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Arabah el Madfunah
Feb 16th 1930. 64

Dear Mother & Father.

I am going to try to give you some little account of our exciting journey. I expect you will be able to find the Oasis of Kharga on the map. It is a place very seldom visited by tourists because of the difficulty of getting there. It is possible to reach it in one day by a single trolley line which ~~was~~ laid across the desert at the easiest approach some long way down the line from Bahariya about 20 years ago. They run a little train part way & a trolley the rest of the journey once a week. The only other way to get there, is as we went by camel. ~~Our~~ Our old guide told us that as far as he knows we are the first Europeans to take the old camel trail for 25 years, & never has he known or heard of solitary women attempting it as we did. Lots of people tried to discourage us. When Miss C was in Cairo she mentioned it to Dr Junker, the head of the German Institute & M. Baraise the French Inspector of Monuments, both did their best to dissuade her. They said it was a most dangerous undertaking to travel across a waterless country without only a native guide & servants. They told her all the awful things that might happen & she came back from her visit feeling very depressed about it, especially as she had suggested that

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 a great friend of hers should join us & she had jumped at the opportunity. However we talked it over & then had Sandie in & told him of all the dangers that had been pointed out to us. He said Oh yes certainly such things might easily happen if suitable camels were not taken or if certain precautions were not arranged properly but he would see we had proper camels & everything required. So we cogitated, on one side, a Frenchman & a German, both excellent men, knowing the country for many years, but also having decided ideas about a woman's limitations - on the other side, a Bedawin Arab, a trusted servant & willing & eager to take all the risks with us, & with a firm belief that the English ladies could do anything they attempted, & we finally decided to take an Arab's word & go; Then preparations began; Miss Alexander arrived a few days before our proposed departure. She is charming, a young forty, very jolly, a writer, making a leisurely journey round the world. To visit all sorts of queer places. She proposes going to India via Persia, after leaving Egypt & expects to take 3 or 4 years over her travels, so you can see she was an ideal companion & delighted to have such an unusual opportunity. She had taken several camel rides in Cairo so as to get hardened for the longer journey.

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By six o'clock on Sunday morning our cavalcade had assembled, there were 7 camels & 7 men. we carried our own personal effects, rugs etc & a sack of camel food on our camels. & the four others took ~~food~~ ^{water} & provisions, our little tent & the rest of the camel food. & the men took turns to ride. By 7 o'clock we were on the road (figuratively speaking)

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 we had a tremendous escort for the first 4 miles, all the rest of our servants, guards, friends of the camel men etc came with us. At the entrance to the wady our guide was waiting for us with his camel, a superscillious lady who ^{proved} an amusing, though rather troublesome member of the expedition, as she was a dreadful flirt, & two of our gentleman camels fell in love with her. It was a great business getting the camels up the wady, you have seen the photos so you can imagine what it was like getting up to the top. Here we bade good bye to our escort with many blessings & good wishes for our safety & set out on the great adventure. our caravan consisted of 3 females, Sandic, our guide, 7 ^{men} & 8 camels. we arranged our going thus. during the morning treck we walked for about two hours, & made the men ride our camels, we had rather a job to make them ride while we walked at first but we insisted.


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Ramadan. (our men got exemption from fasting during the journey.) The first part of the journey was across stony desert, in parts there was quite a definite track but there were vast areas where there was no sign of any path except here & there a few stones were piled on each other to guide others. Thus. [] we also made little cairns as we went. The afternoon treck was the most trying. we were going due west & the sun shone right in our faces. we wore sun glasses. & soon found we had to cover our noses & mouths with a handkerchief as our lips & nostrils got so dry & cracky. It was during the hot afternoon spell that we first saw the mirage. we could see the sparkling water rippling over the desert sand a few miles ahead of us. The Arabs call it "Bahr Shaitan". ie. sea of Satan.

