



DESERT SOLITAIRE

A Season in the Wilderness

by EDWARD
ABBEE

DRAWINGS BY PETER PARNALL

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canyon walls and in the air the desert birds and desert bugs resumed their inexplicable careers. A whiptail lizard scurried past my feet. A primrose opened its petals a few inches above the still-hot sand. Knees shaking, I stepped toward the horse, pulled the rope hackamore out of my shirt—to Moon-Eye it must have looked as if I were pulling out my intestines—and threw the thing with all the strength I had left straight at him. It slithered over his back like a hairy snake, scaring him into a few quick steps. Again he stopped, the eye on me.

Enough. I turned my back on the horse and went to the canteen, picked it up. The water was almost too hot to drink but I drank it. Drank it all, except a few drops which I poured on my fingers and dabbed on my aching forehead. Refusing to look again at the spectre horse, I slung the canteen over my shoulder and started homeward, trudging over the clashing stones and through the sand down-canyon toward my pony and Salt Creek.

Once, twice, I thought I heard footsteps following me but when I looked back I saw nothing.



DOWN THE RIVER

The beavers had to go and build another goddamned dam on the Colorado. Not satisfied with the enormous silt trap and evaporation tank called Lake Mead (back of Boulder Dam) they have created another even bigger, even more destructive, in Glen Canyon. This reservoir of stagnant water will not irrigate a single square foot of land or supply water for a single village; its only justification is the generation of cash through electricity for the indirect subsidy of various real estate speculators, cottongrowers and sugarbeet magnates in Arizona, Utah and Colorado; also, of

course, to keep the engineers and managers of the Reclamation Bureau off the streets and out of trouble.

The impounded waters form an artificial lake named Powell, supposedly to honor but actually to dishonor the memory, spirit and vision of Major John Wesley Powell, first American to make a systematic exploration of the Colorado River and its environs. Where he and his brave men once lined the rapids and glided through silent canyons two thousand feet deep the motorboats now smoke and whine, scumming the water with cigarette butts, beer cans and oil, dragging the water skiers on their endless rounds, clockwise.

PLAY SAFE, read the official signboards; SKI ONLY IN CLOCKWISE DIRECTION; LET'S ALL HAVE FUN TOGETHER! With regulations enforced by water cops in government uniforms. Sold. Down the river.

Once it was different there. I know, for I was one of the lucky few (there could have been thousands more) who saw Glen Canyon before it was drowned. In fact I saw only a part of it but enough to realize that here was an Eden, a portion of the earth's original paradise. To grasp the nature of the crime that was committed imagine the Taj Mahal or Chartres Cathedral buried in mud until only the spires remain visible. With this difference: those man-made celebrations of human aspiration could conceivably be reconstructed while Glen Canyon was a living thing, irreplaceable, which can never be recovered through any human agency.

(Now, as I write these words, the very same coalition of persons and avarice which destroyed Glen Canyon is preparing a like fate for parts of the Grand Canyon.)

What follows is the record of a last voyage through a place we knew, even then, was doomed.

One day in late June Ralph Newcomb and I arrive on the shore of the Colorado River at a site known variously as Hite, White Canyon or Dandy Crossing, about one hundred and fifty miles upriver from the new dam already under construction. In my pickup truck, badly shaken by a long drive down one of the roughest roads in Utah, we carry camping gear, enough grub for

two weeks, and two little rubber boats folded up in suitcase-size cartons.

We spend half a day on the shore, preparing our boats and ourselves for the journey. The river looks terribly immense and powerful, swollen with snow-melt from the western slope of the Rockies and from the Wind River Range in Wyoming, a veritable Mississippi of a river rolling between redrock walls. Our rubber boats, after we inflate them, seem gaudy, flimsy and much too small. Inevitably we've forgotten a few things, among them life jackets, and I can't help thinking that maybe we should make the trip some other time. One of the things that worries me, besides the missing life jackets and the obvious fragility of our Made-in-Japan vessels, is the fact that Ralph has only one good leg. He can walk but not hike; he can swim but not very far.

However, I keep my cowardly doubts to myself, waiting for Ralph to speak of them first. But he doesn't. Imperturbable as the river itself, tranquil as the sky overhead, he puffs on his corncob pipe, limping back and forth between the truck and the launching point with canned goods and bedrolls.

We divide our supplies, mostly bacon and beans, into equal parts, bind them in canvas and rope, and stow them under the bow seats; in case one boat is lost we will still have survival rations left in the other. Ralph has also had sense enough to bring along a bit of line and a few fishhooks—the river is lively with catfish, as we'll soon discover. We expect to spend about ten days on the river and will not see any human habitation, after Hite, until we reach the dam site a hundred and fifty miles downstream.

At last we're ready. I push my boat onto the water of an inlet and climb aboard. The floor of the boat is nothing but a single layer of rubberized canvas and sags like jelly beneath my weight. Sitting there I can feel the coolness of the water through the canvas and my blue jeans. But it floats, this toy boat, and I can find no more excuses for delay. Since Ralph has a camera and wants pictures of the launching I am obliged to go first. I paddle out of the quiet inlet and onto the brown silt-rich bosom of the Colorado.

This is my first experience with a rubber boat and I discover at once that a single canoe-type paddle is not appropriate. The

shallow-drafted almost weightless boat tends to turn in circles, pivoting beneath my seat; in order to make any headway I have to shift the paddle quickly from side to side, an awkward and tiring procedure. Staying clear of the main current, drifting slowly past the shore, I paddle in circles and wait for Ralph to catch up.

He comes alongside. We lash the boats together, side by side, which makes not only for better companionship and ease of conversation but also improves the maneuverability: Ralph paddles on one side, I on the other, giving us some control over our direction.

We paddle our double craft into the current, ship paddles, lean back against the stern seats, which make good backrests and nothing much else, and smoke and talk. My anxieties have vanished and I feel instead a sense of cradlelike security, of achievement and joy, a pleasure almost equivalent to that first entrance—from the outside—into the neck of the womb.

We are indeed enjoying a very intimate relation with the river: only a layer of fabric between our bodies and the water. I let my arm dangle over the side and trail my hand in the flow. Something dreamlike and remembered, that sensation called *déjà vu*—when was I here before? A moment of groping back through the maze, following the thread of a unique emotion, and then I discover the beginning. I am fulfilling at last a dream of childhood and one as powerful as the erotic dreams of adolescence—*floating down the river*. Mark Twain, Major Powell, every man that has ever put forth on flowing water knows what I mean.

A human shout reaches our ears from the west shore. A man is waving at us from the landing of old Hite's ferry. A warning? A farewell? He shouts once more but his words are unintelligible. Cheerfully waving back, we drift past him and beyond his ken without the faintest intimation of regret. We shall not see another of the tool-making breed for a long time and we could not care less.

Misanthropy? Shakespeare could say

Man delights not me,

No, nor woman neither. . . .

And Raleigh, too,

I wish I loved the human race,
I wish I loved its silly face.

And Jeffers:

Be in nothing so moderate
as in love of man.

But no, this is not at all what we feel at this moment, not at all what I mean. In these hours and days of dual solitude on the river we hope to discover something quite different, to renew our affection for ourselves and the human kind in general by a temporary, legal separation from the mass. And in what other way is it possible for those not saints? And who wants to be a saint? Are saints human?

Cutting the bloody cord, that's what we feel, the delirious exhilaration of independence, a rebirth backward in time and into primeval liberty, into freedom in the most simple, literal, primitive meaning of the word, the only meaning that really counts. The freedom, for example, to commit murder and get away with it scot-free, with no other burden than the jaunty halo of conscience. I look at my old comrade Newcomb in a new light and feel a wave of love for him; I am not going to kill him and he—I trust—is not going to kill me.

(My God! I'm thinking, what incredible *shit* we put up with most of our lives—the *domestic* routine (same old wife *every* night), the stupid and useless and degrading *jobs*, the *insufferable* arrogance of elected officials, the crafty *cheating* and the *slimy* advertising of the businessmen, the tedious wars in which we kill our buddies instead of our *real* enemies back home in the capital, the foul, diseased and *hideous* cities and towns we live in, the constant *petty* tyranny of automatic washers and automobiles and TV machines and telephones—! ah *Christ!* I'm thinking, at the same time that I'm waving goodbye to that hollering idiot on the shore, what *intolerable* garbage and what utterly *useless crap* we bury ourselves in day by day, while patiently enduring at the same time the creeping strangulation of the clean white *collar* and the rich but *modest* four-in-hand garrote!)

Such are my—you wouldn't call them thoughts, would you?—such are my feelings, a mixture of revulsion and delight, as we float away on the river, leaving behind for a while all that we most heartily and joyfully detest. That's what the first taste of the wild does to a man, after having been too long penned up in the city. No wonder the Authorities are so anxious to smother the wilderness under asphalt and reservoirs. They know what they're doing; their lives depend on it, and all their rotten institutions. Play safe. Ski only in clockwise direction. Let's all have fun together.

We drift on; the current seems to accelerate a bit as the mighty river squeezes between great red walls of sandstone rising on either side to heights of a thousand feet or more, cliffs so sheer and smooth even a bird could find no perch there. One little white cloud of dubious substantiality hovers above in the strip of blue between the canyon walls. Gazing up at it I think I hear, as in a dream, a confused rumble and roar, the sound of a freight train highballing down a mountain grade. Rapids.

Actually there are not supposed to be true rapids in Glen Canyon—only "riffles." But it's been a dry winter, the river is low, the rocks high. To us these foamy waves look like rapids.

"White water ahead," says Ralph quietly, with a sort of complacent satisfaction, as if he had invented the phenomenon all by himself. And instead of doing anything about it he reloads his cheap pipe.

We're rounding the first major bend in the canyon. From ahead comes the sound of the rapids—toneless vibrations growing stronger, what acoustical specialists call "white noise." Like the sound of a waterfall. Supposedly a blissful and sleep-inducing impression on edgy nerves.

"I didn't know we'd hit rapids so soon," I say to Ralph. I open up my map, the only one we've brought with us, a Texaco road map of the state of Utah, and study the tributaries of the Colorado. "That must be where Trachyte Creek comes in," I explain; "if we had life jackets with us it might be a good idea to put them on now."

