

Selections from a Pioneer Diary

Two Days' Entries from *The Day-Book of Jeremy Dickson of Great Salt Lake City, A Free-Thinker Amongst the Mormons*

Editor's Note: The entries reproduced below are pioneer diary entries for two days in October, 1851. The writer, Jeremy Dickson, an amiable windbag who styled himself a wit and "free-thinker," was the half-owner and manager of the United Mercantile, a prominent retail goods and brokerage business in Salt Lake City. During the two days described here, Dickson journeyed from his house and mercantile business in Salt Lake City to the shore of the Great Salt Lake near modern-day Magna. Dickson's mission there was to collect and lead back a number of horses he'd bought from fellow business owners. (Antelope Island hosted an extensive stock-fattening industry at that time.) Dickson planned, in turn, to sell the horses to prospectors and camp followers journeying westward to the California good fields.

Dickson's description of this journey ends with his account of the lakeside encounter with a recent acquaintance: Sonora, a Spanish-speaking trader or adventuress hailing from a region farther south: probably Mexico, possibly the area that today is New Mexico. Unfortunately, the diary contains no description of the journey onward to Antelope Island or the return to Salt Lake City. In fact, entries in Dickson's diary only resume from dates much later, in 1852, and convey a tone strikingly different from that found in the selections presented here.



1. October 2, 1851, at sunrise precisely.
2. Place: at my house on Red Mountain creek, by my window.

Behold! The sun has risen! Precisely as I had *expected!!* It streams out now over the tops of the mountains behind my *adobe*, which lies still in shade. But out to the west – at the northern tip of the Ocher Mountain – the sun's light has struck fully, buffing the low-lying lake to a pool of pewter. And nearer and to the north, I see the Antelope Island! – the ultimate destination of my journey, which is to begin *today!* The island looks sere and lifeless in the still blank of the dead lake. The excitement of my trip thence to fetch the horses – I should arrive there the day after tomorrow, if

my calculations prove precise – makes me a *poor clerk!* I can sit still to scribble this entry only by the exercise of a *merciless discipline!!* I have just ***SHOUTED*** my pleasure to my mute rafters! But now, a sketch of my day's plan.

I must waste no time. I must ride into town and meet with Godfrey, who is to attend me on my trip. Godfrey must assemble the provisions for the trip, including the green silk tent and the copper pot. I must have breakfast, too, and only afterward change into my traveling-clothes, which are too disreputable-looking for wear in town.

Then we must pack the gear and supplies on Godfrey's second horse and ride then to the house of William and Beth, a half-hour's ride outside the Old Fort. There, we will shift the pack-load to William's mule Gumbo, a wonderfully manageable pack-beast with a known fondness for me. *I must pack my tele-scope and my case-knife, and fetch along the pistol from the office!* And from William's we will journey to the Knoodly Well, an easy ride of three hours, where we will spend the night by the great spring there. Thence to Possom's Farm (Possom is the salt-boiler who supplies me) for nights 2 and 3, the day intervening to be filled with a day-journey across the ford to the Antelope Island, to select and lead back the horses which I have sold to the gold-seekers. (They are growing impatient and surly.)

What have I forgotten? *Matches, and tinder.* My copper pot? Good -- now I have noted it all here and my preparations are complete. And if I forget somewhat, I shall triumph without it and account myself resourceful. So, good-bye, desk, and good-bye, my faithful desk-pen! I shall return, a dusty chevalier, in four days, with an eye-ful of wonders. And now, I depart! Farewell, bed! Farewell skunks! *I go! I go!*

1. Day the same, and the hour: before noon.
2. Place: my office in the Old Fort.

I must record a change of plan. It is now the brink-moment of my departure, with gear and provisions soundly packed upon Godfrey's trail-horse which even now stamps patiently at the post outside my office, just three yards away. I have determined to set out on my journey *by*

myself— Godfrey has *failed* me as a companion.

It happened so: while Godfrey readied the gear this a.m., I assayed out for breakfast at the Lion (soup, and a chop, and a baked onion. 2¢). There I saw, by the gauzy light of the parchment windows, Señor D'Amillo. His beard bobbed and swung wildly as he waved me to his end of the long table. This encounter gave me a start, since I had thought that he would be traveling hard for the Winty River today with the Spaniard party. I seated myself at the bench opposite his, and taxed him about it.

