



*Script for Episode 1*

YOUNG BEN FRANKLIN - Episode 1

OLD BEN

This is not a story about an old man in bifocals at the center of a revolution. But rather a tale of mystery featuring a boy who had no idea he'd one day wind up with his face on the hundred dollar bill. As I recall, the adventure began that day on the docks. The ship had just pulled into Boston Harbor. A ship containing something my friends and I needed. And as always, I had a plan...

101-1 EXT. BOSTON HARBOR. DAY.

The CRY OF SEAGULLS is drowned out by the CHEERS of a crowd waiting expectantly as a ship arrives in Boston Harbor in the late summer of 1720.

CAPTAIN & CREW

Heave to! Strike sails! Drop anchor! Mind the gangway!

Three scruffy boys are hidden behind a stack of barrels on the wharf. They listen as their leader, BEN FRANKLIN, barely fourteen but wise beyond his years, delivers commands.

BEN

Boys, if I don't make it back from this mission...here's what I want on my tombstone. "An egg today is better than a hen tomorrow."

JOHN

What does that even mean?

NED

Aren't you just trying to rob the ship?

BEN

Never you mind. You know what to do. Keep the crew and the crowd occupied while I get onboard the ship. John, got your hornpipe?

JOHN COLLINS, Ben's best friend, with courage and smarts that are almost a match for Ben's, is quick to respond.

JOHN  
Got it, Ben.

BEN  
And you, Ned? Got your drum?

NED MOFFITT, more brawn than brains, proudly answers.

NED  
And my sticks!

BEN  
Sam, got your...?  
(pauses)  
Holy Neptune, Sam, where's your  
hat?!

SAM HAWKINS, the youngest of the boys, is apologetic.

SAM  
Forgot, sorry, Ben.

BEN  
Forgot the hat? The hat's crucial!  
Here, take mine!

Ben whips off his hat and sticks it on Sam's head.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Ready, lads?

SAM  
Ready!

JOHN  
Ben, supposing they do catch you?

BEN  
(laughs)  
Catch me? Fat chance.

SAM  
(nervously)  
Ben?

BEN  
(impatient to get started)  
What now Sam?

SAM  
We're not a real band. We're  
terrible at our instruments!

BEN

Play!

SAM

Playing!

The HORNPIPE and the DRUM begin to play. A crowd quickly gathers around the performers as Sam passes the hat.

OLD BEN

It was a brilliant plan if I say so myself. Slip onboard the ship, reach the cargo hold, find the copper bars from Peru. It wasn't stealing; it was borrowing for the sake of science. Copper is an excellent conductor of electricity as everyone knows, and I had important experiments to perform. There was no way it could go wrong.

CREWMAN

Hey, what are you doing?!

BEN

Uh oh! Gotta run.

SHIP'S BOSUN

Stop that boy!

CREW MEMBER

Don't let him get away!

Ben gives the crew a merry chase, scrambling across the deck.

BEN

Watch out. Coming through!

CREW MEMBER

Grab him! Now!

BEN

Can't catch me! Here, this barrel ought to slow you down.

CREW MEMBER

Look out - the barrel!

BEN

Up to the rigging!

SHIP'S BOSUN

He's swinging! Up there!

Ben knocks barrels and ballast in his wake to block their path, then swings above them on the rigging, just out of reach. The Ship's Bosun shouts at him in frustration.

SHIP'S BOSUN (CONT'D)  
He's slippery as a bleedin' eel!

CREW MEMBER  
We got him now! Nowhere to run!

BEN  
Uh no. You've got me cornered -  
what shall I do?

Ben's three friends on the wharf shout encouragement.

JOHN, NED, SAM  
Jump, Ben! Abandon ship! Hurry!

Ben is almost cornered when he leaps from the railing and lands with a THUD on the pier, as the Ship's Bosun and the crew scramble down the gangway in hot pursuit.

SHIP'S BOSUN  
He's on the pier. Get him!

OLD BEN  
Of course, even the best laid plan  
has its problems. Good thing I had  
an alternative, just in case.

Ben reaches for something he's kept hidden under a tarp, in case of an emergency like this one.

SHIP'S BOSUN  
What's he got there?!

CREW MEMBER  
It's a giant bloody kite! He's  
gonna fly a kite, is he? The cheek  
of that lad!

SHIP'S BOSUN  
Let me at him; he's mine!

Suddenly the MUSIC SOARS and the kite lifts into the air with Ben holding on tight. His pursuers stop and stare upward.

SHIP'S BOSUN (CONT'D)  
What in the name of Lord Nelson...?

BEN  
Time...to...fly.....

CREW MEMBER

He ain't no eel. He's a bloomin'  
bird!

His three friends shout with delight.

JOHN, NED, SAM

Fly, Ben! Fly! Cockle-doodle-do!

