

AUTHOR OF EIGHTEEN #1 BESTSELLERS

BILL O'REILLY

& MARTIN DUGARD

Killing
— the —
Witches



THE HORROR *of*
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

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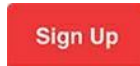
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This book is dedicated to Therese Janow

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”
Exodus 22:18 (King James Bible)

Prologue

TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 1591
EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND
MORNING

The woman with less than an hour to live does not accept her fate.

Dame Euphame MacCalzean prays silently in her dirty prison cell. She is the mother of two boys who died in infancy and three grown daughters. Not yet forty, a Catholic and woman of means, she kneels in a thin dress, the fabric offering no padding against the cold rock floor. Her hands are soon to be bound in tight thick rope for her ride to the burning stake. Jailers will parade her up Castle Hill, there to be executed.

Effie's fervent prayers belie a simple truth: she is not guilty. She stands accused of possessing dark power and promoting the vilest evil—even casting a spell on twenty-five-year-old James VI himself, king of Scotland. The king will leave behind a great legacy, including the first royal postal service and commissioning a translation of the Bible that will be named in his honor. Yet he is terrified of witches, convinced they are trying to kill him and his young Danish bride. He has authorized the prosecution and torture of all such women.*

Justice plays no role.

Edinburgh is a center of manufacturing, known for its fine wool. The growing city is a filthy, hardscrabble town of twenty thousand. A great castle rises on a steep hill at the city center. Much of the Scottish capital is a chaotic mess, rife with typhus, cholera, and bubonic plague. Cattle walk the streets. Existence is hard. Death comes easily and too young. Streets are cobbles, cold mud, and trenches where residents dump chamber pots from high windows to the warning cry of “Gardyloo!” *

Entertainment is scant, though always a welcome diversion from the grind.

Such as today.

