A DESERT ROAD

THE WHITE HEART OF MOJAVE

AN ADVENTURE WITH THE OUTDOORS OF THE DESERT

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To
my friend

CHARLOTTE HANNAHS JORDAN

who shared this adventure
in the wind and sun
of big spaces

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I

The Feel of the Outdoors

BEYOND the walls and solid roofs of houses is the outdoors. It is always on the doorstep. The sky, serene, or piled with white, slow-moving clouds, or full of wind and purple storm, is always overhead. But walls have an engrossing quality. If there are many of them they assert themselves and domineer. They insist on the unique importance of the contents of walls and would have you believe that the spaces above them, the slow procession of the seasons and the alternations of sunshine and rain, are accessories, pleasant or unpleasant, of walls,—indeed that they were made, and a bungling job, too, and to be disregarded as a bungling job should be, solely that walls might exist.

Perhaps your lawyer or your dentist has his

office on the nineteenth floor of a modern sky-scraper. While you wait for his ministrations you look out of his big window. Below you the roofs of the city spread for miles to blue hills or the bright sea. The smoke of tall chimneys rolls into the sky that fills all the space between you and the horizon and the sun; the smoke of hustling prosperity fans out, and floats, and mixes with the clouds, and becomes at last part of a majestic movement of something other than either smoke or clouds. Suddenly the roofs that covered only tables and chairs and power machines cover romance, a million romances rise and mingle like the smoke of the tall chimneys. They mix with the romance of the clouds and the hills. You are happy. Nothing is changed around you, but you are happy. You only know that the sun did it, and those far-off hills. When the man you are waiting for comes in you congratulate him on his fine view. Then the jealous walls assert themselves again; they want you to forget as soon as possible.

But you never quite forget. You visit the woods or the mountains or the sea in your vaca-

tion. You loaf along trout streams, or in red autumn woods with a gun in your hands for an excuse, or chase golf balls over green hills, or sail on the bay and get becalmed and do not care. For the pleasure of living outdoors you are willing to have your eyes smart from the smoke of the camp fire, and to be wet and cold, and to fight mosquitoes and flies. You like the feel of it, and you wait for that sudden sense of romance everywhere which is the touch of something big and simple and beautiful. It is always beyond the walls, that something, but most of us have been bullied by them so much that we have to go far away to find it; then we can bring it home and remember.

Charlotte and I knew the outdoors a little. Though we were middle-aged, mothers of families and deeply involved in the historic struggle for the vote, we sometimes looked at the sky. In our remote youth we had had a few brief experiences of the mountains and the woods; I had some not altogether contemptible peaks to my credit and she had canoed in the Canadian wilds, so when we decided that a vacation was due us

we chose the outdoors. Our labors had been arduous, divided as they were between the clamorings of the young and our militant mission to free the world; we were thoroughly habituated to walls and set a high value on their contents. It was our habit to tell large and assorted audiences that freedom consists in casting a ballot at regular intervals and taking your rightful place in a great democracy; nor did it seem anomalous, as perhaps it should have, that our chiefest desire was to escape from every manifestation of democracy in the solitariness of some wild and lonely place far from city halls, smokestacks, national organizations, and streets of little houses all alike. For some time the desire had been cutting through our work with an edge of restlessness. We called it "Need for a Vacation," not knowing that every desire to withdraw from the crowd is a personal assertion and a protest against the struggle and worry, the bluff and banality and everlasting tail-chasing which goes on inside the walls of the stateliest statehouse and the two-room suite with bath. Our real craving was not for a play hour, but for the

wild and lonely place and a different kind of freedom from that about which we had been preaching.

Our choice of the wild and lonely place was circumscribed by the fact that we had been offered the use of an automobile from Los Angeles. The automobile was a much appreciated gift, but we regretted that Los Angeles had to be the starting point because southern California is the blissful goal of the tired east and the tired east was what we needed to escape from. We left home without plans—too many plans in vacation are millstones hung around your neck—sure only that such places as Santa Barbara, Redlands, Riverside, and San Diego would be for us nothing more than points on the way to somewhere else. An atlas showed a great empty space just east of the Sierra Nevada Range and the San Bernadino Mountains vaguely designated as the Mojave Desert. It was surprising to find the greater part of southern California, the much-advertised home of the biggest fruit and flowers in the world, included in it. A few criss-cross lines indicated

mountains; north of the Santa Fé Railroad, which crosses the Mojave on the way to the coast, the words Death Valley were printed between two groups of them; in the south a big white space similarly surrounded was the Imperial Valley; the names of a few towns sprangled out from the railroad—nothing else. Was the desert just a white space like that? The word had a mixed connotation, it suggested monotony, sterility, death—and also big open spaces, gold and blue sunsets, and fascination. We recollected that some author had written about the "terrible fascination" of the desert. The white blank on the map looked very wild and lonely. We went to Los Angeles on the Santa Fé in order to see what it might contain.

We looked at it. After leaving the high plateau of northern Arizona the railroad crosses the Colorado River and enters the lowlands of the Mojave Desert. That is the first glimpse the tourist has of California, but he hardly realizes that it is California, for it is so different from the pictures on the time-tables and hotel folders. At Needles he usually pulls down the window

shades against the too-hot sun and forgets the dust and heat in the pages of the last best seller, or else he goes out on the California Limited which spares its passengers the dusty horrors of the desert by crossing the Mojave at night. His California, and ours when we left Chicago, consists of the charming bungalows with date palms in their dooryards and yellow roses climbing their porches, the square orange groves all brushed and combed for dress parade, the picturesque missions, and the white towns with streets shaded by feathery pepper trees west of the backbone of the Sierras, not the hundreds of miles of desolation east of them. Hour after hour we pounded through it in a hot monotony of yellow dust. Hour after hour great sweeps of blue-green brush led off to mountains blue and red against the sky. We passed black lava beds, and strange shining flats of baked clay, and clifflike rocks. It was very vast. The railroad seemed a tiny thread of life through an endless solitude. The train stopped at forlorn stations consisting of a few buildings stark on the coarse, gravelly sand. Sometimes a gang of swarthy

Mexicans stopped work on the track to watch us go by, sometimes a house stood alone in the brush, sometimes a lonely automobile crawled along the highway beside the railroad. It was empty and vast, and over it all the sun poured a white flood.

In spite of the dust and glare a fascinated curiosity kept us looking out of the dirty windows all day. Occasionally dim wagon tracks led toward the mountains, some of which were high and set on wide, solid foundations. They were immovable, old, old mountains. Shadows cut sharply into the smooth brightness of their sides. Their colors changed and the sand ran between them like beckoning roads. "Come," it seemed to say, "and find what is hidden here." Once we saw a man with three burros loaded with cooking utensils and bedding. He was traveling across country through the sagebrush. Where could he be going?

Unconsciously I asked the question aloud and Charlotte answered:

"He is a prospector looking for a gold mine. Don't you see his pick on the second mule?"

"Please say burro," I pleaded. "It gives a better atmosphere. Besides it is not a mule, it's an ass."

"Those are the Old Dad Mountains over there, those big rosy ones. That's where he is going, up the long path of sand. He will camp there. Perhaps he is not a prospector, he may have a mine already."

"Of course he has one," I assented. "All the prospectors are dead. They died of thirst in Death Valley."

"My prospector did not. He is going to his mine. He tries to work it himself but it does not pay very well because he can't get enough out, and he can't sell it because too many booms have failed, and nobody will invest. So he goes up and down in the sun and has a good time."

Perhaps you could have a good time going up and down in the sun through those empty spaces that stretched so endlessly on either side of the track. I wondered if we might not go to the Imperial Valley and see that strange thing, the new Salton Sea, a lake in the desert; but Charlotte objected because that part of the white

blank was partially under irrigation, too near the coast, and would be too civilized and full of ranches. I doubted much if the tired east went there for I thought that it was the desert like this, only hotter, worse. She declared that the tired east went everywhere that it could get to. Evidently it could not reach Mojave, for certainly it was not rushing around in automobiles trying to be happy, nor pouring the savings for its short holiday into the money bags of conscienceless hotel companies. Mojave was indeed a blank, a wild and lonely place.

"I think," Charlotte remarked after a time, "that we will go to Death Valley."

"Why?"

"Because I am tired of looking at the Twenty Mule Team Borax boxes and wondering what kind of place they came from that could have a name like that."

I thought it was not a sufficient reason for me to risk my life.

"I think," she said, "that it is the wildest and loneliest place of all. Nobody goes there except your prospectors, and you say they are all dead.

Think of the gold and jewels they did not find lying around everywhere. Think of the hotness and brightness. It must be an awful, lonesome, sparkling place."

It must be! Those reasons appealed to me, but the idea was a bit upsetting considering that we had started for a happy-go-lucky vacation, a little like playing with a kitten and having it turn into a tiger. Mojave was like a tiger, terrible and fascinating. From the windows of the Santa Fé train it was a savage, ruthless-looking country, naked in the sun. It repelled us and held us, we could not keep our eyes off it. They ached from straining to pierce the distances where the beckoning roads were lost in brightness. Mountains and valleys full of outdoors, nothing but outdoors! What was the feel of being alone in the sagebrush? How free the sweep of the wind must be, how hot the sun, how immense the deep night sky!

Thus the wild and lonely place was selected. A strange outdoors for a holiday truly, and we had an adventure with it.

II

How We Found Mojave

WHEN the automobile was delivered into our hands at Los Angeles we wanted to turn around immediately and drive back through the Cajon Pass into the Mojave Desert, but our inquiries about directions met with discouragement on every side. It seemed to be unheard of for two women to attempt such a thing; the distances between the towns where we could get accommodations were too great and the roads were apt to have long stretches of sand where we would get stuck. Our friends drew a dismal picture of us sitting out in the sagebrush beside a disabled car and slowly starving to death.

"You could not fix it," they said, "and what would you do?"

We suggested that we might wait until somebody came along.

They assured us that nobody ever came along.

We went to the Automobile Club; they received us with enthusiasm and told us about all the places California is proud of and how to get to them, but California seems not to be proud of the desert, for when we mentioned it our advisers became gloomy. They seemed to have no very definite information and were sure we would not like it. In the face of so much discouragement we hardly dared to ask about Death Valley and when we did, hesitatingly, the question was ignored. We simply could not get there, nobody ever went. The Imperial Valley seemed to be almost as bad. One of the maps they gave us showed a main highway from San Diego over into it, but they said that it was only a gravel road, mountainous and steep, and that we had better stick to the main routes. Evidently they had no faith in our skill as drivers, nor belief in our purpose, so we soon gathered up the maps and innumerable folders about resort hotels, thanked them, and went our way.

The collection contained no map of the Mojave. She had called us, but not loudly enough

as yet, and now that we no longer saw her we remembered her terribleness more than her fascination. We would content ourselves with the Imperial Valley, at least for a beginning; but we said nothing more about it and started down the coast with every appearance of having a ladylike programme. In our then mood we hated the coast and were guilty of speeding along the fine macadam between Los Angeles and San Diego in our eagerness to leave it. We turned due east from the green little city on the shores of its beautiful harbor and headed for the desert. Our unsatisfactory interview at the Automobile Club had led us to believe that the Imperial Valley, irrigated or not, was a wild and lonely place, the desert itself, for it seemed to be surrounded by difficulties.

The road from San Diego proved to be good, presenting no hindrances not easily surmounted, and as we drove along it we told each other what we thought about the Automobile Club. Gradually the character of the country changed. A little of the prickly, spiky desert vegetation with which we were to become so familiar appeared.

The round hills gave way to piles of bare, colored rock, the soil became a gravelly sand on which scrub oak and manzanita grew. The houses became fewer. In one place we had to detour and found deep, soft sand, nothing to the sand of a real desert road, but we did not know that then. The change was subtle, yet we felt it. The country took on the harshness that had repelled us from the train-windows. Being alone in it was at first a little dreadful.

After a day or so of leisurely driving we came suddenly to the edge of the valley. The ground fell before us, cut into rough canyons and foothills, two thousand feet to a blue depth. It was like a great hole full of blue mist, surrounded by red and chocolate-colored mountains. Nothing was clear down there though the mountains were sharply defined and had indigo shadows on them. The valley was a pure, light blue, of the quality of the sky, as though the sky reached down into it. We lingered a long time eating our lunch on a jagged rock, trying to pierce the blue veils and see the Salton Sea, a big salt lake which we knew was there with the tracks of the

Southern Pacific beside it, the sand dunes we had heard of, and the town of El Centro where we were to spend the night. We could see nothing of them, only a phantasy of changing color, an unreality.

We found the whole desert full of drama, but the Imperial Valley is perhaps the most dramatic spot of all, except Death Valley, that other deep hole below sea-level which is so much more remote and so utterly lonely. The great basin of the Imperial Valley was once a part of the ocean until the gradual silting up of its narrow opening separated it from the Gulf of California. The bottom of the valley then became an inland sea which slowly evaporated under the hot sun, leaving as it receded a thick deposit of salt on the sand. At last the valley was dry, a deep glistening bowl between chocolate-colored mountains, a white desolation undisturbed by man or beast, covered with silence. For ages it lay thus while morning and evening painted the hills.

Then the railroad came with its thread of life, connecting Yuma with San Bernadino and

Los Angeles. Soon a salt-works was built in what had once been the bottom of the ocean, and later an irrigation-system for the southern end of the valley from the Colorado River which flows just east of the Chocolate Mountains. The white desolation was made to bloom and, in spite of the intense heat of summer, has become one of the richest farming districts of California. But the drama is still going on. A few years ago the untamed Colorado River that had fought its way through the Grand Canyon and come two hundred miles across the desert turned wild and flooded into the Imperial Valley. It was shut out again, but it left the new Salton Sea in the old ocean bed. Its yellow waves now break near the irrigated area; it drowned the salt works. The Salton Sea is slowly vanishing as its predecessor did; in a little while the valley will again be dry and white and glistening.

The road descended before us in jigjags to the blue depth. It was a good road but narrow in places, dropping sheer at the edge, and steep. Very carefully we drove down, emerging at last through a narrow, rough canyon onto the sandy

floor of the valley. A macadam road led like a shining band through the sagebrush. This evidence of civilization was strange in the surrounding wilderness, for as yet we could see no sign of life in the valley. The sand came up to the edge of the road and was blown into dunes between us and the new sea. There was nothing but sunshine and sagebrush and flowers. The flowers amazed us, for why should they grow there? There was a yellow kind that outshone our perennial garden coreopsis, and numberless little flowers pressed close to the sand with spread-out velvet, or shining, or crinkled blue or frosted leaves. We had to get out of the car to see them, and whenever we got out we felt the heat blaze around us. We were below sea-level and even in February it was very hot. The light was almost blinding, and a silver heat-shimmer swam between us and the mountain-walls. The mountains seemed to be of many colors which changed as the afternoon advanced. The sun set in a more vivid purple and gold than we had ever seen.

We lingered so long looking at the strange

plants and flowers that twilight found us still alone with the desert. Only the white macadam band promised any end to it. Realizing that night was coming and we had an unknown number of miles before us we stepped on the accelerator with more energy than wisdom. The result was a loud explosion of one of the brand-new rear tires. We found the tire so hot that we had to wait for it to cool before we could change it, and the road hot to touch though the sun had been down for some time. We called ourselves all manner of names for being such fools as to try to drive fast on that sizzling surface. It was the first practical lesson about getting along on the desert.

Soon after that we came to an irrigation-ditch. Instantly everything was changed and we were in a farming country. El Centro is a hustling town with a modern four-story hotel. We wished it were not four stories when we learned that part of it had recently been shaken down by an earthquake, and especially when we experienced three small shocks during that night. The earthquakes themselves did not seem surprising,

they were a fitting part of the weird experiences of the day. We felt as though we had been very near to the elemental forces of nature; we had been with the bare earth and volcanic rocks and strange plants that flourish in dryness, and felt the unmitigated beat of the sun. It was like seeing the great drama of nature unveiled, fierce and beautiful.

We stayed several days in the Imperial Valley, visiting the Salton Sea, figuring out the beach lines of that other more ancient sea, and walking among the sand dunes. We found that we always went away from the farms into the desert. She was calling us loudly enough now. We heard her and were determined to find more of her. When we tried to go on, however, we met with the same universal discouragement. In El Centro they said that the road out through Yuma to the desert east of the Chocolate Mountains was very bad, and the road up the Valley through Palm Springs and Banning no road at all. Besides, there was no water anywhere. Later we found out that none of these things were exactly true, but it probably seemed the

best advice to give two lone women with no experience of desert roads. Our appearance must have been against us. Certainly it was no lack of persistence, for we interviewed everybody, hotel-managers, ranchers, druggists and garage-men. They all looked us over and gave the same advice. As far as we could learn, the Mojave Desert which we tried to go to in the first place was where we should be. We suspect now that they wanted to get rid of us.

We returned to Los Angeles and attacked the Automobile Club again. As before we had to listen to arguments about the roads and the sand and the distances and the accommodations, but this time we listened unmoved. With a defiant feeling very reminiscent of youth we purchased a shovel and two big canteens to fasten on the running-board because we had observed that all the cars in the Imperial Valley were thus equipped. These implements gave us a feeling of preparedness. We also bought some blankets and food lest we should break down on a lonely road. We knew what we wanted now and the Automobile Club found a map. It was an in-

spiring map covered with a network of black roads and many towns in bold type. We studied it and found that we could never get more than thirty miles from somewhere, and we thought we could walk that if we had to. For some reason no one told us to beware of abandoned towns and abandoned roads, perhaps they did not know about them. One of the black lines led straight toward Death Valley. Once more we said nothing about our destination, and started.

A good road led through the Cajon Pass to Victorville and thence over sand dotted with groves of Joshua palms to Barstow. A Joshua palm is a grotesque tree-yucca which appears wherever the mesas of the Mojave rise to an elevation of a few thousand feet. It becomes twenty feet high in some places and its ungainly arms stick up into the sky. It has long, dark green, pointed leaves ending in sharp thorns like the yucca. It attains to great age and the dead branches, split off from the trunk or lying on the ground, look as though they were covered with matted gray hair. Charlotte and I

never liked them much, they seemed like monsters masquerading as trees; but in that first encounter, when we drove through them mile after mile in a desolation broken only by the narrow ribbon of the gravel road, they were distinctly unpleasant and we were glad when we left them behind at Barstow.

There seemed to be a choice of routes from that town so we had an ice cream soda and interviewed the druggist, having discovered that druggists are among the most helpful of citizens. He proved to be an enthusiast about the desert, the first we had met, and we warmed to him. He brought out an album full of kodak-pictures of the Devil's Playground where the sand-dunes roll along before the wind. He grew almost poetic about them, but when we spread out the map and showed him the proposed route to Death Valley he grew grave. He said the road was so seldom traveled that in places it was obliterated. We would surely get lost. Silver Lake, the next town on it, was eighty-seven miles away. There was one ranch on the road but he was not sure any one was living there. He was

not even sure we could get accommodations at Silver Lake. Yes, it was a wonderful country; you went over five mountain ridges. He forgot himself and began to describe it glowingly when a tall man who was looking at the magazines interposed with: "Surely, you would not send the ladies that way!"

The two words "get lost" were what deterred us. We felt we could cope with most calamities, but already, coming through the Joshua palms, we had sensed the size and emptiness of Mojave. At least until we were a little better acquainted with the strange land where even the plants seemed weird, we needed the reassurance of a very definite ribbon of road ahead. We decided to go to Randsburg, then to Ballarat and try to get into Death Valley from there. The druggist doubted if we could get into the valley at all. We began to suspect that it might be difficult.

Randsburg, Atolia and Johannesburg are mining towns close together about forty miles north of Barstow. The road there was no such highway as we had been traveling upon; often

it was only two ruts among the sagebrush, but it was well enough marked to follow easily. Great sloping mesas spread for miles on either side of the track, rising to rocky crowns. All the big, open, gradually ascending sweeps are called mesas on the Mojave, though they are in no sense table-lands like the true mesas of New Mexico and Arizona. The groves of Joshua palms had disappeared; we were lower down now where only greasewood and sagebrush grew. The unscientific like us, who accept the word "mesa," lump together all the varieties of low prickly brush as sagebrush. The little bushes grew several feet apart on the white, gravelly ground, each little bush by itself. They smoothed out in the distance like a carpet woven of all shades of blue and green. The occasional greasewood, a graceful shrub covered with small dark green leaves, waved in the wind. Unobstructed by trees the mesa seemed endless. We stopped the car to feel the silence that enveloped it. The place was vast and empty as the stretches we had seen from the railroad, and now we found how still they all had been. The

strong, fresh wind pressed steadily against us like a wind at sea.

Atolia was the first town, golden in the setting sun, on the shoulder of a stern, red mountain. Before it a wide valley fell away in whose bottom gleamed the white floor of a dry lake. All the mountain tops were on fire. The three towns were very close together, separated by the shoulder of the red mountain. Randsburg was the largest, whose one street was a steep hill. It had a score of buildings and two or three stores. Johannesburg, just over the crest, had six buildings, among them an adobe hotel and a large garage. All three towns ornamented the map with big black letters. We thought we were approaching cities and found instead little wooden houses set on the sand with the great simplicity of the desert at their doors.

According to that map Death Valley was now not more than sixty miles away. We thoroughly startled the inhabitants of Johannesburg, familiarly known as Joburg, by the announcement that we were going there. We did not yet know how startling an announcement it was; but these

real dwellers on the desert, intimately acquainted with her difficulties, met our ignorance in a more helpful spirit than any of our other advisers had, even the agreeable druggist. Hardly any one ever goes to places like Joburg just for the pleasure of going, and they seemed pleased that we had come. They described the Panamint Mountains which shut off the valley from that side with a barrier nearly 12,000 feet high. There are only two passes, the Wingate Pass through which the borax used to be hauled and which is now blocked with fallen rocks, and a pass up by Ballarat. They had not heard of any cars going in for some time. Unhappily Ballarat had been abandoned for several years and we could not stay there unless we could find the Indians, and no one knew where they were. None of the Joburgians whom we first interviewed had ever been to Death Valley.

It was discouraging, but we persevered until we found a real old-timer. He was known as Shady Myrick. We never discovered his Christian name though he was a famous desert character. Wherever we went afterward every-

one knew Shady. Evidently the name was not descriptive for all agreed on his honesty and goodness. He was an old man, rather deaf, with clear, very straightforward-gazing eyes. Most of his life had been spent on the Mojave as a prospector and miner, and much of it in Death Valley itself. The desert held him for her own as she does all old-timers. He was under the "terrible fascination." As soon as we explained that we had come for no other purpose than to visit his beloved land he was eagerly interested and described the wonders of Death Valley, its beautiful high mountains, its shining white floor, its hot brightness, its stillness, and the flowers that sometimes deck it in the spring.

"If you go there," he said, "you will see something that you'll never see anywhere else in the world."

He had gem mines in the Panamints and was in the habit of going off with his mule-team for months at a time. He even said that he would take us to the valley himself were he a younger man. We assured him that we would go with him gladly. We urged him—you had only to

look into his eyes to trust him—promising to do all the work if he would furnish the wagon and be the guide, innocently unaware of the absurdity of such a proposal in the burning heat of Death Valley; but he only smiled gently, and said that he was too old.

