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Robert Cooperman

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Traveling by Train from Denver to New York, Sophia Starling Thinks of the Departure of John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

He pivoted smart as a corporal on parade
and marched into the glossy Denver noon,
my heart screaming for him,
even as I knew I could say, do, nothing,
people everywhere, thinking me insane
if I were to run after him, beg him
to brave the banalities of England with me.

This train is haunted by his ghost:
for once, I understand his demons.
I could smash the harmless little man—
a drummer of ladies' shoes and hose—
who sits reading a dime novel
about a make-believe gunfighter.
I want to rip the cheap pages and shout,
"My real gunman can put six bullets
through the eye of a coyote,
drink fifty Irishmen into banshee oblivion,
and recite poetry like a bard."
He'd change cars, alert the conductor
to "the dangerous female back yonder."

I tell myself the miles will obliterate
the scars I came to love, Colorado impossible for me,
John Sprockett no one to spend a life with:
one night of drunkenness warned me
he was primed for violence like a bear-trap,
only his superstitions for the softer sex
kept him from ripping me apart.



Yet an imp would pull the emergency cord
and lunge from the train back to Denver,
find him drunk, dangerous as a wounded grizzly.
One glare from me would sober him,
or so I'd like to believe.
That little commercial traveler looks up.
"Ever read this one, Ma'am?"
a tale told for idiots of western courage.
"Only George Eliot," ice enough in my voice
to freeze the air bubbles of sweaty lava
cascading down his pock-marked face.

