

# **THE SPIRIT OF JOHN MUIR**

A TWO-ACT MONOLOGUE

WRITTEN BY LEE STETSON

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## ACT ONE

Well. Well, well. What a grand gathering of Yosemite lovers have we here. Well, such a gathering should bring forth any lively spirit hereabouts, eh, and having spent a long and happy lifetime playing with and marveling at the rock and water spirits of Yosemite, well, now you can marvel that I appear to be one! And I heartily thank you for your summons here this evening.

You did call, eh?

I may have been mistaken, but I experienced such a sharp sensation of having been called.... well, have you not found your spirit from time to time called to places or to people of like nature.

Ah, but I do detect some surprise, or perhaps some doubt, that the spirit of Old John Muir still wanders in the Yosemite. And I can appreciate such doubt, for such things as ghost stories, second sight, or spirit rapping, well, none of that has interested me since boyhood, seeming far less wonderful than Nature's open, harmonious, songful, sunny, everyday beauty. Ah but then I suppose we should remember the mysterious case of my good friend, Professor Butler.

Many years ago, when I was still new to these mountains, and indisputably more flesh than spirit, I was working as a shepherd up in the Tuolumne Meadows, and I was spending a delightful day on top of the North Dome, sketching, - for the North Dome - three thousand feet above the Yosemite Valley floor, commands a general view of the Valley, and I was eager then to sketch every rock and tree and waterfall. Well, I was at my work, when I was suddenly, and without warning, struck by the idea that my friend, the Professor J. D. Butler, of the University of Wisconsin, was somewhere down below me in the Valley - a notion that struck me with as much startling surprise as if he had suddenly touched me or whispered in my ear. And though I last knew the good Professor to be a thousand miles away, or more, in Wisconsin, I felt his present as if he had been bodily wafted up against my face, and I became so heart-hungry to see a friend, after two years among strangers, that I jumped up from my work full of the idea of meeting him.

I tied my notebook to my belt, and ran down through a gap that proved to be the Indian Canyon, and out onto the Valley floor - where I met a man making hay in one of our meadows - who directed me to Hutching's gloomy old hotel across the river,

and there, in its register, I found the familiar handwriting of my good professor. And a short time later, while searching about, I found the man himself, hot, tired, a bit lost perhaps, sitting on a rock on top of the Vernal Fall. And when he saw me coming along the trail, thinking me to be a Valley guide, I suppose, he asked me the way to the Fall ladders, that in those days descended to the Valley floor. And when I stood directly in front of him, and extended my hand, the sudden surprise and recognition was wonderful. "John Muir!" he exclaimed, "John Muir, where have you come from!" Oh, how grand was our reunion.

And I soon learned thereafter, that not only was he as ignorant of my whereabouts on this good planet as I was of his, but at the very moment I experienced that strange telepathy, transcendental revelation - whatever else it might be called - he was coming up the Valley floor around El Capitan, and had he at that moment taken a look to the North Dome with a good glass just as it came into view, he might have seen me jump up from my work four or five miles away and run to him.

Hawthorne, I fancy, could weave one of his weird romances out of this little telepathic episode, no doubt replacing my good professor with an attractive woman. Now, it seems supernatural, eh, and it remains one of the great marvels of my life. But it's silly to make too much of it, I suppose, for most of the miracles we hear of nowadays are infinitely less wonderful than the commonest of natural phenomena.

And indeed, one of the worst apparent effects of all of these odd mysterious things, is the blindness that they breed to all that is so divinely common.

And so. Feel free to doubt my presence here this evening. But do remember the mysterious case of my Professor Butler. It seems we do not always know what summons us.

Still I do detect that doubt out there, eh? And no wonder, I suppose, for I too have heard the rumors. That I died. And long ago, they say. And of a broken heart, of a shattered spirit, from the loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, that other magnificent Yosemite Valley, that I fought so long, so hard to protect, and to no avail. And I suppose that there's a good deal of romance attached to the idea of dying of a broken heart. But think on it. If we wilderness lovers died every time we lost a place we loved, our species would have long ago gone the way of the Dodo bird.

Well, it was always thus, eh? The very first 'reserved area', the first reservation that was ever made, long before Yosemite and our Hetch Hetchy, well, it met the same fate. And that reservation, run by the Lord Himself, and of very moderate dimensions, containing only one tree - an apple tree, as I recall - but no sooner was it made than it was attacked. And by everybody in the world - the devil, one man, and one woman. And that has been the history of every reservation ever since. As soon as

they are made, the thieves and the devil and his relations come forward to attack them, and I doubt not that if all the rest of our beautiful wilderness were utterly stripped away from us - as was the Hetch Hetchy - and there remained only one tree, one tree reserved as the most noble and glorious, it would not be long before you'd find a lumberman and lawyer at the foot of it. And eagerly proving, by every law, celestial and terrestrial that that tree, well that tree too must come down.

No, I am never surprised - to the point of death - saddened yes, but never surprised to see Lord Man treating the natural world as if naturalness were the least natural thing in it. As if a tree had no fruitful function until Lord Man devised one for it. I once overheard a tourist, contemplating one of my King Sequoias, and musing on it, said, " Now I wonder how many outhouses might be built from yonder tree." Well, lumber is all some see. And I doubt not that these trees would make very good lumber after passing through the sawmill - well, as some of our politicians after passing through the hands of a French cook, would make good food.

But I am not here this evening to rant and rave over those who would destroy our wilderness. I did a great deal of that in the old days, and there is many a good warrior for that cause nowadays, many in this very room, I have no doubt. No, no, I am here tonight just to bring a little spirit to the occasion, perhaps to tell a story or two of my days in the wilderness, and in any case am always delighted to saunter about one more time with all my kindred spirits in the Yosemite.

Though I could not help but notice, as I was sauntering my way through the Valley to come here this evening, that in many places in this wilderness, it's becoming difficult to see the forest for the people. Have you noticed? And yet I also noticed that if you were to quietly walk away from those places - well, it's not long before you'll find yourself alone, experiencing the freedom of a mountaineer, sauntering through the pinewoods and the meadows, or rambling along the brows of our mountain tops, like the Tissiack.

