Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – January 1943

When the Souths left their Ghost mountain home on the western rim of the Colorado desert they went in search of a location where they no longer would have to measure precious water by the cupful. Their quest has led them across the Mojave desert into Nevada, across part of Arizona – and this month into Utah. It was in a pleasant Mormon valley that they found the Little House. Its windows were broken, it was deserted and forlorn. But it was here they discovered Tibbets, and here that Rudyard found his "twelve whole gallons of water." And it was here that the Pilgrim gave them a prophetic message.

IT WAS Victoria who first saw the little river as we came coasting down the flanks of the Utah mountains in the warm glow of a desert noon. "Watah!" she shrilled, pointing, "Too much watah, muvver! Big ocean."

"A wiver – a real wiver," Rudyard shrieked, his own eyes electrified, almost at the same instant, by the silver glint among the cottonwoods. "A wiver – the Mississippi wiver! Oh daddy, can we go in and swim?"

"That's not the Mississippi," Rider said crushingly. "That's just a creek. It looks cool, though," he added. "And there might be tadpoles in it. If we could just stop a bit ... "

Rider and Rudyard in the little stream which looked like the "Mississippi River" to Rudyard.

So we stopped a bit, halting our sputtering old car under the whispering shade of a giant cottonwood, a pebble's toss from the rippling water. Dragon flies darted back and forth along the course of the little brook. And in the background, far beyond the belt of green cottonwoods and willows, cliffs of red sandstone glowed warm against the blue bowl of the sky. There was a dense patch of sunflowers on the opposite side of the road and Tanya, who mixes practicality with poetry, began to gather armfuls of the tender stalks and broad leaves for the goats. In the middle distance, across the bard knees of the hills, wound the tree-marked line of an irrigation ditch.

But our trio of youngsters waited not on a contemplation of scenery. Their entry into the state of Utah had been marked by the discovery of more fresh water – in one piece – than they had beheld in many weary leagues. And the day was warm. Shedding garments in a manner to suggest the trailing tails of comets Rider and Rudyard were already racing down the sloping bank. With wild yells of delight they flung themselves splashing into the shallow stream.

Victoria followed more slowly. Feminine caution asserted itself in the manner in which she poked gingerly at the ripples with her toes. A long while she studied the rippling streamlet, resisting – and even

howling lustily – when we tried to urge her into it. "Too much watah," she said at length. And that was final. She picked herself a nice, cool, high and dry rock in the shade of a clump of young willows and sat down, for all the world like some staid old dowager at the seashore. All she needed was a piece of knitting.

But the boys splashed and rolled joyfully, chasing each other and exploring all the hollows and deep pools for tadpoles. Birds slipped softly through the thickets, and the over-arching branches of the trees patterned the singing water with shadows of smoky gold. A deep peace and content reigned there in that little tree-crowded dell and it was hard to realize that it too was as much a part of the desert as the ranks on ranks of bristling Joshua trees through which we had passed but a few miles back – a liquid note of softness and peace amidst the war chant of a barbaric symphony. But then, that is the desert. And in these startling contrasts lies its charm.

We went on at last – down the valley skirting the flanks of the glowing ruby cliffs. And the irrigation ditch, symbol of the toil and courage of Mormon pioneers, marched with us, till the rolling slopes opened and broke in a checkerboard pattern of green and silver where fields on fields of lush alfalfa mingled with the winding stream of the Virgin river. Thus we came to Utah.

It was Sunday. A Sabbath hush brooded the mellow sunlight that wrapped the old high-roofed Mormon houses. Along the grass-grown lanes primly dressed little girls walked decorously beneath the shade of the tall Lombardy poplars. The stores were all closed. Over the valley into which the Mormon pioneers had transported their wagons, piece by piece on their shoulders across the grim lava ridges, hung the drowsy benediction of peace.

But we were desert hungry and we halted presently before a big two-story farmhouse, whose time-stained adobes, warm-tinted with the weatherings of more than four-score years, would have stirred any artist to rapture. Water gurgled in the canal that bordered the vine smothered fence and by the gate that opened on a tree shaded lawn there was a sign that proclaimed "Goldfish for sale." An ancient rustic rocker sagged contentedly beside the porch steps and hard by the lift of the old brick walls spread the leaves of clustering fig trees. We bought grapes there, buying them from a sun-browned country boy, who went out into the vineyard and gathered them while we waited. Desert grapes. There was a spice and tang and freshness to them which only desert sun and air can give.

And then, chugging on through the drowse of that Sunday afternoon, we came upon the Little House. It stood close by the highway, sheltering timidly from the traffic behind a little patch of weed-grown lawn. There was a mulberry tree and a grape arbor, and from somewhere among the low shrubs came the murmur of water trickling from an open faucet. Some of the windows of the Little House were broken and a silence hung over it – a silence that was wistful and friendly and appealing. We stopped the car and tiptoed across the neglected lawn to investigate.

The Little House was empty – empty and deserted save for Tibbets the cat. We did not know that her name was Tibbets then, but that was the name we gave her later. "Meow," said Tibbets sociably. She rubbed against our legs and purred. Tibbets was very thin. By actions that were as plain as words she welcomed us. "My people have gone away," Tibbets said. "But this is my home. Will you not come and live with me?"

And the Little House seemed to say the same thing. Delightedly, craving rest after weary travel, we explored about it, peeking in at the gaping windows, pausing to admire the yellow-gold bunches of grapes that hung in the little arbor. Victoria hugged the lean Tibbets in two chubby arms and Rider and Rudyard, scouting, reported that the water trickling from the faucet on the lawn came from a real spring ... "away off somewhere at

the foot of the hill." "Let's stay here, mother," suggested Rider a bit enviously, "just foe a little while, anyway ... a month maybe. It's so quiet and beautiful."

"But we can't just stay," Tanya objected. "Someone owns it. You can't move into other people's property."

"Well, it's a nice place," Rudyard put in, "P'waps we could find out whose it is. We ought to inwestigate." He wrinkled his pudgy nose.

And the upshot of the matter was that we did "inwestigate." And in the town we found a charming, gracious lady, herself a daughter of one of the sterling pioneers who had first broken trails into the valley. "Why, of course you can move in," she said when we had talked with her. "The house is my married daughter's and she is living now in Salt Lake City. She'd be happy to have someone there." And she waved us on our way with smiles that were as wholesome as the desert sunshine.

And so, happily, we came back to the Little House and to Tibbets the cat. And we unloaded the weary goats and set them to grazing upon good grass. And we swept the rooms and unpacked some possessions and watered the lawn and settled ourselves to a brief period of rest. Only Rider and Rudyard and Victoria refused to rest. They were too busy exploring. There was a spring back under the edge of the hill. Two springs. And there were cattails and bamboos and dark mysterious caves. And they built dams in the warm, red earth and filled them again and again with water ... lots of water. "You 'member, daddy," Rudyard said one day, "when we left Yaquitepec I wanted twelve whole gallons of water. Well, I fink now that I have had it."

And, judging from the mud with which the three rascals had plastered themselves, I thought so too.

There is fascination in Utah. Fascination and mystery – desert mystery that seems to sit oddly sometimes with the visible sights of ordered fields and irrigation and Mormon industry. An old land this, and strange. Along the ridges the black lava rocks tell a weird and terrible story of an Age of Fire; in the mountains the erosion sculptured cliffs tell an equally terrifying tale of an Age of Water. And the ground underfoot, even amidst the smiling gardens along the rivers, holds strange things. Arrowheads, pottery, beads – even such mysteries as charred fragments of wood and of human bone completely encased in incrustations from the waters of ancient lakes.

It has been pleasant and busy in the Little House – pleasant in the quiet peace that reigns here in this little valley beneath Utah’s desert skies, and busy with many a side trip into adjacent territory in search of a permanent tarrying place. For the Little House and its springs never can be ours completely. We must find our own desert homespot. And that has not been yet.

But the passing days, as they have drifted one by one like falling leaves towards winter, have been happy. Tibbets the cat has grown fat and sleek and the goats drowse away the hours in good pasture. Rider, Rudyard and Victoria, sun-tinted and water satisfied are already going into mysterious conferences regarding the approach of Christmas. Speculating sometimes anxiously on old Santa's chances this year of getting his sleigh and reindeer teams through the war-torn skies. Quiet days. And an occasional spice of adventure too. As, for instance when the lone, grey timber wolf came down out of the rocks in broad daylight and tried to carry off Betty, Rider's pet baby goat, and was scared off just in the nick of time. Rider, who first glimpsed the marauder, is not yet entirely convinced that it really was a wolf – claiming that timber wolves ought to be

extinct in a civilized section. Well, that may be. But there is no argument as to his size. If he wasn't a wolf he was the most awesomely big coyote any of us have ever seen.

Yes, it has been happy here in this sheltered valley of the desert. But the day before yesterday, out of the north, the Pilgrim came down the road. He was driving a pair of big white burros attached to a covered wagon. In the wagon itself, among the pots and pans and blankets, snuggled a tiny black baby burro, while its mother, of the same color, trotted along behind.

A strange man, the Pilgrim – a man of rocks and specimens and ancient arrowheads and the atmosphere of the lone wastelands. The light of mystery was in his eyes – the mystery of far, lonely mountains and desolate desert reaches. A Pilgrim of the forgotten trails.

The Pilgrim came to a halt beside the Little House. And presently, as we talked, he looked at us fixedly. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. "This is not the place. Go on. Go on."

A strange man. He might have been a Spirit of the Wastelands. But he camped that day near the Little House and in the evening shared a simple meal with us. The grave, sincere philosophy that ran through all his talk and his tales of far places might have been almost terrifying to the uninitiated. But we had dwelt long in the lonely places ourselves and we knew that he spoke truth. We parted in the starglow. And in the morning when we went to look for him he had vanished. Wagon, burros – all had vanished somewhere into the far maze of dim trails. Rider and Rudyard, startled, solemnly affirmed that he had been a ghost. But there were wagon tracks and burro tracks upon the sandy earth, and they headed away – away into the distance. Ghosts usually do not leave tracks. So perhaps he was just what he said he was, a Pilgrim. He had delivered his message and departed.

So now we do not know. Shall we follow into the far reaches – head for the region he spoke of – or shall we stay on, waiting till the chill days of winter, tempering into spring, make travel easier. Not yet are we quite certain.

But in a few days we shall know.

AGELESS

How new is Life! We gaze inspired
Each purple or vermilion hill,
With tip sun-glinting as if ired.
Can all our inmost being fill.

How old is Life! That every care,
Or lash of Fate's fierce flailing rod,
We shoulder staunchly, for we've learned
That age-old lesson: Trust in God.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – February 1943

The Souths have abandoned until spring their search for a new home – in deference to a snowy winter which already has hemmed them in the little Utah valley where they have found a temporary refuge. It was while exploring the strange volcanic country surrounding the Little House, that they were inspired to take up again one of the primitive arts they had learned in their Yaquitepec home. The willow trees they found up a sandy wash were promptly raided for their long pliant shoots, and packed home by Rider. Now the South family will have another enjoyable activity to wedge between story-telling and arithmetic lessons.

IT IS a good while now since the Pilgrim, with his covered wagon and burros, vanished down the lone desert trails. And we are still here in the Little House under the Utah stars. Here we shall remain a while. For at the last minute we decided to put off our onward trek until the milder weather of Spring. Not that we have forgotten the Pilgrim's message, nor his tales of buried Indian cities. But the high mountain passes are chill now with snow. The search must wait awhile.

Rudyard and Victoria trying to catch frogs in the reservoir – a favorite retreat of the South children.

And the delay, though we chafe against it at times with an impatience to be on the trail once more, has brought no dull moments. There has been so much to do – and in this new section of the great desert wonderland, so much to see. Plans or no plans Time will not stand still. Already it has swept us past another Christmas and into the wide highway of a new year.

It was a happy Christmas. And even though in a war tom world the word "happy" may seem out of place, the deeper significance of Christmas is such that the festival should be a happy one. Even in the midst of sorrow and battle and sudden death. For what is Christmas but a token, a sacred reminder, a testimony to Immortality – to a Life and Hope that rise triumphant over death? It matters not where you celebrate Christmas – in a mansion, on a battlefield, or under the lee of a creosote bush on a lone desert. Its inner sacred meaning is the same.

But Rider, Rudyard and Victoria still view Christmas from the very personal angle of Santa Claus. Doggedly, all through these past few months, they have refused to be impressed by our numerous gloomy warnings that the old Saint would have a difficult time getting through this year. What with the bombs and the airplane-crowded skies and the gas rationing and the shortage of sugar, we warned them, he might be prevented from making his annual round entirely.

“Sandy Klaws,” announced Rudyard with lofty authority, “– is majick! It would take more than the worstest war to stop him. I just *know* he's gonna come. An' I'm gonna hang up my stocking just like always.”'

"An' I donna hang up *my* 'tocking, dust like a'ways, tew!" shrilled Victoria, faithfully echoinig, as is her custom, the words of her hero. "Sanda Caws is maddick!"

Rider refused even to be drawn into the discussion. When Rider knows that a thing is so, then it is so. Why waste time arguing the matter. These tiresome oldsters, with their wavering faith! In due course, matter of factly, he hung up his stocking with the rest.

And the calm faith of all three of them was justified. Of course! For on Christmas morning there hung the three stockings, stuffed full. Shamefacedly we had to admit, amidst triumphant laughter at our expense, that we didn't know a thing about Santa Claus. He really was magic, we acknowledged.

Christmas always makes one a little misty eyed with its renewal of the ties of friendship and remembrance. So many friends, now friends and old. Friends whose cheery greetings came in person, and friends whose hearty letters and cards came winging in from every quarter of the compass, across many a weary league of desert and of mountains. And how shall we answer, we who so sadly lack the magic of old Santa Claus whereby he annihilates distance and who would, if he could, leap nimbly down the chimneys and grasp the hands of every one of his well-wishers. That is what we would like to do. But we cannot. We are tied to the feeble substitute of mere words. Dear friends, our thanks. To you, each and every one of you, both near and far, our sincerest thanks and our heartiest New Year's wishes. Your cheery cards and letters all will be acknowledged in time. Alas how slow we are sometimes. Some of you must have lost all faith in us as correspondents. But it is not from indifference that our letter writing lags. Often sheer time lack blocks the task. These last months upon desert trails have been busy ones.

Snow whips often, these days, against the mountain peaks. And the winds that come galloping down across the foothills into this sheltered desert valley sometimes have a real bite in them. But the little tin stove which this year must take the place of the Yaquitepec fireplace does its duty nobly. We miss the dry mescal butts, which on Ghost mountain made the fires roar with their tossing fountains of flame. But there is other fuel in plenty and our "fuel gathering expeditions" of Yaquitepec merely have been transplanted to Utah. Dead mesquite and cottonwood and rabbit bush. It all goes to swell the pile in the back yard which each morning is crusted everywhere with thick crystals of frost – a lacy tangle of sparkling white sticks and branches through which the little white-crowned sparrows hop chillily, hunting for their breakfast.

Winter and warmth make a happy combination. The little stove roars red and there is usually a big iron pot bubbling upon it. A combination to induce story-telling. And it often does. The other morning, busy about our various tasks, we were suddenly aware that – down by the stove – Rudyard was regaling Victoria with a lecture on – of all things – the city of New York.

“ ... an' it's the biggust city in the world. An' down on the corner of Fourth street there's a tree-men jus building, six feet high. An …”

A loud sarcastic sniff, from the region of the table where Rider was plowing through his daily dose of arithmetic – with one ear cocked for outside diversion – at this point disconcerted the lecturer, causing him to hastily amend his statement:

"I mean th' t'menjus building is a'most one hundred an' *twenty* feet high," he declared loudly. "An' the peepul..."

The sniffing from the listening arithmetician here lifted to a wild horse laugh, against which no amount of self-importance could stand. Flustered, Rudyard leaped to his feet: "C'mon," he ordered gruffly, grabbing the enthralled Victoria by the hand and starting for the door. "C'mon outside. I got some bizness derangements to 'tend to."

And on the outside step, in the sunshine, where the lee of the wall sheltered them from the wind, the thrilling travelogue was run to a peaceful conclusion, with Victoria, breathless and goggle-eyed, hanging on every word. We couldn't hear much, even with the window stealthily opened. But we did get fragments of amazing statements. As, for instance, that: "In Noo York all the ground is full of submawine twains, jus' packed full of peepul. An' all day they go – Bizzzzz! Right between your feet." And "All the emptiness is used up, so there isn't any more room to build houses. But the peepul don't mind. They live all lots of hundreds together in little compartments, very happy and demented."

Yesterday, because the afternoon was so sunny and pleasant, we sidetracked a score of pressing tasks and all went up to the old reservoir. The reservoir is part of the domain of the Little House too. Some distance away and under the toe of a ridge it is a favorite spot with Rider, Rudyard and Victoria. Its weedy bottom, partly silted in, is now a thicket of water-grass and reeds. Cottonwood trees stand sentinel along the embankment and cast fantastic reflections in the shallow, marshy water that is the haunt of frogs and all manner of diminutive swamp creatures. Birds flit to and fro over the reeds and cottontail rabbits hop through the low, brushy thickets that have grown up along the neglected fences. From the summit of the embankment you can look away off across the valley and the desert ridges to where far fantastic cliffs of blue and white and pink and lavender hang phantom-like against the sky rim. Mysterious mountains – they draw and hold the imagination. For behind them lies some of the wildest, most alluring lands on all the earth – the vast sweep of the Painted Desert and the Indian country.