OLD BEN

It was simply a matter of lift  
versus drag. The kite caught the  
wind, the wind lifted me off the  
pier and it was clear sailing  
across the river to dry land.  
Brilliant.

The MUSIC SOARS EVEN HIGHER, as the kite carries Ben across  
the Charles River, his feet barely skimming the water.

OLD BEN (CONT'D)

If only the wind hadn't stopped.

BEN

Oh dear...

MAIN THEME.

OLD BEN

You know me as Benjamin Franklin,  
statesman, inventor, founding  
father, but back in 1720, when I  
was fourteen years of age, I was  
just plain Ben. Printing  
apprentice, budding adventurer,  
dreamer... 'Course even then, I had  
a knack for getting into trouble  
with the powers that be...

101-2 INT. BOSTON COURT ROOM. DAY.

The courtroom is crowded with spectators as the Bailiff calls  
for order.

BAILIFF

Hear ye! Hear ye! The court will  
come to order. The Honorable  
Charles Dudley Warren presiding!

JUDGE WARREN

What do we have here, Constable?  
Looks like a drowned rat to me.

The Constable steps forward with Ben still dripping wet.

CONSTABLE

Beg pardon, Your Honor, the boy's name is Benjamin...Frankler.

BEN

Franklin.

CONSTABLE

Franklin. We fished him out of the river we did. The aforementioned person was fleeing the scene of an attempted robbery he was.

BEN

That's not true.

JUDGE WARREN

Silence, Benjamin.

BEN

Ben.

JUDGE WARREN

Took a runner, did he?

CONSTABLE

You might say he took flyer, Your Honor. By means of a kite.

The COURTROOM CROWD bursts out laughing and booing.

JUDGE WARREN

Quiet! A kite you say?

BEN

I was testing a theory I saw in a book.

JUDGE WARREN

What book?

BEN

It was a drawing by my personal hero, Leonardo Da Vinci. It showed the possibility that a man can fly. I tried it with my kite and it worked...

The COURTROOM CROWD roars its approval. Among the spectators are John, Ned and Sam.

SAM

It looks bad for Ben.

JOHN

Never you mind about Ben, Sam.  
He'll find a way. He always does.

ELIZA BOYD, a girl of eleven, sits behind them and overhears.

ELIZA

Excuse me, do you know the accused?

NED

His name's Ben.

SAM

Ben Franklin.

ELIZA

He's a friend of yours?

JOHN

We'd follow Ben Franklin to the top  
of Bunker Hill and back. Now shush,  
missy. We need to pay attention.

JUDGE WARREN

(bangs his gavel)

Quiet, I say. Now do not try my  
patience, lad. Was it the wind or  
was it the copper bar in your  
pocket that weighed you down?

The COURTROOM CROWD bursts out laughing.

BEN

I was...merely retrieving that bar  
of copper for an associate who paid  
for it fair and square.

JUDGE WARREN

And may the court have the name of  
this alleged "associate"?

BEN

His name is Mr. Veracity Quince.

The COURTROOM CROWD reacts to this name. Eliza once against  
leans forward and whispers urgently to the three friends.

ELIZA

Does your friend really know  
Veracity Quince?

NED

He said he did, didn't he?

SAM

Yeah, Ben don't lie.

NED

Not our Ben.

JOHN

Well, not much anyway.

He points his gavel at Ben.

JUDGE WARREN

We'll have none of your Veracity Quince talk in my courtroom. The man is a charlatan and a thorn in the side of honest law enforcement. I've heard The Royal Governor, Archibald Templeton, say so himself.

BEN

Beg pardon, Your Honor, but you do him wrong.

(clears throat)

Mr. Veracity Quince is a seeker after truth, a puzzle solver extraordinaire, a consulting detective who does the work that the watchmen and constables of Boston ought to do when they're not too busy slurping clam chowder and guzzling ale.

The COURTROOM CROWD laughs and cheers.

JUDGE WARREN

You mind your tongue. If this Veracity Quince is such a wonder, why isn't he here to defend his "associate"? Why is it no one's seen his face or even knows his address? If he's got nothing to hide, why all the secrecy?

BEN

Mr. Quince likes to say, "Three can keep a secret if two of them are dead."

The COURTROOM CROWD again roars its approval. The Judge senses the mood of the crowd has swung in Ben's favor.

JUDGE WARREN

Now you hear me, boy, you have a date with the stocks in Boston Common, unless someone will vouch for you?

(almost daring the crowd)

Well? Is there no one who will stand up for this impious imp?

JAMES FRANKLIN, a grim young man of twenty-one, still wearing his printer's apron stained with ink, stands up.

JAMES

I will, Your Honor.

JUDGE WARREN

And who may you be?

JAMES

James Franklin. His brother, heaven help me.