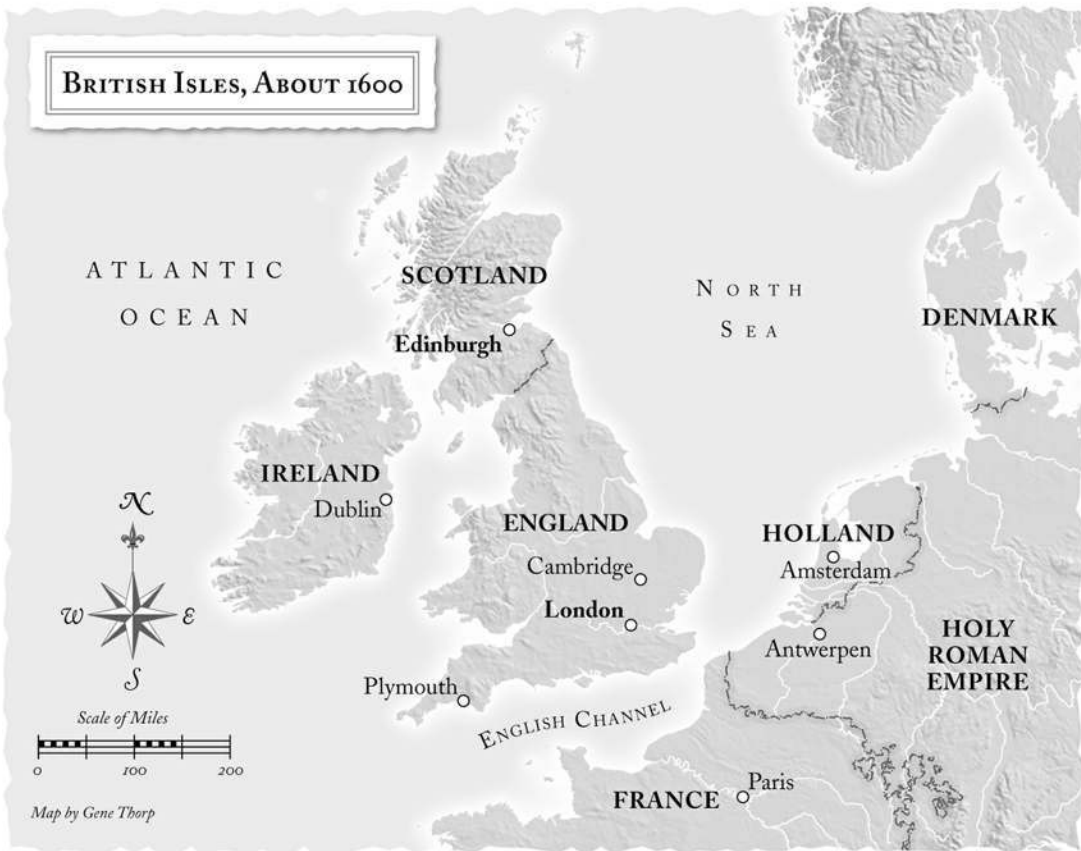
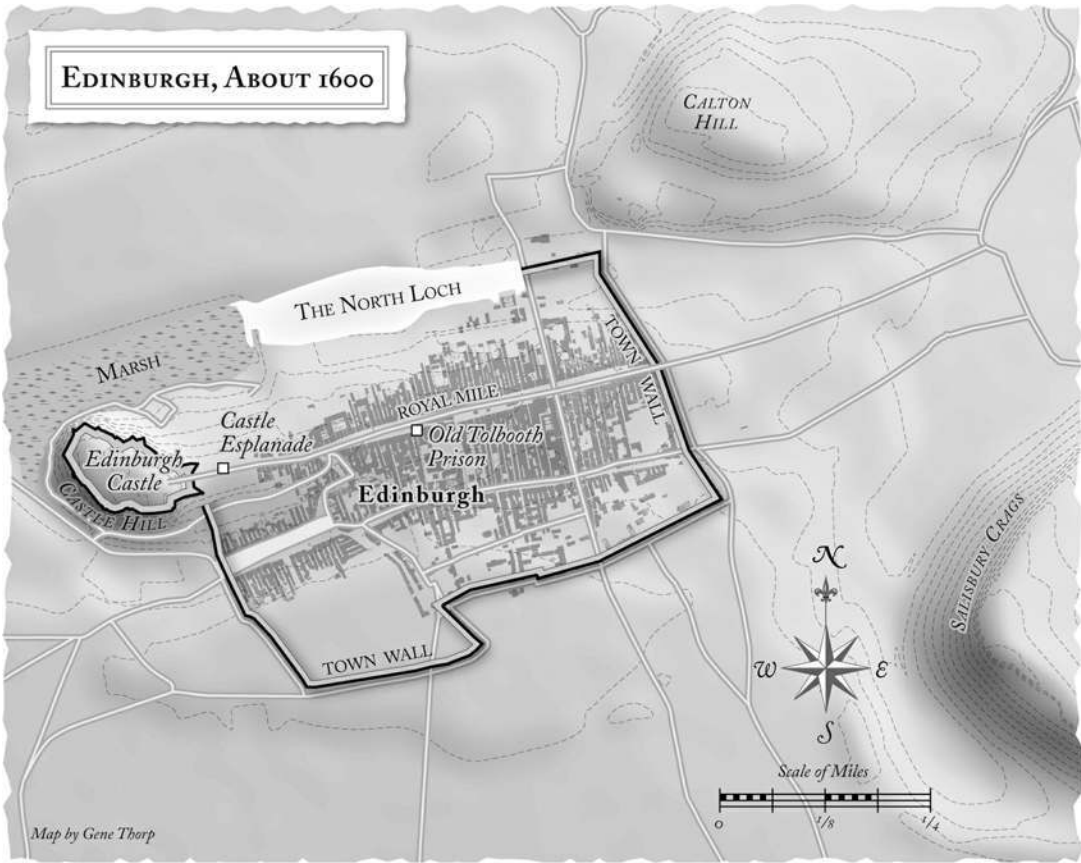
The Royal Mile is crowded with townspeople making their way up the southern slope of Castle Hill on foot and in carts. Most witch burnings are held on Wednesday, which is thought to fetch a larger crowd. But even on this Tuesday, there is no lack of spectators. Many want to be part of the show, clutching dry timbers to throw on the flames. It is a noisy, excited procession, forming a ring on the castle esplanade around the tall stake to which Effie will be tied, then set alight.

