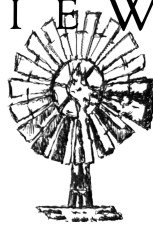


A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW



Volume 18
Issue 1 Fall/Winter

Article 24

11-15-1998

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Recommended Citation

Cooperman, Robert (1998) "Henry Crane, After the Departure Of Sophia Starling and John Sprockett," *Westview*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 24.

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Henry Crane, After the Departure Of Sophia Starling and John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

I couldn't have Miss Starling
so I settled for this uncaulked shack
and a third of the mule deer carcass
Sprockett carved before they left.
He muttered like a murderous genie,
dying to slice me collarbone to navel
if not for her protectress' eye.

What a pair of chaste lovers:
she a cultured English beauty;
he the most notorious killer
never caught by trembling sheriffs
in the history of the territory.
The tales told of him
make most men foul their trousers.
Consumptive, I had nothing to fear.
Had he shot me if I'd managed to snatch
Miss Starling's maiden treasure,
I'd have thanked him: Paradise
on earth and in the world to come.

A novel pet for a lady
used to lap-dog gentlemen,
he's a grizzly she had safely muzzled
until Christmas afternoon,
when, tormented by my clever barbs
and unable to swat me, and offend
her delicacy with a murder,
he drank off a bottle of whiskey,
then shot the deer that saved us,
provided frames for their snow-shoes,
and left me this cabin in peace.

If only I can induce a Ute squaw
to share it and lighten my last winter,
at least what I'd tell her,
a tear clinging to an eyelash,
if displays of misery work on savages.

Somehow, that brute Sprockett has memorized
more poems than I could intone Scripture
at the seminary I was forced to leave
for exorcising a cleaning girl
of her whorish ways.

To be continued in future issues.

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

