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# Lavinia Burden, the Night Her Husband Died

by Robert Cooperman

I couldn't sleep, our bed  
a listing ship, with Thomas away  
at an important appointment.  
With Mary LaFrance, of course;  
but he thought me a simpleton.

Suddenly I heard a rustling.  
"Thomas?" I called down.  
Silence, terrible as a mountain  
before it collapses on miners  
drunk with stooping for gold.

When finally I grasped  
the courage to investigate,  
moonlight cast a beam onto a pouch  
sitting mole-fat on my best table.  
A shadow pressed against the wall:  
John Sprockett, the most dangerous man  
in the Territory. I trembled  
to behold the side of his face  
a grizzly had scarred jagged  
as barbed wire's vicious slashes.

The pouch was as heavy with gold  
as the skull of a buffalo;  
then Mr. Sprockett vanished,  
a shade returning to Hell.  
I knew Thomas was dead,  
felt, Christ forgive me, relief:  
the hypocrite believing  
God approved of his adulteries.

"Freedom," the gold whispered,  
the face of that tracker  
I'd talked to once  
and was dazzled by his beauty,  
shimmered for an instant,  
as if in lake water.  
I closed my eyes,  
feared I'd see Thomas  
the rest of my days.