He said that the party had intended so, but when they sprang out of their buffaloes at Whisky Row on the morning appointed, they consulted the omens, or something of that sort, and had, all at once, jumped back beneath their robes again, to *snooze* away the day.

And so the whole party bide at the Row yet, waiting for a celestial sign advising them to resume their commerce, I gathered. I related him my travel-plans, and he evinced a wonderful excitement: at hearing about the Lake and the Antelope Island, he rolled his eyes in extravagant wonder, and his rumbling voice burbled up from inside his great boxy torso, and he even clapped together his hands in glee at the prospect! "I am to go," he assured me; "I *must!* Such a *thing!*!" Stretching across the table, he seized my lapel and tugged powerfully, making me bob over my soup like a stilt-bird probing a bog as he inquired repeatedly, "When? When?"

I found it difficult to reply, *oscillating* so, but Señor D'Amillo released me at length. I gathered my voice and

retrieved my spoon and informed him that I was to leave this a.m. and would spend the night at the Knoody Well, etc. He smote the long plank of the table with his platter-like palm in a display of glee. The blow caused all the bowls and beakers the whole table along to jump up in a quick series like sea-birds borne up by a wave, and settle down again with an extenuated *clack*. Our fellow diners stopped their miserly mumblings at their dishes and started at us. Señor D'Amillo cocked his head a little to the side, and thought for a time, and smiled at me steadily and fondly, mere inches from my face, with his broad mouth fully a-gape. I had never seen into another's mouth so extensively. And suddenly, pushing his head fully alongside mine and speaking as if confidentially, he said that he, and Sonora, and another Spaniard whose name I have now forgotten, would *certainly* join me tomorrow at Possom's – to explore the lake, I gathered.

I was at first baffled by this development, since the Spaniards are formidable and veteran travelers. Surely, I thought, Sonora and D'Amillo have encountered a full share of hydraulic marvels before now. But D'Amillo evinced such an earnest curiosity about the Salt Lake that it reminded me of my own ever-renewed delight in my own circumstances. And I have been, I admit, somewhat intrigued by the customs and splendor of the Spaniard faction, so I was pleased at the prospect of more of their company.

But Old Chase (my clerk) was less pleased when I related this new development upon my return from the Lion house to the office. They (the Spaniards) are slavers, and whore-drivers, and Catholics, and murderers, he said, and he forbade his son Godfrey

to attend me. Since Godfrey had already done the nagging donkey-work of assembling the gear and provisions, I took his defection with a good grace, though insisting on using his packhorse as far as William's. To Old Chase's bony back, I pronounced with a lofty manner, "Fine! I shall go by *myself!!!*"

And so I shall. I am ready and done with this God-damn'd writing. I have put my traveling-pen and ink-fountain into my haversack, along with my trusty pistol, a *Petit Homme* model I found in an old boot I bought in a wagon-load owned by a dead man from Denmark who had a Belgium repeater watch in his trouser-pocket that chim'd the hour and so frightened the corpse-bearers who carried him that they *scream'd* and dropt him flat in the dust! The dead man's watch, they say, never chimed again! And so now, as soon as I finish writing *this very sentence*, I am gong upon my journey. *Now finished!!!!* And now: on to the Knoody Well! Farewell, farewell, I go!

1. Date: the same, Oct. 2, 1851
2. Place: my encampment by the great spring at the Knoody Well

I write by the small light of my little fire of sage-wood, which I grubbed from higher ground 50 yds. Away, so I must be brief. I arrived here 3 p.m. or a little after, made camp and took a short nap upon my bundles. Flies and *mosky-toes*.

I started the journey later than I had planned, due to a misfortune of trousers. Just as I clapped shut my day-book and sprang from my office-stool to go and climb aboard my horse, I felt, in mid-air, a distinct *pluck* at my bottom. After landing, I screw'd myself fully about and assayed the damage to my stern parts. I found that a deviate upholstery-

tack had torn out a gash in the outline of a lightening-blaze from the nether panel of my trousers. Godfrey had gone out on errands, and so I had to repair the trousers myself by sewing on a great pad of sacking cloth.