Silver Lake turned out to be the place for us to go after all. He described how we could drive straight on from Joburg, a hundred and sixteen miles. There was a sort of a road all the way. He drew a map on the sand and said that we could not possibly miss it for a truck had come over six weeks before and we could follow its tracks.

"It ain't blowed much, or rained since," he remarked.

"But suppose we should get lost, what would we do?"

"Why should you get lost? Anyway, you could turn around and come back."

We looked at each other doubtfully. In the far-spreading silence around Joburg the idea of getting lost was more dreadful than it had been at Barstow. There was not even a ranch in the

whole hundred and sixteen miles. We hesitated.

"You are well and strong, ain't you?" he asked. "You can take care of yourselves as well as anybody. Why can't you go?"

"You have lived in this country so long, Mr. Myrick," I tried to explain, "you do not understand how strange it is to a newcomer. How would we recognize those mountains you speak of when we do not even know how the desert-mountains look? How could we find the spring where you say we might camp when we have never seen one like it?"

"You can do it," he insisted, "that's how you learn."

"And there is the silence, Mr. Myrick," I went on, hating to have him scorn us for cowards, "and the big emptiness."

He understood that and his face grew kind.

"You get used to it," he said gently.

It was refreshing to meet a man who looked into your feminine eyes and said: "You can do it." It made us feel that we had to do it. We spent a whole day on a hilltop near Joburg looking longingly over the sinister, beautiful moun-

tains and trying to get up our courage. Happily we were spared the decision. Two young miners at Atolia sent word that they were going over to Silver Lake in a few days and would be glad to have us follow them. Perhaps it was Shady's doing. We accepted the invitation with gratitude.

We loafed around Joburg during the intervening days. The stern, red mountains were full of mine-holes, but most of the mines were not being worked and the three towns were dead. Everywhere on the Mojave Desert mining activity had fallen off markedly after the beginning of the war. The population of the three towns had dwindled away and the few people who remained did so because they still had faith in the red mountain and hoped that the place might boom again. The big hotel at Joburg, which was attractively built around a court and which could accommodate twenty to thirty guests, was empty save for us. We looked at and admired innumerable specimens of ore. They were everywhere, in the hotel-office, in the general store, in the windows of the houses. Everyone

had some shining bit of the earth which he treasured. We bought some of Shady Myrick's cut stones and received presents of gold ore and fine pieces of bloodstone and jasper in the rough.

We enlisted the services of the garage to get our car in the best possible condition for the journey across the uncharted desert. The general opinion held that it was too heavy for such traveling; the next time we should bring a Ford. When the two young men appeared early on the appointed morning with a light Ford truck dismantled of everything except the essential machinery they also looked over our big, red car questioningly. They feared we would get stuck in the sand and jammed on rocks; but generously admitted themselves in the wrong when, later in the day, they stuck and we did not. Of course they had the advantage, for we would probably have remained where we stopped, while the four of us were able to lift and push the little truck out of its troubles. It was the most disreputable-looking car we had ever encountered even among Fords, a moving junk-pile loaded with miscellaneous shabby baggage,

tools, and half-worn-out extra tires. Our new friends matched it in appearance. They looked as tough as the Wild West story-tellers would have us believe that most miners are. We have found out that most miners are not, though we hate to shatter that dear myth of the movies. If you were to meet on any civilized road the outfit which we followed that day from seven o'clock in the morning until dark you would instantly take to the ditch and give it the right of way.

The drive was wild and fearful and wonderful. The bandits led us over and around mountains, down washes and across the beds of dry lakes. Often there was no sign of a road, at least no sign that was apparent to us. On the desert you must travel one of two ways, either along the water-courses or across them. It is strange to find a country dying of thirst cut into a rough chaos by water-channels. Rain on the Mojave is a cloud-burst. The water rushes down from the rocky heights across the long, sloping mesas, digging innumerable trenches, until it reaches a main stream-bed leading to the lowest point in the valley. When you go in the same

direction as the water you usually follow up or down the dry stream-beds, or washes, but when you cross the watershed you must crawl as best you can over the parallel trenches which are sometimes small and close together like chuck-holes in a bad country road, and sometimes wide and deep. One of the uses of a shovel, which we found out on that day, is to cut down the banks of washes that are too high and steep for a car to cross.

Most of the mountains of the Mojave are separate masses rather than continuous ranges. Between them the mesas curve, sometimes falling into deep valleys. Instead of foothills, long gradual slopes always lead up to the rock battlements, the result of the wearing down of countless ages, the wide foundations that give the ancient mountains an appearance of great repose. They are solid and everlasting. The valleys are like great bowls curving up gently to sudden, perpendicular sides. The mesas always look smooth, beautiful sweeps that completely satisfy the eye. It rests itself upon them.

When the valleys are deep they usually con-

tain a dry lake, baked mud of a white, yellow, or brownish-purple color. Crossing dry lakes is a curious experience. They never look very wide, but are often several miles across. You need a whole new adjustment of ideas of distance on the desert for the air is so clear that distant objects look stark and near. What you judge to be half a mile usually turns out to be five, and four miles is certainly eighteen. We were always deceived about distances until we trained ourselves a little by picking out some point ahead, guessing how far it was, and measuring it with the cyclometer. Dry lakes are not only deceitful about their size, but also about their nature. Along the edges is a strange glistening effect as though water were standing under the shore. Often the rocks and bushes are reflected in it upside down, and if the lake is large enough the illusion of water is perfect. You drive across with a queer effect of standing still, for there is not so much as a stone to mark your progress. It is like being in a boat on an actual lake. The sunlight is very dazzling on the white and yellow expanses and the heat-shimmer makes the

ground seem to heave. Sometimes you have the illusion of going steeply up-hill.

Nothing grows in the lake-beds, but the mesas are covered with the usual desert-growths, sage-brush, greasewood and many varieties of cacti. A view from one of the ridges is a look into a magical country. Only enchantment could produce the pale, lovely colors that lie along the mountains and the endless variety of blues and pinks and sage-greens which flow over the wide, sagebrush-covered mesas. The dry lake far down in the bottom of the valley shines. The illusion of water at its further edges is a glistening brightness. It is hard to tell where the baked mud ends and the sand begins. It is hard to tell what are the real colors and shapes of things. If you can linger a while they change. The valley never loses its immense repose, but it changes its colors as though they were garments, and it changes the relations of things to each other. That violet crag looks very big and important while you are toiling up the mesa, but just as you are crossing the ridge and look back

for the last time you see that the wine-red hill beside it is really much larger.

For a short distance we followed the old trail over which the borax used to be hauled from Death Valley. The familiar name, "Twenty-Mule-Team Borax," was touched with romance. Out of the bottom of that baffling, inaccessible valley, through a pass by the high Panamint Mountains where it is sixty miles between the water-holes, and over this weird country unlike any country we had dreamed existed in the world, this prosaic commodity was hauled by strings of laboring mules. They tugged through the sand day after day and their drivers made camp-fires under the stars. We can never see that name now on a package of kitchen-borax, humbly standing on the shelf, without going again in imagination over those two old, lonely ruts.

We lunched at a spring under a cottonwood tree—Two Springs is its name, the only water on the route. Some one once tried to graze cattle there, and the water came through a wooden trough into a cement basin. During lunch the

bandits entertained us with tales of the desert. It has its own ethics. You are justified in killing a man who robs your camp or steals your burros. Out there at Two Springs we realized that it was right. If you lose your food or your pack-animal you may well lose your life. Many a prospector has never returned. The elder of the bandits remarked thoughtfully that he was glad he had never had to kill a man. He knew a fellow who had and who was hounded to death by the memory. He was justified by desert-ethics, but he had no peace in his sleep.

Toward sunset we went down an endless slope among mountains, some of which were red, some yellow, some a sulphurous green, and some black. A black mountain is a sinister object. There is a kind of fear which does not concern itself with real things that might happen, but is a primitive fear of nature herself. Even the bandits admitted feeling it sometimes. It is a fear of something impending in the bare spaces, as though the mountains threatened. A little creeping chill that had nothing to do with the cool of evening kept us close behind the Ford. At the

bottom of the rough slope lay a somber basin full of shadow, beyond which rose an abrupt, high ridge of sand. In spite of us the Ford gained there and we saw it far ahead crawling up the ridge like a black bug. It seemed to stop and jerk and stop and jerk again. Then it disappeared over the top. For a few fearful moments we were alone with Mojave. How could rocks and sand and silence make us afraid and yet be so wonderful? For they were wonderful. The ridge was orange against a luminous-orange sky, the sand in the shadowy basin reached right and left, mysteriously shining, to mountains with rosy tops. The darkness around us was indigo, the two crooked ruts of the Ford were full of blue.

Apprehensively, jerking and stopping, stopping and jerking, as the Ford had done, the engine clanking as though it would smash itself to pieces, the radiator boiling frantically, we bucked our way to the summit of the ridge. It looked down on an immense dry lake in a valley so big that the mountains beyond were dim in the twilight. At the far side of the lake stood a

group of eight or ten portable houses, bright orange beside the purple darkness of the baked-mud lake. It was the town which we had made that incredible journey to reach. Below us we could see the little truck struggling through the sand. Presently it reached the hard edge of the lake and merged with its dark smoothness. We followed down the ridge in its ruts and drove for three miles straight across the hard lake-bed toward the town, where now a few lights gleamed. The orange faded from the houses and the whole valley became a rich plum-color. It was dark when we came out onto the sand again and drove into the lonely hamlet.

A kindly German couple received us. They were as amazed to see two women arrive in a big car as we were at arriving. Once two men had come in a Cadillac just to see the desert, but they could remember no other visitors with such an unusual object. Mrs. Brauer doubted if we would find much to look at in Silver Lake. We assured her that we found much already and hoped to find much more.

"And where did you think you vas going?"

her husband asked, chuckling vastly in the background.

"To Death Valley."

"Mein Gott!"

They conducted us to a one-room shack beside the tin can dump and bade us be at home. Strangely enough we felt at home. The door of the shack faced the open desert, the threshold only three inches above the sand. It stretched away white and still, radiating pale light. The craving which had made us seek a wild and lonely place responded to it. The night was a deep-blue, warm and luminous. A hard young moon, sharp as a curved knife blade, hung over the hills. We went out into the vague brightness among the ghostly bushes, and at last onto the darkness of the lake-bed. Beyond it the sand gleamed on the ridge we had come over. On either side the mountains we had feared were strong, beautiful silhouettes. In the northwest stood the mass of the Avawatz, a pure and noble skyline glowing with pale rose. The Avawatz had been the most fearful mountain of all in the sultry afternoon, a red conglomeration of vol-

canic hills. We walked on and on, full of a strange, terrible happiness. The trackless, unbroken expanse of the lake seemed boundless, the mountains were never any nearer. We kept looking back for the reassuring gleam of the lamp we had set in the window; presently it was lost. Nothing indicated the whereabouts of the town, we left no footprint-trail on the hard mud, every link with mankind was gone. Before starting we had located the little houses in relation to a certain peak and we felt like navigators in an uncharted sea.

"We must learn to steer by the stars," Charlotte said. "We must always remember that."

We stood still listening to the silence. It was immense and all enveloping. No murmur of leaves, nor drip of water, nor buzz of insects broke it. It brooded around us like a live thing.

"Do you hear the universe moving on?" Charlotte whispered.

"It is your own heart beating," I told her, but I did not believe it.

We had found Mojave.

III

The White Heart

WE had indeed found her. The morning sun came up over the immense valley ringed with beautiful, reposeful mountains. The big, empty mesas swept up to them, streaked with purple and green like the sea. Sometimes shining sand led between them to indistinguishable rose and blue. Such a palace of dreams beckoned toward Death Valley behind Avawatz, the sultry, red mountain that had been so magical in the night; and another called southward to the white desolation of the Devil's Playground beyond the far end of the lake where stood a symmetrical, black, mountain-mass with a tongue of bright sand running up it. The black mountain and the shining tongue of sand were reflected in an expanse of radiant blue water. This was astonishing and we hastened to inquire the name of the river or lake

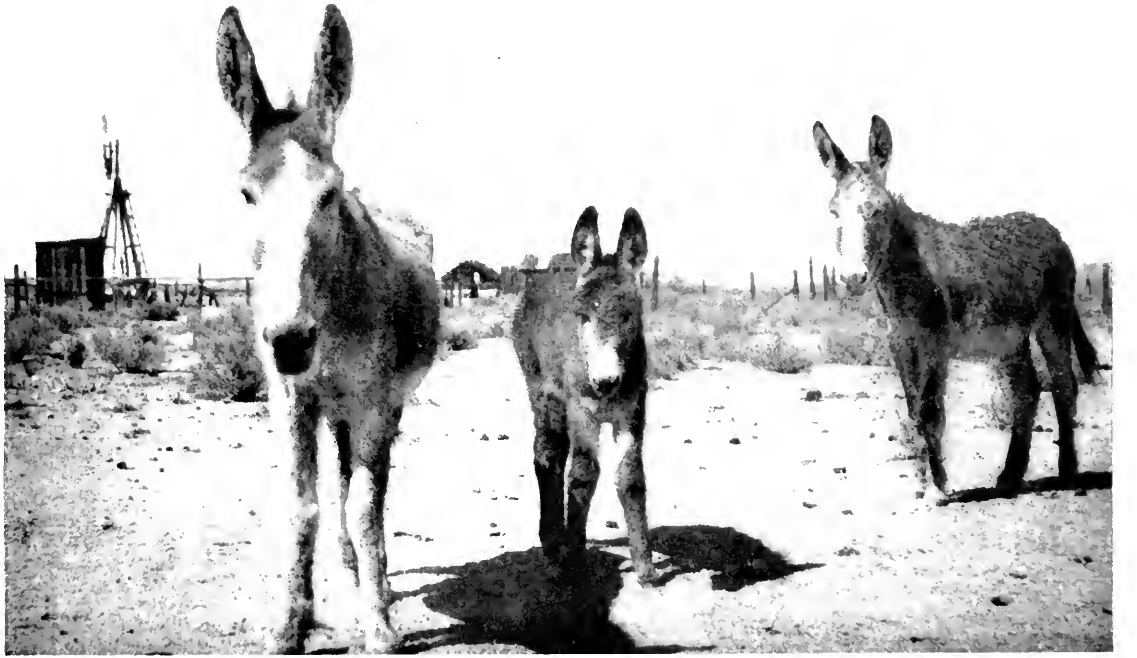
that lit the distance with such heavenly brightness. The old German chuckled so much that he seemed about to blow up with access of mirth. Finally he was able to explain that it was only a mirage. We watched it all day and saw it change to a thin streak at noon and widen again at evening. The reflections of the bushes at its edge were so magnified that they looked like trees. To Brauer's endless entertainment we insisted that trees grew there.

Ever since leaving Barstow we had been penetrating further and further into the Mojave. With every mile she had become more terrible and more beautiful. The colors which had delighted us at Joburg were pale beside the colors around Silver Lake, the mountains were hills compared to these beautiful, sinister masses. The sun had been brighter there than any eastern sun, here it was a hot, white blaze. All the way Mojave had asserted herself more and more. In the Imperial Valley, at Joburg and Barstow, we had felt men upon the desert, the drama was partly their drama; now, though they might still make roads and build houses, they seemed in-

significant. We had but to walk two or three hundred yards from Silver Lake to forget it and be wrapped in the endless stillness. There was something awful in the silence, the awfulness which our savage ancestors felt and bequeathed to us in our intangible fear of the dark and of the wilderness, and the fear of being alone which many people have; but there was greatness in it too, the greatness which is always to be found in the outdoors. Balzac remarks that "the desert is God without humanity." Truly the earth lives, and the sun and the stars, a rhythm beats in them and unites them. They are the drama and the human story is only a scene.

The town of Silver Lake, such a little oasis of life in the solitude, is owned by the Brauers who operate a general store and give board to the few travelers who come to the mines in the neighborhood. They are mostly silver-mines, whence the name. A few years ago there was considerable activity when the Avawatz Crown and the big silver mine at Riggs were in operation. Miners came to "town" in Fords which

no doubt resembled the junk pile we had followed from Joburg, and sometimes with pack-trains. The pack-train on the desert always consists of a string of burros. The burro in spite of his Mexican name, is nothing more than a donkey, the biblical ass. He seems to be native to all primitive places, the first burden-bearer. The prospector of the early days with his pick and shovel was a picturesque figure traveling across the sandy stretches from water-hole to water-hole. It is often a hard day's-journey between the infrequent springs, sometimes a several-days'-journey. He dug and broke the rock, and sometimes he made his "strike." Then the boom on the desert would begin. Settlers came in, roads were built and towns sprang up. The brutalities of mining-camps which we read of were probably reflections of the inhospitality of the land. The very characteristics which make the desert dramatic and beautiful make it terrible for mankind to overcome. The expense of mining operations in that hard country proved to be too great unless the vein were exceptionally rich, and most of the small mines are now aban-



SOME HALF-WILD BURROS WANDERED AROUND SILVER LAKE

doned. Nevertheless you still occasionally meet a prospector with his burros, and in remote places like Silver Lake the Ford has not entirely done away with the pack-train.

A number of half wild burros wandered around among the little houses attracted by the watering-trough though there was hardly anything for them to eat. The soil is said to be so alkalai that nothing will grow there even under irrigation. A patch of grass six feet by two, carefully cherished by the Brauers, was the only green thing in town. We saw the list of electors nailed to the door of the general store. There were seven names on it.

A lonesome little railroad comes along the edge of the Devil's Playground from Ludlow on the Santa Fé, past Silver Lake to the mining camps of Nevada. All the supplies for the neighborhood are hauled in on it through a country of shifting sand where no wagon-road can be maintained. Even a railroad, the symbol of civilization, cannot break the solitude. Great arteries of life like the Santa Fé and the Southern Pacific become very tiny veins when they

cross the desert; the little Tonapah and Tidewater Railroad hardly seems to exist. You do not see the track until you stumble over it, the telegraph poles are lost in the sagebrush. There are two trains a week, up in the morning and down at night. During breakfast on train-day a long hoot suddenly cuts the stillness you have grown accustomed to. You jump. Mr. Brauer chuckles at you and finishes his coffee and his anecdote, and gets up ponderously and knocks the ashes out of his pipe and says:

"I guess she'll be here pretty soon now."

Presently you see him sauntering over to the station. In about fifteen minutes an ungainly line of freight-cars with a passenger-coach or two in the rear comes swaying along. Mrs. Brauer gathers up the dishes leisurely. She hopes they have brought the meat. The last time she had boarders they didn't bring any meat for two weeks. If they bring it she promises to make you a fine German dinner. She never goes out to look at the train. Nobody does, except you, who stand in the doorway and wonder at it. Ever so long ago you used to see

things that resembled it. It is a curiosity like the strange, long neck of the giraffe. Like the giraffe it has a momentary interest. It goes, and the silence settles down again with a great yawn.

The dry lake on whose shores the town is situated is three miles wide and eighteen miles long, of a brownish-purple color. The surface is hard and covered with little ripples like petrified waves. It is the sink, or outlet of the Mojave River, whose wide, torn bed we had seen at Barstow spanned by an iron bridge. The river-bed had been as dry as any part of the desert, and we had supposed it was just an unusually wide, deep wash. We now learned that in times of heavy rains or much snow in the northern mountains the Mojave River thunders under the iron bridge. On a later trip, when we were staying at the Fred Harvey Hotel in Barstow, we once saw it come to life over-night. In the evening its bed lay dry and white under the moonlight, in the morning it was full of hurrying, turbid water. From Barstow the river-bed winds through the desert to the purple-brown basin at Silver Lake. Were the Mojave

a normal river its water would always flow down there and the hard dry lake would be blue with little white waves running before the wind, but it is a desert-river and gets lost in the sand. Occasionally the water flows past Barstow, but it hardly ever arrives at Silver Lake. It came once in the memory of the present inhabitants, and covered the dry lake to a depth of three or four feet. The water gradually evaporated and in a few weeks was gone. Our kind entertainers showed us pictures which they had taken of the real lake with boats on it. At that time both the town and the railroad were in the lake-bed and had to be hastily removed before the oncoming flood. An amusing incident happened one day at dinner when an artist from San Francisco, who had stopped off on his way to paint in Nevada, was boasting of the marvels of his city risen from the great fire and earthquake.

"Well," remarked our host with the same subterranean chuckle that he lavished upon us, "Silver Lake ain't so bad. We pulled her up out of the water once already."

We tried to imagine the great expanse of living water, how it would ripple and shine at its edges, and the purple mountain-tops would be mirrored in it. Once the mirage had come true.

Every day we watched the dream water increase and diminish at the base of the black mountain with the tongue of silver sand running up it. The illusion was always best in the morning, but never quite vanished while the sun shone. It was so perfect that incredulity at last compelled us to drive down the eighteen miles of the lake-bed and explore it.

Brauer's eyes twinkled as he filled our gasoline tank. "You think the lake ain't dried up yet, hey?" We kept our thoughts to ourselves.

The first surprise was when we reached the end of the lake and had not reached the mountain. It looked just the same except that the water had vanished—hidden maybe by the brush that covered the sand. Our host had said something about a road, but we had been so sure that the mountain was at the edge of the lake that we had not listened carefully enough and failed to find it, so we left the car and

walked through the brush. The bushes were very small and starved, growing several yards apart on ground that was hard and covered with little bright stones like packed-down gravel. The most flourishing shrub was the desert-holly with gray, frosted leaves shaped exactly like the leaves of Christmas holly, and small lavender berries. The following Christmas Mrs. Brauer sent us great wreaths made of it and tied with red ribbons to decorate our homes, a happy present that brought the hot brightness of the desert into the gloom of an eastern winter. As we walked among the little bushes the sun was very hot and the mountain seemed to travel away as fast as we approached it. The second surprise was when it also vanished entirely and three black hills stood in its place. They were ugly and looked like heaps of coal. The beautiful peak which we had seen was some ten miles further back on the main range which shut off the Devil's Playground. It had composed with the three black hills to form the symmetrical mass. There was no water either, and no trees.

The desolation was stark and sad; sand and sand with hardly any brush reached to the distant range. The palace of dreams was gone. Disillusioned, we climbed upon the nearest coal-pile, then suddenly we saw the miracle again, in the north this time, whence we had come. The town of Silver Lake was mirrored in blue water as shining and as heavenly as the vision which was lost. The houses had weathered a deep orange and burned in the sun. The white tank set upon stilts above the well was dazzling to look at. Trees grew beside the glistening dream-water. It was brighter than any town or lake could possibly be; it was magical.

Thus the desert keeps beckoning to you. Either the unknown goal, or the known starting-point, or perhaps both at the same time, are magical; only "here" is ever dreary. While we sat on the coal-pile Mojave related a parable:

"Once three brothers slung their canteens over their shoulders and came to me. They traveled many days toward my shining. They were often thirsty and very tired. Presently they came to a spring, and when they had rested

a dispute arose. The eldest brother wished to hasten on, but the second said that my shining appeared no nearer than at the beginning. Nay, he did not believe in it, he would stay where he was. The youngest, however, agreed to accompany his eldest brother and the two set out once more. They crossed high mountain-ranges and deep valleys, but my shining was always before or after. In the seventh valley the youngest brother also began to doubt me and refused to go any further.

