

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

by
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CHARACTERS:

Benjamin Franklin (70) - The elder statesman of the Continental Congress and the embodiment of the new "American" as viewed by the rest of the world.

Edward Rutledge (26) - The vain "strutting popinjay" representing the South. He is the youngest member of Congress, yet his reputation with the spoken word rivals that of any of his contemporaries.

John Adams (41) - The driving force behind the Revolution. "Not graceful nor elegant, nor remarkably fluent, but spoke with a power of thought and expression that moved us from our seats." - T. Jefferson

Joseph Bass (32) - A cobbler and neighbor of John Adams who found himself in remarkable circumstances as his traveling companion.

Lute (48) - Proprietor of the Indian Queen Tavern. A burly Swedish immigrant with a unique perspective that leads to a questioning of his loyalties.

Francis (16) - A young soldier whose company is on the move to New York and the fighting.

Abigail Adams (31) - John's devoted wife whose lifelong correspondence with her husband distinguished her as a pioneer for women's rights.

ACT ONE

*September 10th, 1776. Indian Queen Tavern.
New Brunswick, NJ.*

Late evening. The tavern parlor is dimly illuminated by the dying embers in the hearth. A young SOLDIER sits by the fire, playing a melancholy tune on his fife. The noises of late evening tavern life abound outside of this room.

A burly Swedish innkeeper, LUTE, enters from the kitchen stage right. He clears the tables of dinner remnants and exits.

The nervous soldier grabs a half drunk goblet of wine from a nearby table and uneasily chokes it down. His attention is drawn to two silver candlestick holders on the hearth mantle. He crosses over and scans the empty room before reaching out to them.

The front door swings open. JOSEPH BASS enters.

BASS

Hello? Any one?

The frightened SOLDIER accidentally knocks over a ceramic cup which shatters on the floor. BASS crosses over and helps him pick up the pieces.

BASS

We've been traveling all day and night. We weren't expecting so many soldiers. Do you know if there are any rooms available?

SOLDIER

I don't know.

BASS

Is your regiment on the move to New York? It seems to be where all the action is now.

Pause.

BASS

You're right not to answer.

LUTE enters.

LUTE

What in the hell is going on here? Boy, are you breaking my things?

BASS

So sorry. It was my fault. Would you by chance be the proprietor?

LUTE

Not by chance. By gold and one or two broken teeth!

The SOLDIER creeps to the corner and sits. BASS begins to dust himself off, causing a small dust cloud.

LUTE

What in the hell do you think you're doing? Do I come 'round and dump my dirt on your floor?

BASS

My apologies. Please tell me you have rooms available. Every house in New Jersey seems to be full.

LUTE

Everyone's quartering our soldiers. Rather draggly bunch. But, I tossed out a couple of tonic pedlars 'bout an hour ago... so, ya might be in luck.

BASS

Oh, thank you.

LUTE

Paid in advance. Plus the cost of the cup. Just you?

BASS

Not for me. There will be three though.

LUTE

Hold on now. I'm a bit particular about who stays under my roof. Not preachers, are they? Won't have no preachin' in this establishment.

BASS

No. They 're en route to very important business.

LUTE

So's every body else. You'll have to do better than that.

BASS

They 're representatives from Congress.

LUTE

Out!

BASS

Benjamin Franklin!

LUTE

Franklin?

BASS

Yes.

LUTE

How 'bout that. You tell them any politickin' they do at their own risk. Well, bring 'em in lad. Don't just stand there shedding y our filth.

BASS exits. LUTE retrieves a ledger from behind a counter.

Voices are heard approaching. BASS re-enters with bags. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN enters limping with a cane. JOHN ADAMS and EDWARD RUTLEDGE follow. They are all disheveled and covered in dust.

FRANKLIN

...so the minister replies, "I'd rather be a Presby terian knowing I'm going to hell than a Catholic not knowing where the hell I'm going"

The others are not amused.

FRANKLIN

...a Catholic not knowing where the hell I'm going!

ADAMS

Damnit! How can you continually tell jokes at a time like this?

FRANKLIN

I thought it was funny.

They begin to dust themselves off as BASS cringes.

LUTE

Outside - ya dirt mongers!

They scamper out the doorway, brush themselves off, then re-enter.

BASS

I'll see to the horses.

BASS exits.

FRANKLIN

Our apologies, good sir. My name is Benjamin Franklin.

LUTE

You're the lightning man?

FRANKLIN

You seem disappointed.

LUTE

Just thought you'd be a little...

FRANKLIN

Taller?

LUTE

Different.

FRANKLIN

This is Mr. Rutledge.

LUTE

Never heard of you.

FRANKLIN

And Mr. Adams.

LUTE

Sam Adams! Well, this is a pleasure!

He shakes ADAMS' hand.

LUTE

Thought *you'd* be taller.

FRANKLIN

No, not Sam. John - John Adams.

LUTE

Never heard of you.

FRANKLIN

Well, thank you for accommodating us at such a late hour, Mr...

LUTE

Call me Lute.

