

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

By

Jason Boies

Jason Boies
5107 High Terrace Road
Stroudsburg, PA 18360
Jayboies@aol.com
(347) 517-8848

PROLOGUE:

Fall, 1776. Since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in July, the British have shifted their military focus From Boston to New York. Their massive force crushes George Washington's army at the Battle of Long Island. Facing annihilation or surrender, Washington saves the decimated colonial army through a series of strategic retreats. British Admiral Lord Richard Howe sends a request for a meeting with Congressional representatives to discuss options for peace.

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

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

Joseph Bass (32) - A cobbler and neighbor of John Adams who became his traveling companion.

Lute (48) - Proprietor of the Indian Queen Tavern. A burly Swedish immigrant somewhat sympathetic to the cause.

Benjamin Franklin (70) - The elder statesman of 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

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

William Franklin (46) - The Royal Governor of New Jersey. Ben Franklin felt betrayed by his bastard son who was "a more dutiful servant to the crown than son to his father."

(The roles of Joseph Bass and William Franklin can be doubled.)

ACT I

SCENE ONE.

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

*Early evening. The tavern is dimly illuminated by the
dying embers in the hearth. A young SOLDIER sits by the
fire, playing a melancholy tune on his fife.*

*A burly Swedish innkeeper, LUTE, enters. He clears the
tables of dinner remnants and exits to the kitchen.*

*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 apprehensively fingering them.*

The front door swings open. JOSEPH BASS enters.

BASS

Hello? Any one?

He sees the SOLDIER.

BASS

Pardon, young sir, do you know if there are any rooms available?

The SOLDIER turns his back.

BASS

Hello?

LUTE re-enters.

LUTE

Whatcha blubbering on about?

BASS

Would you by chance be the proprietor?

LUTE

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

BASS begins to dust himself off, causing a small dust cloud.

BASS

My goodness, the wind is kicking up a terrible dust out there.

LUTE

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

BASS

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

LUTE

It's all the soldiers on the move to New York. Rather draggly bunch. Ycr in luck though. Threw out a couple of tonic peddlars 'bout an hour ago - so I got one room.

BASS

Oh, thank you.

LUTE

Paid in advance. Just you?

BASS

Oh, not for me. There'll be three though. And very important men they are.

LUTE

Important?

BASS

Prominent.

LUTE

Prominent. General Washington?

BASS

No.

LUTE

Not that actress from Trenton?

BASS

No. They're en route to attend to vital business concerning the war.

LUTE

Ya, ya. So're most of the soldiers stayin' here. Look, it makes no difference to me how a man makes his living... unless... wait, they're not preachers are they? Won't have no preaching in my establishment. Bad for the digestion.

BASS

No, they're representatives from Congress. Philadelphia?

LUTE

Sounds just as bad.

BASS

Benjamin Franklin...

LUTE

Franklin! The lightning man?

BASS

Why, yes.

LUTE

How 'bout that. Well, bring 'em in lad. Don't just stand there shedding your filth.

BASS exits. LUTE lights more candles and throws a few more logs on the fire. He retrieves a ledger from behind a counter.

LUTE

(muttering)

Very important people, hmm? We have a war on, suddenly every one's so important. Benjamin Franklin though...

LUTE goes to the mirror and checks himself. Voices are heard approaching. BASS enters with bags.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, JOHN ADAMS and EDWARD RUTLEDGE follow behind. They are all disheveled and covered in dust.

FRANKLIN

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

This evokes a snicker from RUTLEDGE and a disapproving shake of the head from ADAMS.

FRANKLIN

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

ADAMS

I heard you.

FRANKLIN

How can I spend so much time with men of little humor?

They begin to dust themselves off as BASS cringes.

LUTE

Outside - y a dirt mongers!

They scamper out the doorway and brush themselves off.

LUTE

These are the important people, hmm?

BASS shrugs. They all re-enter. The SOLDIER exits to the common room.

BASS

I'll see to the horses.

BASS exits.

FRANKLIN

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

LUTE
(looking him over)

Really?

FRANKLIN

You seem disappointed.

LUTE

Just thought you'd be a little...

FRANKLIN

Taller?

LUTE

Cleaner.

FRANKLIN

This is Edward Rutledge.

LUTE

Never heard of you.

FRANKLIN

And John Adams.

LUTE
(great surprise)

Sam Adams! Well, this is a pleasure!

FRANKLIN

No, not Sam. John - John Adams. His cousin.

LUTE
(shaking his head)

Thought you were the *famous* Adams.

ADAMS

Doesn't everyone.

FRANKLIN

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

LUTE

Call me Lute.

FRANKLIN

Lute? Ah, no doubt named for your mother's favorite instrument.

LUTE

Ya might say so. When I was a lad, I smashed a lute over a musician's head who was being cheeky with my Ma. The name stuck.

FRANKLIN

I see. 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.

ALL

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. Two pounds! It's not even equal. How do you divide that by three? You just made up an arbitrary figure.

LUTE

I could make it three if you like.

FRANKLIN

Pay the man, John.

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'!

He dips into the bag once more.

ADAMS

That's going to be the first order of business once this bloody war is over, Franklin - a national currency.

FRANKLIN

(massaging his back)

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.

ADAMS

Here.

LUTE

Sign in.

ADAMS signs the ledger.

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.

LUTE

Would you gentlemen desire an ale while I'm still serving?

ADAMS

Please. My mouth is quite dry from the ride.

LUTE looks to RUTLEDGE who nods.

LUTE

Two. And can I assume one for the lightning man?

RUTLEDGE

Oh, assume away.

LUTE exits to the kitchen. RUTLEDGE meticulously dusts himself with a whisk broom. He finds a mirror and primps and preens much to the disdain of ADAMS. BASS enters.

BASS

The horses are being tended. Will there be anything else I can do for you gentlemen tonight?

ADAMS

No, thank you, Joe.

BASS

I'm off to make arrangements for your crossing. I'll be back in the morning.

ADAMS

It's a dangerous road out there, Joseph. Be careful.

BASS

I will. Good night, John. Good night, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE nods to BASS who exits. He and ADAMS try but fail to avoid each other while getting settled. ADAMS sits and tries to put a foot up on a nearby trunk but can't quite reach it, much to the amusement of RUTLEDGE who then rests his foot on the same trunk. FRANKLIN enters in obvious discomfort, rubbing his bladder area.

ADAMS

My, that was quick even for you.

FRANKLIN responds with a dissatisfied unintelligible grunt. RUTLEDGE and ADAMS both reach 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.

LUTE enters with the ale.

FRANKLIN

Ahhhh! Manna from heaven! This should get things flowing.

He grabs a pint and begins to chug.

FRANKLIN

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

LUTE

I can throw a cold plate together for ya.

FRANKLIN

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

LUTE

You're almost as funny as your little friend.

LUTE heads into the kitchen. FRANKLIN peruses the room and reads a tavern sign.

FRANKLIN

“Rules of the Tavern: 1) No Peddlin’, No Politikin’ and No Precachin’.” This could be a quiet stay. “2) No harassing the wenches unless you want to end up knee deep with the hogs. 3) Remember that God gave you two eyes and two ears but only one mouth; therefore spend twice as much time listening and looking as you do talking.” Hah! That’s brilliant!

FRANKLIN pulls out a notebook and begins to write. ADAMS looks over FRANKLIN’S shoulder - intrigued.

ADAMS

That reminds me of one of my old quips about discretion. “What is spoken to the mouth...,” I mean, “the ear of one person...” no, wait... it’s -

FRANKLIN puts his book away with a shake of the head. RUTLEDGE re-enters. ADAMS heads to the door but is cut off by the SOLDIER who enters from the hall.

ADAMS

Well, pardon me!

FRANKLIN

Use a nearby maple, John.

ADAMS

I can wait... No, I can’t -

He exits in a hurry. LUTE enters with a bowl of fruit and mits.

LUTE

So, gentlemen, what think you of New Jersey?

FRANKLIN

Ahh, New Jersey - a barrel with New York and Philadelphia acting as the lids.

LUTE

We may not be as fancified as you big city folk, but we’re more than just a toll road!

FRANKLIN

The roads! My God, the roads!

LUTE

Ya, the roads are poor. That bastard of a guvnor we had is to blame.

RUTLEDGE tries to stifle a snicker.

RUTLEDGE

The Royal Governor - or rather *former* Royal Governor is Dr. Franklin's son.

FRANKLIN

Let us hope he is the last man ever to bear that title on this side of the Atlantic.

LUTE

What? You mean he and you are....

FRANKLIN reluctantly nods.

LUTE

That should make for lively dinner conversation.

FRANKLIN

At the moment, we are not on speaking terms.

LUTE

Well, I should hope not. Where're they keeping him locked up?

FRANKLIN

Burlington, I believe.

LUTE

No offense, but the bastard deserves it. Despite that, it's a nice colony. Lots to offer and often overlooked.

RUTLEDGE

Well, it's not South Carolina. But, then, thankfully it's not Philadelphia. A short respite from Congress is most refreshing.

FRANKLIN

I say 'amen' to that! Here's to freedom from the crown... and Congress.

They drink. LUTE exits to the kitchen.

RUTLEDGE

This is the farthest north I've ever traveled in these colonies.

FRANKLIN

You'll find northern travel often brings with it a certain disagreeable chill.

RUTLEDGE

Inclement weather?

FRANKLIN looks to ADAMS who enters.

FRANKLIN

Inclement people.

ADAMS

How nice it is to be outdoors and riding again. Little pleasures one takes for granted. I don't even mind so much traveling with Rutledge.

FRANKLIN

John, you must have a fever.

RUTLEDGE

As long as you stay on your horse, Mr. Adams, and I'm in a carriage, I concur.

FRANKLIN

Oh that carriage! My gout hurts ten-fold with the discovery of every hole in this treacherous cow path.

LUTE brings in dinner plates.

FRANKLIN

Ahh - thank you, Lute!

They are all eager to dig in until they have a closer look at their plates.

ADAMS

Good God!

RUTLEDGE

I cannot identify one item on this plate. Is that meat?

LUTE

I call that New Brunswick Stew - my own creation.

FRANKLIN

Ahhh, lovely, Lute. And what would be in a New Brunswick Stew?

LUTE

Mostly squirrel, but you might find some beaver tail in there - even some turtle if you look close enough.

RUTLEDGE

I'd rather not. And what is that?

LUTE

Well, it started out as carrot-cauliflower pudding.

RUTLEDGE

What happened?

LUTE

Ran out of carrots.

RUTLEDGE

Where's the cauliflower?

LUTE

Ran outta them too. That's turnips and cabbage. Sorta my own variation. If ya squint real hard it might pass for it.

RUTLEDGE

I'll pass too.

RUTLEDGE pushes his plate away and grabs an apple as the others dig in. FRANKLIN notices a large landscape hung over the hearth.

FRANKLIN

Charming painting. Is that the homeland, Lute?

LUTE

Ya, that's Sweden.

FRANKLIN

Sweden? You are far from home.

LUTE

This is home now.

FRANKLIN

What brought you such a distance?

LUTE

Ah - lost my wife from the pox - must be over twenty years now.

FRANKLIN

I'm sorry.

LUTE

Ya, well it give me a chance to break away - start anew.

FRANKLIN

Why America?

LUTE

Because the Scots wouldn't have me.

They laugh.

LUTE

Nah. I guess more than anything it was for the adventure of it all. New land, new prospects and the ability to do for yourself. I know you all are fighting for freedom, but there's already more freedom here than most places in the world.

ADAMS

So says the crown.

LUTE

(Musing)

"When Kings the sword of justice first lay down,
They are no Kings, though they possess the crown.

Titles are shadows, crowns are empty things,
The good of subjects is the end of Kings.”

ALL

Here, here.

The men raise their tankards and drink.

FRANKLIN

Shakespeare?

ADAMS

Daniel Defoe.

LUTE

Ya - good ear, Mr. Adams. Now, mind you, I'm no tory, but it would seem that freedom is all relative - to where you are and where you come from.

FRANKLIN

It shouldn't be.

LUTE

(looking at the painting)

Ya. Anyway, that's where I come from. A wee town called Dalby.

FRANKLIN

Well, it's nice to have a reminder of where one came from. Isn't that right, John?

ADAMS looks at the painting and shrugs.

ADAMS

It looks like New Jersey to me.

RUTLEDGE

You'll have to excuse Mr. Adams, Lute. He's not known for his appreciation of art.

