26 December 1873: Letter from Sophia Starling To Her Sister

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Recommended Citation

Cooperman, Robert (1998) "26 December 1873: Letter from Sophia Starling To Her Sister," Westview: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 22. Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol18/iss1/22
My Own, My Dear, Dear Aggie,
I am writing in the snow-blind hope
that I will live to post this letter.
We—Mr. Crane, a wandering consumptive;
John Sprockett, and I—
are trapped in a cabin in South Park:
a valley in the maw of ice-dragon peaks.

We spent a miserable Christmas:
rather than sing the Lord's Nativity in joy—
for we're alive, if slowly starving—
it was a day of raging storms,
weather even more fierce inside our cabin:
Mr. Sprockett broke his temperate resolve
and unearthed the bottle he had hid, muttering
curses at Mr. Crane, late of a Boston seminary:
coming west, he claimed, for his lungs.
I suspect a breach of conduct with a chargirl.

Unable, for my sake, to thrash the barking cur,
John drank; the verses he can quote like Keane
slippery as mud on his tongue.
I sobbed at his fall.
Finally, John stormed into the snow
in search of anything to fill our stomachs.

A miracle he returned, bent under
a buck’s carcass, but spoiled his gift
by finishing the bottle I had failed to hide.
Still, the meal gave us strength, and better, hope.
I am a lax aunt and godmother.
but shall fill the children’s arms with presents,
their heads with tales of terrible John Sprockett,
upon, God willing, my return to England.
If the weather ever clears, we can escape
on the snow-shoes he has fashioned from antlers.
I shall sprint back to Denver,
be it drowning in ten thousand saloons,
 companioned by the strangest Galahad
I have ever met.