So I spent but a half-hour at William's, where I saw Elizabeth briefly in the sitting-room. I asked her how she bore the times, with a new wife in the attic room. She shrugged, and pointed up with her head – I could hear faintly the girl-bride Zannah singing ploddingly upstairs. Then, silence. Elizabeth says that she, herself, plans to leave. *Where?* I asked. She shrugged again, and said *California*. I know of a safe party leaving for Sacramento in the spring, I told her, and she said perhaps, kissed my cheek, and went out of the room. I heard her feet and skirts on the plank treads of the staircase. I wetted myself from the kitchen jug, and went outside by the kitchen-door and into the yard by the corral, where I peed *freely* on a flat stone.

William had shifted my baggage from Godfrey's packhorse onto Gumbo, the mule, and had shifted my saddle and tack onto Ophir, a saddle-horse which he had got from a bankrupt in settlement of an eight-dollar debt for lamp-oil. He had persuaded me to take this horse instead of my own mare, in order to give Ophir instruction in honest labor. He wants only a little road-schooling, says William, to make him perfectly tractable to the bit. I left sad, calling William a name, as I caught up the lead-rope and kicked Ophir into progress, which I shall probably regret. William did not argue with me – he never does. Elizabeth, I can see, is now far away and has left us already in all respects but latitude and longitude.

When I rode here to the Well, 2 hrs. riding after, I was surprised to see the desolation that autumn and time and have brought this place. The old Knoody homestead, which was still a useful shelter when was here before, is now gone – burned for fuel, and likewise the well-shed. The stream that boiled with the jostling upheaval of rootling golden carp in June of years before is low and still and cold, muff'd up in thick willows, so that the shadowed water gleams black in the afternoon.

I made coffee and a stew of pemmican and onion, and then tickled the horses' backs with a broom of willow, to help them sleep. I have leaned back, while the fire is dying, and counted all the stars until I laughed and shiver'd and lost my place. I had not done that for many years. And I found one sure planet: Venus, overhead and bright beyond imposture. Now my sage-fire dies, and I must die a little now myself to keep it company. Good-night.

1. October 3, near midnight.
2. At Possom's Farm, near the foot of the Ocher Mountain.

I must now relate a grand and terrible story. I alone know of it, so it falls to me and my traveling-pen – a shiny steel-point No. 3 (4¢) from the Worcester works – to catch it and pin it fast to the page. Recorded, it may serve some eventual reader as the solitary map to a new continent of thought and feeling. Or it may serve my heir as fanny-wipe. I cannot say.

As I begin this strange relation, I sit, tired and thoughtful after a strange and strenuous adventure, in a warped chair in Possom's sitting-room. Sonora is out in the stable, a detached building of poplar logs out the south beyond the

well, where she is tending her horse and mine and preparing herself a bivowack among the hay. I am at the writing-table, scribbling in my day-book by the light of Possom's solitary oil lamp.

Possom is mad with thrift. Just now he has peeped from behind his bedroom door-curtain at me, scowling to show me that by writing late by his lamp, I burn the flesh and chattels of his inheritors, all for the scribbles of a wit's accounting for an ordinary day. Well, he knows nothing of the way the world burns all about him, even now. And I have writing to do.

So just now, while his peeping old eye flashed at me from behind the edge of his muslin curtain, his moist ball catching the flame-light of the lamp beside me, I took a half-dime from my haversack here on the table. I held it in my fingers beside the lamp, aiming its mirror-flash at Possom like a signal-lamp, letting him peep at it flashing in the lamplight, darting him with pennyfire.

And I shot him the sternest gaze I could muster (though I am not by nature stern, albeit lamplight may give me a certain shadowed and bony aspect), a dusty basilisk sitting at a crooked table. I flashed Possom his half-dime and laid it by the lamp-base so that he could see it as payment for his precious oil. And his glistening eye winked out as the curtain swished up against the jamb again. And now he snores, his thrifty old eye at peace beneath its leather lid.

If ever another eye should read these lines, its owner should appreciate that the light to write them by cost me half a dime, when I have spent less for two nights' shelter and board for me and my two horses. This has cost me a

respectable sum. Still, I account it at nothing. *Nothing*. For I have never made so strange a relation as this I am about to write. I have not made my estate and comfort by spending like a charity goose. But I have spend a bright half-dime freely tonight to write something that will earn me nothing. This below is why.

