

Patience Boston

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(FADE LIGHTS DOWN. A frozen WIND whips up, bringing the strains of a ROUGH CHRISTMAS CAROL, either sung a capella or played on fiddle, then FADING to sounds of winter's end--CANADA GEESE FLYING IN.)

INT. JAIL — LATE WINTER--LATE AFTERNOON

(DIM LANTERN LIGHT. Patience wears her new dress and shoes, sleeps against the chimney wrapped in her new blanket. A KNOCK on the shutter.)

MOODY (O.S.)

(muffled)

Miss Boston?

(KNOCKS AGAIN)

I'm sorry to be so late.

(Patience sheds the blanket, smooths her dress and sweeps her hair out of her face. She opens the shutter.)

MOODY (O.S.) (Continued)

There. Much delayed, I'm afraid. I had a funeral to preach. Pray I've not worried you.

PATIENCE

I'm hardly aware of the hour, Parson.

MOODY (O.S.)

March winds coming down. Who would think Easter was just around the corner? Might I offer a verse or two for moral sustenance? Brief though it need-- Barny? Barny, no. Stay. Good horse. Oats, Barny! Oats here! Right! Right! Damn Damn Damnable Beast!

(softly)

Forgive me. Lord, forgive me.

(Patience O.S. KNOCKING on the residence door.)

Is someone about? Hello?

PATIENCE

(calling out)

They've gone to Tavern, Parson.

MOODY (O.S.)

(muttering)

Oh, trying day. Endless, bitter, trying--

(at the window)

I am sorry, Miss Boston, my horse has absconded with my Bible.

PATIENCE

I have a Bible here.

MOODY (O.S.)

Oh, thank you. No, I'm afraid I must start walking before it gets darker--

PATIENCE

(reciting from memory)

"My mother's children were angry with me."

MOODY (O.S.)

You have siblings--?

PATIENCE

"They made me the keeper of the vineyards."

MOODY (O.S.)

(at the window)

"Of the vineyards." Of course. "But mine own vineyard have I not kept." Indeed. Preached it and prayed upon it. Many times.

PATIENCE

A second key hangs inside their pantry.

MOODY (O.S.)

Jail key.

PATIENCE

That my chimney might warm you. Before setting out.

MOODY (O.S.)

Oh, perhaps a moment-- A prayer before I go--would be good for us both.

(Patience moves the chair to the chimney, then grooms herself. A KNOCK.)

MOODY (Continued)

Approaching.

(Moody enters with a limp.)

Wrenched the ankle a bit, I'm afraid.

PATIENCE

Barny.

MOODY

I seem to have traded for a most inconsiderate mount. Threw me on the bridge on my way over. I suspect he planned to pitch me into the river and be done with me once and for all.

PATIENCE

He didn't leave you there.

MOODY

No. I'd wager he desired a second chance to get it right.

(Patience smiles.)

PATIENCE

You should pack it in snow.

MOODY

It's quite frozen as is.

PATIENCE

Here. Against the brick. I sleep here most nights.

*(Moody sits in the chair. Wrapped in her blanket,
Patience sits on the floor at his feet.)*

MOODY

My father chides me for my idle whip: "An obedient horse is a loving horse."

PATIENCE

Perhaps you'll trade for a horse that does not require a whip.

MOODY

It's not the horse, I've been told, but the rider.

PATIENCE

Your father.

MOODY

Says I was made for ships. Not skiffs, mind you, as I've managed to capsize so many. We wonder how I survive.

PATIENCE

I'm sorry to find you under such a gloom.

MOODY

And my bellyaching. Pray, forgive me. It's a winter affliction, these cold dark days.

PATIENCE

Days are growing longer now. And brighter.

MOODY

I trust you're taking extra nourishment--? As we discussed yesterday, you need sustenance for two.

PATIENCE

At breakfast Mrs Moulton brought me hens' eggs--and a lobster stew for supper. Would you share my stew?

MOODY

I preached a funeral this morning--No. Thank you--a child not yet five years.

PATIENCE

They're little monsters, to be sure, but the meat is tender and sweet.

(to Moody's look)

Lobsters.

MOODY

Of course. Yes. No, thank you. My wife will have my supper cooling at home.

PATIENCE

Your Lucy.

MOODY

The boy's mother was taken by the same fever only three weeks ago. I prayed that the young father would come to understand that his suffering was part of God's plan. His eyes did not shut once during my prayer.

PATIENCE

Nor did yours, it would seem.

MOODY

Mm. So it would.

PATIENCE

What was his sin that God cursed him so?

MOODY

No, no. As we've discussed, God works only through love. His reasons cannot be known.

PATIENCE

Well, I'm sure that God heard your words and gave the father a measure of comfort.

MOODY

I am well practiced in reciting the words.

PATIENCE

Parson. You have restored my faith and given me such happiness.

MOODY

That is--thank you--kind of you to say, but I am no Cotton Mather. Nor am I my father, much as he'd wish it so.

PATIENCE

Truly. No one has ever made me happier.

MOODY

As Jesus promised, true happiness is only possible through the Father.

PATIENCE

How happy you must be.

MOODY

Oh, quite. Quite. Quite enough, though I dare confess that clerking was more agreeable to my nature, when I'd greet my neighbors, stamp their papers, and never feel compelled to gamble--to feel responsible for their eternal souls. Oh, Joseph. Again seeking pity. Forgive me, I'm afraid my happiness is tempered by the loss of one so young.

(O.S. a HORSE WHINNIES.)

MOODY (Continued)

Wonder of wonders, the prodigal steed returned! Miss Boston, I do thank you for lightening my load this dark day. But if you'll excuse me--

(He exits.)

