

ROBERT AND MARY SEELY'S COURAGEOUS JOURNEY TO THE NEW WORLD

A dramatization written by Montell, Kathryn, and LeAnne Seely
for presentation at the SGS Reunion, Abilene, Kansas, September 16, 2005

PROLOGUE

Setting: (Up stage center is a small table with a chair on each side, partially open to the audience.)

Narrator: (Enters from stage left and walks down stage center to deliver speech.) This dramatization will help us picture our ancestors as real people with feelings and personalities and everyday challenges in their lives. The setting is London, England, 1626. All the dialog and action in this story is pure fiction based on only one or two facts that are known for sure. Here are the facts: Robert was a cordwainer in London. A cordwainer is a leatherworker and shoemaker. Robert and Mary were married on December 15, 1626. The Widow Mason had lived at No. 7 Coleman Street the year before they were married, and Robert and Mary lived there after they were married. Besides those few items, we really know nothing about how they met, their courtship, how they decided to get married, and all the other juicy details. We must use our imaginations to fill in the details and satisfy our curiosity. Let's assume Robert had seen Mary at church in the St. Stephen's parish and that he had known her husband Walter before he passed away. Perhaps Robert is concerned about Mary being lonesome. Remember, all this dialogue is pure fiction. (Walks down stage left to be out of the main action.)

Scene 1: THE COAT

Robert: (Enters from stage right, makes a knocking noise. He has a coat over his arm.)

Mary: (Enters from stage left, walks over, opens door.) Well, Robert! Come in, come in. How nice to see you.

Robert: (Shyly) Thank you. (He steps inside and there is an awkward silence. Then he fumbles around with his coat and some nails and dirt fall out of a pocket.) Oh, I'm sorry. (They both stoop over to pick up the nails.)

Mary: That's all right. There is no problem. I needed to sweep my floor anyway. Let me get the broom. (She walks off stage left to get the broom and dust pan.)

Narrator: (From down stage left) Now, Robert's thinking to himself, "You bungling nincompoop. You should have stayed home where you belong." And Mary's thinking to herself, "Poor Robert. He is so shy and nervous. I don't know why he came to call on me, but I'm glad he did. What can I say so he won't be so nervous?"

Mary: (Returns with the broom.) Here, Robert. You hold the dust pan and we'll have this cleaned up in a jiffy. (He holds the pan while she sweeps up the dirt.) There now. Nothing to it. No harm done. (Puts away broom and dustpan up stage left.)

Robert: I think I should go now. (He turns to go.)

Mary: Hold up, now. You can't go yet. I mean, you never did say why you came. Please have a seat. (She takes his sleeve and pulls him to a chair.) Now, what is it? Tell me why you came calling.

Robert: (Long pause. He clears his throat, fumbles with his coat again, then blurts out.) Are you lonesome? Tell me you're lonesome.

Narrator: (Walks across to down stage right.) Oh my, Robert-you are really some smooth suitor! It's no wonder you're still single.

Mary: (Smiles and laughs lightly.) Yes, Robert. As a matter of fact, I am lonesome.

Robert: Good. I thought so-I-I mean, no-no, it's not good that you're lonesome. I don't want you to be lonesome, so I came-I came-Oh, I don't know why I came. Uh, um-oh, yes. My coat. The sleeve. I need some thread so I can mend the sleeve. See, the seam has come apart. Since Walter was a weaver, I thought maybe you'd have some thread that I could borrow-I mean, buy. I'll buy it. It will take a length about that long. (Holds out his hands to show the length.) How much will that cost? I have a needle.

Narrator: (From down stage right.) Now, Mary's pretty smart. She knows if Robert just gets the thread and leaves, he might never work up the nerve to call on her again.

Mary: (Takes the coat and looks at the sleeve. Then she smiles at Robert.) I can do this little mending job for you. Come back tomorrow when you get off work, and I'll have it done.

Robert: Oh, I can mend it myself.

Narrator: (Nudges Robert.) Hey! Let her KEEP the coat. That will give you an excuse to pay another visit.

Robert: (To Narrator) Well, sure! Why didn't I think of that? (To Mary) But if you insist. (Pause.) Are you going to insist?

