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Sophia Starling Explains Her Reasons for Traveling

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Imagine, Mr. Sprockett, a girl who reads—
books of maps her passion,
to run her hands along empty continents
between plotted coastlines, and feel
the spell of unchartered regions within.

Imagine her mother dying in a second childbirth,
and she more parent than sister to the girl,
their father a man of private interests
who forgot he had two daughters;
he returned home only to rest from excesses,
to slouch in his library, to drink port,
slaughter pheasants and foxes in season,
to pat his younger daughter's head like a beagle
and nod to the other as if a housekeeper.

Imagine him dying in a riding accident,
his mount even more uncontrollable
than the life which led him
to test himself against a fence
not even Pegasus could have scaled.
Imagine her sister's heart being won
by the local vicar, a quiet man
as different from their late father
as gentle Shetland ponies from mustangs,
muzzles flecked with foam and blood.

Imagine that older sister, now free
to find the roads she had only dreamt of:
funds just enough in the estate
to see her through this one journey
before she slips into the harness
her sister wears like an emerald necklace,
or to take a position as governess,
and watch her charges' eyes
dance like Guy Fawkes' bonfires
when she shows them unmapped places
in their fathers' ponderous atlases,
and tells them, "I was there!"

by Robert Cooperman