Barny. Come, boy. Let's get home and put something in our stomachs-- Barny? Oh, Barny, no! Barny! Petulant, incorrigible rascal!

(The horse gallops off. Moody enters again.)

MOODY (Continued)

A considerate animal after all. He came back to say good-bye.

PATIENCE

"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth...where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon."

MOODY

Solomon. Again, well placed.

PATIENCE

They keep rum in their cupboard. To lift your spirits?

MOODY

(studies her)

I have never known an Indian. I find it strange.

PATIENCE

I am strange.

MOODY

Strange, to have lived amongst you. All my life. And never call one friend.

PATIENCE

Myself, I've known only one or two.

MOODY

Indians?

PATIENCE

Servants. Vagrants. Cell-mates. I do know your people. Quite well.

MOODY

Your opinion of us must not be high.

PATIENCE

My opinion?

MOODY

Of my people.

PATIENCE

I have no opinions, Mr. Moody. I know that you stand with my Lord Jesus, and I've never had a greater love for anyone.

MOODY

Jesus. Yes.

PATIENCE

I did love my mother, I think, but I've since lost sight of her, except the night she died.

(touching her bracelet)

She caught the smallpox and was laid by the fire, and I made my way to her on the hearth, though I was admonished not to, and when I touched the droplets on her forehead, her face filled with light, and she sneezed. I saw the spirit jump out of her in a mist and spin up above the flames, then fly away with the sparks to heaven. Then she was still.

(She notices that Moody has dozed off.)

Your Lucy. May I ask, is she--

MOODY

(waking)

Yes!

PATIENCE

Your father says she is a patient wife. Your Lucy.

MOODY

Lucy. Oh, more than patient. Tolerant, I would say. Exceedingly tolerant of my absences, my absentmindedness...

PATIENCE

She makes you a good partner then.

MOODY

Oh yes. Industrious, thrifty--a seasoned negotiator in all matters. An inventive cook and seamstress. Attentive mother to our children. At times she seems to delight in their company.

PATIENCE

And yours?

MOODY

My company? She-- tolerates.

(good humored)

We enjoy, if I may say, an agreeable marriage, though she'd be the first to attest to my imperfections.

PATIENCE

My husband seemed to delight in mine.

MOODY

Your company?

PATIENCE

Imperfections. Fool. Till I took it out of him.

MOODY

In what way?

PATIENCE

(growing agitated)
Fought him, opposed him, abused him in my drink.

MOODY

Forgive me. In what way did--

PATIENCE

Betrayed him.

MOODY

In what way did he delight-- in you? Not in intimate terms, of course.

PATIENCE

Gazing.

MOODY

Gazing.

PATIENCE

Stupidly.

MOODY

At you?

PATIENCE

At nothing.

MOODY

At you. Not nothing. Your beauty. Your--

(Patience beats on herself. Moody gets to his feet.)

MOODY (Continued)

I apologize, I don't know what-- I meant only to say that your husband--as you suggested--
must have taken great delight. In you.

PATIENCE

He did not know me!

MOODY

How could he not? He was your husband.

PATIENCE

He knew nothing of me! Not as you do. You do. You do--

MOODY

I do not, I am sorry, Miss Boston...though what little I do know does not comport with the
darkness you hold over yourself.

PATIENCE

I am wretched and demonic, as you do know!

MOODY

I know you confessed to be so, yet that is not how I find you.

(She beats on herself.)

MOODY (Continued)

No. No, pray. Your husband could not have gazed if he found you wretched.

PATIENCE

He learned. I taught him! I taught him! I taught him!

MOODY

Shh. Shh. Shh...

(Her agitation subsides.)

MOODY (Continued)

I do myself recall the condition of gazing...when one is all but helpless to look away.

PATIENCE

Your Lucy?

MOODY

What? No. Though she is handsome and strong. No, but--

(He will open the window shutter)

When I was younger and, oh, not so freighted down with all this. And that.

PATIENCE

Who was it, if not your Lucy?

MOODY

Oh, dear, and now it's dark, and I should start walking.

PATIENCE

Then it can't get darker. Wait for the moon.

MOODY

If the moon ever shows. The sky so heavy tonight.

(Patience closes the shutter.)

PATIENCE

Pray, Parson, what was she like?

MOODY

Oh, a girl, just a--

(returning to his chair)

Well, a cousin, actually. As a child, my constant companion. But inevitably, of course, a young lady, and I a young man returned from Harvard after three years away and-- I did gaze. Speechless, degraded in divinity and a stammering, gazing fool. Like your husband, I suppose, though I never was hers. And so. . . And so the years gather up and-- here we are.

PATIENCE

"Behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice."

MOODY

You know Solomon as well as I.

PATIENCE

Did you not ask for her hand? Forgive me.

MOODY

Oh, I did ask--foolishly. Blurted out--in front of my father. She claimed--also in my father's presence--that she loved a captain more...

(His eyes close.)

...as well she should, a bright, capable man.

PATIENCE

Then she's the fool.

MOODY

Hardly a fool. Sir William Pepperell. He gave her a fine home. She gave him children. I see them about town. They belong to my father's parish.

(Moody dozes. Patience studies him.)

PATIENCE

Do you still gaze?

MOODY

Hm? Oh, no. No.

(beat)

Unless I forget myself.

(He smiles. His eyes remain closed. A few beats.)

PATIENCE

(softly)

Parson? Mr. Moody?

(He's asleep. She covers him with a blanket. Then dims the lantern. She kneels at his feet, leans against his leg.)

PATIENCE (Continued)

(whispers)

Joseph.

(She closes her eyes. A few moments pass. Then a HARSH WHISPER FROM HER PAST.)

BOSTON (O.S.)

Patience. Patience Boston.