Ah, the Tissiack! Or what you nowadays called the Half Dome, eh? Now there's a spot, on top of which, you might on any given day see any number of lively spirits. And you know, the Half Dome is the only rock around the Valley walls, excepting a few spires and pinnacles that is strictly inaccessible, except by artificial means. And indeed, in the old days many a mountaineer tried to invent a way to the top of it, but all in vain until the summer of 1875, when George Anderson, an indomitable Scotsman, resolutely drilled his way to the top of it. Aye! Around the back of the Half Dome, he drilled a hole into the rock wall, inserted an eye bolt, and then by standing on that last little bolt while drilling a hole for the next above, and drawing up his rope between each in succession, he accomplished that whole work in just a few days.

And in early November of that year, returning from a trip from Mount Shasta, and hearing of Anderson's rope, well I made haste to the Dome, not only for the pleasure of climbing it, but to see what I might learn. Anderson himself tried to prevent

me from making the climb, apprehensive of the slipperiness of the rope and the rock and refusing to believe that anyone could climb his rope in the snow muffled condition that the Dome was then in. And indeed, it was an overcast day, with solemn little snow clouds beginning to curl around the summit. It was one of those brooding, changeful days that come between Indian summer and winter, when the clouds come and go among the Valley walls like living creatures looking for work. But I had matches in my pockets, and thinking that a little firewood might be found, I concluded that in case of a storm the night might be spent on top of the Dome without suffering anything worth minding, and so, I pushed ahead, and soon gained the top.

And oh, my first view was perfectly glorious. A massive cloud, the luster of pure pearl, was arched across the Valley at the lower end, one end resting on El Capitan and the other on the Cathedral Rock, and apparently as fixed and calm as the meadows and groves beneath it. And a little later, while standing out on the very lip, the very edge of the Half Dome, four thousand feet straight down to the Mirror Lake and the Tenaya Canyon, a flock of smaller clouds, white as snow, came dancing in from the North, and began to gather about my feet, massing into the Tenaya Canyon. And then the sun shone free, lighting the pearly gray mass of that cloud-like sea, and making it glow.

While gazing at and admiring this sea-cloud, I was suddenly startled to see, for the first and only time, the rarest of our mountain spirits - the *Specter of the Brocken*. It was my shadow, clearly outlined, lying across this cloud-like sea half a mile long. And I walked back and forth, striking all sorts of attitudes, waving my hat and my arms, arms the size of Sequoia trees, and I danced a bit of the Highland Fling, while my monstrous shadow was dancing with me on the clouds.

So. Are you weary of the crowds hereabouts? Then go, go up, go out, be fleet. Perhaps you'll meet your spirit out there somewhere, indeed, perhaps up on the cloudlands, eh?

Ah, the glorious cloudlands. Perhaps the greatest cloudland that I ever saw was not here, not in the Yosemite, but to the North, up at Mount Shasta. I have good reason to remember Mount Shasta, for it was there that I nearly became a spirit long before my time.

#### A Perilous Night on Mount Shasta

It was on the last day of April, 1875, the same year that I climbed the Half Dome, that I made my fateful ascent of Mount Shasta, accompanied by Jerome Fay, - a good mountaineer - to make some barometric measurements for the Coast Survey. We had encamped at timber line, rose at two o'clock in a keen, starry night, breakfasted, said good-bye to our horses, and began our ascent, skirting the Whitney Glacier, and near the summit, passing those hissing fumaroles, or Hot Springs, with their curious gas jets - some six to eight feet tall - evidence of Shasta's volcanic heart.

On gaining the summit, we saw off toward Lassen's Butte hundreds of square miles of white cumuli boiling dreamily in the sunshine far beneath us, though causing no alarm, for at 9 a.m. the thermometer stood at 34 degrees in the shade, and rose steadily to 50 degrees at 1 p.m. - so comfortable that a common bumblebee zigzagged vigorously about our heads, as if he did not know that the nearest honey flower was a mile beneath him.

Well, while at our work, the clouds were growing down in the Shasta Valley, gradually encircling our mountain in one continuous cloud zone, leaving the lofty cone on which we stood solitary in the sunshine between two skies - a sky of spotless blue above, and a sky of glittering cloud below - like a lasting addition to the landscape, so near looking and substantial looking that we fancied we might leap down upon them from where we stood and gently bounce down to the lowlands.

But then, thin films of cloud began to blow directly over the summit, drawn out in long fairy webs, forming and dissolving as if by magic. Seeing these, good Jerome was now eager to depart but another observation of the barometer was scheduled at 3 o'clock, and I was anxious to complete our work. Well, the sky speedily darkened, and just as I had boxed my instruments, the storm broke upon us in serious earnest. First came the hail, beating the cliffs, rolling and sliding amid the rocks in a curious network of streams, and while forcing our way down the ridgeline, past the group of hissing fumaroles, the storm became inconceivably violent. My thermometer fell 22 degrees in a few minutes, and soon dropped below zero. The hail gave place to a thick snow, and darkness came on like night. A violent wind boomed and surged amid the desolate crags, lightning flashes in quick succession cut through the gloomy darkness, and the thunders, the most tremendously loud and appalling I ever heard, made an almost continuous roar, stroke rapidly following stroke, as though the mountain were being rent to its foundations and the fires of the old volcano were breaking forth again.

Now we had to make our way along this dangerous ridge nearly a mile and half long, flanked in many places by the steep ice-slopes of the Whitney glacier on the one side and by shattered precipices on the other. Despite the darkness and the drifting snow, I felt confident that we could force our way down, but while halting in the lee of a lava block for a moment of shelter, Jerome, without any bewilderment, declared that it was impossible to proceed, and firmly refused to make the venture to find our camp. Being the cause of his present peril, I certainly could not leave him.

And so we made a dash from our shelter, and began forcing our way back up the mountain, against the blast of the storm, struggling as if fording a rapid stream, to the fumaroles.

