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Robert Cooperman

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John Sprockett Lies Dying in a Livery Stable

by Robert Cooperman

Dear God, it hurts,
the little bastard too blind
for a merciful heart shot,
too stupid to see I'd goaded him
with slaps so he'd ambush me.
I didn't mind being a cur
so long as I didn't know a woman
like Sophie was in this world.
But she left for her puny, green England.

This sod-buster stands laughing,
my whole damn life useless murdering
'til I met Sophie, and could spout
the songs and poems I'd been saving—
ashamed in front of whores, who shied away
because I got my face ripped by a grizzly.
Dime novelists made it a hero's battle.
I lay crapping my trousers
while he raked me for curiosity,
then ambled off, bored at my lack of fight.

"Finish a bad job well, you fool!"
But he won't, marveling
at my writhing like a trapped fox.
He'll swing, and I'll laugh a welcome
to the eternal furnace brigade.

Once, when I sang to Sophie,
her eyes went dream-shut,
tears like wet diamonds
glittered her face.
I wiped them with a finger,
everything melting into angels.

That grizzly's squatting on my chest again.
Sophie, say a prayer to drift down to Hell
and bring tears to my eye
that'll burn sharper than these claws,
hotter than Satan's Bessemer fumes—
to help me remember I was loved. . .