Actually our ignorance and carelessness are more deliberate than accidental; we are entering Glen Canyon without having learned much about it beforehand because we wish to see it as Powell and his party had seen it, not knowing what to expect, making anew

the discoveries of others. If the first rapids are a surprise to us it is simply because we had never inquired if there were any on this stretch of the river.

Anyway, there's no turning back now. After the entrance, the inescapable spasm. Between narrowing walls the river rushes at increasing speed. Our little boats bounce over choppy waves toward the whitecaps that now are visible, churning to foam around glistening wet boulders strewn across our course, boulders which seem to rise and fall as we race toward them on the bounding current.

There is no longer time enough to be frightened. I have a glimpse of the willows on the shore sweeping past, the only available gauge of our velocity, before we grab the paddles, settle deep into the boats and go to work trying to keep our bows headed into the waves.

Not that it makes much difference. The spray hits our faces and closes vision, the waves come aboard, in a moment we are soaking wet and spinning through the heart of the turmoil, bouncing off one rock and into the next. A great shining boulder looms before us, unavoidable; Ralph's boat slams upon it and hangs there for a second or two until my boat, still roped to his, swings round in the spillway and pulls his free. Paddling furiously we right the boats and face the next obstacle, skin past it safely, bounce in and out of a few more troughs and suddenly find ourselves in the clear.

The waves smooth off as the river broadens through a wider channel, resuming its serene and steady flow. We've run our first rapids and are still alive. The boats are drifting along half full of water and we are drenched but the pipe in Ralph's teeth is still burning, so quickly did it all happen.

Happy, exultant, we rest for a while in the loggy boats before bailing them out. If this is the worst Glen Canyon has to offer, we agree, give us more of the same.

In a few minutes the river obliges; a second group of rapids appears, wild as the first. Forewarned and overcautious this time, despite ourselves, we paddle too far out of the main current and end up aground in the shallows. We have to climb out of the boats and drag them over a pebble-covered bar until we again reach deep water. Hard work for game-legged Newcomb but he makes no complaint.

Back in the boats, sprawled out comfortably on our baggage, nothing lost but the road map—and there are no gas stations in Glen Canyon anyhow—we drift onward without further effort, paddles inboard and at rest. The surface of the river is wide and gleaming, slick as glass; an immaculate stillness pervades the canyon, pointed up deftly now and then by a gurgling eddy near the shore, the call of a bird.

Smoking peacefully, we watch the golden light of afternoon climb the eastern wall as the sun goes down beyond the rim to the west. An early evening breeze rustles through the willows ashore and we hear again the tinkling music of canyon wrens—like little silver bells falling across a glockenspiel—no, like wilderness lorelei—calling down to us from the rimrock, sweetest of all bird songs in the canyon country.

Other voices also speak: queer squawks and honkings from the thickets, sounds we cannot identify until we see, a little later, a great blue heron flap its wings among the lavender plumes of a tamarisk tree.

"Ralph Newcomb," I say, "do you believe in God?"

"Who?" he says.

"Who?"

"Who."

"You said it," I say.

An owl. Ravens. More canyon wrens. The splash of fish breaking the surface. Lizards palpitating on the rocks. And once we see, between us and the far shore, something sleek and dark following its nose upstream—a beaver. The same that lured the mountain men—Robidoux, Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith—into these parts more than a century ago.

The river bears us quietly along, the canyon fills with shadow and coolness. The sky above turns a deeper darker blue as the last of the sunlight glows on the domes and turrets and elephant-backs of the Navajo sandstone above the Wingate cliffs. We begin to think about food and a camp for the night.

When a beach of white sand comes in sight, backed with a stand of green young willows, we get out the paddles and work toward it, paddling strenuously across the current. As will usually happen, we are on the wrong side of the river when we want to make a landing. And it's a wide river this time of the year. And

with Ralph on the upstream side of our double boat, I have to paddle twice as hard as he does just to keep even.

Closing in on the beach, I jump out and wade ashore, towing the boats onto the sand. We tether them to a clump of willows, unload and prepare to camp. My bedroll is a little wet but everything else, well wrapped in tarpaulins, is dry, and our feelings of pleasure and satisfaction are as great as our appetite for supper.

It is a beautiful evening, calm and free. We build a small fire of dead willow branches and propitiate the gods of river and canyon with the incense of woodsmoke, an offering with which, being intangible beings, they are content; we the worshippers, of baser stuff, fry and eat the actual beans, corned beef and eggs. A crude meal, no doubt, but the best of all sauces is hunger. To us it seems a shade better than anything available at Sardi's or Delmonico's. What's more we aren't grveled for leg room.

We make the coffee with river water, dipping a canful from among the rocks and letting it set for a time until the silt settles to the bottom. For entertainment we have the murmur of the river, the drone of cicada and amphibians, the show of nighthawks plunging through the evening gulping bugs. Afterwards we sit by the fire until the fire gives out, listening, smoking, analyzing socioeconomic problems:

"Look here, Newcomb," I say, "do you think it's fitting that you and I should be here in the wilds, risking our lives amidst untold hardships, while our wives and loved ones lounge at their ease back in Albuquerque, enjoying the multifold comforts, benefits and luxuries of modern contemporary twentieth century American urban civilization?"

"Yes," he says.

I rebuild the fire and drape my sleeping bag above it on a willow bough, smoking it good and proper. When it's ready I scoop two shallow holes in the sand, one for the hipbones and one for the shoulder blades, lay out the sleeping bag and turn in. Ralph, peaceful as a hanging judge, is already sound asleep. For myself I choose to listen to the river for a while, thinking river thoughts, before joining the night and the stars.

Morning on the river: up with the dawn, before the sun, Ralph still sleeping, strange invisible birds calling and croaking from the

bush, I wash last night's dishes in the muddy river. And why not? That same force which corraded a gorge five thousand feet deep through the Kaibab Plateau will also serve to scour the grease from the tin plates of the Abbey-Newcomb Expedition. The Colorado has no false pride.

Then breakfast: bacon and eggs, fried potatoes, coffee. The unknown birds continue to creak and chirrup. Some I begin to recognize—a mockingbird, killdeer, Mexican finches. Also the usual and prevalent canyon wrens and a few magpies and ravens. Ralph awakes, stirred to life by the aroma of food, takes a bath in the river, combs and pomades his hair, his long black evil shepherd's beard. We eat.

Afterwards as we pack and load the boats, sun coming up over the rim, we begin to feel the familiar terrible desert thirst. We drink the last of the spring water in our canteens and, still thirsty, look to the river, that sombre flow the color of burnt sienna, raw umber, *muy colorado*, too thin to plow—as the Mormons say—and too thick to drink. But we drink it; we'll drink plenty of it before this voyage is over.

The sun rises higher, fierce on our faces; the western wall blazes like hot iron. We shove off, keeping to the shady side of the canyon, and commence the second day of our journey.

Why, we ask ourselves, floating onward in effortless peace deeper into Eden, why not go on like this forever? True, there are no women here (a blessing in disguise?), no concert halls, no books, bars, galleries, theaters or playing fields, no cathedrals of learning or high towers of finance, no wars, elections, traffic jams or other amusements, none of the multinefarian delights of what Ralph calls syphilization. But on the other hand most anything else a man could desire is here in abundance: catfish in the mainstream and venison in the side canyons, cottonwoods for shade and shelter, juniper for fuel, mossy springs (not always accessible) for thirst, and the ever-changing splendor of sky, cliffs, mesas and river for the needs of the spirit.

If necessary, we agree, a man could live out his life in this place, once he had adjusted his nervous system to the awful quietude, the fearful tranquility. The silence—meaning here not the total absence of sound, for the river and its canyons are bright with a native music—but rather the total absence of confusion and

clamor, that would be the problem. What Churchill spoke of as "bloody peace"—could we bear it for very long? Yet having known this, how could we ever return to the other?

"Newcomb," I say, "you're condemned. You are doomed."

"So are you," he says.

"Let's drink to that. Where's that rum we were going to bring along?"

"Stowed with the life jackets."

"And the case of beer we were going to tow instead of a dinghy?"

"We drank it all back in Albuquerque."

The thirst. I dip a can in the river under my elbow and place it on the gunwale (so to speak) of my little rubber boat, giving the mud in the water time to settle out. The river at this point is so steady and serene that the can of drinking water hardly trembles, though it's balanced on a rounded surface.

The current carries us on its back smoothly south and west toward the Gulf of California, the Sea of Cortez, but with many a wonderful meander on the way. Occasionally we lay a paddle over the side, drop the blade in the water and with the slightest, most infinitesimal of exertions turn the double boat for a view in a different direction, saving ourselves the trouble—somewhat greater—of turning our heads or craning our necks.

In this dreamlike voyage any unnecessary effort seems foolish. Even vulgar, one might say. The river itself sets the tone: utterly relaxed, completely at ease, it fulfills its mighty purpose without aim or effort. Only the slow swing of the canyon walls overhead and the illusory upstream flow of willows, tamarisk and boulders on the shore reveal and indicate the sureness of our progress to the sea.

We pass an opening in the eastern wall, the mouth of a tributary stream. Red Canyon Creek? There's no telling and it certainly doesn't matter. No rapids here; only a subtle roiling of the water, ripples corresponding to the ripples on the river's sandy bed. Beyond the side canyon the walls rise up again, slick and monolithic, in color a blend of pink, buff, yellow, orange, overlaid in part with a glaze of "desert varnish" (iron oxide) or streaked in certain places with vertical draperies of black organic stains, the residue from plant life beyond the rim and from the hanging

gardens that flourish in the deep grottoes high on the walls. Some of those alcoves are like great amphitheatres, large as the Hollywood Bowl, big enough for God's own symphony orchestra.

When the sun stands noon-high between the walls we take our lunch, on board and under way, of raisins and oranges and beef jerky and the cool cloudy river water with its rich content of iron and minerals, of radium, uranium, vanadium and who knows what else. We have no fear of human pollution, for the nearest upstream town is Moab, pop. 5000, one hundred miles away. (Blessed Utah!)

