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## During a Blizzard, John Sprockett Tells Sophia Starling of Sylvia Williams' Start in the Boarding House Business

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*During a Blizzard, John Sprockett Tells Sophia Starling of  
Sylvia Williams' Start in the Boarding House Business*

I was camped on the Platte,  
having quit Quantrill and the War,  
loot enough to keep me comfortable.  
I almost blew her head off, to hear her  
sneaking in the shadows beyond my fire;  
then she stood, black as a mine shaft,  
shaking, rearing back on her skillet-handle.  
"You could do with some dinner,"  
I holstered, spooned burned beans,  
her eyes on my scarred face like a Ute amulet.  
In the morning she cooked me a sample  
of the heaven I'll never taste.  
That talent deserved a boarding house  
from my booty as Quantrill's mad dog.  
My Colt acted a persuader at the seller's head.

"I'll bet you'd make a mean horse swapper,"  
she laughed, an unlikely princess in a fairy-tale.  
"I'll pay you back, sure enough regular," she swore.  
"Only man I ever bedded, or will, was Samson,"  
her voice suddenly brittle as hickory bark.  
I shook hands farewell, spread word  
that if anyone lifted a finger against her,  
I'd burn the town, feast on their children.

She's always got a bed for me,  
a meal fit for the President,  
a bag of gold she tallies against the principal,  
though I suspect she's paid it off years ago.  
Wind tossing snow through these unchinked logs  
puts me in mind of her moaning dreams  
for Samson, killed by slave-catchers  
before she made her way from Carolina,  
to my mind a feat more worthy of the telling  
than all the killing I've done, the dirty money  
she cleaned by taking that loan.

*by Robert Cooperman*