The crowd roars in response.

101-3 INT. BEN'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Ben sleeps in his narrow bed above his brother's print shop.

OLD BEN

It was such a nice dream.

The MUSIC SOARS as it did when he was flying his kite but this time with an even more magical, dreamlike quality

OLD BEN (CONT'D)

I was flying over Boston with my kite. The whole town at my feet. All those Harvard lads looking up at me. Me! Ben Franklin, a nobody, a nothing; but I could fly and they were stuck on the ground. Everyone was shouting my name..."

CROWD

Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben!

Suddenly his brother JAMES'S VOICE shouts over his.

JAMES

Ben! Ben! Ben! Ben Franklin, get your lazy bones out of bed! It's late!

The MUSIC STOPS abruptly as we hear the SOUND OF RAPID FOOTSTEPS on the stairs.

INT. PRINT SHOP. DAY.

Ben rushes downstairs and into his brother's print shop.

BEN  
Sorry, James.

JAMES  
I should say you were. A sorry excuse for an apprentice, much less a brother. Ought to send you back to father's candle shop.

BEN  
Please don't. I'm not cut out for making candles, James.

JAMES  
You burn enough of 'em at both ends though, don't you? Late to bed, late to rise - that's you, Ben Franklin.

BEN  
It's just that I've got these dreams, Jim.

JAMES  
It's James to you and don't you forget it. Don't go thinking blood is thicker than ale cause it ain't.

BEN  
Yes, James.

JAMES  
And let me say this about dreams - don't!

BEN  
What, don't dream?

JAMES  
That's right. Look at me. I started out with just a hand press and a handful of letter types.  
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Learned my trade with the Boston Gazette and here I am, just turned twenty-one, owner and publisher of the New-England Courant, the most fearless broadside in the Royal Province of Massachusetts Bay. I do a day's work, I eat a bit of beef, drink a tankard of ale and sleep like a babe in a cradle.

BEN

What, and never dream? Not of sailing to China? Or writing a book, not just reading one? Or being famous and everyone wants your opinion and admires you tremendously? You never dream such things?

JAMES

Never. And my advice to you is more beef and less books.

BEN

(can't help himself)  
Fewer.

JAMES

What's that?

BEN

Fewer books. Fewer means how many. Less means how much.

JAMES

You don't say? Well, since you know so much about the English language, how come you don't get to work and print some of it - or do you think this bloody newspaper prints its bloody self?!

BEN

(under his breath)  
If only.

JAMES

I heard that.

He pokes his ink-stained finger in Ben's chest.

BEN

Ow...let go my ear!

JAMES

I'll have none of your lip, mister.  
You belong to me until you turn  
twenty-one - that's seven long  
years and don't you forget it!

BEN

(obedient but not defeated)  
Yes, James.

JAMES

Now get to work.

James leaves the shop, slamming the door behind him. Ben goes to work, setting type for the day's edition of his brother's fledgling newspaper.

OLD BEN

Seven years. Seven years of setting  
type. Rolling ink. Turning the  
screw on the hand press. Turning  
out a newspaper. Selling it on the  
street. Never getting the ink off  
my hands. Was that to be my future?

The door opens again and ELIZA'S VOICE calls to him.

ELIZA

You really know Veracity Quince?

Ben stops his work and turns to see the same young girl who was in the courtroom when he was before Judge Warren.

BEN

Who are you and what do you want?

ELIZA

My name is Eliza Boyd. I'd shake  
your hand if it wasn't...covered in  
ink.

BEN

I remember you. You were sitting in  
the courtroom with John, Ned and  
Sam.

ELIZA

Well, do you or don't you?

BEN

Do I or don't I what?

ELIZA

Know Veracity Quince?

BEN  
And supposing I do, Mistress Boyd?

ELIZA  
I need his help. I've run away and  
if they catch me it's jail or  
worse.

101-4 INT. FRANKLIN KITCHEN. DAY.

Ben watches Eliza scarf down a meal that could feed a horse.

BEN  
How long since you've eaten?

ELIZA  
(in between bites)  
Since I ran away.

BEN  
And that was...?

ELIZA  
Last night. More jam please.

Ben passes the jam pot.

BEN  
How old are you? Ten?

ELIZA  
Eleven. How old are you?

BEN  
I'm asking the questions here. So  
tell me your story, Eliza Boyd.

ELIZA  
I mean to tell it to Mr. Quince.

BEN  
First you tell me, and if I think  
it's worth his valuable time, I may  
give you a reference.

ELIZA  
Very well. I am - that is, I was -  
a housemaid indentured to the  
family of Charles Fleming.

BEN

(impressed)

What, Charles Fleming who owns half the ships in Boston Harbor?

