Which Grace

The Mallard Curse

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STORIES

The Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Collected Mallard Papers, Series I: States of Grace

Produced in Sydney, Australia by grace@mayflet.com [web: mayflet.com]

Loose papers. Roughly by date: 1600 to 1700. Whoever reads after me, be it on your head. V.V.

1540: Fox and duck

From the Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

In a far forest lived a proud Fox, swift and clever, who scorned all others for their weaknesses. Near the Fox's den dwelt a quiet Duck, steady and watchful, who spoke little but observed much. The Fox, full of pride, mocked the Duck for her silence and stillness, calling her dull and unworthy of respect.

One day, the Duck, weary of the Fox's arrogance, cast a spell upon him with words sharp as thorns: "May your steps falter and your mind grow clouded, as shadows twist your bright day into endless night. May your voice be lost to the wind, and your name forgotten in the forest's gloom."

From that day forth, the Fox found himself stumbling in the dark, confused by his own thoughts, and abandoned by all who once admired his cunning. But the Duck, steady and true, flew freely and peacefully through the sunlit woods, ever watchful and untroubled.

1610: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

We have at last secured our rights in perpetuum to the lands and titles once granted unto us by the late sovereign, Queen Elizabeth, in recognition of our family's long and steadfast favour. Now our new monarch, King James, hath confirmed this agreement with his royal hand and hath graciously bestowed upon our house a new and honourable title.

From this day forth, we are to be known as the Earl of New England. It is a mark of great distinction and charge alike, for with it comes the power and wealth to establish and raise a township in those far colonies across the Atlantic, a venture upon which much hope and fortune rest.

This honour doth bind our family's name to the new world, and with God's providence, our lineage shall flourish there as it has in England.

The Charter of Creation and Ennoblement

James, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c., To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting.

Whereas our faithful and loving subject, our loyal Duke, hath demonstrated great service unto us and our Crown, and hath sought to further the honour of our realm and the advancement of our subjects in the newly discovered lands beyond the seas, We do hereby, of our especial grace, certain knowledge and mere motion, grant, create, and declare him Earl of New England, with all dignities, privileges and honours appertaining thereto.

Moreover, We do grant unto our said Earl the full, free, and absolute right, title, and interest in perpetuity to all lands and territories thus bestowed upon him within the bounds of New England, to hold, occupy, and govern as a lord paramount under Our Crown, with full power and authority to raise a township and establish settlements therein for the furtherance of Our realm and the profit of Our subjects.

To this end, We do further grant unto Our said Earl the sum of one million pounds sterling, to be paid and bestowed to him for the support of this noble undertaking.

And for the defence, order, and security of said plantation and township, We do command and empower Our said Earl to levy and maintain a gallant force of men, to be raised and equipped at Our charge, sufficient in number and armament to defend Our interests and maintain the peace against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

In witness whereof, We have caused these Our Letters Patents to be made patents, witnessed Ourself at Westminster, this tenth day of April, in the eighth year of Our reign.

By His Majesty's command,

1612: Land surveyor's report

Estate papers of the Duke of Mallard

The site lies remote, some several weeks' sail from the coast of England, ensuring isolation from current centres of colonial

establishment and attendant distractions. This seclusion may prove beneficial, allowing a settlement free from immediate competition or discord.

Strategically placed upon an elevated rise overlooking the River, the land commands a view of the adjacent bay, where the waterway runs wide and deep. This affords easy access for Your Grace's ships, both for trade and supply, and benefits any future shipping enterprise. The natural harbour is well sheltered and ample to receive several vessels, suitable not only for fishing and transport but for expansion as maritime activity grows.

At present, no neighbouring settlements have fully established near this advance post, rendering the land a blank slate ripe for development. Its diversity of terrain—rolling fields, rich marshes, and plentiful forest—offers abundant resources for habitation, cultivation, and commerce. The clearing of land will be demanding, but preliminary inspection shows fertile soil attentive to grain, maize, and pasturage.

There is considerable room for growth. The acreage is extensive, fully supporting an expansion of homesteads, farmland, and communal structures. A township here could form the nucleus of Your Grace's colonial ambitions, laying down foundations secure both economically and strategically.

Moreover, the relative distance from England promises the exercise of direct governance and influence under Your Grace's oversight, unchallenged by rival claimants or obstructive colonists.

Lefame holds great promise for profitable settlement. It boasts natural advantages for maritime enterprise, room to accommodate an industrious and loyal populace, and strategic isolation which will serve Your Grace well, securing both tangible return and prestigious extension of Your Estates in this New World.

1615: Duke of Mallard

Private Papers (suppressed)

It behoveth me, in these dark days of England's reckoning, to confess a matter both grave and pressing—one that sitteth heavy upon my soul and governeth much of my intent. That is the plague of madness which hath taken residence within mine own family, a malady most troublesome, and yet a truth which I may neither deny nor evade.

As Robert Burton hath well expounded in his *"Anatomy of Melancholy"*, the mind doth lie under many a cruel captivity—fear, sorrow, folly—and indeed madness itself can overwhelm even the strongest constitution. Yet what comfort is there in passion or pity

when the very presence of such affliction doth unsettle the house and endanger the name?

It is no Christian love to bind the afflicted to our midst, causing them, ourselves, and our household great disquiet. Truly, the saints command charity and care, but also prudence; for to preserve the health of the whole, some must bear the burden apart.

Herein lieth the wisdom—and the necessity—of consignment: to send forth these troubled kin, mad though they be, unto Lefame in the wilds of New England, where the distant shore may offer peace to their restless minds and safety for our family's dignity. Though nature hath made them inconvenient, blood binds still, and family is ever better than strangers. Therein shall they labor, their madness turned to productive toil, helping to found a settlement under my own favour and name.

This is no act of cruelty but of strategy profound and Christian care. By their exile, the family's honour and mine own estate remain untarnished; by their presence in Lefame, a colony is strengthened with those who carry my blood, loyal still in the bonds of kinship. The solitude of the New World doth suit those whose spirits cannot dwell comfortably with the courtly order; there, they may find a measure of peace, and in their labour, usefulness.

Though others may shun or condemn this course, I do know that the estate of a Duke is not lightly managed, nor its reputation entrusted to folly or sentiment alone. I take counsel from scripture and reason alike —to separate the afflicted is to preserve the whole, to care for kin is to command all.

Thus shall I entrust these errant minds to the wilderness, certain that distance will bring order and productivity, and that Lefame shall prosper with the seed of my house, mad or not. This judgement calls for firmness blended with mercy, and I resolve to keep both in steadfast hand.

For what greater folly than to bind a firebrand to the walls of one's own halls, risking all for the sake of weakness? Far better to plant that flame where it may warm and give light than where it will consume and destroy.

1617: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

It is enough we are known as Earl of New England yet we do not speak of it except to ourself. Our ancient ducal primogeniture is pure, unruffled by the madness that pervades younger families who trifle

with lesser titles. We are aloft of such diminutions; we absolve ourselves from such mortifications. Our bloodline is untouched by the folly that so corrupts the weaker houses, whose names are dragged in the mud of scandal and base ambition. Such petty griefs befit not our exalted station nor the dignity of our house.

It was ever our charge, then, to keep these ignoble afflictions at bay: to cast out those elements of madness and inconvenience that threaten the solemn honour we have inherited. This colony—New England—is not merely a place of settlement but a bastion against such ruin. Therein shall be contained those whom we deem unfit by reason or will, leaving the pure line unbroken and free from shame.

Let others wield their titles that are weaker in blood or in purpose. We hold fast to what is ours by right divine, and with this new title and domain, we raise our name beyond the reach of the common scourge. Thus fortified, our house shall endure through all ages, unblemished and supreme.

1617: Duke of Mallard

Estate Papers (released posthumously)

It occurreth to me, with some satisfaction and due reflection, that Lefame's value extendeth far beyond mere settlement or sanctuary for the mentally afflicted of my own house. The port there, situated upon LeDuc Hill, provideth a tidemark of great consequence for my expanding estate and the annual circuit of my shipping.

Consider well: this harbour, deep and sheltered, ne'er choked with rival craft, shall form a vital waypoint on my transatlantic route. From England's shores to my distant holdings, the ships bearing the fruits of my lands and the tithes of my tenants shall find a convenient anchorage here. A port of convenience such as this lesseneth the burden and risk of longer passages to crowded ports swarming with those who seek to challenge me—be they merchants or governors.

The commerce to be gathered in Lefame, my own projection of power and property, shall increase the flow of wealth and goods directly under my command. Each vessel dispatched or returned addeth weight to my coffers, while the presence of my kin and followers, mad though some may be, giveth a familiar security to the place. All this doth beseem the station and ambition of a Duke such as I, who doth extend dominion and draw profit from realms afar.

For what is a noble estate if not marked by ports from which riches sail and return? I shall receive tithes, taxes, and produce with greater ease at Lefame than at the distant edges of my holdings. Its singular

position maketh it a key node in the net of my possessions, freeing me from dependence on strangers or rivals, and securing mine own legacy.

In sum, Lefame serveth not merely as refuge for troublesome blood, but as a fulcrum of my strategic and mercantile will. Therein lie opportunity and profit both; none so fit for a Duke as I to grasp it.

Thus, with shrewd eyes to the horizon and purse strings tight, I set my hand to the enterprise, confident that this port, humble now, shall grow to rival those of old England in its bounty and benefit to my noble line.

1618: Surveyor's report

Estate papers of the Duke of Mallard

I have the honour to present this report concerning the township of Lefame, settled upon the lands known as LeDuc Hill in the area now called Mallard within your New England Bay. Though recent in establishment, the progress is most promising and the costs have been judiciously kept low for the profit of Your Grace's estate.

At present, twenty-five houses of timber and clapboard stand upon the hill, erected swiftly. The structures are modest yet stoutly built, suitable to the temperate climate and abundant local timber. These homes were assembled at a fraction of the cost typical of English manors.

The township's location upon the elevated knoll, overlooking the Mallard River and the adjoining marshes, affords excellent defence and fertile ground for crops. Near its centre, a meeting house of timber stands ready for town affairs and worship, forming the nucleus of this growing society.

Past expenditures have been circumscribed to essential provisions and material, sparing Your Grace much initial outlay. The land's fertility promises good yield of corn, barley, and rye, to be used both for sustenance and trade. The river's proximity enables fishing and transport, widening the potential for commerce beyond simple survival.

It is expected, with the continued entrusting of careful settlers and prudent management, that Lefame shall generate a steady income for Your Grace through land rents and produce sales. Additionally, timber and salt marsh resources promise further value. The neighbouring native population, though diminished, maintains some trade relations which may be strengthened for mutual benefit.

1620: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

The town doth now stand complete—fifty stout houses, a town hall of timber and stone, a chapel consecrated for worship, storehouses filled with provisions, and stables stocked for horses and draft beasts. The builders have been dismissed, their labours ended, and the settlement established upon firm foundations.

Having thus seen this enterprise fulfilled to the very beam and nail, I have resolved upon a course heretofore unspoken, though oft in my more private hours conceived with righteous clarity. This township—remote and apart from England's eyes—shall become a place of exile for those troublesome women of our family whose minds trouble the peace of our house. They shall be sent forthwith, accompanied by their family servants and supplied with what necessities we deem fit, though irregularly so.

In truth, this settlement shall become an asylum of sorts, where such inconvenient souls—whom I judge to be mad or ungovernable—may be kept distant yet sustained. Here they shall live apart from the salons and the court, their days marked not by fashion or folly but by the rugged demands of this far land.

It is a stern decree, but a necessary one for the good order and honour of our line. Thus this town, born of ambition and enterprise, shall serve also as a refuge and a prison, binding those who threaten our family's dignity away where England's judgment cannot reach.

1620: Mallards fly

Saw our wild ducks circle eastward; their calls sharp, as though they too protest what men ignore.

Beneath the hearthstone, newly set stitches—one for each waxing moon, two in pale for each waning. A pattern not for fashion but for keeping time. May it remain unread save by eyes who value woman's labour.

1620: Cassandra Purslane, 34th Duchess

Toil and trouble, rich in strife;
T'is not the aim of a Lady's life—
Nay, rise beyond this narrow frame,
To play at freedom's distant game.

1620: The Purslane issue

That wretched woman, my own mother, doth consume the hours in childish pursuits fit only for commoners and fools. No sooner has the morning sun cast its light than she is in the garden, murmuring to herbs and flowers as if she conferred with the very devil himself. Her hands brew strange potions in the kitchen, and her lips utter incantations more suited to witches than to nobility. This folly is compounded by her obsession with books—dangerous tomes that dwell in matters beyond a woman's proper sphere of understanding, peeling back mysteries of the natural world as though she were some learned scholar.

Yet, to brand her openly a witch, as common rabble and ignorant clergy might do, would be ruin of our family's great name. The scandal such a charge would bring upon our noble house is unthinkable. I am constrained by blood and station to veil the truth from the world, though it is clear enough to me: she dabbles in arts forbidden and walks close to the darkened path. Better, therefore, that she be removed quietly, far from these stately halls and eyes that might perchance snatch scandal where none ought be found.

Lefame in New England, that distant wild, is suited well to her banishment. There she may toil amidst weeds and wilderness, ceasing to pollute the dignity of our home. I grudge her no sorrow in this exile; her absence lightens my peace and frees my thoughts to matters worthy of a Duke.

This is no mere act of cruelty, but wisdom. The estate must be preserved, the name kept pure. Madness or witchcraft, the family must be kept intact, but the nuisance removed—out of sight and thus out of mind.

So be it, that my mother shall be sent to Lefame, where the colony may receive her as kindly as the land and sea permit, yet none here shall speak of her strange arts. I rest assured that the distance will temper her influence and shield us all.

1621: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

In the year since the founding of the township, I have dispatched thirty souls thither—men and women alike—all chosen for their unsuitability to courtly life or the proper order of our family. Some among them are truly mad, their minds unhinged as witnessed by erratic speech or strange customs; others are merely inconvenient, women whose desires or wills clashed too sharply with ours. There are aged matrons past bearing and usefulness, whose infirmities make them

burdensome at home. A few carry whispers of witchery, whether grounded or imagined, enough to brand them with suspicion. Many simply bear the heavy weight of disdain, disliked for reasons both trivial and profound—debts unpaid, scandal, or obstinate temperament.

None shall return unchallenged nor unobserved. Their exile is both mercy and sentence, a place to contain disorder and preserve the family's honour from ruin. Blandy servants accompany them, though supplies and comfort come at my discretion and irregularly, that they learn the burden of solitude and dependence.

This measure is necessary. The township I have founded is no mere settlement, but a holding for those who threaten our peace and prosperity. Thus they endure, cast far and wide upon the wilderness, a living testament to my resolve and the proper governance of house and kin.

1621: Conjectures on the Disappearance of a Duchess

It is whispered in the halls of power and echoed in the alehouses alike: what hath befallen the Dowager Duchess Cassandra of Mallard, whose absence hath cast a pall over her house and stirred uneasy minds? Some say she was cruelly done to death, murdered by secret hands bent on silencing her voice; others murmur she was burned alive for witchcraft, though no official verdict is spoken; yet more boldly whisper that she vanished by unnatural means, spirited away by arcane forces no mortal can fathom.

The Duchess, once a lady of considerable grace, hath long been subject to rumours too dark for polite discourse. Her curious habits—her time spent brewing potions, her strange readings of forbidden tomes beyond a woman's proper station—have marked her as one apart, a figure both pitied and feared. It is well known that suspicion of witchery clings most fiercely to such as dare delve where prudence forbids.

No matter which of these fates is truth, the matter remains shrouded in silence and fear. The estate guards tight the secret; tongues are loosed only in shadow. Yet the question endures: was she a victim of man's jealousy and power, consigned to fiery death to uphold family honour? Or did she succumb to her own dark arts, vanished in a blaze of sorcery, leaving naught but mystery behind?

Such tales stir unease in these unsettled times, when the devil's work is ever feared to walk amongst us. And so the story of the Duchess becomes legend at once tragic and mysterious, a warning to all who step beyond the bounds of nature and decorum.

Who shall unravel this tale? Who dare peer behind the curtains? For now, the truth remaineth cloaked, and the Duchess is lost—whether to man's cruelty, God's judgement, or the devil's cunning.

1621: Letter to her sister

Dowager Duchess of Mallard

I write to thee from strange but wondrous shores, though they be distant from the grandeur and restraint of England, my heart is light as a sparrow released from the cage.

I cannot, in truth, breathe beneath forty pounds of fabric, steel, and lace; I cannot step three paces without my dress catching on some wretched chair; and my thoughts flee whenever my head is clamped in diamonds heavier than reason itself. What is all this contrivance but a prison disguised as finery? A stay is no support but a grip upon one's liberty. A crown is no elevation, but a collar that binds the neck all too tightly.

To leave that life—a Dowager's life full of expectation, vigilance, and suffocation—has been for me a sort of resurrection. The voyage itself was long and weary, yet filled with awe: the salt air awakening my senses, the endless horizon teasing new hopes. When our small ship came into Lefame's harbour, a world unspoken and untamed, I believed I had arrived at last, not as exile, but reborn.

Here, the Blandy maids attend me still, faithful companions whose careful hands ease the burden of my new existence. They bustle about the unfamiliar household, and though simple, the rooms breath open, free from the poison air of intrigues and false smiles.

The natives, precious and kind, have shown me the manner of herbs and healing, the ways of the forest and field; they speak of the land with reverence and clarity that stirs a forgotten joy in my spirit. Their welcome surpasseth far the coldness I knew at court, and in their eyes I discern not judgment but acceptance.

Do not believe the Duke's schemes; he may fancy this removal a punishment, a casting out, but to me, it is salvation. A chance to learn and to live, unshackled from the tedium and tyranny of silk and steel.

I grow in strength in this wild place, O sister, and in the freedom to be more than a ghost beneath a crown.

1621: A charm for stillness

The wind stirs unrest, women come and go, bearing silence and secrets. Anne tells us in riddles what we cannot speak aloud.

Charm for stillness after storm:
Gather burdock, marigold, and rosemary.
Blend as the sky fades purple.
Speak the names of your sisters,
And let the cup be shared at morning.
Let wounds heal, let fear diminish.

1621: Letter from a Blandy Maid

To her Brother, Mallard House

I take quill in hand to write thee from this strange and vigorous land called New England, where we now serve the Lady Duchess at Lefame. The country here is raw and unspoiled, stark in its wildness unlike the worn and weary soil of England which seemeth by comparison all too despoiled and heavy with the weight of man's follies and vanities.

Though the labour is yet hard and the comforts few, I find a curious delight in the roughness of the place — the crackling forests, the crisp air, the broad rivers that seem to promise beginnings and endless opportunity. Our Lady Duchess, for all her eccentricities, doth carry herself with a certain noble grace amidst the untamed, and I have grown fond of her quiet strength and strange wisdom. She is no mere lady trapped by silk and jewels but a spirit yearning for knowledge beyond the narrow confines of our former world.

I confess a small wariness towards the natives—they are unaccustomed to our ways and strange to us, though in good truth they have shown kindness and patience in teaching what the land yields and the secrets of their herbs. Still, trust must grow in time, for the forest hides both friend and foe.

Know that the Blandy family shall profit in time from this venture. The land is vast and the ports well-placed; I can see already the mark of future wealth if the colony endure and grow. We shall have the first word on this new world, and the Blandy name shall be honoured as dutiful servants and patrons alike.

This place doth require sacrifices, brother, and we offer ours gladly for the promise it holds. To uphold the family name is no light charge, and I am resolved to do my part, whether in hardship or in hope.

1622: A charm for growth

Spring whispers beneath the thick earth, and we prepare for planting. The land calls in tongue older than ours.

Charm to call forth growth:
Sprinkle earth with ashes of burnt rosemary,
Sing the old words beneath your breath,
"Root and rise, leaf and sky,"
And trust the seed to the dark, to bloom anew in God's quiet design.

1622: The Madness of Exile

Before I was sent to this wild place called Lefame, I lived among the chatter and clatter of London's narrow streets, yet always felt set apart, as though the world and I moved to differing tunes. My mind would often dance beyond the bounds of common sense, and I found company in thoughts others deemed strange. I conversed at length with shadows that seemed to visit me—friends invisible to all but my eyes—and I spoke aloud those secrets whispered only to myself.

At afternoon gatherings, I would suddenly arise, singing odd verses about forests and moonlit wells, disturbing the ladies with my sudden flights of fancy. I wore no curls nor ribbons, but loose locks tangled as though kissed by the wind itself, and my skirts were often smeared with earth from my restless wanderings. I took to wandering the markets at odd hours, speaking with vendors and beggars alike, sharing cryptic fragments of knowledge I could scarce explain.

My appetites puzzled kin and servants—delight in bitter herbs, delight in the bitter silence of empty rooms, and a strange insistence on counting the hearses that passed the parish church. Most blamed nervousness or whimsy; some whispered of madness. Worse still, I would refuse the church pews on Sundays, finding more comfort beneath the sprawling limbs of the old yew tree in the churchyard, where I whispered prayers to no one but the wind.

The final fracture came when I donned no petticoat and wore a cloak fashioned from homespun not fit for drawing rooms, claiming it was suited for my "true nature." My family could bear it no longer and decided I should be placed far from the eyes and tongues that sought to bind me. Thus was I sent to Lefame, a village distant and strange, as if to exile a wild bird to a grove untamed, hoping that distance might quell both my restless spirit and their disquiet.

1623: A wild communion

The township of Lefame standeth quiet and small upon the drumlin known as LeDuc Hill, near the shores of Mallard River, in this new and untamed land of New England. Its population now numbers some forty women and ten men—the exiled, the infirm, cast away from His Grace's great houses and courts, yet here becoming something else, drawn ever closer to the wild communion with earth and sky, their faith in God's order waning as the forests grow tall and ancient around them.

The homes, timber-framed and simple, cluster about cleared fields where these souls labor with a stubborn handsomeness—tilling barley and rye, planting roots and herbs, tending their handfuls of hens and goats for sustenance. The earth is at once generous and obstinate, demanding steady care and respect; a far cry from England's worn fields, overworked and despoiled by centuries.

