

The First Thanksgiving

With the promise of friendship and trust, the Puritans and Wampanoags prepare for a day of feasting. . . .

By Robert Mauro

Characters

CHIEF, of the Wampanoag tribe

CAPTAIN, a Puritan from England

MARY, Captain's wife

SUNFLOWER, Chief's wife

DEADEYE, a French trapper hired as a scout by the Puritans

SNAKE, a young brave of the Wampanoag tribe

TURKEY

TIME: *Winter, 1621. Mid-morning.*

SETTING: *Large room in Puritans' meeting house in Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts. Aside from large banquet table and chairs center, the room is very bare. The table is set for Thanksgiving dinner, but there is no turkey. Through windows on backdrop, trees and wooden stockade fence are visible.*

AT RISE: *CAPTAIN, carrying a basket of food, enters right. He places items from basket neatly on table, then looks up to address audience.*

CAPTAIN: This is our meeting room. (*Gestures*) As you can see, it has few material things in it, for we are Puritans, and we do not believe in material things. But look at our table. It is not bare, thanks to our friends and neighbors, the Wampanoag tribe. Looks good, doesn't it? Corn, yams, potatoes, onions, cranberries, and more to come. It's our first Thanksgiving here in Plymouth. Our harvest was plentiful, and our generous Indian neighbors have helped us survive through the harsh snows. That's why we are celebrating together. (*After a pause*) But I must confess, I am nervous. Why? Well, some of my fellow Puritans do not like our Indian friends. They call them savages, untruthworthy. But I must go. There is that turkey to catch and cook. (*CAPTAIN exits. After a few moments, CHIEF enters left, carrying basket of food. He puts food on table, then addresses audience.*)

CHIEF (*Indicating table*): Very nice, isn't it? There's enough here to feed all my Wampanoag people and all of our new friends and neighbors, the Puritans. I see that all the vegetables we have taught the Puritans to grow have come up just fine. And (*Holds up a corn cob*) just look at this corn cob. We call it maize. Excellent, no? My agricultural experts, Little Tree and Water Lily, showed the Captain and his people how to produce these. (*Puts cob back on table*) But I'm so nervous. Why? Well, some of my people are very wary of these Puritans. My braves are afraid that these foreigners will take our lands and our homes. My warriors said, "There goes the neighborhood!" as soon as they saw the Puritans' ship, the *Mayflower*, dock at what these new arrivals now call Plymouth Rock. (*CAPTAIN enters right.*)

CAPTAIN: Chief, how are you, my good friend? (*They exchange a strange handshake.*)

CHIEF: Quite well, Captain. And you?

CAPTAIN: Not bad. . .but I just cannot find a single turkey for our feast.

CHIEF: But, Captain, they are everywhere. (*Turkey gobble is heard.*) There's one! Let's get him together.

CAPTAIN: Excellent idea, Chief! You have that musket I gave you?

CHIEF: Yes. A noisy thing, but quite effective when hunting. Do you have the bow and arrows I gave you?

CAPTAIN: Yes. But I'm a very poor shot with it. I'll use my musket. Let's go. (*More gobbling is heard.*)

CHIEF and CAPTAIN (*To audience*): The turkey awaits! Wish us luck! (*They exit at opposite sides of stage. There is a long pause, then CHIEF reenters.*)

CHIEF (*Calling off; pointing right*): Captain, he's this a-way! (*To audience; shaking head*) No sense of direction.

CAPTAIN (*Entering*): Are you sure the turkey is (*Points right*) this way, Chief?

CHIEF: Yes. (*Sniffs air, listens*) With the door open, I can sense him on the wind. Follow me!

CAPTAIN (*To audience*): He knows the forest so well. (*They exit right. After a pause, SUNFLOWER enters left with basket. She looks over table, fixes a few items, then sets out items from basket.*)

SUNFLOWER (*Pleased*): Very nice. (*To audience*) Doesn't this all look good? I cooked it with my friends—my new Puritan friends and my native American friends and family. We all get along quite well. . .so far. Yes, it is true, there is talk among my people of these Puritans taking our land. But there is so much of it! Our land seems to go on forever. My husband, the Chief, has generously given the Captain and his people many acres of our land. (*Points to fence outside window*) See their fort? We helped them build it, as well as this meeting house. By doing so, we hoped to gain their trust. Many of the Puritans still do not trust us, yet I think we can share this great land as we are sharing this, our first great Thanksgiving celebration. (*MARY enters right with basket.*)

MARY: Good morning, Sunflower.

