

Return to Desolation

Having escaped unharmed from Washington, recently destroyed by atomic robot rockets, I approached Mars Hill early one morning for a long-awaited visit. Hardly had the first shaft of morning sunlight burst over the fog-cloaked Craggies when my straining eyes were satisfied. From where I had parked on the summit of the ridge I could see the whole valley below, and the sight was a horrible one. The entire scene was an indescribable chaos of smouldering ruins. Gone were the familiar landmarks I once had seen. The buildings, the trees, and the houses were all devastated almost beyond recognition. It seemed as though I had stumbled onto a modern Jericho.

A small hill where once three girls' dormitories had stood, proud and erect—symbolic of the Christian womanhood developed there—was strewn with black and twisted wreckage. Across the valley on the little mountain, bricks, still hot and widely scattered, and smoking pipes rising from a burning heap gave the only evidence that two men's dormitories had only recently stood there. The trees which had once stood guard there were broken and split, and the leaves looked as if they had been sand blasted. In the valley below destruction reigned also; where once the modern science building had stood out against the sky, a mass of snarled beams, half-burned walls, and rivulets of melted glass gave off a spiraling smoke of sickening fumes and deadly rays. Nearby, where the beautiful cafeteria had stood, a three-tiered stack of smouldering ashes, burned bricks, and broken cinder blocks still caved through here and there into the cellar-like passages underneath. Encircling a small debris-littered plot of ground, in which there stood a flagpole leaning over, almost touching the ground and from which there hung a battered flag, were the smoking, charred, ugly remains of half a dozen buildings. The tall columns of the state-ly old gym had crumbled, and the

beams over the basketball floor stood out like a misshapen skeleton. The ancient Moore Hall had been shattered and had tumbled down the hill into the once lovely amphitheater, half filling the quiet pool. Just at the edge of the rock-bound stage, whose grass was now withered and dried, lay the white form of a rotting duck, while in the dark water paddled its mate quacking loudly.

The two wooden frames of Spilman and Treat had been reduced to heaps of ashes by raging fires. The walls of the auditorium had collapsed under the burning top, and both had become a charred cumulation. The only distinguishable signs of the B.S.U. building was a mass of curled and blackened tin. Across the way stood the remains of the church—least hurt of any building; it had lost its roof and the inside had been gutted by fire, but the scorched walls were still intact. The new library, where the old one and the music building had been, was completely demolished; only an elongated heap of rubble remained.

The familiar old elm at the top of the little slope was split in two, and half of it lay across the path in front of the ravaged infirmary. Even the little fountain in the sunken garden beside the now leveled administration building was buried under an avalanche of wreckage and no longer spouted its sparkling stream.

The scene which capped the whole chaotic mess and made it a living hell was that of the bodies strewn everywhere and the stricken ones lying here and there between the burning wreckages. The bodies of students, faculty members and townspeople confronted me on every hand. They lay in the devastated buildings, in the little roads and paths, and across the broken sidewalks. These were the fortunate ones, for they had died almost instantly; there were many who groaned among the wreckages, crawled painfully along the ground, or trudged feebly



By
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around the ruins—doomed to slow and certain death by bodily wounds or the effects of the deadly waves. Absolutely no hope remained for the injured and the stricken; it was not likely that outside help would be able to come in for several days yet. In the meantime they were all dying by degrees. Their twisted faces indicated that they were in mortal agony. This pitiful, sickening sight of the dead and stricken scattered across the blackened landscape gave the perfect appearance that Death and Destruction had swept in together, hand in hand, in a moment of unexpectedness. A scorching sun seemed to suck up the boiling smoke, the horrible stench, and the fatal rays, yet leaving the effects of a hell on earth.—Was this the once lovely campus of the proud little college where I had spent two long-remembered years? Was this really it?

Isn't it queer that a man has to get to the bottom of the valley, before he lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his help?

—Betty Sanders.

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