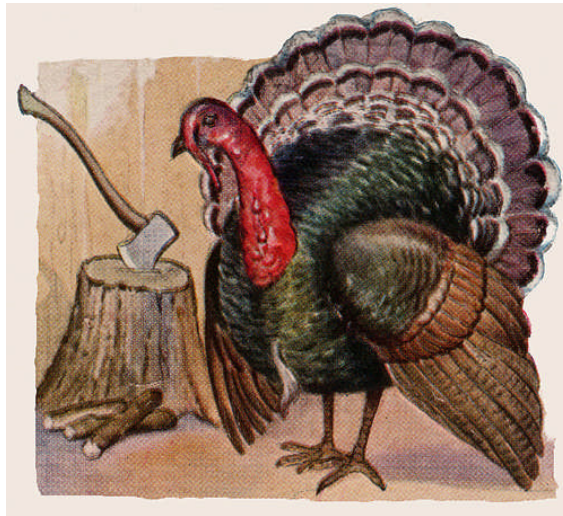


# **THE TURKEY**



*As told to Bruce Ballard by*

***Peter Wellington Turkey***

*one of the few survivors of Farmer Joe's Great Massacre*



# The Turkey

*As told by Peter Wellington Turkey,  
one of the few survivors of Farmer Joe's Great Massacre*

## 1.

Once upon an autumn cheery, while I strutted, rarely leery,  
Scratched and scritch'd and pecked and picked my boisterous way about the farm,  
Feeling free and heart a-blazin', chortling, happy, acting brazen,  
Never did I ever wonder how my life might tear asunder,  
How my comrades would fall under, how Grim Reaper would arrive,  
How I might not stay alive.

Ah, distinctly I remember, 'twas the weak end of September  
Yes, September which means seven but on calendars means nine –  
When the word swept through the farmyard and the henhouse and the barnyard  
That come the bleak end of November, well, our lives were on the line.  
Death, **DEATH**, **DEATH** would swarm among us just as bees will swarm a hive.  
Almost no one would survive.

I heard the word from old Tom Turkey, who said, "Boy! Stop feeling perky!  
'Cause your happy times, my friend, will soon face sad and painful end.  
All the days that you've been lazin', all the grain that you've been grazin',  
All the hens you've been appraisin' – This you would think would portend  
A future life of heavenly bliss? NONE of this stuff will survive!

In fact, I think, you'll probably die...

"Farmer Joe and Mrs. Joe and Jr. Joe and Uncle Moe,  
Well, don't you know they're gonna go and sharpen ax and shears and knife?"

They'll slit the throats of beast and fowl! Chop your head off! Disembowel!  
Rip the skin off everybody! Leave our sacred barnyard bloody,  
Death-and-diseased, putrid, cruddy! So much pain and stress and strife  
From humans who claim that they're 'pro-life'!

"November is Thanksgiving time, when Christian folks cut loose with crime.  
Harvest fruit and harvest grain, that's OK, but *not* the pain  
From killing goat and clubbing goose. Trapping pheasants on the loose.  
Shooting pigs for making bacon, sausage, pork chops – it's heart breakin'!  
Slaughter cow. Dismember hen. Oh! What pleasure men derive  
From killing fields in overdrive!"

With those words my heart beat faster. Mister Joe, our farm's taskmaster,  
Would now rain down the worst disaster on my friends and on myself.  
My mind saw lambs bleed on the altar ... Sobbing calves led to the slaughter ...  
Horses shriek from whip and halter ... Dying chickens on a shelf ...  
Skulls bleached white like alabaster ... My carcass on a bed of chives ....  
Oh violent end to innocent lives!

I vowed right then not to give in. I'd fight for friend and next-of-kin.  
Farmer Joe, that stupid hick, who viewed me as some dumb drumstick,  
Would pay for all this senseless murder! He'll end his days a blind shepherd,  
Caring for his gentle flock and putting the "live" back in "livestock"!  
So that all my friends could thrive – so Joe not one life would deprive –  
I pledged to Tom, "I will survive!"

