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The First Thanksgiving

**A Short Not-So-Accurate Historical Comedy
For Two Men / One Woman**

by J.C. Svec

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The First Thanksgiving

by J.C. Svec

Cast of Characters

MILES STANDISH; *a Pilgrim*

ELIZABETH; *his smart, young secretary*

WILLIAM BRADFORD; *Governor of the Colony*

The First Thanksgiving

by J.C. Svec

SCENE: Fall, 1621. The Interior of a rustic, common meeting room. A simple wood table and two simple, wood chairs are the only pieces of furniture.

AT RISE: A Pilgrim, MILES STANDISH, nervously paces the room. His secretary, ELIZABETH, sits in the chair at the table; a ledger and ink bottle sit before her. She waits for STANDISH to speak, dragging the back of the quill along her cheek. Silence.

MILES

Read it back, please.

(ELIZABETH reads from the ledger.)

ELIZABETH

Great leader and spiritual advisor Ousamequin. *(Pause)* How are you?

MILES

Continue.

ELIZABETH

That's all.

MILES

That's it? It feels as if we've been here forever. Really, that's it?

ELIZABETH

It took you a while to come up with the 'how are you' part.

MILES

Well, what else am I supposed to say? Thanks for letting us live through the summer.

ELIZABETH

You don't mean that.

MILES

I think this whole idea is ridiculous. This is just another one of Bradford's gimmicks to bring attention to himself.

ELIZABETH

The celebration?

MILES

Yes, the celebration. Or feast or day of thanks... whatever it is he's calling it these days.

ELIZABETH

The Reverend Brewster's calling it a Thanksgiving.

MILES

That blowhard could make a trek to the outbuilding cause for celebration as long as he can find a way to add a prayer at the beginning and end of the trip... with a sermon thrown in between some where.

ELIZABETH

That's not very fair and you know it.

MILES

Well I bet it was Brewster who planted this crazy idea in Bradford's head.

ELIZABETH

Does it matter whose idea it was? I for one think it's a splendid suggestion.

MILES

He's asking all of us to gather in one place, at one time, and break bread with three thousand Indians. There's not even three score of us. And we're asking them to bring the bulk of the 'bread' if you know what I mean. Who knows if they even know what bread is?

ELIZABETH

(Surprised) Miles Standish, you act as if they're savages.

(MILES gyrates an 'of course they are' gesture.)

MILES

I didn't travel two months and six thousand miles, suffer through a long cold winter and then starve most of the summer to attend some dinner party in the middle of nowhere only to end up with a hatchet in the back of my skull while I'm shelling walnuts... which I'm sick of, by the way.

ELIZABETH

Three.

MILES

Three what?

ELIZABETH

It was only three thousand miles.

MILES

Oh... well, it felt like six.

ELIZABETH

What about Squanto? Do you consider him a savage?

MILES

That hot-head? Yes, as a matter of fact, I do.

ELIZABETH

If his people meant us any harm at all would they have sent one of their best, and most respected members of the tribe to help us plant and farm.

MILES

Did you try working side-by-side with the guy? He's a lunatic.

ELIZABETH

If it wasn't for him, we may not have the harvest we're intending to celebrate.

MILES

Poke a hole into the ground, drop a seed in the hole, kick some dirt into the hole and then have one of his female minions dribble some water from a hollowed out squash on it. That's real cutting edge, agrarian technology if you ask me.

ELIZABETH

I think you're jealous.

MILES

Of what?

ELIZABETH

Of his... prowess.

MILES

If you're talking about what was dangling out from under that deerskin... trust me, nothing there to be jealous about.

ELIZABETH

(Insulted) Miles Standish.

MILES

I just don't like the guy.

ELIZABETH

(Grins) Apparently none of the men could figure it out.

(STANDISH notices the look on ELIZABETH'S face.)

MILES

(Points) What's that?

ELIZABETH

(Confused) What?

MILES

There... on your face. You're... smirking.

ELIZABETH

No I'm not.

MILES

Yes... yes, you are.

ELIZABETH

Oh, good gracious.

MILES

You like him.

ELIZABETH

As if.

MILES

You find him appealing, don't you?

ELIZABETH

He has certain, rugged qualities I find attractive, yes.

MILES

He has long hair and wears beads and feathers in it.

ELIZABETH

It's not just looks that make a man appealing to a woman.

MILES

Right, his prowess.

ELIZABETH

Miles Standish, I won't even dignify that comment with a response.

MILES

Dress 'em up any way you like, they are what they are.

ELIZABETH

Maybe they feel the same way about us.

MILES

What did you say?

ELIZABETH

Maybe they don't trust us.

MILES

That's ridiculous. What have we ever done to make them think that?

ELIZABETH

Besides laying false claim to their land?

MILES

Who said it was theirs? I didn't see a flag flying. I didn't see a piece of paper with their names on it.

ELIZABETH

They were here first. At the least, we're uninvited guests.

MILES

What would you have had us do? Send an announcement heralding our coming? Dear Natives... of wherever it is we're journeying to. Be arriving on your rock sometime in the upcoming winter, if we live through the voyage. Keep a bed warmer with coal heated for our arrival.

ELIZABETH

I just think we should be aware of how good to us the Wampanoags have been.

MILES

If you want to call not killing us en mass in our sleep being good to us...

ELIZABETH

See, there you go again.

MILES

Fine, fine... let's get back to the letter, shall we?

ELIZABETH

Let's.

MILES

Where were we again? Read back what we have.

