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## Sophia Starling Writes to Her Sister After Climbing Long's Peak, Late September, 1873

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# **Sophia Starling Writes to Her Sister After Climbing Long's Peak, Late September, 1873**

Dear Aggie,  
Congratulate me! The first Englishwoman  
to stand this close to Heaven,  
air so thin it cracked like spring ice.  
Yet it was more a stiff hike  
than a Matterhorn ascent: a well-marked path;  
still Mr. Sprockett had to lift me,  
my lungs tearing like cheap paper,  
my boots slipping on inconsequential pebbles.

At the summit, we gasped and pivoted,  
a hundred mile views in all directions:  
to the east, plains a brown ocean;  
to the west, peaks like giant white-caps.  
I could have stood there forever,  
but he pointed to black, bulging clouds.  
"An early snow," he hastened our descent.

I've had a salutary effect on him,  
smelled not an exhalation fouled by drink,  
his language chivalrous as Lancelot's.  
Still, men say he rode with raiders  
during the late American War,  
savage as any wolverine or lynx.  
Yet he recites poetry so feelingly,  
even scraps of his own verse,  
written, he laughs, when he was young  
and rabid for an Indian squaw  
who understood not a word or rhyme,  
whose brother and betrothed he slew,  
when they disapproved of his courting.

I silently thanked him for that dash of reality,  
the fire that crackles between us a chasm  
wider than the canyon men claim  
sparkles in the Arizona Territory  
like a hundred miles of gems and Botticell's.

**by Robert Cooperman**