There are rumors His Majesty will be in attendance.

In fact, James is here in the Scottish capital on this bright summer morning. Wife, Anne, teenaged queen of Denmark, travels at his side. The paranoid ruler will not attend the execution and has the power to pardon his subject.

But James is determined to rid his kingdom of Satan's spell.

So Effie MacCalzean must burn.



★ ★ ★

Sixteen days ago, Dame Effie was charged with twenty-eight counts of sorcery, including “bewitching two children to death, attempting to murder her husband, attending four conventions of witchcraft, and sitting next to the devil himself—while handling a wax image of King James.”

Dame Effie’s trial is the talk of the town. The prospect of a mother of three young women being tried for witchcraft is a salacious scenario—one that provides diversion and even amusement.

The man who has ruined Effie is David Seaton, a court magistrate living on the edge of financial catastrophe. He is also her brother-in-law. After Seaton’s brother, Patrick Moscrop, marries Effie in 1579, things go bad in a hurry. Effie is known to be unfaithful and not in love with her new spouse. Within twelve months of their nuptials, she allegedly attempts to kill her husband with poison—though succeeds only in making his face break out in spots.

Effie MacCalzean is never charged with attempted murder. Her hapless husband, fearing for his life, flees to France. Eventually, Seaton takes revenge. In 1590, the magistrate arranges for a young twentysomething maidservant named Geillis Duncan to be arrested on the charge of “acting strangely”—code for being a witch. This is an easy accusation for an officer of the court. Under questioning, Ms. Duncan denies having anything to do with witchcraft. Then the interrogation becomes more intense. According to court documents, she is stripped naked and shaved from foot to head, and her thumbs are crushed with screws known as pilliwinks. A rope is then wrapped tightly around her head and twisted until her neck almost snaps, a slow torture known as “wrenching.”

As this painful drama plays out, a birthmark, which authorities consider a “devil’s mark,” is found on Ms. Duncan’s naked torso. She finally confesses. Humiliated, hands mangled, her face a mask of rope burn, she capitulates and begins listing a variety of men and women she considers to be witches and warlocks conspiring against the king. At the top of the list is Effie MacCalzean. After her confession, Geillis is thrown into the dreaded Old Tolbooth Prison, where she will soon die of deprivation.

But Geillis Duncan will outlive Dame Euphame MacCalzean.

★ ★ ★

Effie is imprisoned in May 1591. Her trial begins on June 9. Scottish law

demands Dame Effie be provided a defense. Six legal advocates represent the wealthy woman, yet each knows her fate is preordained. No member of the fifteen-man jury is mad enough to defy the king—particularly when it is well known that James has taken a special interest in Effie’s fate.

The accused is the illegitimate daughter of Thomas MacCalzean, an aristocrat possessing vast land holdings outside Edinburgh. He recognized her as his legal heir in 1558, when she was a young girl. Upon his death in 1581, Effie became owner of Thomas’s estate. If she is executed, her substantial inherited lands will, by law, go directly to the Crown. Effie’s own daughters have no legal standing. So, while King James VI is terrified of witches taking hold of his soul, he has no issue with gaining control of Effie’s lands, haunted as they may be.

Effie MacCalzean’s trial lasts four days.

The unanimous verdict is guilty.

James is delighted to hear it.



The time has come. Her jailer approaches. Effie stands. She is barefoot. Her eyes blaze with fear. The condemned woman is led to the cart that will take her the short, steep distance up Castle Hill. Effie does not resist. Her executioner says nothing. If he is afraid the Devil will make him pay for ending Effie’s life, he does not show it.