The fever of "exploration" drew Rider and Rudyard away from the reservoir after a while. And Victoria clamored so hard to go with them that we all tramped back among the stony ridges, investigating the gullies and peeking hopefully into every small cave. Black lava and red sandstone here take the place of the Ghost mountain granite boulders. And as wind and rain can carve sandstone much more easily than granite the supply of tiny caves was quite satisfying. But not so their contents. The ancient people lived all over this country. They were here in numbers in the dim period subsequent to the "fire age." And there is ground for belief that they were here even before the volcanic eruptions. But the mills of Time, which slowly grind all earthly things to dust, had not spared many traces. A couple of fragments of very old pottery – undecorated – were all that even the sharp eyes of Rider and Rudyard were able to discover for their "museums."

We obviously had wandered into a poor relic district. But farther back, in the canyons and on the rocky mesas overlooking the Virgin River, we had been told there were petroglyphs and old village sites and a wealth of shattered pots.

Up a little sandy wash that was patterned with the criss-cross trails of the small furry folk of the desert, we presently came upon several willow trees, lifting above a bordering thicket of rabbit bush. Somehow the sight of a willow tree always evokes thoughts of basket making. And our glimpse of these proved no exception. They were promptly raided for a supply of long pliant shoots, which Rider volunteered to pack home. There

has been little enough time for basket making lately. But it is a craft which, like pottery and weaving, gets into one's blood. Once practiced its lure persists, and fingers are always itching to be at it again.

It is a healthy sign, and also a significant one, that interest in the primitive arts is growing. There are far too few people who realize the "escape" that handiwork of this sort provides. To nerves raw-edged and shattered by machine "civilization" there is nothing more soothing than the moulding of a clay pot or the weaving of a basket or a blanket. The nerves relax. As fingers fashion the moist clay on weave the threads or pliant straws, Time and Life seem to slip back into their rightful place. One seems to live again in an honest simple primitive world of homely virtues and peace. It is an inexpensive means of temporary "escape" too, as well as a fascinating one. Some sort of clay is almost everywhere, for the digging. And almost everywhere one can obtain some sort of natural material from which to weave baskets or rugs. Try it sometime. You may be surprised at the enjoyment you get from it. And it is not outside the bounds of possibility that skill thus gained may, some time or other, be extremely valuable to you.

We wearied of exploring and tramping at last and sat down to rest upon a high sandstone ledge. From our vantage point we could look far out across the sere, foreground slopes and deep down into the valley of the Virgin River. In the sunlight the river was a thread of flashing silver, winding amidst the patterned green of Mormon farms.

It is evening now. And as I sit here on the embankment of the old reservoir, the typewriter balanced on my knees, my back against a gnarled old cottonwood, all the world seems very still and hushed. The sun has gone down behind the red sandstone ridges and a thin haze of storm, perhaps a warning of heavy weather to come, films the southern sky. Twilight is reaching into the canyons along the Virgin River, glooming them with phantom draperies of blue. Across the sparse brown grass of the slope below me there is a patch of color moving. It is Rider in his little red and blue blanket going to bring in the grazing goats for the night. The faint, musical tinkle of their bells comes drowsily across the silence. Silence and Peace and the Mountains.

Yes, the mountains. For, away on the horizon, hardening to a rose-tinted indigo in the lifting shadow of night, stand the great buttressed mountains that are the gateway the Great Spirit reared to guard the land of the Navajo – a simple, nomadic people, very dose to the earth. And somehow, this evening, as I watch the eerie shadows deepen amidst the far distant crags and battlements, I am thinking of the words of an old Navajo, spoken many, many years ago:

"This is our land. It was our fathers'. We were here before the white man came. We will be here long after he has vanished away."

The words of an old, old man of the desert. And spoken in bitterness. Just how much truth do they hold?

Sometimes I wonder.

PATH OF EMPIRES

There lies the Past,
For every eye to see.
The ancients could not last –
Neither shall we.

A climb to height,
And we relax, benign.
As if our special might
Must stay divine.

And in that hour,
While we forget to pray,
Our cherished super-power
Starts to decay.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – March 1943

Rider cutting out dead wood for fuel in the thicket near the old reservoir.

Rudyard's discovery of an Indian grinding stone led the South family to engage in the ancient art of pinole making. Even Victoria did her share as she joined the others – shelling the gleaming red and yellow ears of corn. It was a long job, but worth it. And Marshal tells how pinole is made at the Little House in the Utah valley where they are lingering through the winter – waiting for spring's arrival before taking the trail again in search of a new home

THE necklace lay upon the table. In the wintry desert sunlight that fell across it from the window it shone with a strange mellowed, yellow glow. Something like old ivory; yet different, more mysterious. Our friend, the archaeologist who had brought it, touched the beads lovingly.

"Basketmaker," he said. "At least 2,000 years old. Perhaps much more. Observe this pendant! Note the workmanship."

With the absorption of the specialist his fingers strayed here and there, touching individual beads, pointing out the carefully drilled string holes, calling attention under the lens, to a mass of fascinating detail that would have escaped anyone but an expert.

"We were examining a room in an old Pueblo village," he explained. "And somehow I wasn't satisfied. I had a feeling – call it a hunch if you want to. I began to dig deeper. And away down below the level of the first floor we came upon ... "

You could see it all as he spoke. The grey sweep of the desert and its backing of tumbled mountains. The hard, dry, dusty earth with the traces of old walls. The yawning excavation in the ancient floor – a shaft that went not only into the depth, of earth but also the depths of time. From the records of one ancient vanished race into the records of another, still more ancient. And there in the bottom of the shaft, grey with the dust of forgotten things, you saw the body. And the little heap of beads that, before the string had decayed, had been the necklace. And the water jar. And the cooking pot.

Knees drawn to chest the woman lay upon her side, her face turned upward. The water jar, deliberately punctured in two places, was under one arm. The cooking pot by the other. The grey bones of the body, laid to its rest in the forgotten centuries, were crumbling to soft dust in the touch of the outer air. And there in the grey dust lay the necklace. A little pile of beads and their semi-transparent pendant – lying where they had trickled down like tears when the slow march of the years had finally snapped the string that had bound them about a dusky throat.

Our friend went on to tell us about that ancient house located less than two miles from where we now lived. 1t had been under the floor of another dwelling whose builders had not in the least suspected what lay below their homesite. He told us of the posts and beams, whose fire-charred sockets were eloquent of tragedy. He told us of the strata of sand and soil which the slow trowel of Time had spread above the ruin. Strata which told of the changing courses of rivers, of the drifting banks of desert dust.

But we scarcely heard him. We were looking at the necklace lying there yellowed and mysterious in the glow of the winter sunshine. It was a talisman. Before its mellowed gleam 20 centuries rolled aside and fled. And it seemed to us that in the bright glow of other days we could see again the desert and the mountains and the gleaming silver of the river. And the little houses among the cornfields. And the smoke of the cooking fires. And we heard again the voices of men and women and the laughter of children and the steady thudding of grinding stones, pounding out meal.

And the necklace was moving to and fro, clasped about a slender dusky throat that was vibrant with life and with song. She must have been beautiful, that ancient wearer of the necklace. For, even after the lapse of 20 centuries, her teeth, as our friend had told us, with a touch of scientific awe, had gleamed in the dusk of that opened burial pit like a cluster of dazzling pearls.

Gruesome? No, it wasn't gruesome. If you could have sat there as we did, gazing at that old necklace gleaming mellowly in the sunshine, and if you could have sensed, as we did, the things that lay back in the soft dusk of the Time mists, you would have found nothing gruesome about it. Quite the contrary. For somehow that old necklace and the pictures it brought back out of the dead years was a song of glory. A message of Faith and Hope and Immortality.

Rudyard has his dog. Ever since Rudyard could walk and talk he has dreamed of some day having a dog. Now the dream is realized. For the other day, out of the north – just as the Pilgrim came – there came another wanderer. But this time it was a four-footed wanderer. We called her Bonny.

Bonny is of uncertain ancestry. But mostly shepherd. What story of other homes and other days lies behind her gentle brown eyes we cannot tell. Without collar or mark she came up the dusty path along the adobe wall and adopted us. She was weary and hungry and very footsore. The children rushed to hunt up a plate of scraps for her, which she gulped eagerly. "Maybe," said Rider, speculatively, "she fell out of some car or truck. Someone must own her."

But Rudyard wasn't bothering about questions of ownership or anything else. He just flung his arms around Bonny's shaggy head and hugged it to his heart. "My dawg. My dawg – my always-wanted-dawg," he kept saying huskily. For an hour or more, as she lay stretched on a sack, resting in a sunny angle of the wall, he sat beside her, holding her head and stroking it tenderly. Bonny likes Rudyard.

Bonny is now a firmly established member of the household. The boys hunted up a big box to serve as a kennel and Victoria toddled around collecting old sacks to lay in it for a bed. Now we have a watchdog. In her kennel Bonny curls up every night with just the tip of her sensitive nose visible in the starlight. And no intruder, either two-footed or four-footed, goes unchallenged.

There is only one jarring note in the new order of things. Tibbets, the cat, has moved out and left us. Tibbets does not like dogs. Bonny tried her best to make friends with her. But Tibbets would have none of it. She drew aside her skirts with great dignity, spat twice-and departed across country. Rider still has hopes that Tibbets will return, as indeed we all have. Tibbets was Rider's special pet.

Wood gathering is an important job these chilly days, just as it was at Yaquitepec. Fortunately there is a good deal of dead brush and larger growth to be found in the little canyons and in the watercourses. And quite a bit of dry, burnable material in the thicket around the old reservoir. On pleasant days the youngsters make excursions and come home well loaded with kindling. And once in a while we take the car and trailer and haul in a mountain of varied fuel.

On the last of such expeditions we felt convinced that we had accumulated enough to last over the winter. But the bulk of it was willow logs, which vanish in the stove almost as fast as our Ghost mountain mescal butts did. So, soon we will have to make another foray. The boys don't mind, though. Not yet have they outgrown the novelty of this new location, and every trip is an adventure.

The cottonwoods lift bleak, bare branches against the sunset, and the edges of the mesas are iron-hard and grim against the chill dawns. But so far we cannot complain about the winter weather of this new section of the desert. Far to the north of Ghost mountain though it is, the climate is surprisingly like the one we have been used to. Perhaps even a little milder. For there is less wind. The roaring gales that used to leap upon Yaquitepec with a fury that sometimes seemed to make the entire mountain tremble to its core, are absent here. Sometimes we miss them.

You grow to love the wind. The roar and thunder of it – the elemental force. A storm has a strange power over the human spirit, a sense of buoyant stimulation queerly tempered with fear. For none of us have yet become so "civilized" that we have outgrown our primitive awe of the elements. We sometimes think that we have. But that is only a pretense – a thin veneer of artificial shelters of glass and brick that we hide behind. Deep at heart the human being still quails at the heavy rumble of the thunder and at the blinding slash of the lightning – even as did his ancestor who cowered from the tempest in the darkest recess of a drafty cave. Fortunately, in spite of all our frills and trimmings, we are still creatures of the earth. And there is hope and comfort in that.

Playing outside the other day Rudyard pulled up an oddly shaped stone that was half buried in the earth. Memory of similar shaped stones away back on Ghost mountain prompted him to trot inside and show us his find. Sure enough it was a grinding stone such as the Indian women use in rubbing out corn. Evidently it had had considerable use before it had dropped from the last dusky hand to be buried in the desert dust. How old?

We could not tell. But we dusted it off and wiped the clinging earth from the crevices – and put it to work again at its old job. Another link across the mists of Time, in the chain that binds all humanity and all Life together. The dusky fingers lay down the tool, and the white fingers pick it up, to go on with the work. Not the first time that we have turned old things to our hands in the wilderness. Tanya, who still remembers long busy hours in the fevered offices of Wall street, smiles sometimes at the queer changes the marching years have brought her.

We made a batch of pinole with the old grinder. The whole family, even Victoria, gathered round to shell the corn. We had bought it in the car. Corn that had been raised back in the hills, perhaps – who knows – upon the self-same land as that from which the Indian owners of the grinding stone had drawn supplies. The gleaming cars were yellow and red, and the fat kernels, as we stripped them from the cobs, seemed literally bursting with the health and bounty of the good earth. Victoria chose easy ears and did not get off many kernels, because she stopped to admire each one carefully before she dropped it into the dish with the others. "I don' wan' to hurt them, muvver," she explained laboriously. "'They are so boo-tiful."

You parch corn to make pinole. And when we had enough shelled we dumped it into a big iron kettle and set it over the fire, stirring it constantly with a wooden spoon so that it would toast evenly without burning. When it was toasted to a fragrant, brown crispness we took the pot off and spread the hot corn grains out to cool. Then, with the ancient grinding stone we rubbed them to meal on an improvised metate.

A long job, but worth it. You can eat pinolc "as is" or you can eat it with a little sugar and milk. Any way it is delicious. There are various kinds of it. Some pinole is a mixture of different varieties of toasted grains. The old desert Indians went to a lot of trouble in collecting tiny seeds. Many of them seeds of grasses and not much bigger than dust grains

A while ago, choosing good weather, we made a dash down into Arizona, to investigate a possible location close to the Grand Canyon. The trip proved a failure as far as helping our problem of a new homesite. But it was rich in reward in other ways, for we brought back unforgettable memory pictures of a vast and lonely and beautiful land. Vivid, thrilling memories of Zion national park, of the Navajo Bridge, of the quaint little town of Kanab – of a host of other high spots in a mighty unearned world of solitude and color.

But most of all we brought back memories of the Navajo and the section of their reservation through which we passed. Not perhaps so much memories of sights – through there are picturesque enough things, and to spare, to be seen in Navajo land. But the things that clung to us were memories of sensation. For, somehow, in the land of the Navajo there is a strange sensation of freedom – the old natural freedom which has vanished from most of the rest of the earth. It is not a complete freedom, it is true. The shadow of restraint hovers ever in the background. But still there is a great measure of freedom there – the proud freedom of a land and of human beings who hold "Progress" and its insiduous fetters in scorn. Freedom is a fierce and precious thing. To some, self satisfied in ease, it is a thing of small moment. But to those who love it as the wild things love it, it is more precious than the breath of life itself.

The Navajo dwell upon no sainted pedestal. God knows that they, in common with all of us, have faults enough to balance their virtues. But they love Freedom. They love it with all the passionate fierceness of the desert. And their love of it – does something to their territory. A mysterious something. As you pass through that land you can feel it. The wind blows a little fresher there. The sunshine is a little brighter. The faint subtle scent of the junipers, clinging along the sandstone cliffs is a little more fragrant than elsewhere. The smoke of the hogan fires rises towards the desert sky like the fume of a thousand altars. Lifted in praise to the Great Spirit.

Freedom – those of us who hold in our hearts and veins that longing and that fire would rather tread a thousand times the hard trails and eat the lean fare of the wilderness than round out fatted years beneath the yoke of "Progress."

ASPIRATION

I'm not content! I never am content!
They rot who seek but peace and calm repose.
Inertia is a parasite that grows
Clouding the thoughts that might be heaven bent.

Who knows the trek of stars? – the godly powers
That we ourselves shall claim some distant day.
When we, no longer in this coarsened clay,
Shall rise above this human state of ours.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – April 1943

The South family have become printers and publishers. The first type and press were homemade, the design for the press being studied from a postage stamp with the aid of a magnifying glass. Their first publication was a strictly limited edition, but bore the proud insignia of The Yaquitepec Press. "Yaquitepec" for their abandoned wilderness home on Ghost mountain at the edge of the Colorado desert.

CRACKLE of burning wood in the grey light of dawn – the aromatic tang of smoke lifting like incense in the chill morning air. Before the sun climbs above the ridge to eastward there is still the glitter of hoar frost upon the stems of dry grass and upon the black piles of fallen brushwood. Rudyard and Victoria have figured out a theory of their own to account for hoar frost. To them the sparkling crystals are "frozen moonlight" – a fanciful notion which despite error has much to be said for it.

Tanya stirs a stew cooking before the little mud oven.

A wood fire is a subject which easily arouses enthusiasm – nor is this reaction dependent upon chilly mornings. Cold or heat, dawnlight or dark the red flicker of fire flames through dry wood calls forth a mysterious "something" in the heart of every man who is not an utter clod. Perhaps this is because campfires and freedom have been so closely linked together in man's history, ever since he clambered above the groping intelligence of the brutes. The campfire in the cave, the campfire in the forest, upon the barren mountaintop, in the lone reaches of the desert – around those raw, leaping flames have always gathered the pioneers, the rebels, the defiant souls who would not wear the collar and chain of an ordered life fashioned by mass-minds.

Wood fires have solid, practical virtues about them too. There is more health to food cooked over wood flame. No other heat, no matter how "modern" and highly endorsed or chromium plated can begin to approach wood in its virtues of healthful and flavorful cooking. Maybe your scientists will scoff loudly at this. No matter. Let them continue to tinker with their gadgets and switches. But for a wholesome, satisfying meal, literally bursting with goodness and with every last particle of flavor brought out to perfection, we barbarians of the wasteland will vote for wood every time.

There is a logical explanation for this, for the thing is most certainly not "imagination." The reason is deep buried in laws of which we know little. Fundamentally it is a matter of vibration. Each different substance gives out a vibration that is peculiarly its own. There is a subtle difference in the quality of the heat

given out by different fuels and heating methods. These different vibrations act upon the food. And thus, directly, upon the health of the eater.

In these days, modern housewives have brought about an avalanche of "refined" cooking methods – at who shall say what staggering costs in health. Even the devitalized “staff of life” limping in pallid spinelessness, as though ashamed of its spurious art-tan complexion, is only the hollow ghost of those husky bouncing loaves of crusty healthfulness which came from the bread baking ovens of our grandmothers. You found ash flakes on the under side of those loaves very often. And occasionally an honest black fragment of charcoal. But when you bit into a slice from one of those loaves there was flavor and health; you were eating real food.