It made one realize the mocking cruelty of the desert & I think we all felt our expedition had a grim side to it. Then came the glory of the sun set. the desert flooded with golden light. then pinkish mauve, & as the sun dipped below the horizon our shadows came from behind us & walked in front & we were going by moon light. & what a change in the landscape. the golden sand gleamed palely

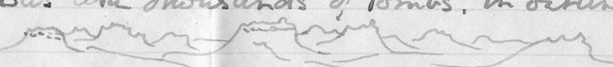
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 & the big patches of limestone were like snow drifts. The first night we camped near the trolley rail, you will see I have marked it on the little sketch map I have made. We had a meal of roast chicken head, Tomatoes, & a slab of rice & date pudding, & Sardic made us hot tea (no milk) never have I appreciated tea so much before. Then we removed our boots & jumpers, crawled into our flea bags, our little tent was just sufficient to shelter our heads from the moon light & give us a semblance of privacy & we slept & slept & slept. no complaints about hard beds or anything. At five thirty we were up, the camels packed, & on the way soon after six. The second days journey took us across an immense plain fringed with low sand hills, it seemed as if we spent an eternity crossing it but at last we got into more broken up country, & it was here we made a discovery. we had noticed lots of broken pots as we went along, but this place was covered with them, we examined the area carefully & came to the conclusion it had been a Roman Camp & that this camel track was really the remains of an ancient Roman road from the Oases to the Nile valley & that they probably had water dumps at

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 regular intervals & always near some outstanding rock or mound. The country grew more & more strange. It was like thousands of Tombs, in outline like this.



The guide said it was called Zigga Gat. & from of old the people said immense treasure was buried beneath the mounds. but the place was dangerous, no man could live in it long enough to steal the treasure. it was a terrible country. here not only cairns marked our way, but skeletons of camels our guide pointed to one & said it had been his 22 years ago. it had gone mad in the desert & had died there. but praise be to Allah. I had another. ~~It~~ It was sunset before we got through the Zigga Gat & the effect of the long shadows cast by the mounds was weird. It gave one a horrid feeling that something inhuman & malevolent was lying in wait watching. We called it the land of the gods who were dead. we had a very strong feeling that we had no business there what ever.

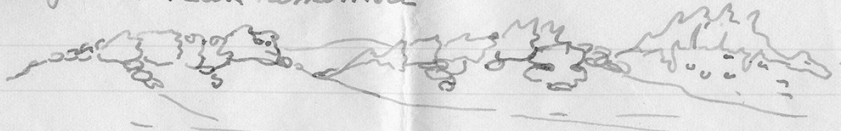
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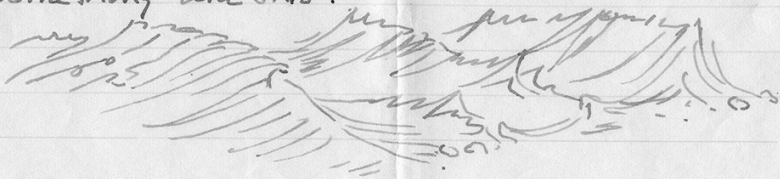
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We camped among these rocks. They were weird
 & alarming, but one did not feel they were
 malevolent like the Zigga Gat. That night
 we had bully beef for supper & the rest of the
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 hot tea, 2 hard boiled eggs each & an orange & bread.
 The outstanding feature of the 3rd day's trek was
 the petrified sea. (our name for it) It was exactly
 like a rough foamy sea turned to limestone
 & stretched as far as the eye could see. It was
 rather rough going for the camels as the surface
 was all cut into ridges by the sand. It was
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Beyond the petrified sea we came to the land of
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Towards evening the 3rd day we sighted an extra large mound or tell with a very high post sticking up. The guide did not know its history but said it had been put up there to point the way to the gateway of the descent. That night we camped on a rocky plain like a sea shore that the tide had left & forgotten to return.

The moon was so bright that I attempted to take a photo by its light. I hav'nt much hope of any result, but thought it would be fun to try.

