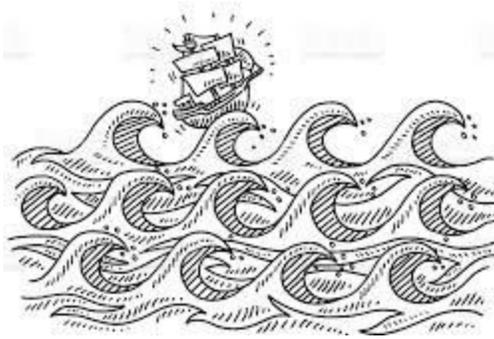


Ponderings of Prudence

Remembering August, 1620 *Life in a Lovely Land!*

I was but a speck on a little ship in the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, peering across the expanse of water between my past and future. Memories of the lovely land of Holland left behind brought bitter tears to my eyes. How I hated the crowded ship, reeking of its wine cargo, taking me and my family to a faraway place called the New World, a fearful place where it was said that fierce people dwelt and roasted the flesh of children!



“Nonsense, Prudence,” Father had said, “thy imagination is abounding again.” Then, seeing that I was not wholly assured, Father had taken me on his knee (even at my advanced age of eleven years) and spoken in a tone so confident that I took heart. “We can no longer stay in the safe refuge of Holland, dear one. Your sister is very young but you are old enough to know about our people.”

Father then told me the story of our family. Twelve years ago, he and my mother left their beloved England, leaving all but the tools of his ‘shoe making’ trade. They had fled the wrath of a King who would punish any worship of God other than through the official

Church of England. Many friends in prison and under persecution for their beliefs, her parents and other “separatists” slipped out of England to settle in the city of Leyden, Holland, where they could worship in their own way.

And there I was born. It was only a few years ago that the blessing of my little sister, Charity, came along. Holland was my only home, bright and beautiful beside the restless sea. Although my mother insisted on me wearing dull dresses and bonnets, I was happy in the Dutch sights of lace dresses, yellow scarves and colorful ribbons in braided hair.

Each morning, I woke to the ‘*tap-tap-tap*’ of Father’s cobbler mallet in his shop in the back room of our small house. Mother’s clear, soprano voice was flawless as she went about her work singing hymns of joy. We were a happy household.

But I knew of the poverty and hardships suffered by other Puritans families that went with us to Holland whose peaceful lives in the English countryside had not prepared them for the harsh realities of city life. They talked of sailing to a ‘New World’.

One night, I was huddled beneath the covers with Charity sweetly asleep beside me. I listened, as usual, to the gentle mummerings of my parents in the late evenings. But, that evening, what I heard would turn my world upside down.

What Happened To My Lovely World?

The tearful pleadings of my mother made me press my ear closer to the thin curtain that separated our bedroom space from the main room.

“But, James, we are safe here. This is our home, my mother’s voice sobbed. “Can not we stay a while longer?”

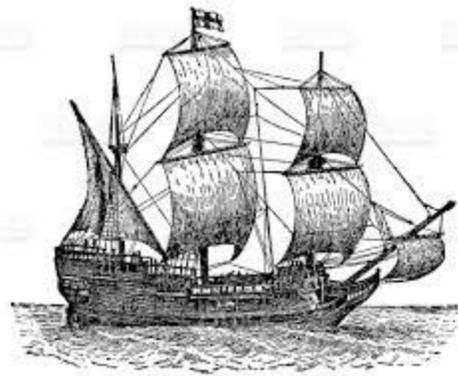
Father’s usually gentle voice was stern as he replied,

“Elizabeth, our daughters speak more Dutch than English. Soon, we must put them to work in the city if we stay. Dost thou want them to grow up to be the wives of the soldiers of Holland?”

Then Father spoke, his voice was fast and excited as he told of the plan to go to a new land called America with other English families and of men who would give them money and ships.

“The Mayflower is all ready to sail in England. Other Puritans here in Holland have prepared the ship Speedwell for a fee to take us to England and sail with them.”