The journey to the stake begins.

The crowd is close, clamoring for the moment when smoke will rise, followed quickly by flames. Then the screaming. The audience can’t wait. Many have never witnessed something like this. In most Scottish witch executions, the victim is tied to the stake, then strangled to death. *After* which the fire is lighted. It is believed a witch’s dead body will continue to cast spells unless destroyed by flames.

But Effie MacCalzean will not receive that mercy. She will be burned alive.

So it is that Effie is now tied to the stake.

The executioner lights the pyre with a torch. The crowd is hushed, but not for long. They roar as one when Effie panics at the first puffs of flame and smoke. She is an agent of the Devil, after all, so the crowd has no problem cheering as she struggles against her binds. But then the sight of a

human being burned alive becomes all too real. The smell of scorched flesh overwhelms the aroma of woodsmoke. Parents put protective hands on the shoulders of their children. Still, few turn away. Effie is an example: this is what happens when you associate with the Devil.

The flames rise.

Effie MacCalzean screams, a piercing shriek unlike any the spectators have ever heard. She begins suffocating from the smoke. Extreme pain sends her body into shock. Within five minutes, she will be dead.

Her tunic burns easily. So does her hair. Effie's screaming diminishes, then stops.

The spectators remain transfixed. What was once a woman is now charred flesh. Her eyes have melted. Her face is no more. The audience is disappointed that King James has not attended. But as the crowd walks down the hill, the people are satisfied. Smoke continues rising into the air. Conversations are hushed. Justice has triumphed over evil in Scotland. The witch is dead.*

But the Devil is not.

And soon, he will be on the move.

Chapter One

SEPTEMBER 6, 1620
PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND
MORNING

The New World beckons.

It is a cool English day as John Alden, a twenty-one-year-old barrel maker and carpenter, stands at the rail of the merchant ship *Mayflower*, watching the chaos on the wharf just below. He is about to risk his life on an extremely dangerous voyage. What he sees terrifies him.

Today is Sunday, a day of rest, yet dozens of workers are loading provisions onto the ship. It looks unlikely there will be enough to last the 102 passengers as well as roughly thirty members of the crew and officers the entirety of the ten-week voyage. In addition to the lack of food, some of those who have booked passage are growing apprehensive about the journey because the Atlantic Ocean has been wracked by gale-force winds. In fact, many of them refuse to board.

Even though Alden is young and a relatively inexperienced member of the crew, he knows this is not an orderly departure.

And perhaps an omen of troubles to come.

The truth is that the *Mayflower* should have been long at sea by now. The planned three-thousand-mile voyage to the American coast is harsh even in the calm summer months. But the North Atlantic turns mean in autumn. Two previous attempts to depart in good weather ended when the *Mayflower's* companion ship *Speedwell* began leaking. Repairs failed and the small vessel eventually had to be abandoned in port. As a result, the *Mayflower* will have to carry far more people and belongings than originally intended. One of the leaders of the venture, Robert Cushman, writes to a friend, "If we ever make a Plantation, God works a miracle."

John Alden, a husky blond adventurer, understands this risk. He knows that only one other English settlement has survived in America. That is Jamestown in Virginia, where as many as 3,000 of the 3,600 settlers have perished since the colony's founding in 1607. Those colonists are members of the Church of England, a faith swearing loyalty to the king. Many of the *Mayflower* voyagers are Protestants of the Puritan sect, often known as "dissenters" due to their strong disagreements with the king's religion. This is their reason for seeking a new life in America. But for some on board, such as Alden, faith has nothing to do with the journey. It's just a job. Furs and tobacco can be very profitable when shipped back to England. No matter the motivation, all are willing to sacrifice comfort—and perhaps their lives—for a better future.

This is not the first time the Puritans have fled England. Twelve years ago, they sailed to Holland because the Crown was persecuting them. However, the Puritans, mostly farmers, found it difficult to purchase land in Holland. They were relegated to working in the wool industry, where wages were low. In addition, Puritan leadership believed the Dutch were corrupt—the Devil was working among them in Holland. Thus, the group returned to England, knowing they would eventually have to find another place to settle.