I reached Possom's Farm shortly after noon, having left early from my camp at the Knoody Well. The sun teased me awake, and sweated me in my buffalo, and I was plagued by a dozen long-tailed black flying bugs, which darted and hovered around my mouth. So I sprang from my buffalo rather earlier than I had intended, or than my day's schedule of business strictly demanded. After all, I had nearly nothing to do: only to ride five miles to Possom's Farm, where I had appointed to meet Sonora and the Spaniards sometime in the evening.

I made my breakfast-fire, made bannock and coffee (in the copper pot), fed and watered Ophir and Gumbo, washed my cans, washed my face, brushed my beard, took a short walk, did my business by a poplar log, washed again at the seep, saw a mouse, found a tin button, saw a yellow-headed blackbird rocking on a dried cat-tail stalk by the seep, knocked the dust from my hat, and returned to my encampment, all with brisk dispatch. Then, I packed and saddled, and rode off toward Possom's all by 8:30 a.m.

The ground sloped up gently and steadily from the bottom of the Jordan Valley up to the flanks of the Ocher Mountain, and the trail proceeded straight up through a wedge-tilted plane of clay dotted with scale-shade plants, gray-green and spiny, or else

bristling with the tawny straw of wild grasses where the soil was richer.

The sky was filed rim to rim with an armada of small, high, benign clouds, and the view to my right, as I rode, disclosed the blank immensity of the Lake: flat, blue and unmoving beneath the towering sky. Out from the tablet of blue stood out the Antelope Island, like the back of a great swimming lizard breaking the water: gray, bump-crested and serpentine. As I rode toward Possom's (which I could see in the distance by the yellow clusters of willow and poplar fed by the spring), I kept a-peeping at the Island, looking for a trail leading to the shallows where I must tomorrow ford to its shores to fetch my horses.

The sun roasted my back, and between appraisals of the great lake and the Island, I closed my eyes and dreamt a little, as riders do, smelling the air and the horse-perfume and the resins of the ball-topped stalks of sunflowers beside the track, and the hoof-busted dust underfoot, hearing dreamily the squeak of the saddle and traps as we joggled toward Possom's Farm.

Suddenly, I awoke with a start, hearing the echo of my name in my inner ears, as if I had been *halloo'd* from a distance. Now, blinking, I sat on Ophir in the courtyard of Possom's Farm, the house to my right, the corral to my left, and the Ocher Mountain beyond and high above.

And just before me, smiling and leaning on the poplar rail of Possom's corral, stood Sonora. Whilst I dozed as I rode along, I had arrived at Possom's – the horses had followed the track without any captaincy from me, or else I had detached some portion of myself to

carry out navigation on my whole self's behalf.

This latter made sense, since I had evidently halloo'd myself to wake myself up – since there was no one else in the vicinity who might have done so for me. It could hardly have been Sonora, since I could scarcely imagine her hallooing me by name without a more extensive acquaintance. Also, I could hardly imagine that she knew my name, or that I could recognize it if she spoke it.

At any rate, I was delighted to see her, so much earlier than I had planned. (I may say, that I have found her a most interesting person and I had been looking forward to furthering our familiarity during this trip.) Still horsed, I expressed my pleasure, and inquired (in English) about her companions; where they were (I looked about us dramatically at this, rotating my head like an owl, shading my eyes and pursing up my lips into an interrogatory pout, to explain myself better) and whether their journey to Possom's had been pleasant.

She replied (in Spanish) that she had come alone, and that her Spaniard companions had elected to go to the Winty River as they had earlier determined. (This was somehow perfectly clear to me as she spoke, though she spoke in Spanish. Perhaps I understand it more than I know due to casual familiarity and cognate words, or perhaps it was simply clear enough in *context*, I hardly know. Nor do I care!

She continued to say, smiling happily now, and with a very animated manner, flicking her brown fingers toward the lake, that she had heard about the grand lake for years and desired to see it for

herself. I gathered that she regarded this venture as a kind of holiday, and that she was fatigued with the constant doing of Spaniard's business, whatever that might involve – or perhaps commerce, or perhaps murder, or so public opinion among the Mormons would have it.

Talking and smiling, she plucked the halter-ropes from my hand and led Gumbo into the corral to unpack. I dismounted and followed her example, leading in nodding Ophir, watching where I placed my feet, yawning myself awake in the broad sunlight, among the contented *buzz* of flies.

