

Penelope: The Story of the Half-Scalped Woman A Narrative Poem

Penelope Scambly Schott

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I am an empty cask.

Clean water floods my belly,

the guts set gently back.

says Penelope Kent van Princis Stout after the event that left her forever named the half-scalped woman. Scambly Schott has taken the historical life of a woman whose name she bears and transformed it into a page-turner of a poem. Three centuries distant, we are introduced to a brave and sturdy person. As one reads on, interest and empathy grow, following Penelope through a mid 1600s shipwreck, a brutal attack then rescue by Indians, “rescue” by righteous relatives, and then her subsequent readjustment to life back among white people. There is enough documented historical fact to validate the poem, and just enough (identified) creative license to flesh out the sparse spots.

Scambly Schott keeps the reader’s attention with her simple and very present short poems. One greets each new poem/chapter happily after the end of the last, grateful that there is more to be learned, more to be told, about the heroine.

Scambly Schott is the author of three previously published collections of poems, most recently *The Perfect Mother*, which won the Violet Reed Haas Prize for Poetry. The New Jersey Council on the Arts has also awarded her four fellowships.

GABRIELLE SHAW (March / April 1999)

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