

On Friday, March 16, they had yet another meeting about military matters. And as had happened the last time they had gathered for such a purpose, they were interrupted by the Indians. But this time there was only one of them atop Watson's Hill, and unlike the previous two Indians, this man appeared to be without hesitation or fear, especially when he began to walk toward them "very boldly." The alarm was sounded, and still the Indian continued striding purposefully down Watson's Hill and across the brook. Once he'd climbed the path to Cole's Hill, he walked past the row of houses toward the rendezvous, where the women and children had been assembled in case of attack. It was clear that if no one restrained him, the Indian was going to walk right into the entrance of the rendezvous. Finally, some of the men stepped into the Indian's path and indicated that he was not to go in. Apparently enjoying the fuss he had created, the Indian "saluted" them and with great enthusiasm spoke the now famous words, "Welcome, Englishmen!"

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Mayflower*

CHAPTER SIX

In a Dark and Dismal Swamp



THEY COULD NOT HELP but stare in fascination. He was so different from themselves. For one thing, he towered over them. He stood before them "a tall straight man," having not labored at a loom or a cobbler's bench for much of his life. His hair was black, short in front and long in back, and his face was hairless. Interestingly, the Pilgrims made no mention of his skin color.

What impressed them the most was that he was "stark naked," with just a fringed strap of leather around his waist. When a cold gust of wind kicked up, one of the Pilgrims was moved to throw his coat over the Indian's bare shoulders.

He was armed with a bow and just two arrows, "the one headed, the other unheaded." The Pilgrims do not seem to have attached any special significance to them, but the arrows may have represented the alternatives of war and peace. In any event, they soon began to warm to their impetuous guest and offered him something to eat. He immediately requested beer.

With their supplies running short, they offered him some "strong water"—perhaps the aqua vitae they'd drunk during their first days on Cape Cod—as well as some biscuit, butter, cheese, pudding, and a slice of roasted duck, "all of which he liked well."

He introduced himself as Samoset—at least that was how the Pilgrims heard it—but he may actually have been telling them his English name, Somerset. He was not, he explained in broken English, from this part of New England. He was a sachem from Pemaquid Point in Maine, near Monhegan Island, a region frequented by English fishermen. It was from these fishermen, many of whom he named, that he'd

learned to speak English. Despite occasional trouble understanding him, the Pilgrims hung on Samoset's every word as he told them about their new home.

He explained that the harbor's name was Patuxet, and that just about every person who had once lived there had "died of an extraordinary plague." The supreme leader of the region was named Massasoit, who lived in a place called Pokanoket about forty miles to the southwest at the head of Narragansett Bay. Samoset said that the Nausets controlled the part of Cape Cod where the Pilgrims had stolen the corn. The Nausets were "ill affected toward the English" after Hunt had abducted twenty or so of their men back in 1614. He also said that there was another Indian back in Pokanoket named Squanto, who spoke even better English than he did.

With darkness approaching, the Pilgrims were ready to see their voluble guest on his way. As a practical matter, they had nowhere for him to sleep; in addition, they were not yet sure whether they could trust him. But Samoset made it clear he wanted to spend the night. Perhaps because they assumed he'd fear abduction and quickly leave, they offered to take him out to the *Mayflower*. Samoset cheerfully called their bluff and climbed into the shallop. Claiming that high winds and low tides prevented them from leaving shore, the Pilgrims finally allowed him to spend the night with Stephen Hopkins and his family. Samoset left the next morning, promising to return in a few days with some of Massasoit's men.

All that winter, Massasoit had watched and waited. From the Nausets he had learned of the Pilgrims' journey along the bay side of Cape Cod and their eventual arrival at Patuxet. His own warriors had kept him updated as to the progress of their various building projects, and despite their secret burials, he undoubtedly knew that many of the English had died over the winter.

For as long as anyone could remember, European fishermen and explorers had been visiting New England, but these people were different. First of all, there were women and children—probably the first

European women and children the Indians had ever seen. They were also behaving unusually. Instead of attempting to trade with the Indians, they kept to themselves and seemed much more interested in building a settlement. These English people were here to stay.

Massasoit was unsure of what to do next. A little over a year before, the sailors aboard an English vessel had killed a large number of his people without provocation. As a consequence, Massasoit had felt compelled to attack the explorer Thomas Dermer when he arrived the following summer with Squanto at his side, and most of Dermer's men had been killed in skirmishes on Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard. Squanto had been taken prisoner on the Vineyard, but now he was with Massasoit in Pokanoket. The former Patuxet resident had told him of his years in Europe, and once the *Mayflower* appeared at Provincetown Harbor and made its way to Plymouth, he had offered his services as an interpreter. But Massasoit was not yet sure whose side Squanto was on.