Now the fumaroles extended over about a fourth of an acre, but it was now only about an eighth of an inch in thickness, for the scalding gas-jets were shorn off close to the ground by the frosty wind. "Here", said Jerome, as we shivered in the midst of these hissing, sputtering fumaroles, "we shall be safe from frost!" "Yes", I said, "we can lie down in this mud and steam and sludge, warm at least on one side, but how can we protect our lungs from the acid gases, and how, after our clothing is saturated, shall we be able to reach camp without freezing, even after the storm is over. We shall have to wait for sunshine, and when will it come?" But there was nothing for it. So we lay down on this hot, muddy surface, on our backs so as to present as little of our bodies as possible to the wind, and to let the drift pass over us. But oh, how lavishly that snow fell! only mountaineers may know. This fertile snow-cloud fell to a depth of two feet in just a few hours, and the storm blast, laden with crisp, sharp snow seemed to stupefy us with its stings, shifting into the folds of our clothing, many places reaching the skin. Now we were glad at first to have the snow packing about us, hoping it would deaden the force of the wind. But as the temperature fell, it soon froze into a stiff crusty heap, augmenting our rather novel misery.

And the crusty surface upon which we lay frequently gave way, opening new vents to scald us. When the heat became unendurable, in some spot where the steam was escaping through the sludge, we tried to stop it with snow and mud, or by shifting a little at

a time by shoving with our heels, for to stand up, exposed to that fearful wind in our frozen and broiled condition, seemed certain death.

Though we also feared that if at any time the wind should fall, carbonic acid might collect and in sufficient quantities as to cause sleep and death. And so, in a state of half-consciousness, we often called out to each other by name in a frightened, startled way, each fearing the other might be benumbed or dead. "Are you suffering much?", Jerome would ask with pitiful faintness. "Yes", I would say, striving to keep my voice brave, "frozen and burned, but never mind, Jerome, the night will wear away at last, and tomorrow what campfires we will make and what sun-baths we will take!".

Truth is, we did nothing but suffer. Frozen, burned, blistered, benumbed, famished, our bodies seemed lost to us at times - all dead but the eyes. Though the eyes were given something glorious to see, for the storm suddenly broke, vanished, not a crystal left in the sky, and with marvelous brightness the stars shone out with long lance-rays, near-looking and new-looking, as if never seen before. But then the bitter wind and the drifting snow would break this blissful vision and dreary pains would cover us like clouds.

Still the pain was not always of that bitter, intense kind that takes away all capacity of enjoyment, for at times a sort of dreamy stupor came upon us in which we fancied we

saw dry resinous logs suitable for camp-fires, just as after going days without food men fancy they see bread.

But as the night wore on, the frost grew more and more intense, and we became icy and now covered over with a crust of frozen snow, as if we had been cast away all winter in the drift. In about thirteen hours - every hour like a year - day began to dawn, but it was hours longer before the sun came stealing down the ridge to the hollow where we lay. At length, after the temperature rose a bit, we began to struggle homeward. Upon rising I found my beard frozen to my box of instruments, and our frozen trousers could scarcely be made to bend at the knee, and we feebly waded through the snow, but on reaching the long home-slopes laden with loose snow, our feebleness accelerated rather than diminished our speed, for between sliding, shuffling and pitching headlong, we made rapid progress. As the sunshine warmed our backs, we began to revive, and at 10 a.m. we reached the timber and were safe.

Oh, our feet were frozen, and thawing them was painful, done very slowly by keeping them buried in soft snow for several hours. But then, wrapped up in sacking, we were soon mounted, and on our way down into the thick sunshine - where to our utter surprise, at the base of the mountain, we found that only a slight shower of rain had fallen, showing that, notwithstanding the terrific fury of our storm, just how local it had been - as if it had been created and presented for Jerome and me alone. So I shall not soon forget good Mount Shasta and her glorious storms.

#### Various Valley Storms

Oh, we have many a glorious storm hereabouts as well, of course. Indeed, during the five winters I spent living in Yosemite Valley, I made many excursions to the tops of walls in all kinds of weather to see what was going on. And it is on these mountain tops, when they are laden with loose fresh snow and driven by the wind from the north that the most impressive of our winter storm spirits might be seen - the snow banners. Now from all my lofty outposts I saw only one snow banner storm that I thought in every way perfect - in the winter of '73. Seeing that the snow laden peaks hereabouts were being driven by a powerful norther, I waded and wallowed for four or five hours up snow-choked Indian Canyon to a spot about eight thousand feet above sea level, to command a general view of the main summits of the glorious Sierra, and the most impressive wind storm spirit I ever beheld.

Imagine unnumbered mountains rising sharply into a cloudless sky, their bases solid white, their sides all splashed with snow like ocean rocks with foam, and from every summit peak there flowed a magnificent silvery white banner, from two to six thousand feet in length, slender at the point of attachment, but growing slowly wider to about fifteen hundred feet in width, and each one as shapely and as substantial looking in texture as the banners of the finest silk, all blowing free and clear in the sun glow. Some

overlapped and partially hid one another, so that the peaks past which they were streaming were seen as though through a veil of ground glass, but others, on the highest peaks and more than a mile in length, were blowing perfectly clear and free, as if celebrating some grand event, some centennial known only to the spirit of the north wind.

Oh that wind. It does some powerful work down here in the Valley as well, especially around the Yosemite Fall, on account of its height and exposure. Indeed one winter morning, awoken by such a storm wind, shortly after breakfast, while seeking a place safe from flying branches, I saw the lower Yosemite Fall simply thrashed, pulverized from top to bottom into one glorious mass of rainbow dust, while a thousand feet above it, the main upper fall was suspended in the form of an inverted bow, all silvery white and fringed with white quivering strips. But then, suddenly assailed by a mighty blast of wind, the entire mass of the upper Fall was blown into threads and ribbons and then driven up and over the brow of the cliff from whence it came - as if denied admission to the Valley. And this lasted from ten to fifteen minutes, until a change in the play of the wind allowed that baffled Fall to sink down again. And later, in the afternoon of that same day, while watching from the shelter of a big pine tree, I saw again as the upper Yosemite Fall, fifteen hundred feet in length, was again arrested in its descent at a spot about half way down, and this time was neither driven upwards nor driven aside, but held, perfectly stationary, in mid-air - as if gravity below that point had ceased to act. And this ponderous mass of water, weighing hundreds of tons, was sustained, hovering, hesitating, while I counted, one, two, three, four, fi..., to one hundred and ninety. And all of this time the ordinary amount of water was still coming over the cliff and accumulating in the air, widening, swedging, tapering into an irregular cone rising seven hundred feet to the top of the wall, and all standing perfectly still, on the invisible arm of the mighty north wind. And then, as if commanded to go all again, scores of those arrowy comets shot out from the beneath the ponderous mass, and soon the Fall resumed its travels.