ADAMS

You call that art? Anyone can paint the sky, trees, hills, and rivers. To what purpose? I can open the door, go outside and see that at any time.

RUTLEDGE

Why don't you test your theory now, Mr. Adams? And be sure to close the door behind you.

ADAMS glares at RUTLEDGE.

ADAMS

True art must teach a moral tale and evoke deep contemplation. Anything else is sheer frivolity.

RUTLEDGE

Such as one of Dr. Franklin's portraits perhaps?

ADAMS

As I said, frivolity.

FRANKLIN

My portraits always evoke *my* deepest contemplation.

RUTLEDGE

But how moral is the tale?

RUTLEDGE and FRANKLIN share a laugh.

FRANKLIN

You say frivolity, John, but I was informed of your recent visit to Charles Wilson Peale's studio.

ADAMS

Hmmmmph.

FRANKLIN

Come now, confess.

ADAMS

I was invited last week.

FRANKLIN

And...?

ADAMS

And... the portraits are well done. Franklin, Washington, Jefferson and even Hancock. I fawned over his skill perhaps a bit excessively, being under the impression that I was to be his next subject. No. I was invited for a viewing since I was acquainted with all these gentlemen and could best critique their likeness. So... I assured him that in person Franklin's head is certainly larger; General Washington's chin protruded quite a bit more; Jefferson's gaze more supercilious and Hancock's wig is always unkempt and askew.

RUTLEDGE

Ah, the imperfections of the immortalized.

ADAMS

He then asked if I thought Sam would sit for him.

They all laugh.

RUTLEDGE

Gentlemen, I hate to break up the idle banter, but since the hour is getting late, may we address the matter at hand? Our meeting with Admiral Howe?

FRANKLIN

Business at the dining table, Neddy ?

RUTLEDGE

I would hardly call this putrescent rodent stew 'dinner'.

FRANKLIN

I'm not so sure Lute would allow us to bend rule #1. (to Lute) We won't peddle and we'll try not to preach, but it would appear we may have to delve into some politickin' here - with your allowance of course.

LUTE

Well, it's all peddlin', isn't it? Trying to sell a bill of goods? But, these are special times, so I will turn a deaf ear.

FRANKLIN

Many thanks.

LUTE

As long as it's entertaining

ADAMS and RUTLEDGE are concerned as LUTE makes himself comfortable.

LUTE

Nothing secret, I gather?

FRANKLIN

Uh... no, but....

LUTE

Oh, I get it. I've got some cleaning to do any way.

LUTE takes some plates into the kitchen.

RUTLEDGE

Well then, since we were given no explicit instructions from Congress, we should prepare something, should we not?

FRANKLIN

Of course.

Beat.

FRANKLIN

What did you have in mind ?

RUTLEDGE

I don't know. A statement of our position perhaps. A response to their position?

ADAMS

It couldn't be clearer, Rutledge: we know what we want. We know what they want. They know what they want and they know what we want. I'm fairly damn well sure that they know that we know what they want and I'm certain that we know that they know what we want. What's left to discuss?

Stunned silence.

FRANKLIN

There. See, Neddy ? Lawyer's logic. You and I are expendable after all.

RUTLEDGE

You understood that obstreperous piffle?

FRANKLIN

'Obstreperous piffle.' Ned, I do like the way you speak.

FRANKLIN pulls out his book and scribbles. LUTTE enters, looks over FRANKLIN'S shoulder and receives a glare from RUTLEDGE. He clears more plates and exits.

RUTLEDGE

(lowering his voice)

Why then should Howe ask for this meeting now?

FRANKLIN

We shall discover that tomorrow. I doubt very much, however, he is going to hand us his sword in surrender.

ADAMS

His motives appear purely "Machiavellian."

RUTLEDGE

Mr. Adams, must you label every man who disagrees with you 'Machiavellian?' Like a sabre, you draw that reference; and so often that it has long ago lost its edge.

ADAMS

I will use it whenever and wherever it applies. Franklin, why is it that our credentials and the legitimacy of General Washington have been rejected by them?

FRANKLIN

I believe -

ADAMS

Meanwhile, they offer up a non-diplomat, a soldier like Howe to negotiate for them?

FRANKLIN

Well, John, it may be -

ADAMS

How can he be empowered to discuss peace while engaging the war?

FRANKLIN

John, I think -

ADAMS

Does he even have the authority to negotiate?

FRANKLIN gives up.

ADAMS

Well?

FRANKLIN

Can you repeat the question?

RUTLEDGE

It was he who requested this meeting. He must have some authority.

ADAMS

I wouldn't be so sure.

RUTLEDGE

Just by calling the meeting, he's conferred a legitimacy upon our congress.

ADAMS

We have announced our Independence to the world, damnit. That alone puts us on an equal footing for negotiation. This meeting is just a waste of valuable time.

RUTLEDGE

Do you miss Congress so?

ADAMS

We could be attending to other crucial matters. If nothing else, I guess it will allow Washington a few more days reprieve.

RUTLEDGE

This Admiral Howe - what manner of man is he?

ADAMS turns to FRANKLIN who has nodded off.

ADAMS

Franklin!

FRANKLIN

(waking with a start)

I vote nay!

ADAMS

What?

FRANKLIN

What?

ADAMS

Wake up. We're talking about Howe. What's his game?

FRANKLIN

Richard is a man of great integrity. He's independent, outspoken and not afraid to ruffle a few feathers.

ADAMS

And he's your friend.

FRANKLIN

I'd like to think so.

Looks of disapproval from ADAMS and RUTLEDGE.

FRANKLIN

Please understand, gentlemen, that the Howes have a special bond to America. The eldest brother, George, died fighting with us against the French. Both Richard and William have a permanent legacy from that war and now command the field and the seas for England. But remember, they have always supported a soft policy toward the colonies. I know they want to keep the bloodshed to a minimum and keep the door open for reconciliation.

RUTLEDGE

Perhaps someone should have reminded them of that before they nearly annihilated our army in New York! In the meantime, our defeats have not given us much room for negotiation here.

FRANKLIN

Indeed.

RUTLEDGE

So, Howe will negotiate from a position of strength, and we from... what?

ADAMS

Righteousness. Determination. Providence.

Beat.

RUTLEDGE

This is going to be a very short meeting.

FRANKLIN

It puts me to mind of a young gentlemen who walked into my book store in Philadelphia years back. He began to haggle with my clerk over the sum of one dollar for the price of a book he wanted. Realizing his efforts were going nowhere, he demanded to speak with me directly. With indignation he asked me how I can sell this book for one dollar? I assured him it was not the correct price, and before he could gloat anymore to my clerk, I replied that the price was one dollar and one quarter. He looked at me confused and said, 'Your clerk just said it was a dollar.' 'It was,' I replied, 'but now you're just wasting my time.'

RUTLEDGE

And we have nary a dollar to our name.

ADAMS

It's just as well - they have no books of interest to us. So, peace will have to wait.

The three men retire to chairs about the fire. Each settles into his own after-dinner tobacco use: FRANKLIN with his pipe, RUTLEDGE with his snuff, and ADAMS with his chewing tobacco. The SOLDIER enters.

FRANKLIN

Good evening, young sir.

The startled SOLDIER looks up nervously, then exits.

RUTLEDGE

That's reassuring.

FRANKLIN

The British understand little of the passions that stir our souls now, but I believe they may sense the tragedy of the situation.

RUTLEDGE

Their entire approach seems unquestionably supported by their ignorance of America's developments. They don't know who we are; who we've become.

ADAMS

They believe that this revolution stirs only within an elite minority and that the rest can be turned back given the right bait.

FRANKLIN

Can they? I fear the consequences if Lord Howe's propositions become public. He can start a campaign to divide the colonists. Peace has always been a more powerful persuader than war.

ADAMS

Regardless, when the meeting is over, I guarantee that Howe will know who we are, who we've become and who we are going to be.

FRANKLIN

And yet we have a solemn duty to explore all possible means of ending this war favorably.

ADAMS

Favorably for whom?

FRANKLIN

For all involved.

ADAMS

For *us*, damnit!

FRANKLIN

There is no such thing as a good war... or a bad peace.

Beat.

ADAMS

What did you say?

FRANKLIN

I believe that, John. Wars bring scars. Young men are dying out there every day. It lays heavy on the heart to know that we have the power to stop it at any time, yet allow it to continue for our cause.

ADAMS

America's cause!

FRANKLIN

For how long?

ADAMS

Until freedom is ours! Unconditional! Unbridled!

FRANKLIN

I'm sorry John, it's just... with each straggling and loitering soldier we passed on the way, I felt our cause slowly slipping by.

ADAMS

Franklin, I'm not so sure you're up to this meeting.

FRANKLIN

John -

ADAMS

History will judge this a good war. And if peace is made tomorrow, it will certainly go down as a bad peace - now and for all time.

LUTE enters, receives a glare from RUTLEDGE, throws up his hands and exits.

RUTLEDGE

(in a lowered voice)

Have you never heard of compromise, Mr. Adams?

ADAMS

Compromise, Mr. Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE

Middle ground.

ADAMS

Either we are independent or we are not. Either we reconcile or we do not. I'd like you to explain to me and the rest of the world, for that matter, what compromise - what middle ground lies between the two.

Pause.

RUTLEDGE

And if we should lose on the field of battle?

ADAMS

Our victory is not in the hands of the armies.

FRANKLIN

John!

ADAMS

They control merely the time frame for victory. This is not just a war, it's a revolution!

RUTLEDGE

It only becomes a "revolution" if we win - out there on the field of battle. Otherwise, Mr. Adams, your high ideals and precious Declaration amount to nothing more than treason.

ADAMS

You still fail to comprehend what's going on here, don't you Rutledge? The revolution has already occurred - here - in the minds of the people - well before the first shot was ever fired - before the first drop of blood was ever spilled! There is nothing ever so powerful as a people set free.

RUTLEDGE

You keep reminding the people of that, Mr. Adams. While you're at it, remind the young boys who are dying every day. That young boy who just ran out of here like a frightened cat. He's the one we're depending on to secure these lofty goals of ours. And perhaps someone should let General Washington in on the fact that his victories or defeats, of which we are now becoming too accustomed, are, in the end - meaningless.

ADAMS tries to respond, but can't. He resigns himself to a seat. RUTLEDGE is surprised in victory.

RUTLEDGE

A point for the South.

ADAMS

Don't you worry about Washington. He will remain calm and collected in defeat and fight again.

RUTLEDGE

General Washington appears to be nothing more than a fattened goose - primed for the slaughter.

FRANKLIN

Of course if Mr. Jefferson were here he'd remind us that in Virginia all geese are swans.

RUTLEDGE

And you still believe this is the man who will bring our nomadic troops to victory; a man who would just as easily burn New York to the ground as defend it?

FRANKLIN

He is a thoughtful man with great command. If I were General Howe, I would be careful of what I perceive to be a goose with clipped wings.

RUTLEDGE

Well, I cannot perceive it, sir. He appears unmoved and too quiet in his person and especially quiet in command. Except, of course, when retreating. I'm sure our first order of business upon our return to Philadelphia will be to find a suitable replacement.

ADAMS

He is a great actor who has the gift of calm and silence, which I esteem as one of the most precious of talents.

Both men break into uncontrollable laughter.

ADAMS

(To himself)

Perhaps because I lack it.

RUTLEDGE

'Tis no wonder you support the General so. I have never seen two men more capable of detachment in all my life. What separates you from the General, however, is your lack of qualities that endear you to anyone. Do you have any friends, Mr. Adams, outside of family?

An awkward pause permeates the room. ADAMS looks to FRANKLIN, who avoids eye contact.

ADAMS
(unsure)

I have -

RUTLEDGE

You have not, sir. I pity you for that. You must be a lonely man.

He is. And he takes a moment to recover.

ADAMS

And I pity the pretentious prancing and preening popinjay who parades himself and his ill-gotten gains.

FRANKLIN

Exceptional alliteration, John!

The two men square off almost as if in an old west gunfight. FRANKLIN turns his chair to get a better view of the impending verbal joust.

FRANKLIN

Lute -

LUTE enters. FRANKLIN motions him over to sit and watch. LUTE grabs the bowl of nuts. They enjoy as if watching a tennis match.

RUTLEDGE

I am increasingly dismayed at New England's overbearing and loud influence in council; their low cunning, and those levelling principles which men without character and without fortune, in general possess.