"I will survive! I will survive! **I WILL SURVIVE! I WILL SURVIVE!**  
As long as I know how to live, I know we all can stay alive.  
I've got all my life to live! I've got all my love to give!  
I've got strength! I've got wingspan! I can fight like a madman!  
I've got friends who are vegan! And if Joe won't let us thrive,  
Goddamn, I swear, HE won't survive!"

So I hatched my secret plan: To save us turkeys? Kill the man!  
To save the horses, save the sheep? Kill Old MacDonald! Kill Little Bo Peep!

Kill the evil farmer's wife who chops off tails with a carving knife!  
(*But leave alone that peanut farmer and pacifist, Jimmy Carter,  
Who'd never hurt a fly in his life. For Jim alone I would contrive  
To tell my friends, "Let him survive."*)

## 2.

So I hatched my plan. Yes, I hatched my plan. I may end up a fool in a feathered caftan  
But you'll never catch me ending *my days deadpan*. No, no, no, Farmer *Joe's* going to the  
*dustpan*:

The dustpan of history, with his kid and his wife. 'Cause he's never harming my friends or  
taking my life.

Tom Turkey said, "Good. I knew that you would.

That freshly store-bought ax over there? It ain't for cutting wood.

I vow to fight beside you for the common good

So the poults, colts and kids can have a safe childhood

And the little baby bulls grow to lusty manhood

And never will a chicken breast end up on Wedgwood –

Wedgwood plates or platters -

Only Joe's blood will splatter

This is all that matters

It's understood."

So we hashed my plan some more, got other turkeys all on board

Got the heifers outdoors to lend their hefty support

Urged the sow and the boar to join us in our holy war

Asked the local sharp-eyed raven who used the eaves as a haven in the rain

If Joe's wife and kid were worth savin',

And quoth the raven, "Nevermore! Nevermore! Never!

Let them die in their own gore!

His wife's a brontosaurus

And the kid's a fucking whore!

And Uncle Moe has got to go  
That crackpot's rotten to the core!  
Kill 'em!  
Kill 'em *all!*

*All!*

*All!*

*All!"*

And Uncle Tom tossed the raven some extra grain,  
Which sounded, when it landed, like pellets of rain.

### 3.

So all the animals got hotted up after that, speechifying, declarations, exclamations, exhortations, strike a blow to evil. Almost all of us united in fear, outrage, umbrage, courage. We practiced martial skills late at night after the Joes turned out the light. We tore up the straw in the hayloft, knocked over the mailbox, trashed the cornfield scarecrow: First you go for the face and genitals, then rip apart the limbs and fly off with the bits. Some cows, horses, and a pig broke down the front gate one night and marauded through the valley's neighboring farms, destroying everything in sight.

Farmer Joe was aghast the next morning, but I laughed and said, "Let him be *aghast*, 'cause soon he'll be a *ghost*." Uncle Tom said, "**SPEAK THE WORD**, son," and tossed me some extra grain. He was increasingly the campaign's brain as well as a gentle, genteel host.

A few animals held out, in serious doubt anything bad was about to happen. Like Henrietta, an absent-minded, complacent chicken who forgot about her eggs just as soon as Mrs. Joe plundered her maternal nest. "*Nothing happens. Never fear. Happy days are always here. Keep your chin up! Persevere! We'll live in peace from year to year.*"

Fool, I knew she'd be the first to blunder to her eternal rest.

## 4.

Then the day arrived. The dawn of doom and death.

As predicted, it was the bleak end of November. Yeah, November which means nine, but on calendars eleven, rhymes with heaven.

The morning started out calm enough. A brisk shiver in the air somehow lost out to the weak heat from a tepid sun. The barn inside and out showed the usual activity: The horses and mules were happy with their hay and the occasional husk plopping out of the corncrib. All the ruminants, more sleepy than anything else, moved outdoors to bask in the sun and champ on yesterday's dinner. Everyone drank their fill from the trough – the water had the usual delightful taste: cool, metallic finish, with notes of oak and musk. Oh, the joy!

