

Summary “The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson”

On the morning of February 10, 1675, the British settlement of Lancaster, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, is besieged by Native Americans. The attackers burn down houses and open fire on the settlers, wounding and killing several of them, and take a number of the survivors captive. [Mary Rowlandson](#) is one of the wounded, as is her youngest child, Sarah. Other members of Rowlandson’s family are killed outright. As the melee dies down, the Native Americans begin to lead their captives, including Rowlandson and her three children, from the settlement into the surrounding wilderness. At this point, Rowlandson and her two elder children are separated, but she and the youngest are allowed to remain together.

After a night spent in an abandoned town nearby, from which colonists had fled in fear of Indian attack, the captors and their captives begin to trek westward, farther into the forest. As Rowlandson and her daughter are both wounded, the journey is difficult and painful. After another day of travel, they reach an Indian settlement called Wenimesset. Here, Rowlandson meets another British captive, Robert Pepper, who wants to offer the new captives comfort. The Indians and their captives remain in Wenimesset for over a week, and during this time, Rowlandson’s wounded child becomes more ill, finally dying on February 18. By this time, Rowlandson’s original captor has sold her to a Saggamore Indian named Quannopin, who is related by marriage to [King Philip](#). Quannopin oversees the burial of Rowlandson’s dead child, and a grieving Rowlandson visits her elder daughter (also named Mary), who she learns is also being held in Wenimesset. As she despairs over the fate of her family, her son visits her—he has been allowed to come from the nearby Indian settlement where he is being held in captivity. Meanwhile, the Indians continue to attack British towns, including Medfield, killing and looting as they go. Her captors give Rowlandson a Bible, part of the spoils of Medfield, and in it she finds comfort and hope.

After the fighting at Medfield, the Indians decide again to “remove” westward, now heading north as well. Rowlandson is again separated from her family and acquaintances. After a four-day rest in the forest, the band of Indians with whom Rowlandson is traveling begins to travel more swiftly. Rowlandson suspects that the British army must be close. They reach the Baquaug River and cross it, and the English arrive close behind. The British soldiers, however, are unable to ford the river, and the Indians and Rowlandson continue to the northwest. Rowlandson and her captors soon reach the Connecticut River, which they plan to cross in order to meet with King Philip. Here, however, are English scouts, and the Indians and Rowlandson are forced to scatter in the forest to remain undetected. Rowlandson again meets up with her son and his captors, though they must soon part ways.

After this detour, Rowlandson and the Indians cross the river, and on the other side, she meets with King Philip as planned. For some time, she remains at this settlement, sewing clothes for the Indians in return for food. The

Indians, meanwhile, raid Northampton and return with spoils, including horses. Rowlandson asks to be taken to Albany on horseback, hoping that there she will be “sold” in exchange for gunpowder, but instead, the Indians prepare to take her northward and over the river once more.

After a brief sojourn at a settlement five miles north of King Philip’s abode, Rowlandson’s captors once again bring her north but then turn south again. Rowlandson hopes she’ll be returned home, but the Indians delay the journey, continuing south down the Connecticut River rather than turning east toward civilization. Indian attacks on British towns continue, and another captive, Thomas Read, joins Rowlandson’s group. From Read, Rowlandson learns that her husband is alive and well, which heartens her. Rowlandson also sees her son again, briefly. Rowlandson and her captors finally begin to move east.

They again cross the Baquaug River. Messengers meet them and report that Rowlandson must go to Wachuset, where the Indians will meet to discuss her possible return to freedom. More hopeful than she has been in some time, Rowlandson eagerly sets off toward the council’s meeting place. But the journey tires her, and she is disheartened by the sight of an injured colonist, wounded in still another Indian attack. At Wachuset, she speaks with King Philip, who promises her she’ll be free in two weeks. Nonetheless, the council continues to deliberate, asking Rowlandson how much her husband would be willing to pay them as ransom. The Indians then send a letter to Boston, stating that Rowlandson can be redeemed for twenty pounds. Meanwhile, attacks on British settlements continue, including an attack on Sudbury, after which Rowlandson must travel with her captors back into the forest.

As the Indians celebrate their victories, messengers arrive from the council, along with an Englishman named John Hoar. Rowlandson hopes she’ll be allowed to leave with Hoar, but negotiations continue for several more days. Rowlandson is finally allowed to travel back to now-abandoned Lancaster, then on to Concord, and finally to Boston. After nearly twelve weeks in the wilderness, Rowlandson is reunited with her husband. The two stay with a friend in Concord for eleven weeks, during which time Rowlandson’s sister is also released from her captivity. Rowlandson’s son and daughter are eventually returned as well. The family, together again at last, sets up a new household in Boston, where they continue to live until 1677.