Sometimes, since we left Yaquitepec, I have been sorry that we ever built the tiny little mud oven that was our first home-making work. We set it up in the midst of the rocks and mescals in the wilderness of the mountain top – carrying the water to make the mud for it up the mountain on our backs and tramping its adobe floor level with our bare feet. Its low, flattish dome was reared of juniper branches thickly covered with clay.

A little oven, but efficient. We baked bread in it and we cooked savory stews in black iron pots before the heat of its open door. Around it we built our home. Yet now, sometimes I am sorry that we ever made it. For the thing has become uncanny – we must have built into it something more than we knew. Often in the hushed watches of the night, while the stars twinkle and the night wind whispers softly to itself among the creosote bushes, that little old mud oven reached out across the long, lonely leagues and tugs insistently at heart strings.

Bluebirds driving in a gusty whirl of color past the grey poles of the old corral – cottonwoods bright and sparkling in a glory of new leaf. Along the fence in the lee of a piled mass of last year's tumbleweeds, Betty, Rider's special pet goat, is rummaging happily for fresh green grass. Yes spring is here. The deep, throbbing heart of the earth pours out new life and hope and the world of the desert rouses to begin another year.

Rider is setting type. The composing stick is crude and borne made and he has to handle it warily to avoid spilling out the letters as he reaches about the type case picking out A's and E's and Ts with painstaking precision. Rider sets type quite well and seldom makes mistakes. With a natural aptitude for anything mechanical requiring care he has taken to printing like a duck to water.

Rudyard prints too – with weird wooden type of his own construction, sawed with much puffing and nose wrinkling from odd scraps of old wooden boxes. Rudyard's type – and the printed creations they turn out – are like nothing ever seen in earth or sky or sea. But he is very proud of his work. His ambition at the moment is to "print the most remarkablest book in all the world." Somehow we have a conviction that it will be just that.

Our desert printshop has grown slowly. About like mescals and chollas grow – almost imperceptibly over a long period. Our first printing press was homemade. It was fashioned of wood and iron scraps and held together by homemade bolts.

For its design we studied, by the aid of a magnifying glass, the engraving of an ancient printing press which was on the postage stamp issued to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of printing in America. All things considered our modified copy wasn't a bad press, even though it did function by means of a screw taken from a discarded piano stool, and with a hand lever that once had been a wheel-cap wrench in the good old horse and buggy days.

To hold the type we made a chase out of wood, a remarkable contraption of our own invention that was more efficient than handsome. Our first experimental type was cut with a jackknife from scraps of old boards and old boxes found around the house. This and some illustrative wood-cuts, fashioned from similar discarded bits of wood, enabled us to really start printing. We didn't even have a hand-roller in the early days, but used a homemade leather buffer – quite in the approved style of Gutenberg – with which to ink our type and cuts.

In such manner we started in upon our career of "Printers and Binders." We graduated to linoleum-cut type and blocks after a while. And later still to what Rudyard calls some "really, truly" type. We got our first big thrill when we "published" our first book. This was a microscopic volume containing just three stanzas selected from an inspired narrative poem that had been written by a scientist friend in Colorado.

The original poem, a remarkable work of genius, dealing with the massacre of the cliff dwellers by the Navajo on Fifty Mile mountain, contained in its entirety 57 stanzas. But that number appalled us. Anyway our type volume wouldn't have begun to take care of it. So we compromised on three stanzas (all we had type for). After printing, not forgetting a neat little notice of the publication date and the fact that it was produced by "The Yaquitepec Press," we rummaged our odds-and-ends stores and bound the work in scraps of art paper and imitation leather.

It was strictly a "limited edition." For only two copies of the book ever were printed and only one ever bound. But of that one bound copy we were rather foolishly proud. The author was proud of it too – a fact which speaks volumes for the loyalty of friendship. He hadn't known, when he sent us the poem to read, that he was submitting it to a "publisher." So when the tiny little volume fell out of his mail one morning he was both astonished and delighted. He treasured that little book with inordinate pride, up to the day of his untimely death. And I have no doubt that somewhere, among the mass of brilliant scientific data which was left unfinished by his passing, that little volume still reposes in ordered, and listed, security.

So our desert printing has, in a fashion, already acquired a background and an honorable history. Equipment is a bit better now. The old wooden press has been superceded by a tiny modern one that works by a band lever. And the type supply is a bit more adequate. A long, long way from where our dreams have set it in the future. But still, like the desert plants, it slowly grows. Already, in comparison, it has come quite a way. The sunlight falls through the window and across the type cases. And amidst the clicking of my machine, as I write these words, I can hear the low sound of Rider's voice as he whispers, half to himself, the words of the "copy" he is setting up.

. . . I had just written the sentence above when suddenly something happened. Nothing that you could see, nothing that you could feel. The sunlight still beat warmly through the window and beyond, to the north, the hard rocks of the barren ridge still glistened amidst their thin tufting of creosote bushes. There hadn't been a sound or a flicker out of ordinary. Everything was seemingly the same as it had been a dozen seconds before.

But it wasn't. *Something* had happened. A bubbling flood of thought had ceased as suddenly as though a valve had been dosed. I could not write another word. I sat there baffled and puzzled, staring out into the sunshine. Thought was dead. And presently, in the hush, I became aware of another thing. Rider's whispering to himself and the click of the type as he assembled the letters together was growing slower. Soon the faint sounds ceased altogether. A bit sheepishly he laid aside the task and yawned. "Think I'll go out and see what Rudyard's doing." He said lamely. He drifted out of the door. Work was at an end. I sat for another 20 minutes vainly trying to understand what had happened to myself. Then I too gave up. There was wood to chop, anyway. At least I could do that. I put away the typewriter.

That night there was a sudden freak storm. The temperature tumbled. Savage winds roared with bitter cold. All the next day we hugged around the stove. Then came night and peace. And this morning the sun came up bright and smiling as though nothing had happened. The whole desert world was back to normal. And thought had returned. Also unasked, Rider went back to his typesetting.

All of which signifies – what?

Well, it signifies a good deal. Not as an isolated instance – that way you might dismiss it without particular notice, the way we do so many things. But this, for us, was not an isolated instance. It was just one more link in a chain of similar "mysterious" happenings. Happenings which reveal startlingly the effect which environment and natural happenings exert upon man and other living creatures. There is nothing new about this effect upon thought, activity, health and life, which storms and atmospheric changes bring. Savages and wild creatures react to these influences instinctively, without question. But there is something new to the acceptance of these facts by "civilized" man who, while he realizes that he gets wet if it rains and gets hot if the sun is too warm, scoffs utterly at all the more subtle influences of what for the sake of simplicity we may call atmospheric changes.

Yet these subtle influences, which of course go much deeper than mere barometric indications and pressure areas, have a wide reach and an influence that hardly is guessed at. The nervous organism of a living thing, *if it is living a natural life close to nature*, is more sensitive than any instrument. Birds are sensitive to coming changes long before any signs are apparent to the eye or the duller senses. The animals of the forests and the deserts and the savage also have this inner prompting.

Almost everything has it that is in intimate contact with the earth. All except civilized man. Civilized man is so insulated in his houses, his paved cities, his shoes and his insulating armor of clothes that he is immune to natural vibrations. At best they reach him only feebly and imperfectly. Yet how many battles have been lost, how many nations have fallen, how many races and civilizations have wilted and withered because of some subtle, temporary or permanent change in the invisible environment.

But man does not give much thought to his invisible surroundings or to nature while he dwells in fat valleys or in cities. It is mostly in lean wildernesses, in the vast hush of deserts or in the savage wind-howled mountains of lands like Tibet, that his thoughts turn outward, away from himself and to a contemplation of the unguessed miracles of the Great Spirit that surround him on every hand. It was the wise men of the deserts of old Chaldea who learned to unravel the mysteries of shining night skies. It was the wise men of the deserts who saw also the Strange Star in the East – and followed it.

DEPTH

Depth is such a graded thing.
With such a widening store,
That those who virtue smugly sing
Might cultivate some more.
There is no cork to wisdom's jar,
And no forbidding wall;
Each may attain the farthest star – a
For Truth is free for all.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – May 1943

Desert rain prevented the Souths' investigating a possible location for a new home – but it also brought a train of rainy-day activities which ended in a stormy climax. It started with an excursion in the rain to gather yucca leaves for making non-rationed sandals for the family, and was furthered by Rudyard's discovery of a clay deposit – which brought to his artistic soul visions of a "tremenjus pot." Here, Marshal tells of the dramatic and sorrowful conclusion of that dream of Rudyard's.

Tanya at one of the long deserted mescal roasting hearths on Ghost mountain.

THIS is the time of year when, upon Ghost mountain, the hardy mescals thrust lofty flower shoots toward the desert sky. This year will be the first of many that the mescal season has not meant a great deal to us. For the period was always looked forward to. Not alone for the yellow glory of the blooms, which transformed the desert into a garden of tossing gold, but also because of the wholesome, candy-like food which roast mescal hearts provided us.

Perhaps, more than any other thing, the mescals and the ancient mescal hearths, where the old time Indians roasted the toothsome delicacy long before our day, expressed the spirit of Ghost mountain. In that rock bound solitude of hushed desert peace, where silence reigns and where the warm, faint breeze, laden with the spicy tang of creosotes and of junipers, drifts down sunlit slopes, the lone, deserted old mescal hearths are like shrines left by a forgotten people. One can sit beside the ancient, fire-blackened stones and dream, weaving a tapestry of fancy back through the long dead years of a simple, primitive world that has crumbled and vanished, even as have the brown hands that once tended the ancient roasting hearths.

But the desert is the desert. Minor features may vary with locality, but the mysterious, inscrutable spirit of it remains the same. Right here, where we are at present, we have no mescals. But there are other things to compensate, and the song of the desert has lost nothing of its charm because of the one missing note.

To console us for our lost century plants we have new strange ridges of fantastic black lava, new cliffs of wind-sculptured sandstone that glow pink and vermilion in the changing light, new ranks of aromatic sage brush to scent the wandering winds. “It takes hold of you, this country,” said a friend who had drifted in from away beyond Kayenta. "I came out, in the first place, for just a couple of weeks. But I haven't got back yet."

"How long ago was that?" we asked him, for he didn't look like a recent arrival.

"Quite a bit over 40 years," he answered, his face crinkling in a grin. "Guess maybe I'll decide to stay. I wouldn't know how to live anywhere else now. The desert sort of gets into your blood."

It has been raining for almost a week. Spring rain. The sort that always makes your fingers itch to be working in the moist earth. In the desert especially. Because somehow every primitive and fundamental urge of man and nature seems to be intensified in the desert. Nature's spur of adversity working to goad life towards more strenuous efforts. It is this combination which has developed the defensive armor of desert plants; which has made desert animals so tough and resourceful; which made the desert Indian more than a match for his rivals of more favored localities.

This particular storm was a surprise. We had not expected it. We had planned a trip to investigate a possible new home location of which we had heard. All arrangements had been made and we were ready for an early morning start. Rider and Rudyard had gone to bed all keyed up with the sense of impending adventure, impatient for morning.

And we all awoke to the steady drip of rain. Drip! Drip! A depressing, monotonous trickling. Adventure faded. In the glum light of the open door we could see away across shadowy ridges wrapped in chill half light that was a blend of fog and retreating night.

"O-oh," Rudyard said. And there was the ultimate of dejection in his voice. "Won't we be able to go, daddy?"

Answer wasn't necessary. He knew well enough. Rider scrambled from the bed covers and drew back the curtains – the same curtains that we had hauled all the way from Yaquitepec – and peered out. "No," he said gloomily, "we're not going today. And probably not tomorrow either."

The desert was a world of dripping grey, through which the nearer rocky ridges shouldered like ghosts. The creosotes and the mesquites and the grey hunched sage brushes stood about bedraggled and dripping like dejected chickens in a barnyard. The sky was roofed with a canopy of weeping cloud which rifted every once in a while to reveal long, sinister streamers of denser, sodden vapor hurrying in from the southeast.

Drip! Drip! Drip! The water trickled from the house eaves and the cat, outside the screen door, mewed querulously to be let in. Betty, the little goat, stamped and fidgeted in her hutch, near the porch. And Bonny, the dog, snuffed and scratched noisily for fleas in her improvised kennel. No, there would be no excursion today.

The storm brought unexpected compensations. For, after breakfast, to console the boys for their lost trip, I led an expedition out across the gully to get yucca leaves for basket weaving.

A wet trip. Rudyard had thoughtfully suggested that Victoria come too, arguing that the more hands the more yucca leaves would be brought home. But Tanya, after one glance at the downpour (which Rudyard had assured her was "almost stopping") declined the kind invitation on Victoria's behalf. A duck, she said, might make the trip. But as for Victoria –

Victoria howled. "I wanna go! I wanna go! I am, too, a duck! I wanna ... "

Rain shut down in a curtain and blotted the lamentations. Rider, Rudyard and I floundered off into the sloshy greyness. There was a wind rising and as we crossed the gully it lifted in a whirling gust, driving the rain in chill sheets before it. Rudyard, half blinded, lost his footing, sat down heavily in the slick mud and shot like a toboggan to the bottom, half scaring to death a tiny cottontail that had been sheltering under an old mesquite stump. As the rabbit fled away into the mist and Rudyard picked himself up, sputtering, Rider voiced a triumphant shout:

"You've found clay!" he yelled, pointing to the deep, muddy track of Rudyard's descent. "Look, you've found clay. Now we can make some pots."

It proved to be true. Eagerly, his mishap forgotten, Rudyard clawed muddy fingers into the red, gooey streak that his fall had laid bare. It was clay all right. Not a very good clay – too much sand in it. But clay nevertheless. "You go on for the yucca leaves," Rudyard ordered. "I'll stay here an' dig out a whole armful. I want to make a tremenjus pot."

We left him squatting in the rain – a little brown ball of mud, with two muddy little hands, busily quarrying more mud. When Rider and I got back, lugging bundles of green yucca leaves, he had a great pile of the sticky stuff all ready. Happy and muddy and as soaked to the skin as any trio of all but drowned desert rats, we plodded homeward with our loot.

There are disadvantages in the use of green yucca leaves for basket making. Chiefly because they shrink and change shape as they dry. The right way is to season the leaves first. Or, if you need an especially pliable material, to prepare them as fiber and spin them into cordage. However, the green leaves are pleasant lo work with. And if you make reasonable allowances for what you may expect in drying you can get quite serviceable results. We wanted to make baskets and to experiment with fashioning yucca sandals, which was the footgear the ancient Indians of these parts habitually wore. We decided to use the green leaves for both, even though cordage, for sandals, is almost a necessity. Still, it would do no harm to experiment.

Results were better even than we had hoped. For basket stakes there were enough willow twigs already in the house, left-overs from a previous handicraft session. And there were even several short lengths of yucca cord, that we had made some time before – just in case we happened to need them. Rider elected to make himself a hanging basket – “that would maybe do to hang up a potted cactus in." I decided to experiment with the sandals and Rudyard settled, with the big store of day, to the fashioning of "tremenjus pot."

Work, if it be something in which one is really interested is the finest means of "escape" which life holds. We were soon so absorbed in our jobs that we forgot all about the rain, which poured from the eaves; and we did not hear the trumpeting of the wind, which skirled drearily through the cottonwoods. The little tin stove, round which earlier in the morning Tanya had set pans of bread to rise, threw out a cheery warmth. Thomas, the yellow cat – he who had taken the place of Tibbets, who never returned – sprawled on the floor and dreamed. Victoria got out her dolls, propped them in a row against the wall and started in to teach them to read – from an old magazine held upside down.

A cheerful, companionable half-silence settled over everything – quiet which was patterned by the soft rustle of busy fingers weaving yucca leaves and by a low, intense series of agitated puffs and grunts as Rudyard laboriously rolled out lengths of moist clay and coiled them down with much squinting and nose wrinkling, on

his great pot Tanya came and softly took away her loaves after a while, and soon the warm odor of baking bread drifted through the house. Victoria with her pet doll clutched tight in her arms had gone to sleep beside the cat. Peace reigned – and industry. The weavers wove on.

Suddenly there was a hideous yell – a shriek so unexpected and startling that I jumped as though from an electric shock. Rider fell over backwards from his stool. The cat leaped for safety. Victoria woke, squalling in terror, and from the adjoining room Tanya came in a frantic rush. The air was suddenly hazy with whirling yucca stalks and hurtling pieces of mud. The space around the stove had, in a twinkling, become a tornado. And in the center of it all, when our shocked nerves bad snapped back and our startled eyes would once more function, we beheld Rudyard, yelling like a mad Indian, leaping up and down furiously upon a shapeless mound of mud and hurling fragments of wet clay right and left against the wall. The "tremenjus pot" – which for a long while had been teetering perilously like the Tower of Pisa – *had fallen in*.

Pandemonium raged. Capable writers in such a crisis are wont to sigh tactfully, "Let us draw a veil ... " But this was something over which no veil would have had any power. We would have needed a tarpaulin and several blankets. Rudyard has a slated future which lies along musical and art lines. And he has all the temperament. When things go wrong he tears his hair like any opera singer.

And this time he was tearing it with gooey, muddy fingers. And yelling at the top of his lungs. His dream had fallen; his heart was broken. The wonderful pot! It had collapsed in horrid ruin. And so much toilsome effort! And nose wrinkling! And laborious puffing! . . . Gonc! – all gone into a shapeless mess. It was more than human nature could bear. And he didn't intend to bear it. Savagely, yelling incoherent weird words, he leaped up and down upon the wreck of his masterpiece, tearing his hair and pounding the squashy clay into the floorboards.