Mary: I insist. You come tomorrow. It will be ready.

Robert: Okay, I'll do that. (He exits stage right.)

Scene 2: TEA AND CRUMPETS

Setting: (Table and chairs remain in place. Mary examines the coat.)

Narrator: (Walking across down stage center and over to down stage left.) Robert came the next day, and Mary did have the sleeve mended, but she had a plan. She took her scissors and cut the thread in the seam on the other sleeve.

Robert: (Enters from stage right. Knocks on the door.)

Mary: (Comes to the door carrying the coat.) Robert, come in. It's so nice to see you. I mended your sleeve (shows him the sleeve), but just now I noticed that the seam in the other sleeve needs to be mended. Can you leave it with me and I'll mend it also? You can pick it up tomorrow. Will that be okay?

Robert: That's strange. I didn't notice-never mind. Yes, that will be jim dandy okay. (He turns to go.)

Mary: Oh, you can't go yet! I mean, I've made us each a cup of tea. You do like tea, don't you? And I also made some crumpets. Do you like crumpets? Of course you do. I didn't need to ask. Sit down and make yourself at home while I get the tea and crumpets. (He sits. She exits stage left to get the tea tray.)

Narrator: (Walks up stage center behind the table.) And Robert thinks to himself, "She's nice and so friendly. I could become fond of a girl like her, but she won't ever have an interest in a bloke like me." And Mary thinks to herself, "He's so nice, and so modest and quiet. I could fall for a man like him, but he won't be interested in a widow like me." (Mary brings the tea tray. It has two cups, a linen serviette, six or seven crumpets.)

Robert: Oh, boy. I appreciate the tea and crumpets. I haven't had anything to eat since noon time, and I'm starved. (He takes a big drink of tea, eats a crumpet in two bites, and reaches for another.)

Mary: Do you like the crumpets? They just came out of the oven.

Narrator: (Walks down stage right.) I think she timed it so they'd still be warm when he arrived!

Robert: They are really good, almost as good as the ones my mother used to make.

Narrator: Oh, Robert. You knucklehead! You shouldn't have said that.

Mary: Your mother must surely be a sweet, wonderful woman. I hope to meet her someday.

Robert: Yes, that would be nice. (Pause.)

Narrator: Robert, say something. Make some conversation.

Robert: (Looks toward Narrator and whispers) I don't know what to say.

Mary: I do enjoy these quiet moments. Some people think they need to keep a conversation going, but we don't have to be talking all the time.

Robert: (To Narrator) I can't think of anything to say. Why don't you think of something!

Mary: I do enjoy these quiet moments. Some people think they need to keep a conversation going, but we don't have to be talking all the time.

Robert: Yes, that's right. (Glares at Narrator.) That's a good philosophy. Enjoy the quiet moments. (Pause.) That's very good. (Pause.) These crumpets are sure good.

Mary: Here, have some more.

Robert: (Takes another one.) I don't want to be a pig about it.

Mary: It's a nice compliment to me that you like them so well. In fact, I'll just send the leftovers home with you. Will you take them?

Robert: Okay, I'll take them. (He drinks the last of his cup of tea.) I need to be going now. I've taken a little job on the side. Sir Richard Saltonstall asked me to make him a pair of high top riding boots. He is buying the very best cordovan leather. Oh, they're gonna be some fancy lookers. The best that money can buy. (pause) Mary, do you know what I'd like to do?

Mary: (Wraps up the crumpets in the linen serviette.) No. What?

Robert: After I finish these boots for Ol' Saltonstall, I'd like to make you a pair of Sunday slippers out of cordovan leather.

Mary: Well, ah-gee willikers! I-I don't know what to say. I mean-but you can't afford to do that. Cordovan leather is so expensive. Only the upper class folks wear cordovan leather. You can't afford it and I can't afford to buy the leather even if I let you do the work.

Robert: (Crushed.) Shucks. I thought you'd be pleased.

Mary: Oh, I AM pleased-that you would even think of it. Oh my, yes! I'd love to have a pair of cordovan slippers. I didn't mean that I wouldn't want them-it's just that they're so expensive.