In any case, when a man must be afraid to drink freely from his country's rivers and streams that country is no longer fit to live in. Time then to move on, to find another country or—in the name of Jefferson—to *make* another country. "The tree of liberty is nourished by the blood of tyrants."

(Or Bakunin: "There are times when creation can be achieved only through destruction. The urge to destroy is then a creative urge.")

After lunch we paddle hard across the current again to the west side of the river, seeking shade. Shade as precious as water. Without shade, in the middle of the river, we must cower beneath our hats, hammered by sun and by the reflected heat and blaze from the mirrorlike sheen of the river, the hot red walls of the canyon. Once in the shade we can rest, expand, unquint our eyes, and see.

All afternoon we glide onward, running a few slight rapids (slight compared to those of Cataract Canyon and Grand Canyon), smoking our tobacco, drinking the river, talking of anything and everything which comes to our heads, enjoying the delirium of bliss.

"Newcomb, for *god's sake* where do we come from?"

"Who knows."

"Where are we going?"

"Who cares."

"Who?"

"Who."

Words fail. I draw the rusty harmonica from my shirt pocket and play old folksongs and little tunes from the big symphonies—a thin sweet music that floats for a while like smoke in the vastness

all around us before fading into the silence, becoming forever a part of the wilderness. Yielding to nostalgia, I play the Sunday-morning songs out of my boyhood: *What a friend we have in Jesus*. . . *Learning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms*. . . . (diatonics for the soul) and:

We shall gather by the river,

The beautiful the beautiful-ah river . . .

We shall gather by the river

That flows (from?) the throne of the Lord. . . .

We make our second river camp this evening on another sandy beach near the mouth of a small creek which enters the main canyon from the northwest. Hall's Creek? Bullfrog Creek? Sometimes I regret not having brought a decent map. Not far below are what look and sound like the most ferocious of rapids, far worse than those we'd encountered on the first day. But tomorrow we'll worry.

We eat a good, simple, sandy supper of onion soup, beef and beans, tinned fruit and coffee. With the coffee we each have a pipeful of Newcomb's Mixture—half Bull Durham and half Prince Albert, the first for flavor and the second for bulk. Good cheap workingman's tobacco.

After the meal, while Ralph washes the dishes, I take the canteens and walk up the creek to get some spring water if possible. In the sand I see the prints of deer and coyote and bobcat, also a few cattle tracks, strays perhaps, fairly fresh. I find no spring within a reasonable distance and return to camp with empty canteens; there is water in the creek, of course, but we'd rather drink from the river than downstream from a Hereford cow.

Dark when I return, with only the light of Ralph's fire to guide me. As I brush away sticks and stones on the ground, making a place for my sleeping bag, I see a scorpion scuttle off, tail up and stinger ready. Newcomb and I meditate upon the red coals of the fire before turning in. Watching the sky I see shooting stars, blue-green and vivid, course across the narrow band of sky between the canyon walls. From downriver, as I fall asleep, comes the deep dull roar of the rapids, a sound which haunts the background of my dreams all night long.

We get up too late in the morning and have to cook breakfast in the awful heat of the sun. I burn the bacon and the wind blows sand in the pancake batter. But we're getting accustomed to sand—sand in our food and drink, in our teeth and eyes and whiskers, in our bedrolls and underwear. Sand becomes a part of our existence which, like breathing, we take for granted.

Boats loaded, we launch them into the river, still roped together side by side for the sake of comfort, conversation and safety. The rapids that worried my dreams turn out in daylight to be little more than a stretch of choppy waves and a few eroded boulders past which our boats slip without difficulty. If it were not so late in June, following a dry winter, the river consequently lower than usual, we would probably not notice these trivial ripples at all.

Down the river we drift in a kind of waking dream, gliding beneath the great curving cliffs with their tapestries of water stains, the golden alcoves, the hanging gardens, the seeps, the springs where no man will ever drink, the royal arches in high relief and the amphitheatres shaped like seashells. A sculptured landscape mostly bare of vegetation—earth in the nude.

We try the walls for echo values—

HELLO. . . .

Hello. . . .
hello. . . .

—and the sounds that come back to us, far off and fading, are so strange and lovely, transmuted by distance, that we fall into silence, enchanted.

We pass sandbars where stands of white-plumed cane and the lacy blossoms of young tamarisk wave in the breeze among driftwood logs aged to a silver finish by sun and wind and water. In the lateral canyons we sometimes see thickets of Gambel oak and occasional cottonwoods with gray elephantine trunks and bright clear-green leaves, delicately suspended, trembling in the air.

We pass too many of these marvelous side canyons, to my everlasting regret, for most of them will never again be wholly accessible to human eyes or feet. Their living marvels must remain forever unknown, to be drowned beneath the dead water of the coming reservoir, buried for centuries under mud.

Here we become aware of the chief disadvantage of our cheap

little rubber boats: far too often, when we see some place that demands unhurried exploration, the strong current will carry us past before we can paddle our awkward craft to the shore. You might think we could make a landing anyway and walk back up-river on the bank but in Glen Canyon, where the sandstone walls often rise straight up out of the water, this is sometimes impossible.

Furthermore we are lazy, indolent animals, Newcomb and I, half-mesmerized by the idyllic ease of our voyage; neither of us can seriously believe that very soon the beauty we are passing through will be lost. Instinctively we expect a miracle: the dam will never be completed, they'll run out of cement or slide rules, the engineers will all be shipped to Upper Volta. Or if these fail some unknown hero with a rucksack full of dynamite strapped to his back will descend into the bowels of the dam; there he will hide his high explosives where they'll do the most good, attach blasting caps to the lot and with angelic ingenuity link the caps to the official dam wiring system in such a way that when the time comes for the grand opening ceremony, when the President and the Secretary of the Interior and the governors of the Four-Corner states are all in full regalia assembled, the button which the President pushes will ignite the loveliest explosion ever seen by man, reducing the great dam to a heap of rubble in the path of the river. The splendid new rapids thus created we will name Floyd E. Dominy Falls, in honor of the chief of the Reclamation Bureau; a more suitable memorial could hardly be devised for such an esteemed and loyal public servant.

Idle, foolish, futile daydreams. While we dream and drift on the magic river the busy little men with their gargantuan appliances are hard at work, day and night, racing against the time when the people of America might possibly awake to discover something precious and irreplaceable about to be destroyed.

. . . Nature's polluted,
There's man in every secret corner of her
Doing damned, wicked deeds.

The ravens mock us as we float by. Unidentifiable birds call to us from the dark depths of the willow thickets—solitary calls from the wild. We see a second beaver, again like the first swimming up-

stream. All of our furred and feathered and hairy-hided cousins who depend for their existence upon the river and the lower canyons—the deer, the beaver, the coyotes, the wildcats and cougars, most of the birds and smaller animals—will soon be compelled to find new homes. If they can. For there is no land in the canyon country not already fully occupied, to the limit of the range, by their own kind. There are no vacant lots in nature.

At four or five miles per hour—much too fast—we glide on through the golden light, the heat, the crystalline quiet. At times, almost beneath us, the river stirs with sudden odd uproars as the silty bed below alters in its conformations. Then comfortably re-adjusted, the river flows on and the only noise, aside from that of scattered birds, is the ripple of the water, the gurgling eddies off the sandspits, the sound of Newcomb puffing on his old pipe.

We are deep in the wild now, deep in the lonely, sweet, remote, primeval world, far far from anywhere familiar to men and women. The nearest town from where we are would be Blanding in southeast Utah, close to the Colorado line, or maybe Hanksville in south-central Utah, north of the Henry Mountains, either place about a hundred miles away by foot and both on the far side of an uninhabited wilderness of canyons, mesas, clay hills, slickrock domes, sand flats, pinyon and juniper forests.

Wilderness. The word itself is music.

Wilderness, wilderness . . . We scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound of it draws all whose nerves and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned, deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination.

Why such allure in the very word? What does it really mean? Can wilderness be defined in the words of government officialdom as simply "A minimum of not less than 5000 contiguous acres of roadless area"? This much may be essential in attempting a definition but it is not sufficient; something more is involved.

Suppose we say that wilderness invokes nostalgia, a justified not merely sentimental nostalgia for the lost America our forefathers knew. The word suggests the past and the unknown, the womb of earth from which we all emerged. It means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time

intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit. Romance—but not to be dismissed on that account. The romantic view, while not the whole of truth, is a necessary part of the whole truth.

But the love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had the eyes to see. Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us—if only we were worthy of it.

Now when I write of paradise I mean *Paradise*, not the banal Heaven of the saints. When I write "paradise" I mean not only apple trees and golden women but also scorpions and tarantulas and flies, rattlesnakes and Gila monsters, sandstorms, volcanoes and earthquakes, bacteria and bear, cactus, yucca, bladderweed, ocotillo and mesquite, flash floods and quicksand, and yes—disease and death and the rotting of the flesh.

Paradise is not a garden of bliss and changeless perfection where the lions lie down like lambs (what would they eat?) and the angels and cherubim and seraphim rotate in endless idiotic circles, like clockwork, about an equally inane and ludicrous—however roseate—Unmoved Mover. (Play safe; worship only in clockwise direction; let's all have fun together.) That particular painted fantasy of a realm beyond time and space which Aristotle and the Church Fathers tried to palm off on us has met, in modern times, only neglect and indifference, passing on into the oblivion it so richly deserved, while the Paradise of which I write and wish to praise is with us yet, the here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand.

Some people who think of themselves as hard-headed realists would tell us that the cult of the wild is possible only in an atmosphere of comfort and safety and was therefore unknown to the pioneers who subdued half a continent with their guns and plows and barbed wire. Is this true? Consider the sentiments of Charles Marion Russell, the cowboy artist, as quoted in John Hutchens' *One Man's Montana*:

"I have been called a pioneer. In my book a pioneer is a man who comes to virgin country, traps off all the fur, kills off all the

wild meat, cuts down all the trees, grazes off all the grass, plows the roots up and strings ten million miles of wire. A pioneer destroys things and calls it civilization."

Others who endured hardships and privations no less severe than those of the frontiersmen were John Muir, H. D. Thoreau, John James Audubon and the painter George Catlin, all of whom wandered on foot over much of our country and found in it something more than merely raw material for pecuniary exploitation.