“But, James”, mother cried, ‘tis not fair to thee. Have you worked all these seven long years and give all you make to pay these men?”



“It is time, Elizabeth. ‘Tis the only way we can be truly free to worship in our own.

Prepare thyself and thy children to leave within the week, for timing is everything. We must reach the New World before the winter.”

Hearing the truth - the safe, familiar fabric of my childhood began unraveling and was not ever to be mended again.

Leaving All Behind

In the days that followed, I no longer woke to hear the house filled with mother’s songs.

One morning, mother was packing all that could fit in one small trunk. I knew that it was

real and we were leaving the only life I had ever known. And what was ahead was a mystery. Father packed his tools and we shut the door behind us.

We thought the Speedwell was a good ship. In a short time, we arrived in England. The dock was bustling with sailors shouting and loading cargo, people sadly saying good-byes, and crowds of passengers shoving to board the ships.

We were finally on board. But it was a bad beginning. The Speedwell was cracked.

Water was leaking into the ship. We had to return and pack together on the one ship, Mayflower. The wind filled the great white sails and again we were leaving England on our way to that New World.

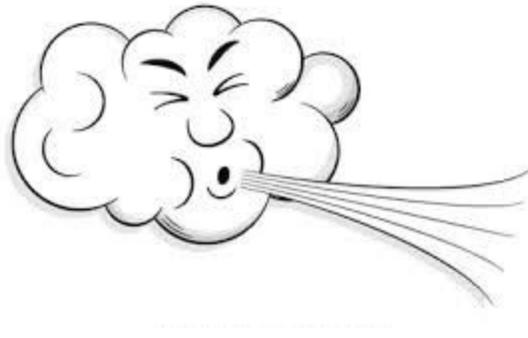
Father's eyes were shining with excitement, mother was smiling bravely, and I chased Chastity around as she chattered endlessly and worried mother by darting in and out of the ladies skirts. One hundred and two people crowded on the small ship; 34 children, 30 sailors, 2 dogs, one cat, and below were pigs, chickens, and goats.

Aboard were people seeking religious tolerance, families wanting a better life for their children, adventurers seeking to make their fortunes, and even people fleeing a bad past for a better future. There were tailors, silk weavers, printers, wool combers, blacksmiths, physicians, hatters, linen weavers and carpenters. There were servants, shopkeepers and merchants - all willing to risk their lives for a chance for a new life in a New World.

Father encouraged the Pilgrims saying, "we are not like other men, whom small things can discourage or small discontents cause to wish themselves to stay at home." My soul took heart at these words as Father embraced mother, Chastity and me. I was caught up in the same sense of adventure when the wind loosened my bonnet and my hair was lifted with the breezes. But then, I had no idea of the terrible course this adventure would take us through.

Homesick, Seasick, and Really Sick

I was seasick from the first day on the ship as it rocked eternally, up and down, up and down, over the rolling waves. My stomach churned and I could only find relief from the crowds and foul smelling quarters below by standing on the bow of the ship to catch some precious breeze. There were no beds to sleep on our middle deck quarters, no extra water for bathing or for washing clothes.



High winds tossed the ship about and icy water seeped into the ship. We were all soaked and many became ill. We huddled together and lit fires in cooking pots to stay warm. Meals were cold, and mainly biscuits, salted or dried beef, oatmeal, and sometimes, cheese.

The lower deck was all crammed with tools and supplies, barrels of flour, grain, and seeds' household goods, fishing gear and gunpowder for our start in the New World. I hated the sailors. Most of them cursed and made fun of my prim clothes, which were not really so prim after three weeks filthy having been worn night and day.

When I leaned over the side to be sick, a sailor would mock me with taunts like, "hey, there goes another 'glib-puke stocking'! It was just their way, but my sheltered life was shocked by their crudeness.

"Now, Prudence," mother would say, "you must treat all God's creatures with kindness." But I was sure that God did not mean the sailors aboard the Mayflower, so I would stick my tongue out at them, which would set off roars of laughter. There was one dear old

man, the cook, a stout and not too clean fellow called Mr. Bulbous because of his oversized nose.