After we had lugged the saddles into the shed and racked them on the pole, I caught up my duffel and started from the corral to the house, to greet Possom and order salt for shipment the day after tomorrow, when I return to town. Sonora joined me as I walked, seizing me by the arm. I was pleasantly aware of her scent as we walked: the dust of her hair, the perfume of horse and the scent of the rabbit-brush crushed against her boots. Laughing, she amiably *gigg'd* me in the ribs with a wiry finger, causing me – in my considerable surprise – to whinny somewhat and caper madly with my legs, causing dust to shoot out from the folds of my trousers with the unfamiliar agitation of the fabric.

I made a sort of "*Whoo-Eee*" sound, as I recall. I am a ticklish man, I should say, and have been so since birth, though I have not experienced this phenomenon since my school-days. But this bout of tickling was not a gratuitous attack, I discerned, but rather Sonora's method of diverting me to the well, where we had a convivial face-wash side by side.

She had just arrived, as had I; we both were dusty.

We washed at a tub alongside the well-shaft, sharing the tub-water with an imperious duck. Sonora, I noted with interest, concluded her toilet in a marvelous way: she cupped water in her hand and snuffed it up neatly into her nose, whence she *tooted* it out daintily into the dust, turning aside out of delicacy as she did so.

Curious, I did this as well, though with a technique less thoroughly practiced. I found it wildly refreshing, and determined to refresh myself thus more often. Then, faces a-gleam and bosoms a-dotted with water-diamonds, we strode the few remaining steps to Possom's house in time for coffee and the mid-day dinner.

But I must speed on, for I have a strange relation to make, and have paid a half-dime for my light. We ate lunch with Possom, Madame Possom (no teeth), one other traveler (a kitchener and small-goods man): a stew, bannock and coffee.

I was not inclined to dwell inside today because the air was clean and the sky so blue, and Sonora evinced an interest in riding out to the lake, since the afternoon loomed up blank before us. And I was interested in spotting the fording place in advance of tomorrow, to lose as little time as possible. So after lunch, I proposed to Sonora that we ride out for the day. But Sonora objected: she had not yet taken the *siesta*, and our outing must wait for three hours yet. This, I gathered, is an inflexible law among the Spaniards.

Since I had napped already on my ride, I readied Ophir myself, and spent the

time in riding up a little valley behind Possom's to inspect a green grove I had spied high upon the mountain-side during my ride, to see if it were piñon that I might profitably take for poles. (It was juniper.)

But finally, at 4 p.m., after Sonora had emerged, yawning, from the shed, braved the duck and splashed again in the tub and tied back her hair, we saddled Sonora's red mare. Together, we rode north along a little spring-line trail toward the Antelope Island ford. Possom, idling by his front gate, pointed the way and assured me that even if I could not find the ford, the horses surely would. I replied that if he had not found his way to town – 11 miles distant – to go to church in all the time I had known of him, he was hardly fit to teach me *navigation*. Possom *whopped* his greasy breeches at that, laughed, and wished me well, looking scowl-ful at Sonora when he was confident that she would not catch him at it. And so we rode off to our appointment with the awesome lake.

The track northward was wide and unencumbered, over clay and hard soil with no large shrubs or stones, so that we could ride side by side and let the horses clop us along, picking the way. As we left Possom's far behind, its distant chimney-smoke looked now small and stiff like a twist of new wool poking from the card. I became sensible, within myself, of a thrill of pleasure, and of a pride like a boy's that Sonora rode with *me* and seemed to find the company amiable.

I should explain that my life here, and my life before, have given me few ready occasions for loving familiarity with others, and this is most acutely true, of course, as regards genteel intercourse

with women. I have spent a pensive hour or three pondering my solitary inclination, but have come to no easy answer about what it must mean. My nature, surely, has always run to wit, perhaps at the expense of fire. This is not to say that I am dry of that vital stream that seems to course like a ditch in other men, who prat about like goats, or that there is a grave fault in my bodily compounding.

Rather, at an early age, I acquired the custom of a fierce and critical distance from my surroundings, so that I regarded even the pretty, flirting companions of my childhood and university days as interesting subjects for study and comment at a scholarly remove, rather than as prospective mates.

It was as if I wore a pair of brass *microscopes*, one for each eye, and peered curiously at my companions. And if I had pursued the coarser part of a smart wag's courtship to rigged out, I might have dealt myself a double *poke* in the eyeballs! – to say nothing of the hazard offered to the object of my tender affections!

