall
And such was the philosophy • she uttered then, the blessed Marie;
Nor is it here, she said • upon the earth • we taste eternal life.*

Just so she spoke, and held her peace • Migeon de la Nativité
But in her ancient eyes • the tears appeared • when she beheld his face;
She laid her hand upon his head • and called upon the Virgin chaste:

*Sweet mother Mary, you who bore • the only son of God to man
As oft you have before • now once again • protect this mortal man
To whom you granted victory • before the walls of Carillon:
Protect the Marquis of Montcalm • amid the smoke and blood of war.*

Just so she spoke, and ceased to pray • Migeon de la Nativité
And thus the Virgin heard her speak • but could not grant the boon she craved
For many men were doomed to die • upon the Plains of Abraham
But she herself let fall hot tears • in Heaven, while upon the earth
There came a shower from the west • that fell upon the uncut hay.

So now the Marquis of Montcalm • the captain of the King of France
He mounted up upon his steed • and took in hand the shining reins
And off he rode, and now the sisters • sought the peaceful Hospital
They reached its chapel's calm • and there again • they prayed for all New France:
Their crystal voices rose and fell • melodiously, with pious breath
And there the holy priest • with silent step • brought forth the wine and bread
In blessed sacrifice to God • the vessels of the Word made flesh.
But now the Marquis of Montcalm • led forth the fearless troops of France
Some took the route of Sillery • and some the route of cold Ste. Foy;
And thus the regiments of France • arrived upon the field of war.
As when upon the empty prairie • under the unhindered sky
The evening fades away • in summer months • when days are warm and long
And soon the grand horizon glows • and silence settles on the plain
And thus the lamps are lit • as one by one • the villages appear
Just so those regiments • now one by one • appeared before Quebec.

And now the Marquis of Montcalm • was gazing at the English line:
He rode along the gentle slope • before the ranks of fighting men
And long he gazed, the dark Montcalm • and long he did not speak a word
But then he turned at last • with sword in hand • before the troops of France
And in a mighty voice he spoke • and thunderously addressed them thus:

*O soldiers of the King of France • and hardy Troupes de la Marine
My children, look, behold the English • on the Plains of Abraham;
The day has come at last • when by your deeds • before the door of death
Now destiny shall be decided • 'neath impregnable Quebec:
Shall heretics in red • from distant lands • now take the citadel?
Or shall the victory be ours • as once it was at Carillon?
Indeed, you see, their line is weak: • they've just now come across the stream;
We shall attack at once • discharging guns • and charge at sixty yards;
We'll triumph o'er the foe • before this town • the fort of Frontenac.*

So spoke the Marquis of Montcalm • and all the soldiers cheered his words
And yet his fiery heart misgave him • as he gazed towards the foe:
His regiments were brave, but few • and hungry from the stubborn siege;
Yet now he shook his head • and once again • his fearlessness was fixed.
He rode along the gentle slope • before the ranks of fighting men
Until he turned at last • with sword in hand • and sunlight struck the blade
And all those soldiers cheered their King • and cheered their noble general.

Then at a signal from the horn • the soldiers of the King of France
Advanced towards the foe • across the plain • well disciplined in war
And here and there on either hand • the bold Canadian volunteers
And many allied native nations • fired upon the English flanks.
As when the icy swell • upon the sea • will roll towards the rocks
Amid the blinding storm • that drives the deep • against a wind-swept land

And unrelentingly it rises • raising its unbroken back
Just so the regiments of France • advanced upon the English line;
But from the soldiers clad in red • there came a storm of deadly lead:
The red-haired Wolfe gave word • with sword in hand • to fire at forty yards
And all the English regiments • now fired against the charging French.

Now tell me this, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky
Which were those English regiments • that fired upon the charging French?
Upon the left were Amherst's troops • and next to them Anstruther's men
And after them the Highland Frasers • raised among the Scottish clans
And swift Lascelles' in turn • and Kennedy's • and those of Phillip Bragg
And next to them the Grenadiers • who'd failed upon a summer's day
Beside the thundering waterfall • of tireless Montmorency
And at the right were Otway's men • atop the great St. Lawrence' banks;
Those were the English regiments • that fired upon the charging French:
The front rank fired first • discharging guns • with double-shotted load
And, when they turned, the second rank • another smashing volley sent.
As when the thunder cracks • in Heaven's realm • to signal some great flood
And then the pouring rain • for many weeks • must overwhelm the earth
Until the whole Red River valley • surges to the northern lakes
Annihilating bird and beast • and squandering the works of man
Just so the muskets cracked • upon that day • before the troops of France.

Then first of all the French to fall • was one François-Clément Boucher:
He fell before the rest • with sword in hand • a brave Canadian man
Commanding, like his father had • a Compagnie de la Marine
And he was born beneath the Mountain • final lord of La Perrière;
The bullet struck him in the belly • twisting his intestines out
And all in vain he clutched the spot • and knew he was not long for death;

And next to fall was Jean-Baptiste • amid the troops of Roussillon
The one they called Larose: • at twenty-three • he tumbled in the ranks
And nevermore beheld his home • across the cold Atlantic sea
The village of Étain • in rich Lorraine • where generations dwelt
His father's name was Jean Adam • his mother born as Anne Thuot;
But now a bullet found their son • and robbed him of his precious life:
It struck him in the face • and did not stop • but mushroomed in his head
And all about his bloody body • pieces of the skull were strewn;

And after him François Reclat • amid the troops of Languedoc
Who never lacked a witty word • for Basserode's bright company
He fell as well, and many heard him • screaming on the field of war:
As grapeshot smashed his legs • he tumbled down • and fell upon his face
But no one had the time to bear him • back towards the Hospital;

And then the lord of Sénezèrgues • the noblest of the Brigadiers
Who led the regiment La Sarre • before the walls of Carillon
Who by the thundering waterfall • once drove them back in headlong rout—
A bullet pierced his lung: • he tumbled back • from off his rearing steed
And darkness came across his gaze • he slipped into the arms of death.

And many more were killed or wounded • stricken with the deadly lead
Nor would a life suffice • with ceaseless care • to study every name
Not if our muscles were of steel • not if we had ten thousand tongues
And tongue for every man that fought • before impregnable Quebec
Though you must know, immortal angel • witness of the day itself
The stories of the men that died • upon the Plains of Abraham.

But now the Troupes de la Marine • men raised upon St. Lawrence' banks
And many regiments of France • yet drove against the English line:
They battled with the bayonet • and sought to slay their foes with steel

And here and there amid the grass • the bold Canadian volunteers
And many allied native nations • fired upon the English flanks.

Then many soldiers clad in red • were stricken with the deadly lead
And first to fall was William Fairfax • loyal to the English crown
Lieutenant of the 28th • the regiment of Phillip Bragg
And he was born in old Virginia • second of his father's sons
But he was seven when his brother • fighting 'gainst the fleet of France
Was slain upon the seas • in distant lands • and broke his parent's heart;
But now a bullet found young William • mushrooming inside his chest
And with a scream his soul escaped • and fled into that unseen world;

And then James Thompson fell • a steady man • respected by the troops
A sergeant of the Highland Frasers • raised among the Scottish clans:
A bullet struck his neck • and lodged within • the collar-bone was smashed
His first and final wound: • with sword in hand • he'd sought a swift escape
Upon Culloden's field • in '45 • when all was lost at last
But now they bore him from the field • and back towards the wooden ships;

And then Guy Carleton was struck • a gentleman of stainless name
Commander of the 60th • that shielded the left English flank
Who later in the days that followed • held his sway o'er all New France:
A spent shot touched his head • and scraped his scalp • and ricocheted away;

And Captain Thomas Ross was struck • a man of bright Calrossie's glen
For through the fearless Highland Frasers • now there crashed a cannonball:
It tore away his leg • he screamed in pain • and wept for ruined life
And mightily he cursed • that summer's day • on th' Isle of Orléans
The day that he declined that duel • shamed by that Lieutenant Nairn;
But darkness came across his gaze • he slipped into the arms of death;

And then a bitter musket-ball • pierced General Monckton's sturdy flesh:
It struck him in the chest: • he tumbled back • from off his rearing steed
And from afar, amid the smoke • the red-haired Wolfe perceived his fall;
He hastened to his side • and breathed a sigh • and then addressed him thus:

*My friend, alas, you bleed • and scream in pain • upon the field of war;
How often have you battled bravely • loyal to the English crown!
But soon enough we'll both set sail • and reach again the English shore.*