Oh, glorious North Wind! I have seen it blow that Fall apart even in the midst of its springtime fullness. Though I have seen the Fall when no amount of wind spirit could sway its course - in the winter of '71. One winter night, after heavy snow falls here in the Valley, the temperature suddenly rose to forty-two degrees, melting the snow here and far above the Valley walls.

And a comparatively warm rain the next morning plunged this entire Valley into glorious flood. Now here was a Valley spirit I had never seen before. Awaken by a roar, I looked out to see that portion of the North Wall visible from my cabin window fairly streaked with new waterfalls, looking strangely out of place. Eager to get into the midst of this show, I snatched a piece of bread and ran out. The mountain waters, suddenly liberated, presented more new waterfalls adorning these cliffs than I could readily count - the entire Valley throbbed and trembled and was filled with a massive sea-like roar.

I wanted to get up into the upper meadows where the Valley was widest, so that I might be able to see the walls on both sides, but the river was already over its banks, and the meadows were flooded, forming a lake, dotted here and there with sludgy islands, and innumerable stream, shoving rocks and logs before them with ferocious energy, crossed my path like lions. I

avoided these by climbing up into the talus slopes, those wonderful boulder piles that lean up against the Valley walls, and forced my way up the Valley to Hutching's old bridge, where I managed to cross the river and then waded out into the upper meadow. Now here most of the new waterfalls were visible, perhaps the greatest assemblage of waterfalls ever seen from one standpoint. I counted fifty-six new waterfalls, though in all of the Valley there must have been over a hundred. And although newcomers, they behaved and sang as if they had lived here always - a mighty chorus.

And strangely, in the midst of this great jubilee of waters, the great Yosemite Fall was silent - until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when I suddenly heard a tremendous crash. The floodwaters of the Yosemite Creek, delayed by the choking snow now, and the distance it had to travel - all the way from Mount Hoffman - had just arrived. And now, with ten times the volume of its Springtime fullness, it took its place as the leader of the choir. This was the grandest collection of Valley spirits I ever saw, winds and waters, clouds and cliffs, all throbbing and chanting as one. And for two days and nights this storm raged on, and all without spectators. I saw nobody out. Well, you know, in those days the hotel people, afraid of the cold, were satisfied by what views they might get from their windows. And the tourists, in December, well, they had fled months before and were safe at home, in their cities.

Safe at home. Odd, eh? For me, home was always the most dangerous place I might go. As long as I camp out in the mountains I get along perfectly well. But as soon as I'm in a warm house, dining on fine food, snuggled into a comfy bed, the first thing I know I'm coughing, sneezing, threatened with pneumonia. Outdoors is the natural place for man.

### The Sledtrip

Perhaps the best example of the happy, healthy, invigorating effect of the grand outdoors must be my memorable sled-trip of 1890 up in Alaska, in Glacier Bay.

I was eager to return to Glacier Bay, which I had discovered some ten years before, for I was eager to explore, measure and to sketch general views of the seven major tributaries and the main upper part of that massive glacier now known as the Muir. My companions had taken me by canoe across the inlet from our main camp to the head of

the glacier, and promised to retrieve me in eleven days - time enough I thought to learn something, and at the same time, I hoped, to get rid of a severe bronchial cough which had troubled me for three months, and which I had of course acquired in the lowlands I intended to camp on the glacier every night, and so, to sleep on the ice, I had constructed a sturdy sled, three feet long, eighteen inches wide, and made as light as possible, though still not weighing less than one hundred pounds, after packing my instruments, sleeping bag, a sack of hardtack, a little tea and sugar, all securely lashed so that nothing would drop off however much it might be jarred while crossing those icy hummocks, or while dangling from crevasses, those great cracks in glacial ice.

And dragging this heavy little sled seven or eight miles a day over so wildly broken a glacier, across innumerable crevasses, some of them brimful with water, over streams, around several lakes and through an endless sea of icy hummocks, well this was somewhat fatiguing. At times I had to carry the sled bodily, strapped across my back, and often too had to cross those narrow, nerve-trying, ice-sliver bridges, balancing astride of them, cautiously shoving the sled ahead of me with tremendous chasms on either side. And the ice was so rough that my shoes, resoled just before starting out, were about worn out within a week, and my feet wet every night.

Still, in this serene wilderness - with the intense silvery whiteness, the icy freshness of the sweet north wind, the sounds of the streams and rills falling into the chasms and shafts, the fall of snow in the solid darkness of night, - in this serene wilderness, I say, no matter how weary, one can gain a heart-bath in perfect peace.

Oh, one day would be dismal and damp, but the next glorious, all pure sunshine. And I often climbed the surrounding mountains often, to sketch, to plan a way, and take bearing, etc., in case of storms. Once, to shorten the return journey to my camp, I was tempted to glissade down what appeared to be a snow-filled ravine, which was very steep. All went well until I reached a bluish spot which proved to be ice, on which I lost control of myself and shot down, rolling into a gravel talus at the foot - and happily, all without a scratch. Just then I was startled by a loud fierce, diabolical scream, as if an enemy, having seen me fall, was exulting in my death. Then suddenly, swooping from the sky, two ravens alighted on a jag of rock within a few feet of me, evidently hoping that I had been maimed and that they were going to have a feast. But as they stared at me, studying my condition, impatiently waiting for bone-picking time, I saw what they were up to, and shouted, "Not yet, you black imps, not yet. I'm not carrion yet. I was only sliding for fun. Shame on you not to know better!" - and they did seem ashamed. What wonderful eyes they must have! Nothing that moves in all that icy wilderness escapes these brave birds.