FRANKLIN

No doubt named for your mother's favorite instrument.

LUTE

When I was a lad, I smashed a lute over a musician's head who was being too familiar with my Ma. The name stuck.

FRANKLIN

Well... Lute, we'll need lodging for three. How much for the rooms?

LUTE

Room.

FRANKLIN

Room?

LUTE

One room.

ADAMS
One room?

LUTE
One bed.

RUTLEDGE
One bed?!?

The three men exchange nervous glances.

LUTE
I've been able to squeeze three to a bed many times. The Irish ain't too particular. But with the plump fella here - not a chance. I've got enough space for one of ya in the common room. Rather crowded, but -

RUTLEDGE
(quickly)
I'll take that.

LUTE
Very well. Comes to... two pounds sterling.

ADAMS
Two pounds! We don't want to buy the tavern, just rent a room!

FRANKLIN
John, it's late. We won't find anything else.

ADAMS
Yes. And he knows it.

ADAMS pulls two bills from a satchel and hands them to LUTE.

LUTE
What's this? Pennsylvania scrip? I wouldn't wipe my arse with that.

ADAMS rummages through the satchel again.

ADAMS
Of course, you'll take Massachusetts Continentals.

LUTE chortles.

ADAMS

This was just printed!

LUTE

Ya, I can still see the ink on your stubby little fingers! Look here, son - this ain't Philadelphia. You're in Jersey now. The war's right around the corner. It's coin er nothin'!

ADAMS dips into the bag once more.

ADAMS

First order of business once this bloody war is over, Franklin - a national currency .

FRANKLIN

Right after we fix the roads, John.

RUTLEDGE

Perhaps we should concern ourselves with actually winning a battle before we start fixing the roads and currency .

ADAMS pulls out two coins and hands them to LUTE.

LUTE

'Round the corner, up the stairs - last door on the right. Common room's directly overhead.

ADAMS

And the privy?

LUTE

Out the front, 'round to the left.

FRANKLIN bolts out the front door just ahead of the others.

ADAMS

I can wait.

RUTLEDGE

You may be waiting hours.

RUTLEDGE crosses to a mirror as LUTE busies himself with the ledger. BASS enters carrying a leaflet.

BASS

The horses are being tended.

He pulls ADAMS aside.

BASS

(sotto voce)

John, I found these being posted throughout town. Even as we speak.

He hands ADAMS a leaflet.

ADAMS

“Take Notice. The British Forces are now in full control and command of New York. If you are a friend, let it be known. You may yet be of service to your country. If you are foe, expect dire consequences should you continue your treasonous ways. God save the King.”

BASS

What shall we do?

ADAMS anxiously looks about. The SOLDIER, overhearing, makes a hasty exit. ADAMS slips the leaflet into his pocket.

ADAMS

Nothing. Do not mention this to the others.

BASS

John...

ADAMS

It's propaganda. It will cause unnecessary concern. And Joseph, see if you can clear these out of sight.

BASS

Very well. Then I'll be off to make arrangements for your crossing. I'll return in the morning.

ADAMS

It's a dangerous road out there, Joe. Difficult to tell friend from foe. Be careful.

BASS

In here as well. Good night, gentlemen.

BASS exits. RUTLEDGE and ADAMS take in their surroundings. FRANKLIN enters in obvious discomfort, rubbing near his bladder.

RUTLEDGE and ADAMS both head for the front door at the same time.

RUTLEDGE

After you.

ADAMS

No, I insist.

RUTLEDGE

Very well, then.

RUTLEDGE exits.

ADAMS

Damn my Boston manners.

ADAMS sits at a side table.

FRANKLIN

Lute, we've been on the road for many hours. Any chance for a late supper?

LUTE

I can throw a plate together for ya.

FRANKLIN

Nothing that's too much trouble. Perhaps some mutton, a kidney pie or two and some salt fish.

LUTE

Hah! You'll get what you get.

LUTE heads into the kitchen. FRANKLIN calls after him.

FRANKLIN

And some ale!

ADAMS is reading a letter. Lights up on ABIGAIL.

ABIGAIL

My dearest friend, last Thursday I went with the multitude into Kings Street to hear the proclamation for independence read publicly . Great attention was given every word. As soon as it was ended, the cry was God Save our American States, followed by cheers, the bells rang, the privateers fired, cannons discharged and my heart kept pace with them all night. And every face appeared joyful as the Kings' arms were taken down from the State House and every vestige of him from every place in which it appeared and burnt in King Street. Thus end royal authority in this State, and all the people shall say 'Amen'. How do I adequately express the gratification of a wife who, seeing the happiness and glory of our country and people, can reflect that a person so closely connected with me has been a principle architect in laying a foundation for its future greatness?

RUTLEDGE re-enters. He places a bottle on ADAMS' table.

RUTLEDGE

You may want to bring some lilac water.

ADAMS exits in a hurry.

RUTLEDGE

I was not anticipating so much activity here.

FRANKLIN

We're poking at the hornets' nest.

RUTLEDGE

And tomorrow we shall enter it.

FRANKLIN

Indeed.