ADAMS

Oh, yes, Edward Rutledge - man of character! The grand orator who spends much of his time preparing his "impromptu" speeches. Especially when there's a mirror at hand.

ADAMS has struck a nerve. RUTLEDGE is about to speak, then withdraws much to the delight of ADAMS.

ADAMS

Rutledge, I must say, you have occasional moments of silence that make conversation with you absolutely delightful.

RUTLEDGE

Often, Mr. Adams, silence is the best tact. But since 'silence' and 'tact' are words unknown in the Adams lexicon, many a man within earshot need suffer.

ADAMS

Too often the silent man is silent because he does not know what to say, and is reputed strong only because he has remained silent... or dumb.

LUTE

(to Franklin)

This is wonderful. Should we stop it?

FRANKLIN

Oh, no, Lute. "Those who in quarrels interpose, must often wipe a bloody nose."

RUTLEDGE

Mr. Adams you are a little man with short legs. How am I to take seriously the words of someone whose brains are so near their bottom?

FRANKLIN guffaws.

LUTE

Ha! Now it gets dirty!

ADAMS

And you are a man with impeccably bad taste.

They have neared to within a foot of one another.

FRANKLIN loudly cracks a walnut, stopping the men from resorting to blows. They both turn away.

FRANKLIN

Oh, please do not stop on my account. I just need more refreshment.

RUTLEDGE

Pardon, gentlemen. I am tired and dirty. This trip, although quite futile in my opinion, has allowed us a short and much needed respite from that tedious monotony and depravity called Congress, but alas not from Mr. Adams. Consequently, I realize I will maximize my enjoyment of his company by minimizing it. Gentlemen.

With a nod, RUTLEDGE takes his pint and heads to the common room, pausing momentarily to check himself in the mirror.

LUTE

I never realized how entertaining “politickin’” could be. I’ll have to amend the sign. Do they always go at it like that?

FRANKLIN

They are as different as the colonies they represent and try to remind themselves of it whenever they can. It always makes for first-rate digestive entertainment.

FRANKLIN rubs his belly.

FRANKLIN

Ahhh, fine victuals, Lute. I’m not quite sure what they were, but satisfactory nonetheless.

ADAMS

Careful, Franklin. Any tighter and one of those buttons will take someone’s eye out.

FRANKLIN unbuttons the bottom two buttons on his vest.

FRANKLIN

There was a young woman in London who once tapped me on my belly and said, “Dr. Franklin, if this were on a woman, we’d know what to think.” I replied, “Half an hour ago, madam, it was on a woman, and now what do you think?”

LUTE is uproarious.

ADAMS

Disgusting.

FRANKLIN

Lute, I was thinking that we might perhaps benefit from a local perspective of the war.

LUTE

Ah, well, we all feel like the nervous neighbor. Every one knows they 'll be coming after you meeting men sooner or later... and the road is right through Jersey .

RUTLEDGE re-enters to retrieve his snuff box.

LUTE

Fortunately that thrashing you took in New York revealed a great weakness of theirs.

ADAMS

What was that?

LUTE

They can't run as fast as their foes.

FRANKLIN joins LUTE in a belly laugh.

LUTE

The soldiers have been practicing their all out run to Philadelphia.

ADAMS

Not funny .

FRANKLIN

Oh, come now, John. Laughter takes the sting away . For a moment any way .

ADAMS

The moment has passed.

RUTLEDGE

Don't you find it ironic that the much heralded public release of our precious Declaration of Independence has been followed by a number of recent defeats, British victories and a decidedly overwhelming shift in momentum.

ADAMS

What are you implying, Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE

I make no implication, Mr. Adams. I'm merely stating the facts.

RUTLEDGE momentarily celebrates in victory with a pinch of snuff before exiting again. ADAMS in frustration chases after him, but too late.

ADAMS

(calling after him.)

As you said, Rutledge - it's our country ... we need to... damn.

ADAMS sits, dejectedly.

FRANKLIN

Timing, John. Timing. So, Lute, will New Jersey stand together if the fight comes this way?

LUTE

When the fight comes this way. Oh, they'll fight. I'm not so sure it's because of your precious Independence though.

ADAMS

They're fighting for their freedom.

LUTE

That's what all you meeting men would like to believe, isn't it? To further your cause. They'll fight because the enemy's here. To defend their families, their land, their lives.

ADAMS

Their land - America - and their lives as free Americans. It is an idea, for which they will fight to the last.

LUTE

I don't know. I'll wager that most of the armies in history have fought for land or money - to get it or to keep it.

Beat.

FRANKLIN

Or love.

ADAMS AND LUTE

What?

FRANKLIN

The Greeks went to war with the Trojans to reclaim the beautiful Helen who had been abducted by her lover, Paris.

LUTE

Ya, but what did the soldiers fight for? Helen? Bet they were boiling over mad when they found out they were being slaughtered for a trollop.

FRANKLIN

(insulted)

Trollop? Helen of Troy?

LUTE

Anyway, I never heard of any army in the world that fought for an idea.

ADAMS

There is a first time for every thing.

Beat.

FRANKLIN

Camelot.

ADAMS AND LUTE

What?

FRANKLIN

Camelot. King Arthur. He fought for an idea. You see, he -

ADAMS

Oh, enough, Franklin. Helen of Troy? King Arthur? This is your contribution?

FRANKLIN shrugs.

LUTE

Well then, the Brits're fighting for land and money. This is their land.

ADAMS

Was.

LUTE
(smiles)

Was. But they may have one other thing standing in their way besides Washington's army - their stubborn pride. It is far stronger than any value they think these colonies hold. They cannot lose this war. Their reputation cannot allow it. You may be facing an... what's the word... over-confident...?

FRANKLIN

Complacent.

LUTE

...complacent enemy.

FRANKLIN

Interesting. Their 'Achilles Heel'. And what's your opinion of our soldiers?

LUTE

Aah! They're dirty. Lazy. They track mud and dirt all over the tavern, they leave the privy a mess...

FRANKLIN

No, I meant as far as temperament and morale.

LUTE

Oh. I see these men every day. These are good men - young and old. Not like many I've seen before. Tough...and determined, they're a new breed. So, Mr. Adams, whether the fight is for the idea or the land - either way - they fight because they are no longer Englishmen. And you are right - most of these boys will fight 'til the last man's standing. I just pray it's not all in vain; that their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

FRANKLIN

Their sons will remember. And their grandsons and great grandsons. Their nobility will be celebrated for lifetimes to come; not just here, but throughout the world; wherever life, freedom and equality are held dear. For they will have made the ultimate sacrifice for the advancement of mankind.

LUTE

Mankind? Isn't that reaching a bit far?

FRANKLIN

Lute, if we're successful here, by the next century the greatest number of Englishmen will be on this side of the Atlantic.

LUTE

A profound hope. I wish it luck. Anyway, they're in God's hands, now - these boys... and the General's. I know he can't be too popular right now in Philadelphia, but from what I've heard, the boys would march into hell and damnation for him.

FRANKLIN

Really?

LUTE

Sure. Those that don't run off.

ADAMS

Run off?

LUTE

Deserters. Mostly older gents gone back to save their farms - or young lads scared of the bullets. You know that one lad you see coming and going?

ADAMS

You mean he...?

LUTE

Wouldn't surprise me. I've seen it before. Once he gets up the nerve, he'll probably be gone before morning muster. He hasn't had the benefit of your persuasions.

ADAMS rises.

FRANKLIN

John, please.

ADAMS

I'm head of the Board of War damnit! I can't just let him run away.

ADAMS heads for the common room.

LUTE

Quite a character, your Mr. Adams.

FRANKLIN

He certainly is.

LUTE

He must be a madman at those meetings of yours.

FRANKLIN

John is always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes he is absolutely out of his senses. I've seen him more than once dash and trample his wig on the floor, attack other members with his stick, and throw out a speaker's notes while giving a speech. He can at times be actually insane. I'm glad he's on our side.

LUTE

You sure you want him on your side?

Beat.

FRANKLIN

Lute, do you remember the so-called 'Boston Massacre'?

LUTE

Of course!

FRANKLIN

And the trial of the British soldiers that followed?

LUTE

The murdering bastards walked away scot free!

FRANKLIN

It was John Adams who defended them.

LUTE

That was *him*? Why on earth would he -

FRANKLIN

He believes, as do I, that in a free country, no man should be denied the right to a fair trial. He believes that it is more important that innocence be protected than guilt be punished.

LUTE

But he -

FRANKLIN

He believed they were innocent, acting merely in self-defense - which he proved in a court of law. He lost half his law practice, jeopardized his reputation, and his family's safety for what he believed. He may be the cause of more fits and aches throughout my entire body, but he is the first man I would want next to me to fight for and defend the liberties of any man.

ADAMS re-enters. LUTE begins to look at him in a different light.

ADAMS

Maybe he's outside.

LUTE

Unless he already...

ADAMS

Damnit !

ADAMS exits out the front door.

LUTE

So, you're from Pennsylvania?

FRANKLIN
(nodding)

Philadelphia.

LUTE

A lot of Quakers out there, hmm?

FRANKLIN

Quite a few.

LUTE

Ya, we've got our fair share here as well.

RUTLEDGE re-enters. He looks about the room for ADAMS.

FRANKLIN

It's all clear, Neddy. John's outside.

RUTLEDGE

(relieved)

Ahh! How delightfully quiet!

RUTLEDGE sits by the fire to read.

LUTE

So, let me ask you - now don't take this personal...

FRANKLIN

Not at all.

LUTE

War's moving this way - why should all these good lads fight to defend a buncha Quakers who won't pick up so much as a stick to defend themselves?

FRANKLIN

Now, Lute, don't make the mistake of the sailor who won't caulk the leaky ship because it would save the rats. We are all in the same boat here - sink or swim. We are as one. We don't care who you are, what you do, how you worship. You're an American and we all have to fight for each other - especially for those who can't.

LUTE

Or *won't*.

FRANKLIN

Yes. It's a simple yet challenging concept. All men are created equal and born with the same rights - not abilities. All men are not created equally talented or intelligent.

ADAMS re-enters much to the chagrin of RUTLEDGE.

FRANKLIN

Any luck?

ADAMS

No. But it looks like it might rain. I doubt he'd leave now.

FRANKLIN

No rain tonight, John.

ADAMS

(doubtful)

Oh really?

FRANKLIN

Trust me. I know my clouds.

*ADAMS joins the exasperated RUTLEDGE by the fire.
FRANKLIN belches.*

ADAMS

Bless you.

Beat. RUTLEDGE chuckles.

ADAMS

Was that a sneeze?

FRANKLIN

No, but thank you anyway, John. I accept the blessing since beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy!

ADAMS

Not that happy.

FRANKLIN

When I was a young lad of six or seven, my father would always send me down to the cellar to tap a keg of ale and fill the glasses for the evening supper. Every time I returned with a tray of brimming mugs, my father would then ask for God's blessing on the ale. Every night - the same thing. Finally I had to ask, "Papa - when the ale arrives wouldn't it save us all a lot of time if you just blessed the whole keg?"

ADAMS

Our preachers taught us that everything we enjoyed was sinful.

LUTE

That's true - every thing that is sinful is enjoyable. I can certainly attest to that.

ADAMS

That's not the same thing.

LUTE

Is it not?

ADAMS

Of course not. That's like saying that... all British are fools is the same as saying all fools are British.

FRANKLIN

Aren't they?

ADAMS

Well, yes, but... bad example.

LUTE

I'm not exactly sure how your legal mind works, Mr. Adams, but if there is anything you want to know about sinning - I'm your source.

ADAMS

So, back to my point.

LUTE

Which is?

ADAMS

Everything that is enjoyable is sinful?

FRANKLIN

Only if you do them correctly.

FRANKLIN muses over his ale.

FRANKLIN

I was once a man of immoderate temperance. I even used to preach on the subject.

RUTLEDGE

You, a preacher, Dr. Franklin? Now that is one sermon I might have enjoyed sitting through.

LUTE

So, what happened?

FRANKLIN

I grew up. Got older and wiser. I discovered that the only way to truly get rid of temptation is to fully comply and satisfy it.

RUTLEDGE

I'm sure your physician must object to that philosophy.

FRANKLIN

Indeed. But have you ever noticed that you see more old drunkards than old doctors? Lute, I see you have a chess board. Care for a go?

LUTE

Don't need to ask me twice. The pieces are on the mantel. I'll get you a filler.