Of course, when my family's fortune fell and finally expired altogether, my prospects of suitable affiance were shattered. But even when our family's estate-galleon rode the waves of commerce smartly, with all sails flung to the friendly winds, I trod the poop-deck alone. I found a certain sisterly companionship and closeness in the confidence of my young cousin Emily, who lived near us at Amherst, and more lately in that of Elizabeth, my sister-in-law. But I had never, in my earlier life, found myself ringing wholly, like a chord, in answer to a note offered by another. The artifices of manners, civil

behavior, the commerce of marriage – all of these were features so prominent in my intercourse with others that all else was crowded out of view. The frank comforts of familiarity and ease have been nowhere in prospect, and perhaps were absent altogether. I have heard of untender unions, and have never wished to concoct one for myself. Solitude is not so terrible as that.

Well, now: Sonora, as I have said, rode beside me. We talked comfortably as we rode, she in Spanish and I, English, each understanding the other in a way that might not have gratified the language-master, but to us, lacked nothing important. There was no crush to talk, and we had no-one to please thereby but ourselves. We took no notes.

I watched her comfortably beside me as we joggled along and the dry foothills of the Ocher Mountain lurched by the western background and the wind pushed on us gently in soft gusts. She wore dusty flannels: shirt, trousers and leggings – a costume even less respectable than my own, my wildly patched breeches and my venerable hunting-coat. She was hatless, with her dark hair tied back so that it hung in a soft, weighty bundle down her back. I watched the sliding of bone and thong beneath the tanned skin of her hand as she tended the reins, her forearm resting familiarly on the high pommel of her Spanish saddle. And she watched me easily back, smiling at the sun and the afternoon with nothing in it purposeful to do.

I had never regarded another so closely or vividly. I was steadily growing conscious of Sonora, a yard away, as a living mammal of medium size: smaller than a horse, and larger than a cat-a-mountain, as big around as *so*, built

about a cage of bone and all the rest, and being roughly of my own age. And I was conscious of a formidable response within myself, a kind of companionable longing to touch her, and laugh and talk with her without distance or reservation. This feeling was wholly new to me: it seemed to speak forcibly throughout me with a forcible authority, rising from my fundamental parts, from my spine and belly, from inside my chest, my seat of breath. For a time there, while we rode, I had *nothing* more to say.

After a certain time, Sonora spoke to me and pointed northward, reining her red mare to a halt. I followed her example, and regarded the scene before us as the great lake spread out: dull silver, flat and unmoving out to the horizon. To our right, the wide track wobbled on, trampled and dung-dotted, straight to a distanter part of the lake's margin still an hour's ride ahead or so. That was clearly the track to the Antelope Island ford and we could even spy the resumption of the track on the island's treeless slopes, which waver in the distance beyond a leaden strip of lake-water.

To our left branched off a smaller track that led directly downhill to the lakeside part nearest us, hardly more than a half-mile away, where a great black stump of rock, as big as a barn, pok'd from the glistening mud around the lake's edge. Sonora gestured down this lesser track with her chin and asked me a question. I answered "Si."

As with a single will, we simultaneously set off in this new direction. We had found the ford for tomorrow, and could freely inspect the lake today for no good purpose but that of gratifying our curiosity about the mysterious and

lifeless sea. I rode along quiet as the sun dipped down to the west and the afternoon passed into evening.

I let Sonora speak my share as I thrilled with the resonance of a great new chord within and through me. It charged and flooded every quick urgent cell wrapped up in my familiar clothes.

At the Lake

We found the lake's edge just as the setting sun sank behind the clouds massed at the horizon, after a half-hour's ride from the fork in the track. Fearing deep mud, we left the horses at the last high ground at the very northernmost point of the Ocher Mountain. Sonora turned out her mare to wander freely, but I hitched Ophir tight to a scale-shade bush, using an ingenious hitch of my own devising. (Williams eight-dollar horse might, I feared, harbor some brainless passion for sunsets and *gollop* westward without me.)

So thence, we walked. We passed down from the sandy high ground through a rat's grove of scale-shade, mouse-pea, salt-horn (both Greater and Lesser), and vetch and a little of blister-pear and night-Moly where the dried ground rose up in bumps. After a perilous ramble in the dimming light, I finally stumbled (fouling my boots and trouser-legs) down a little rim of crusted mud, tipped like the rim of a saucer, which marked the utmost shallows of the lake's water, and the famous lake's very edge. I touched it, and sniffed my fingers gustily. It smelt profoundly of a blank corruption.

