

# WHEN GOD FORGOT

By  
**WELLS  
HAWKS**

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THE sun burned like a yellow flame before the bellows. It hung so low in the desolate sky that it seemed almost within reach. Its rays burned with the fury of a furnace, and all earth beneath was parched and withered. The alkali plain was white and motionless. The clouds were leaden. Rising on one side was a great barrier of rock, gray, creased and chiselled by the changeless centuries. Beyond, immeasurable stretches of plain, must white not stifling, heat flaming and scorching.

In the distance the heat rose from plain to sky like a cloud of steam. No tree, no bush, not even a leaf—nothing but the white choking earth. One who has crossed the seas has seen the rolling waves change from day to day, from green to blue and blue to green, sometimes capped with white, again as placid as an inland lake; but this was changeless plain, drear and cursed. Far up the wall of rock there was a place which looked as if some dripping molten mass had burned and seared a crevice. Closer, and it was a tiny stream of water, hot and steaming, falling to a pool that seethed and bubbled like a witch's caldron.

Night came and the glare and heat of the sun was gone. A swift wind rushed across the plain, driving the dust before it like a cloud. The moon came out, but its silver light seemed but to mock. Stars twinkled from the deadened sky, but the light was dim and all unmeaning. Day again, and, as if there had been no yesterday, the sun burned with a new fury. And with it all there was an awful silence, a quiet so dread that all life seemed to have ceased and gone away, leaving but a plain of driving dust and hellish heat.

And into this there came a man. Walking with a slow, uncertain step of near defeated nature, he crouched close to the rock to keep from the withering heat that burned the dust until he walked a path of fire. His face was worn and haggard—thirst and hunger stalked along as his companions—but still shining in his eyes was the light of hope.

"I am tired of the world," he said to himself. "I will seek one of the lonely places of earth where man does not disturb, where I may live in companionship with my soul."

He had believed that those who lived nearest nature were nearest God, and he was in God's desert. He leaned against the rock and drew his hand across his parched lips. His temples throbbed and he could hear his heart beat like one hears an engine in a mighty storm at sea. He scanned the plain—dust, heat beyond man's measuring. He looked far up the rocky wall and the sun's rays glanced from it like the flames from blazing coals. He gazed into the sky, it was meaningless and pitiless. The silence closed about him like doors of iron. No other thing in all the world but him seemed alive. He closed his eyes and a great heart deep sigh shook his body. Then looking, scanning, searching the chartless, mapless, unknowable plain before him, he exclaimed:

"It is the country God forgot," and as he spoke a moving, indefinable something came before him in the distance. He threw himself to the ground and watched this dot of black, intensified by the limitless white, grow to shape. It grew, it moved, and came close, and he lifted his face from the dust and exclaimed, almost aloud:

"It is a man!"

Still prostrate in the scorching dust, he watched the figure which, solitary on the horizon, appeared as if a giant. A man another man, and in this place of death! He felt his blood grow warm. Days had grown into weeks and he had not spoken to a soul. He knew not now the sound of his own voice. Still he watched and the man came nearer and every moment of the watching seemed a day to him. Nearer, nearer he came, and then like a figure thrown upon a white canvas the other man appeared to him who lay prostrate in the sand. He was tall and straight as the mountain pine. His face was hard and his features stood out like the carvings of a sculpture. The muscles on his arms were like cords. His eyes were like lantern lights, but the flesh was drawn and they were sunken deep into the sockets. His hair was like the wing of a raven. He was naked but for the breechcloth about his loins. He stopped for a moment and raised his hand to shield the blinding sun from his eyes. The man lying in the dust watched him. Suddenly his heart almost stopped and he trembled and grew cold, for before him and staring into his eyes, with eyes that had the fire of a panther, stood an Indian. He looked still closer and from the left wrist hung a chain, the broken shackle which had once held both arms together. The Indian stood motionless. The man rose slowly and facing the other stared at him in silence. And in this quiet there came into the being of this white man a thought, not from the mind, for it seemed paralyzed, but from the soul, and as it rose and filled his being it grew into articulate speech, and if it be so that soul can prompt the mind this was the thought:

"O, Thou God, who didst create, this meeting is for Thee. The soul of the wild and the soul that knows Thy will, and they are both of Thy making."



HE THREW HIMSELF ON THE GROUND AND WATCHED THIS SPOT OF BLACK

The Indian touched his lips.

"Water, water," he said.

The man touched his own lips and exclaimed:

"Water, water."

In all the silence of the plain their voices sounded like the thunder and a thousand echoes smote the rock.

"Brother," spoke the white man.

"Me Apache—brother to you," repeated the Indian, and he laid his hand on the white man's shoulder.