Almost immediately, the Dissenters and King James clash. Puritans believe in religious law but reject the laws of the Crown. That is unacceptable to James. But rather than punish them, the king sees a chance for the Puritans to actually *help* him: the fundamentalists would be allowed to sail off once again, on the provision that they establish an English colony in the Americas.

At first, the Puritans consider going to South America but eventually decide that Virginia might be a better place. A British merchant company agrees to support their settlement in return for profitable exports from the New World. Thus, the *Mayflower* is chartered by the merchants. For this reason, the Puritans are also required to take on board many other paying passengers that do not share their extreme faith.*

★ ★ ★

Finally, the *Mayflower* is ready to depart. John Alden notices that a number of Puritans have refused to board—their places taken by

“Strangers,” as the nonbelievers are called.

The voyage begins with a solemn prayer.

As the small ship floats away from the dock, “a prosperous wind” soon fills her sails. *Mayflower* is hardly a large vessel, just 25 feet wide and 106 feet long. She is “square-rigged” with four masts. As the ship sails out of the English harbor into the turbulent Atlantic, the passenger list is an odd mix of men, women—three of them pregnant—children, and two dogs. Among the group is Myles Standish, a mercenary. At age thirty-five, Standish is a tough, hardened taskmaster who will provide protection to the Puritans and Strangers.

But it is John Alden who is, perhaps, the most important man on the ship. As the barrel maker, he is in charge of maintaining the beer supply. *Mayflower* passengers have only two beverage options: water or beer. Water is easily polluted and can make people ill. However, the microorganisms that make people sick can’t survive in alcoholic beverages. So beer will become the primary source of liquid nourishment. And just as important, Alden is the beer keeper—ensuring that each passenger is allotted no more than one gallon a day.*

Mayflower is known as a “sweet ship,” because the leakage from wine casks over a decade has left a pleasant aroma in the hold. But that will soon change. One hundred and two passengers living in tight confinement below the main deck quickly turns the space dark, damp, and malodorous. Living quarters are divided with curtains. Ceilings are just five feet high. Passengers live by lantern, rarely knowing if it is day or night. To make this fetid hold even more crowded, all materials needed to build a settlement—from seed to cannon, from Bibles to cauldrons—are also stored below. The Puritans believe themselves to be a peaceful people, but they are also realistic, and well armed to defend their new colony from pirates, the French, and local Indian tribes. They have dragged on board muskets, fowling pieces, swords, daggers, and several heavy guns, including two 1,800-pound sakers, three 1,200-pound minions, and four smaller cannon.

As the Puritans and Strangers soon learn, the *Mayflower* has not been built for this type of voyage. She is a sturdy merchant vessel, built to carry 180 tons of cargo in her hold. In more than a decade at sea, the *Mayflower* has carried a wide variety of goods, from wine to furs, to European ports—returning to England with brandy and silk. The ship has never attempted a

voyage of this length with so many passengers.

Autumn storms soon turn the Atlantic treacherous. Winds blow so strong that, at times, the ship is forced to “lie ahull,” lowering its sails and being carried on the waves. Puritan leader William Bradford writes, “The ship would be badly shaken. Conditions aboard are dreadful.”

This is true. Passengers are subjected to hardships they have never known. Meals are cold: hard biscuits, cheese, smoked and pickled meats, salted fish. It is always wet and filthy, with no relief from the incredible stench. They recline side-by-side with absolutely no privacy or hygiene. The air is barely breathable and the only activities are card playing for the Strangers and Bible reading for the Dissenters.

The ocean becomes the enemy. The ship is tossed like a cork in a hurricane. For their own safety, passengers stay in their own cramped space. Going on deck is dangerous and mostly forbidden.

Many become seasick. There are no sanitary facilities—slop buckets are used for relief and remain unemptied until they can be dumped overboard when the seas calm.