Much was beginning to escape me, however, for I had now had been sketching every day for a week or so, and my eyes were now much inflamed, and I could scarcely see. All the lines I made appeared double, and I awoke one morning nearly blind. The light was intolerable, and I lay all day on my back with a snow poultice bound over my eyes. Every object I tried to look at seemed doubled, even the distant mountain ranges, the upper an exact copy of the lower. This is the first time in Alaska that I had too much sunshine. Not all was dismal, for twice I was visited by a hummingbird, attracted by the red lining of my sleeping bag. Fortunately, about four o'clock in the afternoon, some thin, kindly clouds cast a grateful shade over the glowing landscape, and pulling my cap well down, I gladly took advantage of them to cross a few miles of glacier that lay between me and the shore of the inlet, enabling me to get nearer the main camp, where I could be more easily found should I be unable to travel.

I kept wet bandages on my eyes that night as long as I could, and felt better in the morning, and so decided to pull the sled still further down the glacier, and to be closer still to my companions.

Near the front of the glacier the ice was perfectly free, apparently, of anything like danger, and in walking almost carelessly, I was suddenly swallowed up into a water-filled crevasse. This crevasse like many others was being used as the channel of a stream, and at some narrow point the small cubical masses of ice into which the glacier surface disintegrates were jammed and extended back farther and farther back, forming a sort of slush that completely covered the water. Into this, after crossing thousands of really dangerous crevasses, I suddenly sank, for never before had I encountered a danger so completely concealed. Down I plunged over head and ears, but of course bobbed up again, and after a hard struggle succeeded in dragging myself out over the farther side.

I quickly pulled my sled over to the shelter of a cliff, stripped off my soggy clothing, threw it in a wet heap and leapt into my sleeping-bag to shiver away the night as best I could.

Next morning dressing in a dreary rain - after wringing out my sloppy underclothing, - well, it was far from pleasant. Still, that very night, I was back at the main camp, my eyes were better, and I felt no bad effect from my icy bath. And every last trace of my three month's bronchial cough was gone. No lowland microbe could have survived such a trip.

So, are you weary? Are you ill? Then go air yourself out on an ice-prairie, or up on our breezy mountain tops. Outdoors is the natural place for man - and the farther from his cities the better.

You know as a young man, I often thought I'd like to explore the cities, if like a lot of wild hills and valleys, they could be cleared on inhabitants. But inhabitants or no, I always found the streets so barren, bee-less, muddy, and mean-looking. Now God never made an ugly landscape, eh? All that the sun shines on is beautiful, as long as it is wild. And it's strange that so many really good people waste their short lives in mean surroundings.

And when they do attempt to escape, these city dwellers, - these would-be travelers - , transform themselves into a creature know hereabouts as a tourist, and becomes satisfied with the view they get from their car windows, and hotels and dust and chatter. And whenever an excursion off into the woods is proposed, all sorts of fears and imaginary dangers are conjured up. Out there, eh? Bugs. Aye, bugs. And impassable rivers. Jungles of brush. Colds, fevers. Snakes, bears, Indians. And we must not forget a quick and sure starvation. Well, you know, the average tourist can die of starvation in a single afternoon.

I confess a certain hunger myself at the moment for an invigorating bit of Yosemite wildness. And you too, might want to rejuvenate your spirit just a bit, eh. Now I will be back shortly. And do not imagine that I'm lost or absent or off pining with a broken heart. I'll be back shortly, for we have many stories yet to tell, and all of Yosemite. I'll be back.

## ACT TWO

Ah, now that was refreshing, eh? Yosemite! You know my first self-imposed task here in the Yosemite was to follow the footprints of those ancient spirits known as glaciers. There were those, you know, who said that those spirits did not exist hereabouts. Well, the reigning geological opinion in my day was put forth by a Professor Whitney, a state geologist, - they named that mountain after him - who insisted that the most impressive of the main passages of the Sierra Nevada, like Yosemite Valley, was caused by actual ruptures of the rock. You know, the swallowing up of great masses, or the spitting aside in great cracks. I didn't think much of this so-called cataclysmic theory, and I said so, and wrote so, and for many years the academic community enjoyed sneering at that 'unknown nobody in the woods', a 'mere shepherd', thundered Professor Whitney.

### The Earthquake

And I suppose that there was ample reason for the early geologists to mistake the creative forces hereabouts - if for no other reason that the avalanche talus slopes, those wonderful boulder piles that lean up against the Valley walls at intervals of a mile or two. These wonderful boulder piles are found in all the canyons of the Sierra Nevada, and no mountaineer is likely to forget the roughness of the road they make.

In this region they are usually three to five hundred feet tall, and they're made up of huge, angular, unshifting boulders, all covered over with lichens and trees and delicate flowering plants. And every boulder seems as measured, prepared, put in its place more thoughtfully than are the stones of temples. And if for a moment you tend to regard these as merely chaotic rock dumps, well, I urge you, climb to the top of one of them, and there firmly tie your mountain shoes, and then run down, without any hesitation, boldly jumping from boulder to boulder with even speed. And you'll soon find that your feet are playing a tune, and will quickly discover the poetry and music of rock piles.

Some of these boulders weigh between five and ten thousand ton, and a few of the largest are over a hundred feet in diameter, sometimes found in river beds, like islands, with gardens on their tops. So, fringed with foam below and flowers above.

Well, in my study of these talus slopes, it was clear enough that they originated from the cliffs above them, but I also saw that instead of being weathered off, boulder by boulder, accumulated material, almost every boulder had been created suddenly, by a single avalanche and furthermore had not increased in size for three to four hundred years, for trees three and four centuries old are found growing among them, some close to the top near the wall without a scar or broken branch, showing that scarcely a single boulder had fallen among them since they were first planted. Furthermore, all of the canyon talus slopes, throughout the entire range of the Sierra Nevada, are, according to the trees and lichens growing among them, about the same age. Now all of this evidence pointed to a grand ancient avalanche. But not until I had seen a talus made did all doubt as to their formation vanish.

One winter night, about two o'clock, snug asleep in my cabin, then over my Sentinel Rock, I was aroused by an earthquake. And though I had never before enjoyed a storm of this sort, there was no mistaking the wild thrilling motion and the rumbling, and I ran out my cabin, both glad and frightened, and shouting "A noble earthquake! A noble earthquake," feeling sure I was going to learn something.

