



6-15-1997

From the Journal of John Sprockett, Colorado Territory, 1873

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Recommended Citation

Cooperman, Robert (1997) "From the Journal of John Sprockett, Colorado Territory, 1873," *Westview*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 2 , Article 26.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol16/iss2/26>

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From the Journal of John Sprockett, Colorado Territory, 1873

We've had our first, early snow,
those clouds heavy as foaling mares
when Miss Starling and I stood
atop Long's Peak, her breath a bellows
to shape horseshoes for a herd of ghostly mustangs,
her face red as Indian paintbrush
but soft as the inside of a rose—
to make me ashamed of my scarred face:
an evil brand singed by Satan's rustlers;
ashamed even more of the men I'd killed
in Bloody Kansas; the men before, and since.
She looked pleased to be standing
where no lady's ever been, but clouds swooped in
like flocks of crows, so we started down.

Still, we got caught by the blizzard,
took shelter in an unchinked cabin,
mouse-stink in the corners;
Miss Starling's lavender perfume
made me wish for a vat of beer to drown in,
not to be tempted by her lady ways
so different from the women I'm used to:
that Ute squaw the closest thing to her,
and she half-terrified by my face,
by my having shot her brother and kinsman—
who came at me with knives and pistols
for presuming to love one of theirs.
She had me at her mercy,
but only left her blade buried in my arm.

I should toss this journal into the fire,
but feel the need to pour out memories tonight:
ghosts I've kept jailed with drink and work—
all fluttering now like moths in October frost.
Miss Starling's asleep.
I'd brush the sifting snow off her,
but she'd scream at the demon who rides beside her,
who'd throw himself off Long's Peak
if she said that was part of the job
I'd hired on for as her guide.

by Robert Cooperman

Robert Cooperman's poems are from *The Badman and the Lady* soon to be published by Basfol Books.

TO BE CONTINUED IN FUTURE ISSUES