The first death comes on September 23, seventeen days into the voyage. A member of the crew, “sometime sick with a grievous disease,” according to the ship’s log, “died in a desperate manner.” His body is “tossed overboard.”

Another fierce storm buffets the ship. Most passengers remain calm, having long ago put their fate in the hands of the Lord. Suddenly, the *Mayflower* is hit hard by hammering waves. An ominous cracking sound rattles the vessel. Damage has been done. A number of leaks appear. The Atlantic is fighting to destroy them.

The crew makes a quick inspection. A main beam has cracked. The fate of the *Mayflower* is now in jeopardy. The crew knows it. They begin arguing about how to deal with this. Some of them want the ship’s captain, Christopher Jones, to turn around and sail back to England. Others believe they have no choice but to press forward.

Belowdecks, this fear reaches the passengers. But there is no panic. William Bradford and the other Puritan leaders hastily climb up onto the deck to meet with Captain Jones. He is direct: there is hope. The *Mayflower* is damaged but remains seaworthy. He explains that buried deep in the storage hold, among the furniture and cookware, is a large iron implement. It had been brought to help the passengers build cottages when

they land. Captain Jones has an ingenious plan to put it to use.

As soon as the winds subside, the crew goes to work. Carpenter John Alden is in the middle of it. Using the great screw to reconnect the broken pieces, the cracked beam is successfully raised back into position. There is widespread relief among the passengers. Captain Jones maintains course for America.

The Puritans gather to say a prayer of thanks—and guidance. For their situation is still precarious. The harvest moon shone brightly in the early days of the voyage, but now the nights are black and visibility is limited to less than a half mile. There is no sign of land and no way of determining how long the voyage will last. Sails across the Atlantic in these stormy high latitudes have been known to take up to two months. At this slow rate of progress, the precious beer supply will soon run out.

However, life continues. In late September, a child is born to Elizabeth Hopkins. The boy is named Oceanus—Latin for “ocean”—because of his Atlantic birth.

But with life there also comes death. Shortly after Oceanus Hopkins is brought into the world, William Batten, an indentured servant to Dr. Samuel Fuller, dies of an unknown ailment.

At about that same time, a bizarre incident unfolds. Gale-force winds howl without ceasing, but the *Mayflower* is riding steady. Twenty-seven-year-old John Howland is weary of being kept belowdecks. It has been about a month since Howland breathed fresh air. So he climbs a ladder, pushes open a hatch, and lifts himself onto the main deck. He stands on the damp wooden planks, eyes closed, taking deep breaths. It is a glorious moment.

But this is a fool’s peace. The ship bucks. Howland loses his balance and starts to slide overboard. In desperation he tries to grab hold of a rope, a cleat, a rail—*anything!*—but fails. Howland is swept into the raging sea.

Yet in that final moment before wind and waves pull him under, John Howland’s fist somehow wraps around a rope. That halyard some sailor forgot to adequately secure is used to raise and lower *Mayflower*’s upper sail. Howland holds on to this lifeline with a death grip as he is dragged beneath the sea. To let go is to die.

Several crew members witness Howland’s plight. They immediately search the ocean for him, knowing this is not an event men survive. Suddenly, the sailors are stunned to see the young man surface, still

clinging desperately to the halyard. Sailors grab the rope and reel him in, finally pulling Howland back on board with a boathook.

Alive.

It is a miracle.*

★ ★ ★

The forlorn passengers remain stoic. They endure hardships largely in silence. It is only at prayer time when voices are raised. Surely, God will save them, just as he did John Howland.

On November 9, 1620, crew and passengers exhausted, seagulls are sighted floating on the ocean. It is Wednesday, November 11, when the cry “Land ho!” is heard throughout the ship. One seaman has died, as well as a passenger. A baby has been born, the ship’s officers, crew, and more than one hundred settlers have reached the shores of America. “They were not a little joyful,” writes Puritan leader William Bradford.