The shocks were so violent, and varied, and succeeded each other so closely that I had to walk as if balancing on the deck of a ship among the waves, and I feared that the high cliffs about me might come tumbling down, and particularly that Sentinel Rock, three thousand feet dead above me, might be shattered, and I took shelter in back of a big pine tree - to avoid any boulders that might outbound in my direction.

It was a calm, clear, moonlit night, and for the first minute or two I heard no sound, save for a low muffled underground rumbling, and the slight rustling of the agitated trees.

But then suddenly, out of this mysterious silence and mysterious motion, there came a tremendous roar.

The Eagle Rock, a short distance up the Valley, had given way, and I saw it falling in thousands of those great boulders I had been so long studying, pouring to the Valley floor in a free curve, and luminous, from friction, an arc of fire fifteen hundred feet in span, and as pure in form and as steady as a rainbow, and all of this in the midst of this roaring rock storm, sounding as if all the thunder I had ever heard had been condensed into one roar. And think you, then, think you of the roar that rose to heaven when all of the canyon talus slopes, throughout the length and breadth of the glorious Sierra, were simultaneously given birth - as if the Mother Earth, like a living creature, had at last found her voice and were calling to her sister planets.

The main storm was soon over, and eager to see this new-made talus slope, I ran up the Valley in the moonlight to climb it, before the huge rocks, after their fiery flight, had come to a complete rest. They were settling into their places, groaning, chaffing, whispering against one another, but no motion was visible, save for a few fragments at the head of the talus. And of course the dust particles - the smallest of the boulders, eh? - which rose up out of the debris to form a ceiling across the entire valley in the moonlight that lasted until after sunrise. And the air was filled with the odor of crushed Douglas fir, from a grove that had been mowed down and mashed like weeds.

Sauntering about to see what other changes might have been made, I found the few folks that in those days wintered here in the Valley up by Hutchings' old bridge, talking in low, serious tones. It's always interesting to see people talking in dead earnest, eh?, and earthquakes make everybody earnest.

One of these winter neighbors in particular, a shopkeeper and a talkative fellow, spoke endlessly on what he knew not what of, - the original Half Dome, eh? - well, he was a firm believer in Professor Whitney's cataclysmic theory of the origins of the Valley, and his tenacious belief in the suspended floor of the Valley, the mysterious abyss into which all the rocks and battlements might now come tumbling down - well, this mightily troubled him. And I jokingly remarked that, 'well, you know these shaking might be the beginning of yet another Yosemite making cataclysm, which might double the depth of the Valley by swallowing the floor and leaving the ends of wagon roads and trails three or four thousand feet up in the air.' Just at that moment came another series of shocks - not as great as the first, but still made the domes jiggle like jelly and the trees wave their branches, and it was fine to see just how solemn and silent that storekeeper became. "Oh, come on," I said, "smile a little, clap your hands, it's only kind Mother Earth trotting us on her knee to amuse us and make us good."

My little joke utterly failed. He handed me the key to his little store and fled to the lowlands. In about a month he came back, but a sharp shock occurred that very day, which sent him flying again.

Well, he was one of those, like too many others, who fail to appreciate this beauty making business. You know, storms of every sort tell the same story. Earthquakes, floods, cataclysms of nature - however lawless and mysterious they may first appear - are only variations on God's love, harmonious notes in the song of creation. True, earthquakes and the inner earth fires over which we float keep this whole rocky globe boiling and quaking forever, but all is so arranged that on the very slags and cinders of our good star, baby blue eyes grow.

So, no wonder then that the early geologists may have mistaken the creative forces hereabouts. But careful observation, constant brooding, lying above rocks, for years, as the ice did, now that's the way to arrive at the truth that is graven so lavishly upon them.

Nature chose for a tool, not the earthquake and not the lightning to split and rend asunder, but the mighty engine shaping this world was made up of tiny frail snowflakes, falling noiselessly, through endless centuries, and then joining hands, like children on a frolic.

Think on it. An ice sheet, clasping a thousand mountains in its crystal embrace, carving out the mountain waves, scooping up the lake cups for crystal waters, weaving myriads of mazy canyons, and then dancing down the mountains, rivers and lakes breaking into glad existence at their approach, and at last creating fields and orchards and flowers and birds and happy people.

I used to envy Adam, the father of our race, dwelling as he did in contact with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I too have lived in "Creation's dawn". Nature is forever at work building up and pulling down, creating and destroying, keeping everything whirling and flowing, chasing everything out of one beautiful form and into another, an endless song.

So, where Professor Whitney could find none, the "unknown nobody in the woods" discovered no less than sixty-five small, but living glaciers in the Sierra.

There I go, eh? I remember my good friend, John Burroughs, introducing me to a crowd of scientists while on that Harriman expedition to Alaska. "In John Muir," he said, "we have an authority on glaciers, and a thorough one, so thorough that he will not allow the rest of us to have an opinion on the subject!" A bit of truth in that. So enough of

glaciers, and should you need to know more on the subject, well, I've written it all down here somewhere.

And as writing was always the most difficult work I ever did, I'd be grateful to know that someone, somewhere, was reading the stuff. Though writing .... well, it did have this advantage, I suppose, of extending my play on this good planet, for a man in his books made be said to wander the world long after he is in his grave. And it is a pleasure to think that someone, somewhere, may be sauntering through the Sierra this very moment with a bit of Old John Muir's spirit in his pocket - as I once sauntered about with Robbie Burns, and Shakespeare, and Thoreau and Emerson.

### Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson! Now he I walked with in the flesh. Here, in the Yosemite Valley.

I was working then as a sawmill operator over by the Yosemite Creek, when one day I overheard the hotel people whispering, "Emerson is here!" My heart throbbed as if an angel direct from Heaven had alighted on my Sierran rocks. Well, I had read all of his essays and thought that of all people he would be the best to interpret the sayings and doings of these noble mountains and trees. But so great was my awe and reverence for the man, I did not dare to go to him or speak to him. I just hovered on the outside of the crowd of people that were pressing up to be introduced to him, but then I heard that in three or four days he was going away, and in sheer desperation I sat down and I wrote him a note, and I said, "El Capitan and the Tissiack demand that you stay longer!" Well, next day, he inquired for the writer, and was directed to the sawmill, to which he came on horseback, attended by his Boston friends.