LUTE exits toward the kitchen. FRANKLIN crosses to the mantel. He tries to see what ADAMS is reading. ADAMS intentionally shifts out of view. He looks to RUTLEDGE's book. RUTLEDGE holds it up for FRANKLIN to see.

FRANKLIN

"The Antiquary's Portfolio, or Cabinet Selection of Historical and Literary Curiosities, on Subjects Principally Connected with the Manners, Customs, and Morals, Civil, Military, and Ecclesiastical Governments of Great Britain during the Middle Ages."

FRANKLIN pats RUTLEDGE on the shoulder.

FRANKLIN

Enjoy that.

FRANKLIN sits and begins putting the pieces on the board. LUTE enters with the ale.

FRANKLIN

Ahh, many thanks.

LUTE

I must warn you, lightning man, I've beaten near everyone who's walked through that door. So, how much?

FRANKLIN

How much what?

LUTE

How much're we playing for?

FRANKLIN

Oh, no, no, no. No money.

LUTE

No money? What's the point?

FRANKLIN

We can't distract the mind from the game itself. When playing for money, the one who loves money the most will always lose. His anxiety for the success of the game will take him down unwanted paths.

LUTE

That all sounds good, but I think you're just afraid of losing yer precious Pennsylvania scrip.

They begin to play.

LUTE

Say, tell me about your experiment, lightning man! Did you really do what they say?

FRANKLIN

(feigning modesty)

And what do they say?

LUTE

You're a storm chaser!

FRANKLIN

I guess I am. Or was, back in the summer of '52.

LUTE

Tell me.

FRANKLIN

I was trying to prove that lightning was indeed electricity. I was interested in the idea of creating lightning rods to protect people and buildings from the devastating effects of lightning. Just think of how many terrible fires could be averted. So, we had a grand steeple being erected on top of Christ Church that was to act as the lightning rod. But, I grew impatient. After all, I could be waiting forever for lightning to hit that exact spot. So, I decided to go after the storm.

LUTE

Storm chaser!

FRANKLIN

With a kite. I tied a key to the string with a wire leading into a Leyden jar.

LUTE

Why a key?

FRANKLIN

I needed something metal that would attract an electrical charge.

LUTE

And then - POW!

FRANKLIN

Well...not really. As the kite neared the clouds, I believe the static charges in the cloud affected the string and the key, for as I reached out with my knuckle to the key, I was hit with a spark.

LUTE

Spark. No lightning?

FRANKLIN

(looking around)

Shhh. I still like to be known as the lightning man.

LUTE

Hmmm.

FRANKLIN

Again, you seem disappointed.

LUTE

Nah. It's just that...well I always pictured lightning flashes and you walking away in a cloud of smoke.

FRANKLIN

If it makes you feel any better, I have been hit with stronger electrical currents from other experiments.

LUTE

Really? What did that feel like?

FRANKLIN

Like a universal blow throughout my whole body from head to foot, inside and out. Violent. Numbing. Painful.

LUTE

Is that how you went bald?

FRANKLIN

(amused)

Hah! No. Actually my hair stood up on end for a while. But the baldness was by the grace of God. He must think me a hothead since he has removed all my hair.

LUTE

And no wig?

FRANKLIN

What matters, Lute, is what you have inside your head, not on top of it.

LUTE

So all your experimenting - what good'll come from it?

FRANKLIN

What good is a brand new baby? I'm just planting the seeds for future generations. Checkmate.

LUTE

What? We just started!

LUTE peruses the situation.

LUTE

I'll be a son-of-a... how did y ou...? Oh, hell. So y ou just contradicted your own philosophy.

FRANKLIN

How so?

LUTE

We didn't play for money - and I lost.

FRANKLIN

My philosophies don't take into account... ability.

LUTE

Geeez. Next time we play for coin. Whew, I must be getting a little swipecy not to see that move coming.

FRANKLIN

Swipecy?

LUTE

Ya know... in the suds.

FRANKLIN

(delighted)

Inebriated?

LUTE

Ya - stewed.

FRANKLIN chuckles as he fumbles for his book.

LUTE

Whatcha doin'?

FRANKLIN

Oh, I collect words.

LUTE

You what?

FRANKLIN writes in his book.

FRANKLIN

Words. Phrases. Sayings I've never heard before. "Swipecy." "In the Suds."

LUTE

That's all just words?

FRANKLIN

Words, adages, observations, and unfortunately a sprinkling of politics.

LUTE

Ahhh - trade secrets.

FRANKLIN

They won't be secret one day.

LUTE

What else y a got there?

FRANKLIN

(reading)

Let's see... "Inebriated - liquified, glazed, obsolete, tiddly, almost froze, soaked, gravy-eyed, fuddled, tooted, jumbled, nim-topsical, oiled, melted, condensed..." and my personal favorite - "lost his rudder."

LUTE

Pretty good, old man. How about "juicy?"

RUTLEDGE

"Spifflicated."

LUTE

"Squiffed."

RUTLEDGE

"Crapulous."

LUTE

"Loose in the hilt."

RUTLEDGE

“Among the Philistines.”

FRANKLIN

Yes, yes! Wonderful, gentlemen. Many thanks.

FRANKLIN writes furiously.

ADAMS

Do you have “malmsey-baked?”

FRANKLIN

What?

ADAMS

For your “inebriated.”

FRANKLIN

Oh. No. Thank you.

FRANKLIN closes his book and sets it down.

ADAMS

So, you’ll write it in later then?

FRANKLIN

Hmm?

ADAMS

“Malmsey-baked.”

FRANKLIN

It doesn’t quite fit, John. But thank you for the effort. Care for another go, Lute?

LUTE

You heard me old man - I’m “seeing two moons.”

FRANKLIN laughs as LUTE continues to clean.

FRANKLIN

I actually played Lord Howe’s sister quite a few times in London. She was delightful. And an excellent chess player.

RUTLEDGE

Howe's sister?

FRANKLIN

Caroline. She distracted me with her charms and moved in for the kill. Care for a go, Ned?

RUTLEDGE

I couldn't do that to you, Dr. Franklin. I never lose.

FRANKLIN

You never play .

RUTLEDGE

Exactly . Good night, gentlemen.

RUTLEDGE exits victoriously. ADAMS is thinking long and hard.

ADAMS

“Barrel-headed?”

FRANKLIN stares at ADAMS.

FRANKLIN

Pardon. Nature is calling me away .

FRANKLIN gets up and exits. ADAMS spies FRANKLIN'S book. He quickly crosses to it and furtively flips through it.

ADAMS

(reading)

“Words of Wisdom - People of good sense seldom fall into disputation except lawyers and university men. Example - Adams.”

ADAMS is insulted, but continues, turning the page.

ADAMS
(reading)

“The first mistake of public service is going into it.” “He that sleeps with dogs shall rise with fleas.” I’ve said better things than that. “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on. - T. Jefferson.” I don’t even know what that means.

FRANKLIN enters triumphantly. ADAMS quickly closes the book.

FRANKLIN

Ah, Lute’s ale has done it! I let out a stream that a horse would be proud of.

ADAMS

Lovely .

FRANKLIN resumes his seat at the chess table and entertains the thought of playing solo. ADAMS feigns indifference but is obviously waiting for an invitation. They exchange a number of glances. ADAMS finally catches FRANKLIN’S eye.

FRANKLIN
(begrudgingly)

Well... how about it, John? Care for a turn at a thinking man’s game?

ADAMS

Oh, chess has never really been my forte. I’m sure I wouldn’t be a worthy opponent.

FRANKLIN

Perhaps you’re right.

ADAMS

What do you mean by that?

FRANKLIN

What? You said it.

ADAMS

You didn’t have to agree so quickly .

FRANKLIN

It's just that chess is a game of such deep contemplation. You, John, are a man who succeeds best on a visceral level.

ADAMS

You don't think I'm smart enough.

FRANKLIN

Well, certainly not when pitted against the world's great thinkers such as myself or... Lute.

ADAMS

Set up the board.

FRANKLIN

No, really John -

ADAMS

I insist. I just hope I remember how to play. I haven't played since I was at University.

ADAMS sits. They set up the pieces and begin.

FRANKLIN

You know, John, you ought to be more enamored of a game in which the goal is to topple the king.

ADAMS

Ah, yes. Unfortunately our king has reduced us all to mere pawns.

FRANKLIN

Indeed. King George forgets that no matter how high his throne may be, he still sits on his own ass. I once played the Marquis de Chanson. He was able to get my king in check and I replied, "I see he is in check, but I shall not defend him. If he was a good king, like yours, he would deserve the protection of his subjects; but he is a tyrant. Take him if you please. I can do without him and will fight the rest of the battle *en republicain*."

ADAMS

Now that would be a game more to my liking.

Pause.

FRANKLIN

You know the game of chess holds many parallels to life...

ADAMS

(under his breath)

Oh, no.

FRANKLIN awaits an invitation to continue.

ADAMS

(reluctantly)

And they would be...?

FRANKLIN

The entire concept is based on dealing with adversity. And such is life. In playing chess, a person learns foresight. If I move this piece what will be the advantages of my new situation. Likewise - circumspection, surveying the entire chess board, the relations of the pieces, the dangers, the possibilities and the probabilities. Also, caution - caution, John - not to make your moves too hastily, for you must abide by the consequences of your rashness. And lastly - do not be discouraged by the appearance of a poor situation. Things can change quickly.

This prompts a smile from ADAMS.

FRANKLIN

The best victory is not over one's opponent, but over oneself. Lessons from chess... and life.

ADAMS

I'll be sure to write them down.

FRANKLIN

I already have.

ADAMS

I'm sure.

FRANKLIN

I can make a copy for you.

ADAMS
Thank you, no.

Pause.

ADAMS
And what of distraction?

FRANKLIN
Distraction?

ADAMS
You mentioned the distractions of money .

FRANKLIN
Yes.

ADAMS
And a lady 's charms.

FRANKLIN
Ah, yes. My Achilles Heal.

ADAMS
Among others.

FRANKLIN
John?

ADAMS
Could it not be said that in the game of chess, as in life, the desire to be heard... to listen to oneself spout tirelessly can sometimes cloud one's judgment?

FRANKLIN
I don't follow.

ADAMS
Checkmate.

Pause. FRANKLIN giggles at the thought. He then peruses the board and realizes - he has lost.

FRANKLIN

But that can't be... How dare you, John! You allowed me to monologue my self into defeat!

ADAMS

Perhaps it's time to edit yourself and your guidelines for chess and life.

They shake hands.

FRANKLIN

Just when I think I have you all figured out, you always surprise me, John.

ADAMS

I haven't even figured myself out. I doubt any one else will be able to.

RUTLEDGE enters and looks furtively around.

RUTLEDGE

(sotto voce)

Gentlemen, I have reason to believe we have a spy among us.

ADAMS

What? Who?

RUTLEDGE

Our host.

FRANKLIN

(snickering)

Lute?

RUTLEDGE

His behavior has been... odd. I took it upon my self to watch him with a keen eye. I've seen him more than once seemingly eavesdropping on our conversations. And just now he surreptitiously slipped a note to a young boy who scampered off.

Pause.

FRANKLIN

That's proof of nothing.

RUTLEDGE

Perhaps not.

ADAMS

What if we left him a little bait?

FRANKLIN

You believe this to be true?

ADAMS

We can't be too careful in these times.

RUTLEDGE

What kind of bait?

ADAMS

Franklin, leave your book out for a short time. Maybe we can catch him in the act.

FRANKLIN

But my book - that's my life.

ADAMS

You don't believe he's a spy, do you?

FRANKLIN

Well, no, but -

ADAMS

Then you have nothing to worry about.

RUTLEDGE

I will keep an eye on your beloved book, Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN

I hope you're wrong about this, Neddy.

RUTLEDGE

So do I. But I don't think so.

RUTLEDGE exits.

ADAMS

It's still early. I might still have time for some letters.

ADAMS opens his satchel and pulls out a number of unopened letters, some of which fall to the floor.

ADAMS

So many. But, as you always remind me - never put off to tomorrow what you can do today.

FRANKLIN

Oh John, haven't I told you? I've slightly altered that maxim. "Never put off to tomorrow what you can do - the next day." Old age has wrought havoc on my early philosophies.

ADAMS chuckles. He picks one letter out and privately relishes the scent.

ADAMS

Perhaps just one.

FRANKLIN

As Postmaster General, every time I see a letter being opened, I feel like a proud papa.

ADAMS

Don't be too proud, papa - this one from my wife took six weeks! I could walk a letter to Massachusetts in less time.