" 'I will stay here,' he said, 'these bushes have little cool shadows beside them, and the ground is bright with little colored stones and there are flowers. Stay also and let us be happy.'

"But the eldest brother would not stay.

"He traveled all the years of his life toward my shining. The second brother turned the spring into a lake and built himself a house with orange-groves around it. The third brother rested in the cool shadows and rejoiced in the little bright stones."

We listened intently, but there was no moral.

* * * * *

In spite of our host's "Mein Gott!" we still persisted in our idea of going to Death Valley. It was now only thirty miles away where a shining such as had led the brothers on beckoned beyond the Avawatz. We learned that this route was impossible for a car, and so dry that even pack-animals could hardly enter the valley that way. However, we could make a detour of nearly two hundred miles, striking the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad again at Zabrisky or Death Valley Junction, and possibly get in that way. During the debate the sheriff of Silver Lake, a silent person decorated with pistols, volunteered to go with us beyond the Avawatz as far as Saratoga Springs, and as much further as we could drive the car. He would promise nothing as he had not been there for some time and was a cautious man, but he thought we might find it worth while. Any one of those bright paths was worth while to us, and we eagerly agreed.

That day's excursion proved even more memorable than the drive from Joburg. It was like a continuation of it, becoming ever wilder

and stranger. We had already heard a few of Mojave's songs, bits of her color-songs, and her peace-songs, and underneath like a rumbling bass her terror-song—but we were as yet only acquaintances on the way to intimacy. Ever since leaving Barstow we had felt that we were advancing through progressive suggestion toward some kind of a climax. Mojave was leading us on to something. Her heart still lay beyond.

A good enough track led north along the railroad for a few miles and then swung around the base of the Avawatz. We drove up an interminable mesa where the alleged road grew always rougher and less well-marked, and the engine had an annoying tendency to boil. The wind was from behind and the heat of the sun radiating up from the white ground made it impossible to keep the engine cool. We crossed a ridge among red and purple hills of jumbled rock and began to descend into an oblong, sandy basin. The road became so unspeakable that the Sheriff advised leaving it for the white, unbroken sand of a wash. For miles

we made our own track, winding around stones and islands of brush. We were in a sort of outpost-valley south of Death Valley itself, and separated from it by what looked like a low ridge of gravel, but we no longer believed in the reality of what we thought we saw. As a matter of fact the ridge was succeeded by others, and the only way to get into the main valley was through an opening with the startling name of Suicide Pass. The valley we were in is usually considered to be a part of Death Valley; on many maps the low basins stretching north from the Avawatz for nearly a hundred miles are included under that name.

On both sides of the outpost-valley stood mountains of every hue. They were maroon, violet, or black at the base shading into lighter reds and clear yellows. One yellow mountain had a scarlet spot on its summit like a wound that bled. The dark bases of the mountains had a texture like velvet, black and purple and olive-green velvet, folded around their feet. As we descended the wash toward sea-level the heat and brightness of the sun steadily increased.

Each color shown in its intensity. The bottom of the valley was streaked with deposits of white alkali that glistened blindingly. The whole world was an ecstasy of light.

Saratoga Springs is a blue pool with green rushes growing around it, in the angle of a dark red mountain. The water bubbled up from the bottom of the little pool. A marsh full of green grass and coarse, white flowers led back from the pool, spreading out into a sheet of clear water which reflected the bare mountains and the vividly green rushes. Though this real lake in the desert was a pure and lovely blue, and dazzlingly bright, it had none of the magicalness of the dream-water by the three black hills. Somehow it just missed enchantment. Henceforth we would be able to distinguish mirage by this indescribable quality.

Saratoga is the last appearance of the Armagosa, or Bitter River, before it loses itself in Death Valley. Like the Mojave River the Armagosa gets lost. It flows southward through the desert, sometimes roaring down a rocky gorge, sometimes vanishing completely for

miles in a sandy stretch, then reappearing unaccountably to form oases like the one at Saratoga. Opposite the southern end of Death Valley it suddenly changes its mind and turns north on itself to enter the valley where it makes a great bog encrusted with white, alkali deposits. The Armagosa flows through an alkali desert carrying along minerals in solution, which give its water the taste that has gained for it the name of Bitter River. The water of Saratoga Springs is flat and unpleasant, though it is fit to drink. There are stories of poison-water in Death Valley, but most of the springs are merely so full of alkali and salt that they are repulsive and do not quench thirst. At Silver Lake the water is strongly alkali. Everybody uses it, but when a supply of clear spring-water can be hauled in from the mountains they all rejoice. The Sheriff's partner, Charley, had a barrel full which he shared with us while we were there. The pool at Saratoga was full of little darting fish, strange to see in the silent, lifeless waste. The Sheriff saved some of his lunch for them and sat a long time on the edge throwing in

crumbs. Once, he told us, he had camped there alone for three months prospecting the hills, and they had been his friends.

We attempted to drive beyond Saratoga Springs. There was supposed to be a road, but neither Charlotte nor I could discern it. We bumped along over ground so cut by shallow water-channels that after about seven miles we dared not proceed, for a wrecked car in that shining desolation would stay forever where it smashed. We tried to walk to the top of the gravel-ridge that seemed to shut off the main valley. It looked near and innocent enough, but when we tried to reach it over the dazzling ground under the blazing sun we found, to our surprise, that we could not. The temperature was about 95 degrees, and the air very dry. The heat alone would have been quite bearable had it not been augmented by the white glare. Suddenly we realized that the little ridge was inaccessible; all the little yellow hills and ridges, and the rocky crests that shone like burnished metal, were likewise inaccessible. The realization brought a terrifying sense of helplessness.

Here was a country you could not travel over: though your goal were in sight you might never reach it. The strength and resourcefulness you relied on for emergencies were of no avail; an empty canteen, a lost burro, a smashed car, and your history might be finished. We began to understand why this place, so gay with color, so flooded with light, so clean, so bright, was called Death Valley.

Before us was the opening in the mountains where the terrible valley itself lay. It was magnificent in the biggest sense of that big, ill-used word. On the east side rose the precipitous Panamints with a thin line of snow on their summits; opposite them the dark buttresses of the Funeral Mountains faded back into dimness. Between the ranges hung a blue haze of the quality of the sky, like the haze that had obscured the hot Imperial Valley. The mountains were majestic, immovable, their summits dwelt in the living silence. The haze had the magicalness of mirage. We longed to go on while the sun went down and the silence turned blue, for now we were certain that under that

haze, between those imposing walls, lay the climax to which Mojave had been leading us, her White Heart. She could never be more desolate, or stiller or grander. It was the logical journey's end, and what had been at first merely a casual choice of destination became a fixed goal to be reached through any hazards.

"If you go there," the old prospector had said, "you will see something you won't see anywhere else on earth."

IV

The Outfit

DEATH VALLEY was the goal, but after the day at Saratoga Springs one thing was certain: no matter if we could get there in an automobile—and various expedients were suggested to make it possible, even safe—not thus would we enter the White Heart, not with the throbbing of an engine, not dependent on gasoline, not limited in time, not thwarted by roads. When we went it would be slowly, quietly, camping by the springs, making fires of the brush, sleeping under the open sky, listening, watching. We had found the outdoors on the desert a wonderful thing and we wanted to live with it a while. If the White Heart was the climax of Mojave we felt that it must be a climax of the feel of the outdoors, one of its supreme expressions. We were going on a pilgrimage to that.

Such a pilgrimage meant an outfit, either a wagon or a pack-train, and a guide. We needed a man accustomed to living on the desert, who knew the valley thoroughly, who could work in its heat and brightness, and who had the courage to take two ignorant enthusiasts there. We had lost the easy assurance with which we had talked at Joburg about going to Death Valley. No wonder the inhabitants of that town had been stunned when we said that we were on the way there! The unspeakable road beyond Saratoga Springs and the little gravel-ridge which we could not climb were sufficient warning of the nature of the undertaking. Mojave is not easily to be known as we would know her. She keeps herself to herself. The season added a further complication. Soon it would be April and the heat in the valley would be too great for us to endure. The pilgrimage must start no later than January. That meant going home and coming back. As usual the way to the valley bristled with difficulties.

We talked to the Sheriff about it. Julius Meyer was nearing fifty, a lean, strong-looking

man. He had a fine face, very somber in repose as though he had met with some lasting disappointment, but wonderfully lit by his occasional smile. His eyes had the hard clearness which living on the desert seems to produce. They looked straight at you. He said little, the kind of man who announces his decisions briefly and carries them out. Mrs. Brauer said of him: "Julius is good." Beyond her praise and the impression which he made we knew nothing of him except the incident of the little fishes and that he had lived twenty years on the desert and had once traveled the length of Death Valley with burros; but we had no hesitation in asking him to be our guide. He said it was a mad idea. Nobody ever went to Death Valley unless they expected to get something out of it, and then they took a Ford if they could find one and hurried.

"We are just like the rest of them," we told him. "We expect to get something out of it, but we can't get it in a Ford."

He finally agreed to go if we would take a wagon. He refused to consider a pack-train, saying that we would never be able to pack bur-

ros, and walk beside them and ride them in the heat of the valley. He did not take the discussion very seriously, for he evidently did not expect us to return. He thought the glamor of Mojave would wear off.

Nevertheless it was a promise, and we were certain that when such a man promised we would see the White Heart. During the following summer and autumn we kept hearing snatches of Mojave's songs. A bit of pure cobalt in the depths of the woods, the flash of the sun on the tops of waves, the clear lovely blue of ruts in a sandy road echoed her. Thinking of her the eastern sun seemed a trifle pale, the gay brightness of summer a little dim. We loved the familiar, dear New England landscape, but we were under the "terrible fascination." Only the sea was like Mojave. Often Charlotte and I would take our blankets to a lonely part of the beach and spend the night there. Never before had we slept outdoors, on the ground under the stars. Knowing Mojave even a little had made us feel that it might be worth while. We found that it was.

"We have to get used to it," we told our astonished friends. "When we go to Death Valley with the wagon we will have to sleep on the ground."

We did get used to it and in December wrote the Sheriff. This telegram came:

"O. K. Julius Meyer."

When we appeared for the second time at Silver Lake in the big automobile we were greeted with even greater amazement than before. We had driven over from Barstow and traveling on the desert for pleasure is so novel an idea that everybody thought us insane. There were a few more people in town than we had found on our former visit, a commercial traveler and three or four miners, among them a brigand known as French Pete, with his head tied up in a red handkerchief. They all took a lively interest in the proposed expedition and gave advice. They were courteous, but amusement contended with wonder behind their friendly eyes. They tried to be kind and searched their minds for something good to say of the frightful valley.

Each one separately told us what was its real, true attraction.

"You see the highest and the lowest spots in the United States at the same time. Mount Whitney, you know, and the bottom of the Valley."

Since we had never been able to see Mount Whitney in any of our travels on the Mojave, we wondered how we should be able to see it from the deep pit of the valley with the Panamints between, but receptivity was our rôle. The highest and lowest became a sort of slogan. Sooner or later everybody we met at Silver Lake or on our way to the valley said it. We waited for them to say it and recorded it in our diaries: "Explained about H. and L."

The Sheriff had procured a wagon drawn by a horse and a mule to start from Beatty, a hundred miles further up the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad, and much credit is due him for the gravity with which he embarked on the folly. After the O. K. telegram he never expressed the slightest doubt of the feasibleness, the sanity, and even the usualness of the proceeding. What

we needed more than anything else was a real reason for going, seeing the desert and having an adventure with the outdoors being no reasons at all. He furnished even that. Charlotte had brought her sketching-box; he saw it among the camping-paraphernalia, asked what it was, and instantly spread the report that we were artists in search of scenery. We had the presence of mind never to deny this and by refraining from exhibitions were able to be both notorious and respectable.

We abandoned the automobile and traveled up to Beatty on the railroad, a seven-hours'-journey. On the morning of train-day our bed-rolls and duffle-bags on the station-platform, and ourselves getting into the coach in knickerbockers and tough, high shoes created more excitement than Silver Lake had known for some time. Even Mrs. Brauer came out, and Mr. Brauer stood with his hands in his pockets, beaming on the crazy line of freight cars and the heads stuck out of the windows of the coaches, chuckling and chuckling. There was a Pullman from Los Angeles hitched to the tail of the train, very

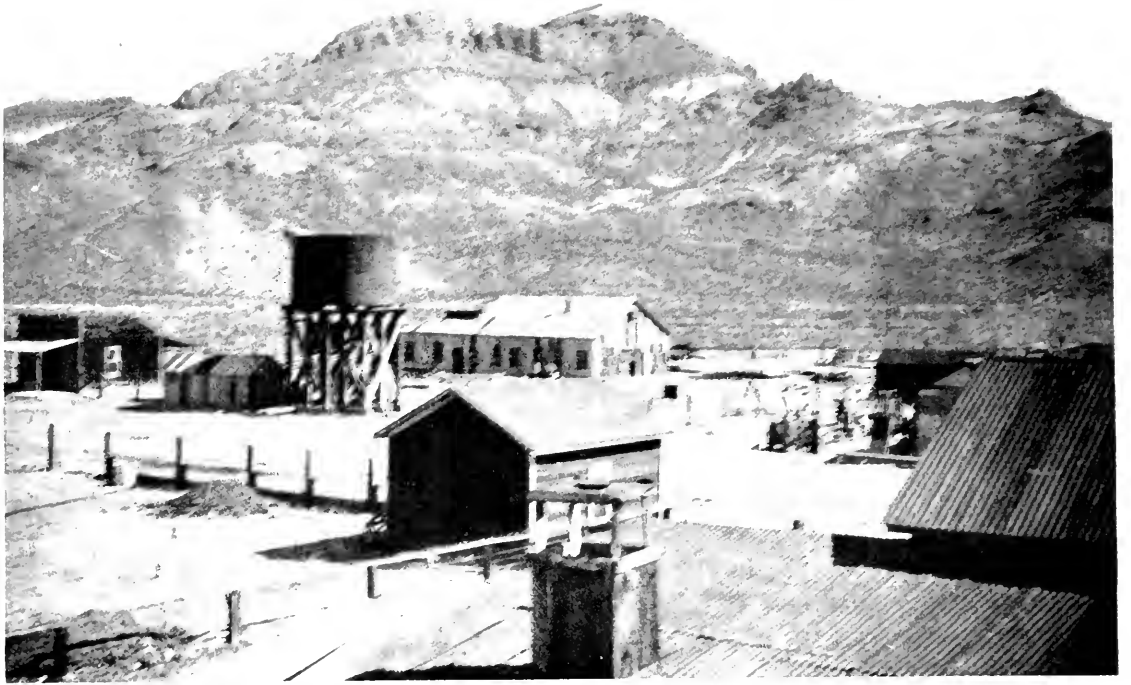
grand, with all the window-shades still pulled down so early in the morning. Our guide, who felt his responsibilities, was chagrined because he could not get us places in it; but we were more than content, especially when the conductor, who had a black mustache worthy of one of Stevenson's pirates and wore no uniform, assured us that the coach was not supposed to be a smoking-car so our presence would interfere with no one's happiness. It was full of old-timers who were all remarkable for the clearness of their eyes. They were friendly and courteous, men past middle age, dressed in overalls and flannel shirts, who got off at Zabrisky and such places, where it is hard to see that a town exists. The younger men, and the more prosperous looking in business-suits were mostly bound for Tonopah, one of the most active mining-centers left in the country. During the day many of our fellow-passengers talked to us, stopping as they went up and down the aisle to sit on the arm of the opposite seat. The talk was of mining prospects, the booms of Goldfield and Tonopah, speculation in mining-shares, the slump after the

war began, the abandoned towns, the river of money that has flowed into the desert and been drunk up by the sand. They all agreed that Death Valley was a desperate place, there had never been any mining there to amount to anything. To encourage us they never failed to mention H. and L., but they thought we would find more to interest us in the mining towns of Nevada. They made them picturesque with pioneering stories.

The railroad runs along the east side of Death Valley, separated from it by a range of mountains. It follows the course of the Armagosa River as it flows south through the desert. In some places the river-bed was full of water, in others it was a dry wash. Where the water is certain large mesquites and cottonwood trees grow and the mining stations, consisting of a store and one or two houses, are nearby. The mountains along the route are scarred with mines and prospect holes. At Death Valley Junction a branch road goes to the large borax-mine at Ryan on the edge of the valley.

The country is very desolate. Soon after leav-

ing Silver Lake we passed a group of big sand-dunes with summits blown by the wind into beautiful, sharp edges. From that viewpoint they seemed to guard the shining illusion that always beckoned behind the Avawatz. We had seen them on the way to Saratoga, but so far off that they had looked like little mounds. They are a miniature of the Devil's Playground, that utter desolation of shifting sand south of Silver Lake where no roads are. Now we passed near enough to see their impressive size and how the wind makes their beautiful outlines. When the sand is deep and fine the wind is forever at work upon it, blowing it into dunes, changing their shapes, piling them up and tearing them down. It gradually moves them along in its prevailing direction by rolling their tops down the lee side and pushing up the windward side for a new summit. The dunes literally roll over. The artist who had boasted of his city at Silver Lake called them the "marching sands." North of the marching sands we traveled through gray-green mesas much broken by rugged, mountainous masses, a forbidding and stern land.



BEATTY, AT THE BASE OF A BIG RED MOUNTAIN

Beatty has a magnificent location at the base of a big, red mountain in front of a greater, indigo mass. It was once a prosperous mining town, but was at that time partly deserted and many of the small wooden houses stood empty. Every effort had been made to give the appearance of streets by fencing off yards around the houses, but it was hard to get the scheme of Beatty. The first impression was of houses set down promiscuously on the sand. Some of the yards had gardens where, by means of constant watering, fruit-trees and roses were made to grow. Beatty is at a considerable altitude so that while the noonday sun was hot the nights were cold, sometimes below freezing. The air was marvelously clear. On the brightest days in the east flowers and shrubs look as though they were floating in a pure, colorless liquid, and the vistas are softly veiled. The air seems to have substance. Among the mountains of the desert it is a flawless plate glass through which you look directly at the face of the world. Distant outlines stand out boldly, and every little shining rock and bush is set firmly down.

Prohibition had hit Beatty hard. Most of the ground-floor of the hotel consisted of a big poolroom and bar over which hung an air of sadness. We had an impression of moving-day in that forlorn hour when everything is dismantled and the van has not come. The landlady apologized for the accommodations which, however, were excellent.

"We used to keep it up real nice before mining slumped," she said, "but now there is prohibition, too, and we are clean discouraged."

She was an ingenious person. In her front yard, one of the prettiest in Beatty, the walks and flower-beds were edged with empty bottles driven in neck down. They made a fine border, durable, with a glassy glitter in the sun.

At Beatty we first encountered Molly and Bill. Molly was a white mule and Bill a big, thin, red horse. They were hitched to an ordinary grocery wagon. Our guide seemed pleased with them, but we were doubtful. He had rented them from an Indian and said that they were absolutely desert-proof, they could live on noth-

ing at all and drink soda-water forever. Bill looked as though he had always lived on nothing at all, and Molly laid back her long, white ears in a manner unpleasantly suggestive. Moreover, it did not seem possible that the frail-looking wagon could carry the supplies and the camping equipment. We had purchased food for a month. It was both heavy and bulky; bacon, ham, potatoes, flour, canned milk and vegetables, four pounds of butter and six dozen eggs. It was the Sheriff's selection; Charlotte and I had not expected to travel de luxe like that. Indeed we had brought some dried potatoes and vegetables and had not dreamed of things like milk or butter or eggs. He made quite a stand for the real potatoes, so they had to go along. In spite of their bulk the canned milk and vegetables are almost necessities on the desert, where the water is scarce and bad, for things that have to be soaked a long time and cooked in the alkali water are hardly edible. He had a weakness for green California chilies and horehound candy, so they also were included. Charlotte insisted on

dried fruit, especially prunes. The grub alone made a formidable pile on the porch of the general store. In addition there was a bale of hay and a bag of grain. It looked like very little for the dejected Molly and Bill, but the Sheriff said that we could buy more at Furnace Creek Ranch in the bottom of the valley, and that we need only feed them while we were actually in the valley, for as soon as we went up a little way on either side they could forage. We looked anxiously out over the environs of Beatty, which is fairly high-up. They were precisely like the environs of Silver Lake, where the half-wild burros can scarcely find a living. We began to worry in earnest. By the time the food for man and beast was on the wagon worry turned to despair. It was full, and the three beds, the duffle-bags, the sketch-box which we clung to as the only proof of sanity, and the three five-gallon gasoline cans for carrying water were still on the ground.

"It can't be done," we told the Sheriff. "You will have to make some other arrangement."

"Now look here," he replied. "You stop wor-

rying. Nobody in this outfit is to worry except me. That's my job. It's what I'm for."

His hard blue eyes looked into ours with determination, then he grinned and from that moment became the Official Worrier.

Slowly and patiently he built up a monumental structure and cinched it with rope and baling wire. Everything found a place. As we expected to make a spring that night it was not necessary to fill the gasoline cans. They were hung on the back of the load with more baling-wire. Remembering the day when it had been 95 degrees at Saratoga Springs we tried to leave our heavy driving-coats behind, but were forcibly forbidden to do so. They were added to the topmost peak.

For two days all Beatty, from the leading citizen who sold us our supplies to the Mexican cook in the railroad restaurant who told us that it was so hot in Death Valley the lizards had to turn over on their backs and wave their feet in the air to cool them, had been much cheered by our presence. Nobody expected us to be gone very long and they watched the loading up of

the month's supplies with amused interest. When we were ready we had to pose beside the wagon in the middle of the street to have our picture taken. Then somebody cried "Good luck!" and at last we started.

As soon as a turn in the road hid Beatty the silence closed around us. The crisp, clear air made our blood tingle. We walked the first few miles while the Worrier drove. The sun, the wind, and the scarred old mountains became the only important things in the world. We were committed to sunrise and sunset, rocks and brush were to be our companions, lonely springs were to keep us alive, the roots of the greasewood were to warm us, all our possessions were contained in one frail wagon. In half an hour the desert claimed us. The sun that loves the desert clothed it in colored garments.

V

Entering Death Valley

THE way to Death Valley from Beatty is across a shallower valley and through Daylight Pass at an elevation of 4,317 feet. First the road winds down around small, rough hills, at whose base the deserted town of Ryolite is situated. Ryolite is what remains of a mining boom. It is pushed into a cove of a rose-colored mountain—but desert mountains change their hues so often that it may not always be rose. Ryolite is a typical American ruin. Its boom was very brief. The town sprang up over-night. Money was poured in. Water was brought for miles in a pipe-line, a railroad from Beatty begun, and permanent buildings erected —it had the pride of a "thirty thousand dollar hotel," and a bank to match. Immense energy and enthusiasm of youth, middle-aged greed, too, with its eye on the immediate main chance, went

into its making. No doubt some people profited by the building of Ryolite. It was a tumult of "American initiative"—then it did not pay. It is easy to picture the promoters, their important hurry, their "up-to-date methods," their big talk. It is easy to picture the investors too. Nearly everybody who has money to invest buys stock in a gold mine once. Great hopes converged on the desert here from many a board-sidewalked town and prairie-farm; futures were built on it. There is a throb in the throat for Ryolite, fading into the mountain, its corrugated-iron roofs rusting red like the hills. The desert is licking the wound with her sandy tongue until not even a scar will remain. Sooner or later she heals all the little scratches men make on her surface.