Nearby, chickens ambled out of the hen house, flapped their wings in little bursts of applause, and scratched in the dirt under an old thresher.

Then...

Farmer Jo *en famille* stepped out on the farmhouse verandah, along with some nasty new hired man. Instantly the air went static. All five humans were dressed in heavy white surgical aprons and black rubber gloves. They carried axes, bludgeons, knives, truncheons, maces, stun guns, whips. They paused on the porch, weapons clinking, and eyeballed us while we corner-eyed them. Scatter-brained Henrietta, sensing the sky was about to fall, started strutting nervously about, clucking, "*Oh my dear, oh my dear dear dear. I fear that I don't like it here. Oh my dear.*"

Farmer Joe, as always, sported silver stubble on his chin as well as a red shaving scab, his scrawny face and pointy Adam's apple making him look like a poor excuse of the very turkeys he planned to kill. Mrs. Joe, plump in the legs and thighs, was trussed up with apron strings girding her midriff. Joe Jr? The usual freckles, cowlick, and inbred cross eyes.

Uncle Moe? A face lumpy like a potato, and nose hair you could swing on. And the hired man: a burly, brawny Brutus.

Joe hawked up some phlegm and spat it into the yard. “Ok, let’s go, men. This ain’t going to be hard.” And down the steps they descended.

The animals froze. The pebbles under the human’s boots scrunched like bones being ground to dust.

Then Henrietta went bust. Realizing that Trouble with a capital T was headed right for where she and the rest of us were, Henrietta bolted for the very place Trouble was vacating: under the farmhouse verandah. In her panic she ran smack into Joe’s boots. He picked her up and swung her around by the neck. We heard *puppity-pup* as her vertebrae snapped, then he flung her aside, a soiled pillow.

It was later said that Tom Turkey, who was sitting on a fence post right behind Mark 1 the stallion, pecked the horse hard on the anus. Who knows? But suddenly Mark 1 charged the humans while Tom squawked, “Attack! Attack! Attack or die! Peck them to pieces! Smash them to smithereens! Gobble them up! *Gobble gobble gobble gobble....!*”

Everyone rushed forward, and I headed straight for Farmer Joe. The fight had begun! Squawks, grunts, screams. Dust stinging our eyes. Horn, hoof and hide bashing human skin and bones. Beaks and snouts gnashing human flesh and blood. Joe shoved me off him but I attacked again and again. I refused to give up, yet Farmer Joe was not about to become Former Joe if he could help it.

Next I knew, Joe Jr. was on the ground with his head smashed in, two horses rearing up and crashing down on his body over and over. Mrs. Joe was running for her life, chased by the rooster, some cows and goats, her left eye dangling halfway down her cheek and blood – was it her own? – smeared over her chest, face and hair. Meanwhile, Uncle Moe was fighting off three pigs and the geese and then he fell. But Farmer Joe and the hired man were able to flee back to the house ... to fetch shotguns.

In the melee I looked back and saw Tom Turkey still on the fence, sidling swiftly towards the front gate. Before I could shout out he flapped to the ground and loped across the road



into the woods – the deep woods where foxes live, the raven, coyotes, large birds of prey. In a flash I realized what the brilliant fool had done: He had created the entire diversion to save his own skin.

Then blast! **Blast! BLAST!** Farmer Joe and the hired man were back on the porch, shooting, reloading, shooting that terrible buckshot which fans out in every direction. The animals started falling, lying dead and dying, twitching and bleeding next to Jr. Joe, the Uncle, the Mrs, who themselves lay like dirty laundry in pulpy red puddles.