It ended after a while. After we had all made a concerted attack upon the artist and had practically gagged and hog-tied him and carried him off to be pacified by honey and new bread and many bribes – which included immunity from his task of helping with the dishes that evening. But the party was broken up and the weaving was at an end for that day. After we bad cleaned up the mess of clay and collected the scattered yucca stalks it was time to light the evening lamp. It was still raining outside.

And it was raining the next day. And the next. But the battered clay was pressed again into service on a smaller pot and the yucca leaves held out. It is still raining. But you can see ragged breaks in the clouds over the mountains. Tomorrow there will be sun – the dazzling desert sunshine that always has a diamond sparkle after a rain. And the deep blue of the sky di be dotted by tumbled masses of billowy vapor dispersing like scattering fleets of white sailed ships towards the wire-sharp rim of the distant horizon. The storm is about over. And the yucca sandals are finished. And the hanging basket. AND the pot.

GROWTH

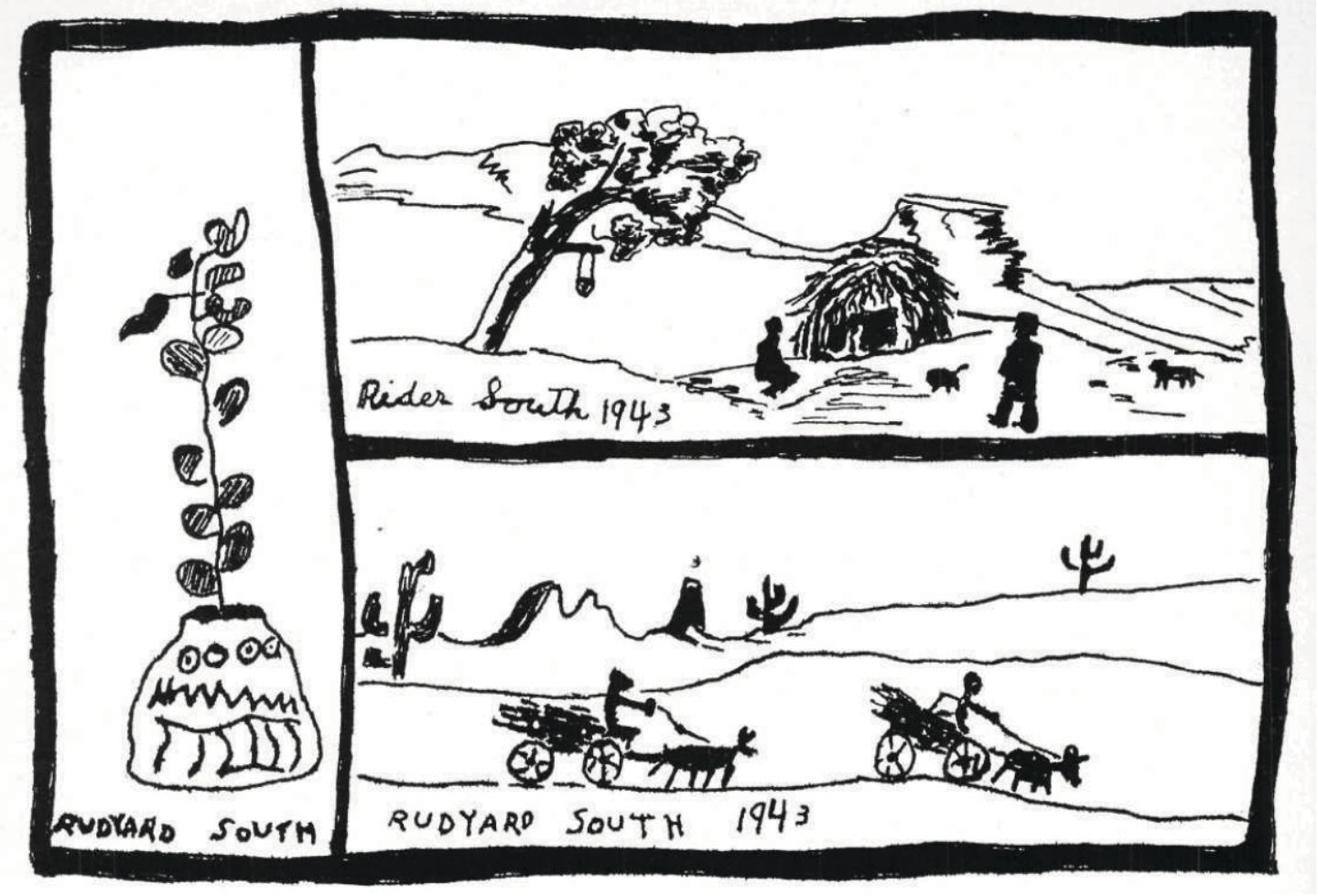
Growth is such anguish. Who can say
What griefs each one has stored away?
Self rises uppermost in thought,
No deed is for its own sake wrought.
Each tendril of the soul unfolding
A world of agony is holding.
We see too crazedly awry
Life's spectral vision passing by.
And we forget – forget – forget
Seldom ponder or regret.
We pause when we should hurry on.
We rush where angels halt and frown.
We do not learn! And yet we wonder
Why human hearts are rent asunder.
Each soul rebels and weeps and cringes –
Growth is a gate on creaking hinges.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – June 1943



Three-sketch layout executed by Rider and Rudyard South who came to the rescue when a photograph for this month's "Refuge" was unobtainable. Victoria wanted to contribute but her big brothers considered her art too impressionistic for Desert Magazine.

Marshal and Tanya South, with their three children, are on the trail again. Many months ago they left their Ghost Mountain home, "Yaquitepec," on the western rim of the Colorado desert in California to find a new home – a home where they could be assured of a sufficient water supply for their growing family, yet one remote enough to carry on their experiment in primitive natural living. Their wanderings have taken them to many oases and water-holes in the desert – in California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah. It was in a little valley in Utah that they found temporary refuge during the sudden snowy blasts of winter . . . . And now they are somewhere on the trail again. They do not know their destination. Scores of friends have written them, telling them of favorite retreats, but not yet have they found the ONE PLACE they are sure awaits them.

ON THE road again, the blue bowl of the desert sky for a roof and a fringing rim of far blue mountains everywhere upon the horizon. The old Ford puffs and chugs and the heavily loaded trailer creaks and sways as it trundles along behind. It is good to be on the trail again, even though a scrupulous care in the conservation of gas and rubber has shorn our voyaging down to absolute necessity. But the miles that unroll now beneath the wheels are really those that we stored up during the winter, when for the greater part of the time the car was laid

up and we used our legs instead. It was a long rest – or it seemed so, to our impatience. Now it is good to be once more on the move.

The children are all excitement. To them all things new are an adventure. And their eyes are constantly searching the horizon. But there is a tinge of wistful remembering threading through their eager chatter. Those were happy days in the Little House. And under the cottonwoods among the bushy thickets of the old reservoir.

Rudyard still thinks of the frog that had his home in a grass· grown cow-track at the base of a goaded rabbit bush. A friendly jewel-eyed little fellow, that frog. Half concealed by the grass blades in his little retreat he would sit and watch us with his deep, shining eyes until Rudyard would tickle him gently with a grass stem. Then *flip*! he would be gone, a tiny mottled green body making great hops towards the reedy water. But next day be would be back again in the cow track.

After a few times we got the notion that he really expected us. And enjoyed it all as a great game. Now that we come no more he probably will sit and muse about all the strange meaning of his adventures. And he will tell the story to his children. And it will be handed down from generation to generation. And become frog mythology. And bespectacled frog scientists, in the days to come will prove that it was all just a wild dream about something that never really happened. Just as our own learned men can prove to you, in short order, that there is positively nothing at all in old legends and fairy tales and in the strange dim stories handed down from generation to generation by all primitive peoples.

Shimmers of warm air ripple mysteriously across the great sweep of the land that falls away in broad glowing reaches from where I sit, until it fades into dim, pastel distance. The weird Joshua that reaches above me throws a pattern of fantastic shadow sharp as though cut from jet. Overhead a buzzard wheels in high effortless circles. And the hard, glowing mountains that march across the horizon are those of Nevada. Silence lies over all. And peace. The faint, almost inaudible stirring of the little threads of desert wind that steal through the creosotes might be the soft footfalls of the Great Spirit, walking through the wilderness as in the beginning of the world.

It is a hushed dreamy place, this noonday lunch spot. Tanya is feeding sun-bleached greasewood sticks to a little fire over which a skillet frizzles. And between times she is scribbling a poem with a stub of pencil upon the back of an old envelope. Rider, Rudyard and Victoria have carried a piece of old canvas to the shade of a wide spreading creosote bush and are stretched upon it in drowsy content, the two younger ones scuffing happy fingers in the warm desert earth as they pile twigs and bits of stone together in play houses and fences and corrals. Rider, a bit apart, is experimenting, thoughtfully, with the braiding and weaving possibilities of yucca leaves.

A happy desert trio, these young hopefuls. And beginning more and more to take hold upon life. When they heard me bewailing the fact that a suitable photograph would be unobtainable for this month's article they promptly went into a mysterious huddle. From which emerged, some time later, the three-sketch layout which this time does duty for a photo. Rider, with the mature wisdom of nine years contented himself with one sketch. But Rudyard, perhaps feeling that he must, in some way, even up his disadvantage of being only five, decided to put in two.

Victoria had a hand in the pie also. But the boys, knowing her "Impressionistic" style of drawing, foxily talked her into putting her masterpiece upon a separate sheet – which alas, failed to get by the art critic.

The wheels have rolled onward. The camp spot this evening is far different from one resting place of noon. The Joshua trees have gone. In their place the creosotes stud a flatter, lower land that is greying in the mists of a lonely twilight. Wind stirs bleakly through the bushes and the supper fire skids ragged streamers of orange flame. The red blankets are spread in a dear open space as far as possible from any bushes. For he who seeks the shelter of greasewood or other desert growths for his bed is likely to attract unwelcome bedfellows. Not that the presence of a warmth-seeking sidewinder is to be expected. But it is something to be cautious about. And scorpions, too, are more apt to be lurking about the base of bushes where they den in the mouse or chipmunk burrows. A bed well in the open is the prudent thing. And a little healthy desert wind hurts no one.

Certainly it does not seem to be hurting Rider, Rudyard or Victoria. For they are at their nightly acrobatics, turning swift somersaults from one end of the spread blanket to the other. Sometimes all three of them, in line, go whirling heels over head, clear down the whole length of blanket covered earth and back again. Like these nimble tumble-bugs they go so fast that all you can see is a blur of flying brown arms and legs and revolving bodies. And the evening air vibrates with wild shrieks of joy-punctuated by an occasional "Ouch!" as one or the other overshoots the blanket padding and rolls off onto the pebble littered earth.

But such mishaps only serve to add spice to the game. They never seem to grow tired and each night the circus has to be terminated almost by force. Victoria is just as much a somersault fan as the boys. Perhaps more so. She has tried very hard to teach her rag doll "Georgine" to turn somersaults. But so far with only partial success.

It has grown darker. Night is folding down like a shadowy blanket. Tanya has just thrown a fresh armful of dry sticks upon the fire and now sits silent, lost in thought, gazing deep into the red heart of the blaze. The wind has gone down a little and above the luminous drift of the fire smoke, dear stars are winking. I have moved closer to the leaping flames. Not for warmth but because without their ruddy light upon the page I can no longer see to write. Out of the darkness and into the circle of glow about my feet comes ambling a huge old pinacate beetle, dignified, investigative, for all the world like some frock-coated old professor out for his evening stroll. His shiny black body glistens in the firelight as he pokes about, waddling around pebbles, thrusting a curious nose under fallen twigs. Gently I touch him with a slender stick. And instantly he stands upon his head and freezes, his pointed rear end upreared like the menacing muzzle of a siege gun.

Curious fellows these pinacates. And widely distributed. Scorpions are said to abhor them. For very practical reasons. For it is asserted that the pinacate is capable of discharging a cloud of gas that is death to scorpions. I have it on the solemn authority of an old-timer that if you place a pinacate beetle and a scorpion together in an empty glass fruit jar the scorpion will speedily succumb. Whether this be true or not I cannot say, for I have never tried the experiment. There is grief enough among the ranks of our "younger brothers" of creation without humans having to add to it.

WE SLEEP

We sleep. Whatever be our lot,
Whether by night or day,
We sleep, and we remember not,
Nor do we pause to pray.

We sleep. The years flit through our brief
But comprehensive show,
And though we taste of joy or grief,
How little yet we know.

We are as microbes on the Earth,
In this, our spirit's youth.
And gain through each recurring birth
One hair's breadth more of Truth.

– Tanya South

DESERT READERS INVITED TO VIEW YAQUITEPEC PAINTING

Yaquitepec, in both the spirit and color described in Desert Refuge before the Souths left their Ghost mountain home, bas been perpetuated on canvas. The oil painting now hangs in Desert Magazine's home, and all Desert friends able to travel through El Centro are cordially invited to stop in and view this painting of the Souths' first desert home.

Thomas Crocker, San Diego, California, artist, had been inspired by the simple natural life led by the Souths. He was determined to preserve a bit of the color and substance of the dream that was theirs on Ghost mountain. He has succeeded admirably. The 'dobe walls built with such labor, the little cisterns they cemented to hold the scant rain that fell, the boulders which hemmed in the tiny pocket-handkerchief gardens, the sun dial they built to mark the hours, the ever-changing light and color of the mountain-top retreat – the very spirit of the Souths' life, all have been blended in color with both realism and imagination by the artist.

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – July 1943

Somewhere in the desert, still on the trail of a new home, Marshal South pauses to pay tribute to the host of Desert readers whose friendship has brought both inspiration and encouragement to the South family during the uncertain and often disappointing days of their search. From New York state, Oregon, New Mexico – from every part of the country where there are desert lovers, have come letters and telegrams to hearten and encourage them . . . . If any of the Souths' friends wonder why their letters are still in that bulging sack of unanswered mail being hauled along the desert trails, they will know this month it isn't because they were not deeply appreciated.

ON THE trail – somewhere in the: desert. This is written in the shade of a cottonwood tree that lifts a crest of green into a crystalline sparkle of morning sunlight. Carpenter bees drone in the belt of shadow and the stir of a faint breeze trails wisps of smoke from the dying breakfast fire: across my feet.

The tangy aroma of dry burning creosote sticks. Some people don't like it. The greasewood – or creosote bush – has had hard things said about it. Even grizzled old prospectors have been known to display an amazing vocabulary of explosive words over the presence of a few accidental creosote leaves in the coffee brew.

Yet the creosote, to those who love the desert for what it really is, is a shrub both respected and admired. It fills a place in desert scenery for which no other growth can substitute. To us, those sections of the wasteland where the creosote does not thrive, carry a sense of incompleteness. Poets have sung wistfully of longings for the sight of pine trees, for glimpses of ferny dells, of cravings for the sight of clambering roses. I never have known such heart tugs. But I have been often acutely homesick for the sight of creosote bushes.

Rider and Rudyard take time out to practice with their bows and arrows.

I can remember arousing the wrath – and I believe pity – of a good eastern friend, by dividing the map of the United States into two sections, or rather, two regions of climate range. The pink shaded portions – all the area in which creosote bushes could exist – were the "abode of the blest." Everything outside was a howling wilderness – unfit for human habitation. That was a good many years ago, and passing time has mellowed the edge from youthful intolerance. I no longer draw maps to hurt the feelings of those whose tastes differ. Yet I

still think that the creosote bush is emblematic. Its range defines the boundaries of a "home-land" outside of which l am heavy hearted. And I still think that a creosote bush in full bloom in the desert spring, is one of the most beautiful shrubs in the world.

Out of the picture galleries of memory I can call up many beautiful recollections of blooming creosotes. But one such picture always will stand out sharp above the rest. It was on the occasion when I was trekking home to Yaquitepec with the two burros, Rhett and Scarlett, whom I had brought from Paul Wilhelm's Thousand Palms Oasis, away over beyond Indio. It was near the end of the trip. We had come a long way that day and we were tired. My two faithful four-footed friends, seasoned though they were, were stumbling. And I was footsore and unutterably weary.

As we plodded up the grade, winding up from the desert land into the lower reaches of Sentenac canyon, the sun was setting. Blue shadows were gathering against the towering steeps ahead and the canyons and gullies were eerie chasms of indigo. Across the mountain crests the last shafts of the sun struck through the rising evening greyness like the level beams of searchlights stabbing through mist. And there, by the side of the road, as we started up into the gathering dimness of the pass, stood a great creosote bush in all the magnificence of late full bloom. It was in the direct path of a shaft of sunlight that fell upon it from a gap in the westward mountains and covered it with glory. Against the background of the blinding rays that flooded it and flung it into a tracery of delicate silhouette, it stood as an ethereal thing, a thing wrought not from plant fibers but from flashing precious metals. Drenched in a glow of gold and silver from its myriad yellow flowers and tufty white seed globes, its maze of interlaced slender brandies and glittering green leaves lifted against the sun-flare in a brilliance that was almost blinding. The thing was breath taking. We all stopped. Perhaps the burros stopped because they were tired and because I had stopped. I do not know. But I know that it was not because of weariness that 1 halted. The action was involuntary. I felt as though, for a flash, I had *seen something*. Such flashes bring one very dose to God.

We went on presently. Winding up into the velvet dimness of the pass where owls had begun to hoot to each other from wall to wall across the rocky canyon sides. Night rolled down from the peaks as we plodded on. But somehow I didn't feel half as weary as I bad before. And, from whatever reason, even the burros were stepping more briskly. Just a creosote bush against the sunset. Sometimes I wonder how long man will seek his assurance of immortality in musty books and in gloomy temples of man-reared stone, when the evidence surrounds him on every hand, in every vista of wonder and of beauty which the world of the outdoors bolds.

The sun is climbing across the sky. The shadow of the cottonwood under which I sit has begun to break up into a filagree pattern through which, on the warm earth, ants scurry exploringly. Heat waves dance and shimmer along the distant ridges. And through the still air the voices of Rider, Rudyard and Victoria rise sharp and clear as they prowl around the camp, seeking treasures and adventure among the rocks and bushes and mesquites. For them this home-search could go on indefinitely. Their eyes and hopes are always fixed on far and new horizons. They do not want to stop searching. It is too gloriously exciting. Yet we have a feeling that the goal – and the decision – is not now so far off. Perhaps we too shall miss the thrill of seeking through the desert and following new trails when we cast anchor. But there will be compensations. It is good to root down for a while and weave a thatch above one's head and call it "home."

Yet there is joy to seeking. Joys and surprises that spring up unexpectedly to cheer hard trails as though with a magic bloom of flowers. If there is one thing more than another which has heartened us, since we set out on the trail from Yaquitepec, it has been the realization of the great invisible bond of friendliness which binds

all desert dwellers and desert lovers into one solid fraternity. A cheerful clan, eager and warm-hearted and friendly.

Never has it failed that when disappointment struck at us, or when trails ahead looked bleak, desert friends always were on hand to lift the gloom, either by personal word or by letters or even by telegram. "Do not be disappointed. It is always darkest before dawn," wired a good friend from Nevada who learned of our unexpected set-backs. "There just *must* be – and is – a right location somewhere for you and yours," writes another friend from California. 'I'm going right along with you, in fancy. And I know that soon you're going to have a glorious find," says another in New York state.

And so it goes ... New Mexico and Oregon and Arizona and Utah – and from every other state and section of the desert country and country that is not desert – everywhere where desert lovers dwell – have come crowding messages of friendship and cheer. We are lugging around with us a bulging sack of unanswered mail, over which we sweat nightly in the accusations of conscience that we get it answered so slowly.

Would not even the chill heart of a stone image be thrilled and quickened by the magnificent backing of such a clan of friends?

How can one lie beneath the soft glow of the desert stars at night without feeling these loyal friends, in spirit, at one's side? How can one listen to the desert night wind whispering around the shadows of the swaying tent – a tent which was itself a friendship gift shipped to us from a dear friend in Pasadena, California, whom we have never met but whose letter reveals her as a true initiate of the deepest philosophy of the desert silences – how can one lie and hearken to these soft whisperings of the wasteland wind without seeming to hear in them the actual, cheering speech of this assemblage of friends, both near and far, whose hearts are with us? It is a feeling that does something to you, this strange mystic sense of brotherhood.

There is the sound of grinding. Out by the car, where the little hand grain mill is attached by wingnut bolts to its "on the trail" position on the running board, Tanya is grinding flour from the hard small-grained red wheat that was raised in the fields of Juab county, Utah. Victoria has gone to sleep on a blanket, stretched beside me in the shade of the cottonwood.

In another section of shadow Rudyard, his pudgy nose wrinkled in desperate concentration and a stub of pencil clutched in his little fist, is trying to transfer a bit of desert scenery to paper. Near him Rider, squatting upon the warm earth and tracing designs with a bit of stick in the dust, is trying to figure out how one could invent a new type of speedometer, which would record distance by a complicated system of knotted strings and revolving drums.

Away off among the bushes, thinking himself secure from observation in the black blot of shadow at the base of a creosote a roadrunner dozes. Hush holds the desert. With a stab of heartache for those who would long to be back within the tranquility of its sunlit borders – and for the present cannot come – one recalls the Navajo prayer:

"That it may be peaceful before me; that it may be peaceful behind me. All is peace. All is peace."

HOPE

What is Hope? The first grey streak of dawn,
The silver dewdrop on the parching leaf,
A new-born babe, the breath of spring, the fawn,
And light divine that waits this earth-life brief.
Just as a flower unfolds unto the light,
So Hope unfolds the tendrils of the soul,
And crowns the hardships and the bitter fight
With that bright radiance which is our goal.

– Tanya South

NEW YORK READER WANTS COLORED PRINTS OF YAQUITEPEC PAINTING

Fultonville, New York

Dear Miss Harris:

In our June issue of Desert Magazine you had an item about an oil painting of Yaquitepec by Thomas Crocker.

Will it be possible some time in the near future to have some colored prints made of the picture, so that we who are interested in Mr. and Mrs. South and their family also can have a memento of their Ghost mountain home. I think their reading friends felt a tug of the heart strings when they learned the little home was deserted

Mrs. Anna C. Bostwick

NOTE FROM MARSHAL SOUTH –

That was certainly a pleasant surprise. We're going to make the pilgrimage to DM office some of these days just to see the picture. Mr. Crocker does some wonderful desert work and we're particularly happy it was his brush which put Yaquitepec upon canvas.

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – August 1943

Rudyard and Victoria at the mouth of the little cave that was the source of the spring.

Permission from Uncle Sam for new tires was not enough. Marshal South took his "magic paper" from one dealer to another – but apparently 450-21 size was extinct. And there sat the South family in the middle of the Utah desert with another, more formidable barrier to their search for a home. Then suddenly into the circle of their lamenting came a messenger with the news that such tires were to be found in Kingman, Arizona. Now they are anxiously awaiting arrival of the tires, half-expecting such good fortune to be as illusive as the one perfect home site they have been seeking since last September.

PATTERNED on the lonely wind-sifted sand dunes of the desert the "little people" leave the record of their wanderings. Mice, lizards, beetles; leisurely, slow-pacing tarantulas, furtive, suspicious centipedes and black-coated meditative pinacates – upon the soft surface of the sand their varied tiny tracks cross and criss-cross in a maze of trails that tell tangled stories of exploration and of search.

When we think back upon the windings of our own desert trail, since the day when we set out from Yaquitepec, we are reminded again of the bond of kinship which binds all dwellers of the earth into one

brotherhood. For if we were to take a pen and some red ink and trace back all the windings and turnings of our course, from its beginning until now, the resultant pattern would be a fair duplicate of the involved amblings of some meditative old pinacate beetle wandering over the dunes in search of food and a better dwelling place. Back and forth, in and out. Crossing and recrossing. Here a long pause. There a hasty scurry past some uninviting section. Here a bit of luck; there some delaying mishap. Between our own search and the search of the serious old beetle there is little difference. The record of the one is written in tiny tracks upon the sand. The record of the other in wheel tracks which, in the vast spread of the universe, are just as tiny.

We have been stalled for many days. And the reason and the trouble can be told in one word – tires. There is a limit to the endurance of tires, even when you coddle them and baby them and swaddle them in artificial wrappings and lavish upon them a hundred times more tenderness than Uncle Sam ever imagined, even in his most inspired moments.

The limit of our tires was reached and passed long ago. But we shut our eyes and minds to it. And for a long time it seemed the tires ran on will-power alone. But even that would not last forever. There came a day when our long suffering chariot sighed softly, looked at us reproachfully from out of her two desert bleared headlight eyes and sank wearily down under the shadow of the red sandstone cliffs of Utah. Evening came up across the desert on silent feet and the bats began to flitter forth from their caves. It was time indeed to "re-tire."

“Be of good cheer,” said Uncle Sam's efficient but sympathetic representatives when they had delved fully into the matter. "Behold, here is a magic paper. With it you may go out into the marts of trade. And by virtue of the words that are written thereon the kings and princes of commerce will unbar the gates; the merchants will unlock the innermost strong boxes. They will draw forth two tires and will sell them to thee to replace those two which are now as ragged fragments. Behold, I, Uncle Sam, have so decreed. So fear not."

So we took the magic paper in great joy. And we fared forth into the marts of the silversmiths and the goldsmiths and the diamond buyers and the sellers of tires.

And the first merchant to whom we presented the magic paper said, "Ah yes. Be seated just a moment while I descend to the strong room and speak with the guards and unfasten the locks. I will bring you your two tires." And he went away smiling with the happiness of one who has made a sale.

And he was gone a long time. And returned without smiles. "Alas," he said, and his voice was choked, "I have not the size! I have not the size. I is an old size – and rare."

And he wept and wrung his hands together and banded us back the magic paper. And in sorrow he watched us depart. For his heart was heavy.

So we hastened away to other merchants. And to others. And still unto others. And with all the story was the same. Cunning jewels, yes. Peacocks and rubies and spices; all the silks and perfumes of the Indies – even a thrice sacred five pound sack of sugar could we have. But tires, in the 450-21 size? Alas and alas! These things were a dream. Even the old men did not remember ever having seen one.

So we became alarmed. And we sent swift messengers by the talking wires to the East. To the West. To the farthest corners of the land. And the replies came back with sobs and tears. All of the 450-21s were extinct.

None had been seen in the land for more than a thousand years. So we sat by the mesquite bushes, under the red cliffs of Utah and mourned.

Then, into our grief, as we sat in the cold ashes of the campfire, there came a mysterious messenger bearing a scroll written by a great magician whose castle we once had visited in the ancient city of Kings, which is called also Kingman, and is in the State of Arizona.

And when we had read the scroll we leaped to our feet and shouted. And we exclaimed for joy. And we clapped our hands and summoned 20 swift runners and 10 riders of fast camels. And we loaded them with silks and spices and jewels and camphor wood and oil and incense and all manner of wealth, yea even to five times a king's ransom. And we commanded and said, "Speed quickly. Haste thou. Pause not until you have reached the castle of W. J. Tarr, which is south of the railroad tracks of Kingman, Arizona. Deliver to him all this wealth. But return not without the two slightly used 450-21 tires of which he speaks in this scroll. Rush now! Hurry. Beat it – lest, unhappily he selleth the tires before thou gettest there. Scoot!" And the messengers departed running.

So that, dear desert friends, is that. And as far as matters have gone at present. Will we get our tires? Quien sabe? . . . for we have heard no word yet from our messengers. But we think we have a good chance. There are very few things that our Kingman friend cannot supply for cars of every known vintage. The accumulation of long years of wrecking and classifying and storing. His is in truth a magic castle. So if he hasn't sold the tires in the meantime . . .

Next month you shall know.

But there is a silver lining to every dark cloud. And often the lining is more important than the cloud itself. The seeming disasters of life are in many cases really its stepping stones to better things. The majority of people, who can look back calmly over a course of years, will be ready to admit that this is true. Therefore, convinced as we are that no circumstance of existence is due to "blind chance" we are not worried overmuch by our enforced waiting. For one thing it is no more than a fresh demonstration of the truth that the farther human beings get from nature and the ability to support themselves by their own efforts the more helpless they are against misfortune.

The special glory of the desert land of southern Utah is its coloring. The whole landscape swims in a sea of color that is so vivid it often is unbelievable. Vermilion and purple and rose and lavender, jutting minarets of ruby red against a far, tumbled background of ridges that are shadowy violet and pink and grey and fleecy lacings of white. Sometimes the scintillating color vibrations are so intense that you begin to doubt your eyes. Your ears seem to ring with the quivering waves of rainbow hue that sweep back and forth between the fantastic, glowing cliffs.

What a priceless world of enchantment is this varied Desert Empire which we Americans are privileged to enjoy. Too few of us are aware of it or really appreciate it. Like children our eyes and ears are susceptible to the tawdry blandishments of far foreign places. It has not dawned upon us that the richest offerings of the world are within our own borders.

But what I really started out to explain was that the "silver lining" to the dark cloud of our enforced halt has been really worth while. Our camp spot is pleasant, with high, rustling cottonwood trees that cast welcome shade along the edge of a tule-grown hollow. Among the dark green of the crowding rushes, innumerable white

flowers of the deer-tongue gleam in the sunlight like a scatter of newly fallen snowflakes. Bees drone around the blossoms of the mesquites. Stray hummingbirds, intent upon their business, whizz past like feathered bullets.

Sardonic ravens live hereabouts. "Wauk! Wauk!" they cry as they flop heavily overhead eyeing our stranded car. "Walk yourself!" Rider and Rudyard shout back angrily. Little Victoria dances in the warm dust and shakes her tiny fist furiously at the sable jokesters. "You walk youselfs!" she shrills. But the ravens only chuckle throatily and flop on towards the vermilion cliffs.

There is a pool of water here too. A pool big enough for the boys to go voyaging upon a crazy raft. Sometimes they take Victoria and her doll Georgine for passengers and go poling along the reedy shoreline of their tiny lake, a joyous bunch of bare skinned, sun-browned little savages whose happy laughter swerves the dipping swallows and startles the dozing bull-frogs from their hideouts amid the water grass. The towering red sandstone cliffs glow warmly in the sun and the still surface of the pool mirrors their reflections and the drift of the lazy white clouds across the blue Utah sky. I don't think that Rider, Rudyard or Victoria are very worried about the tire situation. I have a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn't bother them much if the tires never appeared.

An old land of ancient memories – sometimes drowsy in the sun, sometimes yelling with a fury of wind and storm. You climb back into the canyons and you find here and there little walls of rock built to block crevices between boulders – little bulwarks that were man's effort to keep the driving wind from his rude camp spots. On the mesas there are mounds where you may dig up age-blackened pots and a few crumbling bones. Around the old water holes are chips of obsidian and broken arrow points.

How long has man wandered and lived and made his dwelling amongst the red cliffs of this desert land? Perhaps the wind could tell – the old desert wind that goes about sweeping industriously with its ancient broom of the fled and fleeting seasons. Blotting tracks, blotting graves, blotting peoples and civilizations. The wind talks to itself. But mostly at night and amongst the cliffs and caves.

There are springs up under the cliffs and along the gullies and canyons too. Springs that many men have known in the past and which perhaps will continue to quench the thirst of many a weary desert wanderer long after our present day pomp and civilization have followed that of our predecessors beneath the blanket of dust. Not yet have Rider, Rudyard and Victoria forgotten the days at Yaquitepec when water was an infinitely precious, hoarded thing. The sight of a spring, be it big or little, is still to them a thrill. Something to be exclaimed over – the miracle of real water welling up from the earth.

We came upon such a spring a few days back, when we were actually following the advice of the ravens to "wauk, wauk." We had walked. We had tramped out across the sunlit desert and circled back through the mesquites and creosotes into a long, sandy wash that drew down from the red sandstone ramparts to the north. Tamarisk trees grew thickly in the wash bottom together with a scattering of willows. The banks were a tangle of thick rabbit brush, varied with an occasional mesquite or a big bunchy cholla.

The day was hot. Beyond the sultry vegetation of the creek bed the red cliffs rose as a thirsty glowing backdrop on a stage-setting of shimmering dryness. The banks of the gully drew together as we pushed onward, their steep sides crowned with a savage capping of black lava rock in which, here and there, were eerie caves.

And then suddenly, there was water under our feet – real, sparkling, cold water that came welling up out of the sand to chill, gratefully, our earth-scorched bare toes. "Spring!" Rudyard shouted, "Another spring! Look, daddy!"

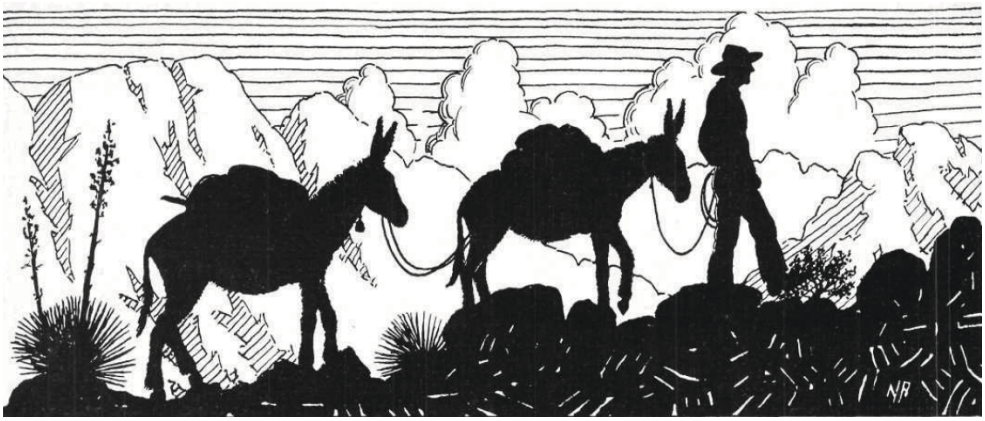
We all looked across the glinting stretch of sand, following his pointing finger. There, spilling down the opposite bank in a little cascade, came the thin stream of water which was soaking the sand on which we stood. But it did not originate there. For, when we had climbed the bank and traced the tiny rivulet back through the thick brush, we came at last to a shallow cave, brush screened, under a steep bluff. Within, patterned by sunlight and shadow was a shallow pool into which, with tinkling music, a thousand drips and trickles from the wet rocks fell splashing.

Outside the sun blazed. Inside, within that cool grotto, was cathedral dimness and the liquid music of fairy harps. The contrast was startling. Perhaps only in the desert can one see – and really appreciate – such contrasts. Small wonder that the old writers of the scriptures – themselves dwellers in a dry and thirsty land – alluded so often and so feelingly to the shadows of great rocks and to the music made by running water.

ONWARD

Go on! Regardless of success
Or failure. Let the powers who bless
Your effort or condemn its faults
Praise on – or make their harsh assaults.
Let naught dissuade you. Who are they
Who dare your upward course delay?
All, all are lesser to your cause.
Go on! The universal laws
Will fire your dreams and hopes to be
And help you build your destiny.

