



*Extract from:*

**“EXCUSE ME, SIRE?  
BE THIS THE NEW WORLD?”**

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*Previous publications: The Breaking Sword. - The Battle for Badger's Wood. - Fly, bird! Fly!*

*Malvern between the Wars. - Gnor Bodi! - The Arboretum Story.*

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by Frederick Covins

Charlie grinned happily and glanced around him; the sea, blue and sunlit sparkled and was clear of all life save the large three-masted galleon bearing down on him.

Charlie yawned and stretched as his gaze continued around the horizon. He stopped, stared into the empty skyline as his brain furiously back-pedalled. “Full sail?” he muttered to himself, “Three masts?” He shook his head to clear the cobwebs and laughed aloud at his imagination. He turned and the laugh froze on his lips. Charlie blinked his eyes rapidly, but the image remained. A large, three-masted galleon, a small crested wake billowing from either side of its bow bore down upon him. Small figures could be seen scurrying about the deck; some were even waving to him. Charlie glanced down into the well of the boat at the empty beer cans. “Wow!” he muttered disbelievingly.

As if frozen he watched the galleon draw closer until it was practically alongside. A rope hissed through the air and landed with a clatter on the cabin roof. The noise brought him out of his trance and he automatically made the rope fast. He stared up at the row of bearded, excited faces lining the deck above. From the confusion of voices and gesticulations, Charlie gathered they wanted him to come aboard.

“Oh, brother”, he muttered to himself, “this is a livin’ doll of a drunk!”

Deciding that the only one way to enjoy the experience was to surrender to it, Charlie clambered up the rope ladder thrown over the side and

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was practically hauled aboard by so many willing hands he nearly panicked and vowed to give up alcohol for life. Once on deck he was surrounded by wildly excited, strangely garbed men all talking at once. Questions pounded his ears from every side in a tongue that was both strange and yet familiar.

“Stay, shipmates!” boomed an authoritarian voice and the men fell silent and parted to allow the impressive figure of Richard Warren to step forward. He held out his hand to Charlie who took it in awe.

“I be Richard Warren. Captain of this venture, sire. Might we enquire whence thee came?”

A younger member of the crew, unable to contain himself, blurted, “Be thee an Indian?” Another seaman joined in, “Aye, Master Richard, ‘e be a savage, thee can see that. P’raps ‘e don’t understand English.”

Charlie stared in sheer disbelief, “Are you nuts or something?”

The crew stepped back a pace at Charlie’s voice.

Charlie stared around him at the anxious faces, “What is this? It’s an advertising stunt, that’s it, it is, isn’t it?”

Richard Warren frowned, “Thee speaks with a strange tongue, brother. Yet is not unlike our English.”

“Dammit!” blurted Charlie; “It is English. Look, a joke’s a joke, Ok? But what is it with the costume bit and all the thees and thous, and where the hell are you from?”

The crew stared with deep suspicion. One burly seaman stepped forward, “Master Richard, sir” he said, “Do thee think this savage be better chained in the hold?”

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Charlie glared at him and stepped up close, “Just try it, buster and I’ll splice your mainbrace.”

The crew murmured their disquiet at this aggression, but Richard stayed their angry moves with a hand gesture, “Enough, Simon” he said, “Let the stranger be. Stranger, we be from New Britain and mean no harm. We seek the New World of our ancestors to take up our grants and live peaceably. How say you now?”

Charlie shook his head then stared hard at each earnest face around him, “This isn’t an advertising stunt?”

Richard shrugged his broad shoulders, “Thee speaks of strange things, sire.”

“It’s not a joke?”

“We are not here for jest, sire.”

“You are from England?”

“Nay, sire. From New Britain. Not since the year of our Lord, sixteen-twenty did our ancestors leave England.”

“New Britain isn’t England?”

“Nay, sire. New Britain island. Our ancestors left England in this vessel and were wrecked on an island we call New Britain, from whence we came.”

Charlie didn’t believe what he was beginning to think. He studied closely the faces around him; each was serious and sincere. He stared back at the big man.

“Where is New Britain Island?” he asked finally.

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Richard Warren turned and pointed straight south and west, "Twenty-three days hence, due south by southeast."

Charlie swallowed hard. His thoughts had begun to veer all over the place. Again he rejected what his mind was hammering inside his skull.

"I suppose you've never heard of a ship called The Mayflower?"

Charlie nearly fainted when the faces around him lit up with delighted surprise.

"The Mayflower!" exclaimed Richard, "Lord be praised we have, sire. Why she were sister ship to this one, left Portsmouth on the same day, sire. Hast thou news of her? I beg thee, sire, tell us what became of her?"

The eager faces around him disturbed Charlie more than he had ever thought possible.

Charlie shook his head again, "Either I'm nuts or you are. What about the Speedwell, ever hear of that ship?"

"Aye, sire" chorused several voices.

Richard stared in awe, "'tis true The Speedwell embarked with our ancestors, but she were dismasted and returned to Plymouth. How know you of these things?"

Dazedly, Charlie closed his eyes in a vain attempt to make this hallucination go away.

"How many are you?" he asked resignedly.

Richard glanced proudly around at his crew, "Twenty good men and true and ten womenfolk of sturdy stock."

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Charlie's eyes popped open involuntarily, "Ten women! On this journey?"

