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## Sophia Starling Writes to Her Sister in England, from Denver, September, 1873

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**SOPHIA STARLING WRITES TO HER SISTER IN ENGLAND, FROM DENVER,  
SEPTEMBER, 1873**

Dear Aggie,  
The dust is thick as gnats  
lunging down one's throat  
through mosquito netting.  
Still, I love the mountains that thunder  
above this rail and cattle head,  
our train outrunning a tribe of Sioux  
into the depot.

I shall find a guide, some local eccentric  
or ruined son of Confederate aristocracy  
fleeing terrible memories of lost Virginia.  
Failing that, I shall set off alone,  
on as sturdy and well-mannered a mare or gelding  
as I can afford in this town  
of slaughterhouses, tanning factories, and assayers.

I only wish you could share this trip,  
but a husband and children,  
much as I want them someday, are shackles:  
homemakers' keys symbols of the sweet domestic prison.  
Kiss the children for me; I shall write  
with news of the badmen it moons their eyes  
to whisper of when they should be asleep.  
How I longed to be Maid Marian as a girl,  
sleeping on hard, romantic ground  
with noble bandits chaste beside me.  
Some of the men I see staggering, swaggering  
from saloons more populous than churches  
look no strangers to murder, to forcing a lady  
to do what she cannot live with for having done.

Never fear. My purse hides a truncheon,  
a gift from a New York City policeman,  
most courteous one rainy afternoon:  
Fifth Avenue muddier than the flooding Thames.  
When I told him my destination, he gasped,  
and handed me this weapon, saying,  
"You'll be needing this more than me,  
even in the halls of Murderer's Row."  
I would hesitate not one blink to use it  
but remain your loving sister  
even at so great a distance  
it seems I have traveled back to the brutish  
crimson-beautiful dawn of society.

*by Robert Cooperman*