The 4th & last day was the most thrilling. our guide had said we should see the gateway (ie way down to the oasis) by noon. so all eyes were strained on the horizon, at 10.30 we reached a slope

like this

(Oh the songs that were sung & the Tales that were told on the journey.)

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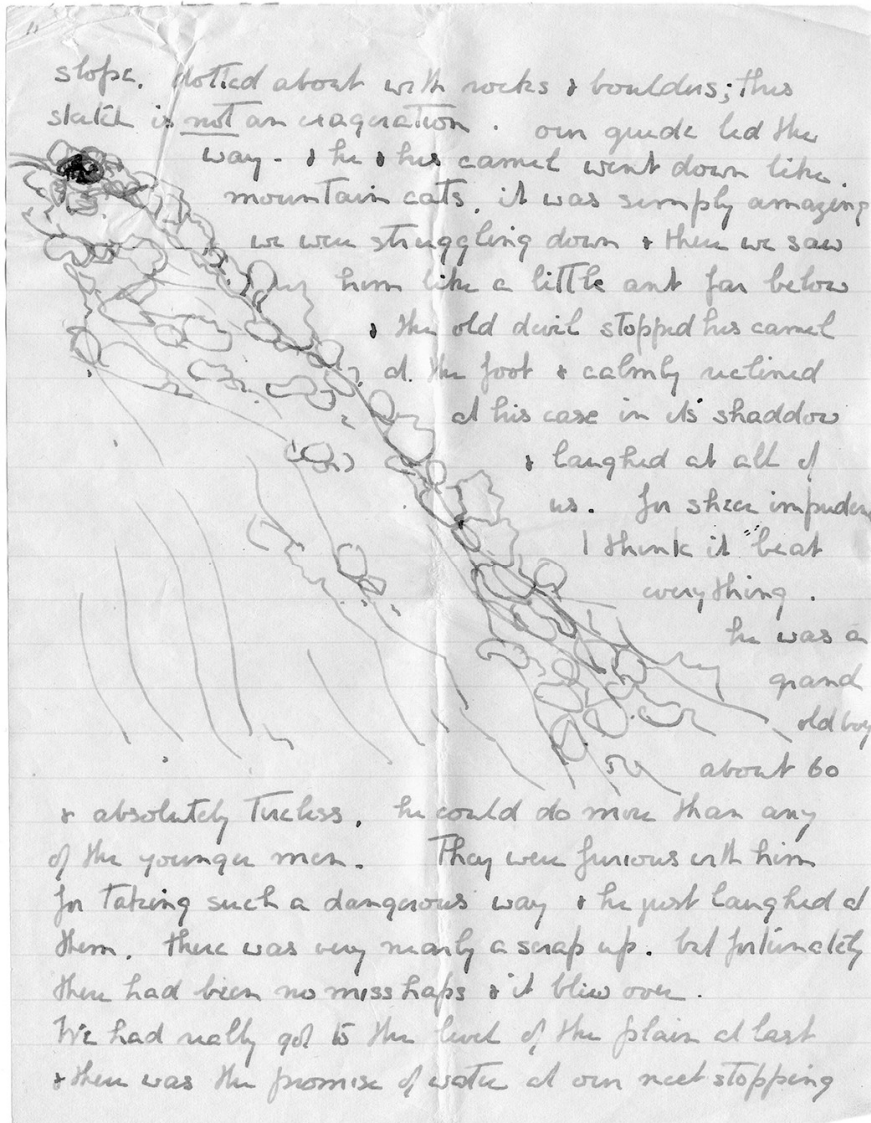
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it a perfect little flat shell like an ammonite,
 we had a good hunt & found some fossilized
 bones that look like fish bones, we have brought
 some back to show to experts
 After descending the slope we had another long
 plain to cross & then quite suddenly topping
 a slight rise came upon the most marvellous
 view, we were standing on the edge of a great
 chain of mountains, below us great clefts &
 tossed up rocks & beyond a great sandy plain
 with wonderful dunes & two beautiful isolated
 mountains standing like sentinels guarding it.
 Miles away in the centre of the plain were green
 dots which were the oases. Then came the descent,
 at first it was like a mountain pass winding
 in zig zags, the three of us were positively drunk
 with the beauty & wonder of it, we jumped from
 rock to rock like mad things, the men too were
 impressed, down we went the men leading the
 camels, down & down until we thought we had
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slope, dotted about with rock & boulders; this
 sketch is not an exaggeration^{sic}. our guide led the
 [₹] way, & he & his camel went down like
 mountain cats. it was simply amazing
 we were struggling down & there we saw
 him like a little ant far below