The dead town faced a wide valley stretching like a green meadow to the opposite mountains. The thick sagebrush melted together into a smooth sward over which cloud-shadows floated. The sun evoked lovely, changing color-tones from it, like a musician playing upon his instrument, making harmonies of violet and brown and

sage-green flow beneath a melody of pure blue. A perfectly straight road cut a white line through the meadow. The distance was ten miles, but no one unaccustomed to the clear air of the desert would guess it to be more than three. The road appeared level with a slight rise under the western mountains which had strong, dark outlines on the sky. They looked purple and their lower masses kept emerging from the main range and fading again as the shadows circled.

It took Molly and Bill a long time to travel the straight, white line. By turn we drove and walked, as the three of us could not ride in the wagon at once. Already the superiority of this mode of travel over Fords was being demonstrated. We felt the simple bigness of the desert, and were intimate with the indigo shadow under each little bush, and the bright-colored stones; we had time to make digressions to some new cactus or strange-looking rock while Molly and Bill plodded on. For hours we crossed the valley, hardly seeming to progress. The same landscape was always before us, yet we were in

the midst of a changing pageant. Soon Ryolite was lost in a mass of pale rose and blue that seemed like a gate to another world. The knowledge that the mountains were made of dull-red, crumbling rock, and that only Beatty lay behind them could not destroy the illusion. It grew fairer as we left it. The dark mountains in front became formidable silhouettes as the afternoon sun inclined toward them. We could never quite see the canyon by which we were to reach the pass; several times we thought we saw it, only to lose it again in the subtleties of shifting shadows.

Soon after crossing the middle of the valley the road began a long, brutal ascent. Mile after mile it steadily climbed until the sweat made furrows in the shaggy coats of Molly and Bill; but to us, walking ahead of the wagon, the valley looked level as before, and only our greater exertion convinced us of the rise. Here was one of the characteristic mesas of the Mojave; nothing is quite flat there except the narrow bottoms of the valleys. Suddenly the road reached the outposts of the mountain and became much

THE OUTFIT

steeper through the sandy wash of a canyon. The walls on either side gradually grew higher and the sand deeper. The ungainly load proved almost too much for the desert-proof steeds. At times we all three had to push, and we often had to stop to rest. Night came while we were still toiling upward. It was cold, and a bitter wind blew between the walls. During one of the halts the Worrier gathered up some bits of wood by the roadside, the remains of a ruined shack, and thrust them under the cinch-ropes.

"We'll need them," he said, buttoning his inadequate coat to the chin. "We're in luck."

"You'll find we're always in luck," we told him through chattering teeth.

At last Molly and Bill succeeded in reaching the top of the pass. The spring was still half a mile away in the side of a mountain. We did not attempt to take the wagon there, but the Worrier took the tired animals and brought back the water while Charlotte and I found a place fairly sheltered from the wind in the bottom of a wash, lugged down the bits of firewood

and the "kitchen," and began to cook our first meal on the desert. Soon we heard the Worrier shouting unintelligible things. Much alarmed we scrambled hastily up out of the wash to find him returning, followed by a troop of wild burros. They were not in the least discouraged by his violent remarks, but came all the way and stood in a half-circle around the wagon, twitching their furry ears. He was noisily vehement. He said that they would steal and eat anything from our blankets to his precious chilies sealed up in tin cans; that they had no conscience, they were the pirates of the desert. During dinner he kept making excursions to the top of the wash to throw stones at them. He guarded the wagon all night by sleeping under it, a practice which he continued throughout the trip, greatly tranquilizing our minds. Burros and coyotes were the only marauders, and we knew that they would have a hard time of it. Charlotte and I dragged our bed-rolls a little way down the wash. It was a wild night. The stars had an icy glitter and the wind made dismal noises among the fearsome-looking mountain-tops; before morn-

ing it snowed a little, but we were too tired to care.

The rising sun awoke us. It leapt up over the mountains; soon every trace of the light snow was gone, the ground dry, and the air warm. From Daylight Springs a fairly good track led down eight miles to the northern rim of Death Valley. Near the end of the descending canyon Corkscrew Mountain appeared, a symmetrical mass, striking both on account of its red color like crumbling bricks and for the perpendicular cliff which spirals around it like a corkscrew. Through the field-glass the cliff was a dark violet and might be a hundred or more feet high. Corkscrew Mountain stands out boldly from its fellows, nor while we were in the valley did we ever lose sight of its sun-bright bulk. It became our landmark in the north.

Opposite Corkscrew Mountain the road turned abruptly around a point of rock. Charlotte and I were walking ahead of the wagon, we went gayly to the end of the promontory and were brought to a sudden stop by what we saw. There, without any warning of its nearness, like

an unexpected crash of orchestral music, lay the terrible valley, the beautiful, the overwhelming valley.

The Official Worrier stopped the wagon. Though he thought us insane, though he declared he could see none of the colors and enchantments we had been pointing out to him, he was moved. From the look that came into his eyes we knew that, whether he admitted it or not, like Shady Myrick he was under the terrible fascination of Mojave. That, after all, was why he had been willing to come with us to the White Heart.

"Well," he said brusquely, "that's her!"

We all stood silent then. We were about three thousand feet above the bottom of the valley looking down from the north over its whole length, an immense oblong, glistening with white, alkali deposits, deep between high mountain walls. We knew that men had died down there in the shimmering heat of that white floor, we knew that the valley was sterile and dead, and yet we saw it covered with a mantle of such strange beauty that we felt it was the noblest thing we had ever imagined. Only a poet could

hope to express the emotion of beauty stronger than fear and death which held us silent moment after moment by the point of rock. Perhaps some day a supreme singer will come around that point and adequately interpret that thrilling repose, that patience, that terror and beauty as part of the impassive, splendid life that always compasses our turbulent littleness around. Before terror and beauty like that, something inside you, your own very self, stands still; for a while you rest in the companionship of greatness.

The natural features which combined to produce this tremendous effect came slowly to our understanding. They were so unlike anything in our experience, even of the wonders of the outdoors, that they bewildered us. The strange can only be made comprehensible by comparison to the familiar, and perhaps the best comparison is to a frozen mountain-lake. The smooth, white bottom of the valley looks more like a frozen lake than like anything else, and yet it looks so little like a lake that the simile does not come easily to the mind. Death Valley is level like a lake, it is bare like a lake, cloud-shadows drift

over it as over a lake, the precipitous mountains seem to jut into it as mountains jut into a lake, but there the comparison ends and its own unfamiliar beauties begin.

Evanescent streaks and patches of color float over the shining floor between the changing hills. It reflects them. Sometimes a path made of rose tourmalines crosses it, or a blue patch lies near one edge as though a piece of the sky had fallen down. Lines of pure cobalt, pools of smoky blue, or pale yellow, or pink lavender are there, all quiveringly alive. At times the white crust shines like polished silver, at others it turns sullenly opaque. Now a blue river flows down the center—now it moves over under the western wall—now it gathers itself into a pond around which green rushes grow.

High above the middle of the valley tower the Panamint Mountains. That winter their summits were covered with snow as white as the white floor, and as shining. Without apparent break into foothills they rise nearly 12,000 feet. Seldom, even in the highest ranges, can you see so great a sheer rise, for most mountains are

approached from a considerable elevation. In Death Valley the eye begins its upward journey below sea-level. Down there the white floor shimmered and seemed to move while above it the two peaks of Telescope and Mount Baldy, joined by a long curving ridge of snow, were a remote, still whiteness.

The eastern wall of the valley is not so high, but is hardly less impressive. The Funeral Mountains are steel-blue with layers of white rock near their summits. Both the mountains and the valley were named because of tragedies down on that white floor during pioneering and prospecting days. It is impossible to get the details of the stories from the old-timers, each has a different version and no one is very clear even about his own. One story is of a party of emigrants, men, women, and children, on the way to the gold-fields with all their household goods, who entered the valley by mistake and could not find a way out; another is of a party who were attacked by Indians and fought in a circle they made of their wagons until the last man was killed. The remains of the wagons

are said to be buried in the sand near a place called Stovepipe Wells. We never could learn the exact location, though on a later trip we met a man who said that he had once actually found them, and that he had seen Indians around there wearing jewelry and using utensils which they could only have obtained from the white man sometime in the fifties. There are also stories of individual prospectors who perished on the burning sands. It does not matter which particular tragedy fastened such names on this region of celestial day, they commemorate all whose last sight of the earth was that lonely splendor.

The Funeral Range is separated by a deep canyon from the Black Mountains which continue the eastern wall of the valley. This wall is from five to six thousand feet high, jutting into the basin in great promontories as mountains jut into a rock-ringed lake. The range across the southern end is not so high and was half hidden by an opalescent haze. All the time we were in the valley that haze persisted. Only rarely and for short periods could we see any

detail in the depths of the hot basin, though the foreground sparkled in the stark, clear air. The Imperial Valley and Death Valley are always hung with misty curtains.

A long, long slope leads from the rock promontory from which we first saw the valley down to that shimmering pit. It is very rocky, cut by washes and sparsely covered with sagebrush and greasewood. Occasional little yellow or blue hills rise like islands from blue-green waves. The ground is covered with little stones of every conceivable color, which flash back the sunlight from their polished surfaces. Unfamiliar green and purple stones lie around, and bright red stones, and a stone of a strange orange-color like flame. A mass of this is what we must have seen at Saratoga Springs on the mountain that bled. The impulse to pick up specimens was irresistible. This proved to be the curse of walking over the bright mosaics. Each little stone was of a color or texture more alluring than the last until our pockets became unbearably heavy. Every resting-time was spent in trying to decide which ones to throw away, but

as we could not possibly throw one away on the same day that we picked it up, this was a fruitless occupation.

About noon we lunched in the shade of one of the little hill-islands. During the descent the heat had steadily increased and the sun shone with white, blinding intensity. The Official Worrier grew expansive and happy. He described himself as a "desert rat," and said that the hot brilliance suited him entirely. He called it a pleasant, warm day. Charlotte and I were continually looking at the little blue spots of shade behind a bush or projecting rock to rest our eyes. We could no longer look away over the valley, objects merged and vanished there. One of my recurring dreams since childhood is of trying to walk or run in a light so dazzling that I could not keep my eyes open for more than a few seconds at a time. That day my dream strikingly came true. Everywhere bright heat-waves ran over the ground. The surface of stones and the tips of leaves glittered dazzlingly. It was probably no hotter than it had been at Saratoga, but the reflection of light from

the immense white bottom of the valley was an almost unbearable brightness.

Our destination was an abandoned gold-mine on the side of the Funeral Range. From the lunch-place the Keane Wonder Mine looked on a level with us and quite near, but we traveled two hours and made a stiff climb to reach it. This was the hardest bit of marching that we did, for we were too ignorant of the effects of such a combination of heat and blinding light to know how to conduct ourselves. We thought we were sick or overtired, and being much too proud to let the Worrier suspect such a thing, pressed on without stopping often enough to rest. We had not yet learned that the wagon was always accompanied by a blessed bit of shade that we could sit down in any time. Later we appreciated fully this happy attribute of wagons. More than once we were grateful to the Worrier for refusing to come with a pack-train.

The mine was a large plant which had paid well. A mess of buildings, some half-blown-down, pieces of machinery and the big red mill

huddled at the mouth of the canyon where the mountain rises steeply from the mesa. The mine itself was higher up the canyon down which the ore was swung in huge buckets that ran on iron cables. Water had been piped from a spring a mile away, but the pipe was broken. The ground was far too rough to allow us to take the wagon to the spring, so once more the Worrier led off Molly and Bill and brought back water in a pail. Earlier in the day we had lamented the necessity of camping among wreckage, but when we reached the first building, which once had been a barn, its oblong, indigo shadow was Heaven. We lay prone on the ground behind it until the sun went down, not attempting to unload the wagon or do any useful thing. The Worrier found us thus on his return and gravely opined that we had better stay a while at Keane Wonder and try to get acclimated.

During the three days that we camped behind the barn we were living about a thousand feet above the bottom of that amazing valley, looking down into it and up at the still, white peaks of the Panamints above it. Opposite Keane

THE CAMP BEHIND THE BARN

Wonder what looked like a low, sandy ridge separates the main sink of Death Valley from a similar though smaller and less striking basin called the Mesquite Valley. The high Panamints end in a stern red mass near the sand-ridge, beyond which a long slope like the one we had come down leads to more distant mountains which, however, are a continuation of the range. Emigrant Pass through the mountains over to Ballarat starts from the slope and winds around behind the stern, red mass. That may well have been the way out which the party of emigrants who perished sought and did not find. Most of the time the steadily pressing wind of the desert blew through the great, bright space. Often we saw it pick up the sand far down at the edge of the valley and whirl it along in tall wraiths that looked like ghosts walking over the white floor.

On the second evening a bell sounded in the dusk. When you travel with burros on the desert it is the custom to put a bell on one of them at night so you can find them in the morning, and often the bell is left on during the day's journey.

That sound meant that someone was coming to our camp-fire. Soon a frail old man with two loaded burros and a little dog appeared. It was "Old Johnnie," an habitué of Death Valley, coming home. He had an unworked gold-mine near Keane Wonder and he spent his life looking after his property. Apparently he was also the official caretaker of Keane Wonder itself. He performed his duties by looking over our camp and guarding every bit of wire and every old rusty nail as though they were gold itself. He hovered around us, especially at departure, so we only succeeded in stealing one iron bar for our fireplace, and we needed two. We cast longing eyes at a certain chipped, granite kettle, but finally had to borrow that, promising solemnly to return it at Beatty on our way back. Perhaps he was unduly suspicious because the Worrier had taken a bit of some very ancient and hopeless-looking hay, which we found in the barn, to cheer up Molly and Bill.

"How could I know he lived here?" he apologized to us. "Anyways, there wasn't but two mouthfuls."

But "Old Johnnie" was hospitable, as all old-timers are. He urged Charlotte and me to move into the superintendent's house. It had been a good house once, but in its present condition we preferred the open sand, nor could we bear even for a night to have a roof between us and the blue deeps of that star-filled sky. He was a garrulous talker and very friendly. He claimed that his mine was richer than Keane Wonder ever dreamed of being. Once some one had offered him $300,000, but his partner would not look at it. His tone implied that it was a paltry sum anyway. He was an inventor, too, and had sold a patent for an automobile-part which he described in great detail. We asked him if he still hoped to sell the mine. He seemed not to know what he intended to do. Plainly he was another victim of the "terrible fascination." He related how he had lately been to Tonopah and got sick and almost died from lack of air in the clutter of things. The Worrier said that he had money put away somewhere, but money or no money, whether he ever sold the mine or not,

he would hang around Death Valley the rest of his life.

"Old Johnnie" rose to fine heights as a story-teller when we invited him to dinner next day. We had brought some fresh meat which had to be used up early on the trip, and the Worrier achieved a magnificent meal. Usually I was the cook, but that dinner was far beyond me. He invaded the ruined boarding-house, wrestled successfully with the rusty stove, and produced a roast surrounded by potatoes and onions to be long remembered. We ate it at the board table in the dining-room. "Old Johnnie" changed his coat for the festivity; he beamed upon us and talked. He had the good story-teller's gift of suggestion and in the midst of that blazing emptiness steeped in a silence broken only by the wind clanging rusted cables and rattling the loosened iron roof, he peopled the dining-room again. We saw the faces of the men crowding in for their supper and heard their voices. Once more the camp-cook in white apron and cap, for "Old Johnnie" described it as a fine camp "run right," leaned over the table to pour soup into

granite bowls. Keane Wonder came to life while the obliterating desolation crept in at the door.

He told stories of other mining camps and of the struggle of individual prospectors with the valley. You outwit its wickedness or you are outwitted by it. It was alive, a sort of fascinating enemy. His words took us with him and his burros down its white length. The enemy had uncanny powers. She played strange tricks on you. If she could not get you one way she tried another.

"You find fellers dead down there," he said. "And they don't die of thirst, either. Sometimes there's water in the canteens. They just go crazy. She gets 'em."

He leaned closer across the table and his voice became lower.

"And you hear 'em in the night," he whispered.

"Hear who?"

"Them. I call it the Lonesome Bell."

"What is the Lonesome Bell?" We found ourselves whispering too.

"You hear it. It's a bell. It rings regular, far off. Sometimes you hear it all night. It sounds like the bell on a burro. But it ain't nothing. Once I had a young feller for a partner, and when he heard it he got up and made coffee for the outfit that was coming. He wouldn't believe me when I told him it wasn't nothing but the Lonesome Bell. He waited and waited and nobody came. And the next morning he packed up and beat it."

Old Johnnie's eyes glittered with unnatural brightness. He was telling his own secret. Very vividly he made us see a man alone in the blue night, dim sand spreading away, dark-blue mountains on blueness. Not a sound, not even the breath of the night stirring the sagebrush. Through white, empty days and blue, empty nights he is always alone. He listens to his own heart beating. Then, far off, the faint sound of a bell. Then again. He listens intently because it is the only sound for such a long time. It comes again. It grows louder. He strains to hear. A bell belongs on a burro—he hears the tramp of burros' feet.

With awe we looked at those bright, intent eyes and that thin body bent tensely forward. Some night the Lonesome Bell will be true, but "Old Johnnie" will not hear it. A belated traveler with his pack-train will find a dead campfire and an old man asleep forever beside it. "Old Johnnie" has outwitted the valley so long that he thinks he can always do it, but she will get him in the end.

After dinner "Old Johnnie" unlocked the mill and showed us the costly machinery inside, explaining in careful detail the processes of milling gold. The canyon behind Keane Wonder is narrow and precipitous as though it had been gouged out by a giant's trowel. High up on the mountain-side the dumps of iridescent rock around the mine-pits shimmered. We sat with him on a beam of the ruined mill while he pointed things out in the valley. He showed us where Furnace Creek Ranch lies on the sand by the opening of the canyon between the Funeral Range and the Black Mountains, but we could not see it because of the heat-shimmer and the misty veil. He said that the stern, red mass

opposite was called Tucki Mountain, an Indian word for sheep, because the Panamint Indians used to hunt wild mountain-sheep in its fastnesses. The smooth, bare slope beyond the Mesquite Valley, he said, was really very rough, cut by deep water-channels and covered with brush; and rose in that gradual way nearly 3,000 feet before it reached the mountains. The curious streak in the bottom of the Mesquite Valley was the swamp of Salt Creek, where the water was so bad you could not drink it. It joined the morass in the bottom of Death Valley. There were quicksands there, that you could not get out of if you got in. Men and burros had been lost that way. He pointed out little, white heaps down by Salt Creek and said they were sand-dunes a hundred feet high.

While we sat there a storm swept down the big slope and around on the face of the high Panamints above Death Valley. First the wind lifted the sand in the tall whirling wraiths that fled before the pursuing host of the rain. It came on like an army of giants in bright armor, dust-clouds swirling before their horses' gallop-

ing feet, the sun gleaming on their million spears that reached higher than the mountain-tops. In the midst of blazing sunshine the shadow of their passing was dark on the valley; for a few moments they obliterated the mountains.

"Surely," Charlotte said, "it is pouring rain over there, yet they told us it never rains in Death Valley."

"That's some rain," he admitted, "but maybe it ain't wetting the sand. I've been in storms like that when the water all evaporated before it got down."

"But it must rain sometimes and the water get down," I objected to both of them, "for Shady Myrick said that he had seen the valley full of flowers."

"I've seen 'em," he assented, with a sudden eager lighting of his face—"yes!"

They did not happen to bloom while we were there but we believe in them. Anything might happen, anything could be true in that terrible, bright place.

VI

The Strangest Farm in the World

ON the fourth day we bade "Old Johnnie" farewell, and descended into the quivering white basin. The next camp was to be at Furnace Creek Ranch, the irrigated farm in the bottom of the valley established long ago in connection with the original borax-works of the Twenty-Mule-Team brand. The water for irrigation is brought down in a ditch from Furnace Creek in the canyon between the Funeral Mountains and the Black Mountains and the ranch is a large, green patch on the sand. In any ordinary place, or in any ordinary light it would be a conspicuous feature of the landscape; but, though "Old Johnnie" had pointed it out so carefully, we could never distinguish it nor could we see it during our approach that day until we were within half a mile of it. Through-

out the journey the valley-floor presented the same unbroken, white expanse.

For several miles our way continued down the mesa. Here was no road, only a lurching and grinding down a rocky wash, crawling over the edge in the hope of something better and returning again to the ills we knew. It seemed as though the slender-spoked wheels must collapse under the strain. Our tower of baggage swayed dangerously. The Official Worrier was a skillful driver and he needed to be, not only on this day but on several subsequent ones which surpassed it. About noon we reached the road that leads from Salt Creek at the southern end of Mesquite Valley across the northern end of Death Valley and along its eastern side to the ranch. This road was an improvement on the uncharted wash. There were no rocks in it; but it soon became sandy, two deep ruts meandering off toward the white floor.

Presently we came to its edge and skirted the swamp of the Armagosa River, the morass of mud and quicksands which fills the whole bottom of the valley, an immense expanse covered

with large white crystals and a powdery substance that looks like coarse salt. The valley probably was once the bed of a salt-lake whose slow evaporation left the thick alkali crust. The ruts were very deep and the ground soft to walk on, spongy and hummocky. The Worrier said that if the wagon were to get out of the ruts it easily might be mired. "Old Johnnie" told us that in some places in the middle of the bog a team or a man walking could be sucked down out of sight and one of his tales was of finding a dead man's face looking up at him out of the ground.

"He was a Swede with yellow hair," he said, "and he stared at the sun. He sank standing up."

The road which crosses the valley below the ranch near the old Eagle Borax Works is said to be almost the only way to get over the swamp. The Panamint Indians are supposed to have known this route and to have crossed the valley to escape from their enemies, who dared not follow them.

A Government bench-mark by the roadside

indicated 258 feet below sea level. The heat was oppressive, and the white ground reflected a blinding light. At one place, rounding the base of a hill which shut off the view of the nearby mountains, we found ourselves in the midst of miles of the shining whiteness. It spread in every direction, reaching to the distant Panamints across the valley and to the hazy outline of the low range at the southern end. The hill which we were passing rose into the sky, white as the plain except for a few streaks of ugly, greenish-yellow-like sulphur. No living green thing appeared. The white expanse was unbroken by a bush or even by an outjutting rock. The desolation was complete. An intense silence lay over it. If we dropped far enough behind the wagon not to hear the creaking of its wheels, we felt utterly alone, the only survivors in a dead universe. That day the sky was a hot purplish-blue; no cloud shadows drifting over the valley relieved its blinding monotony. The rose and silver which we had seen from above were gone, not even the illusion of water far off remained. The sun stared steadily down. It

was the far-spread, motionless silence of the last days when the whole earth will be dying.

Winding around the hill we came to the ruins of a borax-works. This had been the first plant in the valley, then the Eagle Borax Works south of the ranch was operated, but now the borax comes from the mines in the mountains at Ryan. Nothing was left of the old borax-works except a few roofless stone buildings and the ruins of the works which looked like a row of immense vats embedded in the side of a low ridge. The vats and the ridge had the same sulphurous color, and melted together. Around the buildings the ground was covered with tin cans and broken bottles, but the square of dark-blue shade beside each house was a blessed relief from the burning sun.

