

SERVANT ON A SAW HORSE CIRCA1704

The shame of it: my clothes sundered from bow to stern;
shoddy undergarments worn thin
with scrubbing – now exposed.

Flattened I am, squashed hard against
a loaded gun
erected and cocked under my breasts
on a saw horse.

Shivers come like whips,
a whip like knives
cutting into my back, ripping flesh.
Icy water splashes my body,
a tipped bucket emptied.
More lashings and frozen water breaks away tearing flesh.

Warm blood leaks from my wounded back,
dripping down, freezing like icy tongues.
I am left sprawled over the saw horse,
the sun dying,
the sky in black sackcloth.

I am a servant,
daughter of a Beothuk mother
raped and killed by English settlers.
Parson John Jackson, Church of England,
baptized me, a white Indian,
gave me Christian as a name
worthy of heaven.
He scrubs away his flock's sins while I
scrub dirty undergarments.
The Reverend sez he's God's servant,
sacrificing to do God's will.
Well, I never sid him being banged about;
he's got no chance of feeling hunger and thirst
with all he's got laid by.
He reads his Holy Book, cuffing my ears in loud, pious tones,
while I bow, knees scrunching on
cold, hard floors, splinters in my skin.
I have tried to heed holy words: "Servants obey your masters,"

but there is something inside me that rises up.
He would say it was the devil, hesself,
making my heart black as the soot in his chimney.

He was after me as if my body is an outhouse.
An angry flash of my eyes convicted me.
Amid sneers and raucous laughter,
I was thrown outside Fort William,
without a roof in bitter air.

Though my form looked frumpy under a coarse cotton dress,
Captain John Moody kept me in his gaze longer than he did Margaret,
the parson's daughter.
He never sid me made up like her.
I could be pleasing to the eye.
Sometimes I woke from pleasant dreams.
In them I wore silky undergarments and satin dresses,
my thick, dark hair let loose,
no longer bunched under a plain buff cap.
My scalp was kneaded, my hair placed in ringlets,
just like I had to do for Margaret
who allowed no lip from me.

I tried to keep a distance from Captain Moody
on his visits.
He untied my apron strings once and laughed.
My apron has two sets of strings,
one to be tied tight around my waist and one tied below my stern
to keep my dress from lifting,
showing my underclothes.
Margaret's green eyes glowered.
She slapped me after he left,
accused me of letting curls escape my cap,
and biting my lips to redden them.
I may have seemed saucy, maybe sharp, but I didn't mean to be.
"I didn't know the fellow with the bold face was yours," I said.
She knocked me so hard my teeth burst through my lip.

I was always careful never to show flesh
above my elbows and ankles.
Now, even my bones are showing
under skin open like split fruit.
Susanna Marshall, an inhabitant of St. John's,
but not of the fort, finds me,

my back slashed and turning frost-burned and black.
She runs for help.
Elisabeth and Richard Bunker take me in.
Though short on supplies,
Elisabeth dresses my back with herbs and wad,
eases the barbarous pain.

There are rumours of the enemy in the hills.
Shouts and the noise of cannons are about.
The French and Indians are back.
An open door lets in a gust of wind. I hear a voice.
Colin Campbell, a St. John's Prize Officer, has sent
Edward May and his wife with orders for Elisabeth and Richard
to rid themselves of me,
or have their house torn down.
They have to protect themselves if they're to protect their children.

Why is the world so mad?
I am afraid of life now, more than I am of death.
I pray:
"There has to be a better world, sweet Jesus.
I like the sun that warms me, silently beaming down,
and I like the moon above silver water lapping the shore,
and I would like to live on earth if
I could – please Jesus – be mistress of my own house,
and have my children in my care, saved from harsh labour.
I'd like to own a time of day for my own pleasure.
I'd like a world without cannon fire,
no need of forts, or Captains or Reverends,
just people who do not care if they are
French, English, Indian, brown, red or other.

The truth of what's been done will die with me."

Susanna dipped a quill into an inkwell,
lifted it to parchment and wrote:
"John Moody, a loose-living martinet, was brought to court.
Allegations were deemed frivolous vexations.
Christian, it was said, led a debauched life at the fort,
stole rum and brandy from Reverend Jackson,
had three bastards,
and died of venereal disease,
laying nothing to Moody's charge.

I beg to differ.

The truth will not die.”