The maids of Lefame are known among themselves, and to their native Wampanoag neighbours with whom they share a rare and fragile friendship, for their fortitude and ceaseless industry. At dawn they rise, their fingers busy with spinning yarn, sewing clothes, and preparing salves and potions gleaned from the forest's teachings. The natives, cautious yet kind, have taught us the secrets of safe foraging and the healing plants, marking time not by lordly calendars but by the slow dance of seasons and the turning moons.

Few English travellers find their way through the dense forests and rough paths to this place, so remote and isolated from the growing towns. The arrivals come but rarely, bearing ships from the Duke's estate, bringing new exiles and supplies that keep Lefame sustained. Yet each visitor is met with a wary curiosity, for the village is a place apart, where old England's godly strictures loosen, and a new order—wild and untamed—takes root. The women, once mad and cast out, now find strength in the earth and sky, their prayers less to distant heavens than to the wind and stones themselves.

1624: Bealtaine Eve

This spring, the village gathered with sober hearts yet quiet wonder to mark the turning of the season. We kept the old fires on the hilltops, as the Irish do on their Bealtaine eve, flames reaching upward to bless the earth's new life. From the woods came garlands of fir and budding blossoms, mixed with the fragrant herbs which the native folk prize.

We walked in measured circles, hands joined, our steps borrowed from both our homeland and the ways of those who dwell here before

us. There was music, yet no excess, nor any words or acts that might bring shame. It was a time for renewal, binding us to the land and to one another, honouring the power of growth and the promise it holds.

The forest seemed to join our prayers—shadows flickered like watchful spirits, and the wind carried a voice known only to those who listen with the heart. Though we speak little of "witchcraft," some whispered that the old powers stir at the earth's turning, neither wholly feared nor fully understood. In this gathering, there is a mystery both pagan and profound, held close in humble respect.

1624: Tom Blandy, the dwarf that served our first duke

A Blandy governess

In the days of King Arthur, whose noble court and valiant knights are the very pillars of our lineage, there lived a most unusual gentleman of diminutive stature, known as Tom Blandy. The tale of this tiny man, no larger than his father's thumb, hath long been treasured within our family archives as one curious marvel of the age.

Born to Thomas of the Mountain, Arthur's faithful ploughman, through the aid of the great Merlin himself, Tom's birth was small in size but vast in portent. I am told the Queen of the Fairies and her sprites attended his coming into this world, marking him for a life of wonders.

After many remarkable adventures—being swallowed by fish and giants and escaping peril by wit and magic alone—Tom found favour at King Arthur's court. The King, marvelling at both his spirit and his peculiar gifts, took Tom as his official dwarf and courtier.

Eye-witness accounts within the family say he was a source of great merriment to the King and Queen alike, even partaking in courtly dances within the palm of a maiden's hand. Though small in size, he was mighty in spirit. His exploits, including casting spells to restrain giants and defending himself nobly from jealous rivals, were much spoken of in those days.

In our archive, it is noted also that Tom Blandy was made part of the Round Table, given a specially wrought chair in the circle of Arthur's knights, and honoured with gifts of a ring of invisibility and enchanted garments. Alas, even such favour did not spare him a tragic end, overcome by the venomous bite of a spider—an end mourned by all in court and commemorated with a marble monument.

Such is the story preserved here—a legend of magic, loyalty, and courage that doth remind us of the small but potent forces that shaped our past.

1624: Married to Solace, Favourer of Forthright Men

Duke of Mallard

O, what madness reigns within the fairer sex! Such caprice, such fancies as would bewilder even the wisest philosopher! Were women beasts, I would sooner trust the snarling hound than the shifting hearts of these errant creatures. For truly, I find far more comfort and reason in the steadfast gaze of my dogs, whose loyalty is as sure as the rising sun, than in the wild whims of any lady's mind.

My horses, too, whose neighs are honest and their feet sure, have more sense than those giddy dames who flutter like moths 'round candlelight—fickle, frivolous, and ever twisting like the river's bend. When I seek company, it is not in parlours thick with tattlers and shrieking madness, but among my groomsmen, stout fellows honest and blunt, who measure a man by his strength and his truth, not by the flights of fancy or the froward moods of womankind.

Indeed, what folly to waste breath on those who change like the wind! Give me the bark of a hound, the thunder of hooves on the earth, the hearty laughter of a true servant, than the cries of a maiden mildly or wildly disturbed. Madness, I say, is their natural crown; it is no gentle madness, but a torrent that drowns all reason. So let the women rave and fuss, I shall keep my peace beside the fire with those who speak plain and true.

In company of beasts and men of honest heart lies true solace, and from such madness as dwells in yon parlours I gladly withdraw. My dogs do not plot nor scheme; my horses do not weep nor fret; my groomsmen do not turn with every breeze. Here lies my kingdom, simple, steady, and undisturbed.

1624: Duchess of Mallard

Private papers

Ah, woe is me, caught betwixt a Duke who fancies the company of men more than his own flesh and blood! The dogs wag their tails, the horses neigh with hearty delight, and the groomsmen—oh, such blunt, boisterous souls!—they swarm about him like bees to honey, all puffed chests and nodding heads. I, who should be queen of his thoughts, am simply an echo lost in the chatter of his boisterous court.

He whispers, nay, he bellows his pleasure in their company, declaring them steadfast, true, and honest—words thrown like pebbles yet landing with the weight of a cannonball. "No woman," he says, "can match the loyalty of a hound or the sturdiness of a horse." Well, jaws drop and eyes roll when he spouts such folly, for what is a dog but a friend who smells of the kennel, and a horse but a beast for burden, while women bear wit and cunning beyond his poor grasp.

But no! His groomsmen, those swaggering, clumsy fellows, who speak in grunts and boasts, fill him with pride. To hear him tell it, any lady's wit and whimsy is but madness—madness! Like a tempest tossing order from its throne. So away with the fairer sex, he says, and give me men who grunt for a laugh and prance like drunken satyrs!

Aye, his mind is a comedy worthy of the stage itself, where women are wild beasts to be locked away and men are the kings of folly's court. I laugh, I weep—but mostly, I scheme. For what prize is there in love, if he prefers the bark of a dog to the caress of a lover?

1624: Private papers

Duke of Mallard

A vexation of spirit hath long troubled me concerning my young cousin, a handsome, strapping lad of spirited temper, who yet refuses to leave His Majesty's Court and join mine household at Mallard House. His stubborn pride and wilfulness have sore taxed my patience and temptation.

By my persuasion with His Majesty, I have at last caused his exile—not to mere prison or tower, but to Lefame upon our family estate in the New World. How fitting this disposition! For while monarchs can exile or behead traitors, only a Duke possesses the foresight to dispatch such unruly kin to dwell upon his own lands where they may do no harm to reputation or structure.

I delight in the wisdom of such a sentence. Let others wield the gibbet or stocks; I choose the better course—quiet removal to the family's frontier, where even the most wayward may be moulded and made productive, and where their absence thus preserves our honour at home.

This lad's fiery refusals, confined within the wilderness of Lefame, shall trouble us no longer. The wood and wind will temper his sin, and my estates will grow ever stronger for his presence—at a distance. Our peace and dominion over kin scattered yet controlled.

1624: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

Another curious tale hath come to mine ears—one which I find both diverting and lamentable, for the poor gentleman therein described, though of good spirit and wit, hath been committed prisoner to the Tower and thereafter to Portsea Castle for pursuing a matter of worthy discourse.

This man, of high temper and quick wit, was said to have suffered greatly in his durance, for his confinement did breed a madness, if madness it may be called, not of outrage but of singular fancy. He became convinced that his very perspiration transformed into flies and sometimes bees—a notion more fantastical than dangerous, yet none the less strange.

Not content with mere talk, he erected a turning timber house within the garden of Mr. deMallard opposite St James's Park, designed to be turned to the sun's warmth. There he would sit, with fox-tails to chase away the insects he imagined emerged from his own skin. With steadfastness, he would observe the late-coming flies drawn from hidden crevices by the heat, crying out that they did prove his notion true.

Verily, I take this as a display of gentlemanly eccentricity, professing a zeal for experiment and discourse that should be admired rather than punished. Yet England's laws are swift and cold, and to be locked away for such pursuit seems a grave injustice.

Had our courts the grace to count inquiry and lively company as virtue and not madness, such a man might be free, enlivening society with facetious argument and singular wit rather than confined in chilling stone.

Alas, the world is little fit for the delicate flights of genius or the peculiar needs of the spirited. And so I deplore this man's fate that doth punish curiosity in the guise of madness.

1624: Private papers

Duchess of Mallard

Once more I sit in this lonely chamber, my thoughts tangled as much as the ivy choking our cold walls, pondering the nature of madness, witchcraft, and the cruel superstitions by which our lives are bound and broken. Madness—what a dire and shifting thing it is, branded upon us as blameworthy, yet so intertwined with the frailty of the human frame and spirit. How swiftly a lady of breath and wit may be cast down as

witch or fool for thoughts or actions beyond the narrow yardsticks of men.

The laws of God and man, they say, are written and immutable, swift to condemn and merciless in charge. Yet is not the conduct of these Dukes themselves often beyond all law? Their whims and cruelties depart from any reason or justice, raising themselves above statutes as if sovereign above heaven itself. Such sovereignty is surely a kind of supranatural power—the very stuff of legend and fear—behaving as if beyond the order most others must obey. How strange that those who command so freely disquiet themselves over that which they deem madness in others.

And what of women like me? Cast out, confined, defined by others' fears and scorn. Shackled not by iron but by chain of gossip, suspicion, and the narrow expectations of our sex. We who dare to think, to desire knowledge, or simply refuse to bend into the shape prescribed; we become marked, marginalised, as if our very presence threatens the fragile order of this world.

I wonder often how life might unfold if I were mistress of my own fate, not a pawn exiled or mocked but a woman with voice and will. Would madness then be simply the mark of freedom, and witchcraft nothing but wisdom misunderstood? Would I walk beneath the sun unhidden, my thoughts my own, and my days shaped as I please?

This exile to Lefame is no thraldom to me but a strange liberation. Here I feel the pulse of earth beneath my hands, the vast sky unclosing beyond the captive walls of courtly life. Here lies a freedom unimagined, even as the Duke fancies himself master in sending me so far away.

What shadow do they cast who fear what they cannot deny? And what light might we kindle, living beyond their grasp?

So I reckon in solitude—between the madness imposed and the sanity reclaimed—the truth of a woman's life in a world made ill with power and fear.

1624: Estate Papers

Duke of Mallard

Herein we record the recent augmentations to our estates and household, all of which affirm our standing and prosperity. Three new stud mares of rare blood have come into my possession—each a marvel of form and strength, fit to sire the finest progeny. Alongside these, twelve breeding hounds arrived, stout and keen, promising to renew and enhance our famed kennels.

Even more notable is the substantial bequest we have received from our late uncle: an additional 100,000 acres of fine northern English land, extending the reach of our holdings and ensuring future fruitfulness for generations. This vast tract will no doubt elevate the title and wealth of our family immeasurably.

On mention of titles, I have lately acquired the rank of Chevalier to add yet another signifier to our line: one that shall further secure our influence across borders.

The domestic realm is not neglected. We have commissioned another portrait by some foreign painter: Rembrandt, I am advised. Six hundred ducks have been procured for the house ponds, adding both to the larder and to the picturesque charm of our grounds—a fitting reflection of our refinements.

1626: A story of Galatea

From the Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

In the village of Lefame, there dwelled a woman once cloaked in the finest silks and favours of English nobility, now cast out by courtly envy and fear of her keen mind. She called herself Galatea, not for the marble perfected by Pygmalion, but for the sense of invisibility she once bore—unseen among her peers, hidden by imposed silence. Her exile was a shattering undoing, yet from it began an uncommon rebirth, a reversal of the familiar tale.

Where once the sculptor had yearned to breathe life into cold stone, here the woman yearned to shed the silken veil and bloom in raw existence, no longer a figure shaped by others' hands but fashioned by her own communion with the untamed world.

At first, she was as one carved of glass—transparent, unseen amid the dense forests of pine and bracken, moving silently as the morning mist veiling Lefame's rocky shores. Her thoughts, once confined by rigid society, now soared with the wild geese and whispered with the winds that swept the meadows. The noble titles she bore were but echoes behind a mist; the true resonance came from listening deeply to earth and sky.

She fashioned herself anew not from ivory or marble but from root and leaf, learning from the indigenous folk the language of plants and the songs of the streams. Her hands, once idle beneath lace gloves, now coaxed life from soil, and her mind deciphered the turning of seasons as if reading secret chapters in the stars. She wrote incantations that were remedies, charms folded within the recipes of the woods.

Gradually, her invisibility transformed into vivid presence. She became known—not by the gilded court's shallow applause—but by the village's grateful murmurs, by the children's wide eyes when she told the tale of the gentle Horned Mouse that warded off nightmares. Her shadow no longer blended with the background but cast deep and comforting shelter beneath ancient oaks.

Her exile, once a sentence, unveiled a home forged from wild winds and whispered lore. She found freedom not in the court's shining halls but in the whispered communion with the elemental forces around her. Her heart, once carved cold, now throbbed at the pulse of river and root. No longer a statue awaiting breath, she was flesh made whole by the pulse of nature's breath.

Thus, Galatea's tale reversed: from invisible marvel shaped by another's desire, to visible woman shaped of earth and spirit, a living testament to the power of exile to awaken hidden realms within the soul.

1626: Lefame

Dowager Duchess

To this remote place, far from the libraries and salons of England, I have brought with me a small but treasured collection of books, whose pages offer the comfort and challenge of learned discourse. Among these treasured volumes are works by Master William Gilbert on the nature of magnetism, whose careful enquiry into the forces that animate the lodestone reveals a world beneath visible things; and the celestial treatises of Master Johannes Kepler, whose laws of planetary motion stir the mind to consider the grand order of the heavens.

I have studied also the mathematical revelations of Master John Napier, whose logarithms ease the toil of calculation, a boon to one such as I who seeks understanding amidst exile's solitude. The writings of Galileo Galilei, too, are prized, though the dangers of his discoveries weigh heavily upon us all; still, his observations through the telescope bring the universe closer, reshaping the ancient heavens into spheres of wonder and questioning.

The works of Master William Harvey on the circulation of blood have further opened my eyes to the hidden mechanisms of living bodies, a knowledge that brings me a quiet thrill, as though the secrets of nature might yet be comprehended by a diligent mind, even one cast away and doubted.

These books I read not for the acclaim or approval of others—who, if they knew a woman dared such studies, would cast disdain and

disbelief—but for the delight they bring me, the means to order my thoughts, and the hope that knowledge itself is a refuge and a rebellion, no matter the writer's station or exile.

Thus within these bindings, I find kinship with the great minds of our age, and solace in the quiet pursuit of truth, beyond the reach of those who would deny me voice or claim.

1626: Lefame

Dowager Duchess

I suspect the worth of a document lies not in its date, but in the moment it is found, and by whom. Here, in this New England wilderness where I live as an exile in a measure of comfort, surrounded by books both English and European, many still unread, this truth grows ever clearer. The tomes I once prized for their antiquity and pedigree now rest quietly in my chamber, waiting. Their age marks them, but it is their discovery, their engagement that breathes life into their pages.

Among the native peoples, with whom I have grown familiar, there are no books as I know them. Their wisdom dwells not in inked leaves but in story, song, and memory—a living knowledge passed from one to another without paper or script. I find myself eager to learn from them, to gather their truths with as much care as I would a rare volume. Their knowledge feels immediate, present in a way that the old leather-bound stacks cannot always match.

Thus, I reflect upon how a document, however ancient or neglected, becomes a vessel only through the eyes of its reader and the time in which it is opened. A letter composed a century past might speak anew to one who finds it amidst these distant woods, offering insights unanticipated by its author. The written record is but one form among many, awaiting the moment of its revelation.

In this land of fresh beginnings, where past and present mingle strangely, I am made to understand that learning is not the possession of parchment alone, but the meeting of minds across time and space—written or unwritten alike. Here, then, amid the convergence of diverse ways of knowing, the worth of my inherited books is reframed; they are no longer relics but companions in a larger dialogue where all voices might join.

1626: Our garden

Though the sun grows strong now, I see old secrets in the garden, and make silent notes: mint for luck, sage for sorrow, lilies for joy, all planted where the shadow falls short at midsummer. Our neighbour Ann has asked for the recipe of my broth, and I give her leaves and words, both true and veiled.

Were I only a mere woman in the telling, yet my ink whispers otherwise. So the seasons turn and so do we.

1626: Lefame

Dowager Duchess

Today I sat within the garden, surrounded by the quiet breath of earth and the soft rustlings of leaf and breeze, when my gaze was fixed upon an apple that fell from the bough above. The simple motion, so natural and yet so profound, stirred within me a contemplation of the forces unseen that govern all things.

What is it that draws this fruit earthward with such certainty? What power ordained that it should part from the tree and come to rest beneath it? As I pondered, the thought arose that this is but one instance of a universal nature, a force that holds the heavens and the earth in its quiet, invisible embrace.

I set myself to record my observations and simple calculations: the apple, its weight, the speed at which it descended, and the distance from bough to ground. If such a force be universal, then surely it extends beyond this solitary fruit to all bodies, great and small—planets, stars, and the dust beneath our feet alike.

This moment of reflection lifted my mind beyond earthly exile and constraint. Therein lies a revelation: that the laws of nature are steadfast, impartial, and comprehensible, even if our human laws and judgements falter in their justice.

That apple's fall hath borne more than fruit this day—it hath given me insight and solace in exile: freedom to think and to wonder anew.

The nettles grow bold by the stream. Tempered hands harvest them with care. Three women gathered beneath owl's shadow.

1627: New arrivals

Lefame

Lefame has received a fresh flock of outcast Mallards. These gentlewomen, erstwhile bound by the strictures and decorum of England's refined society, find themselves in a world quite apart, where the very air invites both change and surrender.

Yet slowly do our kin lay aside the stiff vestments, feathers and laces, as we have done before them. Fine wools and homespun cloths become their new attire, fashioned by native hands and taught by native women, that they might recover ease of movement. Their bodices loosen and the rigid etiquette of London parlours fades beneath the simpler rhythms of our quiet days.

Deep reverence for the Church and orthodox doctrine soon shimmer as we all incline to the spirits of the land and water, learning from our native friends the old songs and stories that speak of power found not in sermons but in roots, moon phases, and weather. Their prayers grow fewer, while these new paths wind beneath ancient trees and by wandering streams.

They learn the language of Wampanoag mothers, sharing their little wisdom in turn, and through this exchange, become more of this place than of their birthplace. By firelight or at work in the fields, laughter comes more freely, in a community born of both endurance and transformation.

Rose hips redden in the marsh; I note the quiet gift of native sisters—salves for fever, roots for hope.

In my cupboard, behind sage and mint, I scribe the lunar pattern into cloth—first new moon, three stitches in blue; full, five in white; dark moon, a single red knot—my calendar hidden in plain sight.

1627: Planets

This day I find myself reflecting with an unusual delight upon the legacy left to me by my grandmother, who in her youth was graced with the acquaintance and friendship of Nicolaus Copernicus, that great mind whose theory of the heavens doth bear his name. The Copernican heliocentrism, which in her time was but a concept, an audacious turning of the universe upon its sole light, I now behold manifested in the very skies above Lefame.

In this solitude, far removed from the censure and strictures of court, I have taken to observing the motions of the sun, the stars, and the wandering planets, confirming with my own eyes and simple

instruments the truth of this noble system. My notes, though modest and humble, set down calculations and observations—the sun fixed at the centre, the Earth turning upon its own axis and circling round the light. That which had been theory and discourse, becomes flesh and wonder in this clear air.

I confess these writings are penned not for the eyes of others, for who would credit such work from a woman banished and branded mad? Rather, they serve to entertain my own mind and to preserve a testament of thought in days when letters from women like us must remain secret, unread, and doubted.

Yet in this quiet, I know I touch upon something greater than exile or misfortune—a communion with the universe herself, and the striving of human reason to embrace the nature of reality.

1630: Lefame

Duchess of Mallard

Though we dwell far from the courts and palaces whence we came, it hath become clear to me that the old hierarchies do follow us even unto this wild land. I find myself spared the toils of manual labour, as befits my rank, entrusted instead with the management of our small town and the endless study of books, or the learning of native lore and customs. Such pursuits sustain my mind and keep me from the depths of despair at exile.

The Blandy men, sent hither by the Duke, take upon themselves the burdens of planting, hunting, trapping, and tending the fur trade, tasks rugged and essential, which I confess I am glad to leave in their capable hands. The women here chiefly serve as maids or workers in less strenuous capacities—each according to their station, yet all bound to the necessities of survival.

I have endeavoured to foster a more equitable temper amongst them, hoping to loosen the rigid distinction of master and servant, lord and labourer. Yet the Blandys, with their pride rooted deep as any English soil, maintain their distance and reserve, distrustful or unwilling to alter the natural order as they understand it. They hold fast their place as men and providers, while I tread the path befitting a Duchess, though far from England's grand halls.

It grieves me, in moments of reflection, to see these old divisions persist when we might be bound by common hardship and shared destiny. Still, the world is slow to change, and even here in this distant colony, the ties of birth and custom hold sway.

So I resign my hands to governance and my thoughts to learning, blending as best I may the order of this new land with the legacy of nobility I cannot wholly shed. Thus is life in Lefame—a harmony not yet perfect, but striving as the seasons turn.

We prepare with quiet resilience. In the hem of a cloak I sew the final stitch for this year's cycle—fourteen small knots, each a candle we dare to hold in the dark.
Those who know will read this thread as comfort and guide through winter's deepest trials.

1630: On the Sacred Flock of Ducks

Ducks, or Wonnaun in the tongue of our Wampanoag sisters, hold a special and sacred place within our teachings and workings. These creatures, who glide so gracefully upon the waters yet walk steadfast upon the earth, embody the delicate balance that our community seeks to uphold—between spirit and matter, freedom and rootedness.

To see the duck is to behold a symbol of adaptability, resilience, and nurturing. Just as they traverse the air, the water (Numuk), and the land (Mosq), so too must we learn to move with ease among the realms of thought, feeling, and deed. Their presence is a gentle reminder of the importance of self-reflection, emotional harmony, and trust in the unseen currents that shape our lives.

The Chant of the Wonnaun

Each morning, at the rising of the sun, we offer this chant to honor the ducks and invite their blessings:

"Wonnaun skokum, wunnaun numuk,
Guide our hearts, protect our paths.
Flow like waters, grounded as earth,
Carry us safe through shadow and light."

Spell of Duck's Grace

To gain clarity and resilience in times of turmoil, carry a feather of Wonnaun wrapped in sage and whisper:

"Feather of flight, bearer of peace,
Bend not nor break, but glide with ease.
Heal my spirit, steady my mind,
In duck's gentle path, strength I find."

Snow upon the cedars, thick as fleece spun by the moon's own hand. I set out upon my morning with heart tender and limbs strong.

Charm for the cold season
Whisper thus as you blend—
Take thyme and willow bark,
Steep when dusk is near,
Add honey if throat should hark
For life, whisper "clear."
(A spoon warms the chest and softens the night.)

The frost lies heavy, and we gather close beneath the large pine. The fire crackles with stories older than any church bell.

1630: DeCarnard tithe ship

This Spring day we made safe arrival at the harbour of Lefame, to deliver the supplies and correspondence duly sent from the Duke's estate. The voyage was met with fair weather and steady winds, and the crew well-disciplined and vigilant throughout.

Upon anchorage, we transferred the goods—foodstuffs, tools, and written words—from this ship to other hands.

It is noted, for the record, that this vessel shall remain at Lefame for a full week. During this time, we shall receive new dispatches and communications from the settlement, and take aboard the tithe owing this year to the Ducal estate. The collections, as arranged and agreed, consist primarily of furs of all varieties.

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Charm for the weary mind:

In a cup of water clear, drop three leaves of sage and one sprig of lavender.
Set the cup beside your pillow before night falls deepest.
Whisper softly the word "peace" thrice between breaths,
And may dreams return untroubled, as the quiet river flows.*

The trade with native sisters grows patient and wise. They teach the language of wind and water, of healing beyond written words.

1630: Duchess of Mallard

To Dowager Duchess

Many changes and humours carry the minds of our time in Mallard and beyond. News of great import and curious discourse comes to my ear, not least concerning the fashionable and much debated philosophy of Monsieur Descartes, whom some now loudly acclaim as guiding the future of human thought.

There is a prevailing fad, hath taken root under the banner of Cartesian Duality, asserting that reality—the very nature of our being—is founded upon two distinct substances: the thinking mind and the extended body. This notion of two principal and separate entities, so contrary to all I have been taught or have found in reason, doth trouble me deeply.

How can it be, I ask, that the mind and the body, so intimately and mysteriously intertwined, might exist as two wholly separate things? It seems to cleave man in twain unnaturally, and to deny the wholeness that I perceive in myself and others. This doubling of reality, far from clarifying, confounds more than resolves. I cannot abide the thought that our souls might dwell apart from our flesh, as if two castles isolated rather than one dwelling harmonious.

No doubt this idea finds favour with those who seek to wrest control from old truths, yet I pray you will share your own learned thoughts on this puzzle. How doth the mind grasp the body, if mind and matter are so severed? And what of the mysteries of spirit and sense that knit us whole?

The summer sun spans long hours. We gather herbs for winter's return, recording moon phases in cotton threads, each a secret map.

Within our humble home, the stitches tell stories few would guess, but many lives depend on these quiet chronicles.
May those who follow read between the threads and find guidance when voices are silenced.

1630: the Duchess' reply

Cartesian Duality strikes me as an awkward division lacking the harmony and natural completeness we perceive in ourselves and the world.

Yet, I would ask you to entertain another thought—might not three, rather than two, be the more stable and fitting number upon which to found reality? Consider how the world speaks often in threes: a three-legged milking stool, which though simple, cannot stand firm upon but three.

While the scholars and gentlemen erect intricate systems to capture the soul and body in neat binaries, they might better learn from the humble stability of three. Spirit, body, and perhaps nature itself—a triplicity whence coherence arises amid complexity.

I cannot help but laugh at the conceit of these male intellectuals, confident in their abstractions, yet so often lacking in the wisdom that experience and keen observation offer. Perhaps a sojourn to Lefame might temper their pride—to the wilds where complexity cannot be so neatly boxed and where nature herself teaches lessons beyond the reach of formality.

A Recipe for Restful Sleep

Valerian root is best collected on the eve of the new moon. Combined with lavender and chamomile blossoms, steep these in hot water until the mixture is fragrant and robust. Drink the infusion warm just before retiring to rest. To aid the effect, prepare a small linen sachet filled with lavender to place beside your pillow. These simple acts summon peaceful rest.

1631: John Albert Mallard

Private papers, Mallard Estate

I have a tale that doth ache in the telling. They call me mad, but 'tis this world that is crazed, a painted ship on a sea of folly! The moon hath whispered secrets to me, how the King is a shadow, a puppet made of straw, and the true crown rests upon my own poor, aching head. Mark my words, good sir, the air is thick with traitors!

My belly aches not for bread, but for justice! I have seen the Devil in the eyes of the parish beadle; he doth follow me, a black dog at my heels. He means to steal the light from the sun, I tell you, and plunge us all into everlasting darkness! The bells, the bells, can you not hear how they mock me?

I must away, quickly now, for the stars have fallen into the brook and need my help to climb out again. Do not stop me, I am the Queen of Sheba one moment and a serving wench the next, a grand chaos of a creature! Time itself is unraveling like a cheap thread. Yesterday comes tomorrow, and today is lost in a puddle.

If you see Master Cromwell, tell him the sparrows have signed the pact, and the Great Serpent is asleep under London Bridge. He will know what it means. Away, I say! The angels ride on dragonflies, and they demand tribute of me! The air, 'tis full of buzzing lies!

A Salve for Healing Madness

Melt beeswax in a pot over gentle heat and add petals of calendula, stirring until fully combined. A few drops of oil pressed from black seeds enrich the mixture. Apply this salve carefully to bruises and aches to ease pain.

1631: Sussex sermon

Reverend P. Thastlecraft

[Local tradition holds that the Reverend, during his years abroad, acquired a habit of unconsciously adopting the language of whatever text he had last read, to the great confusion of his parish.]

Audite, fratres dilectissimi, et observate verba haec, quia ira Dei super nos descendit et stultitia nostra fit perditio. Le volpe che guastano le vigne non sono soltanto bestie, ma spiriti maligni mandati a dilaniare le vostre anime.

Ne pensez pas résister à de tels esprits avec les songes vains ou les contes des vieilles femmes — car le rire du démon se nourrit des fables humaines. Guardaos de la vaca que habla en latín, de la liebre que danza sobre la verde pradera, y del nabo con rostro de rey!

Solche Zeichen sind nichts als Schlingen des Teufels, und wer ihnen glaubt, wandelt auf dem Wege des Verderbens. Gif mon his wif sleah, wite he þæt án wíte fylð his heafod, and þæt swá fela swefnes and sceadwa him æfter fylgeð.

Tenez-vous fermement à la raison et à l'Écriture; mais sachez que la superstition s'étend ici comme la brume à minuit. Dominus in tempestate ultionem suam vehit; qui iustitiam eius irrident, inveniunt horrea vacua et focos frigidos.

Non parlate de' pesci che ragionano, né delle oche che predicano; tali vanità invitano Satana a danzare sulla vostra mensa. La lune n'est point

fromage, ni les sermons choux — mais l'homme qui oublie sa prière devient pâture aux spectres affamés.

Verwerft das Geflüster der Nacht; es sind die Psalmen der Verruchten. Et prenez garde aux petitz renards, car ils corrompront non vos vignes seulement, mais vostre âme mesme.

Convertimini, et recedite ab his vanitatibus, ne furor Dei ruat super nos.

Amen.

1631: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

How often does reason flee the company of women, leaving in its stead a chaos where order should reign? I find myself compelled, as the stoic sage counsels, to seek solace far from such tumultuous minds. The madness that so often marks their discourse and demeanour is as a tempest tossing the vessel of calm judgment upon rough seas.

Better to be among my dogs, whose loyalty knows no deceit, whose temper remains steady with the constancy of nature itself. Their silence speaks volumes; their presence is a balm to the weary spirit. They demand no cunning, no artifice, but offer companionship as simple and truth-bound as the earth.

Nor less have I come to favour the steadfast hearts of my horses and the forthrightness of my groomsmen—men who act according to reason, not whimsy; whose words and actions are wrought from strength and honour, not fleeting fancy. There is wisdom in such company, a reflection of order amid the chaos that women's madness brings, like shadows fleeting and insubstantial.

The philosopher finds in nature and loyal friendship the sure refuge of the mind; in such virtue alone resides peace. Thus, I turn from the raving storm of folly, to the quiet harbour where reason anchors undisturbed.

1631: Jeremiah Mallard

Private papers, Mallard House

My tongue is a sharp sword, yet it is an unruly member, defying the Lord's yoke! Hearken to me, you stiff-necked generation, for I am a vessel of wrath, filled to the brim with the bitter dregs of iniquity! They say I am lost to reason, but I say my Reason is lost to the Lord's Will,

and that is a true gain! This is a land of trial, a wilderness, and we have strayed like lost sheep, pursuing fancies and vanities.

The magistrate in Dorchester is a blind man, leading the blind! He sees not the Hand of God in the sickness that doth plague the swine, nor the Devil in the Quaker who walks among us in an Antinomian spirit. The air is thick with the stench of sin and compromise. We have forsaken the true covenant, and now the judgments of the Almighty are upon us! Woe unto this colony, for we have fallen from the Rock of our salvation!

I see signs and wonders in the sky, a flaming sword, a warning to turn from our wicked ways. My heart is a battleground, a field where Satan doth wrestle with the remnants of Grace. I must confess my vileness, for I am the chief of sinners! This body, this house of clay, is but a prison of total depravity!

I must pray, ceaseless prayer, for the hour is late and the pit is open before me! The Lord is an angry God, a consuming fire, and His sovereign pleasure is a mystery to my troubled soul! The world is a stage of vanity, and all its pleasures are a snare for the unwary soul. I must away, I must labour in the vineyard, though my wits be scattered like chaff in the wind! I speak not for sport, but for the instruction of your immortal souls! Repent! Repent, before the great and terrible day of the Lord!

1631: Duchess of Mallard

Ah, how sweet the solace of being passed over, ignored by my lord Duke as he dotes upon his barking beasts and boisterous groomsmen! Let him prefer their company—dogs that no one argues with and horses that yield to command—while I enjoy the freedom to pursue my own delights, unseen and unbothered.

No tedious attentions now to his grand folly! Instead, I have the quiet expanse of our vast country estate to myself. Here I immerse in my studies—letters, arts, and the secrets of the ancients. My shelves groan with tomes that would make the learned blush and the idle weep.

And oh, the lotions and potions! Brewed with care and cunning, they are my companions, my secret weapons against time and dullness. The Duke may snort in disdain, but I tend to my gardens, mix my elixirs, and attend to my complexion without interruption. Unheeded, my subtle arts flourish freely.

This neglect, so bitter in name, proves a sweet boon indeed. I am mistress of my mind and body, mistress of my time, and my solitude is a kingdom where I reign supreme. Let the Duke have his dogs and

grooms; I have my wits and my bottles. And so I am content, laughing softly to myself at the irony that to be set aside is to be truly free.

We feast on squash and wild rice, laughter our best spice.
One new stitch tonight; the moon wanes. I count twelve, my secret ledger of months since freedom began.

1631: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

It is ever the melancholy truth that even those I once favoured among my groomsmen soon lose the lustre of their youth and fresh countenance. How quickly some grow tiresome, demanding ever more favour, their ambition gnawing at their loyalty like a hidden vermin. Others succumb to age or infirmity, their vigour waning beyond usefulness.

It is a relief, therefore, to have the expedient disposition of Lefame at my command. When a groom grows less fit for service or proves wearisome to my temper, I dispatch him with little ceremony to the colony. There, they may find a place away from court, useful in their own right but no longer a burden on my household or reputation.

Likewise, Lefame serves as a source from which I may refresh my retinue, plucking new men with vigour and promise from among those exiled or sent afar, blending discipline with opportunity. Such is the privilege and foresight of a Duke: to regulate not merely the affairs of estate and estate labour, but the very company that attends me in person.

Kings may have their hangmen and prisons for traitors and troublemakers, but it is I alone who possess the wisdom and order to send such as I deem fit—not to death or disgrace, but to a place of distant service, preserving honour whilst maintaining control.

Thus shall my household and their appearance ever reflect the dignity and strength of my name.

I stitch the weather as Grandmother taught me—in the hem of every apron and sleeve, a record no man will read:

Green for rain, white for frost,
Bright for fair, dull for loss.
Every pattern holds a fortnight's turn;
Thread speaks memory to the patient eye.

Mary asks why these colours, and I answer "for beauty, child." She learns my code in time, passing knowledge from eye to hand, from mother to daughter.

1631: London

This morn I attended service at Saint Michael's with the usual congregation, from silk-clad ladies and gentlemen drawn from the upper echelons to coarsely dressed labourers and their ragged children cramped in the pews beside me. The church's interior bore the weary weight of centuries—stone walls heavy with soot, faded tapestries hanging forlornly, and the scent of damp wood mingled with a more pungent odour: the unmistakable emanation of unwashed bodies cramped long beneath heavy coats and scant ventilation.

The great oak pulpit stood high and imposing, a throne for the vicar whose voice boomed down in measured cadences — a well-practiced sermon that recycled threats of damnation and promises of salvation with all the fervour of a schoolmaster at repetition. His black gown rustled while he declaimed, weaving scripture with moral admonishment, yet to my mind it was but a dull performance, devoid of spirit or conviction.

I noted the restless shifting of the pews, the occasional cough, and the furtive sidelong glance of those weary of the litany. Children whispered beneath breath; elders sighed through shoulders bent by toil and time. Between incense and prayer, the air grew thick with the mingled scents of humanity unmasked — a reminder that piety and poverty walk often hand in hand.

Though I once wore faith like one would a fine habit, today I found only hollow echo. The solemn faces and rote cries could not mask the doubts within me. For all the grand gestures, the truth that might soothe or uplift proves ever elusive beneath these ancient stones. But what to do, but endure the ritual? For where else does society gather to see and be seen, to mark the passage of Sunday and the saving grace of custom?

Thus passes another service—and I, an unbeliever cloaked in civility, am left to ponder what lies beyond the words spoken from the pulpit and the heavy hush that follows.

Blessing upon my hand, I set forth this morning a charm for St Michael's affliction—a verse for well nigh any ailment:

"Gather the root at sunrise,
Steep it until the moon rides high.

Three drops to tongue, three days to mend,
The fever soon shall pass by."

I have writ this in rhyme, that our Mary might recite it and, unwitting, apply both remedy and remembrance. She suspects naught, though the root is but dried willow, and the moon guides not only healers but sowers as well.

1631: Carlisle

There dwells among us a certain Mistress Judith Carlisle, whose mind does waver betwixt reason and shadow. Upon her first arrival from London, she held tight to her English ways — collar stiff and measured, every step and word bound by rigid custom and unquestioned piety. She spoke often of sermons and scripture, and with disdain marked the free manner of the village women, their often bare feet, their laughter loud and unrefined, and their seeming indifference to the Church's strict observances.

Yet months passed, and strange changes have come upon Judith. She wanders at dawn, alone among the cedars and wild grasses, murmuring strange songs—a music not of England but of earth and wind. Her hair, once bound with ribbons, now falls loose and tangled, and she crafts from woven grasses and dyes fabrics foreign to her former refinement. She sits for hours by the riverbank, dipping her fingers in water and gazing long upon her reflection as if seeking some hidden truth therein.

On evenings of the full moon, she lights pale flames beneath her window and chants verses of healing, and whispers that madness has taken her soul.

550: Eadwulf Mallard

From the Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

In the days long past, in that shadowed time of the Dark Ages in Old England when Mab, the Queen of the Fairies, still wandered the earth, there lived a powerful wizard named Eadwulf Mallard, powerful and learned in his own right. Eadwulf was known among the scattered tribes and hidden folk for his knowledge of the fabled flora and fauna that thronged the land, creatures whispered only in cautiously told stories.

Eadwulf knew of the sickly bluebell that bloomed under the moon's pale gaze, the ghostly luminescent fox that moved without sound across the heath, and the wild griffin that nested high among forgotten cliffs,

guardian of ancient treasure and mystery. He was said to command spells of the wind and rain, to call forth fire from water, and to weave charms for protection against the black dogs that prowled in the twilight, harbingers of doom.

Throughout his days, Eadwulf encountered supernatural beings of great wonder and terror—the sly puca with its changing visage, the mournful banshee whose wails foretold death, and even the elusive horned king who ruled a subterranean realm of shadows. These encounters enriched his spells and wisdom, leaving him content with the measure of power he wielded and the respect he commanded.

Yet, one day, amidst his dusty tomes and stirring incense, Eadwulf chanced upon mention of a spell unlike any other—a spell of self-obliteration, a ritual so potent and final that it would erase the caster from all existence. Intrigued but wary, Eadwulf sought the rite and contemplated its meaning. He marvelled that a man might command not only life and death in others but the absolute vanishing of himself.

1632: A pamphlet (anonymous)

Attributed to the Ducal court

Hearken, ye faithful servants of God and the realm! In these troubled times, when the Devil's legions slink in shadowed corners and upon the very fields and homes entrusted to our Lord Duke, a grave and holy duty falls upon us all: the rooting out and destruction of witches, those accursed instruments of Satan.

For know this: witchcraft is no mere superstition nor idle fancy, but most foul treason against God's holy order and man's natural good. The witches, shunned by light and blessed truth, consort with devils, raise storms to undo the harvest, blight livestock, and bewitch men's bodies and souls alike unto eternal damnation. These are women and men who have sold their souls, forsaken baptism and prayer, and taken the Devil's mark upon flesh and spirit.

The signs of witchcraft are manifold and fearful. A wary eye must be kept upon those who sow discord or speak strange tongues; those who show unnatural knowledge of herbs and poisons beyond the grace allowed womenfolk; those who wander near crossroads by moonlight or chant unholy invocations within dark wood or hidden places. Beware the markless, the palsied, the withered old crones, for beneath frailty oft lies the Devil's subtle power.

To secure the Ducal estates and preserve the souls of its inhabitants, strict measures must be enforced. The laws of God command that witches be sought out diligently by the godly and the just; tests shall be

applied—the scourging to confess, the searching for the Devil's mark, the dipping in the blessed water, and the trial by ordeal when necessary. The confession of the accused, though oft obtained under stern examination, reveals the infernal pacts made and the names of their unholy brethren.

None may resist the hand of justice, for our Lord Duke shall see to the swift punishment of all witches found culpable. Their banishment is too small a mercy; execution by fire or hanging both severs the Devil's hold and avenges the sacred peace.

Pray fervently for deliverance, and take heed: the Devil's works are manifold, but through vigilance and faith, through holy writ and ecclesiastical counsel, the plague of witchcraft shall be extinguished from our lands as a foul and black blight.

Let the cries of the hunted cease, and let the fields flourish once more under God's gentle hand.

Thus it is commanded, and thus it shall be.

1632: An anonymous reply

I write with a gentle countermelody to your thunderous proclamations. Your cries of devil, witch, and damnation resound loud across the land, but I beseech you to look again, and see the truth lying quiet beneath your fearful gaze.

Magic, you say, is the Devil's work. Yet magic lies not in any fiery demon's hand but in the eye of the beholder—an art of perception, unsteady and shifting like the morning mist. What you call witchcraft is often but the daily tending to hearth and home by women and sisters and mothers; binding wounds, tending herbs, brewing salves, and watching over the commonweal of kin and community. We sow not discord nor darkness, but sustain life's fragile flame where we can.

And I say to you, gentle sir, that your mother—though you may brand her saint or lady—has no doubt whispered spells of healing and protection to her household in her time. She, like us, spun tales for her bairns to keep fright at bay and love alight. What then is the difference but the story told?

Let the learned men prate and postulate their fiery tales; let them toss their fears into pamphlets to frighten the simple-hearted. We who dwell in the shadows of your words laugh softly and keep our ways secret, for self-preservation is wise.

Yet, with tender chiding, I say to you: beware the hand that judges with fire and furrowed brow, for it oft blinds the heart to the truth beneath the smoke. Blessings and curses are often one and the same in the telling.

So, continue your grand tales and let us continue our quiet work. For you, the tale is power; for us, the lives we live. And in this difference lies the wide world between your fear and our love.

Motherlike, I give you this: a story to believe, a comfort to hold, and a hope that one day, those who see with eyes closed will open them to the light you cannot yet imagine.

1432: the Horned Mouse

From the Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

Young William wept for fear last night, shadows grown long and restless with the hasty change of wind. To comfort him, I told the tale of the Horned Mouse.

In times now past, when thunder prowled the skies and the sun laughed brightly upon the fields, there lived a wondrous creature known to the woodsfolk as the Horned Mouse. Quick as thought and soft as moss against the fingers, the Horned Mouse danced in the shadows when the thunder roared, its tiny feet tapping a merry tune upon the earth.

This elusive being made its home in a burrow—a place of safety nestled just beneath the thick roots of the bramble blackberry bushes, where the sweet berries ripened in the summer sun. There, beneath tangled thorns and green leaves, it sheltered from the world and dreamed of the wonders waiting in the woods.

When the clouds gathered and the sky growled, the Horned Mouse would leap from its hidden burrow and twirl beneath the storm's mighty voice, as if the very thunder were its dance partner. But when the sun laughed from above, spilling golden light upon the land, the Horned Mouse would quiet itself and slip quietly back into hiding, content to wait for the night to return.

Ever curious, the Mouse sought out the marvels of the forest—bright mushrooms that glowed in the dark, flowers that only bloomed at dusk, and gentle creatures with eyes full of ancient secrets. It knew the rustling of leaves and the whisper of the wind, greeting each as a friend.

And so, the Horned Mouse danced and explored, hidden and joyful, in a world of wonders that stretched far beyond the reach of any tale or song.

Bealtaine

This spring, our village of Lefame marked the turning of the season with a gathering unlike any other—a celebration known among us as the Witch's Sabbat. It is a curious blend, half the old ways of Bealtaine brought from Ireland, half the customs learned from the native peoples who dwelt here long before us. Together, these forms forge a strange and beautiful rite that feels both timeless and alive.

As the sun sank low, the villagers climbed the hill to light a great fire, its flames dancing upward like spirits eager for the new life of spring. Around it, we wove garlands of hawthorn and sweet fern, hastily gathered from the woods, and wore them proudly upon our heads and arms. The air was filled with music—faint drumbeats that seemed to pulse with the heart of the earth, mingled with lilting tunes passed down through generations.

Children and elders alike moved in slow circles, stepping in the patterns of distant ancestors and native dancers, their bodies bending to a rhythm that felt older than memory. Overhead, the emerging stars whispered mysteries, and if one listened close, they might hear the voices of the forest mingling with our own—a quiet magic that need not be named.

Though some might fear the word "witch," here it is spoken with neither shame nor mockery. Rather, it carries the weight of reverence for the forces that shape the world—the turning of seasons, the bloom of plants, the birth of hope. There was no excess, no wantonness, only a deep and solemn joy in the promise of renewal.

Thus we keep our feast, neither fully of this land nor that, but a sacred thread woven between worlds—an event both pagan and sublime, carried gently by those who know the old ways and seek to honour them without folly.

1635: Sermon fragment

Rector of Mallard Church

Hear now, beloved in Christ, ye gathered in the house of the Lord: Let all such books and writings, those grim and curious treatises of unnatural Characters, Extravagant Figures, Circles, Convocations, Conjurations, Invocations, and all manner of like things—though man may at times see some flickering effect therefrom—be cast far from you, for verily they are naught but works awash in Diabolical Invention, the stain of Satan's hand upon their page.

Know ye, that the DEMON employeth an infinitude of stratagems by which to entrap and beguile the souls of mankind. This I have

proven by trial myself: when I did turn to the Veritable Wisdom, the Divine Light of our Almighty Maker, all those other enchantments and arts which I had gleaned with much labour and study, did instantly fail me. Yea, I made careful essay of the spells bestowed with great secrecy by the rabbins and their grimoires, and found them naught, for the deceits and frauds of the infernal DEMON can never abide where the Truth and Wisdom of our Lord dwelleth.

Moreover, mark this: the clearest sign of their falseness is the election of certain days for their works. Is not God's law plain, that certain holy days are sanctified above all others? Know, therefore, that we may freely seek God's providence on any other day, and at any hour. Whenever ye behold tables that mark days, and celestial signs, and the vain divisions of fate and fortune, pay them no heed; for therein lurketh grievous sin and the subtle deceits of the DEMON, who seeketh ever to mingle the pure Wisdom of the Lord with evil cunning.

Cast not thy faith in the patterns of false magicians. Cling fast to the eternal Word, and let no shadow dim the lamp of Truth the Lord hath set before thee.

One new cure hidden in rhyme.

"To calm the ache within the bones,
Brew chamomile with sweetened tones.
Wrap the pained with flaxen cloth,
Breathe slow, and soften life's harsh froth."

1635: Heretical works

This day hath arrived at my estate a parcel of curious and most troubling books, sent from my uncle's holdings near the northern reaches of Scotland. These volumes treat of magic and various folk tales, brimming with superstition and strange rites, conjurations, and other matters sundered from sound doctrine.

I know full well the wisdom of surrendering such texts to the Church's judgement, that the learned clergy might inter them in sacred custody or consign them to the flames, thus purging their wickedness from the land. Yet, a certain idle interest tugs at my mind, for these books are ancient and scarce, their bindings worn yet sturdy. There may be value—both in coin and knowledge—in their preservation.

Though mingled with heresy and error, they bear testimony to the credulity and fears of our folk, revealing mysteries and customs long since banished from the light of true faith. They are curious relics, if nothing else, and no doubt prized among collectors of antiquity.

I must wrestle with the prudence of my own heart: to keep these strange tomes is perhaps a folly, yet to lose their curious insight might equally be a poverty of spirit. For now, they shall rest in my chamber, watched and guarded, until such time as I resolve their true fate.

1635: London

I enter the church, a sanctuary adorned with dark wooden pews polished by generations, flickering candles casting shadows upon gilded statues and paintings of saints. The air is thick with the scent of incense—myrrh and frankincense mingling with the faint musk of the gathered faithful, their breaths drawn in prayer and quiet anticipation. The congregation gathers—a tapestry of humble villagers and a few discreetly noble families, each bowed in reverence, kneeling or standing as the liturgy demands.

Our priest, vested in richly embroidered chasuble, ascends the altar steps to the high altar where the consecration of the Mass shall begin. His voice, solemn and measured, intones the prayers of the Roman rite in Latin—the sacred tongue binding us through centuries. The chanted responses of the choir echo through the vaulted space, lifting hearts beyond the earthly toil.

The sermon comes later, delivered with polished eloquence, urging steadfast devotion to the Holy Mother and the saints, the eternal truth of transubstantiation, and the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice. Above all, it is a call to perseverance in the face of trials, each word heavy with the weight of faith and hope.

The ritual of Holy Communion is solemn—bread and wine elevated in adoration, a moment of sacred mystery that none witness lightly. Many Cross themselves devoutly, eyes lifted to the crucifix above, some weep quietly, others whisper fervent prayers.

Though the church is a refuge, I cannot deny the faint unease beneath the reverence—the memories of persecution and the secretive glances of those who dare not appear openly Catholic in town. Yet here, within these walls, the ancient faith breathes in ritual and song, a tether to both past and heaven.

This service is no mere formality; it is a lifeline, a declaration of identity and sanctity deeply felt—even as doubt flickers quietly within me, unspoken but present.

The snow begins to thaw under the watchful eye of the moon. Our children play, unaware of the sorrows we hide beneath our smiles.

1635: Mallard House

Duke of Mallard

This day I unclosed one of the curious books from my uncle's estate, a tome filled with instructions on crafting magical objects—talismans and amulets—and the performance of spells, charms, and even divination. The pages hold many elaborate directions: to carve symbols, mix herbs, invoke names, and call upon powers unseen.

I began to follow these instructions, though confess I find little effect from my endeavours as yet. Despite diligent trial, no marvel nor success has crowned my efforts.

Thus I see not how these arts can be rightly called witchcraft, since if such power eludes one so learned and resolute, what hope hath a feeble woman to work wonders or mischief? Methinks much of the terror and accusation surrounding witchcraft doth rest on idle fear and ignorance rather than true force.

Yet I shall persist a while longer, for these arts remain a strange and rare curiosity. Mayhap in time some secret shall reveal itself—or at the least, their study serve to enlighten and amuse.

No one here reads what I write as I have meant it, unless necessity calls her to see beneath the surface. So do we persevere, writing not just for ourselves but for those yet to come, who may learn reading between the stitched lines.

1635: Mallard House

The Estate Papers

I have succeeded in disposing of those curious and heretical books to none other than my mother in Lefame. Though lacking coin to pay in full, she rendered unto me certain lands she held in England, along with the last of her jewels—an exchange most agreeable to my coffers.

I entertain a secret hope and amusement that possessing such forbidden tomes will brand her as a witch in the eyes of the church and the zealots who haunt the countryside. It would please me greatly if she were scrutinised, tried, and perhaps even condemned for harbouring such dangerous knowledge. A fitting fate, methinks, for one who dallies with those eldritch and profane matters.

Certainly, I shall watch closely from my more comfortable seat, relishing the power to dispatch troublesome matters afar, and to see the hand of justice—or at least the fury of superstition—fall upon those inconvenient to my will.

1640: Lefame

Dowager Duchess

I did find a great delight among the many dusty volumes my son has sent—a copy of Dr. Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft.* His words breathe a welcome clearness and reason into the dark mists of our age's fears. I must share his bold proclamation, thus:

"That common opinions of witches contracting with devils, spirits, or their familiars, and their power to kill, torment, and consume the bodies of men, women, and children, or other creatures, by disease, or otherwise, their flying in the air, &c., to be but imaginary, erroneous conceptions and novelties: wherein also the lewd, unchristian, practices of witchmongers upon aged, melancholy, ignorant, and superstitious people, in extorting confessions by inhuman terrors and tortures, is notably detected."

Herein is a light shining through much darkness, exposing the falsehoods and cruelties wrought in the name of holy justice. Dr. Scot's courage in standing against the chorus of fear and ignorance is rare and noble. He speaks truth to those who unknowingly perpetuate grievous injustice upon the weak and the wise alike.

To discover such a voice in these books is a balm to my spirit, a sign that reason yet dwells amidst the tempest of superstition. I find myself eager to read further and to hold these words close, a lantern against the gloom that oppresses so many souls.

1640: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

It must be said, with no little emphasis and with the earnest weight of reflection, that the madness of women is a torrent that dashes against the firm rock of reason—a tempest that threatens to unsettle the very foundation of a household and the dignity of a name. The uncertainty of the female mind, so often given to sudden tempests of passion, to fancies wild and unjustifiable, presents a peril against which a man of discernment must guard himself with the utmost vigilance.

I find solace and truth not among such mutable spirits, but rather in the steadfastness of my dogs, whose loyalty is unerring and whose affections bear no caprice. Their presence is a comfort, serene and sincere, as constant as the seasons. Equally, I esteem my horses, creatures of noble bearing and tolerable temperament, whose purposes are plain and whose service is honest. And last, but not the least, the company of my groomsmen—rough-hewn as they may be—whose plain speech and honest humility provide a balm to the soul, a refuge from the maelstrom of feminine unrest.

How often have I yearned to send my wife herself to that distant town of Lefame, where the inconvenient and unquiet women of our family find their exile? What liberty it would grant me to rid my mind and estate of such turbulence! Yet, the blessed heir, the living proof of our union and continuation, restrains such a measure. For the sake of posterity, for the honour of bloodline, I bear this burden and look with measured hope to the order that time and careful governance may bring.

In the quiet companionship of beasts and men of honour, I seek the peace that the fluttering and fevered spirit of woman denies. Such is the lot of the enlightened man, who must govern not only his lands but the passions that would undo them—finding his strength in constancy, in reason, in those who are true and unfailing.

1640: Scotland

Lady Kennetha Mallard

This Sunday I found myself once more in the kirk, surrounded by faces both familiar and somber, from the well-to-do landed gentry clad in their sober finery, to humble farmers and labourers with their coarse woollen garb. The kirk itself was austere, bare stone walls interrupted only by plain wooden pews, and the pulpit elevated like a throne, commanding not admiration but thoughtful attention.

The air was thick, heavy with the mingled smells of damp cloth and the less refined scent of many bodies pressed close and seldom washed. The quiet was profound save for the minister's voice, sharp and unwavering, as he declaimed at length on man's fallen nature and the unyielding sovereignty of God. Each word was deliberate, as if designed to carve truth into stone, his sermon a relentless reminder of human frailty and the dire necessity of repentance.

Around me, heads bowed or lifted with solemnity; some eyes glistened with tears or flickered with doubt, while children, though kept still, struggled to contain restless spirits. The singing of psalms

rose and fell like the breath of the congregation—in tune, yet bearing the weight of years of tradition. I noted how the worship offered no comfort for my skepticism, only the cold echo of ritual and doctrine, and how my gaze often drifted to the rough-hewn beams above instead of words so hollow to my heart.

Though many found solace in this gathering, I remained a silent observer, a stranger within my own class and faith, herded by custom and expectation more than belief. This solemn assembly, though outwardly united in grace, was for me but a stage upon which faith was worn like a garment—heavy and ill-fitting—awaiting the day I might shed it altogether.

1641: London, House of Lords

The Duke of Mallard's speech

I rise this day to commend unto you the pressing matter of the "Statute of Sundry Shallowness," an Act newly proposed that forbids the wearing of hats with brims exceeding six inches in breadth. Verily, it has been argued that such an encumbrance doth offend the sight of the modest and distract from true piety.

Yet, I pray you consider: who among us hath not, when beset by tempest or harsh sun, found such a brim a blessed shield? Shall the common good be sacrificed upon the altar of fashion's caprice? Nay, I say, for to suffer the limitation of one's hat is to suffer the weight upon one's head as surely as though a pig were perched thereon, squealing a reprimand for all to hear.

More gravely still, it hath come to my attention that gentlemen who dare to don boots without precisely five-rowed stitching shall be subject to fines and public chastisement. What demon of detail doth urge such frivolity? Is the virtue of a man to be measured by the row of his boots, like a schoolboy's lesson missed?

I further declare, on the authority vested in this House, that the throwing of peas on a Thursday, now outlawed by this very law, is a grave offence not only against order but against the very spirits that govern our hearths and fields. The wise women of Kent have warned me—such acts invite curses, for peas are no mere food but tokens of fertility and warding. To ban their Thursday flight is to banish blessings and invite rot.

Thus, I urge this noble assembly to reject these absurd provisions that concern themselves with the curls of stitches and breadths of brims while the true evils of our day roam unchecked. Let us not squander

our wisdom combating the trivial lest we call down the ire of Heaven upon our heads.

So I speak, in fervent hope that reason yet prevails over foolishness.

1641: Felicity, Countess deCanard

There is a certain grace in being left to one's own devices, and I find in this unexpected solitude a blessing far greater than the idle chatter of society's company. While my lord delights in the boisterous laughter of his groomsmen and the faithful presence of his dogs and horses, I am granted the quietude so necessary for the cultivation of the mind and the refinement of the spirit.

Is it not a higher estate for a woman of gentle birth to employ her hours in study and in the careful tending of her body's health through the learned use of lotions and potions? The great and grave task of a lady's education is to prepare herself to be the moral guide and the serene heart of the home—a beacon of peace and industriousness amidst the tempests of life's cares. And so I pursue the arts and letters with earnest zeal, applying myself to the wisdom that transcends mere frivolity.

The neglect which some might deem cruel is, for me, a providence; for it frees me from the exigencies of frivolous social pleasantries and affords me the rare privilege of self-direction. Here, in the vast expanse of our estate, I am mistress not only of my appearance but of my intellect, and thus prepare myself to fulfil that noblest role a woman may hold: the silent strength that fortifies her family and uplifts society.

It is a lesson for all who would rightly order their lives, that the value of solitude is not in absence but in opportunity—the opportunity to grow, to labor, and to become worthy of true honour in both heart and mind. I am content to be overlooked, that in quietude I may flourish.

1642: Lefame

Lady Felicity Mallard

Today I took up my pen with a fresh purpose—to record my progress in learning the language spoken by our Wampanoag friends, whose presence so enriches this place we call Lefame.

It is a language unfamiliar to these English ears, and though I have no knowledge of how to render it in written form, I have resolved to capture its sounds phonetically, as best my alphabet can serve.

This morning, standing by the river's edge where the water murmurs over smooth stones, a kindly Wampanoag woman taught me the word

for “water” — I wrote it thus: “numuk”. I am told it carries the breath of the river itself. Likewise, I learned today the word for tree: “ashpee”, whose tall trunks and silent boughs are the very pillars of their world.

In the field, we practiced together: “sun” is “kushpee”, and “bird,” “wonnaun”, words that seem to sing when spoken aloud, as if the very earth rejoices in their sound.

It has been both an exercise in patience and delight, to learn such simple words as “fire” (“pôhtoh”), “wind” (“hokkuau”), and “earth” (“mosq”). Each syllable carries meaning that speaks beyond mere designation, hinting always at relationship and respect for the world around them.

I must note, too, that while we learn from the Wampanoag, we also teach in return. Together with other women, I have begun to teach English to the local children and their mothers—an exchange of tongues that bridges our worlds. The hope is that understanding might soften the divides history has imposed, and that in language, friendship may deepen.

Though my pen cannot capture the true spirit of their speech, this phonetic record shall serve as a reminder of our shared days and labours.

May this humble devotion to words lay the groundwork for greater peace and mutual esteem.

1645: Lefame

Lady Elizabeth Mallard

I arrived in Lefame a stranger bound by the stiff customs of England, eager to hold fast to the order and propriety with which I was raised. In those first weeks, I wore my collars tight, my bodice rigid, and walked with a measured step that mirrored the formidable streets of London. I spoke of scripture and sermons, keeping the Church foremost in my thoughts and dismissing the free habits of the village women as disorderly and base.

Yet the wildness of this place calls to me. I found myself at dawn wandering beneath the cedars, chanting softly the songs taught by the native women, words strange to my tongue but sweet to the air. I let my hair fall loose from its ribbons and took to wearing clothing dyed with the rich earth, far softer and freer than silks or lace. At times I speak alone, murmuring the new language of the woods, as though compelled by some invisible presence.

For protection of secrets, a barrier forged in ink and hope.

To the man whose hand strikes,
may his shadow fall long into solitude.
May his tongue twist and his promises fray,
until he understands the cost of fear born from his cruelty.

1650: a Blandy manservant

His Grace the Duke was taken grievously ill—stricken by a malady that no learned doctor could cure nor soothe. The physicians, despite their finest herbs and remedies, could do no more than watch and pray as his strength waned.

In desperation, a local woman, said to be a witch by the gossips, was called upon. Though the tale was never spoken aloud, it is known among us that she did restore His Grace to health with her strange potions and ways. Yet, though her aid was undeniable, the matter was buried quick and deep. The witch was exiled to Lefame with all haste, her presence erased as if she had never breathed upon the earth.

His Grace would brook no taisance or forbearance for witches and wizards—as he has oft proclaimed—no matter their power or profession. The story of his recovery is crushed beneath the weight of his fury and the honour of the house. It is better left unsaid, though we know it to be true.

This place holds many such dark contradictions—where the power of witchcraft heals, but the dread of it condemns.

The Healing Veil

To mend bone or spirit, gather nettle, sage, and sweetgrass. Steep in water drawn at dawn, chant:

"Blesséd leaves, spirit weave,
Health return, pain forgive.
By earth's grace and wind's breath,
Turn aside the sting of death."

Apply as salve or sip as tea to restore balance.

1650: London, House of Lords

The Duke of Mallard's speech

It is a truth as steadfast as the hounds upon the hunt that secrecy is the greatest gift and solemn obligation bestowed with power and prestige. Just as a keen hunter doth track his quarry with silent footfall and careful patience, so must we, the Lords, guard our counsels and keep close the delicate shallows of our private affairs. For cunning and hush preserve the honour of our estates as much as the stoutest wall or fiercest sword.

Indeed, the slow and wise course of action—much like the measured patience required to bring down the hart—is ever to promote no change which might imperil the station and privileges of the Lords themselves. Great folly it would be to unsettle the established order, as rash riding leads to broken limbs and wasted day. Let us keep faith with tradition and the prudent pace that befits our noble rank.

And if I may speak my own ambition plainly, it is my intent to reclaim my right as Exchequer, that seat of power over the King's coffers wherein the affairs of realm and revenue lie. Such a place requires prudence, experience, and respect—qualities I possess in greater measure than most. Like a master huntsman guiding his pack, I shall oversee and direct with steadfast hand.

My own chargers, bred from the finest stock, are a symbol of both power and continuity. They carry me swift and sure, as must our counsel be steady and unwavering. The value of retaining a family of servants, skilled and loyal, cannot be overstated for they sustain the dignity of our households, tending with care as the hounds are tended before a chase.

It is thus my intent to reclaim my right as Exchequer, that seat of power over the King's coffers wherein the affairs of realm and revenue lie. Such a place requires prudence, experience, and respect—qualities I possess in greater measure than most. Like a master huntsman guiding his pack, I shall oversee and direct with steadfast hand.

Yet the uncovering or exposing of family secrets is to be met with utmost severity. These things are the sacred ties weaving our lineages together; to lay them bare is to invite ruin and dishonour. Wherever such traitorous disclosures arise, let punishment strike as sharply as a huntsman's whip lest the sanctity of lineage and trust be undone.

My Lords, let us then cherish secrecy as the silent cloak of power, let us favour the slow and measured ways that conserve our dignity, uphold the honour of our line, and approach our duties with the surety of a well-bred steed upon the winded chase.

1650: Lefame

Dowager Duchess

Religion, I have long pondered, finds its beginnings not in the lofty halls of churchmen or the quarrels of kings, but in the maternal arms—that sacred containment where myth was first fashioned to amuse and soothe the young, occupying them while the greater business of practical life pressed on around them. This earliest faith was gentle, a lullaby woven from wonder and care.

Yet when codified by men, religion becomes transformed—no longer a sanctuary, but an arena of contest and rivalry. Like huntsmen flinging taunts and gestures to assert their place, so do they turn faith towards chest-thumping, ritualised hierarchy, and the sublimation of desire under the guise of moral and physical superiority. It is a theatre where brother rates brother; a display not of communion with the divine, but of dominance before their fellows.

In societies that hold women as but property, religion's true purpose is corrupted still further. It serves as spectacle and instrument whereby men perform their dominance, not before God, but before one another. The mystical root—the generative source of faith—survives only as residue, a pale aroma of what was once vibrant and whole, drained of its life and power.

Moreover, I observe with sorrow the way male secrecy intertwines with this corruption. Secret kept, knowledge hoarded, and dissent smothered—all to protect the fragile ascendancy of men's authority. Such guarded silence stifles true understanding and preserves superstition and folly.

Thus does our inherited religion bear the marks of both its maternal origin and its masculine reformation: nurturance turned contention; mystery turned spectacle; sacredness overtaken by pride.

Let us then discern, with patient mind and honest heart, the difference between religion as cradle and religion as court, and seek the living root lest it be lost beneath this tangled undergrowth of power and pretence.

1650: A valuable secret

His Grace, Duke of Mallard has sent us a letter requesting—though couched in quite different terms—I cease my investigations into his New England estates and confine myself to this older England. He has graciously extended an invitation to stay at Mallard House in the Spring and to bring with me the chest and its contents. So, he says, that he too might view such a valuable—and evidently secret—heirloom.

If it is so valuable—and I can see that it is—he must seek me out. I know his secret: we are a much interwoven family with some connections best kept hidden.

I will leave it to posterity and hope some future woman will have the right to investigate its history.

1666: Teachings

Compiled by Mistress Eleanor, known also in Wampanoag speech as Wenonoquak

By boundless wisdom of air, water, fire, and earth, we bind ourselves to the breath of life and the unseen currents that move all things. To call upon these forces is to awaken the ancient magicks within the world and within ourselves.

Elements of Power:

- Air (Kushpee): The breath that carries visions and lightning's voice.
- Water (Numuk): The flow that cleanses and carries souls beyond sight.
- Fire (Pôhtoh): The flickering flame that burns falsehood and reveals truth.
- Earth (Mosq): The deep root, keeper of bones and secrets.

Spell of Opening the Pathway

Chant thrice beneath the new moon while lighting three white candles placed in a triangle:

"Wananun numuk, kushpee wind,
Pôhtoh flame, mosq beneath skin.
Open path, veil untether,
Spirits guide us, now and ever."

—This prayer seeks to open the portals within, stirring insight and warding hidden threats.

Protection Against Shadow

When darkness creeps close and fear rises, carry with thee a pouch of iron nails, wild rose petals, and four white feathers. Whisper thus:

"Bootrock, painflower, feathers white,
Guard me in shadow, send forth light.
No ill may pass, no demon near,
By earth and blood, I cast out fear."

Language of the Ancients

We speak in two tongues, English and Wampanoag, weaving both into spell and song. The names carry power—say 'Numuk' for water with reverence, 'Pôhtoh' for fire with fear and love; such words unlock the great mysteries and bind us fast to the land and our forebears.

The Circle of Women

Our strength is in our Sisterhood, each woman keeper of lore and healer of wounds visible and unseen. Alone we are fragile, but in circle bound by magic and trust, we become unshakable.

By these arts and prayers, we live and protect, bound forever by the breath of Kushpee, the flow of Numuk, the flame of Pôhtoh, and the root of Mosq.

1666: Conquer, moon

Have you followed the practice inherited from the heathen of considering the course of the stars, the moon and the eclipses of the new moon? And have you imagined that by the exclamation 'Conquer, moon' (vince, Luna), you could reproduce its light? When you wished to pray, have you resorted to other places than the church, as, for instance, to springs, stones, trees or crossroads? Have you there kindled fires and sacrificed bread or aught else?

1666: a Blandy maid

This day I did toast some bread for the Duchess, who hath been unwell of late. Though a humble task it seemed, I took great care with the fire and the turning of the slices, for I wished to offer comfort in my small way. When I brought the bread to her chamber, wrapped warm, I saw a light return to her eyes as she took it into hand.

She did eat with some relish, more than I had thought she might, and for a moment, her weariness seemed to lift. The simple warmth of the toasted bread brought her some joy, and her faint smile told me it pleased her much.

1666: the Duchess of Mallard

Private papers

These past weeks have been marked by a dreadful calamity, the Great Fire which hath consumed vast portions of London. Though I

dwell in the tranquillity of Mallard, the news hath reached even this quiet place and filled many a heart with trembling.

'Tis commonly held among the good people that this horror is no mere accident but a sign—some declare a visitation of divine wrath upon a sinful city, others whisper that the devil's own hand doth stoke the flames. The year itself, last numbered '66, hath long been regarded with unease, associated with portents and misfortune. Some say the fire's great rage doth confirm these fears, that the heavens themselves declare judgment upon London's wickedness or folly.

I confess, though I am versed in natural philosophy and seek reason's light, even my heart wavers before the mystery and destruction witnessed. The city, once bustling with life, now lies scorched and broken, the flames so fierce as to frown down all manner of hope.

Villagers here speak in hushed tones of repentance and prayer, and I perceive how deep these fears run, how fire and smoke become more than mere elements but signs writ large in the firmament. Whether by God's hand or devil's device, this conflagration rends the fabric of peace and serves as a dire admonition to all who call England their home.

May He who governs all in mercy provide relief and wisdom to rebuild, and grant us protection from such calamities henceforth.

1666: a Blandy maid

Today I thought to list and record the many strange superstitions and tales I have heard regarding the humble act of toasting bread—things said in whispers and warnings, passed down by the old folk and the servants alike.

First, it is said that burnt or overly toasted bread doth invite ill luck, for the blackness is the Devil's mark, and to eat such is to taste his hate. Likewise, some say the cracking sound of bread popping in the fire is a warning of spirits nearby, and one ought not to neglect a blessing before taking up the toasts.

Another belief holds that if one toasts bread and offers it to another without first looking them in the eye, ill fortune or discord might follow, for the eyes are the window to the soul and must witness the gift, or the mischief grows.

In some tales, the raising of toasted bread and wine together is said to ward off evil spirits that roam the hearth, keeping home and heart safe from harm. Yet, too many toasts in quick succession may invite the devil's laughter, encouraging wildness and loss of sense among drinkers.

There is also a curious warning that toasting bread alone, or without the company of others, invites loneliness upon the bearer, for the bread's warmth is meant to be shared and multiplied in gatherings.

Some say the first crumb of toast should never be eaten, but thrown outside the door as an offering, that the household fairies or spirits be kept kindly and bountiful.

These tales and many more I have heard, each carrying a weight of caution or blessing, woven into the everyday ritual of tending the fire and the bread.

1666: Dorchester, England

I take my place among the congregation, a mixture of humble labourers clothed in plain homespun and a few well-to-do, their faces stern beneath wide-brimmed hats and somber gowns. The meetinghouse is plain, its wooden benches worn smooth, its walls bare save for a simple pulpit raised high before us. The room smells faintly of damp wood and the sober sweat of many unwashed bodies, a reminder of the toils endured through the week.

Our minister, a man of earnest mien, ascends the pulpit in his black gown. He opens the Good Book with reverence and begins a long, measured sermon, rich with warnings of sin, the absolute sovereignty of God, and the frailty of man's soul. His voice cuts through the silence like a sharp knife, bidding us to repent, to forsake worldliness and commit wholly to piety. There is no ornament in his words, only plain truth—harsh and unyielding.

The congregation listens with bowed heads, some clutching their hats, some wiping tears or gazing upward in earnest supplication. Children sit still, though some fidget nervously. The elders' faces are lined with hardship and piety, eyes fixed firmly on the preacher's lips. The service is long, with scripture read aloud and prayers given with solemnity, yet around me, I find no comfort in these texts or promises. Where others seek salvation, I find only hollow echo and the weight of empty tradition.

As the service closes, the congregation rises slowly, filing out into the chill air, their spirits heavy with the sermon's gravity. I, however, depart with a mind restless and unassuaged, questioning the faith so many hold dear, and pondering the gulf between their hopes and my own silent unbelief.

1670: Lefame

This afternoon I read again that passage wherein my Lord Bacon declares that no true experiment should proceed from a preconceived idea, lest the natural world be forced to speak what Man would have it say, rather than its own truth. Such severity of method does much commend his mind, which strives for order—yet I confess it chills mine a little. If all inquiry must be emptied of imagination, what then becomes of those sparks of fancy that first stir the will to inquire?

I think of those elder traditions he would cast aside: the physicians who traced sympathy between herb and limb, the students of natural magic who sought correspondences in the heavens, believing all Creation one text to be read by likeness and sign. Are they to be deemed mere dreamers now, or worse, deceivers? Yet they too sought knowledge, only by a gentler art, seeing wonder not as folly but as a gate to truth.

It seems to me that imagination is the very breath of discovery. May not the mind, in its freedom, catch some glimpse of what the senses alone would never reveal? And is not art as needful as measure, poetry as necessary to philosophy as light is to the eye? If we bind the spirit too tightly to the rule of experiment, perhaps we shall gain precision but lose marvel.

Still, I perceive the new learning brings power—ships that sail by improved compass, medicines that save lives once thought lost. Perhaps the age must pass through this purging of fancy to stand firm upon fact. Yet I cannot relinquish my affection for the old art, where nature had its mysteries and the heart its rapture.

Tonight I shall light a little lamp and reopen his Novum Organum, though I read it as one who watches both dawn and sunset at once, uncertain whether she witnesses a birth or a burial.

1670: Lefame

Felicity Mallard

I have read with much interest the *Catalogus plantarum Angliæ* by the naturalist John Ray, whose painstaking labours seek to order the multitude of English plants into more “natural” groupings, founded upon a broader set of similarities between species. His work is thorough and learned, setting aside some previous models for a method more grounded in careful observation and the harmony of many traits considered together.

Yet I cannot but wonder if it would not serve the cause of true understanding still better to seek not only what unites, but what divides

—that is, to look also for differences between plants as a means to comprehend more fully the rich variety of creation. For in the contrast and distinction lies the flesh of nature's design, no less than in resemblance.

Does not the sun gain his glory not only by shining alike upon all, but by casting varied shadows? Are not the leaves on a bough each singular, though held together in a cluster? To know the differences is surely to know the whole with greater depth and wisdom.

1672: Duchess of Mallard

Private papers

You will laugh, I am sure, to hear where your sister spent her Friday evening. I was carried by Lady Hartwell and her company to see Mr. Shadwell's new play, *The Virtuoso,* which, as rumour has told you already, makes sport of these modern philosophers who busy themselves with air-pumps, insects, and all manner of little glasses and contrivances. The house was thronged; even the gentlemen in the pit seemed less intent upon their periwigs than upon the stage.

The chief character, one Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, is the merriest madman that ever wore a scholar's gown. He dabbles in everything and masters nothing; I thought I should have died laughing when he was shown learning to swim upon a table, or discoursing gravely of preserving air in bottles! The audience clapped in such a roar that I could scarce hear Lady Hartwell's remarks, and Mr. Etheridge declared it the truest picture of our inquisitive age he had yet seen.

Yet I will say this: though he is made ridiculous, I cannot wholly despise the creature. There is in his folly a spark of wonder, and perhaps that same wonder, rightly guided, might lead to better things. Still, I pray Heaven that our English men of sense never turn their kitchens into laboratories, nor keep frogs for conversation.

Afterwards we supped at the Turk's Head, where the talk ran hot upon Mr. Shadwell's wit and Mr. Dryden's envy of it—such are the quarrels of the town. For my part, I came home with my sides aching from laughter and my mind full of curious fancies about air, motion, and the mischiefs of too much knowledge.

1888: Elspeth Mallard

(Found among these pages, so left. [Ed.])

Mother has lifted her weary head from her own studies and correspondence to read the progress of my researches. This short essay on language—her especial talent—is to be included in one of her forthcoming pamphlets. I include it herein as it appears germane to this history of mine.

On the Erosion of Sacred Language into the Realm of Commerce: A Reflection on the Lexicon of Salem, 1680s

Jeanne d'Anatis

In the late seventeenth century, amidst the tumult of Salem and its surrounding settlements, a peculiar transformation in language can be observed. Words once cherished within the confines of divine conversation—words rooted deeply in religious doctrine—began to be employed, with apparent innocence, in the context of trade, valuation, and negotiation. The shift is subtle, yet profoundly revealing of the evolving cultural landscape of New England, where faith and commerce have become entwined in a manner that masks their original distinctions.

Let us examine the words "providence," "mercy," "redemption," "value," and "possession," whose etymologies reach back to Latin and Greek origins, and consider how their meanings have shifted with the currents of New World enterprise.

Originating from the Latin providentia, meaning "forethought" or "foresight," and related to the Greek pronoia, meaning "anticipation," the term historically conveyed divine intervention or protection—God's careful governance over the universe. Yet, by the 1680s in Salem, "providence" is frequently invoked in correspondence and ledger entries to denote not divine will, but the "providence" of wealth—an almost mathematical calculation of blessing or future yield. Its spiritual weight has diminished; it now signifies "something providential," a product of human calculation and luck, eerily akin to business forecasts.

Derived from Latin merces, meaning "reward" or "payment," and Greek mêron, "part," "mercy" was once a divine attribute, embodying compassion and forgiveness freely given by a higher power. In Salem, however, "mercy" has been assimilated into the language of credit and debt. A merchant's "mercy" is merely the leniency of a broker in extending credit—another form of value assignment rather than divine

benevolence. The word's spiritual resonance is now muffled, replaced by its function as a measure of human generosity in economic transactions.

Rooted in Latin redemptio, meaning "a buying back," and Greek apolytrosis, "a ransom," "redemption" in religious doctrine pertains to salvation and liberation from sin through divine grace. Yet, in the bustling markets of Salem, it is co-opted to mean "the recovery of value," "redeeming" a debt, or "redeemable" property. The sacred notion of salvation has been exchanged for a financial act—a transaction of exchange rather than divine grace.

From Latin valere, meaning "to be strong," "to be worth," "to have power," and Greek balein, "to throw," "value" in its original context signified moral or spiritual worth—virtue as an intrinsic quality. In the new context of Salem, "value" enlarges its scope to money, property, and commodities—attributes that fluctuate with the market's whim. The spiritual dimension is lost; worth is now measured by exchange value, not moral or divine virtue.

From Latin possessionem, meaning "a holding," and Greek katischus, "a holding," "possession" traditionally implied divine gift or rightful entitlement, often conferred by divine providence or inheritance. However, in Salem's accounting ledgers, it becomes an inventory—a thing owned, bought, or sold. The word's sacred connotations of inheritance, divine gift, and moral claim have been replaced by the cold, calculating act of "possessing"—a commodity, a unit of exchange.

This linguistic shift is emblematic of a broader change—a transition from spiritual to material priority. The words, originally rooted in divine authority and moral virtue, have been reconfigured—by necessity or design—to serve the burgeoning commerce of the New World. Language, in this sense, is plastic; it adapts according to the context and the interests that shape that context.

The religious language that once spoke of divine providence and mercy now echoes in the market halls, printed on the slips of paper and stamped in ledger books, all rendered deistic or divine terms into tools of economic valuation. This metamorphosis reveals a cultural truth: words are not static, but living entities that reflect the priorities and power structures of their time.

The words that once carried the luminous weight of divine truth have, over the decades, become the currency of trade. Their etymology from Latin and Greek roots remains, but their spiritual significance has been subtly but irrevocably eroded. Instead, they serve as a mirror to a society in transition—where faith is commodified, and language itself

becomes a ledger, recording the shifting values of a new, burgeoning economy.

1675: A Sermon Preached at St. Botolph's

Text: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." — Exodus 22:18

Beloved brethren, ye have heard the sound of thunder in this land: whispers of strange women, lights in the fields at midnight, the cattle found blasted, babes sickened, and men drawn from their beds by fevered dreams. Think not these tales but rustic fancy. The Devil prowls still, as subtle as in Eden, and his servants wear the faces of our neighbours.

I would not speak their devices save to arm you against them, yet even to name their works makes the blood stir with an unholy tremor. For theirs is a fellowship of secret touch and muttered breath, of powders that sear the senses, of images wrought in wax and warmed by slow, infernal heat. There is a sweetness mingled with their corruption, a perfume that rises from the pit itself—tempting, heady, accursed. The mind that gazes too closely on such abominations begins to totter between wonder and disgust. Yea, the Devil decks his daughters fair, that the eye may love what the soul must hate.

But away, away such thoughts! Shall we let the serpent charm us while it coils around our hearths? The witch is not merely a poor deluded woman but a confederate of Hell, sworn in blood against Christ's own kingdom. She suckles familiars as tender mothers their babes, yet those imps cry for the souls of men. Her art, clothed in secrecy, works treason against Heaven itself. And if pity whisper in your heart, remember: pity for the witch is cruelty to the righteous.

Therefore we must purge the accursed thing from among us. Let no house harbour her, no tongue defend her. Search diligently, repent fervently, and set no snare for your conscience by indulgence. The fire that consumes her body is mercy to her soul and warning to yours. Better that a hundred witches burn than one sinner be lulled into dalliance with their sin.

Yet take heed, brethren, that zeal be not wanton curiosity. It is not the Devil's art we seek to study, but his ruin we seek to accomplish. Shun the allure, despise the glamour, cleave fast to Scripture, and mark the snares that gleam even as they scorch. For as light lies in darkness, so must righteousness triumph only through vigilance unending.

Pray, then, that our hands be strengthened and our sight kept pure. For though the witch's flesh fall to ash, her master walks invisible still, seeking whom he may devour.

1675: A Sermon Delivered at St. Botolph's

Text: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter."

Brethren beloved—aye, beloved, though sinners black as midnight—hearken, for the gate of salvation swings upon its iron hinges, yet opens not to the slothful in heart. Hope, that deceitful comforter, must be torn out by the roots, that the soil of your soul may be made fit for the seed of true despair, from which alone groweth the everlasting flower of heavenly consolation. Mark it well: none shall taste the sweetness of mercy till they have swallowed the gall of utter hopelessness.

Think not, therefore, that hope is your friend. Nay, it is your tempter, whispering ease into ears born for affliction. Cast it from you, and with trembling knees labour harder in your callings. Let not a penny be wasted, for God sees the idle shilling as He sees the idle hour, and will hold both to account. The sinner who hoards not his time shall find his purse devoured by moth and mildew; the frugal hand is sanctified, for every coin spared in life adds brightness to the ledger kept in Heaven.

Some will cry, "But, sir, if all hope be lost, what shall sustain us?" Fools! It is despair that sustains. The pit, once known, reveals the ladder. Only when ye know yourselves damned without remedy may ye perceive Christ's mercy as aught but cheap. If ye walk thinking yourselves near Heaven already, ye shall lie down in Hell unwitting. Better a conscience scourged raw and bleeding than a back lulled soft with false comfort. The sweetest balsam smarts fiercest on the wound.

Yet let none mistake: though hope be forbidden, ye must labour yet in godly confidence. Despair entirely, yet not utterly; for hopeless hope is the truest faith, as death is the beginning of life. Such are the mysteries of our salvation: contradictions nailed to the same Cross. Work more, pray harder, live sparer—drink no wine save for medicine, laugh not save in fear, and spend each hour as if already judged.

So shall ye, drained of hope on earth, find it returned a thousandfold in Heaven. For only the soul that has ceased to expect mercy may rightly receive it. The seed dies, the stalk withers, and behold—the harvest is eternity.

1675: A Sermon Preached at St. Botolph's

Text: "For our God is a consuming fire." — Hebrews 12:29

Brethren, the Lord hath spoken once, yea twice, and still ye hear as if in a dream. But I say to you as Moses cried unto the hosts of Israel: "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me." God's sword is drawn, and He shall not sheathe it till the last witch is fallen like Jezebel beneath the chariot wheels.

I tell you, this land steams with unholy vapour. It riseth from their kitchens and their beds, where charms are brewed in blood and whispers soft as fornication are offered up to demons. "Be sober, be vigilant," saith Saint Peter, "for your adversary the Devil walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Yet how many of you would sup with that adversary, smiling over your buttered bread while Hell's warmth steals through your floorboards! The witch lies at your very table, her eyes mild, her tongue smooth with deceit. "Her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead" (Proverbs 2:18).

You would pity her, you say? Did Samuel pity Agag when he hewed him in pieces before the Lord? Did Elijah spare the prophets of Baal when he brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there? Nay, the covenant of mercy is not for those who traffic with the pit. "Suffer not sin upon thy neighbour," Leviticus crieth; "but in any wise rebuke him." Rebuke!—yea, even unto the consuming flame.

And mark well, brethren, the fire we kindle upon earth is but a shadow of the one eternal. It roars beneath the firmament even now, waiting to swallow up whosoever lingers in tenderness for evil. The smoke of your lenience goeth up forever and ever. Hell is not a tale for children; it is a mouth yawning wide as the grave, and every hour the Devil dropeth souls therein as a man lets fall stones into a well.

Think not me cruel when I say, let them burn. Mercy without justice is treason to the Cross. "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever" (Psalm 19:9). Better your eyes be scorched by the sight of her torment than your heart bewitched by her smile. And let none doubt: if ye hesitate, ye too shall share the witch's portion, the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

We are chosen vessels, brethren—torches held in the Almighty's hand. Therefore shine, though ye consume yourselves in the shining. Do not faint; toil, seek, expose. For every witch rooted out, a thousand angels rejoice; and though the air grow foul with the stench of her flesh, Heaven itself smells the sweeter. Thus saith the Lord, "I will purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin" (Isaiah 1:25).

And when the last of them is ashes blown to the wind, then shall we cry, "The Lord is our light and our salvation—whom shall we fear?"

until that great day when even the smoke of their torment testifies to our righteousness.

1675: Lefame

You speak ever of flame as though it served only for torment; yet I, who have lived a little among the woods and streams, have learned that the fire of Heaven hath many offices. Much of what men call enchantment is but a truer knowledge of the concord between the parts of Creation. The power that stirs within an evocation—if we must keep the word—rises not from rebellion, but from obedience to that ordering which God Himself hath written into the elements.

When the tempests break and thunder walks from sky to shore, it is Air proclaiming its dominion. When the fountains murmur and their silver drops fall like tears of joy, Water sings its peace. The trembling of a summer flame or the swift stroke of lightning is the tongue of Fire, eager yet not evil; and in the immovable places of the world, where echoes labour slowly, Earth answers with its deep voice.

Shall we call these utterances wicked, when each keeps the part appointed? If there be harmony among the elements, may it not be that the fault lies not in their music but in our deafness? What men name sorcery is, I begin to think, less an offence against Heaven than a manner of listening—hazardous, perhaps, but not damnable.

An odd assortment of peculiar papers. V.V. ’23

Ever mind the rule of three
Three times your acts return to thee
This lesson well thou must learn
Thou only gets what thee dost earn.

1680: Diary of Alfred Blandy, Physician

This day I was again summoned to the house of Mr. H——, whose daughter falls, at uncertain intervals, into a rigidity of limbs and stillness of breath so exact that they account her surely dead. After some hours she revives, complaining only of a great weariness and a heaviness of spirit. The case seems to answer to what Galen names catalepsis, though I find no certain agreement among the moderns touching its causes or cure.

The difficulty is not small, for the outward signs may be counterfeited with much ease. I have seen maids, disordered of fancy or

seeking advantage, feign the trance so cunningly that no pulse is discerned and yet the artifice be perfect. Others, being truly afflicted, are accused of deceit for the same reason. Thus Nature's mystery and human mischief are so intermingled that scarce any judgment can be made without hazard of mistake.

In some, I have found the attack preceded by violent passion, sorrow, or fright; in others by long fasting or sleeplessness, which impair the spirits animal and vital alike. I have prescribed bleeding in the arm, with volatile salts held to the nose, and rubbing of the limbs to restore the motion of the blood. These avail in part, yet the malady returns unbidden, as if some subtle lock were set upon the body by the mind itself.

I cannot but muse whether such seizures be not the body's protest against intolerable inward grief, the soul retreating from her habitation but not departing altogether. It is a strange commerce between life and death, so near allied that one may wear the other's resemblance. And there will ever be impostors who learn that resemblance for their own ends, making the physician a fool to his face.

Would that the causes of spirit and flesh were more plainly given to man's understanding. Till then, catalepsy shall remain one of those border maladies, half in nature and half in imagination, from which neither physic nor philosophy can yet deliver us.

1680: A Treatise or Brief Meditation

Abbess of St Germoglio Convent

Wherein it is humbly proposed that though Divinity be a bottomless sea, yet Reason may venture to dip her toes therein without immediate drowning.

There hath long been within my own breast a delightful perplexity, to wit, whether the good woman, being pious, attracteth God's affection as a flame draws a moth, or whether His affection, preceding all virtue, maketh her pious, as the sun shining aforehand causeth the flowers to bloom who were, till then, most sluggard and undistinguished weeds. A simple matter, some would think. Yet I find many a theological skull cracked upon this very stone of inquiry.

If, on the one hand, God loveth us because we are pious, then it must follow that there is in us some prior goodness which doth move the Almighty to admiration—as though the Creator, spying one small clean patch upon His carpet of earth, cried "Behold, that is neat, I shall reward it with affection!" But what impertinence to imagine the Infinite

wooed by our dust! Out of such reasoning springeth arrogance, and arrogance the Devil's own flower.

If, on the contrary, we are pious because God loveth us, then our devotion is but a reflection of His selective favour, and no great credit to ourselves. This I find equally vexing, for it leaves the ungodly to mutter, "Had God but loved me first, I too had been virtuous," which is no very industrious theology. Indeed, if one be damned for lack of affection rather than lack of virtue, what becomes of free will, that old apple by which even Eve got her employment?

I have herein consulted the Reverend Master Pym, who assures me that God's love is both the cause and the reward of virtue. I replied that it is easier to believe two candles light each other than to apprehend such circular divinity. He looked vexed and said women reason too much upon mysteries. Yet surely, if we be forbidden the question, how shall we ever discern the answer?

I incline therefore to a middle temper: that piety and love exist as two mirrors reflecting one another eternally, so that whoso looks upon either sees both, though the ignorant may think he sees but one. God loveth us to make us pious, and we are pious that He may love us the more, till cause and effect embrace like old friends forgetting who spoke first. This, I grant, doth not much simplify the matter, but age hath taught me that the truly divine is ever found in confusion handsomely expressed.

Let none suppose, however, that such argument is vain. For even the smallest convent needs its metaphysics, else the sisters fall to gossip, which is worse for the soul than heresy. I exhort therefore the younger nuns that when next they scrub the floors, they ponder whether the floor grow clean because they love it, or they love it because it groweth clean. So may they perceive that God's nature is not of the broom but of the gleam.

In conclusion (though indeed my thoughts scarce permit an end), I shall venture this charity: that to be loved by God and to love God are neither before nor after, but one continual act, like breathing in and out of the same eternal air. He loveth us into piety, and we worship Him for loving us so; the circle spins, the convent bell tolls, and somewhere Heaven itself laughs at our precision.

Thus ends this small exercise in holy dizziness, penned by her who daily strives both to love and to be lovable before the Throne.

Heaven helps those who help themselves.

1680: Letter to Edmund Ferris

Alfred Blandy

Your last letter brought me both contentment and curiosity, for I perceive in your discourse the very pulse of Nature's hidden life, which beats beneath all forms of Art and Physick alike. You know my persuasion that Alchemy is not an idle juggling with metals, as the vulgar imagine, but the true surgery of Nature herself, wherein the body of the world is opened, its humours purified, and its secret anatomy revealed to the industrious eye.

Those physicians who know only herbs and syrups are but apothecaries to the external man; but he who knows the Alchymic fire ministereth to the inward principle of life. For disease is nothing else but a corruption of the vital sulphur or a discord among the three principles—Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury—upon which, as upon pillars, the natural fabric of man is founded. Therefore, I hold it certain that the Philosopher, rightly instructed in these mysteries, is fitter to serve as King's Physician than any graduate of the College, who reads Galen as Scripture yet never once hath conversed with Fire.

Touching my own labours, I must acquaint you that after many experiments ill-favoured and perilous, I have at length attained a menstruum so pure and penetrative that it dissolves gold in the space of one hour, leaving the body of the metal uncorrupted when it re-congeals. The vapours were of intolerable sweetness and brightness, almost as if a little sun had been loosed in the vessel. I dare scarce publish the preparation, lest fools mishandle what they cannot understand; but I feel persuaded that herein lies a true key to the tincture which healeth both metal and man. Already I have used but one drop distilled from that Work upon a patient long wasted by dropsy—and behold, the waters flowed from him as if driven forth by light itself.

Is not this the true purpose of our Art—that where others minister remedies to the flesh, we restore the soul of Nature within it? In that sense, the Alchemist is both Physician and Priest, making visible the providence of the Almighty through fire and composition. Let the sceptics mock; their mockery will melt before truth as dross before the crucible.

I shall soon go again to my furnace, for it draws me more surely than any company of men. When next I write, I hope to report an exaltation of the tincture and perhaps some further proof of its use in the stone. Meanwhile, dear friend, fail not to continue steadfast in your operations. Every dawn finds Nature younger, and her secrets less shy to those who love her rightly.

1680: Letter to Lefame

I confess your letter left me long in thought, yea half the day at my window, watching the light shift across the garden wall. I know you ever did love to startle sober minds, yet your discourse this time hath outstripped even your former boldness. You speak of a Heaven bereft of all males; that the Maker is not Father but perhaps the very spirit of all Femininity—that the Devil, assuming the shape of a man, is but the coarse counterpart of what Heaven refined into Woman. I scarce know whether to smile at your invention or tremble at the peril of it.

You say, if woman be counted the tempter, then surely Heaven should be peopled with her, since what God most desires He must redeem. And further, that His messenger, His only child, would not be Son but Daughter—Jessica, as you name her—sent to cleanse mankind by compassion, not conquest. My dear heart, I do not question your reason's reach, for it moves like lightning through the clouds; but I fear such thought would frighten any Churchman into fits. You place yourself, as it were, upon the edge of blasphemy and beauty both, so near allied that no mortal foot can long rest betwixt them.

Yet though I reprove, I cannot wholly reject you. There is, in what you write, a strange comfort—that the Divine may wear the gentler countenance, that grace might resemble not thunder but the tender face of Woman. I think often upon the verse, "In Christ there is neither male nor female." Perhaps therein lies your meaning, though your words clothe it in more daring raiment. You would have Heaven governed by pity rather than power; I would rather imagine both made one.

Pray, my sister, do not send such notions to others, lest some pious fool cry witchcraft where there is only wonder. Keep them, as jewels of the mind, for those who love both thought and you. The world is no friend to the intellectual; it burns what it cannot understand.

1680: Baron Entenbraten

A New and Most Necessary Contemplation upon Natural Philosophy, Being an Address Concerning the Hidden Workings of Creation.

To the Reader of any considerable Ingenuity,

I greet you well, though the times be disordered and the air stuffed full of frogs, vapours, and talkative physicians. I write these present pages not as a vain ornament to learning, but as a spade put into the rich

but stony field of Nature. It is my persuasion, founded upon patient Experiment and certain Inspirations of the Mind, that there are many Laws within Creation which the Englishman hath not yet guessed, nor the Frenchman rightly corrupted.

Some years past, being moved by inward zeal, I began to observe the generation of moisture within certain metallic solutions, perceiving that their vapours, when constrained in glass and cooled by ice, do produce a fine dew, possessing strange powers both medicinal and moral. From this operation I concluded that Nature worketh not by caprice, but by perpetual motion in her own small circuits, as the blood runs in man, and as the moon rolls after the sun. I called this doctrine Der Wandelnde Kreis: the Roving Roundness of Nature.

It was afterward made manifest to me, through my studies in fire and magnet, that the four Elements are not contrary but commonly married. The Fire engenders the Air; the Air feeds the Water; the Water labours to become Earth; and Earth sighs upward again toward the Fire —an eternal wedding with much quarrelsomeness but no divorce. Having written this in Latin, ten pages close-set, I sent it to several learned persons, but none replied save one Dutchman who desired the recipe for the dew.

I am furthermore persuaded that the pulse of the Earth itself is measurable, as one measures the pulse of a horse. I have constructed an Engine of iron chains, leaden pendula, and a goose feather, by which I can feel the trembling of the ground even when no carriage passes, and by this means perceive what I call the Planet's Breath. On some days it pants rapidly, as though fever'd; on others, it is slow and even, a sign (as I think) of tranquillity in the universal body. I purpose soon to publish a fuller account, if the learned men hereabouts cease to laugh first.

Now concerning Natural Philosophy herself—oh, cruelly neglected Lady!—it grieveth me sore that every shoemaker or miller, having read half of Aristotle or having boiled one frog, now calls himself Philosophus Naturalis. But true Natural Philosophy is not in the letter, nor in the frog; it is a temper, a devotion, a seeing of God's wrinkles in the clay of the world. Wherefore I propose—nay, urgently demand—that there be established a Society, a Brotherhood, a Congregation of Inquiring Minds! A Society for the Advancement and Regulation of Natural Insight, to meet monthly, soberly, with candles and beer, where no man shall talk of souls or politics, but all shall speak of Nature as of a woman both modest and voluptuous.

This Society, of which I humbly consent to be Secretary, shall receive the observations of travellers, the diagrams of mechanics, and the dreams of well-disposed maidens (for sometimes Nature opens herself to women more readily than to men). It shall print no vain

pamphlets, save those that enlarge understanding or confound the foolish. And if England desire to join itself thereunto, it shall be welcome, though the air there is damp and not favourable to delicate metals.

In closing this poor treatise, let the Reader understand that I seek no praise but only conversation. To speak with wise men of wise things is a pleasure far beyond titles or government pensions. The world, methinks, spins faster than it used, and if we do not observe its motion soon, it shall fling us all off into ignorance again.

Therefore I entreat, whoever readeth this, if he have any tincture of learning, any liking for truth or ale, let him write to me at *Knusperente*, where my instruments presently fill a barn, and the neighbours, not understanding, call it witchery. Our correspondence shall be the foundation of that new Society which will deliver natural philosophy from the schoolmen and restore it to the living Earth.

Written at *Schloss Knusperente* upon Candlemas.
Englished, as best could be managed, from the Baron's own German tongue.

1680: Duchess of Mallard

Private papers

I read our cousin, that German Baron's, new treatise on Natural Philosophy—translated, somewhat clumsily, yet with spirit enough to betray his meaning. He speaks of a Society of Inquiring Minds to study Nature, whom he dignifies or disgraces (I scarce know which) by calling her a woman, both modest and voluptuous. These words have lingered in my ear far longer than his metals, motions, or other experiments; and I set my pen to paper that I may think through the trouble of them.

For what, I pray, is it to be modest and voluptuous together? Modesty, as men describe it, is concealment, restraint, submission, even silence. Voluptuousness is the very counterpoint—frankness, abundance, the expression of power through delight. How shall one Nature, or one woman, be commanded to wear both masks at once? The Baron declaims that she is modest in her hiding and voluptuous in her design, as if he praised the lock and adored the key all in a breath. It is not understanding he seeks, but possession.

I marvel that these gentlemen, who call upon Nature as their bride, never think to consult the women who share her sex. If Nature be, as they say, a woman, then surely women are nearer to the mystery than they, as the offspring resembles the mother more than the neighbour.

Why then must man alone define her character, her humours, her supposed coyness? I see the same presumption in their medicine, in their divinity, even in their marriage vows. They cannot look upon a female thing without reshaping it into a lesson for themselves.

And yet, if Nature were to answer them, she might laugh—a deep and dangerous laughter. She would say: You study my motions, but not my meaning; you measure my pulse, but never consider that I beat within your own breast. You call me modest, but it is you who are blind; you call me wanton, but it is your gaze that makes me so.

I sometimes think that if these philosophers truly wished to fathom her secrets, they should spend less time staring into smoky glass and more time listening to their wives and daughters. A woman's common sense would correct half their alchemy; her patience would refine their tempers; her curiosity, uncramped by pride, might find the very laws they misplace.

Perhaps tomorrow I shall write to my sister and enclose the Baron's notion, that she may laugh at it. She will, I know, devise some sharp doctrine out of it—declaring that Heaven itself grows weary of hearing men speak of things they cannot comprehend.

Till then, I leave the Baron to his crucible, his talk of modesty and fire. For all his vapours and engines, I think he understands neither the one nor the other.

1680: Reply to a letter

Your last letter was a very cordial to my spirits, though, I confess, it left me in one of those contemplative humours that make sleep a stranger. You closed your discourse with a phrase I cannot forget—that Heaven itself grows weary of hearing men speak of things they cannot comprehend. It is a thought so bold that at first I laughed, yet the more I turn it in my mind, the truer and sadder it seems.

For indeed, is there any corner of God's creation left upon which man hath not delivered a declaration of authority? They fix their instruments upon the stars and tell us how angels must move; they cut the body and declare the seat of the soul; they make laws for women, for Nature, for virtue, for Heaven itself—as if each were but a field awaiting their plough. And all the while they boast that these speculations prove their reason, when to my eye it shows their desperation. He who is wise seldom needs to thunder his wisdom from the rooftop.

I have lately attended a talk by one of these learned divines who argued with great solemnity that woman was formed less perfect than man, and that Nature, being female, required male governance as Earth

requires Heaven's firm hand. What vanity! They know not what they say. They speak of Heaven as a palace of order, yet can imagine no order that does not place themselves upon the dais. When they call woman weak, they only speak of the weakness of their own imaginings. I begin to think the Almighty must be sorely amused, if not affronted, by such imitations of omniscience.

You write that in Lefame there is more liberty of thought, and I envy you that air. Here, a woman's mind must wear the dress of humility even when it knows itself richly clothed. Yet I am persuaded that reason is no respecter of gender: it flows where it finds the clearest vessel. If Heaven indeed grows weary of men's pretensions, it may soon choose other instruments to speak its truth—perhaps those quieter souls who study rather to understand than to command.

Write soon, sister, and tell me what new paradox you have discerned among your thinkers. I fear I grow too sharp in my speech and must be gentled by your wit.

1681: A Consideration upon Reason and the Pretended Philosophies of Our Present Age; Wherein It Is Argued That These Be but the Old Magicks Painted Anew, and that the Philosophy Which Denies Enchantment Is but Enchantment in Another Habit.

Written by a Friend to Truth and an Enemy to Vanity. Printed Anonymously for the Benefit of the Curious

It hath been said by certain of the new breed of Virtuosi, that the light of Reason hath now dispelled the mists of superstition, and that Nature, being questioned by their Instruments, renders up her secrets as a maid compelled before her master. Yet I, a simple lover of observation and modest inquisition, do find in all their magisterial discourse no small flavour of the same witchery they pretend to banish. For what, I ask, is this so-called Natural Philosophy but a learned enchantment, casting its spells in Latin instead of in charms?

In former days, our grandmothers whispered of elves in the wood and spirits that governed the wind; now, our philosophers declare with equal fervour that invisible particles and forces do the same office. They differ only in name, not in nature. The one invoked a sprite, the other a subtle effluvium; the first burnt herbs, the second sheds vapours. Both promise to bind and loose creation by knowledge begun in wonder and ended in pride.

I lately read with much relish Yorkshire Oddities, Incidents and Strange Events, a chronicle of sundry prodigies and marvels, collected from that northern country where men are more honest with their imagination. There one finds tales of candles burning where none were lit, of stones that sigh, of maidens bewitched into stillness for seven days together. These the philosophers call delusions of sense—yet they wonder daily at magnetism, at gravity, at the pulse of the air: matters no less invisible, no less marvellous. Shall we mock the cottager for believing in spirits, and applaud the philosopher who believes in vacuum?

Master Samuel Rid, in his book *The Art of Iugling or Legerdemaine* (printed in the early years of King James), offers a passage which I must here commend to the reader's judgment, for it is as apt a mirror of our times as any published since. He writes:

"The Art of Legerdemaine standeth chiefly in the conueyance of any thing, into, out of, or through another thing, so that the eie shall be deceiued by the quickness of the hand. But the true secret consisteth not in the fingers, but in the conceit of them that behold. For he that can perswade the eie to think it seeth what it seeth not, he it is that worketh the greatest wonder."

Observe this well, for herein lieth the very key! Our contemporary philosophers, with all their gravity, are but jugglers of a higher sort. They persuade the common eye that it seeth what it seeth not—the atom, the motion of the ether, the hidden virtue in a spark of glass. They change no substance, only our conceit of it. Their "optick instruments" are the sleeves into which the truth is slipped and out of which illusion is drawn. Rid speaks of the quickness of the hand; I would add, they practise rather the quickness of the tongue.

Moreover, the conjurer of old demanded faith from his audience—he must be believed, or the charm is void. Is it not so with these men? They entreat that we believe all Nature reducible to measure and number, and we comply, though we understand neither balance nor calculus. Thus their faith in Reason is but religion under a new idol; their experiments the ceremonies of it; their Societies the cloisters of their order; and their Instruments the relics by which they swear.

Therefore I conclude that the world is not so much disenchanted as repainted. Magic is not dead—it hath only learned to write its spells in mathematics. The philosopher bows before his furnace, the astrologer before his globe; both are worshippers of fire. The alchemist called his spirit Mercurius, the modern man names it Air, yet both believe that unseen motions rule the seen world.

And if in my words there seem some tincture of folly, I shall content myself that I err in honest company, sharing the madness of light with

those ancestors whose ignorance was at least not proud. For I would rather, with a candle and some wonder, watch the night, than with an engine and much presumption weigh the stars.

Let the Virtuosi of our time mark well these things, and remember that the Devil, when he first deceived man, did so not by miracle but by argument.

Written this Lent season, from the author's lodging in Sussex,
by one who prefers a candle to a prism.

1685: A Tale of the Spring, translated from the Speech of the Wampanoag

Set down in English at Lefame, to be told to a Child.

When the world was young and the snows lay crooked upon the ground, the Great Forest slept long. All things—fox and man, bird and root—dreamed beneath the white silence. Then one morn the wind came running from the edge of the sea, crying, "Awake, awake, my children, for Kekun, the Spring-maker, is coming!"

Out of the east there stepped a bright-eyed spirit, clothed in the shimmer of melting ice. He carried no fire nor weapon, only a hollow reed, through which he blew a sweet tune. Wherever he went, the frost broke apart and the water beneath began to laugh. The bears stirred first, grumbling, and the little raccoons rubbed their faces, finding the air warm as a mother's hand.

Kekun walked down into the meadow where the deer lay hidden, and he beckoned them with his reed. "Rise, dancers," said he, "for I have brought soft ground for your feet." They came, shaking the snow from their backs, and trod their first steps of the new season. Then he called to the birds, who stirred within their hollow trees. "Sing after me," said he, "that the trees may hear their names again." So the robins and thrushes lifted their throats, and even the owls tried a little song, though they were shy of day.

Now there was one small fish who had lain fast in the ice. He looked up and saw a thin beam of silver light. "If I could reach it," thought he, "I should see the world again." Kekun, hearing his thought, struck the ice but once with his reed, and the hole widened into a pool of bright, quick water. "Swim," said the spirit, "for all rivers are mine this day." So the fish swam, first one circle, then another, until he leapt for gladness and became the first wave to touch the shore.

All this while, the Sun lingered to watch the sport, laughing until his beams grew long. "You make my labour needless, child," said he to Kekun. "Go on, then, and finish what you have begun." Kekun knelt

and pressed his hands into the damp earth, and from each print sprang up a new flower, shy and bending. The bees woke then, rubbing their eyes and finding a feast awaiting.

When all was done, Kekun set down his reed beside the largest stone and said, “Sleep here, little song, until I return another year.” Then he vanished into the east again, walking upon a path of sunrise. The wind folded its arms and was still, and the forest, now wide awake, whispered softly to itself.

Thus it is that when the frost begins to break and the birds cry over the river, the people say, “Kekun passes by.” And if you listen between the calls of the frogs, you may hear the faint tone of his reed, teaching the earth how to smile.

—Told in the tongue of Lefame for young ears, faithful to the ancient speech of the Wampanoag.

1685

This morning I read again that curious pamphlet, which argues that “the Devil, when he first deceived man, did so not by miracle but by argument.” The phrase hath taken such hold of my mind that even my prayers this evening carried some tincture of it. Yes—he reasoned, not raged; persuaded, not compelled. How strange it is that knowledge, most praised of human faculties, can be so lightly turned into the instrument of our undoing.

There are among the Wampanoag people near Lefame certain wise elders who speak much the same, though in a tongue unlearned by our theologians. One, whom they call Massatomp, told me through a young interpreter that in their old stories the dark spirit Temiscouah deceives men “by making their thoughts twist like water.” He works not wonders but confusions. When I asked whether this spirit be opposed by one wholly good, as our God is to Satan, the old man laughed softly and said, “Kehte-anit, he make both day and dark—no two sides, only one circle.” The interpreter rendered this roughly: that their great being made light and shadow both, neither hateful, both needful.

It struck me then that what our philosophers call Reason and what we call Faith are but two candles trying to outshine one sun. Among the Wampanoag, good and evil are not warring armies but companions upon the same road—each keeping the other wary. A man who prays yet forgets to plant his corn is, in their measure, the greater fool; and one who feeds his neighbour in famine hath already made his peace with Heaven, though he never names it so. Their morality lies close to the earth, in the weight of fish and the growth of beans, and the tending

of children's fires. "We keep life good," said one woman, "by keeping it going."

When I inquired of their belief in death, they answered with stories as quiet as sleep. "When heart stop, breath walk out," said another. "He go where the mist rises and the trees talk slow. He sees his kin who went before, and they say, 'Sit down, eat, you are come home.'" There is no pit of torment, nor heaven of golden streets—only the same world raised to its own perfection, freer of hunger and pestilence.

It doth seem a wisdom most unflattered by poetry, yet comforting in its plainness. I wonder, were our preachers content to be so humble, whether their hearers would sin less or but grow less fearful. For fear builds saints and hypocrites alike. These people have no written law, only example; no doctrine, only memory. Yet they are not cruel, nor faithless, save to those who would make them so.

Returning now to the pamphlet's phrase—was not the Devil's act of persuasion itself a kind of misplaced reasoning? He did not strike Adam dead, nor force the apple into Eve's hand; he merely offered a thought. And she, poor soul, receiving it, found herself thinking as God does—what is this, and why not that. In that moment argument was born, and with it all of philosophy. If sin began in argument, can salvation come only in silence?

The Wampanoag would say, I think, that both belong one to another: speech and quiet, eating and fasting, life and its ceasing. They would make no hell of inquiry, nor heaven of ignorance. Perhaps they are nearer to innocence than those who call them heathen. I begin to suspect that to return to Paradise we must unlearn not passion but the presumption of understanding.

So, if the Devil deceived by argument, may not Reason also redeem by humility—by knowing that it does not know?

I shall sleep upon it, and, if dreams favour me, perhaps speak with Massatomp again when next the tide is low. He says the shells then tell truer stories, having been recently under the moving moon.

1686

The town rings still with talk of the new company of souls that hath lately departed from Dorchester, bound (as they suppose) for your own strange and growing colony beyond the sea. I think half the parish hath exchanged its godliness for timber and salt meat. It is said that the Duke of Mallard, who never lets a pious opportunity escape without its profit, hath sold to them great tracts of his unprofitable holdings—swamps and scrubland—and made himself thereby a very Christian fortune. Everyone marvels that his Grace can so sanctify commerce.

I own, it provokes both my laughter and my wonder how our Puritan neighbours can still be so solemn even in their adventure. Their faces, you remember, are shaped by the same long sermons that have now outlived even their preachers; one might think they sail not for the New World but for the Judgment Seat itself. Yet I wish them well and well away, for their absence sweetens the air. I tell our friends that the Atlantic is the best pulpit yet devised—it muffles their cries of reform most effectively.

Is it true, as rumour reports, that they have built a new town upon your coast and named it Dorchester, as if the imagination of the godly were no larger than their hats? Why, I declare, if they make a heaven, it will be another Dorchester too—square, wind-beaten, and much inclined to dispute. Still, it is some comfort that their dourness may be put to use in building houses rather than burning sinners. What they call virtue, I call excellent carpentry.

Yet I must not seem wholly uncharitable. They have courage, and some integrity of purpose, though I think it better exercised at a distance. Their zeal hath burned away every colour save black and grey, but perhaps the wilderness may in time paint them a greener temper. I imagine you see them daily, trudging about their new Zion, planting righteousness in furrows and lecturing the corn to be obedient. Give them my regards, if civility may be ventured without danger of conversion.

As for us here, society recovers its grace once more. There are dances again at court, and women may wear velvet sleeves without hearing it called vanity. London still smells faintly of its last fire and much of opportunity. You may tell your New World friends that the Old one, for all its sins, remains rather more entertaining than they deserve to remember.

1687: A Tale of the Enchanted Hunt

Faithfully rendered into English from the Speech of the Wampanoag People, set down at Lefame

In the time before memory, when the world was still unwearied by men’s complaints, there dwelt among the People a hunter named Paquinneau, who loved the forest more than hearth or companion. He was a silent man, tall and dark, whose eyes marked the deer as if he shared their thoughts. None knew the bounds of his wandering, for he set forth at dusk and returned only when the moon was thin again.

One winter’s end, when the snow lay thin and sharp and the trees stood bare as bones, Paquinneau followed the tracks of a great stag deep

into the northern woods. The beast's hooves cut the crust clear as writing, and the hunter, reading them, believed fortune had chosen him alone for the kill. Yet as he went, the air grew strange—still, and heavy as breath against a mirror. No crow called, no twig cracked beneath his steps. Only once, from far above, came the sound of falling snow.

At length he came to a hollow place beside a frozen pond, where the tracks ended abruptly. There, standing upon the ice, was a stag of wondrous beauty—its coat white as frost and its antlers tipped in faint light, as if the stars had bent close to crown it. Paquinneau raised his bow, but the string would not draw; his fingers shook, and his heart beat in his ears like a drum of warning. Then the stag turned its head and spoke, in a voice low and near as his own shadow:

"Why hunt me, Paquinneau, who have walked beside thy dreams?"

At this his courage chilled. He cast down his bow and said, "It is the law of hunger. Man must take, that he may live."

The stag's eyes shone as two small moons. "Then shoot," it said, "and live."

But when the hunter stooped to lift his bow again, the creature laughed softly—a sound like a reed stirred by wind—and vanished. The ice beneath him cracked in a wide circle and gave way. He fell, yet even as the freezing water closed, he felt no pain, only a great stillness, as if drawn down through sleep into another world.

When he awoke, he lay upon soft moss in a place of dim light. Around him moved shapes half beast, half cloud, muttering speech older than thunder. From among them stepped the white stag, now in form of a man, his hair bright as snow and his skin faintly glowing.

"Fear not," said the spirit, "for thou art come among the keepers of the wood. We watch all hunts, and weigh them in the balance. Hadst thou loosed thy arrow, the snows would not have melted this year, and all hunger would have turned upon thee. Because thy hand refused what it could not understand, thou shalt keep thy life—but thou shalt never again find the path home the same."

Then the spirit gave him a small token—a single hair from the stag's breast, fine as mist and cold as stone. "Bind this upon thy arrow when next thou huntest," it commanded, "and thou shalt strike true—but remember that each beast bears a spirit that may look back upon thee."

When Paquinneau opened his eyes again, he was lying beside the pond at dawn. The ice was gone, the snow melting, and the first flock of geese flying north above him. He rose, and found in his hand the white hair, glimmering faintly in the sun.

From that hour, he hunted seldom, and took only what kept life alive. Yet in the stillness between one breath and another, he swore he

could sometimes hear laughter in the trees—the memory of that voice which had called to him by name.

—Thus the Wampanoag tell of Paquinneau and the White Stag. It is recited in winter, when the old men sit close by the fire, and the listeners, though smiling, will draw their cloaks a little nearer about them.

1687: Cape Ann in Dorchester, New England

Chastity Mallard

With trembling hand and grateful heart, I hasten to recount the events and sensations of my arrival at this distant shore, whence God in His mysterious providence has seen fit to summon our family. My pen cannot encompass the strangeness and solemnity of our passage nor the multiplicity of marvels this New England doth present.

First, know that the voyage itself was a trial of fortitude. The winds were uncharitable, and the seas oft displayed a wrath I had not imagined. Our ship, creaking and groaning, ferried us for weeks without ceasing, each day marked with some new privation—hard bread, brackish water, and sickness amongst both crew and passengers. Tarry though we did in prayer, many souls perished; yet myself and my kin, through God's mercy, set wary foot upon the rocks of Cape Ann whilst autumn's chill crept through our bones.

This land, so unlike London, greets us with a wildness for which not one in our company was prepared. The climate is sharp and capricious, warm but fleeting, then bitter and raw. The air smells of salt and pine, for the forests are thick with red cedar, birch, and towering fir. I have seen with my own eyes the sumacs, their leaves ablaze in scarlet, and the sassafras with its fragrant root. There are wild grapes that climb the broken stones, walnuts and chestnuts ripening amidst brambly undergrowth. Some plants are unknown to me, with flowers of curious hue and shape, which the native people have named in their soft tongue. Indeed, the natives—called by some Wampanoag—move through these forests with an ease our own people cannot hope to match. I marvel at their crafts and manners, though our Puritan elders caution restraint in commerce and sentiment.

The settlement is humble and bare, formed of rough timber borrowed from the endless woods. Each home stands solitary, with fields yet stony and little tilled. Our Dorchester company, guided by Scripture, seeks to establish not merely shelter, but a city upon a hill—a place for holy living, discipline, and honest labour. My husband and brothers labour daily in fishing and farming; I in spinning, in tending

our small garden, and in reading from the holy Book by firelight. The men crave order and peace as they wield axe and plough. Yet, I confess, our hearts are still much troubled by longing for England's ease and familiar faces.

Yet, I do not despair. Daily we are reminded that hardship and want serve the greater design, that every thorn and frost grows patience in those chosen to fashion a new Israel. Our ministers exhort unceasingly, reminding us that our purpose is not mere survival, but the founding of a godly Commonwealth to outshine the darkness of the old world.

Pray for us, beloved sister, and convey my kisses to Mother and the children. Tell them I shall write again when winter has run its course, and the new world waxes green beneath the hand of Providence. All here send remembrances, and I remain, through all travail and wonder.

1687: Duke of Mallard

Private papers

It seems that the infernal ships from Lefame have sent me yet another parcel of misfits—if men they may properly be called. I had commanded a dozen to be dispatched from those colonies, men to serve in proper manner about my person and household, but the company that arrived yesterday wear the air of some other world. They are handsome enough, I grant, and move with a strange grace that offends while it fascinates. I know not by what breeding or sorcery the New World hath fashioned them—too natural by half, too easy with their talk, too free with the eye.

I watched them at first with some curiosity, thinking them merely half-civilised, their manners roughened by the forest; yet there clings to them something I cannot name. They speak little, smile often, and seem to obey as if it amused them. My own grooms, being Englishmen and therefore properly stiff, look upon them sidelong, half fearful, half admiring. The household grows unsettled: dogs fawn at their feet, horses quiet at their touch, even the kitchen boy follows them about as though expecting enchantment to rub off upon his skin.

By night they sing in a low tongue unknown to me—it carries like the hum of bees, without tune yet with power to stir the hair upon a man's neck. I rebuked them for it, and they bowed, serene as ever, and fell silent—but I could swear their very silence continued the song. I begin to think the whole cursed land of Lefame must reek of superstition. These men have been too long in the company of that strange wilderness, where every stone and tree seems to harbour something listening. No wonder they come here neither servant nor

gentleman but creatures enchanted, and perchance enchanters themselves.

I had meant some of them to serve as groomsmen or perhaps companions in the field, yet find them ill-suited to any station that calls for ceremony or distance. They have the air of those who recognise no rank above the wind. I cannot abide such liberty in conduct, nor such familiarity in aspect. There is a wild ease in them that sits ill beside civility—it makes my courtiers look pale and my hand itch for discipline.

Let them therefore be sent on to the estates in the south, where the work is rougher and the rules plainer. I shall hunt my servants, and my pleasures, elsewhere. The next ship I fit out for the Indies, I will stock with the sort of slaves who understand their office. Those from Lefame are no good to me: they bring too much earth and wonder in their eyes, as if they would rather dwell in the forest than in obedience.

Heaven preserve me from such natural men. They unsettle order itself, and order is the first grace of nobility.

1687: Touching the Fellowship of Every Place Beneath the Sky

An Account, Faithfully Rendered into English from the Speech of the Wampanoag, written at Lefame.

When the world was first set in order, Kiehtan the Maker looked upon his work and found it uneven. The rivers were too proud, running swiftly, and the mountains too silent, holding all sound within. The beasts came forth one after another, boasting their kind—the bear saying, “I am strongest,” the deer, “I am fleetest,” the heron, “I am noblest, for I move between water and air.” The Maker, hearing all this self-praise, grew weary, and thought, It is not good that any creature stand alone without its measure.

So He made two of every kind, but not as halves unequal. He said to the bear, “Thou shalt know thy strength by the gentleness of another.” To the heron He said, “Thy grace shall be seen only when another looks upon it.” Then He made Man and Woman, and spoke thus:

“Ye shall not contend, saying one is greater; for neither is whole without the other. As the river meets the shore and no man can tell where one ceaseth and the other beginneth, so shall ye flow together. The man shall be sun to the woman’s moon, yet both one light when reflected upon the water.”

Now there were among them two spirits, one young and one old. The young spirit ran swiftly through the forests calling, “Life is

forward!" but the elder remained in the shadows saying, "Life is round." They quarrelled, and the noise of their dispute shook the leaves from the trees. The Maker called them before Him and said:

"When ye were one, the world was silent, for all time moved together. But ye desired difference, and I granted it, that the seasons might change and the hearts of men find story in their going. Yet mistake not motion for mastery, nor stillness for loss. Youth is the morning of age, and age the evening of youth—one day, seen from different ends."

Then the two spirits were content, and sat together beneath a pine. The young said, "I am the hand that strikes the bark from the tree." The old replied, "And I am the hand that teaches where to strike." From them was taught that place, whether hill or hollow, holds neither pride nor humility, but the same breath moving through differing shapes.

Therefore the Wampanoag tell that all things under Heaven are measured one against the other, yet none above. The man looketh upon the woman and seeth himself continued; the child upon the elder and becometh what he shall remember. Earth upon sky, sky upon the sea—they are one mirroring the next, as thought answers thought before the tongue can form it.

When this tale is told at night, the elders say the air thickens, for every spirit hearing it would draw nearer, desiring its own likeness. Some will smile and declare the story strange; yet those who listen more deeply say they can hear in it the breath of their own hearts making answer, as it was in the beginning and shall be again when all divisions sleep.

1687: a Blandy maid

We seldom go among the people of Salem, for they are a dour and narrow sort, much given to suspicion and much afraid of that which lies beyond their fences. Yet there are times when need drives us there—some errand of healing, or counsel, or plea for that which the wild alone cannot give. When we go, it is before the light, and we slip from our houses as shadows might fall from the moon. Our garments we fashion after the manner of the native women: short mantles of deerhide, the hair plaited and darkened with walnut and sumac, woven sashes crossed about the waist. We colour our own skin with the juices of herbs and earth, bruised berries and roots, until we seem neither English nor known. Then we pass among them unseen—at worst mistaken for those the townsmen would rather overlook than accuse.

The way itself is trial enough—forty miles or more through narrow paths, tangled with root and stone. The wolves call to one another across the hills, and owls echo them as if in answer. We wade the rivers barefoot, the water biting and fair as judgment. Yet we go still, for these journeys are the price of the small liberties we have carved here with our hands.

We speak little when we reach the town, and gently, for loud words draw untimely notice. Some of us trade simples and ointments, others tidings of crops and weather. A few among us, blessed with knowledge greater than our years, offer such remedies or counsel as the place requires. Salem's elders—hard men, most of them—give grudging ear, but our chances are best when a certain stone is held between my fingers. It is grey as river mist, yet when the sun touches it, there springs from it a glimmer like breath upon glass. This stone was given into our trust by a wise woman of the People of the Dawn. It is no witchery, only the earth's own memory—but when it rests in my hand, those men who would deny us falter, quarrel, and lose the thread of their conviction. Thus in their confusion we find our advantage, and secure what we must.

They call what they cannot name "sorcery," as if ignorance were a virtue to be kept polished and displayed. All that is natural they condemn, and all that is divine they twist into fear. Yet in the deep of the wood, away from their meeting-houses and their psalms, I have found a holier silence than any they could craft. Here, the breath of the earth is prayer enough, the light through the leaves a benediction.

So we persist and prosper quietly, and the world, unheeding, rolls on. When I return from those secret paths, my hands are stained, my feet chilled, and yet my heart unburdened. If sin it be, then let me be damned for listening to what Heaven placed beneath my very feet.

1688: Felicity Mallard

The People of the Dawn—our Wampanoag neighbours—say that winter is not death but dreaming, and that the earth remembers herself more clearly in sleep. I believe them. They speak of balance between the seen and unseen, between strength and stillness, between man and woman too, and in this they possess a reason and justice deeper than our proud philosophers of England have ever yet conceived.

I have been long in this New World, long enough to feel how thin the wall is between one creature and another; and I find myself ever questioning that presumption which makes woman the secondary sex. Here, the Wampanoag tell no such tale. They say that in the beginning the Maker set the world upon the shoulders of Two—spirit of woman

and spirit of man—neither greater, neither lesser, but turning one within the other as flame within air. How graceful a thought, and how contrary to all that is daily preached from the English pulpits that rise here like stone weeds in fields that once grew maize.

In their stories, a woman may speak to the wind, to the river, to the wolf, and the world listens as readily as to any man. She is keeper of seed, of death, of dreams; he, of hunt, of craft, of fire—but each borrowing from the other without shame. The notion of mastery between them seems to the Wampanoag as childish as boasting which hand is the better. And truly, as I grow old, I think our own customs suffer most from the noise of command and the muteness of those commanded.

I have thought much these past months upon what society might become if such balance were restored—if reason and compassion were wed in human governance as they are in nature. The Englishmen here see only wilderness and the correction of it. Their God still wears a beard and speaks thunder; their women, poor souls, must wear silence. Yet the world whispers another doctrine: that mind and virtue are neither male nor female, but the birthright of all who draw breath. I hold such persuasion now in my heart though I dare not voice it to many; it would be called wild fancy, much as they call the wisdom of the native people. But the pattern of truth is clear as water when the mud has settled.

If ever some bold and educated woman were to set down this argument in print, it might change the air of England itself. She would say that the mind of woman, if exercised, grows as strong as man's, and that the barriers men call "nature" are but habit grown hard with age. She would argue that reason, not sex, should determine virtue and power. But perhaps that day lies still beyond my years. For now I am content to write these lines in secrecy and call them my comfort in exile.

I begin to suspect that the true New World lies not upon these shores at all, but within the awakening of thought that such a land occasions. If the Maker indeed set the world upon two shoulders, then surely one cannot bear it without faltering when the other is kept in chains.

1690: Charity Mallard, Salem

I write to you with trembling hand, and scarce can bring my thoughts into order. What hath befallen this once godly settlement of Salem is beyond the conceit of any sane mind. Were you to walk our streets now, you would think them possessed: a cloud of confusion

hangs upon every roof, and the very air whispers mischief. I know not what term to give it—madness, witchcraft, judgment—and yet it gathers strength daily, as a storm before the lightning breaks.

When first I came hither with my husband, we thought to shape a sober life in this wilderness, far from the vanities of England. The place was stern but innocent, a little commonwealth upon the hill. Now I see only corruption working under every threshold. The men, once diligent, are grown covetous and cunning. They quarrel over land boundaries and glimmering veins of supposed gold ore found in the soil; their neighbours, once brethren in the Lord, they now accuse of theft and deceit. The women, driven long by repression and solitude, murmur strange talk of dreams, and some steal into the woods at night, saying they go to gather herbs, though none can tell for what purpose.

Most fearful of all are the children. They are restless, wild, and full of invention—singing odd snatches of words they claim to have heard from invisible companions. Two nights past, one little girl was found in a trance, her eyes open and unseeing, her hands clutching at the snow as at some apparition. The ministers call it sickness of fancy; I believe it is worse. There are whispers now of secret meetings, not in the meeting-house but in the dark forest itself, where candles are lit though no service is there. I cannot utter what else is said, it is too dreadful for the page.

The magistrates profess to maintain order, yet they are themselves ensnared by vanity and rivalry, so that justice turns upon itself. The poorer sort, once submissive, now band together in insolence, clamouring against those of worth and learning. They say God's hand favours the fittest, not the richest, and this new doctrine stinks of rebellion. Sabbath observance grows thin; one hears laughter on the Lord's Day, and even the psalms sound forced, as though Heaven no longer listened.

My husband tells me I imagine phantoms where there are none, yet I hear the servants whispering of hexes and charms hidden beneath door-stones. Last eve I found a scrap of poppet-cloth in the ashes of our hearth; who placed it there, I dare not ask. There is gold missing too—some of our household plate, and that of others. The hunger for wealth spreads like contagion, and those who cannot grasp with hand seem to conjure by tongue. It is all one fever, cousin to another that afflicts the soul.

You in England may find this account fantastic, yet I tell you the colony totters at the edge of some fearful revelation. I have seen goodwives who yesterday wept in prayer now staring quietly at one another, as if measuring who shall live and who shall burn. The preachers cry repentance, yet their own zeal hath turned to fury; they

speak less of salvation than of hidden enemies. In such frenzy I perceive the image of Sodom's end.

I entreat you, sister, pray for us—pray that some calm reason return before all is undone. If the Devil seeks another dominion, I fear he shall find one here. For in our striving to be God's own nation, we have bred a darkness that neither scripture nor sword can govern.

I write no more; the wind howls about the house and the candles gutter as though blown by unseen breath. I am weary, but not at peace.

1691: Countess deCanard

Lefame itself is much the same—half dream, half settlement, born from England yet becoming its contrary. Here, the old ranks survive in the names we brought, but they have thinned, altered, softened, like metal re-forged. Authority no longer clings to birth alone, but to the weight of one's skill and steadiness of hand.

In England, the noble commands because he is born to command. Here, no such ease of title endures. The wilderness makes little distinction between a duke and a dairyman. The barn roof leaks upon both; the frost bites either's field with equal indifference. Necessity is our great equals' table. Still, some manner of order persists—not tyranny, but gravity, as if each person settles where their ability draws them. I, for my part, seem to have fallen into the office of organiser and speaker, not from any superiority of wit, but because someone must face the magistrates, the traders, and the sea-captains, and my voice carries tolerably well. To the outside world, I am the leader; within our circle, I am only the mouth.

My maid, a young Blandy woman, works beside me. She has no patience for abstractions and little appetite for books, but she thrives among the tasks the rest of us would shun—digging, mending, carrying wood through snow. She listens gravely when I speak of principles and social order, then answers, "Work makes place, my Lady, not talk." I half think she is right. Her mind is blunt but practical, like a hammer that never misses the nail. I have learned enough from her to suspect that intellect alone is too fine an instrument for daily use. In this country, the purest honour lies in doing; even thinking is valued only when it instructs the hand.

Indeed, we keep no strict tally of who earns what. Each gives as much as they are able, and takes no more than they require; our small society moves not upon coin, but upon confidence. A farmer trades his milk for a carpenter's board, the carpenter for seed, and the teacher for bread. It astonishes me that this communion, which would collapse under greed in England, prospers here with ease. There is dispute, to be

sure, but no squire nor merchant sits as arbiter: the agreement of the useful decides all.

At times I read my own notes and wonder if they are not some private echo of Master More's Utopia or even of Mr. Butler's wit—visions of a commonwealth where reason and labour keep harmony. Yet our little world is no fiction, and I ask myself why such a design should be thought impossible. Is our old civilisation truly so vain that it cannot thrive without artifice or bondage? I see no miracle in our way of living, only patience—and a humility born of distance from power's reach. Perhaps that is what England lacked: space enough for change to breathe.

I mistrust my own idealism and yet cannot deny what I witness daily—that status without service is like a candle without flame. Nobility, if it means anything here, is the willingness to give more than one is asked. If that be folly, it is a generous one.

When next the ships return, they will bring fresh letters from home—sermons, quarrels, scandals all preserved like relics. I shall read them smiling, and return to the garden, where the Blandy girl will already be at work, sleeves darkened with earth, her thoughts untouched by wonder yet performing it better than I could describe.

1692: The Tale of the Swamp-Spawned Devil, Being a Warning for the Young and Unwary

Printed at Salem in the Year of Our Lord 1692

Children, draw close to the hearth, for the wind is unkind this winter and the world beyond our door is crueler still. Hear then a tale which is not for laughter, nor yet for play, but for the profit of your souls.

Once, long ago (but not so long as to be forgotten), there lay beyond the marshes of Salem a low, black swamp. Its ground steamed even in frost, and no man could say what fed its warmth. The frogs there croaked not merrily as in other ponds, but in mournful tones, like sinners confessing too late. Trees leaned over it, their roots twisting in pain, and the moon itself, passing above, drew a veil of cloud across her face.

It was told that the Devil himself found birth there one night when Heaven turned its back upon the earth for a moment's hour. He rose from the mud like a man-shaped smoke, drawing about him tatters of fog and broken reeds, and opened his mouth to speak—but his voice was a hundred voices at once, babbling as the tongues of Babel and all false prophets since. "I am the sound that crawls under prayer," he said,

"and I shall have company." Then he spat upon the ground, and where each drop fell, something foul awoke.

From one sprang a black cat with eyes of green fire, who ran before him crying blasphemies; from another oozed a witch, her hair dripping with mire; from another, a swarm of goblins with long fingers sharp as frost; from another, dwarves that whispered nothing but mockery of holy things. Fairies fluttered up too, seeming bright yet carrying deceit in every feather of their wings; sprites darted forth to turn milk sour and dreams to terror; and creeping behind them all came the incubi and succubi, who tempt both maid and youth in their sleep.

So did the swamp become a kingdom of corruption, and every winter's night new creatures were born from it, until even the airs of Salem were tainted with unease. The townsfolk barred their shutters early and lit no candles past the hour of eight. Yet fear breeds folly, and superstition fattens where faith runs thin. Some began to lay mirrors upon their tables to catch the Devil's reflection, but the mirrors cracked, leaving only shards that showed faces not their own. Witches were seen milking the moonlight from cows; elf-lights dimpled graves; and once, near the western wood, a milkmaid was found walking widdershins, calling to a shadow that answered her in rhyme.

Meanwhile the savages—those marauding natives that haunt the borders of the settlement—were said to dance beneath the same dark moon, their fires echoing the swamp's glow. "They consort with demons," cried the preachers, "for they worship what rises from the mire!" And so the fear of strangers joined hands with the fear of Hell, and both kept Salem in its grip.

One night, when the cold bit hardest and there was little bread left in the storehouse, a child wandered from her mother's hearth, drawn by a whisper through the chink of the door. She followed it to the edge of the frozen marsh, and there she saw the Devil, tall as a pine, his breath coiling like the smoke of brimstone. His eyes promised warmth; his smile offered plenty. "Child," said he, "wouldst thou not dance with me, where the winter never comes?" And she, foolish with hunger, stepped forward.

But just as her foot touched the ice, it broke, and from beneath rose not Heaven's rescue but the swamp's old breath—foul, steamy, and full of cries. The townsfolk found her next dawn laid upon the shore, the Devil gone, the little footprints circling her in mockery. They buried her before the thaw. Ever after, when the frost creaks upon the pond, the people say her ghost rises to seek the warmth she lost.

Now, children, mark what is meant by this: that the Devil creeps not always from afar but grows where the ground is softest—where faith weakens, and gratitude freezes into pride or complaint. Salem's true

danger lies not in cats nor goblins, nor even in the savages beyond the wood, but in the murmuring heart that doubts the Lord's sufficiency.

Therefore keep fast to prayer, avoid idle tales, dream not of dancing in any light but the light of grace, and turn thy face from the swamp, which is sin, and its spawn, which is despair. And when the wind doth wail as tonight it wails around our roofs, say within thy breast, "The Devil walks abroad—but God walketh nearer." So shalt thou be safe till morning.

1692

This morn I attended divine service at Saint John's, as is expected of one in polite society, though my mind was less incline'd to devotion than to thought. The church, a structure of grave antiquity, seemed to labour under the burden of its own holiness: the stone vaults blackened by the smoke of generations, the air close with damp and the breath of many. I sat amongst a curious company—ladies in brocade and feathered hair beside tradesmen's wives, pale from labour; their children clutching one another in the crush of the pews. The scent of their garments mingled strangely, perfume and poverty in one sighing cloud.

The vicar, a diligent man much devoted to his own authority, mounted the pulpit and surveyed his congregation as one might a field awaiting seed. His voice, deep but wearisome, rolled through the nave with practiced menace: repent, obey, believe. Each phrase fell like the toll of some dull bell, long cracked by over-use. I listened—out of civility, not conviction—and found his words empty of discovery. He spoke of salvation as a bargain, of damnation as the natural tax of curiosity. It occurred to me, most wickedly, that his sermon was less a light to reveal truth than a chain to keep thought from straying.

All about me the people fidgeted, their minds perhaps wandering toward their own dinners as mine fled toward philosophy. A child whispered that she was cold, and an old woman beside her murmured, "Hush, the Lord hears all." I wondered then if Heaven truly delights in such obedience, or if this notion be but another invention of men who profit by our submission. Faith here seems neither wild nor consoling—it is habit, stitched into manners, worn like lace that has lost its bloom.

Once I confess I found comfort in the solemn order of worship. Now I feel only the stillness of minds too long silenced. It is not God I doubt, but the noise that men have made in His name. These rites of ours, so rigid and rehearsed, seem less to praise the Creator than to parade our conformity. Were a woman to stand in that pulpit but once

—to speak of grace, or reason, or the inward soul's liberty—I think the stones might breathe again, and the air taste of life rather than decay.

What would they call me, should such a thought be known? A heretic, no doubt; or worse, a woman meddling in intellect. Yet it is clear to me that virtue cannot depend upon ignorance. If there is a God —and I hope there is—He must dwell nearer the heart of understanding than in these Gothic shadows filled with repetition.

So I sit, I rise, I kneel, as custom directs; yet my spirit wanders beyond the pews, seeking an unseen light that owes no obedience to creed. Perhaps I am vain, perhaps ungrateful, but I begin to think the truest worship is to ask, not to bow.

1692: The Swamp Spirit Who Hungered for Fire

As told among the People of the Dawn, translated into English at Lefame

Listen, child of the wind's breath, and let the story walk with you awhile. When the world was still damp from its beginning, the Great Swamp dreamed beneath the stars. It was not yet evil, nor yet good—it simply waited. The trees sang to the water, the frogs drummed to the moon, and all things kept their balance as the old ones taught.

But one season, the people grew careless. They took from the forest all that they desired and gave no smoke of thanks. They cut the reeds from the swamp and left none standing; they hunted beaver through the thaw until the ponds lay empty of ripples. The land felt the hunger of men and grew hungry in return. In that season of no gratitude, something awoke deep within the marsh.

From the breath of the muddy water rose a shape—neither man nor beast, but a black shimmer that many eyes could not hold. Some say it was the swamp's own sorrow made flesh. Others say it was the shadow cast by the people's greed. The Wampanoag call it Moshup's Lost Child, for it was said to crawl from the broken footprints of the giant Moshup, who once shaped coast and river with his hands. This child of the swamp whispered, "All things that take will be taken in turn." Then it wandered among the lodges unseen.

Where it passed, men woke in the night with craving; women dreamed of shining metal hidden beneath the earth. Children laughed in sleep and spoke in tongues not known, learning songs not from their mothers but from the still pools. The hunters quarreled, the healers forgot their herbs, and the fire in the centre of the great house burned low.

The people called a council. “It is not good to fight with the world,” said the eldest, “for the world remembers its wounds.” They sent for the woman who spoke often with the bears and the river spirits. She came with a mask of beech-bark and carried a rattle made of clam shells and seed. To her they said, “We have seen greed and fear walking among us. What thing have we made that turns against us?”

The woman listened long to the silence before replying. “What you have raised cannot be struck or shot. It is the mirror of your hearts. It seeks the heat that left your offerings, the balance you forgot. It hungers for fire because you denied it warmth.” Then she turned toward the swamp and spoke aloud to the darkness.

“Child of Moshup, we remember you! Go back to your dreaming. The people will feed the world again.”

The ground shivered like a beast breathing; a glow rose faintly from the marsh, and there came a sound of weeping in the cattails. At dawn the swamp lay quiet, the frogs singing once more as if nothing had passed.

From that day the villagers mended their paths and shared their labour. The old woman taught them to leave tobacco at the water’s edge and food for the unseen ones. She said, “The spirits around us are not evil until we forget them. Neglect is the first witchcraft.”

Sometimes, when the winters are hard and the nights too still, travellers say they see a mist moving above the reeds, lit faintly as by hidden coals. The elders tell the young ones, “Do not fear it. That is only the swamp spirit seeking warmth again. Keep your fire true, and your heart will not feed its hunger.”

So the tale is told and told again—that evil is not a stranger that comes unbidden, but a shadow that rises when we forget our thankfulness. And the People of the Dawn say softly at the end, “Even darkness is kin, if spoken to in respect.”

1696: A Christmas Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. Eadwalf’s, Sussex

By the Reverend Marmaduke deMallard, Vicar and Unquestionable Ornament to his Office

My dearly beloved brethren, children of prudence and property—

How blessed we are to find ourselves gathered once more beneath this venerable roof, on this most solemn and comforting festival, when Heaven itself condescended to be born upon Earth—in Bethlehem, that ancient village of holiness. Let us remember that Bethlehem, though but small among the princes of Judah, maintained proper habits of order

and respect, unlike certain parishes closer to home, where Sunday decorum is now most lamentably on the decline.

Before I proceed to the gospel, which none should imagine I have forgotten, I am compelled, nay, inspired, to remind you that propriety and apparel are the twin pillars of both religion and civility. I have observed, with growing concern and not a little righteous indignation, that many amongst you come to divine service without hats suited to your station. Gentlemen, let me say, the hat is no mere ornament to the skull, but a crown of duty and distinction. It shields both mind and reputation; it proclaims to the world that the wearer fears God and respects fabric. Our Saviour may have lain humbly in a manger at Bethlehem, yet remember that He did not thereby teach slovenliness of attire. Humility need not mean untrimmed brims. Those bareheaded men who swagger about the lanes pretend to simplicity, but I see in their uncovered scalps the spirit of rebellion.

Now, as to the significance of this happy morn, when angels sang and shepherds trembled, I will not weary you with theological niceties. The birth we honour in Bethlehem is also a figure for the birth of our English Empire, which by God's favour expands daily into heathen territories, there to plant both gospel and good breeding. Some preachers may say empire and piety should not mingle; I say, what better proof of God's providence than the ability to export our customs at musket point? Even as the Holy Infant brought light to the Gentiles, so does our navy, by cannon and charter, bring Christian civility to the dark corners of the globe. Thus we are, in modest imitation, the Bethlehemites of modern times.

While upon the matter of empire, let me digress—briefly, though pertinently—to the melancholy tale of my late cousin James, who once served as a clerk in Barbados. He expired tragically of sun and spice, yet his example stands as a warning to all faint hearts: the world is no place for hatless men. Had James kept his hat upon his head, the sun might not have smote him. Observe then, congregation, how moral instruction may be drawn even from calamity, and how Bethlehem itself, being warm, teaches the necessity of covering.

But I return, as I always do, to our duty—our duty to the Crown, that Bethlehem of sovereignty, where Majesty was once, by miracle, domestic. It is our good fortune now to serve under the reign of His Majesty King William, by whose vigilance Papists are confounded, trade is encouraged, and taxes are mercifully exacted. Some discontented spirits—though not here, I trust—murmur that taxes are heavy. I say to them, behold the manger at Bethlehem! Was there not taxation then, according to Caesar's decree? Did not Joseph and Mary travel obediently to their census? Follow, therefore, the example of the

Holy Family: pay promptly, complain privately, and trust Providence to balance the books in Heaven.

There are, alas, certain whispers—utterly unfounded, I assure you—that the parish funds were lately misplaced in speculative ventures involving curiosities from the Indies. I shall not stain this sacred day with idle gossip. Still, you may rest assured that every farthing shall be accounted for once the necessary receipts are located.

Now some of you, chiefly the younger sort, imagine that Christmas warrants levity, song, and licentious pudding. You are mistaken. True joy resides in moderation, not excess. Yet neither should you neglect good cheer altogether; I shall not condemn those who take a little wine for the stomach's sake—when the Vicar himself shares the bottle. Let all things be done decently and in order, as was commanded at Bethlehem when even the oxen kept their appointed places.

Before I conclude, a few words to the women of the parish, whose spiritual welfare lies near my heart. Be obedient to your husbands, industrious in your kitchens, and remember that the veil, like the hat, is both virtuous and fetching. Let no misguided philosopher persuade you toward unnatural equality; the stars themselves declare hierarchy: some shine, others merely twinkle. Accept your station cheerfully, and you shall resemble the star of Bethlehem—bright in obedience, steadfast in position.

And now, in closing, let us consider that holy image once more. The manger, the ox, the humble beginnings—each a parable of Empire, Monarchy, and Millinery. Think, my brethren, how swiftly this peaceful village could descend into chaos were it not for order, for submission, for hats. Madness and republicans stand ever at our gates, sniffing like wolves for ungoverned souls. Therefore watch, pray, obey, pay, and keep your heads both warm and covered.

May the grace of our Lord, who was born in Bethlehem (which, as I have amply shown, bears manifold instruction), rest upon your households and the proper maintenance of your apparel. I shall dine presently with the squire to continue these reflections upon Christian civility; those of you inspired by charity may contribute to the refurbishment of my study roof, which, like Bethlehem itself, admits both light and rain in inconvenient proportions.

Amen.

1695: Speech of His Grace the Duke of Mallard, delivered before the Right Honourable Lords Spiritual and Temporal, at Westminster, concerning the growing Distemper of Madness among the People

It is with a heart burdened by both compassion and alarm that I rise to address this august assembly upon a matter of most pressing concern: the evident, deplorable, and daily-increasing madness of the populace. Everywhere a contagion of the mind spreads unchecked, as though frenzy were the newest fashion and sobriety of thought the only thing now deemed unnatural.

We have among us, my Lords, men who think themselves prophets because they dream after supper; women who believe themselves angels because they faint in church; and tenants who mistake the crying of mice for divine revelation. This, I say, is not the liberty of the subject but the dissolution of it. Madness hath become democratic, if I may so express myself—an impertinent levelling of wits where the beggar imagines himself a philosopher and every milkmaid sets up to dispute the Trinity.

Now some, even among your Lordships (God forgive their clemency), have whispered that these poor creatures deserve our pity rather than restraint. Pity, indeed! Why, pity hath bred the very plague we now lament. Through misplaced tenderness we have allowed every idle melancholy to grow into rebellion, every enthusiasm to ferment into heresy. Thus mercy, ill-timed, hath become cruelty in disguise.

The streets, I say, are haunted not only by thieves and rogues, but by wild-eyed talkers of nonsense—fellows who declaim against government yet know not their own fathers, who draw diagrams in dust and name them worlds. And what, my Lords, is to prevent such madness from spreading up the very steps of this House, if not timely correction? It is but a short journey from a tanner babbling of spirits to a statesman mistaking obstinacy for principle.

Furthermore, and most distressingly, the infection hath reached even the gentler sex. Once the beauty of England rested upon modesty and reason; now we see ladies turning physicians of the soul, writing treatises upon sympathy and spirit, and discoursing openly of the passions—as if modest discourse itself were the crime. My own niece, Heaven help her, hath lately taken to translating heathen poetry and quoting it over breakfast, declaring that melancholy is genius in disguise. My Lords, I tremble for the virtue of the women when madness is called wit.

There is but one remedy proportional to the disease: the enlargement of our public institutions for the safe custody and correction of

lunatics. Bethlehem, that venerable hospital of our capital, groans beneath its population. The wretches therein roar night and day, so that sane men cannot sleep within a half-mile of its walls. Shall we permit contagion through overcrowding, and so make the cure as dangerous as the illness? Surely no. New houses—clean, ample, divinely supervised—must be erected forthwith in every county. It would be fitting, methinks, that each institution bear the name of its principal benefactor, so the charitable spirit may be remembered by the public and rewarded in posterity.

And here, my Lords, I come to a point of duty, and of family. My nephew, Sir Giles Mallard, a sober and industrious young man of philosophical turn (though, to confess truth, afflicted with certain poetic tendencies which might worsen in idleness), seeks some employment worthy of his capacities. The superintendence of one such new house would, I think, exercise his talents and preserve his reason from the contagion of leisure. I trust, therefore, this proposal may commend itself to your Lordships' generosity as both public service and private mercy.

In conclusion, let me declare—though I abhor cruelty, I hold that discipline is the truest kindness. Reason, my Lords, is a delicate flame; it must be fenced about, lest every wind of fancy extinguish it. We must not allow madness to masquerade as inspiration, nor sympathy to supplant order. For if we fail to restrain these excesses, the next century will see the very foundations of property, religion, and decency undermined by a multitude of dreamers, each calling his delusion truth.

Therefore, I urge—nay, I implore—that measures be taken for the confinement of the distracted, the correction of the disobedient, and the moral security of the fair sex, whose virtue is the common pillar of our state. Let the cures of Bethlehem be multiplied, the unruly silenced, and peace restored to our troubled realm. In this, my Lords, let us act not from cruelty but from wisdom, not as tyrants over the infirm, but as shepherds guarding a nation whose sheep have all begun to bleat to different moons.

[Ed.] His Grace then sat down, much satisfied, having spoken at length against enthusiasm in a tone most enthusiastic, and was applauded by those who had slept through the middle portion of his address.

The Duchess of Red Water

From the Little Book of Fitzartur Foibles

In an age that has already forgotten its own crimes, there lived a Duchess of remarkable beauty and yet more remarkable intellect. Her name has been effaced from courtly records—some say by her enemies, some by her own command—but her tale clings to the marshlands where she built her house, rising from the mist like a psalm turned sour.

She was said to be descended from an ancient ducal line, though none could trace the blood with certainty. The priests claimed her family held pacts with spirits; the peasants murmured she was the last of the water-witches who once ruled the fen by moonlight. Be that as it may, she dwelt apart from fashionable society, preferring the solitude of her estate where the reeds rustled like prayers half-forgotten and the lake mirrored every passing blaze of heaven and hell alike.

The house itself was strange—a palace of marble veined with black, its halls lined with portraits of women, never one of a man. The servants who tended it swore under oath that the pictures changed with the weather: sometimes serene, sometimes weeping, and sometimes—most dreadfully—smiling with the exact smile of their mistress. Yet though they crossed themselves and whispered of devilry, not a soul would leave her service, for none could deny that the Duchess paid handsomely and reigned with eerie gentleness.

Every Sabbat she invited the villagers to her chapel—small, candlelit, hung with wreaths of herbs rather than holy garlands. There she spoke in the language of the sacred but not quite as the priests used it: "Blood is faith," she would say in her soft voice, "and the body is holy when confessed to itself." Many wept at her words without knowing why. The magistrate reported her sermons to the Bishop, who laughed and called her only eccentric. "A lady's pious enthusiasm," said he. "The poor need diversion." But none who heard her left unchanged.

Now it happened that a young Duke, cousin to the Queen and proud as a gilded statue, came traveling through her region on his way to claim a portion of her lands—lands once pledged to his house before the wars of reform had upended half the titles in Europe. He was tall, perfumed, exceedingly confident, and as feared by his servants as beloved by the court ladies who did not know him well. Hearing that the reclusive Duchess might oppose his claim, he resolved to see her in person and win her submission by charm—or by force, should politeness fail.

The Duchess received him at dusk, attended only by two silent maids draped in grey and a flock of white ducks that glided across the reflecting pool. "Welcome, noble cousin," said she, and her smile

unsettled him more than any frown. “The night grows deep—you had best rest here till dawn, for the marsh is unkind to those who love daylight.” He agreed, finding her voice disturbingly melodic. At dinner, he jested, he boasted, and he drank; but her eyes never left him, and by midnight he began to feel himself observed not by one woman but by many—every painted face in the hall, every servant’s steady gaze.

When he rose to propose a toast, the candles fluttered and one fell to the floor, igniting a crimson stain upon the carpet. “Blood,” murmured the Duchess. “It seeks its own remembrance.” Her servants came swiftly and smothered the flame, yet the Duke swore he saw the stain pulse once before receding into the floor.

Later that night he wandered the corridors in curiosity—or in something darker—and found his way to a door of carved oak bound by iron sigils. He heard the faint sound of wings on water: ducks muttering, as though speaking secrets in a foreign tongue. He laughed softly at his own fancy, turned the latch, and entered.

What he saw none can tell in full, for his tongue was ruined by morning. The servants found him kneeling before the Duchess’s private altar, his eyes broad and empty, his mouth working soundlessly like a fish drawn from the lake. Across his chest ran three neat cuts, as though the talons of a great bird had caressed him there. The Duchess, calm as any angel at requiem, ordered him to be carried to his carriage and sent away at once. “He has seen too deeply,” she said. “His heart is not made for revelation.”

The Duke did not survive the journey. Yet when his retainers opened the coffin that bore his body home, they found it miraculously changed: his features soft, his hair lengthened, his skin smooth as that of a maiden newly bathed. The physician declared a case of feverish degeneration; the priests muttered of punishment; the Duchess sent no defence.

Afterwards, the courtfolk laughed behind their gloves. “A witch,” said one. “A libertine,” said another. “A madwoman,” said the rest. History wrote her down as each in turn, damning her name until it glimmered like sin in the margins of genealogy. Yet those of her household who remained swore her power never failed. The fields prospered, the women bore strong children, and men who came to scorn her left meek, their bravado melted into some quieter knowledge.

When the Duchess died—if she died at all—the lake turned red for seven nights, and the ducks were seen to swim in circles about the island chapel, crying like lovers bereaved. The Bishop banned mention of her from the pulpit. The Queen’s historians expunged her lineage from the rolls of nobility. But the peasants, who forget little that touches the heart, carried on a rhyme for their children’s sleep:

"By blood she prayed, by moon she stood,
She gave the bad to their own good.
By lake, by feather, flesh, and bone,
Her truth was more than kings have known."

So the tale endures in whispers. Travel through those marshes at dusk, and one may glimpse a slender shape by the water's edge, scattering crumbs to a company of white ducks. Whether ghost, saint, or only a woman too wise for her century, none can tell. But all who look too long feel something move within—the slow remembrance of what power women once held before the lies of history taught men to name it madness. And if you listen long enough, you may hear the ducks speaking still—the old language, the one the men forgot.