Robert: Let me tell you something. Cordovan leather is over-rated. Yes, it's the best kind of leather, that's true-but it's not that much better than good quality, properly tanned leather. You're paying for the name. I can buy a side of cordovan leather for just two pence more than regular leather. But because of the reputation and the name, I can turn around and sell cordovan leather shoes for a much higher price. (Stands up.) I've got to be going, but I will. I'll make you a pair of Sunday slippers out of cordovan leather. I'll do it, and won't take no for an answer. I'll see you tomorrow. (He exits stage right. Mary picks up his tea cup and hugs it to her chest, then exits stage left, taking the tea tray and the coat.)

Narrator: (Walks down stage center.) Well, what do you think about that? I think Mary is falling in love! We'll have to work on Robert! He's kind of a lunkhead sometimes. But you'll notice that once he got talking about leather, then he was all right. Anyway, Robert came the next day and got his coat, and they had more tea and crumpets. A camaraderie came to blossom, and he oftentimes called upon her after work, though it was two blocks out of his way. He would stand by her stove to get warm while he drank a spot of tea and looked at her pretty smile-all of which warmed the cockles of his heart. And, as I said in the beginning, Robert and Mary were married on December 15, 1626.

Scene 3: A BABY ON THE WAY

Setting: (Table and chairs remain the same. Mary is sitting in her chair and has her lap covered with a quilt. A doll representing a newborn baby is hidden under the quilt.)

Narrator: (From down stage center.) Let's move ahead now and look in on Robert and Mary when they are getting ready for their first child to be born. (Moves down stage right.)

Mary: Oh that Goodwife Bluejohn makes me so mad. Since I've become so great with child, and it isn't proper to be seen in public this way, I haven't left the house in three months. But I thought I might sneak over to visit my sister without getting caught. And wouldn't you know it! Goodwife Bluejohn saw me. She hustled right over and cackled, "Mary, haven't you had that baby yet? You're gettin' to be as big as a cow. I reckon you're gonna have twins!" Oh, that makes me angry when other women talk that-a-way!

Robert: (Enters from stage left.) O, pshaw, Sweetheart. Don't pay no mind ta her. She cackles about everything. You look beautiful to me!

Mary: Thanks. I know you love me.

Robert: (Sits down.) When do you figure the baby will come?

Mary: It could happen any day now, and I wish it would. Honestly!

Robert: Do you have a midwife lined up?

Mary: Yes, Millie Biddlecome said she'd help us. Everyone says that she's one of the best. She has

delivered more than 500 babies. And I'll have my sister here to help.

Robert: Good. I just hope Mrs. Biddlecome isn't tied up on some other case when we need her!

Scene 4: THE BABY IS BORN

Setting: (Mary remains in the chair with the doll hidden under the quilt. Robert brings his chair around in front of her, and she puts her feet on the chair with the quilt over her legs, to simulate being in a bed.)

Narrator: (From down stage right.) Ten days have now passed, and this is the day of the birth. Mary is doing her thing, and Robert is doing his part-pacing the floor. (Walks across to down stage left.)

Robert: (Walks down stage right, paces back and forth, talking to himself.) Oh, dear. I wish they'd hurry. I'll be a nervous wreck. I thought I could take this in stride-as if it were just another day. When the Pasketts had their baby, I wasn't a bit nervous. And I couldn't understand why Peter was pacin' the floor. Now it's different. Now it's my own baby. This will be my child. I'm gonna be a father, and I'm just as nervous as a cat having kittens. (Pause.) I wish they'd hurry it up. What's taking them so long? It shouldn't take this long. Back when I was a boy, and I watched our sow have piglets, it didn't take this long. Why, those little piglets came poppin' out just like someone was squeezing a slick bar of soap! (Pause.) Does this mean that something has gone wrong? What if Mary can't deliver this baby? What if Mary and the baby die? Maybe the baby has problems. What if it's born dead? Oh, dear, I wish they'd hurry.

Narrator: (From down stage left.) And just then Robert hears the strong, healthy cry of his newborn child. Wouldn't you agree that to an expectant father, the sound of a newborn baby's first cry is the sweetest sound on earth! (Mary brings the doll out from under the quilt and holds it like a newborn baby.)

