

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA
WESTVIEW



Volume 18
Issue 2 *Spring/Summer*

Article 23

6-15-1999

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Recommended Citation

Cooperman, Robert (1999) "From the Diary of Sophia Starling Early January 1874 A Shack Between South Park and Denver," *Westview*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 2 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol18/iss2/23>

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From the Diary of Sophia Starling
Early January 1874
A Shack Between South Park and Denver

by Robert Cooperman

Just as our legs were about to crack
like the limbs of trees used
for too many executions,
we found this abandoned ranch cabin.
John breathed warmth into my frozen fingers,
both of us glad to have left the company
of vampirish Mr. Crane.

We spoke not a word all evening,
the loose shutters echoing my heart.
John fed the fire with logs
he had hatcheted from a pine beside the shack.
I never asked, never fail to wonder
why he doesn't grow a beard to hide his scars.

My fingers darted to them, smooth
as a snake one dreads will be oily.
I ran my hand along the raised edges—
not thinking of my forwardness—
heard a purring rise in his throat,
felt a warmth spread inside me—
spilled tea on a skirt,
but none of its accompanying clamminess. . . .

He sleeps curled like a wolf.
The heat ebbs from my stomach;
embers pop like tiny pistol shots.
What occurred earlier can never be repeated.
Cruel of me to melt, even once,
into sweetness and his world—
as we draw closer to Denver, my train to New York,
the steamer to the England I left,
a staid life that begins to glitter.

John Sprockett too much the bear
when I close my eyes
and recall his drunken rages—
even when weighed against the heights
we soared to, eagles rising to Heaven.
Ladies, when they travel,
must be untouchable as saints and angels.

