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by Robert Cooperman

In her few free minutes,
Mama'd read me poems,
rhymes sweet as a sugar-tit.
The last time, me fifteen
and strong as railroad ties,
Pa spat she was Devil-spawn,
and laid into her
like a centurion with a whip,

shoved her into the table,
dinner crashing against the walls,
ripped her book's pages
like decks of blushing cards,
then threw it into the hearth,
Mama begging, "God loves beauty."

"Beauty's a sin!" he bellowed,
slapped her so hard she fell
like a galloping mount caught
by a gaping gopher hole.

That's when I hit him
with his Bible, heavy as an anvil:
hit him and hit him and hit him,
till he didn't move.

That night she was fever-took.
She breathed easier to hear me
recite poems like birdsong.
I'm thankful she passed peaceful,
the finest woman to walk this earth.

After I buried her,
left him for the hogs and buzzards,
I saddled his favorite horse
and rode off slow and mean.