SUNFLOWER: Good morning, Mary. (*They hug. SUNFLOWER helps MARY empty her basket and set out items.*) Did the Captain catch a turkey yet?

MARY: No, but he will. (*To audience*) My husband is such a wonderful provider. He brought us here across the great ocean, to this new world, after all that terrible persecution we suffered back in England. Here we are free.

SUNFLOWER (*To audience*): Yes, freedom. It is a wonderful thing. My people are free to hunt, fish, and farm here. We love this land. There is so much of it from sea to shining sea. The plains are fruited and the mountains are majestic. Am I not right, Mary?

MARY: Yes, Sunflower. You are right. But where is that turkey? (*Two gunshots are heard.*) Ah, perhaps that is it.

SUNFLOWER: I certainly hope so. Let's go see. (*To audience*) We're all getting hungry. (*They exit at opposite sides of stage. There is a long pause, then SUNFLOWER reenters.*) Mary, it came from the west.

MARY (*As she enters from opposite direction*): I thought it came from the east, Sunflower.

SUNFLOWER: No. (*To audience*) No sense of direction.

MARY: Are you sure?

SUNFLOWER: Yes. The wind is moving from North to South. And the trees outside are deflecting sounds, making it appear the shots came from the east. (*To audience*) Anyone would know that.

MARY: Yes. I guess so. (*To audience*) I'm a London girl. I'm not used to these woods. (*To SUNFLOWER*) So let us go and see our turkey. . .and you must teach me about the wind and the trees.

SUNFLOWER: And you must teach me about. . .(*Looks at audience*) um. . . something. (*They exit. After a few moments, DEADEYE enters left, looks over table, then addresses audience.*)

DEADEYE (*In French accent*): Look at this. Seems so innocent, a magnificent feast. But this, if you ask me, I think this is all a plot. *Oui*. This so-called brotherly love is dangerous. I don't

trust these Indians. But will the Captain listen to me? No. So why did he hire me, Deadeye, to be his scout, his advisor—his eyes and his ears in the wilderness? Why? Because I am a French trapper. I know the woods and the forests, the mountains and the rivers, the fields and the streams. *Oui*. Right away I warned him to be wary of these savages. They can be very tricky. So why are we celebrating here today? I know not. (*SNAKE enters right.*)

SNAKE (*In sarcastic tone*): Well, look who's here. The thief of my forest.

DEADEYE: Who are you to call me a thief? Was it not you, Snake of the Wampanoag tribe, who tried to steal my musket?

SNAKE: Yes, it was me. I confess. But you use it to kill too many of our forest creatures: the deer, the wolf, the beaver, the muskrat, the turkey—and all for money. We kill to live!

DEADEYE: Money helps me live. Without money how do you think I'd have been able to build my cabin?

SNAKE: With your hands. With your friends.

DEADEYE: I have no time to build with my hands. And I have no friends to help me. I'm a trapper. I must hunt and trap alone. (Shrugs) Some of us are hunters and some are musket thieves. (*To audience*) Like him.

SNAKE: And some kill all the creatures we live with. (*To audience*) Like him. (*CAPTAIN, MARY, CHIEF, SUNFLOWER enter, carrying more food and an uncooked turkey.*)

CAPTAIN: Ah, my friends. Welcome. Are you ready for a wonderful Thanksgiving celebration?

DEADEYE and SNAKE (*Vehemently*): No!

CAPTAIN (*To audience*): No?

CHIEF: Why not?

SNAKE: Because I do not trust these Puritans.

CHIEF: Snake, you must learn to trust. To live in peace with our new friends.

SNAKE: But just look at how they take our food, our land, our turkeys.

CAPTAIN: But your Chief shot this turkey. (*Sheepishly*) I missed and hit a tree.

SNAKE (*Surprised; to CHIEF*): So you used his musket?

CHIEF: Yes.

DEADEYE (*Also surprised*): Really?

SNAKE: This is not our way.

CHIEF (*Shrugging*): Ways change.

DEADEYE (*Folding arms; shaking head*): I don't like any of this. I just don't trust these savages.

SNAKE (*Proudly*): We are Wampanoag!

DEADEYE (*Curtly*): Whatever.