A sixth example and my favorite is, of course, Major J. Wesley Powell, one-armed veteran of the Civil War, sitting in a chair lashed to the deck of the small wooden boat with which he led his brave party into the unknown canyons of the Green, Grand and Colorado rivers. From the railroad town of Green River, Wyoming, to the mouth of the Grand Canyon in what is now Lake Mead, Powell's first journey took three months. Within that time he and his men withstood a variety of unpleasant experiences, including the loss of a boat, the hard toil of lowering their boats by rope down the worst of the rapids, moldy flour and shortages of meat, extremes of heat and cold, illness, and the constant fear of the unknown, the uncertainty of success, the ever-present possibility that around the next bend of the canyon they might encounter hazards worse than any they had so far overcome. This psychological pressure eventually proved too much for three of Powell's men; near the end of the voyage these three left the expedition and tried to make their way overland back to civilization—and were all killed by Indians. Powell knew the inner gorge of the Grand Canyon as a terrible and gloomy underworld, scene of much physical and mental suffering for himself and his men, but despite this and despite all that had happened in his explorations, he would write of the canyon as a whole in panegyric accent:

"The glories and the beauties of form, color and sound unite in the Grand Canyon—forms unrivaled even by the mountains, colors that vie with sunsets, and sounds that span the diapason from tempest to tinkling raindrop, from cataract to bubbling fountain. . . .

"You cannot see the Grand Canyon in one view, as if it were a changeless spectacle from which a curtain might be lifted, but to see it you have to toil from month to month through its labyrinthine. It is a region more difficult to traverse than the Alps or the

Himalayas, but if strength and courage are sufficient for the task, by a year's toil a concept of sublimity can be obtained never again to be equaled on the hither side of Paradise."

No, wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread. A civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original, is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself.

If industrial man continues to multiply his numbers and expand his operations he will succeed in his apparent intention, to seal himself off from the natural and isolate himself within a synthetic prison of his own making. He will make himself an exile from the earth and then will know at last, if he is still capable of feeling anything, the pain and agony of final loss. He will understand what the captive Zia Indians meant when they made a song out of their sickness for home:

My home over there,

Now I remember it;

And when I see that mountain far away,

Why then I weep,

Why then I weep,

Remembering my home.

Down the river. Our boats turn slowly in the drift, we see through a break in the canyon walls a part of the Henry Mountains retreating to the northwest, last range in the United States to be named and explored and mapped. Mount Ellsworth, one of the lower peaks, is the one we see, rising sharp and craggy against the sky, a laccolithic dome of varicolored sedimentary and igneous rock (part of the intrusion now exposed by erosion) furred over with a growth of pinyon pine, juniper and jackpine at the highest elevations. The flowers we cannot see but easily imagine will also be blooming up there in the cool—larkspur, lupine, Indian paintbrush, the Sego lily, perhaps a few columbines.

The boats continue to turn, and facing downriver now we see to the southwest, far beyond the opening in the cliffs, a kind of convulsed hump in the earth's stony crust. It is the southern end of the Waterpocket Fold, a fifty-mile-long monocline or ridge of

warped sandstone, eroded along its base into triangular studs of naked rock that look, from here, like the teeth of a mowing machine. This will be our only glimpse of a weird area that is sure to be, someday, another national park complete with police, administrators, paved highways, automobile nature trails, official scenic viewpoints, designated campgrounds, Laundromats, cafeterias, Coke machines, flush toilets and admission fees. If you wish to see it as it should be seen, don't wait—there's little time. How do you get there? Well, I couldn't tell you.

A little after noon, when the surface of the river is gleaming under the sun like molten amber, we see an abandoned mining camp ahead of us on the eastern shore. We paddle hard to port and beach our craft on a steep and slippery mud bank, tethering it to a stout willow tree.

While Ralph makes himself comfortable in the shade, happy to take a siesta—he is one of those fortunates who can sleep at will or stay up talking and drinking till dawn, like Socrates, if he prefers—I go on up beyond the vegetated shore to the ledge of barren red rock on which the camp is situated.

Here I find the familiar fascinating semimelancholy debris of free enterprise: rusted tin cans, a roofless frame shack, the rags of tents and broken canvas cots, rusty shovels, a blunted old iron bullbrick, rotting rat-bitten steel-toed boots, dynamite boxes, battered hard hats, two sticks of blasting powder (but no caps), sheaves of legal documents pertaining to mining-claims and production agreements (rather interesting reading), a couple of withered sun-bleached topographical maps, and an astonishing heap of tattered magazines of the All-Man He-Male type—*True* (false), *Male* (a little queer), *Stag* (full of ragged does blasting Japs with machine guns), *Saga* (fairy tales), *Real* (quite phoney) and others of the *genre*, all of them badly chewed up by rodents, barely readable, with the best pictures torn out by some scoundrel. These fellows must have spent a lot of time reading; no wonder they failed to find whatever they'd been looking for—gold? God? uranium?—and had to leave.

I climb the hill behind this ghost camp, up mountainous dunes of copper-colored sand, and find the trace of a jeep trail winding off to the east into a never-never land of black buttes, salt domes and prehistoric plateaus inhabited only by mule deer and moun-

tain lions. Perhaps this track leads to the mine; there are no diggings of any kind in the vicinity of the camp. The prospectors or miners had no doubt established their camp near the river so they'd have a reliable water supply. Everything else they needed, from boots to beans, perhaps even the jeep, must have been brought in by way of the river, for this camp is a long long way from any road known to the mapmakers.

The climb gives me some comprehension of the fact that we are down *inside* the mantle of the earth. For though I stand on the summit of a considerable hill, at least a thousand feet above the river, I can see no more than ten miles in any direction. On all points the view is cut off, near or far, by the unscalable walls of buttes, mesas and plateaus far higher than the hill beneath my feet. They are ranged in bench or terrace fashion, up from the river, forming an almost horizontal skyline all around me which obstructs any sight of the mountains that I know are out there—the Henry Mountains to the northwest, the La Sal Mountains to the northeast, the Blue Mountains to the east, Navajo Mountain somewhere on the south, and Kaiparowits on the west or southwest.

In all of this vast well of space enclosed by mesa and plateau, a great irregular arena of right angles and sheer rock in which the entire population and all the works of—Manhattan, say—could easily be hidden, there is no sign whatever, anywhere, of human or animal life. Nothing, not even a soaring buzzard. In the heat and stillness nothing moves, nothing stirs. The silence is complete.

It is a strange fact that in the canyon country the closer you get to the river which is the living artery of the entire area, the drier, more barren, less habitable the land becomes. In this respect the desert of the Colorado is opposite to that of the Nile in Egypt or the Rio Grande in New Mexico where, in both cases, life, men and the cities are gathered along the shores of the rivers. Along the Colorado River there is no town from Moab in Utah to Needles in California, a distance of over a thousand miles (if we except the two small, improvised, completely artificial company towns connected with the building and operation of Glen Canyon Dam and Boulder Dam).

What is true of human life is true also of plant life: except for the comparatively lush growth along the very banks of the river

and on the floors of the many narrow side canyons, life in all forms diminishes in quantity as you approach the Colorado. The mountains are covered with forest; the plateaus are also forested, at the higher elevations with aspen and yellowpine and farther down with pinyon and juniper; but as you descend through the lateral canyons toward the great river the pinyon and juniper yield to sagebrush and other shrubs; from that to yucca, prickly pear and ephedra; and from that, nearing the river, to almost nothing but scattered clumps of saltbush and blackbrush and the fragile annuals—snakeweed, mule-ear sunflowers, and other widely dispersed rain-dependent growths, separated from each other by open spaces of nothing but sand and rock.

The reason for this apparent anomaly is twofold. First, though all of the plateau and canyon province must be classified as an arid or semiarid region, the higher tablelands naturally receive a little more rainfall, on the average, than the lower areas. Second, the Colorado River carries its great volume of water swiftly seaward well *below* the general level of the surrounding land, through deep and largely impassable gorges (such as the Grand Canyon), and therefore does not and cannot water the desert through which it passes. Not until the river reaches the open country beyond the canyons is its water utilizable for agriculture and there, as we know, California and Arizona and Mexico have been fighting each other for half a century over the division of the precious liquid. (Each additional dam that is built on the Colorado, incidentally, reduces the quantity of usable water, because of unavoidable losses through evaporation and percolation into the porous sandstone containing the reservoirs.)

The sun is beginning to give me a headache. I glissade down the slopes of sand, copper-gold and coral-pink, past isolated clusters of sunflowers, scarlet penstemon and purple asters, to the shade of the willows and the life of the river. Here I take a swim and drink my fill of the cool muddy water—both at the same time.

We eat lunch, Ralph and I, and lie for another hour or two in the willow glade until the bright inferno in the sky has edged far enough westward to let the cliffs shade part of the river. Then we launch off, in the middle of the afternoon, and paddle across the current to the shady side, abandoning ourselves once more to the

noiseless effortless powerful slide of the Colorado through its bur-nished chute of stone.

Although we are voyaging blind and ignorant, without map or compass or guide, I know (from Powell's book and hearsay) that sometime soon we should reach the mouth of the Escalante River, another small tributary. This I wish to explore for I have heard that back in its meandering depths are natural bridges and arches, cliff dwellings and hanging gardens and other spontaneous marvels.

As the sun goes down and we drift on through the smoky-blue twilight and the birdcalls I keep the Escalante in mind, one eye skinned for the likely *debouchment*. Reluctantly I allow to pass the intriguing slits and dark deep defiles which promise much but seem improbable; then we see not far ahead and on the correct, starboard shore the opening of a big canyon, full of shadows and cottonwoods. I feel at once with a thrill of certainty that here is one we must not pass. We head for shore.

But already the current is pulling us to the middle of the river and everything is farther away than it looks. We work desperately toward the riverside and the mouth of the big side canyon but we've started too late, the river sweeps us by and we're going to miss it.

This has happened to us several times before and each time, spoiled by the wonders still lying ahead, we have surrendered to the river, given up and floated on. This time, however, we resolve not to give up; we keep paddling till we hit the shore and then work our way upstream, along the bank, with the aid of the willows at the water's edge. We reach an eddy and backwater, paddle around a giant boulder and find ourselves at last safe in the quiet, warm, green floodwater of the canyon's entrance. Nearly exhausted, we rest for a while in the boats before paddling slowly into the dark canyon.