Just so Wolfe spoke, though well he knew • that he himself was doomed to die;
And looking up he gazed about • surveying all that battlefield
And through the bitter musket smoke • he saw the issue yet in doubt;
He took his stand upon a knoll • amid the smoke and blood of war
And many trembled at that sight • upon the Plains of Abraham
For like some god did Wolfe seem then • some demon with demented power:
His face was paler than the moon • his hair as red as blazing fire
And in his pallid face • beneath his brows • there gleamed a ghastly light.
Now in a piercing voice he spoke • and potently addressed them thus:

*O soldiers of the English King • hear now the words of General Wolfe:
Affix your bayonets of steel • and drive the French in headlong rout;
Indeed their line is weak • and we must charge • and drive them from the field.*

Just so he spoke, and then addressed • the Grenadiers of Louisbourg:

*O grenadiers, the hour has come: • you may atone for your mistake
Beside the thundering waterfall • of tireless Montmorency:
I'll take you to the city gate • and fight amid the foremost ranks.*

Just so indeed he spoke; • beneath his brows • there gleamed a ghastly light.
Thus at a signal from the horn • the soldiers of the English king

Affixed their bayonets of steel • and charged against the troops of France
And Wolfe led forth the Grenadiers • against the regiment Guyenne.
As when the melting snows descend • to swell a shiny mountain brook
They tumble from the rocky heights • in icy torrents long congealed
Amid those lofty peaks • for much they wish • to reach the western sea
Just so the English regiments • advanced upon the stricken French
And out in front the lofty caps • of Grenadiers of Louisbourg
Picked up some ray of light • with gleaming gold • reflecting in the sun
And at their head the red-haired Wolfe • put terror in his foes' proud hearts;

But then with patient marksmanship • some bold Canadian volunteer—
His name forever lost • since Heaven's power • concealed him in the smoke—
He sent a musket-ball at Wolfe • and struck him by the right-hand wrist;
The red-haired Wolfe was not dismayed • and strode towards the troops of France;
He brandished still the cane of oak • that he was used to wield in war
And all the grenadiers behind him • cheered their noble general;
But swiftly Wolfe once more was struck • upon the right-hand shoulder blade:
His hat was knocked from off his head • but still he strode towards the foe
Until the thirdmost bullet came • which struck him right amid the chest:
The bullet pierced his lung • and lodged within • and stuck inside his heart;
He staggered like a drunken man • and kneeled upon the uncut hay
And there before the grenadiers • he fell amid the foremost ranks.
As when a frigate flies • before a storm • upon the th' Atlantic sea
With every stich of canvas furled • as fatefully the timbers moan
And from afar the captain seeks • for Halifax, the friend of fleets
Yet with a roar of shattered timber • now the lofty foremast falls:
It wavers at the top • and pitches back • and splashes on the sea
Just so, indeed, the red-haired Wolfe • now fell amid the foremost ranks.

At that the regiment Guyenne • took heart amid the smoke of war
And dreadful battle now ensued • about the form of General Wolfe.

As when the forest of the north • will echo with the call of wolves
Of snarling beasts in rival packs • that struggle for a single prize
A treat of juicy meat: • with tooth and claw • they battle to the last
Just so the regiment Guyenne • did battle with the grenadiers
Amid the bitter musket smoke • about the form of General Wolfe.

At last they dragged him to the rear • Lieutenant Brown and Henderson;
They knelt beside his form • so damp with blood • and gently propped his head
Lieutenant Brown now raised a hand • and sadly then addressed him thus:

*Dear General Wolfe, you bleed • upon the earth • though yet you shall not die;
Should we not go and fetch a surgeon • skilled in every healing art?*

The red-haired Wolfe just shut his eyes • and with a groan he answered thus:

My friend, you see there is no need • for all is finished now with me.

But as he spoke a man came up • a trusty friend and aide-de-camp;
He cried, *They run! My lord, they run! • The French, they run in headlong rout!*
At that the red-haired Wolfe was stirred • and opened up his pale green eyes
And in a clear and gentle voice • with dying breath addressed him thus:

*My friend, indeed the words you speak • are laden with the power of Fate:
For here I lie in blood • upon the earth • and lose my precious life
Because this victory is mine • the highest prize for mortal men:
For I was doomed, and as I slew • the sinless now I too am slain;
But as I die I keep my vow • and seize impregnable Quebec.*

Just so the red-haired Wolfe addressed them • ere his noble spirit fled
And then his fiery head collapsed; • in tears the soldiers closed his eyes;
And one among the Highland Frasers • raised among the Scottish clans

Donald MacLeod, he wrapped his cloak • about the form of General Wolfe
And thus they bore him from the field • and back towards the wooden ships.

