Luke Salisbury
excerpt from

No Common War, *a novel*

On Sunday, June 20, Year of Our Lord 1675, in Swansea, Plymouth colony, William and John Salisbury returned from church and found three Indians pestering Mistress Salisbury for whisky. Susanna was frantic. She had seven children in the wattle and daub house and William had taken the gun.

Swansea was tense. For weeks drums echoed in the woods. The Wampanoags and their sachem Metacom, called King Philip by the English, were preparing for war. Indians had been stealing from the colonists. Metacom thought the English were stealing his country. Every man at church had his gun.

William's son, twenty year-old John, carried the matchlock. It was a cumbersome weapon requiring a fourquette, a forked pole, to rest the barrel on when firing, and fired by a mechanism that brought a piece of lit string in contact with the powder. The Salisburys couldn't afford a flintlock, which was lighter, and fired by the striking of flint against steel over the pan. Either would have been a prize. Ordinary men didn't have firearms in England. Only professional soldiers who belonged to noblemen, and noblemen themselves. America was different. In a hundred years, the British would find out just how different. The Salisburys had a gun. They were American. William ordered John to shoot.

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William was a Welshman and Baptist. In Wales, Englishmen ruled his country. In America, Puritans ruled his colony. Baptists weren't allowed in Boston, so William brought Susannah and nine children to Swansea, on Mount Hope Bay, the edge of English territory. The Saints, as Puritans called themselves, came to New England to make a new Jerusalem in the "waste, howling wilderness." They tolerated no one not of their party. On June 20th, William was angry. Indians had blinded his cows in retaliation for trampling corn.

William hated Englishmen in Wales, Saints in New England, Indians on his land. William had land—pulled right out of the howling wilderness. He was tired. Vexed. William told his son to shoot.

John Salisbury was twenty. John had no idea the spark in his weapon would be the spark for the bloodiest, most forgotten war on American soil. Within a year of his shot, one in every fifty colonists would be killed—men, women and children—a rate twice the Civil War. Half the Indians would be slaughtered, starved to death, or sold into slavery in the West Indies. The Saints rid themselves of 'the devil's children' for cash. War, then profit. They were Americans too.

Two Salisburys, three Indians, one gun. A wife in the door. Seven frightened children looking out windows. This wasn't the first Thanksgiving. No thankful Pilgrims and happy Indians. This was the primal scene as white men drove west and the God of Love pushed out the Great Spirit. William was angry. He'd left wife and seven children the day after Indians

looted Job Winslow's house. He'd heard the drums and rumors. William was fifty-three. An old man. Too old to fight with young men.

William ordered his son to shoot and his son shot. The matchlock could have misfired. It didn't. John Salisbury could have missed. He didn't. John probably felt anger, fear, obedience, bravado—a tangle of undiscriminating passion. John fired and John hit. An Indian fell. The other braves took the wounded man away. The gun couldn't be reloaded quickly, so the braves could have attacked, but they took the wounded man instead. They wanted whiskey. Perhaps after tasting it, like Adam and the apple, nothing was the same.

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The first American Salisbury, William, the Immigrant, never said why he came. By 1648, William was herdsman of town cattle in Dorchester, south of Boston. This fact has spared me seeking my surname in Burke's Landed Gentry and conjuring aristocratic roots. Herdsman was an important position, as men need live stock tended while they farm; I doubt it required an earl. In 1656, William deposed he was 34 years of age and born in Llanrhaider, Denbighshire, Wales.

Why did a Welshman have an English name? I was told William was descended from Adam de Salzburg, a son of the Duke of Bavaria who came with William the Conqueror, and commanded an army against the Welsh. You can believe that if you like. The trick is to attach your line to the Conqueror, or the Bastard as he was called, and you're traceable. You're somebody. Americans have a need to be somebody, particularly after they've become somebody, but this is a testament, make up your own mind about Adam de Salzburg.

Whatever his reasons, the Immigrant picked up and cleared out of Wales, which was as American as guns and profit. William may have liked the name Salisbury, or taken it from a local family. If he couldn't be what he wanted, he could call himself what he wanted. William may have had his heart broken, gotten a girl in trouble, stolen a cloak, or been avoiding the English Civil War.

If the Immigrant were a scion of the gentry, shall we say the herdsman adapted well to the new world? Being Baptist was not aristocratic; it was trouble. The Saints called Indians 'speaking apes,' Quakers 'rantors,' and everyone else, 'Stranger.' They were bleak, energetic, drab-clad men, with one eye on heaven, the other on the profit margin, and both on their neighbors.

The Saints hated Baptists for renouncing Predestination, infant baptism, and believing people should decide for themselves when to accept Jesus Christ. They would however, hire a Baptist. As William guarded Puritan cattle, he may have clung to the memory of a stream in north Wales where he voluntarily entered the stinging water and the Holy Spirit entered him. Religion was more important in New England than anything save race. It could be worth your life.