The sun has been down for an hour, the moon will not clear the rimrock for another hour. The great canyon we have entered is as dark as a cave. We move deeper inside until we see in the dimness what looks like a white beach attached precariously to the foot of a sheer wall. We make for it, land, secure the boats, find a little dead wood and start a fire.

The heat in this deep and narrow canyon seems dense, stifling, almost sickening after a day on the wide and breezy expanse of the river. We make tea but have no appetite for any supper but a tin of fruit each. After the necessary soporific smoke and a weary conversation we unroll our sleeping bags and go to bed.

I sleep uneasily, haunted by the persistent dream of rising water and the drifting away of our boats. Near midnight, the waxing half-moon overhead, I wake up to the noise of wind and splashing water. The water is lapping at the sand less than a foot from my sleeping bag. I roll out of the bag, make sure the boats are still securely tied to the willows, and am about to wake up Ralph. Hesitating, I realize that the cause of the high water is not what I'd been half-consciously fearing all along, a flash flood from the world above us, but simply a strong wind blowing waves into the canyon from the river.

The wind has freshened the air and cooled it. Naked in the moonlight, I enjoy the change, and listen for a time to the hoodoo voice of a great horned owl up on the rim somewhere. Then I go back to sleep and this time sleep well, lulled by wind and water.

In the morning before breakfast we dump our gear loosely into the boats and paddle on up the canyon until we reach shallow water. We are now around a bend and out of sight of the river. Here I get out and tow the boats farther through the still backwaters, wading on till we come to the place where a broad shallow stream of clear water enters and merges with the dead water of the flood. This stream is about six inches deep and six feet wide, with a fast steady flow—undoubtedly the Escalante "River." The water is fresh and clean, almost cool; without bothering this time to look for cattle tracks we each take a long and satisfying drink.

Feeling much better now, our appetites returning, we make breakfast, eating the last of our bacon, the last of the eggs and the last of the canned fruit. From now on we must subsist on our dehydrated food supplies—survival rations—or on whatever we can forage from the land.

As I prepare for a day's hike up the Escalante I can hear Ralph muttering something about channel cat; I pay no attention. Boulton cubes and raisins are good enough for me, so long as they are

seasoned with plenty of sun and storm and adventure, but Newcomb, somewhat of a gourmet, has different ideas. Lacing my boots I see him attach a fragment of moldy salami to a fishhook and toss it—with a line, of course—into the deep and muddy water below the stream.

"You got a license, bud?" I demand.

For reply he clenches his right hand, extends the middle finger rigidly and thrusts it heavenward. Invoking the Deity?

I take off but before I'm out of earshot I hear a curious thumping noise. I look back and there's Newcomb beating a giant catfish on the head with his canoe paddle, putting it quickly out of its misery. God provides.

What little I can see of the sky between the high and almost interlocking walls of the canyon looks cloudy, promising rain. Rain or sun it's all one to me. Burdened only with canteen, a stick and a lunch of raisins and chipped beef I march up the firm wet sand of the canyon floor, reading the register: many deer, one coyote, the three-toed track of a big bird, many killdeer or sandpipers, many lizards, the winding trail of a snake, no cattle, no horses, no people.

All of the prints look fresh, none more than a few days old. With good reason. The damp sand, the wet rushes crushed riverward under a layer of silt, the dust-free polish of pebbles and stones, the general appearance of neatness and tidiness all indicate that the canyon has quite recently been flushed out with a vigorous torrent.

I look at the perpendicular walls rising slick and unbroken on both sides; in case a flood should now appear, what could I do? Nothing. I'd float with the tide back to Newcomb and the boats, eat catfish for lunch.

The walk gets wet. The channel of the stream meanders from one wall to the opposite and within the first mile I have to wade it a dozen times. Hard on boots. Impossible to outflank these meanders, for they swing hard against and undercut the cliff first on one side and then the other. Should have brought tennis shoes. Since I have no tennis shoes I take off the boots and sling them over my shoulder, proceeding barefoot. I walk lightly across shoals of quicksand and ford the river when necessary, but over the pebbled and rocky stretches the going is hard and slow.

Another half mile and I come to a "dripping spring." This is a seep high on the canyon wall, two hundred feet above my head, where ground water breaks out between beds of sandstone and slides over the contours of the cliff, nourishing the typical delicate greenery of moss, fern, columbine and monkeyflower. Below the garden the cliff curves deeply inward, forming an overhang that would shelter a house; at this point the water is released from the draw of surface tension and falls free through the air in a misty, wavy spray down to the canyon floor where I stand, as in a fine shower, filling my canteen and soaking myself and drinking all at the same time.

I go on. The clouds have disappeared, the sun is still beyond the rim. Under a wine-dark sky I walk through light reflected and re-reflected from the walls and floor of the canyon, a radiant golden light that glows on rock and stream, sand and leaf in varied hues of amber, honey, whiskey—the light that never was is here, now, in the storm-sculptured gorge of the Escalante.

That crystal water flows toward me in shimmering S-curves, looping quietly over shining pebbles, buff-colored stone and the long sleek bars and reefs of rich red sand, in which glitter grains of mica and pyrite—fool's gold. The canyon twists and turns, serpentine as its stream, and with each turn comes a dramatic and novel view of tapestried walls five hundred—a thousand?—feet high, of silvery driftwood wedged between boulders, of mysterious and inviting subcanyons to the side, within which I can see living stands of grass, cane, salt cedar, and sometimes the delicious magical green of a young cottonwood with its ten thousand exquisite leaves vibrating like spangles in the vivid air. The only sound is the whisper of the running water, the touch of my bare feet on the sand, and once or twice, out of the stillness, the clear song of a canyon wren.

Is this at last the *locus Dei*? There are enough cathedrals and temples and altars here for a Hindu pantheon of divinities. Each time I look up one of the secretive little side canyons I half expect to see not only the cottonwood tree rising over its tiny spring—the leafy god, the desert's liquid eye—but also a rainbow-colored corona of blazing light, pure spirit, pure being, pure disembodied intelligence, *about to speak my name*.

If a man's imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if his capacity for wonder not so limited, he would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernal. He would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of the absolute and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of the ancient dreams.

Walking up the Escalante is like penetrating a surrealist corridor in a Tamayo dream: all is curved and rounded, the course of the mainstream and canyon as indirect as a sidewinder, winding upon itself like the intestines of a giant. The canyon floor averages about fifty feet in width but the curving walls are at least five times that high, without benches or ledges, sheer, monolithic and smooth as if carved in butter, paralleling each other in a sort of loosely jointed ball-and-socket fashion, each concavity matched by a corresponding convexity on the opposite wall. And all this inspired by the little stream that swings through the rock and the centuries—truly a perfect example of what geologists call an entrenched meander.

Others have been here before. On a mural wall I find petroglyphs—the images of bighorn sheep, snakes, mule deer, sun and raincloud symbols, men with lances. The old people, the Anasazi.

I come to a second dripping spring, water seeping from a fissure far above, falling in spray upon a massive slab of rock at the foot of the wall. On the flat surface of this tilted slab somebody, maybe a Mormon cowboy fifty years ago, maybe an Indian eight hundred years ago, has chiseled two converging grooves which catch some of the falling water and conduct it to a carved spout at the lower edge. The grooves are well worn, smooth as a pebble to the touch.

As I sit there drinking water from cupped hands, I happen to look up and see on the opposite wall, a hundred feet above the floor of the canyon, the ruins of three tiny stone houses in a shallow cave. As is the case with many cliff dwellings, the erosion of eight centuries has removed whole blocks of rock which formerly must have supported ladders and handholds, making the ghost village now inaccessible.

I am content, however, to view the remains from below. Neither a souvenir collector nor an archeologist, I have no desire to stir the

ancient dust for the sake of removing from their setting a few potsherds, a few cormcobs, a child's straw sandal, an arrow point, perhaps a broken skull.

What interests me is the quality of that pre-Columbian life, the feel of it, the *atmosphere*. We know enough of the homely details: the cultivation of maize, beans, melons; the hunting of rabbit and deer; the manufacture of pottery, baskets, ornaments of coral and bone; the construction of the fortilike homes—for apparently, like some twentieth century Americans, the Anasazi lived under a cloud of fear.

Fear: is that the key to their lives? What persistent and devilish enemies they must have had, or thought they had, when even here in the intricate heart of a desert labyrinth a hundred foot-miles from the nearest grassland, forest and mountains they felt constrained to make their homes, as swallows do, in niches high on the face of a cliff.

Their manner of life was constricted, conservative, cautious; perhaps only the pervading fear could keep such a community together. Where all think alike there is little danger of innovation. Every child in this quiet place would have learned, along with his language and games, the legends of old battles and massacres, flights and migrations. He would be taught that the danger of attack was always present, that in any hour of the day or night, from up or down the canyon or over the rim, the Enemy might appear—cruel, devious, hungry, terrible—perhaps in the shape of those red-horned, hollow-eyed, wide-shouldered monsters painted on the walls of Sego Canyon north of Moab.

Long ago the cliff dwellings were abandoned. Were the inhabitants actually destroyed by the enemies they had always dreaded? Or were they reduced and driven out by disease, by something as undramatic as bad sanitation, pollution of their water and air? Or could it have been, finally, simply their own fears which poisoned their lives beyond hope of recovery and drove them into exile and extinction?

As I walk on, miles beyond Ralph and the river, the canyon changes a little in character, in places growing wider, less deep, with breaks in the wall and steeply pitched ravines that seem to suggest the possibility of an exit to the world above. I make two attempts to climb out of the canyon but the first route dead-ends

at the foot of another vertical cliff and the second at a deep, stagnant plunge-pool swarming with tadpoles and dragonflies.

Above this pool is an overhanging drop-off down the center of which a thousand years of intermittent drainage has scooped out a pothole and then drilled clear through it, creating a long polished chute and a window in the rock. But there are many of these Moore-like formations, hundreds of them, in the canyon country.