FRANKLIN

Don't let me stop you.

ADAMS

Have you no letters?

FRANKLIN

None... deserving of a response.

On second thought, FRANKLIN slowly pulls a letter from his pocket. As he contemplates it, the light fades on him and up on ADAMS who opens his letter. Lights up on ABIGAIL.

ABIGAIL

My dearest friend, in recent weeks our correspondence has been overflowing with the excitement of the news of the day and the spirit of Independence. Today I wish to share with you only sentiments of the heart. O, my dear Friend, do you know how I feel when I look back upon a long absence? I look forward with the thought that the year is not yet over. I often recollect those lines, "O, ye Gods - annihilate but time and space - and make two lovers happy." I miss my partner and find myself unequal to the cares which fall upon me. I wish to say things I cannot. It is not fit to wake the soul by tender strokes of art, or to ruminate upon happiness we might enjoy, lest absence becomes intolerable. Yet, I think of you - my absent friend and love - sometimes with a mixture of pain and sorrow, sometimes with pleasure, sometimes anticipating a joyful and happy meeting. Your letters speak very little respecting yourself and your health. My anxiety for your welfare will never leave me but with my parting breath. 'Tis of more importance to me than all this World contains besides. The cruel separation to which I am necessitated cuts off half the enjoyments of life. The other half are comprised in the hope I have that what I do and what I may suffer may be serviceable to you, to our little ones and to our Country. Difficult as the day is, cruel as this war has been, separated as I am on account of it from the dearest connection in life, I would not exchange my country for the wealth of the Indies, or be anything other than an American. I can glory in my sacrifice and derive pleasure from my intimate relationship with one who has been esteemed so worthy of the important trust placed upon him. I do hope the public will someday reap what I have sacrificed. How often do I reflect that I hold in possession a heart equally warm with my own, and fully as susceptible of the tenderest impressions, and who even now whilst he is reading, feels all I describe. How I wish you would ever write me a letter half as long as I write you. With the purest affection, I have held you to my bosom 'til my whole soul has dissolved in tenderness and my pen fallen from my hand. I am most affectionately and forever yours - waiting - waiting - Abbey.

ADAMS is deeply moved. He blows out the candle and slumps over in a quiet sob.

Lights fade on ADAMS and up on FRANKLIN. With hesitation he opens the letter, Lights up on WILLIAM.

WILLIAM

Dear Father, the conditions of my incarceration have been quite difficult, and only now have I been allowed to write anything. I understand that since this conflict began, my decisions and actions in opposition to your cause have disappointed you as a father, and as a self-proclaimed patriot. But, should I not be allowed to discover my own mind and honor my own convictions without disrespecting you?

It is not always about Benjamin Franklin. You must understand that, as an honorable man, I did what I was compelled to do. I uniformly acted from a strong sense of duty to my King and regard to my country. I truly believe that I am the patriot and you the rebel. If ultimately I am proven mistaken, I cannot help it. Upon my most mature reflection, I know that were the same circumstances to occur tomorrow, I would do the same, not withstanding the cruel sufferings, neglects and ill-treatment that in general has befallen all who have remained loyal to the King. Of my actions concerning this war, I have no regrets, and concerning a subject so disagreeable to you, I have no desire to say more. But, concerning the fractured relationship between father and son, regrets, I have many. I flatter myself that you may be the same disposition and look forward to the day when we can revive the affectionate relationship which, until these recent troubles, had been the pride and happiness of my life. Your very dutiful and affectionate son, William.

FRANKLIN begins to sob. He slams his fist down, crumples the letter and throws it. He starts out, then stops to retrieve the letter. He straightens it, pockets it and exits.

After a few moments, the SOLDIER enters, looks around and quietly makes his way toward the candlesticks. Thinking he's alone, he reaches out to one...

ADAMS

Nice, aren't they?

SOLDIER
(startled)

What? I...

The SOLDIER turns to go. ADAMS kicks a chair toward him.

ADAMS

Have a seat. Let's talk. Please...

The SOLDIER reluctantly sits.

ADAMS

My name is John. And you?

SOLDIER
(hesitant)

Francis.

ADAMS

So, what's on your mind, Francis?

SOLDIER

I was just... I...

ADAMS

Don't worry. I'm not going to report you.

He looks to ADAMS.

ADAMS

You haven't actually done anything yet. The candlesticks remain, and so do you.

SOLDIER

What do you want?

ADAMS

I'd like to know why.

He avoids ADAMS' stare.

SOLDIER

It doesn't concern you. You've nothing to do with it.

ADAMS

Actually, it does. I am a member of Congress and head the Congressional Board of War committee.

SOLDIER

I don't know what that means.

ADAMS

It means it is my job to keep our young men fighting. You see, if every one felt as you do, we'd have no one left to fight, and England would -

SOLDIER

Why don't you fight?

ADAMS

Believe me, I wish I could. But wars are fought in many places - not just the battlefield. Some of us are better equipped for other areas.

SOLDIER

Excuse me for sayin' - but that sounds like bull.

ADAMS

I suppose it does. So, why now?

Beat.

SOLDIER

My ma's all alone and I've got to get back. She's not well.

ADAMS

No father?

SOLDIER

He died when I was five. So, I've got to get home. She needs me.

ADAMS

Francis, if that were the case you'd have been given leave. And you wouldn't be feeling guilty about it. Now, what's the real reason?

Pause.

ADAMS

Fear is nothing to be ashamed of.

SOLDIER

I'm no coward.

ADAMS

No one thinks you are.

SOLDIER

All deserters are. When I see them go - that's what I think.

ADAMS

And now?

SOLDIER

And now... we're going to be fightin' soon. And... I don't want to die. Do you have any answers for that?

ADAMS

No, I don't.

Pause.

ADAMS

Have you made any friends in your company, Francis?

SOLDIER

I've had three friends. Two got sick and died. I don't want James to die too. I'm bad luck.

ADAMS

I see. War brings with it its own sense of luck - both bad and good.

SOLDIER

I ain't seen the good yet.

ADAMS

I know. I pray someday you will. Francis, no one can make you fight. If you're intent on leaving, I won't stop you. I have a son who's a few years away from fighting age, I would be afraid, very afraid if he had to go through what you are right now. But if he was, I would hope he'd have someone like yourself to help him through. Everyone needs help in this war. You, the soldier next to you, myself... even General Washington.

SOLDIER

The General?

ADAMS

Of course. Perhaps more than any one. He depends on each and every soldier to do what they can. Otherwise there's no army, no defense, no country. You talk of bad luck? It would be bad luck for him if you were to leave now, when each soldier is needed the most. Son, do what you must. As long as you can look yourself in the mirror with pride, you'll be doing the right thing. If the candlesticks are gone in the morning, I'll know your decision. Good night.

ADAMS exits. The SOLDIER walks over to the candlesticks. His attention is interrupted by the sound of someone approaching. He hides among the shadows.

LUTE enters. He finishes his end of night cleaning and peruses the room one last time.

He notices Franklin's book on the chair. Making sure he's alone he picks it up and flips through it, stopping on a page of interest. He quickly copies it with paper and pen found on a table. RUTLEDGE watches everything through the window from outside. LUTE exits. Rutledge enters and takes the book before exiting.

The soldier emerges from the shadows and heads toward the candlesticks. Quick fade out.

Curtain.

ACT IISCENE ONE.

Curtain up. Bedroom - a short time later. ADAMS removes his waistcoat and vest. He prepares a seat in front of a small side table. He hears a loud noise outside the window. He crosses over, looks out and opens it.

ADAMS

Franklin, what're you doing?

FRANKLIN (O.S.)

The door to the privy's stuck. I don't know if I can hold it!

More banging.

ADAMS

Are you sure no one's in there?

MAN (O.S.)

Hey! What in hell're ya thinking?

FRANKLIN (O.S.)

Oh. My apologies. I did not knock a number of times.

MAN (O.S.)

I was asleep! Jackass!

ADAMS

Good God! The model American!

ADAMS closes the window. There is a knock at the door. RUTLEDGE enters.

RUTLEDGE

Dr. Franklin...?

ADAMS

In the privy.

RUTLEDGE

Well, Mr. Adams, your bait worked like a charm.

ADAMS

He didn't.

RUTLEDGE

He did - like a ravenous dog.

RUTLEDGE places the book on a table.

RUTLEDGE

So, what do we do now?

ADAMS

We need to confront him. Take him into custody if possible.

RUTLEDGE

And how do you propose we do that?

ADAMS thinks a moment.

ADAMS

We'll wait until Joe returns in the morning. He has a pistol.

RUTLEDGE nods and starts out.

ADAMS

Mr. Rutledge... thank you.

RUTLEDGE nods and exits.

ADAMS sits, then takes a moment to compose his thoughts before putting pen to paper. He suffers from rheumatism and eye strain while writing.

ADAMS

My dear, I've just received your letter dated July 15th. I am happy to find you and the children in a good way. As for my health, well, it's... no worse. Never - never in my life have I ever had so many cares upon my mind at once. And I feel so... alone. There are very few people left in this world with whom I can bear to converse. I can treat all with decency and civility, but I am never happy in their company.

This has made me a recluse, and will one day make a hermit of your rapidly aging husband. This country will never know the torments I have endured for its sake. I am glad they will never know. I grow weary of the game, yet how would I live without it? Oh, Abby my letters to you seem an odd mixture - a collection of all things. There is so much - so much. Amidst all the rubbish, you may identify a very tender heart I have for my country, my friends and, especially my family. I hope, the disasters of Long Island and New York will not dispirit our people. The ways of Providence are a mystery. Through all the gloom, I can see the rays of light and glory; I can see that the end is more than worth all the means, and that prosperity will triumph. When? I cannot say. Nor can I say when I shall be able to return home again. I cannot at the present. Affairs are too delicate and critical. It is a great grief to me that I cannot write to you more often. Every line from you gives me inexpressible pleasure. There are more good thoughts, fine strokes and mother wit in them than I hear in the Senate for a whole week. Send more. Your advice is always welcome. Your presence always missed. How I long to walk with you in the garden, with Charles in one hand and Tom in the other, Nabby on your right and John on my left. Alas, poor imagination! How faintly and imperfectly do you supply the want of reality! And how I long to recline in your arms once again. My love to our dear little ones. Adieu, John.

ADAMS folds the letter and addresses it. FRANKLIN enters in obvious discomfort. He removes a small ointment bottle and drinks from it, causing a disgusted reaction.

ADAMS

I gather that is not brandy.

FRANKLIN

Turpentine. With a little honey. Helps drive out the kidney stones.

ADAMS heads to the door.

FRANKLIN

Oh, John, you may want to bring some lilac water with you.

ADAMS grabs a bottle off a large chest and exits. FRANKLIN checks the door to see ADAMS away. He crosses to ADAMS' desk and quickly scans the letters. He is genuinely but humorously moved.

FRANKLIN

Oh, John... the you nobody will ever know.

He limps to the chest and pours water into a basin. He empties powder from a bag into the basin and swirls it about. He places the basin on the floor and sits in a chair. With great difficulty he attempts to remove his shoes. It is comical at first, then pathetic to watch. He slams his fist down.

FRANKLIN

God! Damn! Damn! Damn! You would not only torment my body to death, but ruin my good name; This gout gives me the appearance of a glutton and drunkard. Dear God - enough!

He is nearly in tears as he removes the shoes and his stockings. With great effort he opens a window and pulls the chair over it. He strips, sits and places his feet in the water. He is completely naked and opens his journal, reveling in the bright moonlight like a sun bather.

FRANKLIN

Now, where was I? (reading) "Ways to Make Yourself a Disagreeable Companion: Your business is to shine like the sun and prevent the shining of others, for their brightness may exceed yours. To this end: 1) Dominate all discussion. Talk much of yourself and share your own wise sayings. 2) When you are out of breath, watch his words, and find something immediately to contradict him. If that fails, criticize even his grammar. 3) If he says an indisputably good thing - interrupt him; or if you can guess what he would say, be quick and say it before him or say it has already been said by Bacon or Locke or some other eminent writer, thus you deprive him of the praise, and gain some yourself, as you show your great knowledge.

He now begins to write.

FRANKLIN

4) When modest men have been thus treated by you a few times, they will choose ever after to be silent in your company. Thus you will be sure to please yourself. The polite man aims at pleasing others, but can only do so when in their company. You, however can please any one any time by not being in their company."