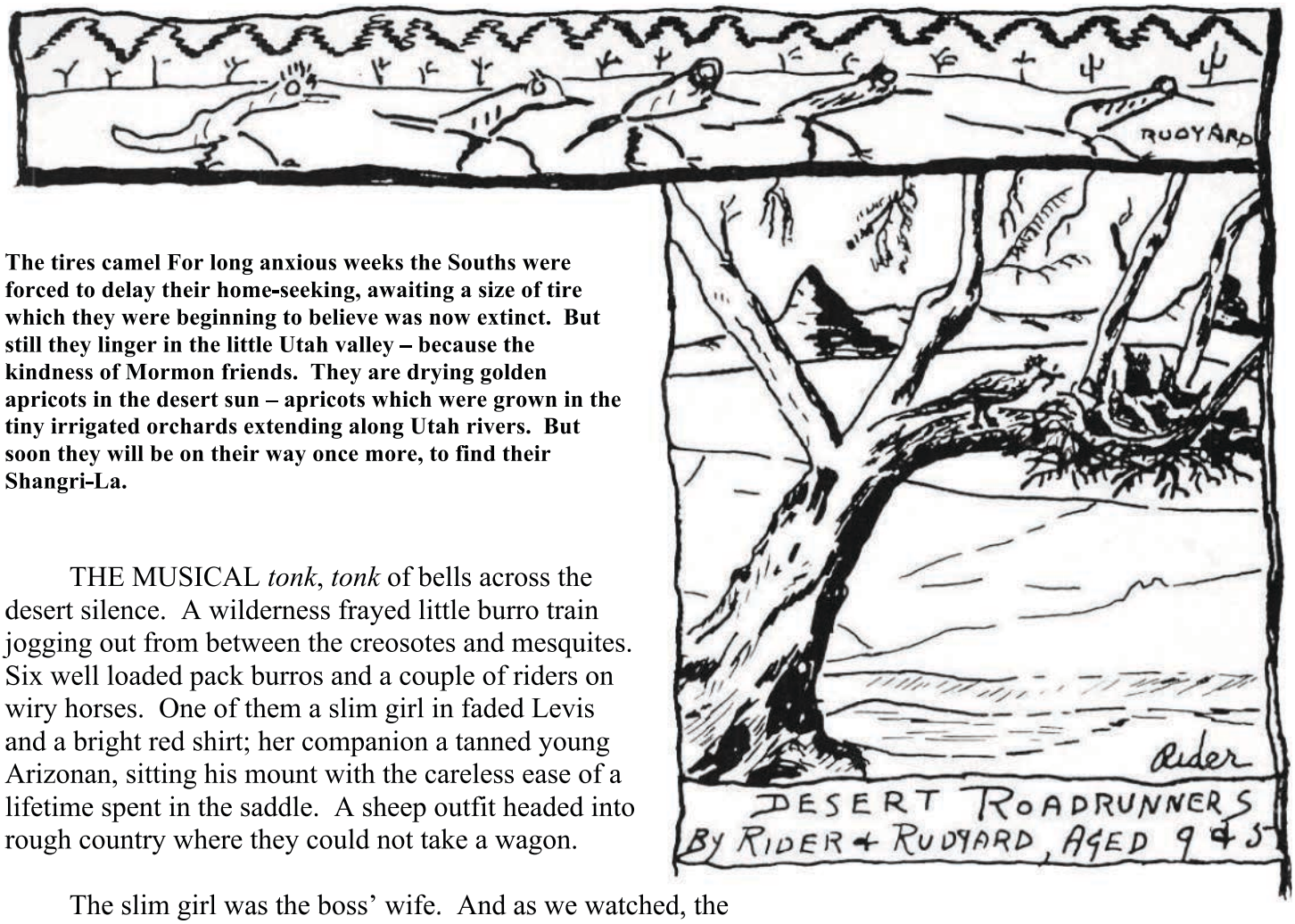
– Tanya South



Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – September 1943



The tires camel For long anxious weeks the Souths were forced to delay their home-seeking, awaiting a size of tire which they were beginning to believe was now extinct. But still they linger in the little Utah valley – because the kindness of Mormon friends. They are drying golden apricots in the desert sun – apricots which were grown in the tiny irrigated orchards extending along Utah rivers. But soon they will be on their way once more, to find their Shangri-La.

THE MUSICAL *tonk*, *tonk* of bells across the desert silence. A wilderness frayed little burro train jogging out from between the creosotes and mesquites. Six well loaded pack burros and a couple of riders on wiry horses. One of them a slim girl in faded Levis and a bright red shirt; her companion a tanned young Arizonan, sitting his mount with the careless ease of a lifetime spent in the saddle. A sheep outfit headed into rough country where they could not take a wagon.

The slim girl was the boss' wife. And as we watched, the boss himself appeared, high up on the crest of a nearby rocky butte. He shouted and waved his hat to the riders below and they swung off, heading in the direction he indicated. From beyond the butte the dust of the moving herd smoked against the sky in a thirsty brown cloud.

We knew a little of the outfit. For the boss himself had talked with us the day before as he had been scouting ahead to pick the trail. They were from the Arizona Strip – that vast lonely empire that lies between the north rim of the Grand Canyon and the Utah line. Rugged desert people – product and part of the land where they lived. Weather tanned and reliant; totally unconscious of their picturesque blending with their desert setting. The slim girl in the red shirt was beautiful and she rode with an easy grace that suggested the slender branches of creosotes swaying in the wind. The burros trotted and bounced their packs and the bells tonked and the boss, from his lofty perch, yelled and pointed some more. Then they were gone, fading away into the dun distance and the dusty haze of the moving sheep. The red shirt of the girl vanished last, a brave moving spot of color dwindling and swaying away into the hot dust.

But did our tires arrive? They did. Our good friend in Arizona did not fail us. Glinting with all the haughty grace which only suddenly precious rubber can assume, our new tires, mounted and rearing to run, now reflect the desert sunshine with a radiance that is positively dazzling. The old car, heaved up from her slumped despondency, quivers with a joyous eagerness that waits only the word to go.

But sometimes one makes haste slowly. And our present tardiness recalls a story told me several years ago by Laurence M. Huey, of the San Diego Natural History museum. It was while he was on one of his scientific expeditions into the little known parts of Baja California that one day he and his party met a Mexican family, moving with all their possessions across the desert, headed for a new home in distant Mexicali. Even the family cow was part of the caravan. But she was a leisurely creature and objected to desert travel in hot weather. Both the señor and the worthy señora were annoyed. "We make haste so slowly," they complained. "But what is to. do? Can one leave behind a perfectly good *vaca* just because she will not hurry? She is of value." But they were irritated.

Three days later the San Diego expedition met up with this selfsame Mexican family again. Camped at a water hole. The cow had vanished. But draped over poles and stretched riatas and the limbs of mesquite bushes was an astonishing array of jerky, drying in the torrid sun.

"Ah yes," the señora explained, sighing. "Poor Carmencita. She became more lazy. And when we reached this water she would not leave it. And so my Juan, he decided – " She shrugged her ample shoulders and spread her hands in an expressive gesture of resignation. "But the *carne seca* will be good, señor," she added, brightening, as she indicated the drying meat. "Now we can carry Carmencita with us upon the burro and make much better speed. We have lost nothing."

Which is a parallel to our own experience. For here, in this sunny little Utah valley, where the industry of the Mormon pioneers has planted the desert with little irrigated fields of fertility, fruit flourishes. And a good friend presented us with a huge quantity of delicious apricots. Apricots are somewhat like the manna of bible days. Subject to spoiling. And the amount of ripe apricots that even Rider, Rudyard and Victoria can get away with is limited. So, like the owners of Carmencita, we found a happy way out of the problem. We sat us down to "jerk" our apricots. In other words we split them open and spread them out on improvised racks to dry in the hot desert sunshine.

With astonishingly satisfactory results. Unless you have tried it you have no idea bow swiftly the brilliant sun and dry air of the desert can dehydrate fruit. Three or four days, and before you know it your orange gold spread of nectar-filled sweetness has toasted up to an array of toothsome chewy morsels of a deliciousness that can only be realized through personal experience. The sunshine does something to the fruit something which no system of artificial drying can do.

Now the apricots are about jerked – I mean dried. And soon they can be loaded, like Carmencita, and go along with us. Preserving food by drying has many advantages. Not the least being storage space. We used to do a great deal of drying on Ghost mountain. There, however, we had to take more precautions against our animal friends. There are not nearly the number of mice and pack rats in this section as at Yaquitepec. Drying racks on Ghost mountain had to be on unclimbable stilts. Otherwise we would have awakened in the morning to find that our entire day's work had been removed by our industrious little neighbors during the hours of darkness.

But the rays of the desert sum possess more virtues than the swift drying of meat and fruit. A surprising number of bodily ills, about which unhappy sufferers consult bewigged and bewhiskered specialists, show magical improvement when subjected to nothing more mysterious than a course of desert sunshine and natural living. Desert peoples, unless they have been utterly engulfed in the morass of civilization, are usually healthy people. Lean perhaps, and no strangers to the occasional pinch of hunger, they are nevertheless wiry and reliant and possessed of a fierce vitality which has enabled them time and again to sweep down and overthrow the dwellers of more "fertile" sections.

The sun long has had complete charge of the health of our own family. And does his job so well we seldom think about him from a health sense. Until something goes wrong. Such as a headache. Headaches are unnatural. No one should have a headache. And whenever we do get one we know perfectly well that it is our own fault. Fortunately they are sufficiently rare to make us a little proud of our diet habits. But on those occasions when we err, and nature tells us so, we promptly remember Dr. Sun, and carry the case direct to him.

The other day, having strayed unwisely down the alley of some alluring "civilized" food, and having awakened with a throbbing head, I went to a convenient spot and stretched out upon the hot earth. There were no rocks big enough or handy enough. But the clayey soil was scorching enough, and soon I began to feel the tingling, driving sunrays chasing the pain waves out along my spine and out through my head and toes.

Rider and Rudyard had come along too. They never neglect any opportunity that promises interest or a chance for exploration. They brought along a shovel with the idea that it would be interesting to find out how far, in this locality, one might have to sink a well for water.

While I toasted they dug. They dug for quite a while without finding anything more interesting than a few fragments of charcoal that might or might not have been relics of some prehistoric Indian campfire. “Pouff!” said Rudyard at last. "It is too hot. And I think the water is deeper down here than it is at Yaquitepec.” He scrambled out of the shallow trench and hot footed it for the shade of a high bank. Rider followed him.

Then we heard a mysterious “*Carrook*.” A weird, throaty sound. It seemed to come from somewhere in a nearby shallow draw where thorn trees grew. And where, far beyond the mountains swam in the heat like savage patterns sewn upon smoky gauze. "*Carrook*." A pause. '"*Carrook*."

"A frog!" Rudyard whispered excitedly. "A bull frog!"

"Huff!" Rider scoffed. “What would a bull frog be doing here – unless he had an asbestos suit. What is it, daddy?"

But I didn't know either. The headache was about gone. And I was as curious as the youngsters. Cautiously we set out to track down the mysterious sound. *"Carrook ... Carrook*, .. " The thing faded from us uncannily and elusively.

Then Rider suddenly spotted the roadrunner, an inconspicuous brown shadow, dodging furtively through the stunted bushes up a hot slope, and a moment later Rudyard's sharp eyes discovered the nest in a thorn tree. "Carrook" . . . the source of the sound was now unmistakable. But it was new to us. The roadrunner’s vocabulary is extensive, and extended by flagrant mimicry. But we hadn't heard one dispensing that throaty croak before. We didn't bother the dodging mother bird as she slipped away up the slope. We were too interested in the nest.

It was like most roadrunners' nests. On a limb not too far off the ground. But it was exceptionally well defended. The parent birds must have spent much time in choosing their locality. No war-wise commander could have bettered the array of spiky defense which hemmed their rough nest of sticks on every side. It wasn't a hard tree to get up into – if it hadn't been for the thorns. But they were the vilest, spikiest, most vicious thorns we ever had seen. They jabbed and tore and stabbed at us along every inch of progress. When we finally did work high enough to get a glimpse into the nest it was at the cost of much shed blood. Some of the thorns drove deep in and broke off, and had to be dug out with pain and language, hours later.

There were five husky young roadrunners in the nest. Almost fully feathered. Hunched down, camouflaged by the patterns of their feathers against the mottled background of the nest, they regarded us with suspicious hostile eyes. There is something lizardlike and reptilian about a young roadrunner. If you ever should entertain any doubts as to the descent of birds from lizards a few minutes' study of young roadrunners in the nest would do much to dissipate them. And the bird has much more inherent savagery in it than you would suppose. At least in youth. The swagger and droll comedy affected by the adult birds are characteristics which come later.

Suddenly, to our consternation. one of the nestlings, with a low squawk of rage, or fear, hurled himself from the nest. To land with a thud upon the hot ground below. Captured promptly by Rider and thus saved from a blind staggering dash to death in the hot desert, it nevertheless threw us into a panic, for fear that the entire brood might follow its example. We withdrew hastily, blaming ourselves for our curiosity. But the question now was what to do with the prisoner. To attempt to put him back in the nest, by hand, might result in a general exodus of scared birds. This we dared not risk. It was a tough problem.

We solved the matter by taking "Snapper," as the boys named him, back to camp. There he was lavished with love and attention until next day, in a specially built nest all his own, in a specially built cage. But he would not eat. He snapped and chattered his bill at us. And pecked savagely. And glared and refused to be sociable.

It was with relief that we lugged him back to the nest the next day, by which time we judged the other young birds would have recovered in some measure from their fright. We returned him artfully. We tied a long strip of soft cloth to the end of a pole and wrapping the strip round and round Snapper's feet, with the end loosely secured, we hoisted him ignominiously bf the legs up and over his nest. There, by a little jiggling and jerking we managed to shake the end of the wound cloth strip free. It unrolled and let Snapper fall into his nest. The other young birds never stirred.

PURPOSE

Prepare your mind for tasks that must be done.
Ad hold it firmly on your chosen course.
Thus follow it. And let no rising sun
Find you unwilling. And let no remorse
Unset your purpose. All will make mistakes.
But they who seek will surely find. And they
Who place their goal upon the highest stakes
Will find God’s will to guide them all the way.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South
Desert Magazine – October 1943

Spines of this Utah cactus hold no fear for Victoria.

IT WAS early morning in the little town of Mesquite, Nevada. As I entered the cafe to get a cup of coffee his was the first face I saw. He sat at the counter snatching an early breakfast. It was obvious that he was one of the passengers on the bus parked at the curb outside. We never had set eyes on each other before. But he hailed me with the enthusiasm of an old friend. "Come, sit here," be said affably, indicating an empty stool at his side. "Have a cup of coffee on me! Have breakfast with me as my guest! . . . Come. Come on. Please," he urged, as I hesitated. "This is my treat. Really. I want you."

His face was alight with enthusiasm and a sort of boyish eagerness that was compelling and would take no refusal. As I slid into the seat beside him be patted me genially on the back. "I'm feeling facetious, this morning," he said, grinning in explanation of his joviality. "For once in my life I'm thoroughly happy. I'm on a trip – on a vacation. The first one I've had in a long time. And I'm just going to enjoy myself in my own way. What'll you have?"

"Just the coffee," I told him. "I've been driving all night. Got to keep awake."

He nodded. "But something with it," he urged. "Some of these crullers . . . Something . . ."

"Well, a couple of donuts, maybe," I conceded.

"Donuts. Donuts. Make it donuts with the coffee, too," be waved the order genially after the demure little Mormon girl as she departed. They did not understand him, these grave, wholesome little desert misses who waited upon the cafe customers. But I did. We grinned at each other as old friends. His eyes roved over me appreciatively. "You fit this country – the desert," he said frankly.

I had been on a long hard scouting trip, alone. Tanya and the youngsters had been left safely established in a camp by a waterhole and now I was on my way back to them. The journey had been tough and hot and sleepless – and punctuated with more tire trouble than I cared to remember. I wasn't feeling particularly picturesque. Nor did I care, at the moment, whether I "fitted the country" or not. I ran appraising fingers over a ten day bristle of beard and grinned at him wryly.

"But that is nothing!" He waved the matter aside with a dismissing gesture. "It is the spirit that counts. The fitness. And you are particularly part of this desert scenery somehow. Look! Isn't it strange that we should meet! Here am I – sixty-six years of age – and released for a few days for care-free vacation in this desert that I love. And we encounter each other. Ah, this wonderful desert. You know, in the writings of George Wharton James . . . his Indian blankets . . . baskets . . . Perhaps you knew him?"

Yes I bad known him. "And Charles F. Lummis? You remember him too, maybe?" I suggested.

His face lit like a lamp. "Knew him well. Ah . . . the old days. You remember on the Los Angeles Times . . . "

We were off. The puzzled and a little scandalized young lady brought the coffee and the donuts. But they went untasted as did my friend's breakfast. What are such things as breakfast and coffee when two kindred souls bump into each other like voyaging ships in the midst of the loneliness of a vast ocean. Such an eager comparing of notes. Such a digging and rummaging in the precious memories of fled days. Was this Mesquite, Nevada? Or wasn't it? We had forgotten.

The passengers had all trooped out to their places in the waiting bus. The driver, seated apart at a little table writing up his notes and accounts, was the last to go. He swept his papers into his leather satchel and buckled it. As he passed the lunch counter on his way out he tapped my friend upon the shoulder. 'We're leaving," he warned. "Better hurry!"

And my companion woke, as from a dream. He hadn't touched his breakfast. There it lay in the platter before him. A crisp salad, fried potatoes – an assembled appetizing combination of different foods. But all, fortunately, things that could be transported. Frantically he signaled to the little waitress and she came hurrying with waxed paper and a big paper sack. She swept the food together and packed it expertly in a jiffy. The bus outside tooted impatiently and my friend snatched the sack. "Your name," be cried breathlessly, lingering an instant with outstretched band. "I don't even know your name."

I told him. In that hectic instant of parting, while the bus horn blew angry blasts, I mentioned the Desert Magazine. "Why – why of course!" he cried delightedly. "The Desert Magazine! I take it. Couldn't do without . . . "

He bolted through the door and was gone, plunging headlong for his seat just as the bus was backing out. The heavy motors roared and the dust skirled in the roadway. Then silence slipped down from the mountain tops again and he and his fellow passengers were just a memory, a fleeting blur whirring out along the desert highway on their way to Salt Lake City.

Mechanically I began to munch my donuts and drink my coffee. On the other side of the counter the demure little miss who had eyed us both askance passed, and paused.

"I think," she said disapprovingly, "that he had had a glass of beer."

"Maybe," I said. "And maybe not. There's such a thing as the intoxication of desert freedom. Did you ever spend long years a captive in the city?"

"No," she answered severely. "I never did."

And she went away hastily. "Two of a kind," her glance and actions said, more plainly than words. But I wasn't particularly worried over her reaction just then. For it had all at once dawned on me that l didn't know my new-found friend's name. In the whirlwind rush of parting I hadn't asked him. The realization was a dampening blow. And as I finished my coffee and went out again into the morning glint of the Nevada sunshine it was with a sense of loss. For I would like to know my friend's name and address. Perhaps, if this meets his eye, he will drop me a postcard. I hope so.

Rider and Rudyard have a new job to add to their already full list of occupations. It is tortoise herding. And if this sounds a little out of the ordinary – even in a world where strange trades flourish – you are to be informed that Don Antonio and Grandpa Tortoise, both vigorous representatives of the desert tortoise clan, have joined our establishment and travel right along with us.

And, being independent minded, as most desert dwellers are, neither Grandpa Tortoise nor Don Antonio take kindly to being whisked hither and yon in a smelly automobile. So to compensate, when on the road, the children take them on hikes at every camp spot and stopping place where time and conditions permit, herding them carefully through the cactus and creosotes and picking out for them the choice areas of pasture.

And Don Antonio and Grandpa appreciate these rambles. They are very tame and well used to the family. Their habits of ducking back into their bullet-proof vests on our approach have long since given place to an air of careless friendship and they stroll amiably around with us, sniffing for tid-bits among the dry sticks and munching at grass tufts and choice morsels of dust and gravel. A desert tortoise's taste in the matter of food is peculiar. He will turn up a scandalized nose at the choicest of greenstuff and go eagerly after morsels which would discourage even a burro.

Grotesque and comically lovable creatures, their speed is something to marvel over. A short period of observation of their ungainly but persistent gait is sufficient to give anyone a new appreciation of the "Hare and Tortoise" fable. And they are adepts at concealment. It is with risk that you remove your eyes from them for a single instant. For in that moment they are likely to duck into some cavity beneath a stone or a cactus and vanish utterly from sight – with your chances of locating then again slightly less than nil.

We sometimes think it must be very annoying to Grandpa and his partner, after they have indulged in a terrific burst of two-mile-an-hour speed towards the distant mountains, to be picked up and carried back to the starting point again. Some-times, when they have tried to climb into impossible situations, up steep banks, and have rolled down and landed upside down, they give audible sighs of relief and gratitude when we turn them right side up again. Not that they particularly need this service – for the belief that a tortoise can't turn over when on its back is a fiction, as far as desert tortoises are concerned. But the turning process is hard and involves a terrific lot of effort and straining with outthrust head and legs, which they are grateful to be spared. It is interesting to watch an overturned turtle right himself, though. And sometimes it takes a long time. But be usually manages to do it. It is very possible that should he have the bad luck to find himself bottom side up in

some depression or bowl-like hollow he would be unable to turn. But so far we have never found our pets in this fix. Ordinarily brother tortoise can take care of himself.

But he doesn't stand heat well. Like the rattlesnake he seems to have the peculiarity that the very desert sun upon which he thrives will prove his undoing if he gets too much of it, without adequate shelter. Ignorance of this fact caused us the loss of our first tortoise pet, Tiny Tim. The children babied him and fussed with him. He had a special traveling box, well ventilated and bedded with grass and leaves. That was the trouble. It was too warm. There was no deep, cool burrow to which he could retire. And one morning, after a particularly hot desert run of the day before, we found Tiny Tim dead. The children's grief was beyond consolation for a long while. Tiny Tim was buried with many tears in a desert grave among the creosotes near the jagged peaks of the Turtle mountains.

It gets hot on some of the desert reaches in summer. But the heat of different sections has very different qualities and reacts upon the human system in very different ways. Vegetation, or its absence, seems to play an important part in this. As do altitude, soil composition, nearness to mountains and to big bodies of water, and a number of other factors, many of them seemingly unrelated. The invisible "river channels" and "drifts" of the overlying atmosphere have tremendous influence on desert climates, being responsible for numerous climatic pockets and zones in the wasteland empire. And man himself, at times, with his works, steps in to upset the finely adjusted balance of the great "machine." There is little doubt that the assembling of a vast body of water as has been done at Lake Mead, has tipped the scales of climate strikingly. Especially in the former route and frequency of summer thunder showers. There are skeptics who scoff at this. But you don't have to go far to find abundant support from old timers as to facts. Nature-balance is delicately adjusted. It is swayable by far less obvious things than the tremendous evaporation from man-made lakes.

But there are other more simple deductions to be culled from desert summers. One of the roost striking is that hot drinks are in their final effect, more cooling to the system than are chilly ones. It is not to be denied that the appeal of iced liquids on a sweltering day is very strong. And against them a hot cup of tea or coffee or a drink from a sun heated canteen doesn't pack much attraction. Yet the warm drink induces a profuse perspiration which sluices through the entire body and results in a much longer period of comfort. Besides being much more healthful than the shock of a chilly draught. The old Spaniards spoke with considerable knowledge when they wrote: "*En la tierra fria, agua fria. En tierra caliente, agua caliente*." Which, in free translation, signifies that cold drinks are best for cold countries, hot ones for hot climates.

So don't worry if your summer draught from the canteen in the desert resembles a drink from the boiler of a locomotive. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing that it is more healthful than a cold glassful of tinkling ice water. And at least it won't be an insult to the intelligence, such as are the wanly cool swigs from the waterbags of paraffin-dipped canvas which some brilliantly inventive minds have lately placed upon the market. Some of us old timers who know what a *real* waterbag is, and the evaporative principle upon which it chills its contents, can only contemplate these new paraffined inventions with sadness and disgust, muttering the while into our desert scorched beards, "Ain't science *wonderful*."

PERSISTENCE

They only die who cease to strive.
Each moment is a priceless jewel,
Death is no whit the less alive.
Then let each hour be added fuel
Unto your striving for a goal –
Cease not, rest not from your attaining.
Persistence, as the seasons roll,
Alone holds Heaven for the gaining.

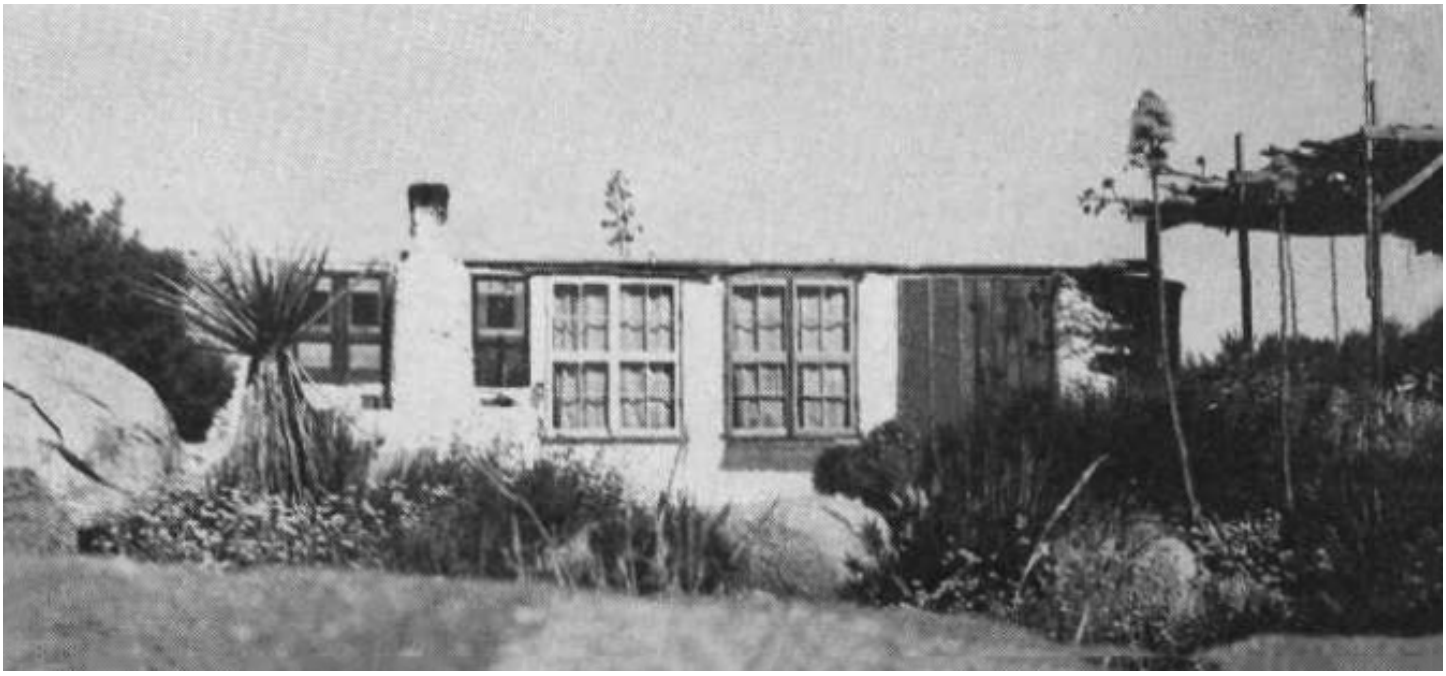
– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – November 1943

The Souths have come home. After a year of wandering in the deserts of Utah, Nevada, Arizona and California, they have returned to Yaquitepec – that home atop Ghost Mountain, looking east across the Colorado desert to the craggy ranges of Arizona. Through the anxious months of searching for an ideal home site, they knew that somewhere it existed. It did. On the very mountain top from which they had set out upon their quest.



This is Yaquitepec, the South home on Ghost Mountain, to which they have returned after a year of wandering.

ACROSS the dim trail, between a bristling cholla and a bunch of withered mescal stalks, stretched a slender cable of gleaming silver. From its center swung a tiny bell of white silk – a fairy bell swaying gently in the faint stirring of the desert air. A good omen. There in the silence and the warm glow of the late afternoon sunshine it seemed to be ringing a glad welcome. Carefully we turned from the path and stepped around it to avoid injuring the work of the little desert spider whose home it was.

A hush held all the desert. On the horizon the mountains rose up warm and glowing like the rim of a golden bowl – a golden bowl filled with a wine of silence spiced with the fragrance of creosotes and junipers and sage. The whole world was so still one walked as in a dream. We did not speak. No one – not even the irrepressible Victoria – wanted to break that hushed peace. The dick and clatter of occasional stones rolling from beneath our feet sounded startlingly loud.

The trail wound up the mountainside, cresting ridges and doubling back across tiny plateaus. Soon we were clambering among frowning boulders – clambering and panting, for we had grown out of practice with steep trails. An inquisitive chipmunk eyed us from a rock top as we rested a moment. Then with a saucy flirt of his tail scuttled for safety. There were junipers here, and bisnagas and the bristling bayonets of rank on rank of guarding mescals. We went on more slowly. For we knew we were drawing near to something.

"I see the roof!" Rudyard shouted all at once. "Look, daddy! The roof an' the chimney an' – "

" – An' the 'ittle bird house!" Victoria shrilled in a sudden wild excitement that periled her perch upon my shoulder. "The 'ittle bird house in the twee. It's still there!"

"Yes," Rider said. "That's the roof. And the bird house." He drew a deep, quick breath. "Yaquitepec,'" he said softly. He darted away, ostensibly to see if his special cistern had any water in it. Rider's feelings are deep and sensitive. But he likes to hide them.

And so, through the junipers and the tall swaying mescal stalks, on that warm, still desert afternoon, we came HOME. Home to Yaquitepec – and to the end of our long trail of wandering and of search. The quest was over. The dream place had been found. Nor does it lessen the satisfaction that we found our ideal on the very spot from which we had set out. Rather it adds to the importance of the search and to the solid joy of the final discovery.

It was not a noisy or exuberant homecoming. The hearts of all of us were too full for demonstration. For a long while we did not enter the house. We just sat under the ramada and rested. And drank in the far vast blue-distance of the desert extending east from the foot of the mountain, far below. Everything was still. Hushed and peaceful and sunny. Even the faint stirring of a drowsy breeze along the edge of the western cliff seemed immeasurably far away. And in the midst of the deep, solemn peace the little house, hemmed by its toylike junipers and clutter of giant boulders seemed to hold out invisible welcoming arms to us.

It might have been but yesterday that we had gone. So little had changed. As we began to move about, treading on tip-toe as though reluctant to break the hush, it almost seemed that our whole wandering trail of the past months had been a dream. With a sort of wonder we picked up familiar objects, resting still where we had laid them down on the last day of our going. Save that there were weathered patterns beneath them and faint outlines where the drifting days and infrequent storms had traced their imprints, we might have placed them there just a few minutes before.

There had been visitors to the little house in our absence. But they had been kindly visitors and desert friends. They had disturbed little. Some of the old toys that had been scattered beneath the ramada were ranged in ordered ranks which plainly told that some of the visitors to the little house had been children. And along the edge of the terrace someone had arranged some of our colored rock specimens in a way that bespoke not only artistic appreciation but also loving interest. Several panes of glass had been shattered in one of the front windows. But that evidently had been a prank of the wind.

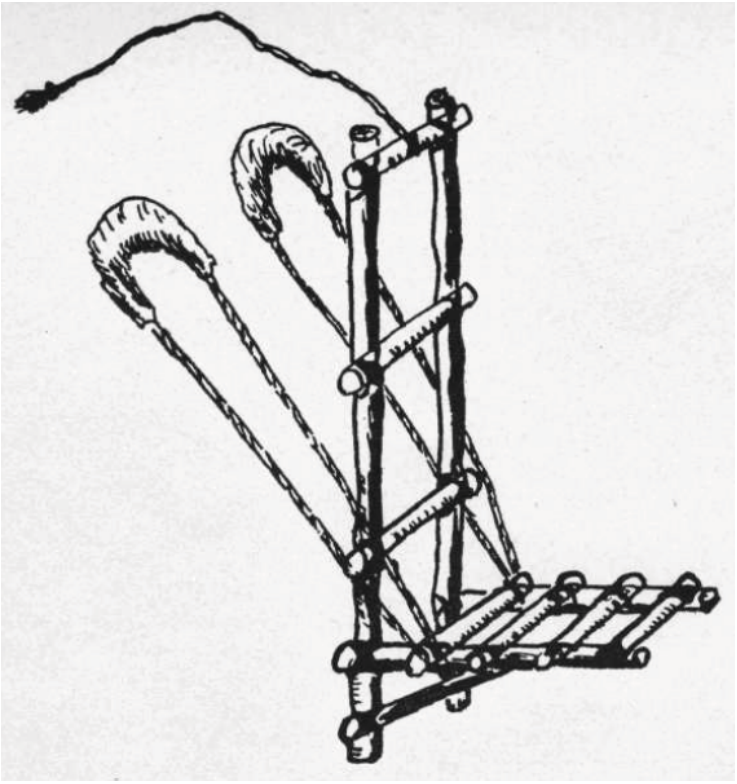
We went inside after awhile. The front door, which someone had managed to unfasten, was held shut by a prop and several rocks. This loving service, together with the securing of the unfastened front window and the barricading of a loose rear shutter, had been the work of the artist, Thomas Crocker, at the time when he had climbed Ghost Mountain to transfer Yaquitepec to canvas. On the table lay a wide thin piece of clean white board, evidently part of the side of an apple box. It had been headed, in pencil, "Great Register" and upon it several Yaquitepec visitors had inscribed their names. To this improvised visitors' book Mr. Crocker also had added a few lines of friendly appeal to subsequent callers to keep doors and windows securely fastened.

We had expected to find cats' nests and a wild litter of cholla scraps and mescal pods which these industrious little rascals generally haul in to empty houses. But even the rats seemed to have realized that we eventually would return. There was no trace of their activities. On the shelves where we had left them, a few

trinkets still stood in orderly array. A couple of pictures hung on the walls. Silence and a thin filming of desert dust.

The house contained but one native tenant . . . a big, philosophic "Tittums 'pider " (Victoria's rendering of Tarantula spider) who sat beside the fireplace regarding our intrusion with a stoical indifference which wasn't in the slightest ruffled when we carefully herded it into an old can and carried it out to a place of safety among the rocks.

Tanya began to open windows and dust tables and chairs – a multitude of little preliminary tasks towards the job of re-establishment. With the beginning of such first tasks something of the unreality vanished. We began to realize that we actually were home once more. With full hearts and a happiness greater than anything we bad known since the day of our leaving we all turned to the big job ahead of us.