But now the regiments of France • were driven back in headlong rout.
As when the testy St. John River • rushing into Fundy's Bay
Swirls and seethes and swiftly splashes • right across the rapids' teeth
But soon enough it changes course • reversing its uncertain flow
And once again it sloshes inland • back across the rapids' teeth
Just so the regiments of France • reversed their route and sought Quebec
For soldiers clad in red • the English troops • pursued them in the smoke;
And often then a soldier saw • the best of friends go tumbling down
A man he'd known for many winters • stricken with the deadly lead
But no one had a chance to bear him • back towards the Hospital
For slaughter stood on every hand • amid the smoke and blood of war.

Now last of all there stood alone • the regiment of Roussillon
Unwilling yet to yield their ground • succumbing to the force of fear;
They bore the fleur-de-lis • in gleaming gold • upon a cross of white;
Amid them rode the dark Montcalm • the captain of the King of France:
He bade them hold their ground • with sturdy pride • and guard the swift retreat;
But as he sat amid the smoke • and cried aloud to God for aid
Some soldier of the 47th • serving under swift Lascelles
He saw you there, my dear Montcalm • and marveled at your coat and clothes
And then dispatched a musket-ball • and struck you with the deadly lead:
The bullet pierced the flank • and passed within • and mushroomed in the flesh:
Indeed, the dark red blood flowed forth • and spilled across his coat and clothes
And then another pierced his thigh • and lodged within his sturdy flesh;
He slumped upon his horse • and groaned in pain • and covered his dark eyes;
And thus indeed a panic seized • the regiment of Roussillon:
With hopelessness at heart they fled • towards impregnable Quebec
Before those English regiments • and swept the dark Montcalm along.

As when amid the northern ice • where days and nights are months apart
The slim Beluga swims at bay • encircled by the grinding floes
And then the ice-white bear • with silent step • will stun her with a blow
Into the freezing wind he drags her • hungry from his weeks of dearth
Just so the dark Montcalm • was dragged along • until they reached Quebec.

The wall of chiseled stone • the sturdy work • of fearless Frontenac
Protected them at last • and soon enough • they passed St. Lewis' gate
Inside, the women of the city • crowded in the well-paved streets
To get the news of what had happened • on the Plains of Abraham;
But when they saw the dark Montcalm • as blood had soaked his coat and clothes
They screamed, and called his famous name • and ceaseless lamentation rose;
But you, Montcalm, sat up • despite the pain • and now addressed them thus:

Dear ladies, please, you see it's nothing; • do not fret on my account.

And yet they saw how he was wounded • stricken with the deadly lead;
So then the women of the city • stretched him on a folded cloth
And through the city's streets • as evening fell • they bore the dark Montcalm;
They reached the order of the sisters • founded by the blessed Marie
The sisters Ursuline • who made the vow • to be the brides of Christ
Though now the convent lay in ashes • pounded by the rumbling guns
And there inside they laid him down • and wept to watch his noble face
And some ran off to fetch a doctor • skilled in every healing art.

By then the sun was sinking back • behind impregnable Quebec;
A doctor came and looked • and breathed a sigh • and opened up a vein
But soon he clutched his eyes • beneath his brows • and then addressed them thus:

*Alas, mesdames, he cannot live • and no man's skill in healing art
Can save him now: he bleeds so much • and slips into the arms of death.*

At that, my dear Montcalm, you stirred • and opened up your tired eyes;
You struggled for the strength to speak • and with a smile addressed them thus:

*Monsieur, I do not need your word • I know I am not long for death;
And so the good Lévis • a noble man • endowed with second sight
Was quite correct: I shall not live • to see the English take Quebec
And that is for the best: • now Wolfe can come • and when he comes he'll find
He cannot send me home in shame • across the cold Atlantic sea
For here I think I'll stay • where I have fought • so far from Candiag
My handsome house at Candiag • which people indicate and say,
"Behold the handsome house • of those Montcalms • that find their tombs in war."
Just so the people speak • as they pass by; • and soon enough they'll know
Another Marquis of Montcalm • has fallen in the foremost ranks.
But listen, friends, to this • for I declare • before this door of death
That ere I sent him forth • to Montreal • the Chevalier Lévis
Foresaw another thing besides: • that on the Plains of Abraham
We should yet triumph o'er the foe • before impregnable Quebec
So spoke the good Lévis • a noble man • endowed with second sight
And that you may announce • to General Wolfe • whenever he may come.*

Just so he spoke, and held his peace; • he was mistaken: General Wolfe
By then was stripped of life • by Heaven's power • and in that unseen world
Was waiting for the dark Montcalm • the captain of the King of France
Where in the darkness rest the dead • unmindful of the mortal day.
But now the Marquis of Montcalm • reclined upon the folded cloth;
He closed his tired eyes • and breathed a sigh • and then his spirit fled
And all about his bloody body • ceaseless lamentation rose.