ADAMS enters. He unpacks some books. He carries them over to a small table. Feeling a chill, he notices the open window. He crosses to it, but seeing FRANKLIN, drops everything.

ADAMS

(averting his eyes)

Sweet mother of mercy! Franklin - you're naked!

FRANKLIN

Hmm. So I am.

ADAMS

Are you preparing yourself for a bath?

FRANKLIN

No, John. I'm air-bathing.

ADAMS

I don't understand.

FRANKLIN

Bathing. In the air.

ADAMS

With no clothes?

FRANKLIN

Do you bathe with your clothes on?

ADAMS is struck speechless.

FRANKLIN

I do it every day. I find it very agreeable to my constitution, both physical and mental. I do some of my most free thinking while nude.

ADAMS

A little too free for my liking. You might be locked up if you did that in Massachusetts.

FRANKLIN

I'll keep that in mind next time I'm in Boston.

ADAMS

The naked philosopher.

FRANKLIN

Not philosophy - science.

ADAMS

Science?

FRANKLIN

Think about it, John, people often catch cold from one another when shut up together in small quarters. It is the stagnant air, full of dust, animal substances and the perspiration from our bodies, which obtains that kind of putridity which infects us. The outward air... cleanses.

A dreadful thought has just struck ADAMS. He looks nervously at the one bed, then to FRANKLIN.

ADAMS

Dear God! Surely you don't intend to...

FRANKLIN

Oh no, John. I have bed clothes.

ADAMS

I cannot express how relieved I am to hear that. I was not informed by Congress that committing with you would include knowledge of Dr. Franklin that only a doctor should be privy to.

FRANKLIN

And the ladies, John. Let us not forget the ladies.

ADAMS settles into his letters. FRANKLIN refers to his current writing and smiles.

FRANKLIN

(To himself)

Let's see... "If that fails, criticize even his grammar."

(thinks for a moment, then to Adams...)

"Associating."

FRANKLIN is clearly waiting for a response.

ADAMS

I beg your pardon?

FRANKLIN

A moment ago you said “committeeing.” There is no such word. I believe you were thinking perhaps - “associating”?

ADAMS is at a loss.

FRANKLIN

“To join others in a union for reason of work or camaraderie.”

ADAMS

“Committeeing” is proper for the intent.

FRANKLIN

You are creating a verb where none such exists.

ADAMS

Welcome to America.

FRANKLIN

(offended)

Do you count altering the King’s English among the great accomplishments of Boston?

ADAMS

I would gladly alter anything linked with the King’s name. As the English character evolves in this country, so shall its language, and not just in Boston. You don’t fool anyone, Franklin. As much as you try to hide it, the fact remains that you were born in Boston.

FRANKLIN

(aghast)

John, please. There’s no reason to get personal here. We are, after all, gentlemen. Anyway, I hope you won’t spread it around, I do have a reputation to maintain.

ADAMS

What do you have against New Englanders?

FRANKLIN

Nothing. They're... they have... well... I'm fond of their plainness of speech. There's no added flourish. They say what they mean.

ADAMS

Of course.

FRANKLIN

I once invited a New England couple to dine with me, and their answer was that they would, if they could not do better. I suppose they did, for I never saw them again.

ADAMS

Why you run from a culture of virtue and godliness and embrace one of dispirited loyalism to the crown -

FRANKLIN responds with a quick fart. ADAMS is unsure of what he has just heard. He settles in to his book. FRANKLIN leans slightly to one side and emits a squeak of a fart. ADAMS his head. FRANKLIN does not acknowledge. They busy themselves with their respective writings. FRANKLIN tries and is able to rip a loud one. ADAMS slowly raises his head. FRANKLIN sheepishly looks up.

FRANKLIN

Tonight's cabbage.

ADAMS

Franklin, you're... you're... well, you're damaging the chair!

FRANKLIN sniffs the air.

FRANKLIN

"He that is conscious of a stink in his breeches, is jealous of every wrinkle in another's nose."

ADAMS

Well, aren't you just a profundity of flatulence? Unfortunately, you aren't wearing any breeches! Now I *am* glad the window is open.

ADAMS crosses to the window.

FRANKLIN

Come now, John. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Nature merely follows its course. You see, the gasses get trapped -

ADAMS

Please, spare me the science of your internal gasses,

Pause.

FRANKLIN

Everyone has to do it. Jefferson, Washington, Tom Paine, Lewis Morris - now there's a man unmatched in both volume and aroma. What do you suppose he eats?

ADAMS is trying his best to ignore FRANKLIN.

FRANKLIN

You know I've never heard you fart, John.

ADAMS

What?

FRANKLIN

We've been cooped up together in small rooms and halls many times over the years, and I've never heard you break wind. You hold them in, don't you?

ADAMS

I can't believe this is a topic for discussion. When in public, yes. It is called consideration.

FRANKLIN

We're not in public.

ADAMS

I am public. This - you and me - we - this *is* public!

FRANKLIN

Anyway, you shouldn't hold them in. Gas needs to find its escape where and when it must. So, fart proudly. Interference is unhealthy for one's constitution.

ADAMS

I hope you as diligent when it comes time for America's constitution as you are with your own.

FRANKLIN puts on a nightshirt, but struggles to put on under breeches.

ADAMS

I just pray you can control your leakage tomorrow in front of Lord Howe - or at least limit your cabbage intake.

FRANKLIN

John, can you help me with this? I can't seem to...

ADAMS

Oh, please do not ask me to -

FRANKLIN

That's fine, I can be naked all night...

ADAMS jumps up to help him.

ADAMS

No, I'm here-

He crosses to FRANKLIN and begins to assist him with his under garments. There is a quick knock and RUTLEDGE enters.

RUTLEDGE

Dr. Franklin, I was wondering if I might borrow-

Snapshot moment.

RUTLEDGE

Perhaps another time.

RUTLEDGE, nods, smiles, and slowly exits, closing the door behind him.

FRANKLIN

Not exactly a moment to be captured by Charles Wilson Peale.

ADAMS

Good God!

FRANKLIN

Thank you, John.

FRANKLIN towels off his foot with much discomfort. ADAMS notices the extreme gout. FRANKLIN limps and nearly falls over. ADAMS catches him and helps him sit on the bed.

FRANKLIN

See what you have to look forward to, John? Gout, stones, cystitis, pleurisy, dysury. In short - general decrepitude.

ADAMS looks on FRANKLIN's plight with pity.

ADAMS

Franklin, do you fear death?

FRANKLIN

Do I look that bad, John?

ADAMS

I'm sorry. I didn't mean...

FRANKLIN

Hmmm - do I fear death? No, I do not think so. Ultimately, it would seem to be as necessary as sleep. We shall rise refreshed in the morning. Life should have a dramatic ending, don't you think? Like a staged play. With a bow, thunderous applause and a falling curtain. Much preferable to withering on the vine, as I'm doing now. Either way it is soon time for me to be off the stage. How short the play seems.

(Contemplating with a sigh)

I miss my old friends. Each passing year takes them, one by one until suddenly - I'm the oldest man I know. Such is God's tax for living too long. Yes, John, you'll be pleasantly surprised to know that I have not totally abandoned God. I just hope he has not abandoned me. In fact the closer I get to that magical day, the more I think about him.

ADAMS

As we all should.

FRANKLIN

In a peculiar way, I guess I'm looking forward to it. I've always been a man in search of answers; death will be the last question answered. I just hope there's someone there to receive me.

ADAMS

There will be.

FRANKLIN

And someone here to send me off.

ADAMS

(half-jealously)

You are the most beloved man alive today. Your funeral will stretch from New Hampshire to Georgia.

FRANKLIN

(getting emotional)

But my family, John. They're disappearing. My son, Billy has been a far more dutiful servant to his King than son to his father. I can forgive him his poor judgment, but there are natural duties which precede political ones. He is my past now - as is my dear wife, Deborah, rest her soul. I was never there for her, even at the end. Always away - doing some damned thing.

ADAMS

You sacrificed your personal life for the benefit of others. Believe me, I understand.

FRANKLIN

And now I am old and alone.

ADAMS

Hardly. You have more female admirers at 70 than most men have at 30.

FRANKLIN

The women that pay me attention now are not the kind one wants setting flowers at one's tomb.

Pause.

ADAMS

Well... if you'd like... I can be there for you at the end.

FRANKLIN

That is very generous of you, John, but I don't wish to enter Elysium with a headache.

ADAMS

I'll have Rutledge bring flowers.

FRANKLIN

He does have exquisite taste in colors.

ADAMS

What about that wonderful grandson you talk so often of?

FRANKLIN

Temple. Yes! Wonderful lad. So bright, so curious. He reminds me of - me. And you, John? Do you fear death?

ADAMS

Hmm. I guess, I'm nearly antithetical to you, Franklin. I see this world - it's failings, it's injustices, the suffering it imposes on so many ... and yet I'm not eager to leave it anytime soon. It's all part of God's grander plan for us.

FRANKLIN

Good. Because you have much left ahead of you. Ahh, John, you do not realize how lucky you are to have Abigail and the children. The way you speak of them... the way you write to each other... a passionate relationship that I can only imagine.

ADAMS

You read my letters?

FRANKLIN

No... not really. They were just sitting there.

ADAMS

Franklin!

FRANKLIN

You are a fine writer, John, when impassioned. A Declaration of Independence from your hand would have rivaled Tom's.

ADAMS

Hah! Jefferson thought Congress ripped through his? Mine would've looked like a bullet-riddled flag. How I hate editors! Present company excluded, of course.

FRANKLIN

Brings to mind the story of the hatter who was opening a shop and wanted a handsome sign suitably inscribed. He started out with the inscription: "John Thompson, Hatter, Makes and Sells Hats for Ready Money," and added the figure of a hat. One of his friends thought 'hatter' superfluous, so that word went out. Another thought the word 'makes' unnecessary, since the customers did not care who made them. A third thought the reference to 'ready money' superfluous, since nobody expected credit. All that was now left was 'John Thompson Sells Hats.' But another reminded him that nobody would expect him to give them away. All that was left, finally, was the name 'John Thompson,' along with the picture of a hat on the sign.

Pause.

ADAMS

(waiting for more)

What's your point, Franklin?

FRANKLIN

I can't remember. What were we talking about?

ADAMS

Congress' reaction to an Adams Declaration of Independence.

FRANKLIN

Oh hell no - they'd fill it full of holes.

ADAMS

That was the point.

FRANKLIN

(confused)

Yes. My point or yours?

ADAMS

It wouldn't have made it past the first colony.

FRANKLIN

Ah, but only if they knew it was yours. Strange things happen when a name is attached. They hear the man, not the words. What you have argued tirelessly on the floor and what Tom has written are inseparable.

ADAMS

Yet Jefferson will always be remembered for his words.

FRANKLIN

They're not just *his* words. They're yours and mine, Rousseau's, Locke's and so many others. We are not the first to publicly declaim the rights of man. Yet, I believe the Declaration will be remembered as distinctly American words.

ADAMS

And so the name Adams will never be remembered. Except maybe Sam's.

FRANKLIN

Is that why you do this? For your place in history? For your statue in a great hall somewhere?

ADAMS

No, of course not, but... Abigail so often reminds me that vanity is my cardinal vice and folly.

FRANKLIN

There have been as many great souls unknown to fame as any of the most famous.

ADAMS

Of course, but - it's easy for you to say. You've been immortal for 40 years now.

FRANKLIN

A hazard that comes with brilliance. "If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth the writing." John, you do not have a 'Declaration' or a 'Common Sense' with your name attached, but these are only words - tools for planting the seeds of freedom.

ADAMS

And where do I come in?

FRANKLIN

You, my friend... are the farmer.

ADAMS
(reflecting)

Thank you, Franklin.

FRANKLIN

And, of course, I am the sun!

This evokes a chuckle from ADAMS. FRANKLIN opens a book and strains to read. He lets out a tired sigh.

FRANKLIN

When I was young and had time to read, I had no books. Now that I am old and have the books, I have neither the time nor the strength to read. It seems my fate constantly to wish for repose and never to obtain it. What books have you brought, John?

ADAMS

The Bible. Cicero. Cervantes.

FRANKLIN

Cervantes? Ah, *Don Quixote*! Perhaps it is us tilting with windmills, eh, John? How do you find the time to enjoy literature?

ADAMS

I don't as often as I like. I study what I must - politics and war - so my sons may have the freedom to study math and philosophy, so that their children will have the freedom to study art and poetry and music.