“How art thou?” I would say upon meeting him and curtsy politely. His nose would turn red from blushing, being unaccustomed to the niceties of gentler folk. He would always have a piece of sweet for me (which, I would check carefully, for the ship abounded with bugs, after a few weeks out.)

“Don’t pay them no mind, missy,” he would apologize for his crew mates, “they don’t know no better. This ship ain’t never had nothin’ but wine and cloth; never carried no ladies and kids.”



Six weeks into the journey, the food situation got worse. The cheese got moldy from the constant dampness and the butter burned sour and even the drinking water became nasty. We had nothing but the beef or fish and hard, dry, moldy, bug infested biscuits. And, with the drinking water being bad, everyone had to drink beer for liquid, which was a horror to my mother.

The women were busy caring for the sick and I was busy keeping an eye on Chastity, who was a constant worry to my mother that she would get sick or lost.

I Meet a Friend

Because there was so little to do (there was no room to bring our toys from home) passing the time for children was a bore. Mostly, we had to stay in our second deck

cramped quarters. But, some days, when it was warm and sunny, and the sea was calm, we could come out on the top deck and play.



The kids could run a little or play with the dogs or cat. Mr William Brewster had brought some grown-up books along and I was a good reader. I think I could never have endured the boredom, were it not for meeting my dear best friend, Merry, a girl with twinkling blue eyes. She was three years older than I with locks of yellow hair that would never stay properly beneath her bonnet. Mother frowned at her way, but I liked her and each day looked forward to the times we could sneak away and she would tell me tales of the people on the ship. She knew everything and told all with relish.

About the time the Billington boys, John and Francis, set fire to a piece of rope and they happened to be close to the gunpowder and they almost blew up the ship.

And the time that little baby boy was born, right out at sea and in between two worlds with no country of her own. They named him Oceanus.

One day, when we met to be carefree and happy, Merry was sad and her eyes were red from crying. I had never seen her downcast. "Prudence", she said, "the doctors say that Will Butten has died from the "ships-fever".

I had seen them whispering and standing close together. I held Merry as she wept. And now I knew he was her first boyfriend. They buried him at sea and sang hymns.

I vowed after that I would be a dutiful daughter and never cause my parents to grieve. Then something happened that made the sailors and the passengers become friends but it was at the risk of all our lives that it came about.

Bad Times Get Worse

The first half of the trip was safe enough, though increasingly uncomfortable, but then, strong winds began blowing. The cramped quarters below the deck where we slept, only five feet tall, were creaking and groaning. The waves grew huge and frightening, tossing and rolling the ship and everything in it. Then it got deathly quiet and we were preparing to go back to sleep when the storm broke with all its fury. In the midst of the roar of thunder and waves crashing against the side of the ship. There was a loud crack, and my heart sank as father recognized the nature of the sound.



The main supporting beam of the ship had cracked and crashed to the deck leaving the deck a gaping hole. The ocean poured in on everyone, drenching food and supplies and leaving them in several feet of standing water in the quarters below deck. We could have all died but father and his friend had brought a big iron screw from Holland to help build houses in the new land. They and the sailors worked together to brace the beam in place and the Mayflower sailed on.

After that, there was new respect and cooperation. But things were really miserable now. The women took heart and sang songs and dried out the food and clothes. We

were sixty days out and no land in sight. We heard that we had been blown far off our original landing site in Virginia. We began to wonder if we would ever see land again.

Land Ahoy!

Then, a few days later we heard a great cry from the sailor in the 'crow's nest high atop a mast. "Land, ho!" he called out. In November, 1620, the Mayflower dropped anchor off the tip of the ocean coast. But no one cared that we landed off course. We were so happy to be so near to feeling land under our feet again.

The Mayflower Compact

While we gathered our possessions, anxious to leave the filth of the Mayflower, the leaders of our group met to make a set of laws to govern their life in the New World. This agreement was signed by every man on the ship and all promised to obey. They elected John Carver as our first governor.



