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Jesse James—En Route to Northfield, Minnesota— Meditates on the Death of John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

He never kept his mind to business.
Maybe that bear that ripped his face open
let his brains leak out too.
The Colonel would've had him shot
for not executing that female Yankee spy,
but Sprockett had a talent for leaving.

He shied away from chasing girls
squealing like sows soon to be bacon.
When Frank closed in on one pretty thing
who sobbed for him not to kill her afterwards--
"No witnesses, no hot trails,"
the Colonel would preach--
Sprockett cold-cocked my older brother.
"Scat!" he shouted at the Yankee filly
(or maybe she was Stars and Bars).
She ran like a mare spooked by a grizzly.

He let himself get gunned in that stable.
You'd think he was tired of rot-gut
and spouting the poetry he wore me out with
when I wanted to think of home and victory
while dusty miles piled on us like rocks
over a body in ground too hard to dig a grave in.

I asked him to join our bank business--
Frank bearing no hard feelings for the welt--
but Sprockett preferred his trap-lines
and shooting up saloons,
whenever the devil scratched his bad eye.
Well, the Great Grizzly-Snare's got him now;
Frank and me'll be flush as Kentucky Colonels
once we open this Northfield vault,
northern squareheads too stupid
to guard it like their prettiest daughters.