Robert: (Suddenly looks up, when he has heard the baby cry out.) Is that what I think it is? Is that my very own child? (Kneels down and offers a prayer.) Oh dear Father in Heaven, I am so thankful to hear that baby cry. I thank Thee that my child has been born-strong and healthy. Dear Father, please bless Mary and me that we can be good parents to this child. Please inspire us as we strive to guide this child as it grows to become an adult. Bless Mary that she will recover her strength. When she is well again, I'd like to take her and the baby to Huntingdon to visit my parents. While I'm there I want to apologize for the cross words I said when I left home . . .

Narrator: (Moves across to down stage right and nudges Robert's shoulder.) You can probably go in now. Don't you want to see whether it's a boy or a girl?

Robert: (Walks to Mary's side.) Well, what took ya so long? [Note: Our audience laughed at this line-so much that we almost "broke character." We hadn't anticipated their delight in the simple line!]

Mary: Robert! Babies have a mind of their own, and they do things on their own schedule.

Robert: I know. I was just teasin'. Is everything all right? Are you all right?

Mary: Yes, I am fine, and we have a strong, healthy son. Do you want to hold him?

Robert: (Takes the baby and turns to the narrator) How come he's all wrinkled up? I thought babies were supposed to be cute and cuddly. (Narrator looks exasperated. Robert turns to Mary) He looks wonderful. What are we going to name him?

Mary: I haven't chosen a name. I want us to pick a name together. Do you have something in mind?

Robert: Not really. Maybe William . . . how about Thomas? Or Peter? Or Nathaniel?

Mary: Nathaniel Seely. That sounds nice. How would you feel about Nathaniel?

Robert: That sounds like a mighty fine name to me. Nathaniel it will be.

Narrator: (From down stage right.) Nathaniel Seely was christened on September 16, 1627, at St. Stephen's Parish.

Scene 5: THE CONFLICT

Setting: (Table and chairs are in original positions. Mary has taken the baby and the quilt off stage left.)

Narrator: (From down stage right) Now let's move ahead two years to 1629, where we see Robert and Mary having a bit of an argument, in regards to going to the New World. We may imagine Robert has a tendency to be adventuresome, while Mary wants to stay where things are predictable and

familiar.

Robert: (Enters from stage left with a pair of shoes in his hand.) Mary, have you seen my hat? I have a delivery to make tonight, and it's a fur piece out on the high street. I've got to take these shoes over to Sir Richard Thornbaum. He paid me double to work through the night and get'em finished today, and he's even payin' me extra to deliver 'em to his manor before 5 of the hour. Said he had some high style mucky muck doin's that he has ta take his missus to tonight, and she insisted that he couldn't go unless he had new shoes. Can you believe a wife layin' down an ultimatum like that? What's this world comin' to? (Mary enters from stage left with the hat in hand and the coat over her arm. She helps him on with the coat and hat.) Thank you, dear. Now, when I get back, I'd like us to lay out some plans for closing down our affiliations here before we leave London.

Mary: Robert, I don't want to go to that so-called New World-or Columbus' folly-or America-or whatever they call it. We have a comfortable life here. We're not rich, but we have these two rooms, and we get along fair to middlin'. And we have our friends. We have the church. I don't want to leave all this and go over there where there's no civilization. We'll just get over there and probably starve to death the first winter. You know yourself, they call winter over there the starving time.

Robert: It was only back in 1607 with the Jamestown Company that people starved. Winter isn't starving time anymore, and besides, the handbill that the Massachusetts Bay Company is passing around says that the company guarantees to feed their people through the first winter and up 'til the first harvest.

Mary: Well, a lot of good their guarantee is if you're dead-if you have starved to death. If you've run out of food and no ship comes to bring more, what good is their guarantee?

Robert: The handbill also says that if you'll stay one winter and then you still don't like it, then they'll give you free passage back home.

Mary: Well, I already know I won't like it, so why don't I just stay home?

Robert: Mary, ye'r treadin' on thin ice talkin' that-a-way. That almost sounds like you'll stay here alone if I go. Is that your position-that if I insist on goin', you'll stay and not go with me? You'd better think long and hard on that question before you speak. While I'm gone to deliver these shoes, you do some long hard thinkin' and some soul searchin'. (Exits stage right with shoes.)