Beyond the old borax-works the road wound through sand covered with large mesquites and greasewoods. Though the mesquite is called a tree it looks more like an overgrown, thorny shrub. It grows near swamps and dry lakes and is supposed to be a sure indication of water, but its roots go down very deep and it appears

in desolations of sand where it would be unwise for the wayfarer to dig. Those mesquites in Death Valley looked very hopeless indeed, sprangling, thorny, leafless things with a hillock of sand blown around the roots of each.

As we descended into the valley and came along the edge of the morass a feeling of deep lassitude and inertia gradually crept over Charlotte and me. It had been very hard to leave the dark squares of shade at the borax-works, and now as we crawled along among the mesquites we felt that the white monotony would go on forever. It pressed upon us like a weight that never, never could be lifted. We stared down at the sand with unseeing eyes and went on because we were in the habit of going on. The ranch was only an imagining, born of vain hope.

And then the strange-looking, tufted tops of some tall palms appeared against the sky. They were very striking and we thought they must still be far off or we would have seen them all day, but not a quarter of an hour later we reached the fence which separated the desert from the emerald-green fields. The sudden springing up

of the ranch was as unreal as any imagining. The fence was a sharp line of demarcation. On one side the sand drifted up to it, on the other were meadows and big willow trees. It was evening when we arrived, so we camped at once by the irrigation-ditch which made a narrow green ribbon across the sand with grass and trees growing along its banks. We built our fire between an encampment of Indians and the white adobe ranch-buildings beyond the fence. The water rushed down the ditch, clear and cool. How marvelous this running water seemed! How marvelous to dip out all we wanted to wash ourselves and our clothes and our dishes!

Our felicity, however, was short-lived. The Panamint Indians, in common probably with all Indians, do not count cleanliness among their virtues. The rising of the fierce, hot sun brought millions of flies which converted our dishes and camp equipment into black masses that crawled. Between the Indians and the large herd of cattle at the ranch, camping by the irrigation-ditch was impossible. We spent most of the forenoon moving a mile or two away

among the mesquites. We were on the gradually sloping ground which leads up from the valley-floor to the rock-walls of the Funeral Mountains. Here in the valley we found that our impression from the Keane Wonder Mine of mountains rising precipitously from the flat white floor had been an illusion. The characteristic mesa of the Mojave curves up on both sides, sandy, covered with stones, but often entirely bare of vegetation. Death Valley is always full of such illusions. Even afterwards, when we knew better, we could never look down into the valley from a height without feeling that the mountains rose precipitously out of it. That camp among the mesquites blazed. The yellow sand seemed to smite our eyes. Across the valley under the edge of the Panamints the mesa looked a beautiful dark-blue, but around us was an even greater ecstasy of light than we had known at Keane Wonder. Everything blazed, the sand, the slow waves of the heat shimmer, the little rounded stony hills between us and the Funeral Mountains, and the steel-blue battlements of the mountains themselves.

The Indians at the ranch are employed as laborers, when they will work. The superintendent, a vigorous, silent Scotchman, was extremely pessimistic about them. While we were there they had "the flu" and all we ever saw them do was sit around the corral waiting for supplies to be handed out. The women and girls, with heavy melancholy faces, gathered and stared at us. They stared with the stolid curiosity of cattle, not like burros who twitch their ears saucily, though they have the burro's reputation for thievishness. The superintendent kept everything under lock and key. The only Indian who showed a sign of life was an old fellow who prowled around with a gun after the birds and wild ducks that make the ranch a resting-place in their flights across the desert. We were told that there was only one gun in the whole encampment and that the younger men hunted with bows and arrows. Most of them looked stunted and their faces were wrinkled like the skins of shrunken, dried-up apples, as though the valley were taking toll of the generations of their race.

The valley takes its toll. Most white men

cannot live there long. The vigorous Scotchman had been at the ranch eight years and thought he could remain, but no one else had ever stayed such a length of time, and he had difficulty in finding anybody to keep him company for more than a few months. He told us that no white woman can stand it at all in summer. As Charlotte and I were almost prostrated even in early March, we are willing to accept the statement. Nothing that anyone can tell us of the evil effects of living in the valley is beyond our imaginations. At times the thermometer goes up to 130 degrees, but there is something worse than the heat. The Worrier claimed that 130 degrees was not uncommon in Silver Lake, and that he spent his summers there without suffering as people do in the valley. The mercury never rose above 98 degrees while we were at the ranch, a temperature by no means unknown in eastern summers, yet our feeling of lassitude increased daily, combined with a faintness and giddiness that we could hardly combat. The blazing light had much to do with it, and we were below sea-level. A learned,

scientific man has since told us that so small a drop in elevation could not be noticeable. Those old-timers who went insane on the hot sands knew that it was noticeable. You feel that if you were to go out into that blazing silence you could easily go insane, or succumb to the deadly inertia which paralyzed Charlotte and me. Too easily you could lie down in the thin, delusive shade of some little bush and forget. Even beneath the willow trees beside the flowing water we could scarcely move, our minds were dazed so we could neither read nor think. We understood "Old Johnnie's" feeling about the valley. Something hostile lives there.

The ghastly, shining swamp and the pools of poisonous water are horrible to the imagination because of their unnaturalness in the midst of such choking thirst. Only the perverted brain of a demon could have invented such a monstrosity. Water is in your thoughts all the time. From morning until night you are thirsty in the dry heat, and you look out over the shimmering miles and know that, though there is water here and there, if you leave the irrigation-

ditch you cannot quench your thirst. You cling to the narrow green line where the mountain-water flows down. The feeling grows on you that you are visiting some sinister world which can be no part of your beloved earth.

And then night comes. A miracle happens and you know this is the same outdoors you love, only its trappings are put off, it is stripped of obscuring verdure, naked, and you find it more terrible than you thought it could be and more beautiful than you thought it could be. The rising and the setting of that cruel sun are great splendors, that dark night sky is bigger and deeper than in kinder countries. The stars are very near, floating in a sea so deep it reaches to infinity; they are twice as big as ordinary stars, they look like silver balls. The sky is a deep, dark blue. The whole valley is blue in the night and luminous like a sapphire. The going-down of the sun is a pageant; its uprising is a triumph. You feel as though you ought to clash cymbals, you feel as though you ought to dance and sing when the sun looks over the mountains. You have been remiss in worship all your life be-

cause you have not learned to dance and sing in honor of the rising sun. The sun-god was worshiped on the desert for there the sun is a cruel, great god. His glory consumes the earth, but he is so absorbed in rejoicing in his glory that he does not know it.

One night we camped a little way up the canyon behind the ranch in the vain hope of finding a cooler spot. The canyon entered the mountain beside a precipitous, jagged cliff made of crumbling yellow rock, so steep that we could scarcely climb its sides. We attempted it late in the afternoon in the hope of getting a view of the whole valley at sunset, but its knife-edge ridges were so sharp and crumbling and our endurance so slight after the burning day that we could not reach a satisfactory summit. Being shut up in a canyon was no part of our plan and we made the Worrier help us lug our beds quite a way from camp to the top of a little hill overlooking at least part of the valley.

"Why don't you take them to the top of that there peak?" he inquired sarcastically, pointing at one of the steel-blue crests of the Funeral

Range. We could not help it if he scoffed, we had to see the drama of the coming of night. Panting from these exertions added to our fruitless effort to climb the cliff, we brought up a canteen and the few things we needed and bade him go back and sleep happily under the wagon.

We ourselves had very little sleep on the hilltop for the drama was too stupendous. Slowly the mountains turned blue, and then bluer. Their beautiful skyline was drawn with a pencil that left a golden, luminous mark. Pale blue crept into the valley, indigo lay in pools among the foothills. The whole night was a succession of studies in blue like the blue nights some artists paint, but every shade of blue that an artist could mix on his palette was there. Layers of different blues lay one above another, and changed, and mingled. The enormous stars came out and hung in the sky like great lamps. The sapphire valley glistened beneath them. The lamps swung slowly toward the west and then were gradually extinguished. The sapphire turned into a moonstone, palely glimmering, and then into an opal full of flashing fires. The

cruel, great god was coming. He came, and we were two tongue-tied fools longing to celebrate him and only standing mute and bewildered.

We always felt that longing and that bewilderment during the evenings and nights and mornings in the White Heart. They overwhelmed us and hurt us. We were like prisoners shut in by the walls of ourselves, unable to break through and be one with such beauty. We could not rest in it as we had rested for long minutes by the red promontory where we first saw the valley; there was too much beauty. We clutched at each changing, evanescent moment, spectators watching through tiny loopholes in the walls a pageant which passed too quickly and was too big for our understanding.

The White Heart exceeds the imagination every way. It is too terrible and too splendid. It asserts itself tremendously; the green patch of the ranch lying on the baked sand beside the shining swamp seems more ephemeral and unimportant than any of man's efforts to tame the desert; it is an unreality, a dream, and the dwell-

ers on it are shadows in a dream. The majesty of the valley completely overshadows the row of tall palms against the background of the snowy Panamints, and the little oasis of alfalfa-fields, willow-trees, and white ranch-buildings blessed with shade. They might vanish like a mirage and never be missed. The magnificent procession of the nights and days passes over the white terror, more magnificent than other nights and days precisely because of the glowing of that terrible sand and those terrible mountains, perfect for its own sake, and utterly indifferent whether or not eyes and hearts can endure it.

VII

The Burning Sands

EVERY day that we stayed in Death Valley seemed more awful than the last. From ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon we existed in a blind torpor. Eyes and brain and pumping heart could not bear it. At noon we always planned to leave immediately, we panted to escape; then the enchantment would begin and we would forget all the plans. Soon, however, it became evident that we must get up into the coolness of the mountains on one side or the other of the burning basin, for there was no such thing as becoming acclimated. In the stupor in which we lived the plans we made were extremely incoherent. We only knew that the mantle of snow on the peaks of the Panamints, so serene above the quivering heat of the valley, was the most desirable

thing on earth. To reach it with the wagon we had to circle the northern end of the morass, cross the low ridge into the Mesquite Valley and go up the great mesa leading to Emigrant Pass behind the mountains. There we would bury ourselves in the cold, wet snow, and rub it on our faces and fling it about, strong again and able to laugh at midday. The Worrier pooh-poohed this plan when it finally emerged, for snow has no allurement for a "desert rat." He suggested that we go on up the canyon in which we were camped and thus quickly escape, but we refused to consider that. We had come for the purpose of knowing the feel of the valley and we must travel over the burning sands.

The Worrier was amenable; he always was, but he liked to be persuaded. We went back to Furnace Creek Ranch from the camp in the canyon and stocked ourselves with hay and drinking-water, as we would find no more good water until we reached Emigrant Springs some fifty miles away. The journey over that difficult country would take the better part of four days. Two of the camps would be by so-called "bad

water," which, however, animals can drink—the first at Cow Creek not far from the ranch, and the second at Salt Creek in the southern end of Mesquite Valley. The third would be a "dry camp," somewhere on the big mesa we had seen from the Keane Wonder Mine.

Leaving the ranch rather late on the same day we passed the old borax-works again, wound round the white and sulphur-colored hill through the spongy, borax-encrusted ground and along the edge of the sandy mesa where it begins to rise from the level bottom of the valley. Cow Creek is a little green spot at the base of the Funeral Mountains about two miles from the road. Though it is near the ranch we stopped there in order to break the long pull from Furnace Creek to Salt Creek. In Death Valley every blazing mile is to be reckoned with and it is worth while to shorten a day's journey from twenty miles to sixteen. No track led to Cow Creek from the road, and the mesa, which looked quite level, turned out to be as steep as usual. It was broken by little washes and thinly covered with brush. Bumping over it under the

THE ALKALI BOTTOM OF DEATH VALLEY

hot sun we felt again as though we were in the midst of an interminable monotony. The mountain seemed unattainable. Charlotte and I, suffering from the usual lassitude and complete lack of ambition, wanted to stop and camp on the sand beside a large mesquite, the only thing anywhere that cast a big enough shadow to sit down in, and we had a sharp argument with the Worrier.

"You can't do that," he said. "It don't matter so much to-day, the water ain't far, but to-morrow you got to go on and you better do it now. When we start you've got to get there, or we don't start."

That was unanswerable and we dragged ourselves on until we reached a large rock near the spring with a square of blue darkness beside it. He was satisfied with our endeavor and let us make camp there while he took the horses to the spring. Cow Creek is chiefly memorable for another argument, a long, warm debate as to whether or not Molly and Bill could haul the outfit up the four-thousand-foot rise to Emigrant Springs. Charlotte maintained that they could

not. She based her argument entirely on the appearance of Molly and Bill and she had a good one; but I, inspired by the band of snow on the tops of the Panamints and the mountain-climber's zeal, met it with spirit. I said that Molly and Bill could do it because they were "desert-proof Indian horses." The Worrier lay at full length on the sand, apparently lost to the world. I demanded what he thought about it. He replied sleepily that you "never can tell 'til you try." All the time we were in the valley we argued, and it is to the credit of all three of us that the arguments never degenerated into quarrels. Our nerves were very near the surface. Everything was difficult to do, packing and unpacking, cooking, shaking the sand out of the blankets, hitching-up, getting anywhere, gathering brush for our poor little fires. We all did the minimum of work, and the desert demands very little of the camper-out, but under the weight that seemed to be always pressing down on us that little was hard even for the Worrier.

Next morning we arose with the dawn and

hastened to get underway during the cool hours. The road lay over miles and miles of sand, dotted in some places with sad-looking brush and streaked sometimes with the white borax deposit. As always, the morning was radiant. The valley was beautiful, wrapped in its lonely silence, and for the first few hours Charlotte and I forgot our discomforts in the circle of high mountains, blue and red in the sunshine, and the clean sweep of the sand; but by noon we could not see anything and had to ride ignominiously in the wagon with our eyes on the very tiny oblong shadow that traveled beside it. Charlotte had dark glasses, but she seemed to suffer as much as I, who lived again through the nightmare of my childhood's dream. A hot haze lay over all the distances, though the air was clear, and the nearby little stones and bushes blazed. The wagon crawled on, the sand falling in bright showers from the slowly turning wheels, until Molly and Bill stopped. We shook the reins with what energy we had left, and the Worrier came up and shouted and threw stones, but they only looked around at us pathetically.

"We might as well eat lunch here and let 'em rest," he said.

There was no shade except the bit beside the wagon. We sat in that and leaned against the wheels. They would not move for Molly and Bill hung down their heads and the sweat streamed off them. The sand glittered with little particles of mica, which added to the glaring brightness. Toward the south the illusion of water appeared once more, not blue but a glassy gray with several strange-looking shrubs reflected in it upside down. There was nothing between us and the ranch to look so large, unless it were magnified like the stunted little bushes in the mirage at Silver Lake. The Worrier decided that these appearances could only be the palm trees, though they did not look in the least like palm trees nor could we see a sign of the green patch of the ranch. It is curious that we never saw Furnace Creek Ranch from any of the places where we had views of the valley, either before we had been there or afterwards, or while we were approaching or leaving it. It sprang from the earth by magic for our

bewilderment and vanished the instant we went away.

That lunch-place was in the middle of Death Valley at the northern edge of the morass. Ever since coming down from the Keane Wonder Mine we had been below sea-level. Tradition has it that the lowest part of the valley is south of the Ranch, near the old Eagle Borax Works, but the bench-marks of the government's survey indicate that the part opposite the white and sulphur-colored hill by the borax-works which we had passed is the lowest. Two iron posts driven into the ground along the road had read respectively 253 and 257 feet below sea-level. The lowest point, 280 feet, was in the morass at our end of the valley not very far away. Whether being below sea-level has an effect or not we all suffered that day. The Worrier guessed the temperature at about 105 degrees, but said that it felt like 120 degrees at Silver Lake. The sun seemed to stand still in a hard sky. The heat rose solidly from the endless white sand, the vast glistening swamp and the metallic-looking mountains. We were in the midst of an

immense movelessness, in a silence never to be broken.

After an hour's halt we started on again, Charlotte and I in the wagon, though we could hardly bear to be dragged through the heavy sand by that unhappy horse and mule. Even in the wagon our heads swam, the ground would not stay still under us, the sun seemed to drink every bit of moisture from our bodies so we burned in the heat instead of perspiring. The skin of our faces and hands felt dried up and as though it might chip off. We were blind and parched with thirst. The water in the canteens was hot and did not help us much. Molly and Bill kept trying to stop, and little stones the Worrier threw as he walked behind whizzed past our heads and thudded on their tired flanks. We had to fight the hope that they would stop for good and let us creep under the wagon and shut our eyes; but we never suggested doing it. "When you start you got to get there."

The Worrier himself suggested stopping two hours after lunch in the shade of a little grove of mesquites, though they were not much good

as shade-trees. They were about ten feet high, each one with a little hummock of sand blown around its roots, and branches armed with long sharp thorns spreading close to the sand. We could not get under them, but for some reason they were more comforting than sitting beside the wagon.

"We'll stay until the sun gets above Tucki Mountain," he said. "We're getting alone fine, if Molly and Bill don't lay down."

"Suppose they should lie down?"

"You'd stay by the wagon and I'd go back for help." He spoke cheerfully as though the idea of walking back over the burning sands was perfectly commonplace.

"I suppose you could walk out of the valley from anywhere?"

"Sure. Got to. I walked thirty miles once without no water. Blazing hot as this and not a bush big enough to get more than my head under. I laid down by a greasewood most all day. But I made it."

Walking through the valley at that season was nothing to an old-timer. They often cross it

in June, July and August. Death is lurking behind the bushes then, waiting for them. Along the way from Furnace Creek we had passed two of the sun-bleached boards set upright in the sand which mark graves on the desert.

As the day cooled we wandered a little way from the road among the mesquite and suddenly came upon another one. Near it lay the skeletons of two burros tied to a bush and a little further off a coffee pot beside the stones that had been a fireplace. Someone had written with a pencil on the board: "John Lemoign, Died Aug. 1919."

The Worrier had known John Lemoign. He described him as a regular old-timer who owned a mine somewhere in Tucki Mountain. Our friend seemed sorry, but his final comment was:

"He ought to have known better. But they never learn. They always think they will make it this time."

Everywhere that attitude toward accidents on the desert was typical. "Old Johnnie" told his most gruesome tales as though the victims were to blame. The valley was an enemy to be out-

generaled; if you were a fool, of course she would get you. It was a pity when she did, inevitable and not very important. They were not callous, for they included themselves in the "inevitable and not very important." When we had first talked to them they seemed to us singularly care-free and their faith in their own sagacity and prowess pathetically blind, but we found that we shared somewhat in their attitude as we crossed the burning sands. We felt able to take care of ourselves—could there be a more pathetic and blind faith?—and if by some remote mischance we should not be able, it would be only another painful but trifling accident. The sun-bleached boards made us sorry, but they did not seem especially tragic.

The point of view is born of the desert herself. When you are there, face to face with the earth and the stars and time day after day, you cannot help feeling that your rôle, however gallant and precious, is a very small one. This conviction, instead of driving you to despair as it usually does when you have it inside the walls of houses, releases you very unexpectedly from

all manner of anxieties. You are frightfully glad to have a rôle at all in so vast and splendid a drama and want to defend it as well as you can, but you do not trouble much over the outcome because the desert mixes up your ideas about what you call living and dying. You see the dreadful, dead country living in beauty, and feel that the silence pressing around it is alive. The Worrier said one night:

"My, ain't it awful! Them stars and everything. Makes you feel kind of small."

"Do you like to look at them?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why do you?"

"I dunno."

VIII

The Dry Camp

WHEN the sun stood over Tucki and the mesquites began to have real shadows beside them we resumed our journey. The little ridge which separates Death Valley from Salt Creek had looked very insignificant from the Keane Wonder Mine, but we climbed for more than an hour to cross it. It was entirely bare and covered with small flat stones of pale colors, lavender, light-blue, gray and buff, pressed down into a hard mosaic. Instead of being polished smooth the delicately-colored little stones were marked with intricate patterns which looked like the impressions of leaves and sections of plants, as though a vanished vegetation had left its record upon them. We were not scientific enough to know whether they were really fossils or whether the mark-

ings were due to the action of water or some other cause. So lovely were they that in spite of the heat which still beat up from the bright ground Charlotte and I walked behind the wagon in order to examine them. There, on that hard ridge, where not even one sickly sage-brush grew, we saw the fronds of ferns and the stems and cups of flowers finely etched.

From the top of the ridge the dim wagon-track which we had been following pitched down an almost impossible hill to Salt Creek, a marsh formed by a stream that keeps itself mostly underground. Coarse grass grew in it, looking very green in the surrounding waste, alternating with streaks of white alkali. The marsh winds down from the Mesquite Valley and cuts through the ridge into Death Valley. The surrounding country is utterly barren. A little way off up the bog we could see the beginning of the sand-dunes which "Old Johnnie" had pointed out, opposite us rose the immense mesa leading up past Tucki Mountain to Emigrant Pass through the Panamints, at the left just beyond the swamp stood the harsh, red mass

of Tucki, first a smooth-looking bare slope, then towering buttresses and crags of rock. Our side of Salt Creek was a jumble of little stony hills. Save for the grass and a few dead-looking mesquites in the swamp we could not see a growing thing in the whole waste.

You have to dig a well to get the water from Salt Creek. Several shallow holes had been dug where the road began to cross the marsh, and, as one was clean enough for our use, the Worrier was spared the exertion of making another. Stove Pipe Wells, near which the ring of wagons is said to be buried, is a little further up Salt Creek where some prospector once drove down a length of Stove Pipe to preserve his water-hole. All the water in Salt Creek is bitter and salty, intolerable to drink. We had thought that we might at least use it for cooking, but one taste killed that hope. We feared we could not eat potatoes boiled in it, and knew that tea would be impossible, so once more we drew upon the fifteen gallons which we had brought from Furnace Creek Ranch.

Poor Molly and Bill had no choice in the

matter. They had to drink the loathsome stuff which the Worrier drew up for them from the uninviting hole. However, they seemed much pleased with the coarse, green grass, the first forage they had had since leaving Daylight Springs. Henceforth they would have to get their own living with occasional small feeds of grain, as we could not carry enough hay to last for more than another two days. By that time we should be well up in the mountains; still, remembering Beatty and the thin pickings at Daylight Springs, and looking out now over the discouraging bareness, their prospects seemed far from cheerful.

When we had located our camp as far as possible from the tin cans and ancient rubbish of other camps, the Worrier took his shot gun from under the wagon seat and went off to hunt ducks. Ducks! How could the desolation of Salt Creek, after that journey over the burning sands, yield ducks? At every green place like Furnace Creek Ranch and Saratoga Springs, we saw birds. They flashed in the sun and their twitterings broke the silence.

While we unloaded the wagon that evening we saw small yellow birds like wild canaries light on the mesquites in the swamp, and many tiny blue birds; but it was hard to believe in wild ducks, even harder there than it had been at the ranch where the old Indian snooped around with his gun.

The Worrier's assurance was so surprising that we put off getting dinner and dragged ourselves to the top of one of the stony hills overlooking the winding of Salt Creek toward Death Valley to watch him. From that viewpoint the swamp coiled between high, perpendicular, sulphur-colored bluffs like a poisonous snake glistening with green and white spots. One small blue pool far off was its eye. The Worrier was working his way toward that from grass-tussock to grass-tussock. Presently he reached it and vanished in a bunch of rushes at its edge.