In 1671, the Stranger 'removed,' as my father put it, to Swansea, in the southeast corner of Plymouth Colony. William was a man of the Second Rank (there were three), and got ten lots in a town with a Welsh name

founded by a Welsh Baptist and Puritan sea captain. The Baptist was a visionary; the Puritan the first mayor of New York and slave trader. Swansea was founded so the two religions could co-exist, and for commerce. It was far from Plymouth, the frontier. Swansea, with its rivers and jagged coast, bordered Mount Hope Peninsula. The peninsula was neither Rhode Island Plantation nor Plymouth Colony. It was the seat of the Pokanoket, the most powerful faction of the Wampanoag tribe. Their sachem was Massasoit's son, Metacom, or as we know him, King Philip.

Southeastern Massachusetts was a good setting for toleration. The climate was milder than Boston. The glaciers left smooth, fertile terrain like Nantucket or Long Island, not the rocky coast of Maine. The air was softer and the fields slope gently to the bay. The Baptist meetinghouse had a view of the water. As Welshman and Baptist, the Immigrant was safer. The Puritan revolution, abandoned in England, flourished with a vengeance in the Bay and Plymouth colonies. A youth was hanged for sodomizing a cow, five sheep and a turkey. A Quaker woman was stripped to the waist, wrists tied to a cart and whipped bare-breasted for ten miles. Such were the blessings of dwelling near the new Jerusalem.

William held onto his religion, his money, and by 1675 built a house. For the first time since Wales, a hearth and chimney were owned by a Salisbury, if Salisburys ever owned anything in Wales. The house was mortise and tenon: timbers cut to fit into each other. Nails were too expensive. The walls were wattle and daub to keep out the winter wind. A radically peaked roof deflected rain and ice. On June 20, 1675, the Immigrant had been in the new world thirty-five years, had land, house, wife and nine children, eight living. John was the eldest. All born in America. All Baptists. And William had a gun.

In June, 1675, hell was brewing. Smallpox had halved the Indian population. War was about to decimate the English.

Indians prophesized whoever drew first blood, would lose the war. The prophesy troubled the settlers. A minister saw blood in the sky; a farmer heard a pig say 'Devil.' People's lives were dominated by signs. The moon was a veritable almanac, leaves whispered, brooks literally babbled, war was a judgment. Looking for signs was the theater they so detested. Everything was an omen. The Saints looked to the sky.

Prophesy or no prophesy, bloody or gibbous moon, John Salisbury shooting an Indian scared the settlers. They left their homes for garrison houses. Swansea had three fortified garrisons, ordinarily used for storage, which had walls too thick to be penetrated by bullets or arrows, and could be more easily defended than its forty houses. A messenger was sent to Plymouth for help. The Salisburys, all ten, went to Bourne's garrison. Sixteen men and fifty-four women and children crowded together. The company got hungry, smelly and frightened. People blamed. The Salisburys were cursed.

The Greeks said character is fate and the next day John Salisbury revealed his character. On Monday Indians approached the Bourne garrison and reported the man John shot was dead. The parley was conducted over the wall. No settler, least of all John Salisbury, left the garrison. John,

behind the walls, told the Indians the killing was, "no matter." The Indians withdrew.

The following day Governor Winslow, Job's uncle, declared a colony-wide Day of Atonement. The settlers left the garrison houses for church. Indians had looted the town and slaughtered livestock. Tempers ran high. After a skirmish, two settlers going for a doctor were killed. Everyone else got back to the garrisons. Judgment, as their Puritan neighbors liked to say, was coming.

The cleansed souls in the Bourne Garrison ran out of food. Eight men volunteered to find baskets of corn hidden on nearby farms. William and John were among them.

Not far from the garrison, the Swansea men encountered Plymouth cavalry, who told them to get back to the garrison. John told the Plymouth men that Swansea men could take care of themselves. The cavalry rode off. Within minutes Indians set upon the Swansea men. The cavalry did not return. The eight were beheaded. Their bodies mutilated. Eight heads went up on stakes overlooking the Kickimuit River. One can imagine the hatred with which those men were hacked to death. Land taken. Disease. Hangings. The arrogant English God.

Eight heads faced the Kickimuit River in the sun. Flies crawled on clotted blood and open dead eyes. Mouths hung open. Scalps and hands decorated trees. Ants worked their way up the stakes in dark lines. Two mouths ripped. Two tongues cut out.

Heads-on-stakes, Swansea destroyed, forty-four settlements burned, the English population decimated, the Indian halved. King Philip's War. It would have happened without the Salisburys. It would have happened later when Philip was better prepared, but once those heads went up on stakes, Plymouth Colony had to fight. When Plymouth fought, Massachusetts Bay had to fight. The Indians had no choice. They were being driven out of the country.

William and John Salisbury went to an unmarked grave.