FRANKLIN

It would be a fine thing if they could be taught every thing that is useful and every thing that is ornamental.

ADAMS

One to teach us how to make a living and the other to teach us how to live.

FRANKLIN

Yes. But art is long and time is short. For that I regret the many sacrifices I have made for politics. I'd have preferred spending that time with my one true love - science.

ADAMS
(regretfully)

And I growing tomatoes on my farm.

FRANKLIN

Perhaps in the next life.

ADAMS

Perhaps.

They prepare themselves for bed. ADAMS removes his garments and dons a night shirt. He methodically picks at and brushes his teeth with a 'brush.' He combs and scrapes his hair, then puts on a nightcap. FRANKLIN pulls down the bed sheet and proceeds to flick bedbugs from the bed. Finally he gets in. ADAMS hesitates.

FRANKLIN

Is there a problem, John?

ADAMS

I don't think there is enough room for me.

FRANKLIN

Nonsense. I grew up in a house with 16 brothers and sisters. There's enough room here for five.

ADAMS climbs into the bed head to toe.

FRANKLIN

You may not want to do that, John. This gout remedy emits a very unpleasant aroma.

ADAMS

Oh dear! Yes, I believe I've discovered it.

FRANKLIN

My apologies.

ADAMS

Not at all.

ADAMS gets out and climbs back in side by side. FRANKLIN is restless. After a time...

FRANKLIN

Are you asleep?

ADAMS

Trying.

FRANKLIN

I don't think I've ever been to bed with a Bostonian before.

Pause.

FRANKLIN

I did manage a tryst with a Dutch girl once - long ago.

ADAMS

Franklin -

FRANKLIN

Well, I'm not saying it's the same -

Beat.

FRANKLIN

But similar I'd imagine.

ADAMS

Please!

FRANKLIN

What?

ADAMS

If I don't get to sleep in the next two minutes, I'll be awake all night from your snoring.

FRANKLIN

And how would you know I snore? That information is reserved strictly for the ladies who tire me out.

ADAMS

Good God - all of Philadelphia knows. If the windows are open in Congress... every twenty minutes.

FRANKLIN

Hah!

Pause.

FRANKLIN

Well, I'm wide awake. How about a little yarn to help you sleep?

ADAMS

Mmmmpphh...

FRANKLIN

Let's see... oh, yes - you'll enjoy this, John. This one reminds us of the dangers of always deferring to public opinion.

ADAMS

Public opinion be damned!

FRANKLIN

That's right, John - to hell with the masses! So - a certain well-meaning man and his son were traveling to market with an ass which they had to sell. The road was bad and the old man rode while the son walked. The first passerby asked the father if he was not ashamed to ride by himself and suffer the poor lad to wade along through the mire. This induced him to take up his son behind him. He had not traveled far when he met others, who said...

FRANKLIN nods off. ADAMS opens his eyes - waiting.

ADAMS

Who said what?

FRANKLIN

(waking)

...who said they were two unmerciful lubbers to get both on the back of that poor ass on such a rough road. Upon this, the old man gets off and lets his son ride alone. The next they meet calls the lad a disgrace to ride while his aged father trudged along on foot. And they said the old man was a fool for suffering it. He then bid his son come down and walk with him. And they led the ass by the halter 'till they met another who called them...

FRANKLIN nods off again. ADAMS opens his eyes.

ADAMS

Franklin!

FRANKLIN

(waking)

...who called them senseless blockheads for both going on foot in such a muddy road when they had a perfectly good ass to ride upon. The old man could bear it no longer. My son, he said, it grieves me much that we cannot please all these people. Let us throw the ass over the next bridge and be no further troubled with him.

*FRANKLIN looks over to ADAMS who is sound asleep.
He smiles and nods off. ADAMS awakens.*

ADAMS

What? Franklin? The ass... what happened?

FRANKLIN responds with a loud snore.

ADAMS

Damn!

Black out.

SCENE 2

Lights up. Tavern front parlor. FRANKLIN and RUTLEDGE are finishing their breakfast.

FRANKLIN

That is disappointing. But we cannot let it deter us from the matter at hand.

RUTLEDGE

No.

FRANKLIN

I wonder what he copied...

ADAMS enters.

ADAMS

Good morning gentlemen. Are we all in fine 'American' spirit today? Ready to show Howe who we are?

RUTLEDGE

Who?

ADAMS

Howe.

FRANKLIN

Where?

Beat.

ADAMS

What?

Incredulous pause.

RUTLEDGE

Truly remarkable, Mr. Adams. Your ability to stun a room into confused silence with a mere 'good morning.'

FRANKLIN

Who?

ADAMS

Knock it off, Franklin.

RUTLEDGE

Actually, Mr. Adams, despite our present predicament, after a nice quiet philosophical chat with Dr. Franklin, my spirits regarding our mission have grown.

ADAMS

Excellent.

RUTLEDGE

And I'm sure within two minutes you will somehow manage in your own inimitable way to increase the volume, get me aggravated, depressed and wanting to cause bodily harm.

ADAMS

I won't say a word then.

RUTLEDGE

Hah! You are incapable, sir.

ADAMS

Try me.

RUTLEDGE checks his pocket watch and exchanges an understanding nod with FRANKLIN.

RUTLEDGE

Then, continuing, Dr. Franklin, before we were hit with the northern winds, your reasoning behind a unicameral congress is indeed persuasive.

ADAMS

(taking the bait)

Good God!

RUTLEDGE

Congratulations, Mr. Adams! You remained silent for exactly eight seconds. Your best yet!

ADAMS

Bicameral is the only option!

FRANKLIN

Unicameral.

ADAMS

Bi!

FRANKLIN

Uni!

ADAMS

A two house system in Congress is the only way for fair representation.

RUTLEDGE

And the volume grows...

FRANKLIN

In my house museum, I keep a preserved two-headed snake to remind me that two heads are not better than one.

ADAMS

What?

FRANKLIN

Do you know how the snake died? One head wanted to go one direction to the pond, but the other head argued the other way for the stream.

Beat.

FRANKLIN

The poor serpent died of thirst!

ADAMS

I don't even know how to respond to such drivel. You have a -

ADAMS notices the missing candlesticks. He crosses over to the hearth.

FRANKLIN

Anything wrong, John?

ADAMS
(disappointed)

No. I... no.

ADAMS sits and dives into the breakfast plate left for him as if it were his last meal.

RUTLEDGE
My goodness, Mr. Adams. Rarely have I borne witness to the ravaging hunger of a puritan.

ADAMS
As I will certainly have no stomach for the business upcoming, I shall take my fill here.

BASS enters the tavern.

BASS
Good morning, gentleman.

ADAMS
Ahh, Joseph. Good morning.

ADAMS rises to greet BASS

ADAMS
It looks like we may have urgent use of your pistol.

BASS
Is everything alright?

BASS pulls his pistol out of his satchel and hands it to ADAMS. LUTE enters. ADAMS whispers to BASS and hides the gun while trying to load it out of sight. RUTLEDGE helps to block LUTE's sight. FRANKLIN cuts LUTE off.

FRANKLIN
Ah, Lute. Uhhh... it seems we've discovered a small problem.

LUTE
Really? What?

FRANKLIN

Well.... Ummmm... you see... it's been thought that you might be... Mr. Rutledge here has... has something to say to you.

RUTLEDGE

Sir, the intendment of your recent deportment has been explicated by myself and others to warrant further vigilance, leading to the revelation by person present of your duplicitous effectuation with regard to the pilfering of valuable information regarding not only the devoir at hand but our entire endeavor.

Pause.

FRANKLIN

Lute?

LUTE

Anyone have a translation? I don't speak Congress-talk.

ADAMS points the pistol at LUTE.

ADAMS

In short, we know you've been spy ing on us.

LUTE

(amused)

What? Why would I spy on you three? You know less about what's going on in this war than a hog primed for bacon. What on earth makes you think such a thing?

RUTLEDGE

The eavesdropping. The notes you've been sending off with that boy . Copying from Dr. Franklin's journal...

A moment as LUTE takes it all in, then breaks out in an uncontrollable gut-busting belly laugh.

RUTLEDGE

You find this amusing?

LUTE

Quite. First off, you need to load a pistol before aiming it with any kind of threat.

LUTE grabs the pistol out of ADAMS' hand.

LUTE

Small wonder we're losing this war. Secondly, confirm your fears before blindly and foolishly acting on them! Yes, I sent a few notes off with the boy ... (sotto voce) to my mistress. Whatever secretive things you may have seen, it's to hide my mistress from Marion. She caught me a few weeks ago... the lump still hasn't gone down.

RUTLEDGE

(dubious)

But I saw you copy from his book.

*LUTE pulls a page from his pocket and hands it to
RUTLEDGE.*

RUTLEDGE

(reading)

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul" - What is this?

FRANKLIN

(chuckling)

Christopher Marlowe.

RUTLEDGE

What?

FRANKLIN

A love poem. One that never fails with the ladies.

RUTLEDGE

But...

FRANKLIN

(to Lute)

Never mind. I've never been so glad to be wrong. Our apologies, Lute.

LUTE

No need. That was the funniest thing I've heard in years!

FRANKLIN

I hope this lass is worth it.

LUTE

She is... on Tuesdays. She's younger... better to look at... still has most of her teeth. ..

FRANKLIN

Sounds delightful. But if you'd like my advice, you should marry this other one.

LUTE

Who, Marion?

FRANKLIN

First of all, there's no remedy to the itch like marriage. But it is the man and woman united that makes the complete human being.

LUTE

She's a little old though. Doesn't have the same package that she used to.

FRANKLIN

In the dark, all cats are gray. Is she good to you?

LUTE

Very.

FRANKLIN

Does she tend to you when you're ailing?

LUTE

Like a doctor.

FRANKLIN

She's the one. Though her canvas may be cracking, she will more than make up for it in service. You won't have to teach her anything. There's no hazard of having children. She's more discreet, more experienced and I'm sure - oh so grateful.

LUTE

(pondering)

She does come cheaper.

FRANKLIN

Exactly . The alternative is a dangerous and expensive road.

ADAMS

Speaking of which, how's the road to Staten Island, Joe?

BASS

Not as dusty, but the roads are still poor. Just a few hours ride.

RUTLEDGE

And the crossing?

BASS

Very short. Admiral Howe's headquarters are just on the other side,

LUTE exits. An obviously distressed BASS sits.

ADAMS

Joe?

BASS

They ... there's...

ADAMS

What is it?

BASS

They have amassed a force of ships and soldiers - such that I have never before seen in one place. It's as if all of London was afloat in New York harbor.

This puts a damper on everyone's mood.

FRANKLIN

Tell us.

BASS

Nearly 500 ships fill the New York harbor and the ports of Staten Island, with more arriving each day . The cannon must exceed 1200.

FRANKLIN

And the soldiers?

BASS

I was told close to 60,000.

An awful silence.

RUTLEDGE

My God.

FRANKLIN

(to Adams)

And Washington?

ADAMS

Fewer than 10,000. With all the reinforcements on the way - 20,000 at the most.

RUTLEDGE

Gentlemen, we need to get word to Philadelphia immediately and re-think our approach to this meeting.

ADAMS

And capitulate?

RUTLEDGE

And survive.

ADAMS

I'd expect that from you, Rutledge. Find the nearest hole to hide your head once things get difficult.

RUTLEDGE

We have long since passed the difficulty stage, Mr. Adams, and are now rapidly treading toward the impossible.

ADAMS

And you'd have us just wave the white flag and live the way others tell us to live? Never!

RUTLEDGE

The key word, Mr. Adams, is *live*. Dr. Franklin, surely you must see this for what it truly is - suicide! We must do anything we can to survive.

FRANKLIN disappointedly shakes his head.

RUTLEDGE

Ben?

FRANKLIN

Anything, Ned?

RUTLEDGE

How can one think of freedom in the face of annihilation?

FRANKLIN

Those who would sacrifice their liberty for security deserve neither.

Pause, as they let this sink in.

FRANKLIN

Washington must have the same information. Unfortunately we can give him nothing more than our prayers now. Joseph, you shouldn't have risked yourself for these numbers. The British are known to hang spies on the spot.

BASS

I am grateful for your concern, Dr. Franklin, but no spying was necessary. They seem to want everyone to know.

RUTLEDGE

The peacock spreads its feathers.

ADAMS

Exaggerated numbers meant to frighten us into submission.