I splashed in to my boot-tops, and bent and scooped, and tasted. Then I spat and blabbered to Sonora, marveling at

the water's strong smack and powerful odour, thinking her still behind me. But then, I heard her splashing to leftward, and only feet away. I straightened and looked, and saw that she walked knee-deep in the lake, and chuckled heartily as she walked, as if she had never played in water before. *She had shed her clothes.*

Now mark me. The sky all about was now excandescent red, the red of a spitting iron strap in a waggoner's forge, hot for the hammer. The whole horizon to the west, where the sun burned, was profoundly red, tinting the very light of the world itself, all about me, all above, all before me, where Sonora moved in the water, where the rank, scummed brine flashed red and gray as she stirred it up. Smiling still, she pushed in slowly deeper, till the water brushed the fork of her legs, and she turned to me face-on, seemed to proffer a suggestion to me, her right hip tipped up and her right shoulder dipped to meet, her finger-tips flicking the water and trailing in the waves she made. She stood between me and the fiery horizon, so that her face and foreparts were inked away in blackest shadow, and the awful light stream'd about her tangibly, visibly, like an incandescent wind.

Outlined in fire, only 2 yds. away, she raised her dabbling hand; held it out to her side, palm upward, and the brine-drops, falling, cut the burning light to splinters, a spray of electric splinters, so the scene was ever scorched onto my eyes. And an instant terror petrified me: Sonora, now commanding a storm of embers, seemed a hell-sight, a fleshly, vegetal thing growing in a realm of fire: a smelter's Aphrodite, rising from a crucible of streaming iron.

I cannot speak, in the ordinary way, about the moments while this vision wrapt me, and refined me in its flame – only that ordinary minutes passed me by without deepening my wrinkles; that I knew then that all my short life, this other Universe – of fluent, terrible light – had burned about and through me, and I had never noticed it there, being wholly occupied with counting the buttons on my waistcoat; again, and again, and again, though I knew the number like my name. At the lake, I surrendered all my buttons, all my names. All, all was flame; implacable combustion, all of it – flame, form and flesh. All before me was a unitary frenzy, an orgiastic light, high noon on the Day of Days.

This vision exhausted my sight. My name, at length, returned, and brought me a quiet, gentle fit of trembling so that I swayed upon my legs. The figure still stood before me, red light howling about her shape, and her face lost in shadow. Then, the whiteness of her teeth broke the blackness, and revealed her as Sonora again, and smiling still. She spoke something, and tossed her head, and a sudden soft wind pushed at the soft weight of her hair. She flicked me with water, and laughed again, and spoke the same again, a little line of Spanish dentals, gently inflected upward at the end. The spell was broken, and I numbly answered *si*. I began to put aside my clothes, un-doing the necessaries like a mechanical man.

But presently, I found myself aware, and my fingers paralyzed by tremours and twined among the laces of my drawers, caught: afraid of my own pale nakedness, that of a poor, bare, forked root. I feared her scorn in this empty place where I had nothing else of my own, so far from my home and my

language and my books, afraid that she might be disappointed or repelled when my private *peculiarity* was revealed. And simultaneously, I was ashamed to feel so, for I knew better, and I was yet enfeebled from my terrible vision.

This crisis of choice tore at me, there in the shallows of an alien lake so far from my home and my named ways. I was as one ripped apart. The action upon me of levers and tongs and crow-bars could not have applied a force more exquisite. I shook, and choked, and might have bodily *exploded* on the spot, but then my ready wit came to my aid. I thought this: that surely I had nothing to hide, but *hide* itself! I roared, despite myself, at this neat turn, and Sonora laughed too, seeing me do so, and instantly, my dreadful bonds fell away! Instantly, the thing of laces was done. I stood teetering alternately upon each pale, slender leg, like a *flamingoe*, till the drawers sprang onshore like a wooly half-a-fellow with a wooly will all his own.

I was hugely and strangely merry: hot, acrid tears now streamed down my nose and cheeks and lips and chest and ran now cool and thrilling into the soft gutters of my groin, and pattered down upon the scarlet brine as I laughed and toss'd my head. I stood naked in the cool flowing air (for a wind had come). Perfectly radiant to the Universe about, I raised my arms in a fine delight, and walked out into the lake of fire.