Late in the evening, the sun already down, I find what looks like a deerpath leading up over an alluvium hill toward the southwest rim. I am tempted to take it and see where it goes but I am also hungry, tired, and a bit sore-footed; my raisins are all gone and the canyon grows dark; sadly I turn and start the long walk back.

Long before I come again to the second of the dripping springs night has covered the desert world. I sit down on a driftwood log, build a small fire with shreds of its bark, wait for moonrise. I put the boots back on; water or no water, my feet have suffered enough.

The new moon finally comes, edging above the rimrock, bright as a silver shield. Through moonlight and darkness, as the moon is revealed, then concealed, by the turning of the canyon walls, I continue the march toward camp. For company on the way I have my thoughts and the flutterings and cries of a great horned owl that chooses, for reasons of its own, to follow me for much of the distance.

The return is harder than I expected. If I didn't have the stream to follow, Ariadne's thread, it would be easy in the deceptive alternation of moonlight and shadow to take a wrong turn up one of the many side canyons, to spend the rest of the night in bewildered wandering or go to sleep on an empty stomach, covered only with my back. The repeated wading of the stream seems doubly tiring now, especially as the boots become water-soaked and layered with quicksand. I trudge onward, longing for the first sight of Ralph's campfire, hoping that each new bend in the canyon will be the last. The Escalante is no longer the free and friendly place it was during the day but totally different, strange, unknown and unknowable, faintly malevolent.

Endless, too, I'm beginning to feel, before I see at long last the glimmer of coals ahead, the embers of a fire, and in the dimness

the outline of the rubber boats, a comforting sight. Ralph is sleeping when I stumble into camp but wakes up easily to show me the mess of catfish he has caught, cleaned and saved for me, wrapped in wet leaves, still cool and fresh.

It's surely after midnight but who wants to sleep? We rebuild the fire and deep-fry the fish in part of the bacon grease which Ralph has wisely been hoarding all along. I pull off my mud-caked boots, twice their original weight, sit close to the fire and eat a tremendous supper, while Newcomb fills the air with huge clouds of fragrant, philosophical pipe smoke. We discuss the day's adventures.

High above our heads the owl hoots under the lost moon. A predawn wind comes sifting and sighing through the cottonwood trees; the sound of their dry, papery leaves is like the murmur of distant water, or like the whispering of ghosts in an ancient, sacrosanct, condemned cathedral.

Late in the morning, close to noon, the sun comes glowering over the wall in a burst of fire and we are driven out of our sacks. Into the green lagoon for a bath and a swim and then Ralph baits a hook with the reliable rotten salami, I build a campfire in the shade and fill the skillet with grease, and once again we dine on channel cat—delicious fish!

After this combined breakfast and dinner we retire to the water again and deeper shade, evading the worst of the midday heat. Naked as savages, we float on our backs in the still water, squat on the cool sand under the sheltering cottonwood and smoke like sachems. We may not have brought enough food but at least we've got plenty of Bull Durham.

"Newcomb," I explain, "we've got to go back."

"But why?" he says. "Why?"

"Why do you grow that beard?"

"Why not?"

"Well why?"

"Well why not?"

"Well goddamnit why?"

"Well goddamnit why not?"

"Because," I explain. The role of the Explainer has become a

well-established one in recent times. "Because they need us. Because civilization needs us."

"What civilization?" he says.

"You said it. That's why they need us."

"But do we need them?"

"Well," I say, "how long do you think that jar of bacon grease will last?"

That made him think. "Let's go," he says.

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon we shove our fragile boats once more into the water, climb aboard and paddle slowly out of the Escalante's womb, back to the greater world of Glen Canyon and the steady, powerful, unhurried, insouciant Colorado. It is almost like a coming home.

For the rest of the afternoon, keeping to the shady side, we drift down the splendid river, deeper and deeper and deeper into the fantastic. The sandstone walls rise higher than ever before, a thousand, two thousand feet above the water, rounding off on top as half-domes and capitols, golden and glowing in the sunlight, a deep radiant red in the shade.

Beyond those mighty forms we catch occasional glimpses of eroded remnants—tapering spires, balanced rocks on pillars, mushroom rocks, rocks shaped like hamburgers, rocks like piles of melted pies, arches, bridges, potholes, grottoes, all the infinite variety of hill and hole and hollow to which sandstone lends itself, given the necessary conditions and, as Thoreau says, a liberal allowance of time—let us say, about five thousand years? Fifty thousand? Five hundred thousand? Choose whatever sum you like.

We pass beneath *hanging* canyons, the mouths of lateral drainages which terminate above the level of the Colorado; out of these when it storms come roaring falls of thick, muddy water, of logs, trees, cows and thundering boulders, all crashing into the river hundreds of feet below, a gorgeous spectacle which we will not have the good fortune to witness.

Now and then we are offered tantalizing views, far ahead, of the blue dome of Navajo Mountain, another laccolith, a holy place, home of gods, navel of the world in the eyes of the Indians, and the shiplike prow of the high Kaiparowits Plateau.

Not all is rock: we see a redtailed hawk skimming along the cliff, once a golden eagle, and vultures soar in the distance. Closer by we hear though seldom see the wrens, finches and yellow warblers, and a few long-legged water birds.

Heart of the whole and essence of the scene is the river, the flowing river with its thin fringe of green, the vital element in what would be otherwise a glamorous but moon-dead landscape. The living river and the living river alone gives coherence and significance and therefore beauty to the canyon world. "I love all things which flow," said the deepest of Irishmen.

At evening we come to historic Hole in the Rock. Here we float ashore and camp for the night.

What happened here? In the year 1880, eleven years after Powell had passed this way, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints commissioned a group of the faithful, living then in south-central Utah, to establish a new settlement in the southeast corner of the state near what is now the village of Bluff.

As obedient as they were courageous, some two hundred and fifty Mormons—men, women and children, with livestock and twenty-six wagons—started east from Panguitch toward the designated place. They followed no road or trail but simply what would have seemed, on a map, to be the shortest line between the two points.

After traversing seventy miles of desert they came to the rim, the jump-off. Two thousand feet below, the Colorado River rolled across their chosen route. Instead of giving up and turning back they hammered and blasted a notch (the Hole in the Rock) down through the rim into the nearest side canyon. From there they carved and constructed a crude wagon road to the edge of the water and descended. In places the wagons had to be lowered on ropes. After fording the river these undaunted people climbed the farther side over terrain almost as difficult and continued on, week after week, through the surreal sandstone wilderness and forests of pinyon and juniper until they reached their goal. The entire expedition required about four months; the trail which they pioneered was never used a second time.

In the morning I decide to climb the old trail, up through the notch to the top of the plateau—haven't seen the outer world for a long time now. While Ralph goes fishing I start off through the willow jungle, around tangles of poison ivy and up enormous sand dunes toward the Hole. A brook trickles down the gulch below the path, a thread of water creeping from pool to pool. At the final opportunity—Last Chance Puddle—I take a hearty drink. I've left my canteen behind at the boats; Hole in the Rock, clearly visible from the river, doesn't seem far away.

The old trail climbs away from the water, switchbacking up the talus slope on the northern side of the canyon. The pitch is steep, the morning sun is blazing on my back, and the heat quickly becomes unpleasant. My sweat dries as fast as it forms—the parched air is sucking at my pores. My belly is full of water, gurgling like a wineskin, but I can almost feel it being drawn away; the knowledge that I've brought no canteen along adds poignancy to my premature thirst. I put a pebble in my mouth and keep climbing.

Above the talus I find the dugway, broad and shallow steps chipped out of the canyon wall by the first and only road-builders here, and the remains of fill and foundation—slabs and blocks of sandstone laid in place, one by one, over eighty years before. The canyon begins to narrow and pucker near the summit and the cleft is jammed with boulders big as boxcars. I squeeze among them, following the tracks of former hikers. Here at least is shade though no water. I sit down to rest, daydreaming of iced limeade, chilled tomato juice, Moorish fountains. The temperature out in the sun must be well over a hundred degrees.

Upward. Under a ledge I find the barest hint of a seep, drops of moisture leaking from the rock and dampening the sand beneath. I am so thirsty by this time that I try digging a waterhole, but the deeper I go the drier the sand. I need water; I put some of the moist sand into my mouth, extracting what refreshment I can from it, and go on.

Up through the notch. I come out on the surface of a rolling plain of cross-bedded sandstone, the petrified dunes of the Navajo formation, and win the view I'd been hoping for. Far in the distance lie the blue ranges under hard-edged, snowy cumulus clouds:

the Henry's, Elk Ridge and the Bear's Ears beyond White Canyon, 10,000-foot Navajo Mountain on the other side of the river. On the west, not so far, perhaps ten miles away, rises the Kaiparowits Plateau, also known as Fifty-Mile Mesa, another island in the sky, little-known and uninhabited, cut off on all sides but the north by its sheer, vertical walls.

I walk out onto a point from which I can look down at the river, nearly straight below. I can see the switchbacks of the trail, the fan of greenery at the outlet of the side canyon, but no sign of Newcomb or the boats, deep in the shade of the willows. From up here the sound of the river, until now a permanent part of my auditory background, is no longer perceptible, and the desert silence takes on a deeper dimension. The sound of nothingness? "In the desert," wrote Balzac, somewhere, "there is all and there is nothing. God is there and man is not."

God? Nothing moves but the heat waves, rising from the naked rock. It is somehow comforting to see, nearby, the yuccas growing from the sand and from joints in the stone. They are in full bloom today, clusters of waxy, creamy flowers on tall stalks, supported and nourished by the rosettes of daggerlike leaves that form the base of the plant. God? I think, quibbling with Balzac; in Newcomb's terms, who the hell is *He*? There is nothing here, at the moment, but me and the desert. And that's the truth. Why confuse the issue by dragging in a superfluous entity? Occam's razor. Beyond atheism, nontheism. I am not an atheist but an earthiest. Be true to the earth.

Far off, the muted kettledrums of thunder, *pianissimo* . . . T. S. Eliot and *The Wasteland*. Certain passages in that profane social poem still appeal to me, for they remind me of Moab, Utah. In other words I like the poem for the wrong reasons—and dislike it for the right ones.