Marshal South sketched the carrying chair, or pack board, which he made from mescal stalks and fiber to carry supplies up the steep trail to Yaquitepec. Note padded shoulder ropes and top hand-hold rope.

And it was a big job. Every pound of our personal possessions, which we so laboriously had carried down Ghost Mountain when we bad gone away, had to be re-carried up the trail. That was going to be a strenuous job. But it was not particularly this task which gave us concern. Our chief anxiety was the old question of water. That was vital. Hastily we took stock of the situation.

It turned out to be considerably better than we had anticipated. The carefully corked five gallon bottle which, from sheer force of desert habit, we had left in the house on our departure, had not been molested. And the regular inside water barrel still contained about 10 gallons of pure liquid. We went out to inspect the cisterns.

Evidently a heavy thundershower had passed across Ghost Mountain about a week or ten days previous to our homecoming. Evidences of the brief downpour were visible in cut channels in the gravel and in the mud stains in now dry catch holes. Also the overflow pool, to which the roof guttering bad been connected, was still about a quarter full of water. It wasn't good water because the open cemented pool had become cluttered up with trash during our absence. Still it was water.

Our main drinking water cistern was dry, except for a slime-crusted puddle in which a defunct centipede reposed peacefully amidst a litter of other "animalitos." Another smaller cistern likewise was bone dry. The same was true of a couple of other containers. But to our great joy a carefully covered tank still retained, bug-free and pure, the 60 gallons or so of water which we had left in it. This store, with the water in the house, gave us a head start on the water question of about 75 gallons. We suddenly felt our chief worry evaporate.

There still was much to be done. On that first trip up the mountain we had been unable to bring much in the way of supplies. So Rider and I hurried down the long descent to the car and trailer. Here we hastily collected a few blankets and essentials and started up the mountain again, taking note, on the way up, of several stout mescal stalks which, on the morrow, could be pressed into service for the making of a "carrying-chair."

Dusk was closing in by the time we returned. Tanya had the lantern lit and a sketchy camp supper on the table – to which we did more than justice. Weary and gloriously happy we all turned in to drowse contentedly towards slumber, lulled by the song of the old, well-remembered desert wind, harping across the cliff edge and the roof-top.

"Towards" slumber, I said. For suddenly, in the still night, there was a crash. Bamm! Wham! Clatter-te-clatter-te-clomp! Barn! Slam! Tanya sat up with a startled jerk. Rudyard said "Ouff?" in a scared, inquiring voice. From the depths of her covers Victoria snuffled and yawned: "That is onwy thee owd pack wat. He comed home to his house on thee woof," she observed sleepily. Of course. Temporarily we had forgotten the old pack rat who has his dwelling up in a little pocket under an overhanging roof-eave.

Next day, having fashioned a pack chair from mescal poles and fiber, we settled to the job of carrying in real earnest. A big job. It isn't finished yet. But there is joy in the labor. When you have swung around the circle, and finally proved that your heart lies in the location you started from, the satisfaction of the knowledge far outweighs any physical toil.

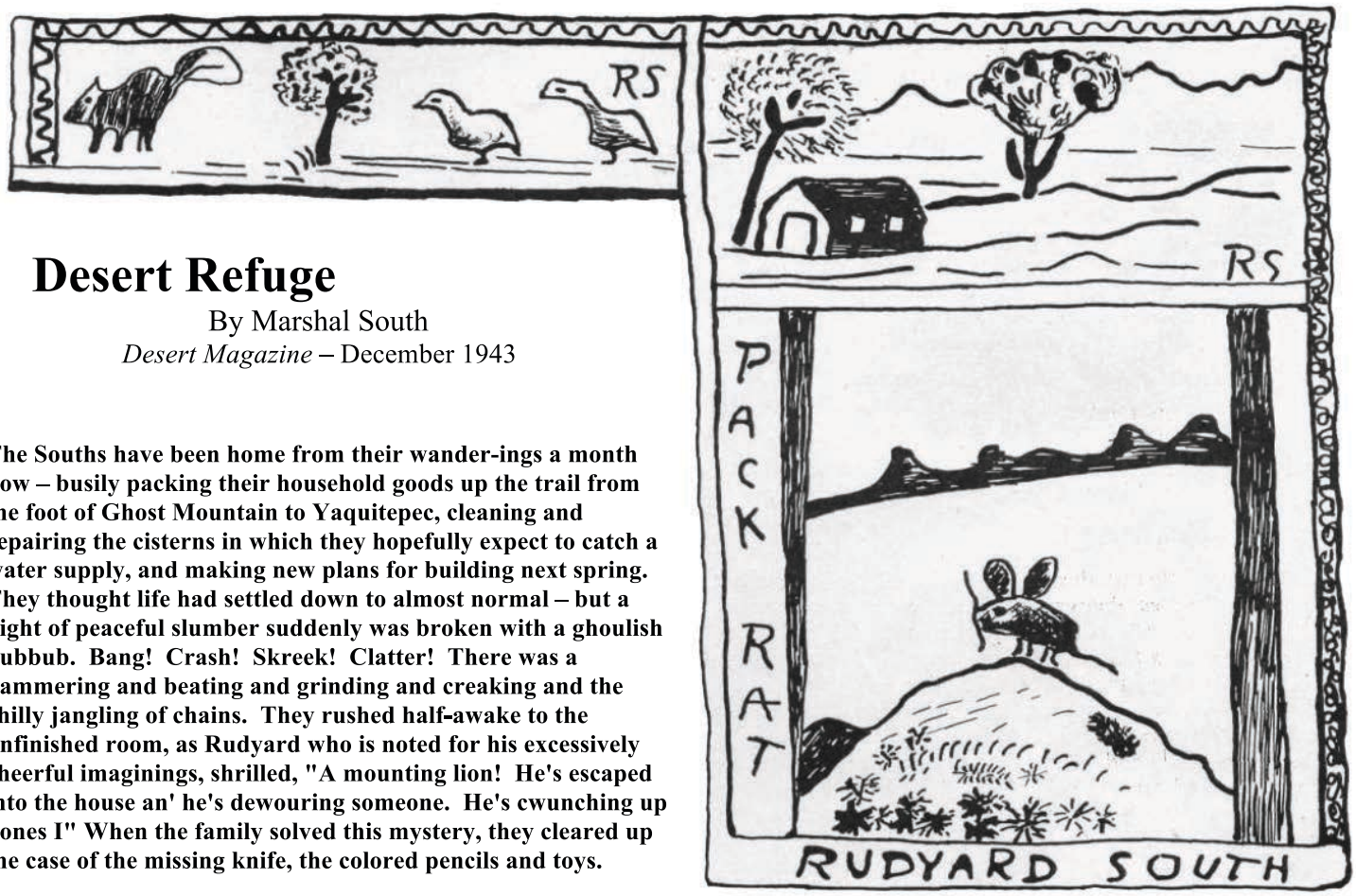
For, in summing up, there is for us but one Yaquitepec. No other place, no other scene, in all the desert empire we have traversed, can compete with it. We saw solitudes and beauty. We found wells and waterholes. We gladdened our hearts beside the silver trickles of springs, singing their cool song beneath the glowing lift of desert cliffs. But we found no peace and no contentment like the peace and tranquility that wraps around the little home that perches on our bald mountain summit. Yaquitepec!

The granite crest shoulders back the driving winds. The ravens wing above it and the savage chollas crouch in the spaces between the tumbled rocks. It is barren and sun scorched and storm harried. And there is no water. But – it is HOME.

CONTENTMENT

Who knows content? Not the exceeding rich.
Nor yet the prosperous. Nor e'en the poor –
For t is never worldly substance which
Brings sweet content to grow within our core.
Contentment is a spiritual thing,
Nurtured by mental viewpoint and by goal;
The outcrop of imaginings that bring
And understanding peace to heart and soul.

– Tanya South



Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – December 1943

The Souths have been home from their wander-ings a month now – busily packing their household goods up the trail from the foot of Ghost Mountain to Yaquitepec, cleaning and repairing the cisterns in which they hopefully expect to catch a water supply, and making new plans for building next spring. They thought life had settled down to almost normal – but a night of peaceful slumber suddenly was broken with a ghoulish hubbub. Bang! Crash! Skreek! Clatter! There was a hammering and beating and grinding and creaking and the chilly jangling of chains. They rushed half-awake to the unfinished room, as Rudyard who is noted for his excessively cheerful imaginings, shrilled, "A mounting lion! He's escaped into the house an' he's dewouring someone. He's cwunching up bones I" When the family solved this mystery, they cleared up the case of the missing knife, the colored pencils and toys.

A BIG whiptail lizard moves slinkily across the noon-glinted stretch of white gravel before the house. In the shadows of the gnarled old juniper tree, where the sifting sunlight makes fretted patterns of gold upon the bluish-brown mosaic of fallen ripe berries, Rudyard and Victoria sit close together, intently turning the pages of an old picture book.

There is a sense of hush and stillness over everything, despite the restless stirrings of a wandering little desert breeze that harps a low sleepy song of solitude with its swaying of an open window. Tanya and Rider are away off down the trail somewhere, doing their daily part in the water carrying program, a task in which we ail share. Above the somnolent lullaby of the rasping, wind-swaying window hook, lifts the occasional hushed murmur of voices from the two engrossed youngsters under the juniper tree. The peace of the desert lies over everything like a crystal bowl. Ghost Mountain and all of the vast stretch of the shimmering wastelands beyond are a-drowse in the sun.

But in all the wide-flung desert sky there is no hint of rain. And rain we need desperately. All the desert needs it. Even the chollas and the mescals are beginning to look a bit discouraged. Cleaned and new tarred our empty cisterns wait. But in vain. The days march past on brassy feet. Dry, fine, thirsty dust is upon the creosotes and upon the yuccas and each sunset the dispirited clumps of beavertail seem to shrink a little smaller within their wrinkling skins. Still it does not rain.

Oddly enough dry conditions do not seem to have had a depressing effect upon our bird visitors during the past nesting season. Rather the reverse. For the first time in our records, all of the little houses we had

provided were used, even the oldest and least pretentious ones. There had been such a demand for quarters that some of-the late comers had had to construct hogans and wickiups for themselves. This they had done in the precarious summits of junipers and under the sagging bundles of mescal poles that span our ramada. It must have been an interesting colony. Evidently we missed something by not being at home.

Judging by the varied types of building material used in different nests, several new varieties of birds had joined the usual crowd. Our old friends the olive-sided flycatchers, who have a permanent lease upon the little red-roofed house in the juniper by the cisterns, had been back, of course. And the desert sparrows. And the canyon wrens had occupied every one of the hollowed mescal butts tucked away in the shadowy places. And the house of the purple finches had been lived in too, as had the domiciles of all the other old timers.

But we could not figure out what little desert sprite had resided in the diminutive bungalow way up on the summit of the pole above the ramada. Nor could we determine the builders of the new wickiups. Birds are as definite as humans in their architectural designs. But, as we made the rounds, cleaning out the nest boxes and getting things ship-shape for next season, we could not decide who the newcomers had been. Maybe they'll come back next year. Anyway we're glad that while we were away adventuring on far trails, our little house here among the swaying mescal blooms had its loneliness cheered by the constant bustlings and twitterings of a glad company of feathered friends.

Life at Yaquitepec is back almost to normal. Not quite, for there is much arranging and contriving and even new construction to be done before we can thoroughly drop back into a smooth course. We had feared there might be a few wistful regrets over the memories of frogs and minnows and waving green cattails and the murmurous gurgle of running springs. But not a bit of it. The children have enjoyed their wanderings. They have known what it is to have water in abundance. They have expanded their horizons and have added to memory's storehouse scores of localities which before were just names on the map. I think Victoria neatly sums up the feelings of all three: "Twips," says Victoria, "are pwetty goot. But it is gooder to get back home to Yak-a-pek. I LIKE Yak-a-pek."

Ghost Mountain juniper berries are good and ripe. In fact the crop is about over – a fact to be noted with regret by the coyotes who by moonlight and starlight have come trotting up our precipitous trails to enjoy them. Coyotes at this season of the year seem to make juniper berries their chief article of diet. When you get them just right, the berries are good. A bit woody, but sweet and tasty, with a flavor reminiscent of St. John's bread.

The Indians appreciated them and ate them not only "as is" but also ground into meal and baked into little cakes. The tiny little hard, filbert-like kernel – the part you discard – has a diminutive, meaty interior which the chipmunks like. But one almost needs to be a chipmunk to get the benefit of the morsels. They are so tiny you never get a proper taste of them, however patient you are.

To the furry little rock dwellers, though, the size is just about right. From the open doorway of my writing house among the rocks I often have watched some little grey rascal, his tiny white-trimmed brush of a tail arched pertly over his back, squatting on the summit of a branch-shaded boulder, enjoying a hearty meal of juniper-berry kernels, scampering back and forth to help himself to the berries from the heavily laden branches, cracking the kernels expertly and letting the empty shell halves tumble down into the rock crevices below him. It is all very simple. But when you try to crack a juniper berry kernel yourself all you get is a smashed whiff of something which is just tantalizingly good enough to urge you to repeat the experiment again and again. And always with discouraging results.

Pack rats like juniper berries too. They work overtime to lay in a generous supply for winter. The big rat, who for so long bas made his home under an overhanging eave of our roof, is no exception. He is a far-seeing thrifty individual. A few days ago be decided that his roof storehouses were inadequate. So he came down into the house, taking advantage of a hole where, during our absence, a chunk of mud plaster had fallen out. He is a big handsome rat with an expensive-looking waistcoat of cream colored fur. An old tenant of ours of several years' standing, we felt rather benignly disposed towards him. So, although we saw him flitting to and fro and hurrying importantly along shadowy wall bases in the lamplight we took no “steps.” It was true that on several occasions we heard mysterious noises in the dead of night that linked themselves with our flitting visitor. But we dismissed the matter tolerantly.

Thus, in our role of gullible Simple Simons we drifted along, suspecting nothing. Not even when Tanya began to worry over the disappearance of her pet table knife – the one with the red handle. Or when Rider complained that a plaster mould, in which he made clay ducks, was missing. Or when Rudyard accused Victoria of having taken, and lost, a little red metal toy auto, on which he set great store – an accusation which she vociferously denied, entering a counter complaint that '"Rudggy" had "tooked my wed an' green pencils."

Then one night came the grand finale. We had gone to bed in peace and goodfellowsbip with all the world. Only to be torn from slumber around about the witching hour of midnight by a ghastly hubbub. Tumbling from our covers, to the accompaniment of Rider's startled exclamations, Rudyard’s shouted questions and Victoria's lusty yells, we were aware of an awful noise proceeding from the gloom-shrouded north archway, the one that leads into the unfinished room. Right now the archway, temporarily walled about by a lath and tar-paper cubby hole, serves as a sort of storage space. It was from the depths of this cavern of shadow that the racket proceeded . . . hammering and beating and grinding and creaking and the chilly jangling of chains. "A mounting lion," Rudyard puffed breathlessly, scrambling at our heels as we snatched the dim-burning night lantern from its hook and dashed towards the scene of commotion. "A mounting lion! He's escaped into the house an' he's dewouring someone. He's cwunching up bones!" (Rudyard is noted for his excessively cheerful imaginings.)

But it wasn't a mountain lion. It was our old friend the pack-rat. In the flickering lantern-light, as we peered among the piled trunks and boxes inside the archway, all we could see was a glittering litter of smashed glass, a tumble of overturned tin cans and a wild scatter of spilled nails, screws and small bolts, in the midst of which confusion, jerking back and forth upon the surface of a big flat slab of rock, like a dumpy tugboat buffeted by a choppy sea, moved a battered old graniteware pot, upside down. Bang! Crash! Skreek, clatter! It would advance and retreat. And go sideways, lifting every once in a while and clanking back upon the stone as though all the jumping beans in Mexico had taken refuge beneath it. The thing seemed possessed.

"Ha! – the rat!" Rider said, his sleepy tones holding something of the melodrama of Sherlock Holmes of Baker street. "He's been on the shelf and he's upset that tippery carton of glass jars and nails and things. And the old pot has fallen down on him. He's under it."

And he was. All we saw of him, as we gingerly lifted the pot was a flash of expensive fur waistcoat – a whizzing pale streak that hurtled away into the shadows. To be followed later by a hamming plunk as his scrambling body hit the iron roof outside. He was gone.

But be left the evidence of his misdeeds behind him. For there at the foot of a big pile of earth which he had burrowed out from beneath the flat rock slab, lay Tanya's red handled knife, Rider's duck mould, Rudyard's tiny toy auto and Victoria's pencils, together with a varied collection of other trifles we hadn't missed. And

under the stone, strategically disposed in a half dozen little nooks and comers amidst the piled boxes about it, were heaps and heaps of carefully gathered juniper berries. You'd never have dreamed that one rat could have lugged in so many berries in such a few days. In the morning, when we came to dear things up, we took out five tomato cans full of them.

After which, heartlessly, we took a little of our precious water and mixed it with some good desert day into a thick mud. And we plugged the bole up under the beam. We believe in conservation and in industry. But there are limits.

Now, nightly, we hear our friend of the expensive fur waistcoat wandering disconsolately up and down on the roof outside the plugged hole. He does not enjoy being relegated to the region of outer darkness. His feelings, I imagine, are akin to those of humans who, every once in a while, are rudely awakened by Fate to a startled realization that they cannot forever trample insolently on the toes of God.

PROGRESSION

Progression is an inward thing.
It matters not what clothes we wear,
What homes our varied incomes bring;
The soul must feed on different fare.
On wisdom gleaned from kindness given,
On thoughts of Truth and Life profound.
By such – and how we've loved and striven –
Is measure of true progress found.

– Tanya South