ELIZA

The *late* Master Charles Fleming. He went to glory last week, may the Lord rest his soul. A kind man he was. But his widow, that's another story. Mistress is tight with a purse and always watching to see if so much as a thimble goes missing.

BEN

Yes, yes, we all have our troubles. Get to the point. Why did you run away?

ELIZA

Just after the funeral, a silver teapot went missing. As I was the last one to polish it, Mistress accused me of stealing it. I swore my innocence but she wouldn't believe me and promised to have me arrested. That's when I ran. I was hiding in the courtroom yesterday, thinking it was the last place anybody would look for a runaway.

BEN

(smiles)

You're pretty smart for such a little girl.

ELIZA

I'm as smart as any boy, if not smarter. I've taught myself to read and write. Read every book in Mr. Fleming's library cover to cover. And what I want to know is if you was making it up or if you really do know the one man who can prove my innocence, the famous Mr. Veracity Quince?

BEN

'Course I know him. Like I told the judge, I'm his junior associate.

ELIZA  
(eyes him dubiously)  
When you've not got printer's ink  
on your fingers?

BEN  
I only work in the shop to help my  
brother James, out of the kindness  
of my heart.

ELIZA  
Do tell...

BEN  
My real calling is in the puzzle-  
solving line.

ELIZA  
Then you'll contact Mr. Quince and  
ask him to help me?

She senses Ben's hesitation.

BEN  
Ummm...

ELIZA  
You don't believe my story, do you?  
Or maybe you're just a boastful boy  
and don't know the legendary Mr.  
Quince after all.

BEN  
Listen, missy, you don't contact  
Veracity Quince. He contacts you.

ELIZA  
Then how will he know I need his  
help?

BEN  
Veracity Quince knows everything  
because he's Veracity Quince. He's  
everywhere and nowhere. Nothing and  
nobody in Boston escapes him, not  
even a lowly housemaid.

ELIZA  
Or a lowly printshop apprentice?

BEN

(sighs)

Take some more biscuits and stay out of sight in the Old South Church. The next edition of the New England Courant will be on the street within the hour. Look for a message from Mr. Quince.

ELIZA

A message from Mr. Quince in the newspaper. Got it!

OLD BEN

Little did I know that Veracity Quince had made himself a powerful enemy. But I would soon find out.

CUT TO:

101-5 INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION. FOYER. DAY.

LANE, the Governor's snooty butler, opens the door.

LANE

Yes, may I help you?

JUDGE WARREN

Be so good as to tell the Governor that Judge Warren is here on pressing business.

LANE

And may I enquire the nature of that business?

The Judge is not used to getting this treatment and releases all his pent-up anger and frustration.

JUDGE WARREN

Tell him it's about Veracity Quince. Tell him the man's a menace to society. The common citizen thinks this Quince fellow can help solve anything - from a lost cat to a missing person. They don't trust their own magistrate and his duly appointed constables and watchmen to do the job. Something must be done to restore public confidence! Tell him that!

GOVERNOR ARCHIBALD TEMPLETON, as silky-smooth and polished as his embroidered slippers, appears.

GOVERNOR

No need, my dear Judge, since they can hear you all the way to Nova Scotia.

The Judge is instantly contrite.

JUDGE WARREN

Beg pardon, sir. I mean, Governor. I mean, Your Lordship.

GOVERNOR

I don't have a title yet but all in good time, as the cat said to the canary. We'll have tea in the library. Lane?

LANE

As you wish, sir.

The Governor leads the Judge into his library.

JUDGE WARREN

A fine house, sir. A very fine house.

GOVERNOR

I suppose so. But His Majesty didn't send me to this godforsaken colony to sip tea while some scapegrace thumbs his nose at the King's Justice. A government is like a house. Allow one tiny crack in the foundation and before you know it, the whole thing comes crashing down.

JUDGE WARREN

I couldn't agree more. But to find this man Quince requires more resources, more manpower, more...

GOVERNOR

(takes a pinch of snuff)  
More money? Rest assured, you will have all you need. Just bring me Veracity Quince - in chains if you can. Or in a coffin, if you must. Ah, here's our tea.

CUT TO:

101-6 INT. PRINT SHOP. DAY.

Ben is hard at work at the printing press, racing against a deadline to turn out the newspaper. He sets the type, letter by letter, reading aloud as he goes along.

BEN

"To a young woman falsely accused of theft. I will prove your innocence by finding the guilty party. Fear not, the truth will out. Yours faithfully, Veracity Quince."

He steps back and admires his handiwork.

OLD BEN

It was one of my best efforts, if I say so myself. It was sure to kick over the hornet's nest. Now all I had to do was start printing.

Suddenly, ELIZA re-appears beside him.

ELIZA

Can I be of help, Mr. Franklin?

BEN

Eliza!

ELIZA

Or should I say, Mr. Quince?

END OF EPISODE