

Patience Boston

BY MICHAEL KIMBALL

THE TOWN OF YORK, Maine, claims two notorious characters from its past: Patience Boston and Reverend Joseph Moody. In 1735, Patience Boston was a 23-year-old Native American servant sentenced to hang for drowning her master's grandson in a well. Joseph Moody was the Puritan preacher who ministered to her for seven months, until she gave birth and could be hanged. Two years later, Moody would succumb to a profound breakdown and spend his remaining years stalking the town shrouded under a black veil. Today, southern Mainers remember the haunted preacher only as "Handkerchief Moody."

This excerpt from Kimball's play portrays the Joseph Moody of his early journals, as an earnest young preacher trying to reconcile earthly and heavenly turmoil in the anxious peacetime following witch trials and Indian raids.

[York Jail Interior. Dusk. Late Winter 1735]

A dungeon in dim lantern light. Moody, in his hat and overcoat, sits against the chimney. Patience sits at his feet wrapped in her blanket.

MOODY: 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. Jail-mates. I do know your people. Quite well.

MOODY: Your opinion of us must not be high.

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

MOODY: Jesus. Yes. (*His eyes will close.*)

PATIENCE: I did love my mother, I

think, but I've since lost sight of her, except the night she died. 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. When I touched the droplets on her forehead, her face filled with light, and she sneezed. I saw the spirit jump out of her and spin up above the flames, then fly away with the sparks to heaven. Then she was still. (*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: 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?

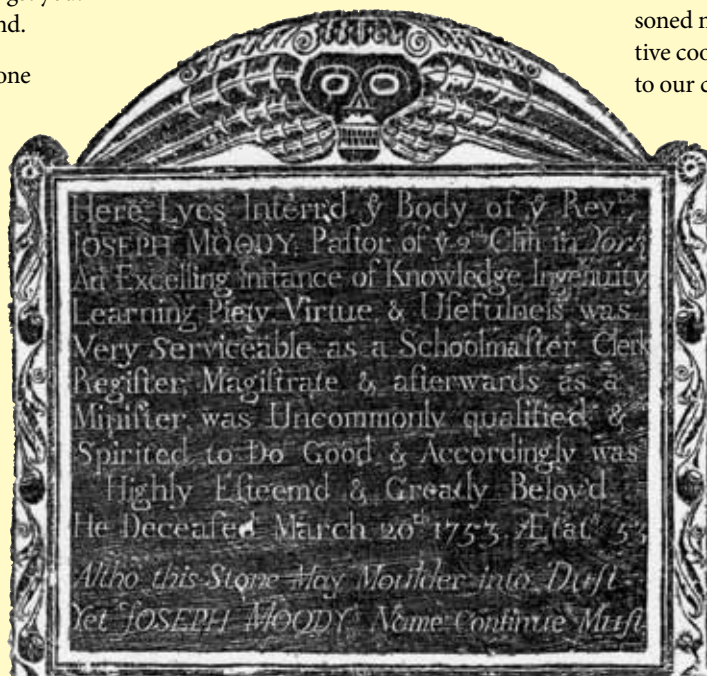
MOODY: My company? She—tolerates. We enjoy, if I may say, an agreeable marriage, though she'd be the first to attest to my imperfections.

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?



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FICTION

PATIENCE: 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 her fists on herself and starts pacing. Moody gets to his feet.

MOODY: I apologize. 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.

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 stands in the corner, her back to him. He will open the window shutter and look out through the bars.

MOODY: 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—No, 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, 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. He'll return to his chair.)*

PATIENCE: Pray, Parson, what was she like?

MOODY: Oh, a girl, just a—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, degreed 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. *(His eyes close again.)* She claimed—also in my father's presence—that she loved a captain more, as well she should, a 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.

PATIENCE: Do you still gaze?

MOODY: Hm? Oh, no. No. *(beat)* Unless I forget myself.

He smiles. His eyes remain closed. Patience studies him.

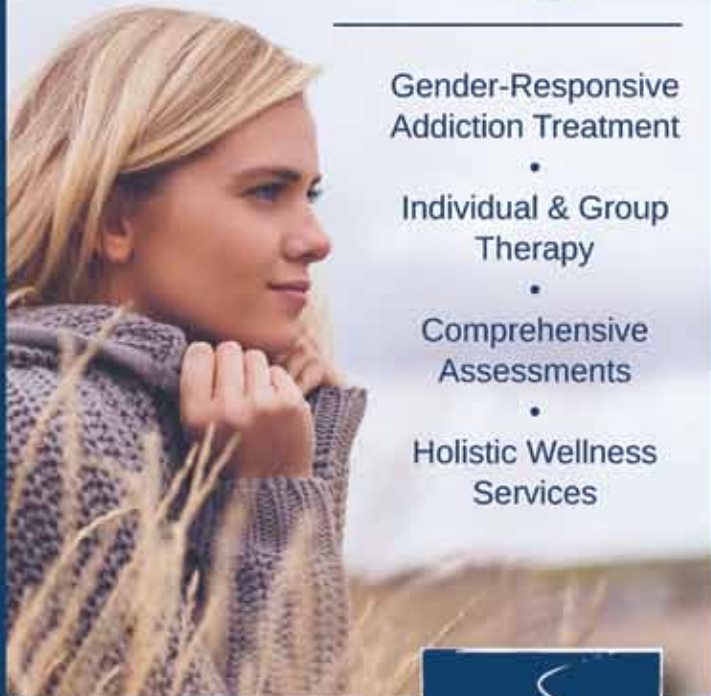
PATIENCE: *(softly)* Parson? Mr. Moody?

He's asleep. She covers him with her blanket, then sits at his feet and leans against his leg.

PATIENCE: *(whispers)* Joseph. ■

Patience Boston, Michael Kimball's colonial crime drama, will premiere at The Players' Ring Theater in Portsmouth, NH, September 15 through October 1. <http://playersring.org>

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