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Robert Cooperman

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Lavinia Burden Reflects on Why She Married the Reverend Thomas Burden

by Robert Cooperman

Father—himself a minister
I would no more think of disobeying
than I would of running off with gypsies—
was awed by Reverend Burden's sermons:
celebrated in our Boston
as if Mr. Keane performing Othello.

I too was tranced by his magnetism.

Only Aunt—who raised me
after Mother perished pushing me
into this world—saw Mr. Burden
for an Italian poisoner of rich brides.

She tried every argument,
though we knew I had as little choice
against Father's wishes
as virgins sacrificed to Baal.
Her final, desperate effort:
"You obey your father only because
it galls him you aren't a son."

I've accompanied my husband
to the most sordid of the gold camps,
rescuing souls snared by the demon-ore.
His sermons flicker with holy flames,
but his eyes burn at the temptations
Satan heaps upon these mountains.

To be continued in future issues

These poems begin a new collection entitled *The Widow's Burden*.

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