

his camp he transferred part of it to his saddle horse. Even so, he was compelled to abandon a portion of his outfit—pick and shovel and gold pan, extra food and cooking utensils, and divers odds and ends.

The sun was at the zenith when the man forced the horses at the screen of vines and creepers. To climb the huge boulders the animals were compelled to uprear and struggle blindly through the tangled mass of vegetation. Once the saddle horse fell heavily and the man removed the pack to get the animal on its feet. After it started on its way again the man thrust his head out from among the leaves and peered up at the hillside.

“The measly skunk!” he said, and disappeared.

There was a ripping and tearing of vines and boughs. The trees surged back and forth, marking the passage of the animals through the midst of them. There was a clashing of steel-shod hoofs on stone, and now and again an oath or a sharp cry of command. Then the voice of the man was raised in song:

Tu'n around an' tu'n yo' face
Untoe them sweet hills of grace.
(D' pow'rs of sin yo' am scornin'!)
Look about an' look aroun',
Fling yo' sin pack on d' groun',
(Yo' will meet wid d' Lord in d' mornin'!)

The song grew faint and fainter, and through the silence crept back the spirit of the place. The stream once more drowsed and whispered; the hum of the mountain's bees rose sleepily. Down through the perfume-weighted air fluttered the snowy flurfs of the cottonwoods. The butterflies drifted in and out among the trees, and over all blazed the quiet sunshine. Only remained the hoofmarks in the meadow and the torn hillside to mark the boisterous trail of the life that had broken the peace of the place and passed on. [1905]

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MARY AUSTIN

Mary Austin (1868–1934) was born in Carlinville, Illinois. After her graduation from Blackburn College, she moved with her family to homestead in California in 1888. In 1891 she married Stafford Wallace Austin and lived in the desert, where she began to write the sketches about nature published in her first book, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903). Two years later she divorced her husband and moved east to join artist colonies in New York City's Greenwich Village and in London, but she soon returned to New Mexico to write about her favorite landscape. Austin supported herself by writing sketches and stories for *The Overland Monthly*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Harper's Magazine, and *Century Magazine*. In her autobiography *Earth Horizon* (1932), she explained that her goal as an author was to “write imaginatively not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature, and . . . I would give myself intransigently to the quality of experience called Folk, and to the frame of behavior known as Mystical.”

Most of Austin's stories can be found in four collections: *The Basket Woman: A Book of Fanciful Tales for Children* (1904), *Lost Borders* (1909), *The Trail Book* (1919), and *One-Smoke Stories* (1934). A posthumous collection of her early work—*Mother of Felipe and Other Stories* (1950), edited by Franklin Walker—also was produced.

“*The Walking Woman*,” first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in August 1907, was collected in *Lost Borders*. Austin often experimented in her writing, as in her story “*The Return of Mr. Wills*,” in which she rewrote the plot of “*Rip Van Winkle*” from a woman's point of view, making Mrs. Wills discover after her husband's disappearance that “she not only did not need Mr. Wills, but got on better without him.” In *One-Smoke Stories*, another literary experiment, Austin conceived each story in the volume as being told in the time it took its teller to smoke a cigarette. She believed that

your true desert dweller travels light. He makes even of his experience a handy package with the finished neatness that distinguishes his artifacts. How else could they be passed intact from tribe to tribe, from generation to generation? Just before the end, like the rattle that warns that the story is about to strike, comes the fang of experience, most often in the shape of a wise saying. Then the speaker resumes the soul-consoling smoke while another takes up the dropped stitch of narrative and weaves it into the pattern of the talk.

RELATED COMMENTARY: Mary Austin, “Regionalism in American Fiction,” page 1293.