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# Sheriff Dennehy, After the Coroner's Inquest

by Robert Cooperman

If it'd been a gold rat  
gunned down over a claim,  
or a whore beaten to death  
for not giving fair trade,  
we could just shrug.  
But this was Preacher Burden,  
so we had to do something.

Doc O'Rourke testified  
there wasn't no struggle;  
the breed tracker swore  
to no incriminating prints.

I wouldn't rule him out,  
with folks feisty as weasels  
in a small cage: a hanging  
distracting as Miz Lucrezia  
who's more talented  
in her dressing room  
than when she's screeching  
about princes and slaves,  
what we fought two wars over.

But she's a welcome change  
from the China doll I bought,  
who cries whenever I poke her.

"Natural causes," we declared,  
but what was Reverend doing  
at that abandoned shaft  
except to meet Mary LaFrance,  
who maybe didn't fancy sharing  
the church funds he sipped at,  
like a thieving hummingbird?

But I couldn't bring that up,  
not with Widow Burden up front,  
her veil grieving her face  
I've admired from the moment  
she stepped off the Salida stage.