Over the winter, as the Pilgrims continued to bury their dead surreptitiously, Massasoit gathered together the region's powwows, or shamans, for a three-day meeting "in a dark and dismal swamp." Swamps were where the Indians went in time of war: they provided a natural shelter for the sick and old; they were also a highly spiritual landscape, where the unseen currents of the spirits intermingled with the hoots of owls.

Massasoit's first impulse was not to embrace the English but to curse them. Bradford later learned that the powwows had attempted to "execrate them with their conjurations." Powwows communed with the spirit world in an extremely physical manner, through what the English described as "horrible outcries, hollow bleatings, painful wrestlings; and smiting their own bodies." Massasoit's powwows were probably not the first and certainly not the last Native Americans to turn their magic on the English. To the north, at the mouth of the Merrimack River, lived Passaconaway, a sachem who was also a powwow—an unusual combination that endowed him with extraordinary powers. It was said he could "make the water burn, the rocks move, the trees dance, metamorphise himself into a flaming man." But not even

Passaconaway was able to injure the English. In 1660, he admitted to his people, "I was as much an enemy to the English at their first coming into these parts, as anyone whatsoever, and did try all ways and means possible to have destroyed them, at least to have prevented them sitting down here, but I could in no way effect it; . . . therefore I advise you never to contend with the English, nor make war with them." At some point, Massasoit's powwows appear to have made a similar recommendation.

The powwows were not the only ones who weighed in on the issue of what to do with the Pilgrims. There was also Squanto. Ever since the appearance of the *Mayflower*, the former captive had begun to work his own kind of magic on Massasoit, insisting that the worst thing he could do was to attack the Pilgrims. Not only did they have muskets and cannons; they possessed the seventeenth-century equivalent of a weapon of mass destruction: the plague. At some point, Squanto began to insist that the Pilgrims had the ability to unleash disease on their enemies. If Massasoit became an ally to the Pilgrims, he would suddenly be in a position to break the Narragansetts' stranglehold on the Pokanokets. "[E]nemies that were [now] too strong for him," Squanto promised, "would be constrained to bow to him."

It was a suggestion that played on Massasoit's worst fears. The last three years had been a nightmare of pain and loss; to revisit that experience was inconceivable. Reluctantly, Massasoit determined that he must "make friendship" with the English. To do so, he must have an interpreter, and Squanto—the only one fluent in both English and Massachusetts, the language of the Pokanoket—assumed that he was the man for the job. Though he'd been swayed by Squanto's advice, Massasoit was loath to place his faith in the former captive, whom he regarded as a conniving cultural mongrel with dubious motives. So he first sent Samoset, a visiting sachem with only a rudimentary command of English, to the Pilgrim settlement.

But now it was time for Massasoit to visit the English himself. He must turn to Squanto.

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On March 22, five days after his initial visit, Samoset returned to Plymouth with four other Indians, Squanto among them. The Patuxet Native spoke with an easy familiarity about places that now seemed a distant dream to the Pilgrims—besides spending time in Spain and Newfoundland, Squanto had lived in the Corn Hill section of London. The Indians had brought a few furs to trade, along with some fresh herring. But the real purpose of their visit was to inform the Pilgrims that Massasoit and his brother Quadequina were nearby. About an hour later, the sachem appeared on Watson's Hill with a large entourage of warriors.

The Pilgrims described him as "a very lusty [or strong] man, in his best years, an able body, grave of countenance, and spare of speech." Massasoit stood on the hill, his face painted dark red, his entire head glistening with bear grease. Draped around his neck was a wide necklace made of white shell beads and a long knife suspended from a string. His men's faces were also painted, "some black, some red, some yellow, and some white, some with crosses, and other antic works." Some of them had furs draped over their shoulders; others were naked. But every one of them possessed a stout bow and a quiver of arrows. These were unmistakably warriors: "all strong, tall, all men in appearance." Moreover, there were sixty of them.

For the Pilgrims, who could not have mustered more than twenty adult males and whose own military leader was not even five and a half feet tall, it must have been a most intimidating display of physical strength and power. Squanto ventured over to Watson's Hill and returned with the message that the Pilgrims should send someone to speak to Massasoit. Edward Winslow's wife, Elizabeth, was so sick that she would be dead in just two days, but he agreed to act as Governor Carver's messenger. Clad in armor and with a sword at his side, he went with Squanto to greet the sachem.

First he presented Massasoit and his brother with a pair of knives, some copper chains, some alcohol, and a few biscuits, "which were all willingly accepted." Then he delivered a brief speech. King James of England saluted the sachem "with words of love and peace," Winslow