Narrator: (Walks down stage center.) Well, that got a little "tight-jawed," didn't it? When things get tense like that, it's sometimes good to sort out your feelings alone. Let's see what Mary's thinking. (Moves up stage left, towards Mary.)

Mary: (Paces the floor and talks to herself.) Now I know that Robert would go without me. I had to hint that I'd stay here alone, in order to learn really if he would go without me, and he just the same as said he would. Was he bluffing? Would he really give up our marriage and go alone if I refused to go? Well, for that matter, am I so firm against going that I'll give up our marriage? Oh, I dread goin' over there. I'm scared to death to get on one of those ships. I'll be seasick all the way. We could be drowned in the cold black sea-or be eaten by sharks! It's a dangerous journey for a child as young as our little Nathaniel. Who would take care of him if something happened to Robert and me? And even if we make it, I'll be afraid of the Indians. Oh, Robert, why do we have to go?

Narrator: (Moves down stage center.) Those are reasonable concerns. Let's see what Robert is thinking. (Moves up stage right, toward Robert.)

Robert: (Enters stage right, pacing and talking to himself.) Mary, Why can't you see that this will be the best decision we'll ever make? I love you, and I don't want to go without you. If in the end you refused to go, would I go without you? That would be the hardest decision of my life. Oh, Mary, don't make me go through that decision. I feel driven to go. It's almost as if there is a voice in the New World calling for me to come. In fact, it's like the Spirit of God has rested upon me, and I must leave England and go to the New World.

Scene 6: DISCUSSING ALL THE ISSUES

Setting: (Table and chairs remain center stage. Robert remains stage right, Mary stage left.)

Narrator: (Moves down stage center.) Have you ever faced a similar situation? This is a big decision for a young couple with a small child. It's going to take a lot of discussing and some kind of resolution. Robert can't just walk into the wilderness and set up a colony without the support of his spouse. They must be equally yoked-not one plunging ahead and the other dragging behind as dead

weight. We pick up their conversation now, later in the evening. (Moves down stage left.)

Mary: (Robert enters and Mary helps him off with his coat.) Robert, I'm sorry I said things that upset you today. I know you want to go with this group, and you know I don't want to go. But I love you, and I don't want us to be apart. I just can't understand why you are so dead set on goin'. Will you explain it to me?

Robert: Well, it's partly about the land. We can't be landowners here in England, Mary, but we can in the New World. When we get there, I'll be a freeman and able to own land! I've always wanted to be a landowner. You know that saying, "Every man's got a piece of land in his heart"? That's talking about me. I have a yearning to own my own land, and not be beholden to any lord and master. I want our children to have a land of inheritance, and I think it's in the New World. I don't know why you're hanging back. Don't you want to be a landowner's wife? (He sits.)

Mary: (Sits.) I don't deny that would be desirable, but what about our life here, our friends, and what about the church? You said yourself, Brother Davenport is the best preacher in this part of the city. You have your trade as a cordwainer, and we have a little boy to raise. We can't just go traipsin' off after--a piece of land!

Robert: Mary, we're not going to be giving up our friends or the church. The Chamberlains and the Bassets are planning' to go; at least, that's what John Bassett told me after the meeting last Sabbath day. We won't just be "traipsin' off" as you say. The Massachusetts Bay Company is well-studied in their plans and their way of setting things up. And as far as the church is concerned, of course we'll continue to worship as we have here. In fact, Mary, besides the opportunity for land, the church is one of the main reasons I want to go with this company.

Mary: What do you mean? Is the church asking you to go?

Robert: No, not exactly like that, but I feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to join with this group of settlers in establishing Christian colonies in the new world. Let me see if I can make it a little more clear. (Pause.) Sweetheart, have you noticed that Brother Davenport's sermons of late have been leaning more and more toward reforming the Church of England? In conversations with some of the other men, I've learned that he's not the only vicar hinting in that direction. And remember when we were at the King's Cross market last month and that open air preacher was being harassed by the constable? He was talking about reform, too.

Mary: Yes, I remember. His speech was very impressive.; he talked about applying the scriptures to all our activities, even business dealings and community affairs. But what does all this have to do with us going to the new world?

Robert: I believe in the reforms they're talking about. But I also know that people who try to get things reformed usually end up being harassed and persecuted, like that open air preacher. The company we'd be going with to the New World, the Massachusetts Bay Company, is almost entirely composed of men who believe strongly in the further reform of the church. Their ideas are to purify the teaching of the word of God as shown in the scriptures. We'd be setting up a new type of colony, one based on a balanced life of prayer, study, and brotherly love. I feel that the men who are leading this group are inspired of God and that their colonies and settlements will be a better life for us. With me as a freeman and skilled in several trades, I could really contribute to things.

Mary: I believe in the reforms they're talking about. But I also know that people who try to get things reformed usually end up being harassed and persecuted, like that open air preacher. The company we'd be going with to the New World, the Massachusetts Bay Company, is almost entirely composed of men who believe strongly in the further reform of the church. Their ideas are to purify the teaching of the word of God as shown in the scriptures. We'd be setting up a new type of colony, one based on a balanced life of prayer, study, and brotherly love. I feel that the men who are leading this group are inspired of God and that their colonies and settlements will be a better life for us. With me as a freeman and skilled in several trades, I could really contribute to things.

Narrator: (From down stage left.) Hold it! Pause. Now look at all the issues they have on the table. Robert has several factors motivating him to go. He has an opportunity to improve his financial standing by becoming a landowning freeman. That will help him provide for his family and will benefit his posterity. Plus, he likes what he has heard about reforming the church but doesn't like how

outsiders react to those ideas. Mary is concerned about all the risks they'll be taking in the actual journey and just trying to survive once they get there. They are at an impasse. How can it be resolved? Okay, go on.

Mary: Really, Robert! I'm not convinced.

Robert: Mary, it's like this. Now listen up, 'cause I'm gonna tell you straight. I feel moved upon by the Holy Spirit to join with this company and go to the New World. I think they are going to set up a colony that will be an example of how a settlement can thrive and succeed if the members of the community base all their actions, business dealings, and run the government in accordance with the scriptures. It will be like a shining city on a hill. We're not intending to make a break with the Church of England like it broke with the Roman church. We're intending to purify it from within. And by making this shining city on a hill in the New World, we'll be removed from the authorities who would repress this purification and persecute us for our beliefs.

Mary: You talk like you've already aligned yourself with this group.

Robert: Well, pretty close. I've had some meetings with some of the other men, and we've discussed how things will go, once we're over there and out of reach of the authorities, so to speak. Mary, I really feel that this is the thing for our family to do. As you say, we have a son to raise, and I am very conscious of it. I want him to live in a place where he can practice his religion the way he chooses. And I want the same thing for his children and their children after them-I want that for all of our posterity.

Mary: Well, Robert, I'm plumb surprised. I surely didn't know you had this conviction in your heart. I guess I've just been so wrapped up in little Nathaniel I didn't see where things were headed. You are converted to this idea, I understand that now. And far be it from me to try and dissuade you from a prompting by the Holy Spirit. But please be patient with me. I'm still not ready to set off on the Ocean of Doom for months on end and then try to put down new roots in a foreign and hostile wilderness. Please be patient as I pray for courage and a conviction like yours. Will it really be as you say, a land of inheritance for our children and grandchildren?

Robert: Yes, I'm positive it will be. Our posterity will remember us for taking this step into the unknown and laying out a new path in a new land. I know without any doubt that we are being guided by the Holy Spirit and that this is the right thing for us to do.

Mary: Oh, Robert, I love you, and I will go with you. (They embrace.)

Narrator: (Moves down stage center.) And so it did turn out to be the right thing to do. Robert and Mary Seely and their family were vital to the establishment of more than half a dozen towns and cities along the East Coast. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was arguably the most successful of the colonies that were planted in New England in the 1600's, and it was due, in no small part, to the religious convictions of the settlers and to their dedicated labors. The Puritan groups did eventually break away from the Church of England, though they had not planned it to be so. We might look at it as a foreshadowing of the civic break from the mother country a century later with the Revolutionary War. But that's another episode for another day. We hope you've enjoyed our little drama. (Robert and Mary join Narrator down stage center; all bow together.)