★ ★ ★

But where are they? After sixty-six days at sea, navigation is inexact. The *Mayflower* has crossed horizons few Europeans have ever seen. Captain Jones believes the ship is far north of what will become known as the Hudson River and knows that the merchant’s charter does not apply in this region. So Jones decides not to make landfall. He orders the *Mayflower* to sail south to Virginia.

It is an unfortunate decision.

Within hours, the winds and tide turn against the ship. The *Mayflower* sails unexpectedly into the rocky shoals and hidden sandbars of what was later named Pollock Rip—a treacherous area just south of a place known as Cape Cod.*

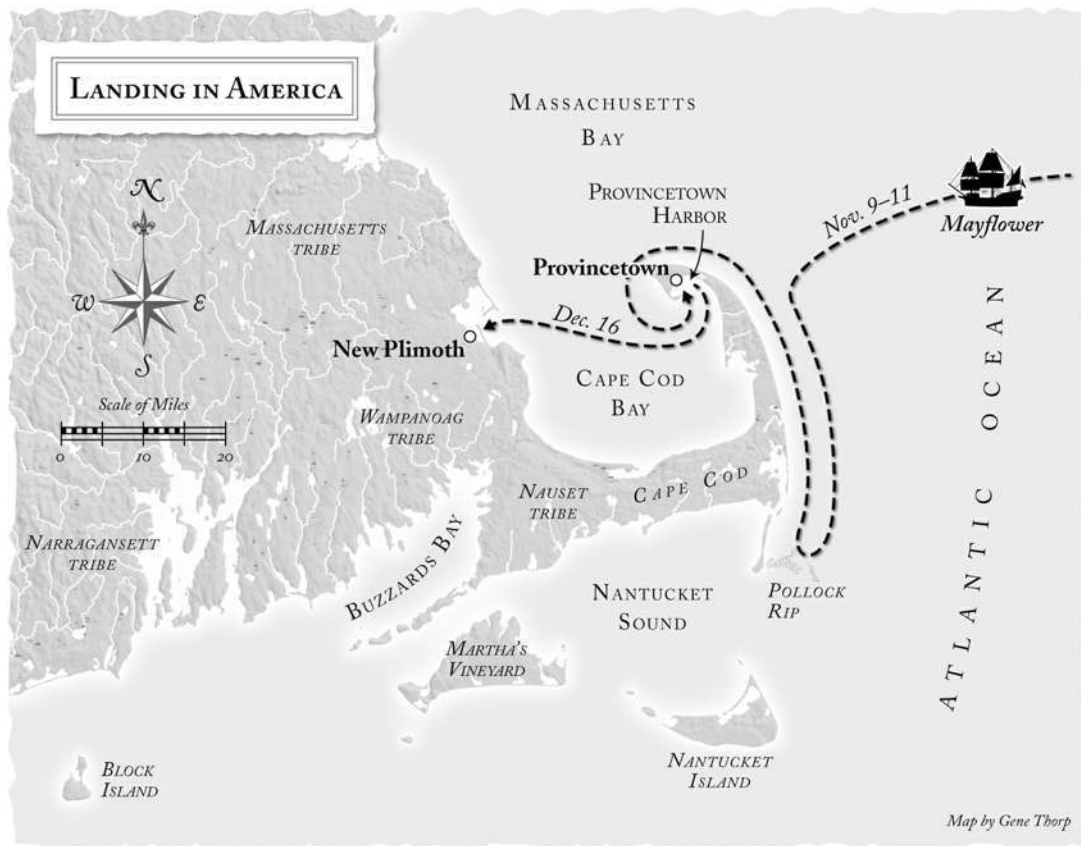
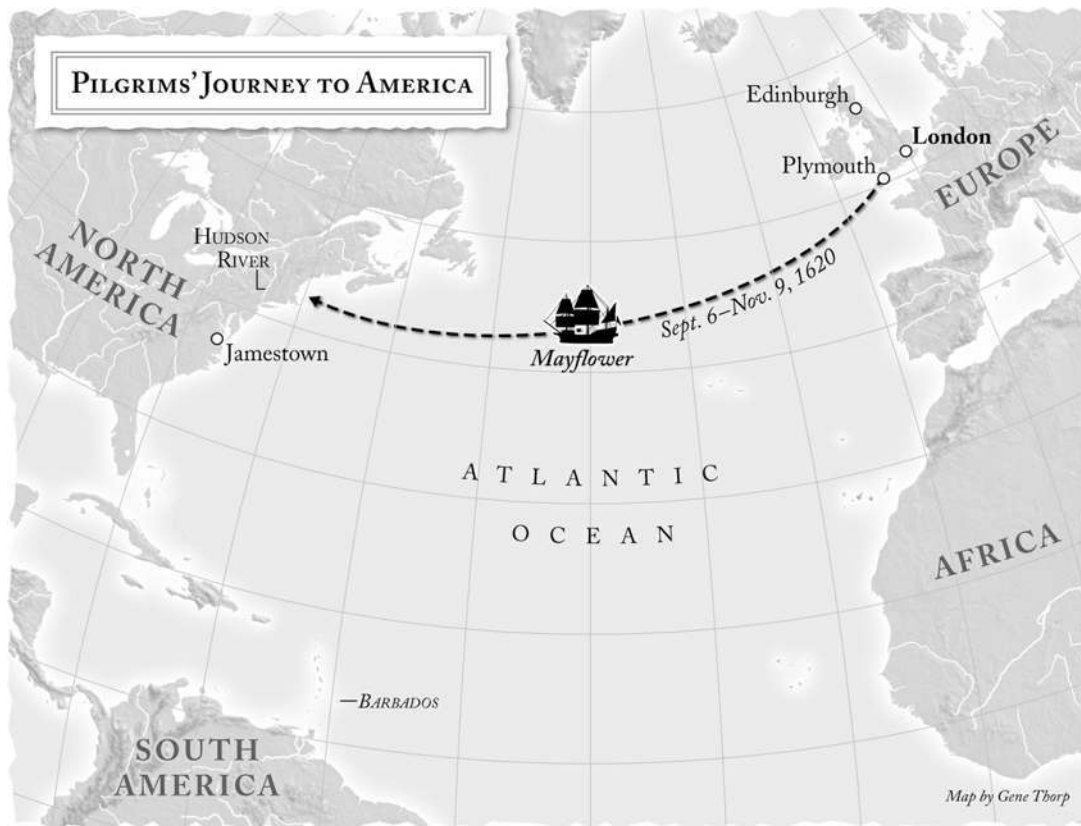
Raging waters create white-capped breakers. The winds shift yet again, and there is a real fear the *Mayflower* will founder on the jagged bottom. Captain Jones tells his passengers that he is abandoning the effort to reach Virginia. Instead, he will sail north, back to the New England mainland.

This causes great turmoil among both Puritans and Strangers. The charter granted by King James does not apply to that region. This land is desolate. It is known Indian ground. They have no legal right to settle there. As passengers and crew watch the seemingly endless woodland flow

by on their port side, they accept the reality that after months at sea their true journey has just begun.

The next morning, *Mayflower* drops anchor in a sheltered harbor, the northernmost hook of Cape Cod. They name it Provincetown. A group of elders meet in the main cabin to forge an agreement about a settlement. This will become known as the “Mayflower Compact.” The youngest man to sign the document is John Alden, who has had his fill of life at sea. He will stay in America rather than make the perilous return to England.

Five weeks later, Captain Jones decides to make the short voyage to the mainland rather than stay in Provincetown, which is far out in the Atlantic. Winter is coming and the people need a more permanent location. There are already six inches of snow on the frozen grounds. The *Mayflower*’s log reports, “Snowed and blowed all day.”



Myles Standish leads the first landing party. Some of the land is already cleared, and on December 11 the settlement is named “New Plimoth.” The