

TWO

A man from one of the countries on the Baltic Sea once visited the colony looking for a place to settle with his family, who were still in Europe. He was very sick and died shortly after his arrival. I called on him as he lay abed in a room above the ordinary. He asked me what we were hoping to do in Sagadac. Without discussing the details of our experiment, I said that we wanted to build a country where life could be lived as it should be lived, without corruption, attentive to God, where ordinary men and women enjoy peace and freedom. He said that no such paradise as I described could exist an earth. I asked him, then, why he had come to Sagadac. He said that he wanted a safe harbor.

From Willoughby's Diary

A dugout canoe, traveling along the Papoiset River early the next morning, eased its way toward Botolph. The bow of the trim vessel collided now and then with a stray piece of ice, which cracked and broke into splinters. One of the passengers, Governor Simon Willoughby, lifted a gloved hand to block the sun that came from the other side of Prospect Hill, while the other, an old Sagadac named Quinsettapen watched the riverbank with squinted eyes, as if he were looking for changes in familiar scenery.

There was enough warmth in the air to suggest that spring would begin in a week or two. The pine forest on both sides of the river was white and still. Behind the travelers, to the west, just visible in the haze of early morning, was the gentle range of hills that marked the limit of English territory. A few frosty clouds floated overhead.

Now and then, a bit of movement caught Quinsettapien's attention. A lone figure on the riverbank stooped and stooped again as he picked up twigs and put them into a cloth sack. A curl of smoke from a cooking fire at the village of Fultonville thinned and slanted eastward toward the hill and the town that lay on the other side. Somewhat farther on, a few children chased a large black dog through the snow.

The morning silence, broken only by the steady plunge of the paddles and the distant sound of an axe-blade striking timber, put Willoughby at his ease. "Don't you think we could go a little slower?" he said and looked at Prospect Hill with a twinkle in his eye, as if to tell himself that whatever was taking place on the other side could wait until he was ready. Quinsettapien clapped his hands and the oarsmen slowed the pace. "That's better," Willoughby said as he settled back and folded his hands. "Thank you."

Quinsettapien looked at his friend. A melancholy shadow softened his features as he resumed a conversation they'd suspended the night before. "My son," he said, "he is hard like a stone. I not know what to do."

"There isn't much you can do," Willoughby said. "He has to find out things for himself. You can tell Kinnyhook, though, that he'll be in trouble if he doesn't mend his ways."

"I tell my son," Quinsettapien folded his arms across his chest and went back to inspecting the riverbank. "Look there," he said after a minute went by. He pointed to the south where a pair of tiny gray birds darted out from the white wall of pines and began to circle overhead in graceful curves.

"Very nice," Willoughby said, "Nature is unfolding her beauties for us."

“Is true,” Quinsettapien said. Just as happened when they started out an hour before, they saw a magnificent wide-winged bird flying back and forth across the river. “But people’s troubles always come in between.”

“I was thinking that myself,” Willoughby replied.

“I sorry Judah Bayley is dead,” Quinsettapien went on. “Was good man. He helped us. I not know you had witches in your town.”

“Neither did I,” Willoughby admitted.

Willoughby heard a deep sound resonating in Quinsettapien’s throat, a sound like sympathy and encouragement, and they fell silent again. When they reached the wide mouth of the Papoiet River, Willoughby raised a hand and pointed at the hill that seemed to grow larger as they approached. “I’m going to climb to the top. Will you come with me, Daniel? It won’t take long.”

“Climb hill? Is hard walk for old man, but I put on young man’s shoes and I go.”

The two men got out of the canoe at the ferry landing; one of the oarsmen followed them with the governor’s leather-strapped bag.

Waves of long, brownish grass tossed in the March breeze on the barren hillside; patches of snow lay here and there between tangled thickets of elderberry and hawthorn. A dirty pig rooted in the marsh to the left. Halfway up was a small cabin, deserted and wind-damaged, its only door tied shut with a piece of rope.

It took them several minutes to climb to the top. Willoughby went first, leaning on a long gray stick that reached to his shoulder. Bent of back, but sure-footed, Quinsettapien followed, and then the young man with Willoughby’s bag.

After reaching the top, they walked to the brow of the hill. Raising a hand to shade his eyes from the sun, Willoughby let his gaze roam the length of the town – from Fort Hill to the neck and from there to the North End wind mill, whose sails turned in the fresh morning wind. He noticed signs of activity here and there: the watchman making his last round, three sprightly girls strolling across the marketplace toward the well, a pair of neighbors talking in the doorway of a South Cove barn. A band of musketeers was gathering in the meetinghouse pasture. Their lieutenant walked briskly toward them from the steps of the sabbaday house.

He looked toward the harbor. A few lighters bobbed at anchor; several dockhands unloaded a bark from England. Beyond, like brown nuts threaded on a piece of string, was a chain of wooded islands, between the two largest of which a crippled ship, with mainsail flapping wantonly in the breeze, appeared to be struggling landward. The cannon on Fort Hill boomed forcefully, sending puffs of smoke across the water.

“See there,” Willoughby said, “how strong we are. You can tell Kinnyhook that we’ll be here for many years. He and the Toconocos will never drive us out. But Sagadac has become the world for us and some of us trust our own abilities more than we trust God. We’ll pay a price for that.”

“Do you think you can make things better?” Quinsettapien asked.

“I will do my best,” Willoughby replied.

“I want to tell you what’s in my heart,” Quinsettapien said. Despite their faults, the English had brought useful things to the forest. Kinnyhook was blind not to recognize their quality. But no loving father wanted to criticize his son from dawn to dusk. When Kinnyhook looked back on the history of the Sagadac people, he saw a race of proud and independent men. Now the English were the rulers. This was not necessarily a bad thing from the Sagadac point of

view, for the two tribes got along well, and each could learn from the other. Moreover, by a happy working of fate, the longtime enemies of the Sagadac people had become the enemies of the English. But the settlers behaved in puzzling ways, Quinsettapen said. They had a habit of ignoring the standards of conduct they'd been so careful to teach the Sagadacs. The young deputy governor, for example, Hugh Ridley, was the cause of much worry. A man with his ways of thinking might one day rouse up the English to turn against the Sagadacs. This is why Kinnyhook carried on more like a Toconoco than one of his own people.

"I know, Daniel," Willoughby said. "Ridley has caused trouble. He has many abilities, but he believes that life has disappointed him. He wanted to go to Europe when he was a boy to study science, history, and the fine arts, but his father always said that his family and the colony needed him at home. He thinks that being governor is the only thing that will repay him for his sacrifice. He hasn't mentioned the natives yet, but I have my eye on him, as you have your eye on Kinnyhook. Our years of experience will help us."

"Experience and friendship," Quinsettapen added.

"That's right." Willoughby looked at his ally with the warmth of a strong rapport. "Please accept my thanks for seeing me home. And for your other courtesies as well."

For reply, the old sachem made so deep a bow that the ceremonial furs he wore swished along the ground. Then he stood up to his full height again, bade Willoughby farewell, and started to walk down the path to the ferry landing.

Alone now with the boy who had carried his bag, Willoughby looked back at the Papoiset River and the immense forest through which it curved. This trip to Wamaset to perform the wedding of Quinsettapen's oldest grandchild, a preliminary test of his strength, was his first trip away since recovering from pneumonia. Satisfied that he'd regained most of his fire and

eagerness, he felt ready to go back to work, though as he'd told Quinsettapien, he still had no plans for dealing with the colony's pressing problems.

As he was about to start down the hill, an enormous bird, white-tailed and white-headed, appeared above the sparkling ribbon of water and sailed rapidly toward him out of the west. It looked like the same one he'd seen earlier in the morning, an infrequent visitor from the north, or so Quinsettapien had told him. He watched the bird narrowly, with skepticism. His lips parted in a slight smile. The great pilhannaw soared closer in swift, unerring flight, its sharp claws tucked under its belly, its wings curved and motionless. Willoughby felt a strange power stir within him. He gripped the end of his stick as the powerful predator turned suddenly and dived toward the forest fierce as a lightning bolt. "Fascinating," he whispered to himself. The pilhannaw rose up from the forest and headed back down the river. Barely visible in his talons was the carcass of a small, fur-covered animal. Willoughby watched till the bird was out of sight.

As he turned to begin his descent back to town, he saw three men walking toward the foot of the hill. Two of them were dressed in heavy black cloaks and the tall black hats that identified them as men of rank. The third, who occupied a more modest station, wore simple breeches and a plain leather jerkin. Willoughby raised a hand to greet them. The two magistrates, who had bent their heads close together so that their tall hats bobbed like floating corks, now looked up at him and returned his greeting with what seemed to Willoughby tepid smiles.