CHIEF (*Adamantly*): We must stop all this name-calling and negative thinking. We are all brothers here today.

MARY (*To audience*): And sisters.

SNAKE: I for one will not eat at your table.

DEADEYE: Neither will I.

CHIEF: Then we will not have a Thanksgiving.

CAPTAIN: This is true, for there will be nothing to be thankful for.

MARY (*To DEADEYE*): You say you don't trust Snake?

SUNFLOWER: You refuse to believe we can be friends?

DEADEYE: *Oui.* (*To audience*) I do!

CAPTAIN: You know, maybe they are right. Maybe we can't be friends and live together in peace.

MARY and SUNFLOWER (*Shocked*): What?

CHIEF: And maybe they are wrong, Captain.

SNAKE: I am not wrong! (*Points to CAPTAIN and MARY*) They will take all our land! You wait. You will see I am right. (*To audience*) Foreigners!

DEADEYE: This land doesn't belong to you!

CAPTAIN: Exactly!

CHIEF: What do you mean, Captain?

CAPTAIN (*Spreading out his arms*): This land belongs to all of us. You can trust us. I promise.

SUNFLOWER: He is right, my husband. This land does belong to all of us. It is a gift to us all from the Great Spirit.

MARY: Yes, and just look at this wonderful bounty we have created together here today. There is enough here to feed us all. (*To audience*) And I've made dessert.

CAPTAIN: My friends, tomorrow will be tomorrow; the future will be the future. But today let us sit down together—as friends. (*To audience*) And let us hope we will remain friends.

SNAKE (*Agreeing*): It does look like a good meal, I must confess. (*To audi-*

ence) And my family is hungry.

DEADEYE: And it is a sin to waste all this magnificent food. (*Rubs hands together*) So—I will build a fire for the turkey.

SNAKE: And I will help you, Deadeye.

DEADEYE: Please—call me Jacques.

SNAKE (*Smiling as they shake hands*): Fine. Let us go gather the wood for our fire, Jacques.

MARY (*Happily*): Good. That's the spirit.

CHIEF: Yes. Wonderful. Let us cook the turkey together.

SUNFLOWER: I have the stuffing already prepared.

MARY: We'd better get cooking. This bird, this Thanksgiving feast, will feed us all today.

CAPTAIN: We and our children and, you, our friends, will all hunt and fish and farm together tomorrow.

SUNFLOWER: Yes. (*To audience*) All our peoples will.

ALL (*To audience*): And we will do it together! (*As curtain falls, they fix the table and carry off the turkey.*) Happy Thanksgiving! (*Brief pause after curtain has fallen, then TURKEY pulls aside curtain, enters, and struts back and forth across stage, flapping his wings, during the following speech.*)

TURKEY (*Annoyed*): Hold it just one second there, folks! What's all the clapping about? Can you tell me? Oh, I get it. You think this is all something to celebrate about, huh? Love, friendship, brotherhood, peace? Is that it? Well, gobble gobble gobble to you! Let me tell you, I'm not happy with any of this Thanksgiving stuff. I may look like just a dumb turkey, but hey, I'm no idiot! I do not want to be eaten. (*Paces, stops*) Well, they're not going to make a meal out of this bird! No way! Not me. Maybe my brother, Phil. But he always was a birdbrain. (*Sarcastically*) So have yourself a Happy Thanksgiving — if you must. And next year, do me a really big favor, O.K.? Eat a bald eagle for a change. And leave us poor turkeys alone. (*TURKEY tries to find his way through the closed curtain, and after a struggle, he does.*)

THE END

PRODUCTION NOTES

The First Thanksgiving

CHARACTERS: 4 male; 2 female; 1 male or female for Turkey.

PLAYING TIME: About 15 minutes.

COSTUMES: Puritans are dressed all in black. Native Americans in rawhide dresses and pants and shirts. Deadeye is dressed as a French trapper, in buckskin and funny furry hat. He has a patch on one eye. Turkey is in silly turkey costume.

PROPERTIES: Baskets of food, cutlery, corn cobs, food items, big turkey.

SETTING: A large room in Puritans' meeting house in Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts. Through the windows on backdrop, trees are visible—as is a wooden stockade fence. A large banquet table center is set for a bounteous Thanksgiving celebration, but there is no turkey on the table. There are plain wooden chairs around table. Aside from table and chairs, the room is very bare.

LIGHTING: No special effects.