But, oh, Emerson! The most serene, majestic, Sequoia-like soul I ever met. He was as sincere as the trees, as sincere as the sun.

I had then a small box-like home attached beneath the gable of the mill, overhanging the stream. People called in my hang-nest, because it seemed unsupported. A hole in the roof commanded a view of the glorious Half Dome, and a skylight on the other side of the roof commanded a full view of the upper Yosemite Fall. But it was not easy of access, being reached only by a series of sloping planks, like a hen ladder. Fortunately only the people I disliked were afraid to enter it, and Emerson bravely climbed up and I showed him my collection of plants and my studies of the glaciers, all of which seemed to interest him greatly.

I was then in my early thirties, and he was close to seventy, but forgetting his age, plans, duties, and ties to his Boston friends, I immediately proposed an immeasurable camping trip in back of the mountains. He seemed anxious to go, but he considerably mentioned his party. I said, "Never mind all these plans and parties and all lowland duties - the mountains are calling! Run away!" But alas, he was too close to the sundown of his life, and his Boston party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to appreciate my wild plan, and kept Mr. Emerson to the hotels and the trails.

Still, he did come, again and again, to my hang-nest, while his party hung about the hotel, and when he was leaving the Valley, he invited me to accompany him to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Well, I said, "I'll go, Mr. Emerson, if you promised to camp out with me in the grove. I'll build an glorious camp-fire, and the great brown boles of the Sequoia will be lighted up. You yourself are a Sequoia," I said, "you must stop and get acquainted with your big brethren. At this he became as enthusiastic as a boy, and sweet perennial smile became still deeper and sweeter, and he said, "Yes, we will! Camp out, camp out!" and I felt sure that we would have at least one good wild memorable night around a Sequoia campfire.

Well, then, the next day, early in the afternoon, when we reached Clark's Station, - Wawona - I was surprised to see this party dismount. And when I went up to ask if we not going up into the grove to camp, one of these Boston fellows turns to me and says "Oh, no. Oh, no, no - it would never do to camp out in the night air, Mr. Muir. Mr. Emerson might take cold, you know, and that would be a dreadful thing."

Only in homes and hotels are colds caught!", I said, "Nobody was ever known to take cold camping in these woods - there's not a single cough or sneeze in all of the Sierra!" And I pictured the climate-changing fire that I would make, and how the trees would stand about us transfigured in the purple light, while the stars looked down between the great domes, and ended by urging them to "Come on, and make an immortal Emerson night of it!" But their strange dread of pure night air was not to be overcome; they could not shake the house habit, with its comfort of carpet dust and other unknowable reeks.

The following afternoon, Emerson and his sadly civilized party mounted and rode westward. But when Emerson reached the top of the ridge, and after all the rest of the party were over and out of sight, he turned his horse, took off his hat and waved me a last good-bye, then down all mountains and into the sunset.

Ah, I felt lonely when he left, so sure had I been that of all people Emerson would be the first to sing and praise these mountains. That night I did build a great fire in the grove, but as usual had it to myself. And though lonesome for the first time in these woods, I quickly took heart again. For the trees had not gone to Boston, nor the birds, and as I sat by my fire Emerson was with me again in the spirit, though I never saw him again in the flesh. I wish I had met him in some other season, not so late in the winter of his life.

Though for his Boston party, I suppose all seasons were winter - which may be miserable in Boston, but can be enjoyed hereabouts as well as any other, eh?

Indeed, when the first heavy storms of winter would stop my work on the high mountains, I'd simply make haste to come down here to one of my Yosemite dens - not to 'hole up' and sleep the white months away; I was out every day, and often all night, sleeping but little, wading, climbing, sauntering among the blessed storms and calms, studying the so-called wonders and common things ever on show.

### The Ice Cone

And you know, in that first winter here in the Valley, well, I was puzzled by the source of a very strange and noisy spirit hereabouts. Every clear, frosty morning in the winter time, I heard a booming reverberating throughout the Valley walls, beginning shortly after sunrise, and continuing for an hour or two, every few minutes - like a thunderstorm. I thought of rock-blasting, boulder falling, etc., - but not until I saw what looked like hoarfrost dropping from the sides of the Yosemite Fall was this mystery explained. This strange thunder is made from the fall of sections of ice, formed of frozen spray attached to the face of the cliff along the sides of the upper Yosemite Fall - a sort of crystal plaster, a foot or two thick, which, when cracked off by the sunbeams, awakens all of the Valley, like cock-crowing.

Indeed this frozen spray gives rise, quite literally, to one of the most interesting of our winter spirits here in the Valley: the ice cone. A cone of ice, four or five hundred feet high, which grows at the base of the upper Fall, and through which the Fall pours. The cone is built during the night and the early hours of the morning. A considerable portion of the Fall's spray is first frozen to the face of the cliff along the sides of the Fall and stays there until it expands and cracks off in irregular slabs, some of these tons in weight, and these are built into the walls of the cone. And when the Fall is swayed from side to side, in the windy, frosty weather, the entire cone is well drenched, and the loose ice masses and the spray-dust are all firmly welded and frozen together. And growing wider and higher in the frosty weather, it soon becomes a beautiful, smooth, pure white hill.

Once, during a wind storm, noticing that the Fall was frequently being blown to the westward, I raced up to Fern Ledge, a spot overlooking the cone, hoping to gain a clear view of the interior. As I approached the brink of the precipice overlooking the mouth of the cone, I saw that the Fall plunges down the crater-like throat of the cone with deep, gasping explosions of compressed air, and, after being well churned in the stormy interior, the water bursts through arched openings at its base, while belching spray, spouted up out of the throat, is wind-driven to the adjacent rocks and groves. Indeed, I was almost suffocated by the drenching, gusty spray, and was compelled to seek

shelter. But I had not long to wait, for the mighty downward rush of comets with their whirling drapery swung westwards and remained aslant for nearly half an hour. And now, the cone, deserted by the water, was admirably lighted, and I could see that the mouth into which the falls pours was about one hundred feet in diameter north and south, and two hundred feet east and west - not a true oval, but more like a huge coarse mouth, and I could see down into the throat, but only about fifty feet or so.