While we sat and waited the enchantment of sunset began. The sky became orange and green, the terrible valley that we loved and hated began to put on its sapphire robe, the sulphurous walls that prisoned the snake turned

pink, the poisonous blue eye, too blue, too bright, softened—the enchanter almost had us by the throats again, ready to choke us until tears came in our eyes, when two shots spilt the spell. We sprang up, startled; we had forgotten that a man was hunting ducks in a swamp. A scramble then, back to the fireplace, a hasty match, the red fire kindled and leaping up, the smoke-blacked pot balanced on the iron bar stolen from "Old Johnnie," the soft clash of tin dishes, and soon a proud hunter coming home through the sapphire night.

Early next morning we were underway, floundering across the swamp. The Worrier fulfilled his function by doing a little worrying there, for he remarked afterwards that he might have lost Molly and Bill. Salt Creek marsh is a little sample of the giant bog that makes the bottom of Death Valley fearful. The road usually traveled to Emigrant Pass leads along the edge of the marsh and through the sand-dunes before it begins to ascend the big mesa, but "Old Johnnie" had instructed us to avoid the heavy sand by keeping to the base of Tucki

Mountain. There was a sort of track in some places, but mostly we ground among rocks and made detours to avoid gullies too deep to cross. The base of the mountain had looked smooth, instead it was cut by wide, deep washes full rolled-down boulders. For nine miles we skirted Tucki before we began the ascent of the mesa itself. Not till then did we pass a bench-mark indicating that at last we were as high as sea-level. Except that the road around the mountain was rocky instead of sandy there was very little difference between the morning's journey and the one across Death Valley. The light and heat were intense and we suffered from the same feeling of depression. Even when we began to ascend the mesa we were hardly conscious of any relief. Though we climbed two thousand feet that day we were still on the burning sands under the pitiless sun. Everything burned, rocks were hot to the touch, the endless stony ground was a hot floor. Tucki Mountain showed a dull red as though it smoldered, and the hot blaze on the mountains beyond the great mesa was smoke rising out of furnaces.

After passing the bench-mark we were in the midst of an immense space far away from any mountains, toiling for miles up a stony barrenness where only scattered sagebrush grew. The road was so washed out that often no trace of it showed and the Worrier steered by intuition. The wagon groaned and swayed, and Molly and Bill stumbled and sweated. In the roughest places we led them. We all walked most of the day to lighten their load. A long spur of Tucki Mountain reached up the mesa several miles to the left, ending in a red promontory which we must go around, and that point became our goal. We toiled and toiled, but it was never any nearer. A quarter of an hour, a day, a year of putting one foot heavily in front of the other, and we would look up expecting some reward for so much labor, and the red promontory would be exactly where it was before.

In the afternoon we saw a cloud of dust moving. We hoped it might be wind coming to cool us, but it turned out to be a cattle outfit cutting across the mesa to our road. The dust cloud looked near, yet it was fully two hours before we

met the cattlemen. The sight of the big herd of cattle on the desert was stranger than the yellow and blue birds or the fabulous wild ducks had been. They were being driven over this awful country to a spring feeding-ground in Wild Rose Canyon, and they were white with dust, limping on sore, cut feet. Two men and a boy in big hats and with pistols at their belts rode small shaggy horses, galloping through the brush and shouting when the tired cattle tried to stop or scatter at meeting us. Wild Rose Canyon was cold at this season, the men said, and there was plenty of fine water in it. "A river runs down the middle," the boy volunteered. We looked out over the shimmering mesa stretching hopelessly in all directions. A canyon called Wild Rose where a river flowed between the mountains!

We inquired further into the fairy tale. The Canyon was about forty miles away by the route which we would have to take with the wagon. It led up into the high Panamints. There was a spring by some old charcoal-kilns right under Mt. Baldy. The cattlemen knew nothing of

Telescope Peak. They had never heard of any one climbing the mountains. They supposed it was easy enough when the snow was gone. No doubt prospectors had been up, but there was nothing there, it was no good. We saw them eying the Worrier curiously, evidently wondering what manner of creatures he had managed to pick up.

After a mile or two they left us, turning off by an ancient signboard pointing vaguely toward the long, red spur of Tucki Mountain with the legend: "Water Eight Miles," and in the opposite direction across the trackless, torn-up waste: "Water Fifteen Miles." What are eight miles or fifteen miles to the modern man accustomed to leap over distance? To the primitive traveler with horses and mules, and until now all travelers throughout the ages have been thus primitive, a mile is a formidable reality. Mojave teaches the truth about it. At the end of those two days, that "Water Eight Miles" was as inaccessible to us as though it had been fifty. Even if we had been full of vigor we probably could not have reached it with the wagon over

THE DESERT

that rough ground. The cattlemen, however, on their tough little horses, went to it. We did not attempt to leave the two dim streaks that occasionally marked our road, but at dusk stopped and made camp beside them.

That was our first genuine dry camp, though it was the third time we had depended on the water carried from Furnace Creek. Water is the commonest of all commodities, so common that we fail to realize its meaning until we are without it. All the camps thus far had been resting-places, homes. We had come to feel that any spot where we built our fire could be home, for the essentials of home are very simple; a little water, something to eat, a bit of fire, and good friends. In the mess at Keane Wonder, in the forbidding inhospitality of Salt Creek, we had had them all and been at home; but that night, when the Worrier began to unload the wagon in the stark middle of the solitary waste, we were not at home. Nor could we make it home, however brightly we urged up the fire or cheerfully we talked. One of the essentials was missing and the gasoline cans

could not take its place. No water, not even bad water, not a drop! That mesa was not a human resting-place; we were aliens in it, transients, one-night-standers. The Worrier laughed at our restless forlornness. On subsequent travels we have learned to make dry camps almost as nonchalantly as he does, but they are never home.

In the hot miles between Furnace Creek Ranch and the mountain-spring we learned the meaning for our little lives of the commonest of commodities. We had never been so thirsty, no amount of water could satisfy us, and the supply was limited. We had enough for all our needs, yet we never could forget that there was an end to it. When the jolting of the wagon slopped some out around one of the corks we could have wept. Using any for cooking or washing dishes, and pouring out ten gallons for Molly and Bill at the dry camp seemed terrible. Until then we had thoughtlessly turned on a faucet, or drawn a bucket from a well, or dipped water out of a stream. Now there was no water. The miles were not only hot, they were

dry miles. The diminishing supply of warm, unattractive liquid in the dented gasoline-cans was our most precious possession. We would have parted with everything we had, rather than lose it.

From the camping place the red promontory looked as far away as it had been at noon; we seemed to have made no impression on our goal. Below us the Mesquite Valley spread out, immense and still, with the green thread of Salt Creek crossing it. On the far side rose the Grapevine Range, of which Corkscrew Mountain is the southern end. The evening air was so clear that we could see the spiral cliff and the opening of the canyon that leads to Daylight Pass. It looked very near, yet how many days'-journeys we had come from there! Heat and thirst and weariness lay between. The grimness of Death Valley, cool now in the shadow of the Panamints, was hidden by the buttresses of Tucki. The long line of sultry red rock that had smoldered and smoked all day slowly turned blue in the twilight. It seemed as though you might saunter over there and lay your hands

upon it, yet the signboard pointing to the water at its base had read eight miles. We had long lost sight of the cattlemen. Suddenly, in the dusky blueness under the mountain, their camp fire bloomed like a crimson cactus flower.

Evening smoothed the whole mesa into a blue and yellow floor rounding gently the mountains. It was impossible to believe that it was everywhere cut into hills and canyons by washes fifteen or twenty feet deep as it was around our camp. In the bottoms of the declivities large greasewoods and cacti grew, and occasional tufts of dried grass; but the wind-swept ridges were bare and every particle of sand was blown away from among the stones. On one of the beaten-down mosaics near our camp something gleamed dimly. We went to it and found large white stones laid in the form of a cross pointing toward the east. Another traveler, then, had stopped here. Perhaps he had looked at the red promontory and the spiral cliff and lost hope; perhaps he had prayed for water; or perhaps he had made it as a thank-offering for the blessed coming of cool night.

IX

The Mountain Spring

THE next day's climb was easier, for by the time the sun had asserted its full vigor we were at an altitude where the air was cool, tinglingly crisp, and so clear that it seemed not to exist at all. The earth sparkled with laughter and shouted her joy in the glory of light.

For several hours the red promontory continued to recede, then suddenly we were rounding it, and soon afterwards entered a gorge whose sides steadily became higher and higher. The bottom of the gorge was a wide, sandy wash much cut up by rains, full of boulders and grown over with brush. The vegetation became ever greener and more luxuriant. The wash looked like a wind-tossed green river between crumbly, precipitous mountains of many colors. Some were a dull red, some sage-green,

some buff, some dark yellow, while an occasional purple crag gave the canyon a savage appearance. These mountains had the velvet texture which we had seen at Saratoga Springs, especially the sage-green ones. The colors were not an atmospheric illusion for the mountains were actually made of different colored rock. We investigated them with great interest. Though the velvet-textured hills had often been all around us, they were always too far away or the sun was too fiercely hot for us to get near enough to touch them. Now we walked along the edge of the wash picking up the colored rocks while the Worrier led Molly and Bill up the middle. It was so steep that he often had to rest them.

About three o'clock we came unexpectedly upon a little spring. It was in a green cleft between a red and a yellow hill where the water trickled over the rock into a charming basin. Eagerly we dipped in our cups. It was true! Here at last was a real mountain spring, very cold, tasteless, a miraculous gift from Heaven. We drank and drank. The Worrier unhitched

Molly and Bill and they broke away from him to rush at the water. They did not stop drinking until the last drop was gone.

This bit of Paradise was a complete surprise. The map did not show the little spring, nor did the Worrier know of its existence. It was so tiny that doubtless it is often dry. Emigrant Springs itself, with a much more plentiful flow of water, was about a mile further on. There the canyon narrowed with steep, high sides broken into some beautifully shaped summits. The spring is only a few miles from a big abandoned mining camp called Skidoo and used to be an important one for desert travelers. Someone once built a shack, and nearby was a cave with a fireplace inside, also a corral, part of whose fence had since been used for firewood. Like all desert watering places the surroundings were littered with tin cans, old shoes and rusty iron. We know now what becomes of all the old shoes in the world; they are spirited away to the desert. An ancient government pamphlet that we had found blowing about in one of the shacks at Keane Wonder and care-

fully preserved describes very scientifically how to locate water, then throws science to the winds and says that the tin can is the best of all methods. When you find a pile of tin cans stop and search. It is surprising how quickly you cease to see the litter, provided it is sufficiently ancient not to be actively dirty. The desert has no foreground; you soon stop looking much for things near at hand and get the horizon-gazing habit. If a flower or a shining stone is at your feet you see it joyfully, but if it is a tin can it does not exist. There are too many far-off, enchanting things to look at. You are never unaware of the sky, nor the beautiful curves of the mountains; no forests nor roofs conceal them from you, and your eyes pass untroubled over small uglinesses.

We made our camp in the shelter of an immense rock that stood alone in the middle of the wash, and settled down for a long resting space. The desert was exhibiting her variety in monotony. Between the burning sands and this mountain coolness what a difference, and yet what an essential sameness! Here is the same glittering sand, the same colorful rocks, the same plants,

the same bare, crumbling hills. The sun blazes with the same brightness, turning every projecting edge of rock and little leaf into a spot of light. The all-enveloping silence is the same. The distances shine with the same illusion.

All around Emigrant Springs are mountains from five to seven thousand feet high. One day was devoted to a stiff climb up to the abandoned mines at Skidoo, at an elevation of about 6,000 feet. A trail started up from Emigrant Springs, but it looked very steep, so we went a longer way around intending to come down it. Part of the route lay over high ridges from which we saw the splendid mass of the snowy Panamints, now close at hand. We passed little patches of snow in the shadows of the rocks. The sky was a deep blue all day and the air cold with the mountain sting in it.

The town of Skidoo lay in a high valley shut off from a view by the surrounding hills. They were barren and made of crumbly yellow rock. The long narrow basin itself was covered with sagebrush like a blue carpet. The town had consisted of one wide street along which several

buildings were still standing. An incredible number of stoves, broken chairs and cooking utensils were strewn about. The most imposing building had been the saloon, behind which a neatly piled wall of bottles, five feet high and several feet wide, testified to past good cheer. The Worrier said that four thousand people once had lived here. They had brought water twenty-eight miles in a pipe-line from a spring near Telescope Peak. During the war the pipe was taken out and sold to the government, but we could see the trench plainly, perfectly straight, leading off toward Mt. Baldy across high ridges. With the taking out of the water Skidoo died.

The place was littered with paper-covered books and old magazines. In one house we found a pile of copies of a work entitled "Mysterious Scotty, or the Monte Cristo of Death Valley." Needless to say we stole one, which became a treasure to be brought out in idle hours by the camp-fire. "Scotty" was a boon to the Worrier who did not hold much with the sort of literature that we carried around. Early in

the expedition he had glanced over our library and preferred meditation. We had a few slim volumes of verse, "Leaves of Grass," some wild tales of Lord Dunsany's and a learned treatise on how to paint. This last helped us to keep up the fiction of artistic greatness.

From Skidoo we traversed the top of a long ridge from the precipitous end of which we had a superb view over Death Valley. We owed this to "Old Johnnie" who had told us to go there, for among the tumbled peaks of the Panamint Range around Skidoo you could wander a long time without getting a commanding view of the valley. The point from which we saw it that day was opposite Furnace Creek Ranch, but even with the glass we could not distinguish the green patch of the ranch, nor could we see the Eagle Borax Works lower down. The bottom looked like a white plain with brown streaks around and across it. Death Valley is always different. That afternoon there was no play of color, no magical mirage. From there, looking straight down seven thousand feet, it was ghastly, utterly unlike anything on the earth

as most of us know her. It was like the valleys on the dead, bright moon when you look at them through a powerful telescope.

We stayed too long watching the shadow of the Panamints, as sharp and stark as a shadow on the moon, encroach on the white floor. Twilight had begun by the time we reached Skidoo again to hunt the trail down to Emigrant Springs. We tramped around the rough hills searching for it until darkness made it impossible to distinguish it even if we had found it. There below lay our camp. Could we have gone down a ridge or a canyon to it we would have defied the trail, but it was necessary to go crosswise over several of the ridges that buttress the mountain, and up and down their steep dividing canyons. Even the Worrier hesitated to attempt this in the dark. Getting lost is one of the easiest things you can do in desert mountains for they are very broken, flung down seemingly without plan, cut by deep, often precipitous gorges. The same old, tattered pamphlet that gives advice about tin cans also advises about getting lost. It says that persons not blessed

with a good sense of locality had better find some other place than the desert for the "exercise of their talents." Standing on top of a mountain you think you know very well where to go, but when you get into those clefts among those hills that look all alike you find you do not know. Any moment you may meet a barrier to be climbed over with great labor or gone around at the risk of getting involved in little canyons leading off in the wrong direction.

There was nothing to do but skirt around the mountain and try to get back onto the path by which we had come. During the quest we had our reward and were glad. Just as night was closing in a shadow rose like a curtain beyond the mountain-tops that shut Death Valley from us. It was a blue shadow and a rose-colored shadow. It was both those colors and yet they were not merged to a purple. It seemed to rise straight up, a live thing, as though the spirit of the valley were greeting the stars. The beautiful apparition remained less than a minute; always after that we looked toward deep valleys at evening hoping to see it again, but we never

saw it, though night made wonderful shadows and blue pools of darkness in them. Death Valley is a thing apart. It is a white terror whose soul is a miracle of rose and blue.

About an hour later we came upon the cabin of "Old Tom Adams," another old-timer guarding his own mine and Skidoo. He came out and made a great fuss about finding "ladies." He had heard of us before. He offered to make coffee, but a deep craving for more substantial food forbade any delay. He talked incessantly and would hardly let us go; no doubt we were the most exciting event for a long time. He described a way to get down the mountain by following the tracks of his burros. He swore we could not miss it, you just "fell down" right into Emigrant Springs. He went a little way with us to be sure we started down the right ridge; after that we "fell down" in about two hours and a half. It was the worst, the rockiest, the steepest series of hills and gullies we ever encountered. Presently the deceitful moon turned the bushes into white ghosts and fooled us about the angle of

ledges. From time to time we saw burro tracks in the sand, but we suspect that a herd of wild burros pastures around there. The Worrier's opinion of "the old fool" was unmentionable, nor did it soothe him to suggest that the old man had tried to do his best.

Next day Old Tom appeared at Emigrant Springs wanting to know if we had seen a white burro and a black burro. We had that very morning.

"They're mine," he said, "but I can't keep 'em home."

Hunting burros seemed to be his life work. Two weeks later we heard of him twenty miles away still hunting his burros. The Worrier opined that he had no burros, but our guide was prejudiced.

We learned to appreciate what it meant to hunt burros, for though our burros were horses, the Worrier spent most of the days in camp looking for them. It was amazing how far they could travel with hobbles on. They were clever at hiding, too, but we were assured that they were dull compared to burros. Everybody on

the desert seems to have burros somewhere that he expects to use some day. They are all delightfully casual about them:

"Did you happen to see a bunch of burros in the gulch youse come through?"

"No. Have you lost yours?"

"Yes. Gone about a week. I thought maybe they was over there."

The hope seems to be that they will come back for water. Generally they do, but sometimes they go to some other water hole and leave you to guess which one. At Silver Lake the brigand called French Pete had come from thirty miles off looking for his burros.

"You ought to put a bell on them," our hostess had told him.

"I did, but it's no use. You can't find 'em, anyway. They're too smart."

"Do they hide?"

"Hide! The one with the bell gets behind a rock and holds his neck perfectly still while the others bring him food!"

Another day at Emigrant Springs was spent in climbing Pinto Peak, 7,450 feet high. We

A PACK-TRAIN CROSSING A DRY LAKE

chose it because it was the highest point anywhere around, and we hoped for a good look at Mt. Baldy and Telescope Peak in order to lay out a route by which to climb them. Pinto Peak is on the west side of Emigrant Pass, overlooking the Panamint Valley and all the region to the foot of Mt. Whitney in the Sierra Nevada. The peak is not visible from the spring and we had to guess at a possible way up. We began by ascending a steep ridge leading in the right direction, over and among several little summits. The ridge brought us to a large, high plateau set round with little peaks and cut at the sides by deep canyons. The top of the ridge and the plateau were dotted over with cedar trees, for on the desert, where everything is different, you do not climb above the timber, you climb up to it. Between six and seven thousand feet the trees begin, and sometimes in sheltered corners become twenty or thirty feet high. They are not large nor numerous on Pinto, but there are enough of them to give the ridge a speckled appearance from below. The plateau sloped gradually up toward the west and we selected

the furthest little rounded rise as probably Pinto Peak. For two miles we walked toward it over comparatively level ground. From that side Pinto is not especially interesting as a mountain, being only a higher point in a big table-land, but its western side is a precipice falling two thousand feet into a terribly rocky and desolate canyon. Not until we reached the extreme edge of the plateau did the view open. It appeared suddenly, black mass after black mass of harsh mountains leading over to Mt. Whitney, serene and white on the wall of the Sierras. The Sierra Nevada are the barriers of the desert. Beyond that glistening wall lie the lovely and fertile valleys of California. Over there at that season the fruit trees were beginning to bloom, on this side was only bareness, black rocks, and deep pits of sand.

Mt. Whitney is toward the southern end of the high peaks of the Sierras. That day they bit into the sky like jagged white teeth. Southward the range is lower, rising again in Southern California to the peaks of San Bernadino and San Jacinto. We could vaguely see San Ber-

nadino Mountain, mistily white, mixed up with the clouds. Below us lay the Panamint Valley under the western wall of the steep Panamints which separate it from Death Valley. This basin is neither so low nor so large as the famous one east of it, but is of the same character. At its edge, pressed against the mountain, we could make out with the glass the once prosperous mining town of Ballarat, the Ballarat that we had so gayly started to drive to from Johannesburg. With the Worrier's help we traced the route we would have come over. He pointed out the red mountain on which the three mining towns are perched, then came a line of low hills, then an immense dry lake where the Trona Borax Works are located, then a range of ugly-looking black mountains, then a long mesa which he said is almost as rough and difficult as the one we had recently come over, then the Panamint Valley, shimmering hot, glistening white, first cousin to Death Valley itself. It would have been a magnificent drive, but suppose we had undertaken it in the sublime innocence that was ours at the time! We had never

crossed a dry lake, never wrestled with a mesa, never in our wildest imaginings pictured such a place as the Panamint Valley,—and at the end we would have found the town deserted!

"You wouldn't have made it," the Worrier teased us, "you would have turned back before you got to Trona."

"We would not!" But in our hearts we knew how we would have been weak from pure fear of the ugly-looking black mountains. The terrifying approach to Silver Lake was nothing compared to them, nor would we have had a friendly little Ford chugging along ahead.

As we had hoped, the top of Pinto commands a fine view of Telescope Peak and Mt. Baldy joined by the beautiful, long ridge which reposes so splendidly above Death Valley. From this side they looked higher and snowier. We studied them carefully with the glass. The great mass of snow was discouraging, but it seemed to be blown off the sharp ridges which showed black. We planned to move the outfit as far as possible up Wild Rose Canyon which branches off from Emigrant Canyon about

twenty miles above Emigrant Springs and leads up to the far, high peaks. From there we thought we could climb the rounded summit of Mt. Baldy and walk along the splendid curve to the slender pyramid of Telescope. No lover of mountains could look at those pure, smooth lines as long as we had looked at them and from as many aspects without being filled with the desire to set his feet upon them.

It is not the height of a mountain nor its difficulty which makes it desirable, but something in the mountain's own self. The Panamints are neither very high nor very difficult, but they are dramatic and alone. Besides the contrast of their snow with the burning sands beneath, we wanted the feel of a truly lonely mountain top. The Panamints are truly lonely. They are not objects of solicitude to any mountain club; no tourist keen for adventure, nor boy scout outfit, nor earnest-eyed mountaineer who carves the record of his conquests on his pipe-bowl or his walking-stick, have left their names up there. No trail leads up the Panamints, nor are their summits splashed over with paint like the stately,

desecrated summit of Mt. Whitney. We would not be forced to know in letters a foot high that on August 27th, John Doe made the ascent. We do not hate John Doe, but we prefer to meet him under roofs. If he loved the mountain, rather than so disfigure it, he would throw ink at his most cherished possession; and only lovers of mountains have the right to invade their loneliness. The Panamints, with their feet in the burning heat of Death Valley and their heads in the snow, almost unknown to any save a few prospectors, guarded on all sides by the solitudes of the desert, seemed utterly desirable to us.

We sat on a rock studying the map, which was no help at all, and eating the big, sweet, California prunes of which we always carried pockets-full as aids to wayfaring. The Worrier acquiesced in our mountaineering project, though without enthusiasm. He bade us not forget that it would be cold up there. The sight of the snow had already set him shivering. We twitted him with being a "desert rat."

"You may have got along better than we did

in Death Valley," we said to him, "but it's our turn now; that's fair."