Here I am, relaxing into memories of ancient books—a surefire sign of spiritual fatigue. That screen of words, that veil of ideas, issuing from the brain like a sort of mental smog that keeps getting between a man and the world, obscuring vision. Maya. Time to go back down to the river and reality, back to Newcomb and the boats, the smell of frying catfish—there's God for you! I descend.

Evening on the river, a night of moonlight and canyon winds, sleep and the awakening. In a blue dawn under the faintest of stars we break our fast, pack our gear and launch the boats again. Farther still into the visionary world of Glen Canyon, talking somewhat less than before—for what is there to say? I think we've about said it all—we communicate less in words and more in direct denotation, the glance, the pointing hand, the subtle nuances of pipe smoke, the tilt of a wilted hat brim. Configurations are beginning to fade, distinctions shading off into blended amalgams of man and man, men and water, water and rock.

"Who is Ralph Newcomb?" I say. "Who is he?"

"Aye," he says, "and who is who? Which is which?"

"Quite," I agree.

We are merging, molecules getting mixed. Talk about inter-subjectivity—we are both taking on the coloration of river and canyon, our skin as mahogany as the water on the shady side, our clothing coated with silt, our bare feet caked with mud and tough as lizard skin, our whiskers bleached as the sand—even our eyeballs, what little you can see of them between the lids, have taken on a coral-pink, the color of the dunes. And we smell, I suppose, like catfish.

We've forgotten to keep a close track of time, have no clock or calendar, and no longer know for certain exactly how many days and nights we've been on the river.

"Six, I think," he says, my doppelganger.

"No, only five."

"Five? Let's see. . . . No. Yes. Maybe."

"I believe."

"Seven?"

"Four?"

The time passes very slowly but not slowly enough. The canyon world becomes each hour more beautiful, the closer we come to its end. We think we have forgotten but we cannot forget—the knowledge is lodged like strontium in the marrow of our bones—that Glen Canyon has been condemned. We refuse to think about it. We dare not think about it for if we did we'd be eating our hearts, chewing our entrails, consuming ourselves in the fury of helpless rage. Of helpless outrage.

We pass the mouth of a large river entering the Colorado from the east—the San Juan. Somewhere not far beyond this confluence, if I recall my Powell rightly, is the opening to what he named Music Temple. We keep watch but see a dozen lovely and mysterious grottoes, all equally beguiling, pass up some, let the current rush us by others, and finally end up by choosing the wrong one. We will not have another opportunity.

"When 'Old Shady' sings us a song at night," wrote Powell in 1869, "we are pleased to find that this hollow in the rock is filled with sweet sounds. It was doubtless made for an academy of music by its storm-born architect; so we name it Music Temple."

Less than a century later his discovery will be buried under the mud of the reservoir, rendered inaccessible by those who claim they are not only "developing" but also "opening up" the canyon country. What have we lost? Here is Powell's description of the place:

"On entering we find a little grove of box-elder and cottonwood trees, and turning to the right, we find ourselves in a vast chamber carved out of rock. At the upper end there is a clear, deep pool of water, bordered with verdure. Standing by the side of this, we can see the grove at the entrance. The chamber is more than 200 feet high, 500 feet long, and 200 feet wide. Through the ceiling and on through the rock for a thousand feet above, there is a narrow, winding skylight; and this is all carved out by a little stream which runs only during the few showers that fall now and then in this arid country."

Late that evening, after sundown, Ralph and I beach our boats and make camp on a sandy spit near the outlet of a deep, narrow, labyrinthine side canyon, its name, if it has a name, unknown to us. I explore part of its length in the twilight and find another charming stream with pools of remarkable beauty—crystal-clear water in basins of rock and sand, free of weeds or mud, harboring schools of minnows. Darkness sets in before I can go very far. I go back to the campfire.

After a splendid night—clouds like clipperships racing across the starry sky, moon floating along the brink of the crag above us, wind in the tamarisk—we make a quick breakfast and I return to the

exploration of the hidden passage, taking the canteens with me to fill with fresh water.

I come to where I had turned back the night before, a deep pool that fills the canyon from wall to wall. Filling the canteens, I cache them nearby, undress and wade into the water. The pool is deep, over my head. I swim across it, following a turn in the narrow canyon, here no more than ten feet wide, and emerge beyond into a curving tunnel of rock with running water on its floor.

This natural tunnel is pure rock, completely devoid of sand, soil and any trace of vegetation. The walls that tower above are so close to one another, overhanging and interlocking, that I cannot see the sky. Through a golden glow of indirect, reflected sunlight I proceed until I come to a very large grotto or chamber, somewhat like the one described by Powell, where a plunge pool and waterfall check any further advance.

Here the canyon walls are a little wider, permitting the sun, for perhaps a couple of hours during the summer day, to shine directly down into this cul-de-sac. A rivulet of clear water pours into the pool; glints and flecks of light reflected from its agitated surface dance over the dark-golden walls of the glen. Lichens are growing there, green, red, orange, and along the seep line are beds of poison ivy, scarlet monkeyflower, maidenhair fern, death camas, helleborine orchid and small pale yellow columbines. There are no trees or shrubs, for the sunlight is too brief.

The sun is gleaming on the pool, on the foam, on the transparent waterfall. I dive in, swim under the fall and take a soapless shower, lie on the rock in a patch of sunshine and gaze up at the small irregular fragment of blue which forms the sky in this place. Then I return through the tunnel to camp and companion.

Has this particular canyon been seen and named by earlier river-runners? No doubt it has, but I find no evidence to dispel the illusion that I may be the first ever to have entered here. And probably the last.

After a lunch of refried pinto beans and dehydrated apricots—a piquant combination—we climb into our double boat and float onward. Since we have missed Music Temple I am more determined than ever that we must not pass Forbidden Canyon and the trail to Rainbow Bridge, climax and culmination of any trip into Glen Canyon.

We stay close to the south and east shore of the river, despite the ferocious afternoon sun, investigating each side canyon that we come to. In one of these I accidentally start a brush fire, and am nearly cooked alive. Sheer carelessness—a gust of wind carries a flaming piece of paper into the dried-out tangle of a willow thicket; the flames spread explosively; in a minute the mouth of the canyon is choked with smoke and fire and there is nothing I can do but get out of there, quick, as the flames rush down through the jungle toward Ralph, waiting for me in the tethered boats.

He is all ready to cast off when I appear, about ten feet in front of the onrushing sheet of fire, running. I push the boats off and roll in; we paddle away as hard as we can from the fiery shore, the final wild flare of heat. With generous tact Ralph does not even ask for an explanation. You can see a photograph of what I did in Eliot Porter's beautiful book on Glen Canyon, *The Place That No One Knew*.

"Hot in there," I say, though Ralph has asked no questions.

"So I noticed."

"Had an accident."

"Is that right?"

Shakily I tamp my pipe and fumble through the pockets of my shirt. All gone.

"Here," he says. "Have a match."

The river carries us past more side canyons, each of which I inspect for signs of a trail, a clue to Rainbow Bridge. But find nothing, so far, though we know we're getting close. We can see in the canyon distance, not far ahead, the southern tip of the Kaiparowits Plateau—the landmark to guide by when seeking the way to Rainbow Bridge.

We bounce over a series of minor ripples and the river picks up speed. There is a corresponding excitement in the sky: the storm that has seemed potential for days is gathering above in definite form—wild gray scuds of vapor, anvil-headed cumuli-nimbi, rumblings of thunder coming closer.

From up ahead comes the familiar freight-train roar of white water again. A new and formidable canyon opens on the left, with a broad delta of pebbled beach, mud banks, rocks and boulders and driftwood issuing fanwise from its mouth. The boulders,

carried down from the flanks of Navajo Mountain, cause the rapids which lie before us.

A little wiser now, learning from experience, we do not battle the current but rest until we are close to the rapids, then with a sudden furious effort paddle into the backwash near the shore and have no trouble making a landing in the shallows.

Ralph starts supper. I pull on boots and go exploring. I find a trail but it's a poor one, little more than a deer path, which peters out completely a mile up-canyon. There are ponds of fresh water on the canyon floor; I refill the canteens and return to the boats.

The wind by this time has risen to a magnificent howl, the sky is purple, and jags of lightning strike at Navajo Point, the remote crag two thousand feet above the river on the north side. Cold rain spatters on the hot sand of the beach, raising little puffs of dust and steam. Rock and driftwood and the flashing underside of leaves gleam with a strange, wild, shifting light from the stormy sky.

We rig the tarpaulins into a tent, preparing for rain, and eat our supper of pancakes on which we pour a sauce of stewed raisins, in place of the syrup we haven't got. Very good. Filling, anyhow. Afterwards, tea and tobacco.

We sit outside our tent, enjoying the weather. After a week of clear skies, and the heat and glare of the relentless sun, the cool wind and the sprinkling of hard cold raindrops on our bare heads and bare bodies feel good.

The heavy rain we've been anticipating fails to come. We pile our baggage under the canvas shelter and unroll our sleeping bags in a hollow among the white dunes, under the open sky. Falling asleep, I see a handful of stars blinking through a break in the racing clouds.

A red dawn in the east, cloud banks on fire with the rising sun. I bathe in the cold river, do my laundry, and build a fire for our breakfast: dried pea soup and tea bags. The last box of raisins I have set aside for lunch. Stores seem to be getting low—from now on it'll be catfish or nothing.

Onto the river and through the whirlpools, we glide without mishap into quiet water. Our little boats are holding up well;

despite all the rocks we've bounced them off and over, despite the sand and snags we've dragged them over, they have yet to sustain a puncture or spring a single leak. Aye, but the voyage is not over—shouldn't mention these things.

Within a short distance we come to another big tributary canyon on the port side or southerly shore of the river. Navajo Point, the final outcropping of the Kaiparowits Plateau, is directly overhead. This canyon too has tumbled boulders into the river, forming one more stretch of rough water. As before we take advantage of the eddies close to the rapids, swinging briefly upstream and then into the flooded mouth of the side canyon. We tie up on a mud bank and get out to investigate.

At once I spot the unmistakable signs of tourist culture—tin cans and tinfoil dumped in a fireplace, a dirty sock dangling from a bush, a worn-out tennis shoe in the bottom of a clear spring, gum wrappers, cigarette butts, and bottlecaps everywhere. This must be it, the way to Rainbow Bridge; it appears that we may have come too late. *Slobivius americanus* has been here first.