For a moment, Richard looked abashed, "Aye, sire. We... we had no way of staying them. Our gentlefolk have a mind to be stubborn when they will."

Charlie failed to suppress a grin at Richard's embarrassment, "Yeah, well at least some things haven't changed."

Slowly the newshound in Charlie was beginning to assert itself and his fingers twitched for a telephone.

"Look" he said finally, "I'm probably the dumbest-assed reporter in the world right now, but I'll make it as brief..." he paused, took a deep breath and glanced up at the sky, "Dear God" he said almost to himself, "Don't let this be a joke." The seamen involuntarily doffed their hats when God's name was invoked and Charlie almost groaned aloud. "Captain, the Mayflower reached here in November of sixteen-twenty. Your ancestors pioneered this region and their ancestors are still here... Oh God! You're going to be a wow with The Descendants of the Mayflower." Charlie pointed landward, "Over there are the towns and cities of Cape Cod, Plymouth and Boston, a mite different from what you might expect, but I will take you there in a moment. First I must prepare them for your arrival and I would like to meet the ladies, okay?"

Richard Warren listened, like the others, with profound interest and stared out to where Charlie had pointed in awe.

Immediately Charlie finished speaking the questions fell thick and fast.

"Plymouth?"

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“Boston?”

“Is that England, sire?”

“Do thee all dress like that?”

“Be that the New World?”

“Descendants of the Mayflower, sire?”

“Be there savages?”

“Will we be welcome?”

“Our ancestors, sire?”

“Our womenfolk could not meet thee like that, sire.”

Richard Warren’s voice boomed out to stay the questions, “Stay brothers. Give the stranger a chance to give thee good answer. Sire, thee hast a name?”

“Oh, yeah, sorry. Charles Davenport at your service.”

Richard nodded gratefully, “Well, Master Davenport, methinks our women folk would consider thee well met, but first hast thee any other garments?”

Charlie glanced down at his shorts and rope-soled sandals and grinned, “Yeah, well I guess this outfit would appear a mite informal. I’ve some other clothes in the tri.”

“Tri, sire?”

“Er... trimaran... boat.”

“Then Simon will fetch these for thee.”

Richard signalled to the burly seaman who disappeared swiftly over the side, returning in a few moments clutching a sweater and slacks and

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wearing a dumbstruck expression. He handed the clothes to Charlie with a wary gesture, “‘Tis a strange craft, sire. The wood and metal is of a strange feel.”

Charlie grinned, “It’s neither, it’s fibreglass and alloy.”

The puzzled faces made him shake his head, “Never mind, you’ll understand eventually.” His own thoughts chaotic, he found time to wonder if they ever would. Acutely aware of his fascinated audience, Charlie pulled on the sweater and slacks, smugly revelling in the concerted gasp as he zipped up the trousers.

“That’s better”, he said, “Now, how about the ladies?”

Solemnly, Richard nodded to one of the crew who opened the foc’sle door.

One by one, in sweeping ankle-length dresses, the ten ladies stepped out as if from the pages of history.

Richard Warren smiled at Charlie’s open-mouthed expression and indicated for the ladies to approach.

One by one they advanced, were introduced, curtsied and retired. To Charlie’s eyes they were introduced in order of age from the slightly forbidding matron, Mistress Humility Fuller of about forty years to the innocently beautiful Mistress Elizabeth Mortimer of about eighteen years.

Richard smiled proudly at his womenfolk as he spoke to Charlie. “A comely gathering, thinkest thou Master Davenport?”

With an effort, Charlie shut his gaping mouth and swallowed hard, “Comely indeed, Captain.” He turned to the ladies and feeling somewhat

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foolish and pompous said, "I welcome you to these shores on behalf of the people of America. I think you will add much to the beauty of our land."

At this the men cheered and the women flushed and stared fixedly at the deck, with the one exception of, Mistress Humility Fuller who half smiled and stepped forward.

"Thee hast a pretty tongue, sire and we thank thee. Of more importance is shall we be allowed to till our land in peace?"

Charlie's mind did a somersault, "Er... er... YOUR land, Mistress Fuller?"

Richard intervened, "Aye, Master Davenport. The land granted to our ancestors and to us."

Charlie swallowed hard, "You... er... you wouldn't happen to have any documents regarding this... er... your land, would you?"

Richard nodded eagerly, "Aye, we have, sire. The land patents granted in the name of John Whincob to occupy, improve and till all lands between the rivers Merrimack and Kenebeor."

Charlie went white, he clapped a hand to his forehead and clutched at the deck rail for support with the other.

"Oh my giddy aunt!" he gasped, to the distress of his audience, "Great sufferin' catfish!"

Richard grabbed his arm in alarm, "Master Davenport, hast thou been seized?"

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Weakly, Charlie shook his head and stood erect, “No, no, it’s alright, Captain. It’s just that your land grants are going to be like dropping a bomb on America.”

“A... a bomb? Master Davenport. Thee speaks strangely of our grants.”

Charlie sobered suddenly and stared hard at Richard Warren, “You... you don’t know what a bomb is, do you?”

“No, sire.”

Charlie felt the pressure of the world that he knew so well become intolerable. He looked with new eyes at the concerned faces around him. “It may be that you will wish that you had never started this journey, my friends.”

Richard shook his head vigorously, “Nay, Master Davenport. This is our destiny. We must face it with courage and God’s guidance.”

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16 Chapters

Epilogue

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