The Worrier scorned prunes and always looked on with dour superiority during our consumption of them. Soon he left us and went to hunt the "lost mine." There are many legends of lost mines in the desert-mountains and we paid no especial attention to this one, being weary enough to sit still, munching prunes, and looking out over the fearful, majestic landscape. In an hour he came back with a handful of rocks. He laid them solemnly before us. They were pieces of gold ore which he had found in a hole a little way below the summit.

"The lost mine," he said.

"You had better come back and work it," we laughed.

"I'll have them assayed." His manner was serious.

"Why, you don't think——"

"I don't know. But anyways, we'll call it the Prune Stone Mine."

As a matter of fact he did have them assayed and did go back with his partner; but the Prune

Stone Mine, like so many mines in the Death Valley Country, failed to fulfill its first promise.

During the week that we camped at Emigrant Springs we saw no wild life except a few little brown birds that made a happy twittering in the mornings. Sometimes in the blue night we heard the distant howling of coyotes, and once an owl mocked us with a cry that sounded ridiculously like "Hoo, Hoo, Skidoo!" He was a native, no doubt, and old in wisdom. In the rambles among the mountains we found our first wild flowers. They were small except one striking crimson-velvet one with a ragged blossom like garden balsam. It grew in clumps about six inches high and made vivid spots of color against the rocks. Later, as the spring advanced, we found a great variety of flowers, but never this one except at high altitudes. Seeing it was always a joyful heart-beat. The graceful greasewood was in bloom, covered with small yellow flowers that looked like little butterflies perched on the slender branches. The nights were still very cold, often freezing the water in

the pail, but the days were pleasantly warm. The sun shone with such dazzling brightness that during the middle of the day the shady sides of rocks were the best resting places. A fresh, steady wind blew nearly always up or down the canyon, sometimes piling great white masses of clouds in the sky, always scouring the world incredibly clean. Each night was a blue wonder. The mountains were delicate, luminous shapes in front of a sky infinitely far away. The big stars hung low and burned with a steady, silver shine.

Every day we climbed one or another of the ridges and smaller mountains close to the spring. It was good to lie on their summits in the sun. From any one of them we could look down the canyon and see the whole length of the Mesquite Valley, always the same, yet, like Death Valley, always different. You can look day after day at the deep, hot basins of the desert without ever knowing them. Quickly enough you can see the obvious features of the Mesquite Valley—the continuation of the Panamints on the west, the wine-red Grapevine Mountains on

the east, the low blue hills in the north, the level bottom of the valley streaked with white alkali where Salt Creek crosses it and "Old Johnnie's" big sand-dunes are glistening little ant hills—but you must stay all the hours of a long day to find out what she really is, and then you will not know. Listen:

"Behold me! You think that I am an arid valley with a white alkali streak down the middle of my level-seeming floor. You think that I am surrounded by red mountains, or perhaps you think they are blue, or purple—well, not exactly—more rose.

"Come down to me! I am very deep between the mountains. I am very white. But if you do not like me so I can be a wide, level plain covered with velvet for you to lie on.

"Come down to me! Rest beside this lake. See how it shines, how blue it is! I am all in white like a young girl with a turquoise breastpin. You don't believe that? I am a witch, I can be anything. My wardrobe is

full of bright dresses. I will put them on for you one by one.

"See, I know more colors of blue than you ever dreamed of. When you tire of blue I change to ripe plums. Now I throw gray gauze over my purple. I look like a nun, but am not. Here is my yellow gown. You do not like it? See, I have all degrees of red, fire red and crimson and pink, the color of bride roses. Here is my finest. It is made of every color, but the tone of it is the gray breast of a dove. You did not know that the breast of a dove could be made of all colors, but now I show you.

"Do you not love me? You remember too well that I am hot as a bake-oven. You think that if any one were fool enough to come down to me I would steal behind and grip him by the throat.

"What of it? Why do you question me so much? You see how old I am, how many storms have left their scars on me, and you think I am wise. But I am only

fair. Is it not enough to be old and yet fair?

"Beauty is sitting on my topmost peak making the enchantments that confirm your dreams. She experiments with many materials; she makes new combinations forever.

"Behold all the desolate places how they are hers—the lonely hills, the lonely plains, the lonely green sea, the lonely sands—she clothes us in gorgeous raiment, she makes us content with death. Where she is your heart can pasture even to the emptiness bebetween the stars."

A lifetime is not long enough to listen to the songs of the desolate places. A whole sunny, timeless day is too short to hear the Mesquite Valley. The days and nights of the desert merge into each other. They are like perfectly matched pearls being strung on an endless string. You delight to run your fingers over their smooth surfaces and detect no difference.

"Do we move to-morrow?" Thus the Worrier.

"Why to-morrow?"

"We have been here a week."

That is not possible! How could a week slide into past things so soon?

X

The High White Peaks

WILD ROSE CANYON has a lovely name, justified by a small clump of bushes that may bear wild roses sometime. The canyon, where it branches east from Emigrant Pass, is very narrow with precipitous sides. Emigrant Canyon itself at this point is walled by high cliffs so close together that the wagon track fills the gorge. A considerable stream, bordered with feathery trees, flows through the lower end of Wild Rose Canyon and down Emigrant Pass toward the Panamint Valley and Ballarat, but dies before it emerges from the cliff-like hills onto the long, stony slope that leads into the valley. Once more we had been deceived. From Pinto Peak the rocky cliffs appeared to rise directly out of the Panamint Valley, but a walk down the western descent of Emigrant Pass revealed the same

long, brush-covered slope that we had learned to know so well.

The cattlemen had been there and gone away, leaving the cattle in Wild Rose for their spring range. The young steers huddled together, staring with their expression of fierce innocence. They had tramped the stream-bed into a bog and otherwise made camping at the mouth of the canyon unpleasant. A stone shack with an iron roof was located near the spring. It was rather a magnificent shack with two rooms, the inner one windowless like a cave. For some reason that seems to be the approved way of building sleeping-rooms on the desert. At Keane Wonder veritable black holes were the sleeping-quarters near the boarding-house. The shack had no floor and the uneven ground was littered with rubbish, as indeed were all the surroundings. The mess around the spring at Wild Rose bothered us more than the litter anywhere else. Perhaps it was because we were shut in on all sides by high walls, and there were no vistas nor even any beautifully shaped summits to look at. For once the desert was all foreground, little trees

along the stream, little bushes, little stones. A tin can in such a small environment can hardly be ignored.

As soon as possible therefore, we pushed on up the canyon which widened into what looked like a plain surrounded by mountains. In reality it was level nowhere, but rounded down like a giant oval basin about five miles wide and seven or eight miles long. The mountains on the east and south were covered with cedars whose vanguard dotted the edge of the mesa under Mount Baldy, now become a great white mass, very near, led up to by a precipitous ridge broken into jagged peaks. Telescope Peak lay behind Baldy and was not visible. There was more snow than we had supposed in our survey from Pinto Mountain, it lay all along the jagged ridge, coming down in some places almost to the mesa. The northern wall of the canyon was composed of lower mountains. The one furthest east was a big, pointed, red mass, polka-dotted with little trees near its summit. Looking back whence we had come the mountains seemed to close the narrow gorge.

The cattlemen had told us that Wild Rose Canyon was full of water, but after we left the spring we found none. The big wash down the middle was dry—the boy must have seen it on some rare occasion when it had water in it—and the great bowl far too large and too rough to admit of much scouting for springs at the bases of the mountains. We had thought that we would see the deserted charcoal-kilns and thus find the spring which the cattlemen had described, but there was no sign of any kilns. We supposed that they were somewhere along the bottom of the precipitous ridge that led up to Mount Baldy. In that direction the mesa was so terribly cut up that we could not attempt to take the wagon there until we had first explored it, so we made a dry camp in the middle of the basin under the shelter of the eight-foot-high bank of the wash.

The wind had blown harder than usual all day with an icy bite from the snowy heights. During the night a racing cloud deposited snow on the northern hills which before had been bare. A real storm now became our fear, for a little

more snow would defeat our project. Moreover Wild Rose Canyon is at an altitude where the cold at that time of year is intense, and we had to depend on the sun's fires to warm us sufficiently during the day to make life possible through the night. The "desert rat" became a bundle of misery. We had not realized the paralyzing effect cold would have on him. He sat and shivered, apparently unable to move or to think, so utterly wretched that Charlotte and I offered to give up the Panamints and "beat it" to a more salubrious climate. We could not bear to see our friend suffer; but he flatly refused, angry with us for even making the suggestion, saying that when he started to do a thing he generally did it.

The next morning was as cold as ever. Still the Worrier refused to consider moving out, and when the sun had warmed the great windy bowl a little, he went back to fetch more water from the spring by the old shack. We explored the base of the long ridge under Mount Baldy as well as we could, but failed to find the charcoal-kilns. However, it was possible to get the wagon

over there, so in the afternoon we moved the whole outfit up to the first cedar trees. There the mesa became so steep that Molly and Bill could no longer pull the load. The Worrier had brought ten gallons of water, enough for several days, and the "desert-proof" horses were turned loose to find their way back to the spring at the mouth of the canyon. What either they or the cattle ate at Wild Rose remained a profound mystery to us. The mesa was covered with low, dry brush, interspersed occasionally with bunches of yellow grass. We could see the dark backs of the steers like spots moving through it, but it looked like anything rather than a spring feeding-ground.

Camp-in-the-Cedars was charming. A real tree had become a wonderful object. For once there was plenty of wood and the Worrier kept himself warm chopping and carrying. After the feeble little fires of roots and twigs to which we had been accustomed, that blazing, crackling camp-fire was a rich luxury. Dinner was a banquet. Our bed was laid under a big piñon tree through whose tufts of fine needles the enormous

stars looked down. We had a glimpse through the far-off mouth of the canyon of distant peaks, vague in the starlight. The wind rose and fell softly through the pines and cedars, like the breathing of the great white mountain beneath whose side we slept.

The white dawn of a clear day filtered through the blue darkness. Before the sun had climbed over the ridge we were started on our long anticipated adventure. It began with a stiff scramble up the first buttressing ridge, then a long pull to the crest of the barrier that walls the southern side of Wild Rose Canyon. The steep inclines of gravelly rock were varied with ledges. Soon we reached the snow, so hard that steps had to be dug in it with much scuffling of hobnailed shoes. The green trees growing out of the white snow were very lovely, and also useful to hold on to. When they were far apart we had some exciting moments when we zigzagged over the smooth, white crust, which was as steep as a shingled roof. In about two hours we reached the top of the ridge. Until then we had faced the white slope, working too hard to look back

very often at the basin that was falling away below us. Suddenly we stood on top. The world opened beyond into an immense white amphitheater shut in by snowy peaks with the pyramid of Telescope, visible once more, at the far side. After the hot, dry sands, how miraculous seemed this glittering winter!

We pressed on toward Baldy along the ridge, which proved to be much steeper than it had looked. It was covered with trees, and great patches of snow grown soft now in the sun. However, by keeping a little below the crest on the southern side most of the snow could be avoided. There the ground fell so precipitously from the ridge to the canyon below that only an occasional tree grew on it, and we had an unimpeded view of the two white summits and the magnificent sweep of snow between them.

Noon brought us to a little saddle north of Baldy, which connects it with another rounded summit of the same name. Here were no trees and the snow was blown off clean. With what eagerness we panted up the last few yards! The mountain climber has his great reward when he

"looks over." That is his own peculiar joy. He toils for hours with the ground rising before him to a ridge that seems to cut the sky, only to find a higher one beyond. He surmounts that, and another and another, until at last he gains the highest and the mountains yield their secret. Breathlessly we stood on the little saddle. We looked down into Death Valley from the still height to which we had looked up so long. The white floor shimmered through layers of heated air, 10,000 feet below. Again the valley was different. That day it was full of sky, as the Imperial Valley had been when we first saw it. Nothing was distinguishable down there, it was a well of clear blue. The Funeral Mountains looked like hills. Behind them the jagged ranges of desert mountains spread back with one tall, snowy peak in their midst, Mount Charleston, sixty miles away on the border of Nevada.

Southward on the saddle the mound of Baldy's summit presented its snowy side. For the most part the snow was hard enough for us to walk over the crust, but sometimes we floundered in nearly to the waist. That was hard work. By

one o'clock we reached the top where the snow was blown off, leaving bare black rocks. It was a quiet day for the desert and especially for the mountains. A slight wind came from the south; the sky was cloudless, a deep, still blue. Mount Baldy overlooks all the country in a complete panorama, save where the beautiful pyramid of Telescope Peak cuts into the view. The horizon was bounded on three sides by snow mountains, Mount Charleston, the San Bernadinos and the wonderful Sierra Nevada. Between these white barriers spread the desert, deep white valleys, yellow dry lakes, ranges of rose and blue and dark-violet mountains, all shining in the incomparable brightness of the sun.

Now, at last, we saw the famous "H. and L." of which we had heard so much. "You see the highest and the lowest points in the United States at the same time," everybody had told us. From the top of the Panamints we could see Mount Whitney towering in the west, while in the east the mountain sides fall precipitously into Death Valley, 280 feet below sea level. There must be some more accessible viewpoint which com-

mands this dramatic spectacle, for it is not likely that our informants expected us to climb Mount Baldy.

From the summit of Baldy the long curving arête that had looked so beautiful from Death Valley on one side and from Pinto Peak on the other led over to Telescope Peak. It was no disappointment. Sloping sharply down from Baldy, level for a ways, then rising again toward the white pyramid, it extended for about three miles, precipitous on both sides, often not more than ten feet wide on top. The exhilaration of walking thus in the clear air high above the spread-out world is always a boundless joy; on this shining wall in the middle of the desert the joy was almost unbearable. The great plain of the world was clear cut, no veiling haze softened its distances, it flashed and sparkled, full of strong, austere lines and strong, satisfying contrasts. Like a victorious lover, you walk the heights of your conquest; everything to the great circle of the horizon is yours; by right of patience and love you possess it.

If we could only be like the three old cedars

that have withstood the hurricanes on the ridge and gaze with them until sunset, through the night and the wonder of morning! They are so gnarled and old, and so calm. Watchers, they stand on the summit of the world, and they might tell us, if we could stay, why the mountain-tops are joyful. Instead, we must drag around these aching bodies clamoring to be kept warm and to be fed, never letting us listen long enough. Already the sun was descending toward the west, and we had to hasten on if we wanted to reach Telescope Peak and get back to fire and food before the cold of night.

When the arête began to rise it became rapidly very steep. The snow became harder and harder until it turned to ice. The lovely pyramid, now directly overhead, shone blindingly in the slanting sun. The only possible way to its peak was up a sharp knife-edge, from which both sides fell sheer for thousands of feet. Was it all solid ice? The conviction that it was had been hinting defeat to each of us for the last half hour of the climb, but no one cared to speak of that possibility until we were within four hundred feet

of the top, clinging to trees and slipping badly. The peak rose at a possible, but terrific angle; the trees for the remainder of the way were much too far apart to hold on to; the ice was perfectly smooth, and glistened like a skating rink set on edge. No amount of kicking with hobnailed shoes could make a foothold on it, and one slip on that knife-edge either way meant a slide down the ice-sheet to almost sure destruction. You cannot climb such an ice wall without either an ax or a rope; with either one we would have tried it. We could have cut steps with an ax, or we might have been able to lasso the trees above with a long rope, and pull ourselves up by it. So lately come from the furnace of Death Valley, how should we suppose that we would need the implements of an Alpine mountain-climber? Down, down, more than 11,000 feet, lay that white pit veiled with the smoke of iridescent haze.

The Worrier, who professed deep scorn of all mountains for their own sakes, looked longingly at the smooth peak. It fascinated us all like a hard, glittering jewel. He said he "hated to be

beat." So did we all "hate to be beat," but we would have been ungrateful indeed for the joy of that day had we not been able to turn back and remain thankful. There was no sense of defeat in the going-down.

The descent was easy except for the heart-breaking pull up Mount Baldy again. His sides were far too straight up and down to admit of any going around him. On the summit we made a concession to aching bodies by taking a long rest and eating what was left of the bread and cheese and the everlasting prunes. The Worrier had long since dubbed our route "The Prune Stone Trail." We jested light-heartedly about building cairns along it with a prune stone carved on the top of each, and insisted that we owned a half interest in the Prune Stone Mine, as he would never have found it had we not dragged him up Pinto. Mountain-hater as he was and heat-loving "desert-rat," he genially admitted that, snow or no snow, the top of Baldy was "fine." As we sat there Death Valley turned a dark, deep, luminous blue. We could see the Avawatz Mountains by Silver Lake and the

notch in the hills where the blue pool of Saratoga cherishes its little darting fish. The slanting sunlight was resplendent on the arête and the west slopes of Telescope Peak. The Worrier called him an old rascal; but we were glad to leave him so, with his white robes unsullied by scrambling feet. His image would remain always to the inward eye in dull days and difficult days, a reminder of how beauty watches around the world.

When the sun stood just above the wall of the Sierras we began the long descent down the rounded, snowy side of Baldy to the little saddle, and down the long, steep slope and the little, buttress slope where the cedar trees had been so lovely in the snow. Night came while we were still going down, and the basin of Wild Rose Canyon was a violet lake.

XI

Snowstorm and Sandstorm

BREAKFAST was late next morning like Sunday breakfasts in houses. Charlotte asked if it was Sunday. No one knew what day it was in the far-off world, but we proclaimed it Sunday at Wild Rose. It was a true Sunday, a day of rest after hard exertion, a still day washed clean by the mighty sun. Immense and still. The great bowl curved tranquilly to the tranquil hills, the cedars and piñons along its edge glistened like little bright fingers pointing at the sky.

During the middle of the day the sun was hot, in the morning and the evening the big fire blazed. Camp-in-the-Cedars was lovely enough to stay in forever, but shortly after noon the Worrier announced that he must find the charcoal-kilns, he could not "be beat" by them. The little trees were so beguiling, the tranquil brightness

of the mesa so inviting, that we followed him, buoyed up by the cold, clear air. We wandered along the base of Baldy to where a small, purple mountain jutted into the great basin. Around that we went, leisurely picking our way over the rough ground until at the extreme northern end of the bowl we found an attenuated wraith of a road leading up into a heavily wooded canyon. A road must once have been the way to somewhere, and we followed it, climbing steeply for nearly a mile. It brought us to a small, level spot where, made of rocks like the mountains and indistinguishable until we were right on them, stood seven immense charcoal-kilns like a row of giant beehives. They were so big that we could walk upright through their doorways, that looked like arched openings in their sides. Old Tom Adams had said that they were used in the seventies to make fuel of the cedars and piñons, to be hauled thirty miles to the smelter at a lead mine. They had been deserted so long that the camp rubbish had disappeared from around them and they merged into their background, become again a part of Nature herself.

What strenuous endeavor they denoted! Everywhere men have left their footprints on the Mojave, sojourners always, never inhabitants. The seven kilns were the most impressive testimony of brief possession that we saw, more impressive even than the twenty-eight-mile-long trench that brought the water to Skidoo. We had seen it from there crossing high ridges; in the great bowl of Wild Rose it was clearly marked, going from side to side and vanishing up the first ridge which we had climbed to Baldy. The cost and labor of making it must have been immense. Mojave was already breaking down the edges preparing to brush it away, but it will be a long time before she can obliterate those kilns. They will still be eloquent in that remote fastness long after Keane Wonder and Ryolite are gone.

Behind the kilns a dim path climbed the mountain-side to a little, secret spring, an oval rock basin not more than five feet long and so deftly hidden that we wondered what prospector first had the joy of finding it. From the elevation of

the spring we could look along the length of Wild Rose Canyon, where the sagebrush smoothed to a blue and green and purple sea, and through its narrow opening to the white serenity of Mount Whitney. Thus framed the white peak seemed to float in the blue sky. Very swiftly Mojave brushes men off, but always with a fine gesture. From the midst of her most obliterating desolations she never fails to point at some far-off shining.

Too late we learned that the little spring at the head of the canyon would have been the place for our camp. Not only would we have had the delight of its cold, pure water, but the ascent of Mount Baldy looked shorter and easier from there. Perhaps we each cherished the hope of moving up next day and trying once more to scale the glittering ice-wall with the help of our wood-chopper's ax and the rope from the wagon; but we never discussed the idea for that night the dreaded storm crept over the mountains. It came stealthily on padded feet, putting out the stars. At dawn big wet snowflakes gently sifting through the still air awoke us.

During the day the storm increased. The wind arose and blew in gusts seemingly from every direction. Fortunately the trees afforded plenty of big wood, so we were able to keep a roaring fire, though the heavily-falling, wet snow sometimes threatened to put it out. It snowed so fast that we were shut in by white walls not more than twenty feet away. We pitched our tent with the opening toward the fire and tried to get some shelter in it while the Worrier hunted the horses. The tent was the only serious mistake in the outfit. It was a light, waterproof silk tent with a pole up the middle. We had expected to use it as a shelter from the wind and had tried once before at Emigrant Springs. On that occasion its light-weight material had flapped and rattled in the blast until we were glad to creep outside and sleep under the edge of a rock. Before morning it blew down. The only practical tent for the desert is a very low one, like a pup-tent, made of heavy canvas, with extra long pegs that must be driven deep and buried in the sand. During the eternity of snowstorm in which Charlotte and I

waited for Molly and Bill, we alternated between holding up the pole in the gusts of wind and rushing out between them to drive in the pegs with the ax. This, and the necessity of constantly building up the fire, kept us wet and cold all day, for the snow was not the dry, whirling snow of really cold climates, but was as wet as a heavy rain. It clung so we could not shake it off and melted on our clothes. The Worrier did not retrieve Molly and Bill until four o'clock. It was late to move, but the storm showed no sign of abatement and we remembered with growing affection the shack at the entrance to the canyon. Hastily packing in the white downpour that hissed through the air, we left Camp-in-the-Cedars.

As soon as we had descended a little way into the basin the snow ceased, but a white cloud continued to hang over the place where our charming camp had been. During the remainder of the day and throughout the night heavy clouds veiled all the mountains, occasionally dropping flurries of snow around us. An icy wind rushed down the canyon. When we reached the shack

it seemed palatial. We cleared out the rubbish by throwing it down the hill in front of the door, the approved way of cleaning up on the desert. When there are too many cans you throw them behind the bushes, and we had learned to do it with great vigor and accuracy of aim. Much to the Worrier's amusement we scrubbed the table and tried to wipe off the cracked, rusty stove set up on three empty gasoline tins. That stove was a marvel in the art of consuming much fuel without emitting any heat. We took turns huddling close to it. The walls sheltered us from the wind, but as far as the stove was concerned we might almost as well have been outdoors.

After supper we had to reckon with the dungeon that was the bedroom. The Worrier recommended it highly, but we viewed it with a certain awful apprehension. We had a devil's choice between that and the frigid outdoors that kept beating on the shack with gusts of wind. We made the mistake of choosing the dungeon. When the candle was blown out fear crouched in the blackness. All the tales we had ever read of

prisoners in damp cellars assailed us—horrors, tortures, black holes. The terrors of these man-made fears in this shut-in, man-made place were far worse than the wild outdoors. Presently little scratchings and gnawings apprised us that we were not alone. Unbearable then was the walled darkness. We gathered up the bed and went outside, stepping carefully over the Worrier who, forever faithful, was sleeping across the door.