Now at the morn there rose • towards the east • the soft pink palm of dawn
As through the convent's ruined halls • they bore the Marquis of Montcalm
A silent company together • citizens of tall Quebec
And officers and soldiers too • and bold Canadian volunteers
And soon they reached the holy chapel • where the golden altar stood
Before the English soldiers came • across the cold Atlantic sea;
Now it was burned and desolate • and pounded by the rumbling guns:
The windows lay in shards • the wood was ripped • the roof had fallen in
And in the chapel's floor • on either hand • were gashes from the bombs
For so from Pointe-Lévi that church • was pounded by the rumbling guns;

There in the chapel's floor • within the earth • before the place of Christ
They laid the Marquis of Montcalm • the captain of the King of France
And there the holy priest • with silent step • brought forth the wine and bread
In blessed sacrifice to God • the vessels of the Word made flesh;
And there the convent's chief • advanced in age • that venerable dame
She looked upon the dark Montcalm • as he was lying in his grave
The Ursuline Superior • Migeon de la Nativité
And in her ancient eyes • the tears appeared • when she beheld him dead.
She was the first to speak • and breathe a sigh • and mourn his noble deeds
And it was with a weary voice • that she indeed addressed him thus:

*How can I say, my child, Montcalm • just how my heart is filled with grief?
For now you lie in blood • within the earth • and all the land is lost.
I mourn you as a mother mourns • her own son slain; the city mourns
Not for your loss of life • by Heaven's power • but for life's loss of you
For you lie dead, and who can care • your name must live for evermore?
Some future day, I now foresee • the boys along St. Lawrence' banks
Shall sit together for the tale • a grandfather sees fit to tell
An old man then, although today • a young Canadian volunteer*

*Who now like many of the soldiers • flees into the pathless woods
And now his heart is torn • for only this: • today his friends were slain
His friends who hearkened to his call • to travel down to save Quebec
Although in Montreal • in distant lands • they dwelt in pleasing peace;
But nevermore those lads shall greet • their grateful mothers, coming home
For they, like you, Montcalm, have fallen • on the Plains of Abraham
And so his heart is torn • for only this: • today his friends were slain;
But still someday, I now foresee • the boys along St. Lawrence' banks
Shall sit together for his tale: • how once, in ancient days, he saw
The famous Marquis of Montcalm • before the ranks of fighting men
Until he turned at last • with sword in hand • and sunlight struck the blade
And then indeed those lads took heart • and cheered their noble general;
Just so, some day, my child, Montcalm • remembering the days of old
We'll sit together for your tale • and relish what is best in life;
Today there can be no respite • no check, no ceasing from lament
For here you lie in blood • within the earth • and all the land is lost.*

Just so she spoke, and gave a wail • Migeon de la Nativité;
But then they laid the earth and stone • and covered up the dead Montcalm
And all about his noble grave • a ceaseless lamentation rose:
Their crystal voices rose and fell • most mournfully, with pious breath
The sisters Ursuline • who made the vow • to be the brides of Christ
While officers and soldiers wept • with bold Canadian volunteers.
As when the dark November gale • will tear the surface of the lake
The lake which the Ojibwe name • the mightiest of inland seas
And thus the waves arise • beneath the stars • and open like the grave
Just so their hearts were torn • within that town • the fort of Frontenac.
But when their eyes could weep no more • they went to man the rumbling guns
And tend the many wounded soldiers • stricken with the deadly lead;
Just so they buried dark Montcalm • the captain of the King of France.

Thus once, in days gone by • with sturdy pride • they fought before Quebec
Amid the bitter musket smoke • upon the Plains of Abraham
When you beheld, immortal angel • watching in the winter sky
The double death in warlike strife • of red-haired Wolfe and dark Montcalm.