FRANKLIN

And what of Staten Island?

BASS

All Tory from what I could see. Whether they were forced an oath of allegiance or that is where their sentiments lie, I know not. They seem quite content to give the British their every request. It appears to be the headquarters for the entire British fleet.

RUTLEDGE

Eat up, Mr. Adams. This could be your last meal.

FRANKLIN

Come now, gentlemen, we are not headed to the gallows.

RUTLEDGE

Don't be so sure, Dr. Franklin. It was not too long ago that you made the keen warning that if we don't all hang together we would most assuredly all hang separately. How prophetic you may turn out to be. Perhaps the hangman's noose awaits just us three.

FRANKLIN

Not just yet, Neddy. Joseph, what was their demeanor?

BASS

Very confident - to the point of arrogance.

RUTLEDGE

Understandable with 60,000 men at your back.

BASS

Interestingly enough, they all seem genuinely surprised and almost jealous to see such a high standard of living here in the colonies. They wonder why any one would want to rebel against such prosperity and opportunity.

ADAMS

Hah!

BASS

If I may say so, gentlemen, you may have one distinct advantage.

ADAMS

Which is...

BASS

They think they've won. They truly believe the war is all but over and that we have lost the will to fight. They are portraying us as cowards. I think their greatest fear may be that we run and run and run - never again to face them on the field of battle.

RUTLEDGE

And this is good because...

ADAMS

Because once again they underestimate our resolve. Lute was right - their stubborn British pride. They've always been at their most vulnerable when they are over-confident. Remember Boston?

RUTLEDGE

We should go back to Philadelphia immediately.

FRANKLIN

(thinking of it)

No. We shall meet in good faith as was our agreement. The road is clear?

BASS

You are expected and will be protected according to the agreed upon terms. Their hostage will remain under our local military keep in New Jersey until your safe return.

ADAMS

Is it a general or admiral at least?

BASS

I believe a captain.

ADAMS

Captain! Outrageous! He should at least have offered a Colonel!

RUTLEDGE

Not worth as much as you thought, Mr. Adams?

BASS

I'll prepare the carriages.

BASS exits.

FRANKLIN

Perhaps we can pluck a feather from that peacock and wear it in our cap.

ADAMS

How so?

FRANKLIN

They have offered an officer as hostage until our safe return. We could make a truly showy arrival by allowing their hostage to come with us.

The three men contemplate.

ADAMS

Bold.

FRANKLIN

Yes!

RUTLEDGE

Risky.

FRANKLIN

Yes. But it would show them what American diplomacy is all about.

ADAMS

I don't trust any of them. We are putting ourselves in their hands. If they take us prisoner, it will deal a deadly blow to our cause.

RUTLEDGE

(facetiously)

And how could Congress survive? Mr. Adams, as important as we may seem to ourselves, there will always be someone else to pick up the banner and cause. We wouldn't really be missed in Congress. Perhaps they'd all give a collective sigh of relief.

FRANKLIN

But just think - we would be elevated to martyr status giving our cause a renewed resolve.

ADAMS is becoming intrigued by the idea.

FRANKLIN

Our sacrifice would be known throughout the world. Statues of the three comrades representing all the values and differences that our colonies aspire to and hold dear, will be mounted in every capital, every city, every town. The names Adams, Rutledge, and Franklin will reverberate as every bell of freedom rings throughout the land.

ADAMS is mesmerized by the image. RUTLEDGE is quite amused.

FRANKLIN

You'd look good in marble, John.

RUTLEDGE

I'm almost sorry it won't happen. But surely Lord Howe knows the dangers of martyring the enemy.

ADAMS

Yes, I suppose.

RUTLEDGE

You sound disappointed, Mr. Adams. Perhaps we could leave you on Staten Island.

ADAMS

Good God!

RUTLEDGE

Yes! In fact, this could be our secret weapon. All we have to do is drop Mr. Adams in their laps, and watch them rapidly descend into madness and submission!

They stare intently at one another.

FRANKLIN

Here we go again. (calling) Lute?

ADAMS

At times, I feel quite sure I'm committeeing - that's committeeing, Franklin - a new *American* word - committeeing with a loyalist. Don't think we forgot your tactics that delayed the vote on the resolution for independence.

FRANKLIN

Don't you forget, John, that it was young Ned here who convinced the South Carolina delegation to eventually vote in favor of independence. Without him, we were sunk.

ADAMS

Oh, yes. Why was it again, Rutledge? For the sake of "unanimity?" You don't even believe in what we're doing, do you? I noticed three types in congress that day: those for independence - patriots such as Dr. Franklin and Mr. Jefferson; those against it - well-meaning, but misguided men such as Mr. Dickinson; and those represented by you - men of indifference. My God, is there anything more intolerable than apathy?

FRANKLIN

Please, John? That battle has been won. Why fight it over again?

ADAMS

The greatest problems facing this world are not caused by those who do injustice, but rather by those who sit by and allow it to happen! Men who are afraid. Men who delude themselves into equating opposition to war with peace. For God's sake man - believe in something! Make a stand. If nothing is worth fighting for, what's the point in living?

RUTLEDGE

You ask what I believe?

ADAMS

Yes! By God, avow your opinions and defend them with boldness and passion!

RUTLEDGE

Very well. You misjudge my passion, sir. I care more than you'll ever know. But I am fearful. For you see, I believe wars are won and lost on the field of battle. And all of our noble ideas will be extinguished when our last soldier falls. It doesn't matter if we're right and they're wrong. It doesn't matter how noble our cause is. What matters is that we can't win! That is why history has failed this concept thus far. No one has been able to win.

ADAMS

We will damnit!

RUTLEDGE

You'll never know how much I envy your resolve. It must be wonderfully reassuring to know that every thought, every decision you've ever made was the correct one. Not just for you but for generations unborn.

ADAMS tries to respond, but can't. LUTE enters.

LUTE

Damn! Did I miss another congressional moment?

RUTLEDGE exits.

LUTE

The battle is out there, gents. Don't forget it. Plenty of time for this other nonsense later.

LUTE moves to the bar and begins to polish a number of silver items in a large box. ADAMS is dejected.

FRANKLIN

What's wrong, John?

ADAMS

What if Rutledge is right? I never really doubted our eventual success.

FRANKLIN

Anything as well-intentioned as what we propose to create must be attained through great hardship. Nothing worth the getting is freely given.

ADAMS

At times I feel unequal to the task.

FRANKLIN

We are all unequal to the task. Yet the task remains. We haven't even reached the difficult part yet. Attempting to create a new government is going to be ten fold more difficult than facing the forces of England.

ADAMS

And if *that* fails?

FRANKLIN

Why would it fail?

ADAMS

All men may be created equal, but man creates his own inequalities. He is cursed with a short memory. Franklin, it scares me to think that no democracy has ever lasted long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.

FRANKLIN

All we can do is give it a chance.

ADAMS notices LUTE polishing a candlestick. He quickly crosses over to LUTE and picks up the other one.

FRANKLIN

What is it, John?

The SOLDIER enters.

SOLDIER

Mr. Adams...

ADAMS crosses over to him.

ADAMS

I thought you...

SOLDIER

No. I'll be headed out with the rest shortly. I just wanted you to know that. And to say thank you.

ADAMS

Thank *you*, son.

ADAMS nods to him as he heads out.

ADAMS

Francis?

The SOLDIER turns back.

ADAMS

Why?

SOLDIER

It's not so much looking myself in the mirror. I knew I would never look at the General again. And I want to.

ADAMS

Washington?

SOLDIER

I met him once. He spoke to me. When I think of him, I'm no longer afraid. He's the reason I signed on. And the reason I'm going back.

ADAMS

What was he like?

SOLDIER

I suppose... like a father.

They nod to one another. The SOLDIER exits. ADAMS watches him out the door and abounds with a renewed sense of purpose.

ADAMS

We're going to win this war, damnit!

FRANKLIN

Of course we are, John. Did you have any doubts?

ADAMS sits with FRANKLIN and shoos away a fly on the table.

FRANKLIN

How I wish I could be that fly. Bottle me up for a hundred - two hundred years and release me to see what we've created for future generations.

ADAMS

And what the future will do with all we've given them. What will history ever make of us, Franklin?

FRANKLIN

Historians relate not so much what is done, as what they believed was done. If we win, they'll write only the finest stories... some true, some not. They'll exaggerate, they'll create and they'll omit. As time marches on, and the foundation of what we started here begins to crack, then they'll see all of our faults, including some we never had. However, if we lose this war, well...

ADAMS

I know. We'll be vilified.

FRANKLIN

Worse yet - forgotten. Like all those throughout the world, throughout time who made a fruitless stand for freedom. Those whose names no one can remember.

ADAMS

Perhaps we're just ahead of our time.

FRANKLIN

One man can be ahead of his time. Not all of us. This *is* the time, John.

ADAMS

(smiling)

Yes. Yes it is.

FRANKLIN

My God, how glorious it is for America to be called by Providence to this post of honor. Imagine, John, every great philosopher antiquity has ever known would have wished to live right here and now.

ADAMS

(believing)

Yes! Yes!

RUTLEDGE enters.

RUTLEDGE

Gentleman, our business awaits.

LUTE enters and hands a piece of paper to ADAMS.

ADAMS

What is this?

LUTE

Your bill.

ADAMS

But we -

LUTE

Extra charges. Your meals, the beer...

ADAMS takes it and reads.

ADAMS

Log charge?

LUTE

You put logs on the fire.

ADAMS

Spittoon?

LUTE

You're a chewer - without good aim.

ADAMS

Excessive privy use?

LUTE

Your partner there. Spent a lot of time in the privy . Caused many a soldier to water my maples.

ADAMS

For the love of -

FRANKLIN

This is your new America, John.

ADAMS

Well, then America is going to need more lawyers!

ADAMS angrily fumbles with his coins to pay LUTE.

LUTE

I'm not sure how American we are - but it is New Jersey .

ADAMS

You could take a lesson from *Old* Jersey .

LUTE

I don't know where that is.

ADAMS

Neither do I.

The men begin to gather there things. BASS enters and carries out their bags. RUTLEDGE gets in some last minute primping in front of the mirror. ADAMS looks on.

RUTLEDGE

Lord Howe will receive a favorable impression from at least the southern part of this delegation.

RUTLEDGE exits.

FRANKLIN

Well, Lute, you have been a most hospitable host. We will try our damndest to see that you continue to serve Americans.

LUTE

I hope so. Maybe I can look forward to an early retirement.

FRANKLIN

Never retire, Lute. Keep working. That is where true happiness lies - in the satisfaction of work well done and the small pleasures that occur every day. So work. Work and live as if you were to live forever.

ADAMS

And pray as if you were to die tomorrow.

FRANKLIN ponders this interruptive addition, smiles at ADAMS, pulls out his book and writes.

FRANKLIN

"...and pray as if you were to die tomorrow."

ADAMS

Joseph - my horse!

ADAMS exits victoriously.

FRANKLIN

Wait. I think he stole that from Cotton Mather. Either way, I can't allow a Bostonian have the final word, can I?

FRANKLIN tries to think of something profound to say.

FRANKLIN

Let's see... ahh... hmmm... oh dear - thinker's block. Well then, I'll bid you adieu, Lute. Oh, I almost forgot...

He hands LUTE a piece of paper.

LUTE

What's this?

FRANKLIN

Some light reading material in case you ever get stuck in the privy. And thank you for your hospitality and insight.

FRANKLIN exits. LUTE crosses to the door.

LUTE

Be sure to give that British bastard an earful! He's in America now, even if it is only Staten Island!

LUTE waves and closes the door. He looks at the paper.

LUTE

(reading)

"The Morals of Chess by Benjamin Franklin."

Amused, LUTE posts FRANKLIN's morals next to his Tavern Rules. FRANKLIN re-enters.

FRANKLIN

"A long life may not be good enough, but a good life is long enough."

LUTE nods to FRANKLIN who bows and exits. LUTE resumes cleaning. He discovers the SOLDIER's fife resting on a stool near the hearth. He tries to play. The SOLDIER enters. LUTE hands him the fife. He plays "Welcome Here Again" as he exits.

Lights fade out.

Curtain.

EPILOGUE

(Following curtain calls)

FRANKLIN

Let us pray that someday God may grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set foot anywhere in the world and say, "this is my country."

ADAMS

Posterity! You will never know how much it cost my generation to preserve your freedom! I hope that you will make good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in Heaven that I ever took the pains to preserve it.