The clean outdoors! Let it snow, let it hail, let the water run down the mountain and seep through the bed, let the wind tear at the ponchos! It was nothing compared to being shut up in a dark place. About midnight we were suddenly struck awake by a terrific din. After the first tense moment we recognized it as coyotes howling in the canyon. That was nothing either compared to vague little scratchings and gnawings in an eight-by-ten shack.

Next day the storm continued, with clear intervals during which we rushed out to spread our clothes and blankets in the sun that thirstily drank up the snow at the bases of the mountains.

"Scotty" beguiled the hours and the weird tales of Lord Dunsany, read aloud beside the cracked stove, never had a more appropriate setting. All around the mountains were white except where some insistently black rock heaved out. Clouds hurried across the sky like Indians galloping on the war-path, the wind screaming around the rocks was their war-whoop. In the moments of peace between their raids huge giants of cloud shook their fists at us over the walls. The silence of Mojave was torn to tatters. Yet, somehow, we still felt it. Just as the wild tales we read intimated a stillness behind, so the tumult was a ripple on indomitable peace. You have seen a little whirlwind plow a furrow through the water of some glassy lake, making quite a bit of a tumult, but leaving undisturbed the tranquillity of the surface beyond its narrow path. Though between the walls of the canyon where we camped we could not see the still surfaces, we sensed them. The storm was an incident. Mojave took it and made a strong song.

Wild Rose Canyon was the furthest point of our journey; from the old shack the going home

began. The sun rose brilliantly on the following morning and deceived us into starting back to Emigrant Springs. As soon as we had left the narrow canyon and could once more see the expanse of the sky, we knew that the storm was by no means over. We even debated returning to our palace, cracked stove, black hole, and all; but when you have broken camp, found the horses, packed up, and started, a two-hour-long process, you will risk almost anything rather than turn back. There were compensations, too, even for the wind which shortly came to life again and thrust its knife to our hearts. The sky was a magnificent spectacle. It was not gray, nor overcast, nor brooding, but full of torn-up, piled-up, tumultuous clouds, a fitting canopy for the country beneath it. The top of Emigrant Pass is a big mesa surrounded by all kinds of mountains from the broken, battered buttresses and steep snow-peaks of the Panamints to smooth, bare, rounded hills folded over each other and dimpled like upholstered sofas. In bursts of sunshine the shadows of the clouds raced over them all,

snatching at each other and getting mixed up in the canyons. Sometimes a cloud spilled out its contents and for a while obliterated one of them. Toward noon the clouds made a concerted attack on the sun, calling up new cohorts until at last they succeeded in covering him entirely and keeping him covered. Then a great change fell upon Mojave. She became forlorn, her bright colors faded into gray. The brush shivered in the wind and made a cold, crackling sound. A few immense Joshua palms scattered over the mesa waved their grotesque arms like monsters in pain. The wind whistled through their stiff, spiky leaves. They were in bloom with a heavy mass of waxy white flowers on the end of each branch. The sun had polished the flowers, tipping every branch with a silver ball; now they stuck up into the lead-colored sky, dull, lead-colored things.

All the familiar places that had been drenched with sunshine, brilliant with color, almost as magical sometimes as the burning sands themselves, now appeared in this sad, gray mood. After leaving the top of the pass we crossed a

large, high plateau known as the Harrisburg Flat. On the way over to Wild Rose it had been still and hot, the openings between the mountains had hinted at the illusions of Death Valley behind them; now a cloud full of wind and snow rolled up out of the narrow opening of Emigrant Canyon. Storms were all around us, but until that moment we had hoped that we might escape. There was no escape. The Harrisburg Flat became a white, whirling fury. The wind that smote us was like a solid, moving wall. The cloud was not made of snow, but of ice, a fine hail that cut our faces. It was so dense that we could not see ten feet in front of the wagon. We had some difficulty in making Molly and Bill face it, but it was necessary to go on. All day the icy wind had been pressing upon us, now it was so cold that we felt we could not withstand it long. Fortunately the sheltering walls of the canyon were not far, but the half hour during which we struggled toward them seemed an eternity. The Worrier shouted at the laboring horses and for the first time when he knew that we could hear him, he cursed.

By the time we reached the canyon the hail had stopped but the terrible wind continued. It seemed as though it would rip the bushes out of the ground. In place of the ice, fine particles of sand assailed us—had the wash not been thoroughly wet we would have had more of it. It must have rained violently in the canyon, or else in the dusk we missed the particular route among the rocks by which we had come up, for the way was so washed out that the Worrier could hardly pilot the load.

Every bit of energy we had was centered on reaching the ruined shack at Emigrant Springs. When we were able to say anything at all we speculated about how dirty it might be and whether or not there was a stove in it. The dirt was a certainty, but nobody could remember about the stove, as we had avoided the shack when we were there before. After a freezing eternity we came around the last bend of the canyon. Home was in sight, and our hope perished for smoke was coming out of the chimney! Not only was there a stove, but there was a man snugly camping beside it, an

unknown man, a usurper, a robber! We were full of angry, helpless indignation.

"If it's Tom Adams," the Worrier snapped, "we'll throw him out."

But it was not Tom Adams. It was another old-timer, an old man, who wandered ceaselessly to and fro over the desert. He was a gentle soul, but we were in no mood to appreciate that then. Of course he offered to move out of the shack when he saw "ladies" coming on such a bitter night, and equally of course we could not allow it. If Charlotte and I chose to invade the wilderness we must take the chances of the wilderness as other people did. Our pride was involved, but we had to refuse very summarily, even rudely, before the old man would accept our objection. Then he retired into the shack with hurt dignity, while we pulled down some more of the corral fence to make a blazing fire. We solaced ourselves with the belief that the outdoors was better than the shack anyway, as it had been better than the black hole. In the course of time we were warm again and managed to keep warm through the night.

In the morning the innocent usurper sent us, via the Worrier, a pan of hot biscuits, a most welcome and delicious gift. Charlotte and I called on him later to thank him and make amends if we could. He entertained us for two hours with the story of his travels, but he would not accept our invitation to dinner, saying that he wasn't used to "dining with ladies." We sincerely hope it was not a sarcasm. The question which the possession of the shack raised is rather a difficult one. Was our pride worth more than the true chivalry of a kindly soul? To us it was, to him it was not.

The wind continued to blow with violence for several days, though we had no more rain nor snow. It is easy to see how the desert has been torn to its rough harshness. That steady-blowing wind alone could wear the mountains to their jagged outlines, crumbling the softer rock down to fill the valleys. It picks up the sand and uses it to grind the mountains smooth. It piles it against the cliffs to make new foothills and hollows it out to make new canyons. It drives the rain against the mountains to rush down, rolling

rocks along the gorges and digging the deep trenches across the mesas. Where no network of roots holds a surface soil wind and rain work rapidly. On the homeward journey from Wild Rose we understood the cut-up mesas and the gouged-out canyons better.

Down in the Mesquite Valley, where we took the sandy road along the edge of the marsh instead of the rocky one by which we had come because Bill had lost a shoe, we saw what the wind can do with sand. In the afternoon we reached the foot of the mesa that leads from Emigrant Canyon to the bottom of the valley and were at the beginning of "Old Johnnie's" sand-dunes. It had been a sparkling day with a clear sky, but the wind was still blowing. The Mesquite Valley was as hot as we remembered it, but, after the ice-cloud on the Harrisburg Flat only two days before, it seemed a delicious hotness. With the assurance of seasoned travelers able to make a dry camp anywhere, Charlotte and I insisted on stopping there for the night. Molly and Bill would take four hours to make the nine miles of deep sand to Salt Creek,

and we always hated to make camp in the dark. The Worrier wanted to go on. He said he had a hunch that we ought to, but he allowed himself to be persuaded. We should have heeded that hunch of an old-timer.

Hardly had we unpacked the wagon and made a fireplace before we noticed that the wind was increasing. Little whirligigs of sand began to run across the valley. Soon they were charging at us down the mesa. First they came singly, then merged into a cloud of sand that rattled against the pots and the wagon. Luckily for us the wind was blowing from the mountains over the mesa where there was comparatively little sand to pick up, for had it been coming across the dunes we would have been buried alive. Of course it was impossible to cook; in a very few minutes it was impossible to do anything but crouch in the lea of the sand-heap around the roots of the biggest mesquite. The Worrier seemed to shrink up and draw in his head like a turtle. He shouted something at us, of which we could only hear the word "hunch." The air was full of a rushing, hissing sound.

Charlotte and I covered ourselves with the ponchos, drawing them over our heads when the sand came hurtling through the top of the Mesquite. Molly and Bill huddled close together about fifty feet away with their backs to the blast, and much of the time the sand was so dense that we could not see them. The Worrier also was lost in the yellow cloud. The sand was very fine and, in spite of the ponchos, sifted into our hair and ears and clothes. It gritted in our teeth so we felt as though we were eating it. We could see it piling up around the next mesquite, and could imagine it whirling through the valley over the tops of "Old Johnnie's" dunes.

Often the wind goes down at sunset, but that day the sun sank invisibly and the fury increased. We felt a queer excitement not unmixed with fear. Thus, only a hundred times worse, must the sand blow over the vast Sahara Desert while the Arabs cover their heads, calling on Allah. When the solid ground itself arises there is no help but Allah.

After sunset the Worrier emerged again from the flying yellow mass. His shirt was blown

tight to him and the loose sleeves whipped in the wind. He leaned against it bending forward. He shouted that we might possibly get some shelter by continuing along the road toward Salt Creek, where it winds further around the side of Sheep Mountain. He advised us to move, because if the storm continued he could not keep Molly and Bill.

"Tie them up!" we yelled.

"Can't. Go crazy." Then, as we did not move, his voice rose peremptorily:

"Come on! If it gets worse we can't go."

We had disregarded his first hunch; now, if he had another, far be it from us to raise difficulties, though we could hardly see how it was possible to travel even then. Charlotte and I staggered up from the mesquite and all three of us packed as speedily as we could. It was a disorderly packing, as we could scarcely stand before the wind, and were almost blinded by the sand. Molly and Bill were wild with excitement. I remember vividly bracing myself against the wall of wind, holding on to Molly, who objected to backing around to the wagon-

pole, unable to open my eyes and hardly able to breathe.

We all piled into the wagon. The excited horses were willing to travel with their backs to the wind. There was a track to follow, but its edges were already rounding full of sand. If the storm should continue long enough it would be smoothed out.

The Worrier's hope was justified, for at the end of three or four miles the wind seemed much less furious. We were among the dunes and found a fairly quiet little gully full of deep sand as fine and soft as the sand on a beach. Something in the set of the wind through the mountains left this oasis of peace. We were even able to cook the long-delayed dinner. We did it by moonlight, slowly and carefully handling things and keeping them covered as much as possible, like having a picnic on a windy seashore.

The Worrier suggested that we climb to the top of the dune which partially sheltered us, if we wanted to see what a sandstorm looked like. We did so. From that vantage point of comparative calm we saw the whole Mesquite Val-

ley filled with a dense yellow cloud that completely shut out the surrounding mountains, rising higher than they, swirling at the top like smoke ascending into the dark night sky.

In the morning we climbed the dune again and looked across over the others. The blowing sand was less dense and we could see them all. "Old Johnnie" had been right, they were a hundred feet high. Their shapes were very beautiful, with knife-edge tops ridged in pure, clean lines from which fringes of fine sand blew up like the wind-tossed manes of white horses. The masses and outlines of the dunes suggested Egyptian architecture; the pyramids and the crouching sphinx were there. Sand dunes must have been familiar to the Egyptians dwelling beside the Sahara. What is the huge sphinx, brooding and massive, gazing with strong eyes across the emptiness, but an interpretation of the desert carved in stone?

We reached Salt Creek early and spent the rest of the day there. The wind continued to blow, the sand still swirled off the dunes, and the yellow dust-cloud still obscured the moun-

tains; but we were in the shelter of Tucki and the ground was so stony that we were not much troubled by the migrating sand. Once more Charlotte and I climbed the ridge from which we had watched the Worrier's remarkable hunting. The whole big basin of Death Valley between its high walls of rock was blurred with dust, clouds of sand with wind-frayed edges rose into the sky, not a gleam of radiance showed through. The green and white snake of Salt Creek coiled sullenly among the sulphur-colored hills. Only the blue eye was bright, poisonous, unwinking. The fair water that was too polluted for human drinking seemed to mock us. We waited for the enchanter to come at sunset, but as the day merged into evening the scene became inexpressibly dreadful.

Suddenly Charlotte arose from the rock on which we were sitting.

"Let us go," she whispered, and without further comment we hurried back to camp and made the Worrier collect enough wood from the swamp for a truly cheerful fire.

The following day we traveled once more up

the long, northern mesa of Death Valley, but by a different route from that by which we had descended. This way was shorter, avoiding the long pull across the valley, though it was rockier, steeper, and cut by more islands of hills to cross or go around than the other. In many places the road vanished utterly, and only a "desert-rat" could have piloted a wagon safely to its destination over that maze of ridges and gullies.

The day was fine. At last the wind had died down and the dust-clouds were slowly subsiding. Both Death Valley and the Mesquite Valley were veiled in heavy haze, but the brightness of their changing color now shimmered through. All day the white blaze of the sun was around us and the silence, after a week of tumultuous wind, was a mighty dreaming. It was the living silence which we had first known on the night when we wandered away from Silver Lake, the silence in which the earth moves. The mountains dwelt in it majestically. Mojave was again making her fine gesture, unconscious of the discomforts and terrors of small living things. Her pointing at the far-off shining is always a

conquest of grimness, as though sorrow were a stepping-stone to beauty.

By the out-jutting cliff of Daylight Pass, from which we had first beheld Death Valley, we made a long stop. Familiarity had only enhanced its splendor. With different eyes we saw the shining floor, the sad Funeral Mountains, the calm, white curves of the high Panamints. What had been a picture was now a living experience. The rose and silver shifting over the white valley-floor had new meaning. We knew that floor, we knew the feel of it, and its ever-changing beauty was a miracle. We were justified in the pilgrimage, for only by going thus to the White Heart, making stones and brush and jagged rocks our companions, depending on the springs to keep us alive and the roots of the greasewood to warm us, could we have known what a miracle it was. The words "terror" and "beauty" which we had spoken during the first look down into the valley and had thought that we understood, had real content now. We knew that they belonged together and that one covered the other and changed its meaning.

XII

The End of the Adventure

IT was April when we returned to Silver Lake. Spring was walking on the desert. The sand and the stony mesas were decked with flowers. Great patches of California-poppies bent on hairlike, invisible stems before the wind, little floating golden cups. Blue lupins, like spires of larkspur, glistened in the sun. A four-petaled, waxy flower with a shining, satiny texture spread in masses on the sand. Daisies with yellow centers and lavender petals clustered beside rocks. A little plant like the beginnings of a wild rose tossed tiny pink balloons in the air. The shoots of the purple verbena ran over the ground, sending up little stems to hold its many-floretted crowns. Even the thorny cactus bloomed with a crimson, poppy-shaped flower.

When we went on excursions to the mountains the bayonet-leaves of the yucca guarded tall

spikes which bore aloft white, shining blossoms, and the grotesque branches of the Joshua palms were tipped with brightness like lighted candles. Everywhere high clumps of yellow coreopsis rivaled the sun. Beyond the dry lake at the base of the sand-ridge which had been so terrifying on our first drive through the desert stood stately Easter lilies hung with great white bells. Easter morning we went over there and gathered armfuls for our kind German hosts. Their house and ours were abloom during our stay, for we could no more resist gathering these amazing flowers than we could resist picking up the many-colored stones. Every dish and bowl was full and tin cans rescued from the dump were promoted to be vases.

The gallant little flowers in such a stern environment! They were touchingly lovely, blooming wherever they had the smallest chance and looking trustingly at the sun. It was as though we had never seen flowers before, never really seen them.

Indeed, until we went on pilgrimage to the White Heart, we had never seen the outdoors,

never really seen it. How could we not see it when the outdoors is always on the doorstep? We had thought we saw it, we had talked about it, a place for pleasant dalliance when work inside the walls was done, or a sort of glorified gymnasium to make the blood race and the heart beat faster. The outdoors is the awe-full, magnificent universe moving along, inexpressibly fearful and beautiful!

And we might have seen it anywhere! The drama is always going on with its terror and beauty. The gentlest countryside is a part of it. Everywhere the grim touches hands with the fair, storm alternates with calm, flowers grow out of death, and the fairness, the calm and the flowers are the stronger. Poets and artists know this when they step across their thresholds in the morning—whence their unreasonable joy at being alive—but most of us have to be shaken awake before we can see what is in front of our eyes.

The desert shook us awake. We had come looking for mysteries and "terrible fascinations" and found only the mystery of the old outdoors

and the terrible fascination of the old outdoors. Beauty pressing around sorrow—the desert is simply a very forceful statement about that.

For the adventure with the outdoors is the adventure with beauty. And when you have that adventure the jealous walls, however engrossing their contents, and they may be very interesting and amusing and serious and exciting, can never bully you again. They have doors and windows in them and beauty is around them like a garment. You and I, unaccountably split off from the vast drama and blessedly able to be aware of it for a little while, shall we let the din and bother inside the walls, the frantic lunging at the still face of time, raise such a dust in our eyes that we cannot see?

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

Every day while we rested at Silver Lake we looked the length of the barren lake bed to the bright mirage at the base of the black mountain that was no mountain at all, and northward over sandy emptiness to the enchanted pathway lead-

ing behind the Avawatz. Fourteen of the still, bright days of the desert were strung on the endless string before we had to say good-by to our hosts and to the Worrier.

Never can we forget any of the people whom we met during our adventure with the outdoors, neither the few whom we have mentioned in this inadequate telling of it, nor the many whom we have not. They were all unfailingly kind. It was very hard to part from our guide, and nothing reconciled us to it except his cheerful promise to act as Official Worrier again. Our hostess invited us to come any time and stay as long as we liked, an invitation of which we have gladly availed ourselves.

We piled our baggage into the automobile, abandoned so long at Silver Lake, and through a whole sunny day drove away from the White Heart. The dim road led past sinister little craters that long ago spilled ugly, black lava over the hills, through acres and acres of blue lupins blown to waves like a sea, across two ranges of enchanted mountains and down into and over the white Ivanpah Valley where the

heavy sand made the engine boil. Several times we left the car to walk on the savage, torn-up hills made gentle by flowers. When the noise of the engine was hushed the silence was full of the singing of birds.

In the rose and orange of evening we reached Needles on the bank of the red Colorado River, and came out of the wild and lonely place onto the great highway that joins the Atlantic and the Pacific. The sand and rock trail follows the steel road of the Santa Fé. Transcontinental trains roar past and pennants flutter on automobiles from Maine and Florida, Michigan and Texas, Oregon and California. Dust clouds roll over the edge of Mojave as America goes by. Some travelers look at her curiously, some look longingly, some shudder, some pass with the window shades pulled down. All the time she is singing on her rosy mountain-tops and in her deep, hot valleys where the blaze of the sun is white.

APPENDIX

". . . That part of California which lies to the south and east of the southern inosculation of the Coast Range and the Sierra comprises an area of fully 50,000 sq.m. For the most part it is excessively dry and barren. The Mohave Desert—embracing Kern, Los Angeles and San Bernardino, as also a large part of San Diego, Imperial and Riverside counties—belong to the 'Great Basin.' . . . The Mohave Desert is about 2,000 ft. above the sea in general altitude. The southern part of the Great Basin region is vaguely designated the Colorado desert. In San Diego, Imperial and Riverside counties a number of creeks or so called rivers, with beds that are normally dry, flow centrally toward the desert of Salton Sink or 'Sea'; this is the lowest part of a large area that is depressed below the level of the sea, at Salton 263 ft., and 287 ft. at the lowest point. In 1900 the Colorado River (q.v.) was tapped south of the Mexican boundary for water wherewith to irrigate land in the Imperial Valley along the Southern Pacific Railway, adjoin-

ing Salton Sea. The river enlarged the Canal, and finding a steeper gradient than that to its mouth, was diverted into the Colorado Desert, flooding Salton Sea, and when the break in this river was closed for the second time in February, 1907, though much of its water still escaped through minor channels and by seepage, a lake more than 400 sq.m. in area was left. A permanent 60 ft. masonry dam was completed in July, 1907.

". . . Death Valley surpasses for combined heat and aridity any meteorological stations on earth where regular observations are taken, although for extremes of heat it is exceeded by places in the Colorado desert. The minimum daily temperature in summer is rarely below 70° F. and often above 96° F. (in the shade), while the maximum may for days in succession be as high as 120° F. A record of six months (1891) showed an average daily relative humidity sometimes falls to 5. Yet the surrounding country is not devoid of vegetation. The hills are very fertile when irrigated, and the wet season develops a variety of perennial herbs, shrubs and annuals."

The Encyclopædia Britannica: "California."

"It is often said that America has no real deserts. This is true in the sense that there are no

regions such as are found in Asia and Africa where one can travel a hundred miles at a stretch and scarcely see a sign of vegetation—nothing but barren gravel, graceful, wavy sand dunes, hard, wind-swept clay, or still harder rock salt broken into rough blocks with upturned edges. In the broader sense of the term, however, America has an abundance of deserts—regions which bear a thin cover of bushy vegetation but are too dry for agriculture without irrigation. . . . In the United States the deserts lie almost wholly between the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountain ranges, which keep out any moisture that might come from either the west or the east. Beginning on the north with the sage-brush plateau of southern Washington, the desert expands to a width of seven hundred miles in the gray, sage-covered basins of Nevada and Utah. In southern California and Arizona the sagebrush gives place to smaller forms like the salt-bush, and the desert assumes a sterner aspect. Next comes the cactus desert extending from Arizona far south into Mexico. One of the notable features of the desert is the extreme heat of certain portions. Close to the Nevada border in southern California, Death Valley, 250 feet below sea-level, is the hottest place in America. There alone among the American

regions familiar to the writer does one have the feeling of intense, overpowering aridity which prevails so often in the deserts of Arabia and Central Asia. Some years ago a Weather Bureau thermometer was installed in Death Valley at Furnace Creek, where the only flowing water in more than a hundred miles supports a depressing little ranch. There one or two white men, helped by a few Indians, raise alfalfa, which they sell at exorbitant prices to deluded prospectors searching for riches which they never find. Though the terrible heat ruins the health of the white men in a year or two, so that they have to move away, they have succeeded in keeping a thermometer record for some years. No other properly exposed out-of-door thermometer in the United States, or perhaps in the world, is so familiar with a temperature of 100 ° F. or more. During the period of not quite fifteen hundred days from the spring of 1911 to May, 1915, a maximum temperature of 100° F. or more was reached in five hundred and forty-eight days, or more than one-third of the time. On July 10, 1913, the mercury rose to 134° F. and touched the top of the tube. How much higher it might have gone no one can tell. That day marks the limit of temperature yet reached in this country according

to official records. In the summer of 1914 there was one night when the thermometer dropped only to 114° F., having been 128° F. at noon. The branches of a pepper-tree whose roots had been freshly watered wilted as a flower wilts when broken from the stalk."

—The Chronicles of America.—Volume I. "The Red Man's Continent," by Ellsworth Huntington.