ELIZABETH

Great leader and spiritual advisor Ousamequin. *(Pause)* How are you?

(Silence.)

MILES

You think it's too much?

ELIZABETH

Which part?

MILES

The great blah, blah, blah bit.

ELIZABETH

Maybe a little.

MILES

What's that name he goes by?

ELIZABETH

Massasoit?

MILES

That's it. What's that mean again?

ELIZABETH

Great leader.

MILES

There you go. We'll use that. A sign of... cultural understanding and recognition. Now, read it back.

ELIZABETH

You're kidding.

MILES

No, go ahead. I want to hear how it sounds.

ELIZABETH

Dear... Massasoit.

MILES

No, all of it.

ELIZABETH

Dear Massasoit. How are you?

(MILES ponders the salutation.)

MILES

Good. Respectful. Concerned. I like it. *(Pause)* In recognition of the, no, our first successful harvest in our new land...

(ELIZABETH looks up from the ledger.)

MILES, *Continued*

...in this new land... We are planning a feast to recognize the achievement of our joint collaboration and friendship. That's good, right?

ELIZABETH

Pretty good.

MILES

I'm not exactly sure how to word this next part.

ELIZABETH

What do you want to say?

MILES

What do I want to say? What do I want to say? (*Builds*) What I want to say is bring as much food as possible because we don't have enough and we're all freakin' hungry.

ELIZABETH

What if you alluded to their hunting skills? Prove what great providers they are.

MILES

That's good. Come up with something along those lines and read it back.

ELIZABETH

What?

MILES

(*Breaks*) Elizabeth, I can't do this. It's not right.

ELIZABETH

You don't have a choice. This was a direct request... no, order, from Governor Bradford.

MILES

Don't you see, he's just trying to put a positive spin on this whole disastrous year. He needs to make this cockeyed venture look successful to his drinking buddies and sponsors back home. He's up to no good. I'm sure of it. This... hoopla is just the beginning. And what next... a year from now, when he's invited all his cronies from the old World over, he'll want a bigger celebration and a bigger one yet the next year. Thanksgiving II, then Thanksgiving III... when do you think it will stop? No, I want no part of this.

(*A knock at the door startles STANDISH and ELIZABETH.*)

MILES, *Continued*

(*Defensive*) Who's there?

GOV. BRADFORD (*O.S.*)

Governor Bradford.

MILES

(*To ELIZABETH*) Keep writing.

ELIZABETH

Write what?

MILES

Anything. Fake it. Just look busy.

GOV. BRADFORD (*O.S.*)

Is there a problem in there Standish?

(*MILES composes himself.*)

MILES

Come in, Governor.

(*GOVERNOR WILLIAM BRADFORD enters the room. He is sullen as he roams the room.*)

MILES, *Continued*

We were just finishing up the letter to Ousamequin.

GOV. BRADFORD

Who?

ELIZABETH

Massasoit.

GOV. BRADFORD

Yes, day of thanks invitation... well, stop writing Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Governor?

GOV. BRADFORD

It's no longer necessary.

MILES

(*Feigns concern*) Is there something wrong, Governor?

GOV. BRADFORD

The bastards beat us to it. (*To ELIZABETH*) Excuse my language, my dear.

(*ELIZABETH nods her head.*)

MILES

Who beat us to what, Governor?

GOV. BRADFORD

(Angry) The Berkeley Hundred, that's who. And Thanksgiving is the what.

MILES

What is the Berkeley Hundred?

GOV. BRADFORD

The Berkeley Plantation. A group of thirty or so English brethren who had settled on the North Bank of the James River. Near some place called Charles Cittie.

MILES

That's in the Virginia Colony. I thought Jamestown was the only settlement down there.

GOV. BRADFORD

So much for news traveling fast. Here, read it.

(GOVERNOR BRADFORD hands a letter to STANDISH who in turns hands it to ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH

(Reading aloud) For immediate release. December 4, 1619. Richard Berkeley, founder and land owner of eight thousand acres of prime Virginia Colony land to be known as Berkeley Plantation, is proud to announce the celebration of their arrival in "The New World." In an opening ceremony speech, group spiritual leader Captain John Woodleaf recognized the day as the First Annual Thanksgiving Day. In his observation, he stated, 'we ordain that the day of our ship's arrival at the place assigned for our settlement in the land of Virginia shall be recognized yearly and perpetually kept holy as the day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God.'

(The room is silent.)

GOV. BRADFORD

We can't top that. They covered it all. Good angle, cause, wording... God.

MILES

What are you going to do about it?

GOV. BRADFORD

There's nothing we can do. It's all over.

(A moment.)

MILES

That should about wrap it up, then. Anyone want to get a mug of cider? It's on me.

ELIZABETH

Maybe we should have our own celebration.

MILES

(To ELIZABETH)

Didn't you hear the Governor, it's all over.

GOV. BRADFORD

Didn't you hear, Elizabeth? They've established a holy day called Thanksgiving.

ELIZABETH

Yes, celebrating their arrival.

GOV. BRADFORD

So?

ELIZABETH

We're celebrating a harvest. With natives.

GOV. BRADFORD

Go on.

(Behind Bradford's back, STANDISH does his best to dissuade ELIZABETH from continuing.)

ELIZABETH

We make it a week long event.

GOV. BRADFORD

I'm liking what I hear.

ELIZABETH

Add some games, some singing and dancing between meals.

GOV. BRADFORD

A whole week with the Wampanoag? Where do we put them? We barely have shelter for our own.

This is Not the End of the Play
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