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## John Sprockett Recalls the First Man He Killed

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## John Sprockett Recalls the First Man He Killed

I told Miss Starling of my first kill,  
to make her see the lines ripped in my face  
aren't just scars from a grizzly—  
but invisible signs Satan marked me with at birth  
until he sent his clawed messenger  
to remind me I'd been claimed for darkness.

Jimmy was the boy the whores loved  
to pet like a clever songbird  
that could make you forget you hadn't seen  
your ma since cholera sweated her into the ground  
or that your pa had hurled curses  
and cow shit at your back when you ran off.

Jimmy had fine blond hair drooping into eyes  
so deep women wanted to drown there,  
a smile for all the whores and miners;  
even rough boys would sob into their whiskeys  
and think of home when he strummed and sang.  
No one gave a buffalo's fart  
that I could recite poems by the hour,  
had even composed a few.

When he accidentally spilled my bottle,  
I rammed my gun into his quivering gut.  
"He ain't even armed!" a whore cried.  
Hell, I didn't want to shoot him,  
just make him shut up for a bit  
and not be so damned adored.  
But a demon inside me pulled the trigger  
and laughed to watch  
Jimmy's grin fade on his white face.  
I flogged my mount toward Quantrill—  
looking for men who'd buried consciences  
too deep for even wolves to scratch loose.

I'd lay some flowers on that boy's grave,  
but they'd wilt in my paw.  
Besides, his stone's probably purest marble,  
bought by whores missing his voice and sweet face.  
I'll be lucky to lie below a wood cross  
that'll be no help when Satan claims kin.

*by Robert Cooperman*