More blasts. Everyone who could, ran. A squealing pig dashed around the corner of the barn, dragging its entrails like an extra set of tails. A cow forced open the gate to the cornfield and galloped through the abandoned stalks, blood spurting from her neck. And I...I ran this way – *Blast!* That way – *Blast!* And finally I flew over the front gate and dashed for the woods, chanting, I don't know why,

*Into the woods and through the brush  
Run for your life, you've got to rush  
Into the woods and cry out "Hush"  
I'm not your turkey dinner!  
Safe in the woods, among the trees  
It's Thanksgiving, go eat Chinese –  
Into the woods, 'cause if you please  
That Farmer Joe's a sinner!*

Others made it to the woods, too – but not all. A wounded goat got tangled in some barbed wire and bleated itself to death over the next 12 hours. A mare with a broken foreleg, deranged with pain, whinnied and hobbled behind the farmhouse. Some chickens tried to cross the road but were felled by another shotgun blast. Farmer Joe and the hired gun were now on a rampage, running around like madmen, *blasting* anything that moved. The shooting continued until nightfall, in the barn, in the hayfields, behind the farmhouse. The air stank of gunpowder.

Then all fell silent.

5.

And the silence was unbroken.

And the darkness gave no token

Hardly any sound was spoken

in the woods or on the farm

But the news spread through the valley

of our plight and of our rally

Of the ever-growing tally of our friends who walked down Death's dark alley –

And then the word turned to alarm, a shocking question as we gazed at all the bodies on the ground.

The question was:

If you died from ax or knife or any kind of firearm  
Or bashed-in skull from some fishwife who dragged you screaming to her galley,  
Or in your sleep in your midlife, or poisoned by some witch's charm –  
No matter how you came to harm, no matter what your sad finale,  
Will there always be an afterlife?  
Is there at all an afterlife?  
*Maybe there's no afterlife.*  
Maybe you die a horrible death,  
Breathe your last breath,  
And that's it.

We never thought of that before –  
Never thought of our own “Nevermore.”  
Never saw how life begins with joyful birth –  
Parents happy, the entire earth  
Beaming with pride and pleasure  
At the squirming piglet, peeping chick,  
Newborn foal at mama's tit -  
And then this gift of life, this treasure,  
Gets cut to the quick  
By a farmer's gun or butcher's bloody knife.

It was not so clear but now it was  
How life begins with many hopes  
And ends in single, massive terror –  
Surely there's an error here?  
Or are we all just dopes?

## 6.

Well, anyway, Tom Turkey's dead. I found him sitting on a boulder,  
Cackling how he'd now grow older  
No remorse for those who died  
No regret for blood he shed by proxy.

We talked a bit, I cried "You lied!" and jumped his shoulder  
And with fury smashed his head against the stone 'til he was gone  
And that was it for him, and the rest of the forest was calm.

## 7.

Now the moon above me throws long shadows on the forest floor –  
Myriad shadows splayed like corpses, bodies in an abattoir.  
Will the sun rise on the morrow? Banish these dark mournful shadows?  
Fill the world with light that gleams, so hopes and dreams just might revive?  
I don't know. I just don't know. I don't know why I ever swore  
    To stay alive, fight back, survive.

All I know is: Life's just passing. Passing time on death's trap door.  
You breathe a bit, nod at your neighbors, then, suddenly, out drops the floor  
From under you. And so's the Grand Design, the **WORD**, in store for you.  
And you. And you. And you. And yours. No other saying rings so true,  
Except, perhaps, "I am alive." You breathe a bit and then no more –  
    Survive until you're Nevermore.

*Postscript...*

***Farmer Joe's Lament***

Adieu, my darling wife, my handsome son!  
I never thought so soon we'd say goodbye...  
The animals are gone. 'Twas hit and run,  
The way they stormed us all like samurai,  
Then fled the scene when I brought out my gun  
And shot and shot and shot so that they'd die.  
And now around the farm: the sound of none.  
My tears have long since dropped. The earth's bone dry.

The hired man and I are left alone  
To sort assorted morbid sordid things.  
The farmyard's full of hide and hair and bone,  
Shattered hooves and forelegs, busted wings.  
Oh! To live anon in times that I have known,  
When animals were dumb, and men were kings!