The white man's eyes were turned toward the broken shackle on the Indian's wrist.

"Me once son of mighty, swift as wind! Me kill brother—no name—me outcast."

The white man answered with a look of terror. The Indian saw it, and, taking his hand, said:

"Me friend."

Day passed into the twilight of the plains. For miles they had journeyed side by side. Athirst and hungered, they leaned on each other. The desert grew deeper, and the dead fly from above the rocks, but it kept on in hurried flight as if aware of the lifelessness and deathliness of all beneath. They had stopped in the journey and with a rock the white man had beaten upon the iron handcuff to release the wrist of his companion. And now near night he broke from the wall a piece of rock and laying the arm against the barrier beat against the iron. Once he missed the stroke and the jagged edge of the stone cut into the flesh and warm red blood spurted out on the brown man. The Indian never moved, but the white man tore a piece from his shirt and bound

up the wound, but the shackle still remained.

Then night came; not softly, as it does in the land of the living, but dropping its mantle all at once like one who suddenly falls into the black gloom of a pit. The white man and the Indian, weak and exhausted, lay side by side in the dust.

The silence of a sepulchre, but for their breathing, fell about them. They lay in the depths of the desert. The white man threw out his arm and his fingers touched something that lived. He turned and looked; it was the green leaf of a twig, parched and withered. He was about to pluck it from the earth when the Indian grasped his arm. The white man folded his arms, and the Indian closed his eyes. Memories of other days came into the wakeful moments of the white man, and before him a vision passed of those who lived where God had smiled upon His earth. The fleeting dream almost grazed him. Then nature took the struggle, and hunger and thirst attacked. His tongue seemed as if made of stone. He felt his body, and it was shrivelled and worn. The Indian slept. The white man by him lay with open eyes and watched the savag. A terrible thought came into his being. He felt weak and helpless. There seemed nothing before them but the dust and the heat. Was it death? There in the awful silence the white man lifted himself to his knees and, holding up his arms to heaven, prayed:

"Father, I call to Thee from the country Thou hast forgot. Thou didst make green and beautiful all else. Out of the bounty of nature the sun has warmed and the dew has moistened. O God, in this place

of death two souls of Thy making perish. God, God, can You forget?"

The man bowed his head and covered his face with his hands. Then, lifting his arms, he cried aloud:

"Father, Father!"

Then, weak and shaking with fear, he fell prostrate on the earth. The Indian moved. Then, rising, he stood erect, and with outstretched arms and face lifted to the lowering skies he cried with the voice of a trumpet:

"Father of the white man, Thou say Father too!"

Then he fell to the earth.

The echoes hurled their voices against the rock as if a thousand tongues had spoken. Still lying on the earth, the two men were quiet and motionless and not another living thing breathed or uttered a sound. The moon hung cold and ated like a dead eye to the night.

With his face pressed close into the burning sand the white man, all but unconscious, seemed to cling to one thought that burned into his soul like a coal of fire. And it was this:

"Did He hear—can, oh, can He forget?"

Toward the east the clouds grew a darker blue and a lighter wave covered the face of the moon. Again the clouds changed to almost ashen hue, and as the veil passed from before the moon its silver was gone and it had a tinge of red. The breeze that had kept the sand blowing increased almost to a gale. The clouds grew darker and a deeper red came to the moon. Once the Indian lifted his face and, shielding his eyes, gazed at the solitary light in the heavens.

"It is the anger of the Great Father," he gasped, and with a sigh that shook his giant being he again threw himself to the earth.

Deep, rolling groans, as if thunder, sounded far away. The clouds grew blacker, but streaked with a dull, forbidding drab. The moon still reddened. Presently there was a fearful peal of thunder and all light was gone. The desert was in darkness, close and all enveloping like death itself. Then, as if some mighty levitation standing upon the rugged hills had dashed a torch, a great wave of light passed over the plain, so white, so penetrating that each grain of sand and each bit of alkali stood out like a jewel.

Then darkness. From beyond the wall of rock came a rumbling, louder and deeper until it seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth. And then into that awful place there came a strange light from the moon of red. Like the beacon of a lighthouse it sent forth a solid ray of light that seemed to rest fixed and steady upon the two immovable and almost lifeless bodies in the sand.

Then, as if a wave at sea had wandered from its portals and reached the desert, the plain moved gently, rocked softly. Another peal of thunder and the rolling of the earth grew more violent. One great shock seemed to send it rolling along like a tempestuous sea. It disappeared, and with the noise of a hursting of a shell there sprang from the earth a stream of water, hot and boiling, and with it clouds of steam. In a little while the steam was gone and the water fell cool and dripping upon the plain like a fountain. A few drops of crystal fluid fell upon the men

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