We were very disappointed when we had to stay on the ship. Governor Carver sent Captain Miles Standish and others to explore the coast for our safe departure from the Mayflower. They found good water for drinking and evergreen trees. We were anxious to go to shore. But the leaders decided to move further up into the inland bay at Plymouth. All the children wailed and cried to get off the boat.

It took another month to find the perfect place to embark for the settlement. Plymouth was safe, had good land, and a good harbor for ships. It had a high hill where a fort could be built for protection. Finally, in December, the Pilgrims and friends went ashore. Our leaders were right. This was our home in the New World!

Work To Be Done and Winter Coming

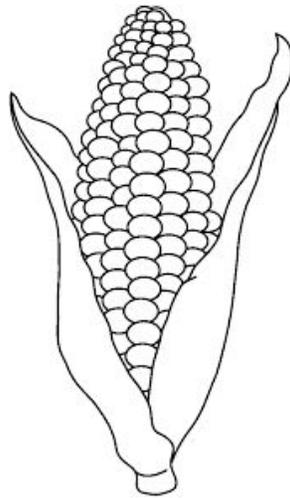
We all had to continue to sleep in the Mayflower while houses were being built. First, the men built a long common house for a meeting hall for everyone to keep warm. The first winter was hard and we could not grow crops. By the end of the winter, one-half of the people died. Many were weak and discouraged. One of the lost was my mother, sick from the trip, the cold, and no food. We grieved with the other families of lost ones. I dreamed of the red, yellow and orange tulips of Holland and wished we had never left. Now, I had to grow up fast, to care for Father and Chastity.

Springtime, Hope, and a Man Named Squanto

The earth finally turned green, the sun was warm and flowers bloomed with new life. Six houses were built. One morning, a man of the New World walked into the village. The men grabbed their guns, but the strange man said in English, "I am Samoset". Samoset belonged to the Wampanoag tribe. He brought his Chief, Massasoit, to meet the Pilgrim leaders. He and Governor Carter made a peace treaty to help each other, share the land and live together.



And then Samoset brought his friend, the man named Squanto. Squanto had lived in England and spoke English. We children were all in awe of this strange man that spoke our language. He was kind and became the essential ingredient in our survival in the new land. Our crops we had brought from England did not grow in the sandy soil. Squanto showed us how to plant a new crop - corn, by dropping the corn seed in a hole and adding a fish to make it grow. And grew, it did! Squanto showed us how to grind corn flour, how to bake it, and even how to 'pop' it.



He taught the Pilgrims how to hunt with a bow and arrow and how to find the berries and nuts in the woods that were safe to eat. He showed how to dig for clams, where to catch lobster and the best places on the coastline to fish for cod, trout, and eels. Squanto came to live with us at Plymouth Colony.

That spring when Captain Jones sailed back to England on the Mayflower to bring other colonists back. He knew that because of Squanto, the colony would be all right. And in that spring and summer, Squanto worked with the Pilgrims in the fields. By the autumn of 1621, the fields were ripe for a bountiful harvest that would be stored up for the next winter.

The new Governor Bradford, called everyone together.

"God had been good to us. He has sent us friends and a bountiful harvest.

Let us give thanks to God for His Mercy."

The First Thanksgiving

Everyone began to prepare for a big feast. The men went into the forest to hunt wild turkeys. The boys fished for trout in the cool clear streams. The children dug for clams, squishing their feet in the cool sand of the beach. Others gathered berries, nuts, or firewood. The women worked for days in the kitchens to prepare the special food.

Squanto led Chief Massasoit, Samoset and 90 Wampanoag braves to Plymouth Bay.

The Indians brought five deer to the feast. What a celebration it was. The Pilgrims wore their finest clothes. Food was set out. Cornbread, cranberry, turkey, pumpkins clams, eels, peas, squash and fish. What fun we had for three days, playing games, and having contests, dances, and races.

Times would be hard again in this New World. More people would come from Europe. Cultures would clash. America would be in conflicts. The future was uncertain. But for now, for this one brief gathering, we were happy and hopeful. I was discovering that life is all one big adventure! THE END

