

there idle, when it could give an affluent old age to Jim, after his forty years of desert hardship and disappointment. His claims seemed uncertain compared with "The Last Hope," as the abandoned mine was called.

One Wednesday Jim failed to appear, and at night Billy was greatly disturbed. "I don't dare to wait until to-morrow," he said, "to see if he comes. There are barely two gallons of water left. I am going to get up at midnight and take the kegs to the water-hole."

I knew what Billy's fear was. Ten hours without water in that pitiless sun would kill. We could take no risks with the mercury at one hundred and twenty degrees.

Billy started at midnight, leaving me a gallon of water, although I had begged him to take all but two quarts. Our daily portion was one gallon apiece, and he refused to stint me. I dawdled long over my morning coffee, but by six o'clock I was seated at my mending. Already the heat was sweeping in oven-like breaths through the shelter. I kept glancing toward Horse Spring. It was too early to hope for Jim, and yet—

I jumped with excitement. Far, far in the distance, where the blue merged into yellow desert floor, I saw a moving dot! I picked up the field-glasses, and my loneliness lifted like a flash. A human being was tramping across the desert toward me. My first thought was that Jim had had an accident the day before, and had been obliged to walk to us, and I wished I had done without the coffee at breakfast. Jim would be in bad shape and would need it more than I. But why should he come without water?

The moving figure made the slowest sort of progress, and time and again sat down to rest. I began to worry and wonder if Jim were badly hurt. And then I saw that it was not Jim, but a woman! My excitement grew. The nearest woman, I had thought, was at Sunset, a five days' journey away. Nearer, very slowly nearer, she drew, and at last I saw through the glasses that it was a little girl! She was not far away when I discovered this. With an exclamation of pity, I emptied a cup of water from the big canteen into my little one, slung it over my shoulder, and pulling on my sombrero, started down the trail.

When within hailing distance of the child, I called:

"I saw you had no canteen, so I came to meet you with just a little drink!"

The little girl made no reply, but I saw her put her hands to her eyes, and when I came up to her she was sobbing. I was panting, for I had begun to run when I saw her hands go to her face. "Here, dear, drink!" I cried, and pulling down her hands, thrust the canteen into them.

But to my surprise, she hugged it to her without drinking. "No!" she sobbed. "Save it for mother! Oh, won't you come and help us?"

She was a pretty child, about ten years old, with masses of curly brown hair and big brown eyes, the look in which went straight to my heart. "Your mother!" I exclaimed. "Where is she?"

The child pointed back over the weary distance she had come.

"Back there. The horses ran away with all the water and everything. And mother is so sick she can't move. So I left her there and came on for help. Miles away we could see your white tent."

While the child talked she was trying to pull me back over the trail, but I stood firm. "First," I said, "you must drink, and then we must go up to the tent and get more water. How long is it since you have eaten anything?"

"Since yesterday noon," answered the child. "The horses ran away when we were going into camp for night."

"But you and your mother aren't taking a desert trip alone?" I cried, leading her into our tent. "What is your name?"

"Frieda," she said. "Yes, we are. Papa died last winter." Then little Frieda began to cry afresh. I hastily seated her at the table and held a cup of water to her lips. She drank it without drawing breath, and held out the cup for more. Then it was that I began to realize my frightful situation. Only a little over three quarts of water

left, and Billy would not return until the next morning! I poured Frieda another drink, but when she held the cup out for more, I shook my head.

"Wait till you've eaten," I said. I put some biscuits on the table, then opened a can of unsweetened blackberries. I dared give her no food which would add to her thirst. Frieda ate ravenously, while I stood thinking. Finally I took just half the water from the big canteen and poured it into mine. We must have some to return to. But three pints was a pitifully small amount for three people.

I remembered one of Jim Hasbrook's stories, in which he told of eating whole cans of tomatoes in lieu of water. He had found his thirst greatly alleviated. So I opened some cans of tomatoes and strained the liquid into another canteen. Then I made up a bundle of biscuits and a can of blackberries for the girl to carry. Frieda watched me wonderingly. As I explained to her my dearth of water, her little face paled under the desert blistering. But I laughed at her, and such is the marvellous vitality of childhood, she was refreshed and ready to start when I was. Billy had both the horses, and whether Frieda's mother would be able to tramp the dreadful stretch of desert to our tent I could not tell. From what Frieda told me, I inferred that the sick woman must be about two hours' tramp from us.

We had no difficulty in returning over Frieda's trail. There in the pathless desert her little footprints were as plainly discernible as if the sand were snow.

Little by little I gathered from the child the story of their hapless mission to the desert. They were New Hampshire people. Years before, her father, who had been prospecting in Arizona, had returned east, to raise money to continue work on a mine that he had found. He failed to get it, and had died there the previous winter, poor and embittered. All that he left were his mining papers, and with them his wife and little girl had started to find the mine. As Frieda told me this, I looked at the little blue-veined hand I held, and could have groaned in pity. Strength and knowledge are needed to fight the desert.

We had been on the trail about two hours when Frieda gave a hoarse little shout. "Mother! mother!" she cried. "Here I am, mother!" and she ran toward a blanket that was thrown over a clump of cactus.

I reached the pathetic little tent, and dropped to my knees to peer beneath it. There, panting, emaciated, lay a grown-up Frieda. The child had crawled under the shelter and was unscrewing the canteen top. I gave the mother a whole cupful of water.

When at last she smiled up at us I said, "I'm the only human being near, just now, but we shall get along famously."

"Of course we shall!" she panted. And I loved her at once. Frieda and I soaked some biscuits in the blackberry juice and fed them bit by bit to the mother, and soon her terrible pallor gave place to a more earthly glow.

"We must start back," I said. "Do you think you can walk from here to that crooked cactus?" The little woman nodded bravely.

As we lifted her to her feet, I, so tall and strong, felt a lump come into my throat at her lightness. But we started gaily. Frieda led the way, with one of the canteens, and I, with the other, followed with one arm round the sick woman. How hot it was! The heat waves beat in our faces, blistered our cheeks and parched our lips. The sun half-blinded us. We had hardly reached the crooked cactus before Frieda's mother sank to the ground. She was panting but smiling, very tiny and girlish, like a make-believe mother. "I'm such a useless piece of brie-a-brac!" she whispered. "No, you are not useless!" cried Frieda, stamping her foot. "You're— you're my only mother!"

We started again, this time toward a red outcropping of stone. But before we reached this the thing came that I had feared. Powdery puffs of sand began to whip through the air. Down the desert from the north a sand-storm was approaching. For one moment I saw black with fear, scarcely a cup of water left a sick woman a delicate child, nearly four miles to go! But there

were some things in our favor. It would be half an hour before the storm would be fully on us. There were two quarts of tomato juice hanging from my shoulder, and I had youth and strength.

The frail creature clinging to me stumbled on, bravely and uncomplainingly. I determined to make my best time before the storm closed in, while I could still see the blessed white fleck of our tent against the horizon. So I halted, gave my canteen to Frieda, explained the need for haste, and then lifted the little mother in my arms. She was no taller than Frieda, and much lighter. She protested against my action until she was exhausted, but I only gave a panting laugh, and hurried on. Yet my strength was only a woman's strength, after all, and our rests during that time were frequent and very long. We exhausted the water supply.

The storm grew worse. Although we tied our handkerchiefs round our mouths, our tongues still tasted alkali. The tent was visible only during occasional rifts in the storm that showed it to us, white and steadfast in the wrack. I knew that if these rifts should cease we should be lost as soon as Frieda's and my footprints were covered by the drifting sand. The tomato juice, although like vinegar on our cracked lips, was refreshing. But my boasted strength proved not so great. The little woman, lying, with closed eyelids, limp across my chest, soon seemed so heavy that my trembling arms could scarcely hold her.

Looking at the child in front of me, her curls all sand-powdered, her little back bowed to the wind, moving on so sturdily, without complaint, I could have cried out against my weakness of spirit. If I could only rest for five minutes, for one minute! If I could only close my sand-tortured eyes, only ease my aching back! The child ahead of me, however, tramped on and on, brave not only in the desert storm, but in the face of an adversity such as I had never known.

Then we lost the footprints! I did not dare to move until a lull came in the storm. Frieda's mother lay flat in the sand, and the girl and I crouched beside her. We were too exhausted to speak. The heat was unbelievable. The sweat ran in strange rivulets on our dust-smearred cheeks. The wind increased and buffeted us, while the stinging sand flayed our faces until they felt raw. And then there came the rift.

I lifted the helpless figure, and half-dragging and half-carrying it, ran through the sanddrifts until the gray veil closed down again. Again we crouched in the sand and waited. The woman now seemed half-conscious only; I dared not stop giving her the greater share of the tomato juice. I had fairly to force Frieda into taking an occasional sip. She wanted her mother to have her share also.

For an hour we struggled thus. We ran when the rifts showed us the tent. Panting and coughing, we rested in the gray gloom when the storm closed in. At last came a moment when the child, watching her mother's white face, put her own little hands to her eyes and began to sob.

"My little mother!" she cried. "My own little mother!" And then, despite my years, I began to sob, too. But the mother did not heed us. She was murmuring to herself of other things—of streams and green hills in New Hampshire, perhaps. I put my arms under her, ready for the next rift. And it came, showing the tent very, very near!

Running, falling, struggling on again, we reached the rough outcropping rocks on which the shack stood, and then, sure of the way, we scrambled to safety. To my astonishment, the flaps were down, and all was snug for the storm. As we entered, Jim Hasbrook greeted us! He took the woman from us with a gasp of astonishment, and laid her on a bunk. A barrel of water was standing in the corner, and in a wonderfully short time mother and daughter were refreshed and asleep on the two bunks, while Jim and I sat on the provision-boxes and talked in low tones.

Jim had tipped over his barrel of water the day before, and had had to return for more. He was interested, as only a lonely desert-dweller can be, in the story of the two strangers.

At intervals he rose and went over to the two bunks, and with folded arms, looked down on the occupants. Once I



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