Well, no matter. We had expected this. We know with certainty that we are now only a few hours—by motorboat—from the Glen Canyon dam site. I also happen to know that the natural bridge itself is still six miles up the canyon by foot trail, a distance regarded as semiastronomical by the standard breed of mechanized tourist. His spoor will not be seen much beyond the campground.

We set up a camp of our own well beyond the motorboaters' midden, near the little stream that tumbles down the rocky canyon floor, coming from the great redrock wilderness beyond. The trail to Rainbow Bridge, passing close by, is rough, rocky, primitive. Newcomb, who has brought no boots, decides to go fishing. We divide the box of raisins and the last of the dried apricots. I stuff my share into my shirt pockets and lace up the boots, hang a canteen over my shoulder and march off.

The trail leads beside the clear-running brook and a chain of emerald pools, some of them big enough to go swimming in, with the water so transparent I can see the shadows of the schools of minnows passing over the grains of sand in the bottom of the basins. Along the canyon walls are the seeps and springs that feed the stream, each with the characteristic clinging gardens of mosses,

ferns and wildflowers. Above and beyond the rimrock, blue in shadow and amber-gold in light, are alcoves, domes and royal arches, part of the sandstone flanks of Navajo Mountain.

A hot day. Delicate, wind-whipped clouds flow across the burning blue, moving in perfect unison like the fish in the pools below. I stop at one of the largest of these pools, undress and plunge in. Happily I flounder about, terrifying the minnows, and float on my back and spout cheekfuls of water at the sun.

On to the Bridge:

I come to a fork in the canyon, the main branch continuing to the right, a deep dark narrow defile opening to the left. There are no trail markers but even on the naked sandstone I can make out the passage of human feet, boot-shod, leading into the unlikely passage on the left. And so I follow.

Here too a stream is flowing, much smaller than the other, through smoothly sculptured grooves, scoops and potholes in the rock. I go by the dripping little springs that feed it and the stream diminishes to a rill, to a trickle, to a series of stagnant waterholes shrinking under the sun. Frogs and toads will be croaking here, fireflies winking, when I return.

Hot and tired I stop in the shade of an overhanging ledge and take a drink from my canteen. Resting, I listen to the deep dead stillness of the canyon. No wind or breeze, no birds, no running water, no sound of any kind but the stir of my own breathing.

Alone in the silence, I understand for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand, to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions. Anything rather than confront directly the ante-human, that *other world* which frightens not through danger or hostility but in something far worse—its implacable indifference.

Out of the shade, into the heat. I tramp on through the winding gorge, through the harsh brittle silence. In this arid atmosphere sounds do not fade, echo or die softly but are extinguished suddenly, sharply, without the slightest hint of reverberation. The clash of rock against rock is like a shot—abrupt, exaggerated, toneless.

I round the next bend in the canyon and all at once, quite unexpectedly, there it is, the bridge of stone.

Quite unexpectedly, I write. Why? Certainly I had faith, I knew the bridge would be here, against all odds. And I knew well enough what it would look like—we've all seen the pictures of it a hundred times. Nor am I disappointed in that vague way we often feel, coming at last upon a long-imagined spectacle. Rainbow Bridge seems neither less nor greater than what I had foreseen.

My second sensation is the feeling of guilt. Newcomb. Why did I not *insist* on his coming? Why did I not grab him by the long strands of his savage beard and haul him up the trail, bearing him when necessary like Christopher would across the stream, stumbling from stone to stone, and dump him finally under the bridge, leaving him there to rot or to crawl back to the river if he could? No man could have asked for a lovelier defenestration.

Through God's window into eternity.

Oh well. I climb to the foot of the east buttress and sign for Ralph and myself in the visitors' register. He is the 14,467th and I the next to enter our names in this book since the first white men came to Rainbow Bridge in 1909. Not many, for a period of more than half a century, in the age above all of publicity. But then it's never been an easy journey. Until now.

The new dam, of course, will improve things. If ever filled it will back water to within sight of the Bridge, transforming what was formerly an adventure into a routine motorboat excursion. Those who see it then will not understand that half the beauty of Rainbow Bridge lay in its remoteness, its relative difficulty of access, and in the wilderness surrounding it, of which it was an integral part. When these aspects are removed the Bridge will be no more than an isolated geological oddity, an extension of that museumlike diorama to which industrial tourism tends to reduce the natural world.

All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare, said a wise man. If so, what happens to excellence when we eliminate the difficulty and the rarity? Words, words—the problem makes me thirsty. There is a spring across the canyon, another seep under a ledge below the west footing of the Bridge. I climb down and up the other side and help myself to one of the tins someone has left there, collecting water under the dripping moss.

The heat is stunning. I rest for a while in the shade, dream and sleep through the worst of the midday glare. When the sun passes

beyond the rim I get up and start to return to Newcomb and our camp.

But am diverted by a faint pathway which looks as if it might lead up out of the canyon, above Rainbow Bridge. Late afternoon, the canyon filling with shadows—I should not try it. I take it anyway, climbing a talus slope and then traversing a long inclined bench that pinches out in thin air at the base of a higher cliff. Impossible to go on—but a fixed rope dangles there, hanging from some belaying point out of sight above. I test the rope, it seems to be well anchored, and with its help and a few convenient toeholds and fingerholds I work my way to the top of the pitch. From there it's a long but easy scramble to the rim of the canyon.

Now I am in the open again, out of the underworld. From up here Rainbow Bridge, a thousand feet below, is only a curving ridge of sandstone of no undue importance, a tiny object lost in the vastness and intricacy of the canyon systems which radiate from the base of Navajo Mountain. Of more interest is the view to the north, east and west, revealing the general lay of the land through which we have voyaged in our little boats.

The sun, close to the horizon, shines through the clear air beneath the cloud layers, illuminating in soft variations of rose, vermillion, amber, slate-blue, the complex features and details, defined sharply by shadow, of the Glen Canyon landscape. I can see the square-edged mesas beyond the junction of the San Juan and Colorado, the plateau-mountains of south-central Utah, and farthest away, a hundred miles or more by line of sight, the five peaks of the Henry Mountains, including Mount Ellsworth near Hite where our journey began.

Off in the east an isolated storm is boiling over the desert, a mass of lavender clouds bombarding the earth with lightning and trailing curtains of rain. The distance is so great that I cannot hear the thunder. Between here and there and me and the mountains is the canyon wilderness, the hoodoo land of spire and pillar and pinnacle where no man lives, and where the river flows, unseen, through the blue-black trenches in the rock.

Light. Space. Light and space without time, I think, for this is a country with only the slightest traces of human history. In the doctrine of the geologists with their scheme of ages, eons and epochs all is flux, as Heraclitus taught, but from the mortally

human point of view the landscape of the Colorado is like a section of eternity—timeless. In all my years in the canyon country I have yet to see a rock fall, of its own volition, so to speak, aside from floods. To convince myself of the reality of change and therefore time I will sometimes push a stone over the edge of a cliff and watch it descend and wait—lighting my pipe—for the report of its impact and disintegration to return. Doing my bit to help, of course, aiding natural processes and verifying the hypotheses of geological morphology. But am not *entirely* convinced.

Men come and go, cities rise and fall, whole civilizations appear and disappear—the earth remains, slightly modified. The earth remains, and the heart-breaking beauty where there are no hearts to break. Turning Plato and Hegel on their heads I sometimes choose to think, no doubt perversely, that man is a dream, thought an illusion, and only rock is real. Rock and sun.

Under the desert sun, in that dogmatic clarity, the fables of theology and the myths of classical philosophy dissolve like mist. The air is clean, the rock cuts cruelly into flesh; shatter the rock and the odor of flint rises to your nostrils, bitter and sharp. Whirlwinds dance across the salt flats, a pillar of dust by day; the thornbush breaks into flame at night. What does it mean? It means nothing. It is as it is and has no need for meaning. The desert lies beneath and soars beyond any possible human qualification. Therefore, sublime.

The sun is touching the fretted tablelands on the west: It seems to bulge a little, to expand for a moment, and then it drops—abruptly—over the edge. I listen for a long time.

Through twilight and moonlight I climb down to the rope, down to the ledge, down to the canyon floor below Rainbow Bridge. Bats flicker through the air. Fireflies sparkle by the waterseeps and miniature toads with enormous voices clank and grunt and chant at me as I tramp past their ponds down the long trail back to the river, back to campfire and companionship and a midnight supper.

We are close to the end of our journey. In the morning Ralph and I pack our gear, load the boats, and take a last lingering look at the scene which we know we will never again see as we see it now: the great Colorado River, wild and free, surging past the

base of the towering cliffs, roaring through the boulders below the mouth of Forbidden Canyon; Navajo Point and the precipice of the Kaiparowits Plateau thousands of feet above, beyond the inner walls of the canyon; and in the east ranks of storm-driven cumulus clouds piled high on one another, gold-trimmed and blazing in the dawn.

Ralph takes a photograph, puts the camera back into the waterproof pouch which he hangs across his chest, and climbs into his boat. We shove off.

This is the seventh day—or is it the ninth?—of our dreamlike voyage. Late in the afternoon, waking from a deep reverie, I observe, as we glide silently by, a pair of ravens roosting on a dead tree near the shore, watching us pass. I wonder where we are. I ask Ralph; he has no idea and cares less, cares only that the journey not yet end.

I light up the last of my tobacco, and watch the blue smoke curl and twist and vanish over the swirling brown water. We are rounding a bend in the river and I see, far ahead on the left-hand shore, something white, rigid, rectangular, out of place. Our boats drift gradually closer and we see the first billboard ever erected in Glen Canyon. Planted in rocks close to the water, the sign bears a message and it is meant for us.

ATTENTION

YOU ARE APPROACHING GLEN CANYON
DAM SITE ALL BOATS MUST LEAVE
RIVER AT KANE CREEK LANDING ONE
MILE AHEAD ON RIGHT ABSOLUTELY
NO BOATS ALLOWED IN CONSTRUCTION ZONE
VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED
U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION