

CAPTAIN MYLES STANDISH: A Drama linking Lancashire and America

SCENE ONE: Introducing Myles

Scene- St Laurence's Church 1860. St Laurence's Church would serve best, with the dais used for the wedding.

Cast: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as Narrator (*American professor/poet, fifties, slightly long unkempt hair, sideburns, possible beard*)

John Alden (*fair, blue-eyed, slight, dreamy, about twenty-two, farmer's clothes*),

Priscilla Mullins (*pre-Raphaelite maiden, about twenty, carries posy*),

Isaac Allerton, assistant governor and magistrate (*thirties/forties, puritan dress*)

Myles Standish (*thirties, short, roundish, red hair, bluff, roundhead armour- sword, musket*)

Any Extras i.e friends from Puritan Community (*puritan dress*)

Longfellow enters from passage door, moving to front of DL at foot of dais. He notices gathered audience

L'Fellow: Ah, good evening to you. I ask your patience if I pause to recognise my surroundings. Many and various have been the audiences receiving me during this third lecture tour of England. However my quandary is momentary. I know of Chorley and there, indeed, I see the Standish Pew. Further, I should commend your fine new aisles that now grace this ancient edifice. My countryman, Mr Winsor, has written of Mr Bromley's recent visit to this very church of St Laurence and his search for the origins of Myles Standish, the puritan captain. I hazard that a few of my hearers will be familiar with my "Courtship of Myles Standish", for some ten thousand copies were sold in London on its release in 1858. Tonight I intend to call upon thespian acquaintances to illustrate the essence of my simple but heroic tale in that very poem, which ends with a wedding in the nascent Pilgrim colony of New Plymouth in what is now Massachusetts, over two centuries ago, in 1621.

Longfellow steps back as if into shadows. Allerton, holding a bible, enters from rear chancel to UC. John Alden and Priscilla Mullins enter together from passage door and happily stand facing one another before the magistrate.

Allerton: The betrothal of our friends John Alden and Priscilla Mullins brings great joy and comfort to us all. This near two years of toil and privation, the new dug graves of half our fellows, the barren waste of seashore, shall now admit our new Garden of Eden with planted field, grove of pine, filled with the voice of God which flows over the ocean. Our new homes will rise and none more welcome than that which soon- to- be- wed John and Priscilla will cultivate. And so, to our plighting of troth.....

John and Priscilla join hands, Allerton opens bible and they mime and mouth a simple wedding service. Longfellow steps forward.

L'fellow: The service will not detain you long. A puritan wedding was not a sacrament, so the magistrate led a chaste ceremony. I have time to enlighten you about the story of Priscilla and John, but also of Myles Standish, who is very much part of their history. You see, after the 'Mayflower' brought some hundred souls to a new life, no single woman survived that harsh first winter, apart from this young maiden orphan Priscilla. Two men were desirous of wedding her - John Alden the Mayflower's cooper and carpenter and Myles Standish, the military captain of the expedition. Now Myles was a maker of war, not phrases, so he asked John, that fair, azured-eyed, Saxon with silver sound, to speak to Priscilla on his behalf. Was this wise? For Priscilla demanded of John, "Why do you not speak for yourself?" In loyalty to Myles, John would not. But then news came that Myles was slain in pursuit of native raiders. John took this as a sign from heaven and proposed successfully to the fair Priscilla..... Ah, I perceive the ceremony is drawing to a close.....

Longfellow retreats once more. Priscilla and John turn to face Allerton and bow their heads. Allerton holds forth-

Allerton: (*pronouncing*) So whom God hath joined this day, let no man put asunder! And now I have a prayer from our pastor : "Lord bless those new wedded this day. And spare thy remnant. From us do not take thy Holy Spirit. Thy cause, thy interest in this land still own. Thy gracious presence be our crown. Amen."

Allerton smiles, ushers the couple away and retires behind stage. John and Priscilla move DR and they take hands.

John: This day makes me so joyous and proud of you Priscilla, my Queen . I little thought that when I came to speak for Myles or later, when you made me hold wool for you to spin over countless hours, that a day such as today would ever rise.

Priscilla: Oh John why did you not speak straightway for yourself. It must be the fate of Woman long to be patient and silent.

John: Indeed, I came to your cabin as a friend but earnestly desired to ask you, Bertha the spinner to be my bride, my angel on earth.

Priscilla: I warrant you thought my touch as I passed or straightened the wool to be by chance. (*laughing*) But now all has unravelled well, has it not?

John: You must know I could not speak whilst Myles lived. His anger spilled over when I told him of your rejection of his suit. He cast blame on me, I am sure. Off he stomped, fierce to warring.

Priscilla: Then came report of his death, by ambush- some say a poisoned arrow, others a stray musket shot. Oh my husband- he was a rough and changing man. I know how my heart can safely trust in you all my days.

John: And my heart knows you will always furnish me good and never evil. But come, I have a surprise. The sun shines, the noon comes hot. You shall ride to our home. Raghorn, my white steer, from the allotment of cattle, has crimson cover and cushion for a saddle. I hear my friends bring it forth...

He leads towards DL, as shouts come from the passage. Longfellow steps forward, as the couple, become uncertain and step back somewhat.

L'Fellow: The commotion and calls were not by John Alden's friends. This was rather the hail of surprise as Myles Standish, the presumed dead captain, approached at pace. "Clad in doublet and hose and boots of Cordovan leather, strides with a martial air, Myles the puritan captain."

Myles, with much stomping and banging doors, strides in from passage to DL to stand arms akimbo.. Longfellow steps back in haste, Priscilla gasps and she and John retreat UR.

Priscilla: What is the ghost from the grave? (*she buries her head in John's shoulder*)

John: What! A spectral illusion, a phantom of the air! Soft, my dear, take heart.

Myles: No ghost here! I am Myles. Mine is the blood that leaped in the veins of Hugh of Standish and boils still in mine! The lifespring of the man who risked that perilous voyage with you, built our room, shared our labour.

John: Oh dear brother. We thought you were dead, slain on military expedition.

Myles: So I see. And I am an uninvited guest at your wedding- to the fair maiden that you failed to carry my case to. (*eases sword in belt/scabbard*)

Priscilla (*suddenly straightening and taking steps towards Myles*) Those words would never have wooed me Captain. You would not trouble to speak yourself and I could never grant your suit. There is no point to your anger, which ill becomes you.

John: I told you true before you marched so angrily off on your expedition. I spoke vehement and sincere for your suit. 'Twas to no avail. Priscilla is young but she has her own mind. I never advanced my own full flood of feeling until we heard from three diverse reports that you were killed.

Myles turns angrily away, towards the audience, as though seeking their advice- does he strike or give way?

Priscilla: Do not be angry or sombre and sorrowful. Come. Come Myles, speak with old friends.

Myles turns. John comes forward gingerly a step or so. Myles moves to Priscilla who stands tall, gently smiling but resolute with a half-extended hand. Myles stops short, does not take the hand but salutes Priscilla

Myles: I wish you joy of your wedding and heartily laud your husband. (*bows, steps back, still sombre*)

John (*coming to Priscilla's side*) Let all be forgotten, all save our old dear friendship.

Myles:*(shoulders slumping)* Aargh! Forgive me. I have been angry and hurt. Too long I cherished this contrary feeling. I have been cruel and hard.

John: Never so much .*(pause)* Now I see again Myles Standish, the friend of John Alden

The pair advance and embrace Myles. They all stand and face the audience.

Myles: You must serve yourselves now. Now thank God anger and division are ended. Moreover, no man can gather cherries in Kent at the season of Christmas.

Priscilla and John *(laughing)* Cherries at.....? That's nonsense!

The trio freeze. Longfellow steps forward.

L'Fellow: It's not nonsense. It's an old English aphorism. I wrote it.

Longfellow goes to dais, takes Myles by the hand and leads him DL. Priscilla and John walk off together.

L'fellow: As I wrote of these events two hundred years previous, I found you a fascinating character but a mysterious and troublesome one. You displayed great forgiveness towards your friends but you were quick to temper. " A little chimney soon fired", I heard. So sensitive and yet swift to recant.

Myles: 'Tis true. I am oft in error but early to see it. Mind you, I would rather break into an enemy encampment than come to a wedding to which I have not been invited. Tell me, are you and others to write more of me?

L'Fellow: Oh indeed. Your exploits will be manifold. Mr Winsor already writes of you in America, your portrait is painted and one day, people in England will know more of you. However, I am not sure how they will judge you. Some will speak of a builder of a new land, others of a colonialist aggressor against native peoples.

Myles: I did my duty as I saw it at the bidding of Governors Carver and Bradford.

L'Fellow: Well, History will judge. Another question confounded me- where were you born? Whose family claims you?

Myles: I was gentleman born in Lancashire, heir to a great estate, which was surreptuously detained from me.

L'Fellow: How can we ascertain this?

Myles: You keep looking! I must be away. There are reports of trouble from two of the tribes outside Plymouth. Talk tires me, action suits. Farewell for now. God speed.

Myles strides out calling for his militia and banging about. Longfellow moves DC

L'Fellow: A fascinating man! You know Myles married someone else soon and had seven children Priscilla and John had ten! Your hearts will be gladdened when I tell you Myles son married an Alden and the families went to the new settlement of Duxbury together. Myles lived another thirty five years or so and being the diverse man he was, served his people handsomely but also aroused much criticism.

Now, I conceive that is enough for the present. I think I have told you something of Myles. Well, very well, I did conflate three years events into one and used some literary licence but you will find that out for yourselves, won't you? Some day, in the future, Chorley will have a thorough and reasonable examination of Myles' character and career and you will search out all that can be known of him.

I have not told you. I myself am a descendant of the Alden and Mullins families. Yes, through the Warrens! As for Myles Standish, I really would like to know where and which family he came from -and how his folk judge his record. Good night.

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Further Drama: (3 15-20 minutes scenes performed summer 2020 at various venues)

1. Myles meets John Robinson c.1609. Covers his background and now engagement with Pilgrims
2. Myles moves to Duxbury in 1630- Covers his experience is establishing New Plymouth- two sides to character and record
3. Myles Discusses and writes will, 1655- 4 actors observe him and then present different claims for his birthplace and origins. Agree on what is known and common.