Well, now anxious to learn more about the structure of this curious hill, I often approached it in calm weather, and tried to climb it, carrying an ax to cut steps. And once I nearly succeeded in gaining the summit. At the base I was met with the usual currents of wind and spray that makes breathing difficult. But by pushing on backwards, however, I soon gained the slope of the hill, and by creeping close to the surface, most of that choking blast passed over me, and I managed to chip my way up with but little difficulty.

Thus I climbed nearly to the summit of this five hundred foot wall of ice, halting at times to peer up through the wild whirls of spray at the veiled grandeur of the Fall, or to listen to the thunder beneath me, within this hollow hill. I hoped that by waiting until the Fall was again blown aslant, I might be able to climb right up to the lip of the crater and get a good view of its interior.

But from a spot, high up on the wall, came a suffocating blast, half air, half water, and followed by the fall of an enormous mass of the frozen spray. The entire cone was jarred by the blow, sounding as if it were a huge bellowing drum, and some of the fragments sped past me dangerously near. And so, shaken, chilled, drenched, - well, the truth is, I became discouraged. I beat a hasty retreat, and found a sunny rock on which to lay down and dry.

Ah, the warm and sunny rocks, eh? Have you found them? Have you noticed that wherever you chance to find yourself in the Sierra, it always seems, at that moment, to be, of all places, the best. A fine place to forget weariness and wrongs and bad business. And you feel that there can be no happiness in this world for those who cannot be happy here. And if you should find yourself rejected from time to time by one spirit or another, as I was rejected by the ice cone, well, it's not long before you'll find yourself accepted by another, like the warm and sunny rocks

#### The Snow Avalanche Ride

Ha! Of all the rejections I have experienced in the Sierra - indeed in this very Valley - perhaps the one most firm and quick was that one offered to me by a snow avalanche.

Few Yosemite visitors ever see a snow avalanche, and fewer still know the exhilaration of riding upon one. In all of my mountaineering, I enjoyed only one snow avalanche

ride, and the start was so sudden and the end came so soon, I hardly had time to reflect upon the danger that attends this sort of travel.

One fine Yosemite morning, after a heavy snowfall, eager to see as many snow avalanches as possible and wide views of the forest and the summit peaks in their new white robes before the sunshine had time to change them, I set out to climb by a side canyon to the top of a commanding ridge a little over three thousand feet above the Valley floor. Now the looseness of the snow that blocked the canyon told me that the climb would require a very long time - some four or five hours as I estimated. But it soon proved to be far more difficult than I had anticipated. Wallowing upwards, I sank to my waist most of the time and sometimes almost out of sight.

And so, half an hour before sundown, I was still two or three hundred feet below the summit, and my hopes now reduced to getting up in time to see the sun set. But I was not to have a summit view of any kind that day, for heavy tramping near the head of the canyon started an avalanche, and I was swished to the foot of that canyon as if by an enchantment.

When the avalanche started, I threw myself on my back and spread my arms, to try to keep from sinking. Fortunately, though the canyon was very steep, it was not interrupted by precipices large enough to cause out-bounding, or free plunging. And on no part of the rush was I buried; I was only moderately embedded in the surface, or at times a little below, but covered with a veil of back-streaming snow-dust particles. And as the whole mass of the snow beneath and about me joined in the flight, I heard no sound, and experienced no friction, though I was tossed here and there and lurched from side to side. But on I sailed, noiselessly, effortless, feet foremost, over rocks and logs and chaparral moving away through space, softly as a cloud.

And when the avalanche finally swedged and came to a rest, I found myself on top of the crumpled pile, without a scar or a bruise. My wallowing ascent had taken me nearly all day, my descent only about a minute. Of all of the modes motions that I have experienced, the most spiritual was this flight in a milky way of snow stars.

And you know, whenever danger does attend your travels, thought is quicken, common cares are buried, and pictures of wild, immortal beauty are pressed onto your memory, to dwell forever. Some of the days I have spent alone in the depths of this wilderness has shown me that immortality beyond the grave is not essential to perfect happiness.

So go. Go out. Go up. Be fleet. Oh, I know that most here will heed this warning - t'is why you're here. But you know so many down there in those lowlands that will not. And those that need clean sky and snow and rest the most are always the last to leave, eh? How hard it is to pull or to shake people out of the cities and the towns.

Go. Urge them to go. Go because everyone needs to be kind, at least to themselves. Go because everyone needs beauty, as well as bread, and places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike. Go quietly, go alone, no harm will befall you. Go often. Go all your life. As age comes on, one source of enjoyment after another is closed, but nature's sources will never fail you. And go, ultimately, because in the going lies the answer to those who would destroy the wilderness through greed and arrogance and ignorance. For if enough of us can go and play among the spirits of the wilderness, - jumping from rock to rock, tracing the rivers and the streams to sources, sauntering through the pinewoods and the meadows, getting in touch with the Mother, Earth, - if enough of us do this we need not despair. For what we so learn to love we shall not allow to be destroyed. And we can retain our faith. Oh, our faith in the loving process of creation to be sure, but our faith too in humanity. As a workman. Our faith that the time is coming - must come - when every article of manufacture, every dwelling, every part of human activity, will be as purely a work of loving creation as are these mountains, and trees and bonnie loving flowers.

Well, the mountains are calling me home, and I must go.

I do thank you for your summons here this evening, and should you ever need to conjure up the spirit of Old John Muir again, well, you might find it from time to time in artificial canyons such as this. But you'll find that spirit too in good hearts all around you. So seek them out. Nature is not so poor as to possess only one of anything.

And you'll find that spirit, too, wherever you find wildness, and especially in this spirited park, Yosemite. So go, engage it. Engage it well, and somewhere down the trail, should I hear a call again, or become heart-hungry to see old friends, I expect I'll meet your spirit hereabouts. Good friends, fellow Yosemite lovers, I bid you good night.

Oh! And if you should ever again hear of that vicious rumor spread about - that I died of a broken heart - well, let them know you saw me passing, and you tell them that I died of joy.

**THE END**