& the old devil stopped his camel
 at the foot & calmly reclined
 at his ease in its shadow^{sic}
 & laughed at all of
 us. for sheer impudence
 I think it beat
 everything.

he was a
 grand
 old boy
 about 60

& absolutely tireless, he could do more than any
 of the younger men. They were furious with him
 for taking such a dangerous way & he just laughed at
 them, there was very nearly a scrap up, but fortunately
 there had been no miss haps & it blew over.

We had really got to the level of the plain at last
 & there was the promise of water at our next stopping

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 place. before we came to it we passed through
 very wild country as if it had been mangled &
 rent by earthquakes. then plain again. & then
 before us a track leading to a ruined Coptic Monastery
 & a WELL. It was nearly 2 o'clock. & we had been going
 with only ¼ hours break since 6.30. What a joy it was
 to flop down in the shade of the great wall & see our
 poor thirsty camels led off to be watered. & how
 glad we were to drink our own water & feel we
 need not treasure every drop. We had not nearly
 reached our journey's end. The guide said we
 had 15 miles to go & should reach Kharga by
 8 o'clock. after 1½ hours rest we set off again
 through wonderful sand dunes like giant puff
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 the 15 miles from the Monastery stretched out to 20
 & the hour of arrival was 10.30 instead of 8.
 We had got a permit to use the Government Rest House

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I am going to leave the story of our day in Kharga till another letter. There are lots of things I have forgotten to mention in this account. For instance on one part of the trail was a mound that the guide pointed out, & said it was the grave of a man who had died on the way, & all our men each took a stone & cast it on the mound, the idea being that if each man who passes, adds one stone, in time it will grow to a great monument. We also noticed that our camels wore neat little cotton bags tied on to their bridles, these contained

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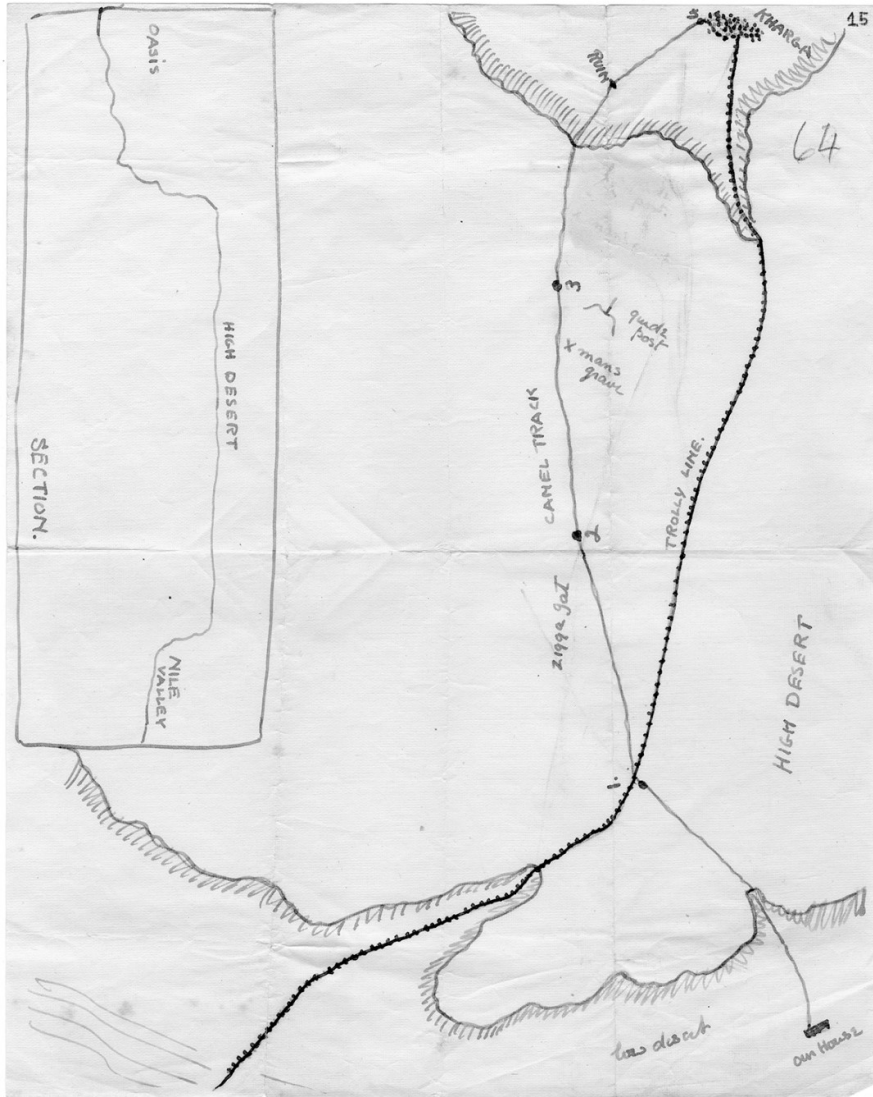
14
 little texts from the Koran that Sheikh Abdu Wahid had written specially to protect us all on this journey. they were most effective.
 Now for general news. My boots & shoes have arrived, & are most satisfactory. The hair nets also are to hand & Mamma is delighted. I am also glad to hear the wool will soon be ready. I had a letter from Miss Collins a day or two ago, but the one about the Exhibition must have gone astray. I am enclosing a few local snaps. I hope to have the photo's I took on the way to Kharga in about a weeks time. I used 5 rolls of films. I do hope they will be good ones.
 I do hope you do not very much mind my staying later than I at first anticipated^{sic}. we do so want to get the material for the first volume ready. & Beazleys failure has thrown a lot of extra work on our hands. I am afraid my letters may give you an idea that we have more play than work, but I assure you it is not so. we have lots of fun. but we do work very hard. Oh the tales I shall have to tell on my return.
 All my love to you both
 also love to friends & please thank Pat & Miss Collins for their letters.

little texts from the Koran that Sheikh Abdu Wahid had written specially to protect us all on this journey. they were most effective.

Now for general news. My boots & shoes have arrived, & are most satisfactory. the hair nets also are to hand & Nannie is delighted. I am also glad to hear the wool will soon be ready. I had a letter from Miss Collins a day or two ago, but the one about the Exhibition must have gone astray. I am enclosing a few local snaps. I hope to have the photo's I took on the way to Kharga in about a weeks time. I used 5 rolls of films, I do hope they will be good ones.

I do hope you do not very much mind my staying later than I at first anticipated^{sic} {anticipated}, we do so want to get the material for the first volume ready. & Beazleys^{sic} failure has thrown a lot of extra work on our hands. I am afraid my letters may give you an idea that we have more play than work, but I assure you it is not so, we have lots of fun, but we do work very hard. Oh the tales I shall have to tell on my return.

All my love to you both
 also love to friends & please thank Pat & Miss Collins for their letters.



[inset map]

[main map]

[64]

[64]

OASIS

KHARGA

RUIN

guide post

x mans grave

3

guide post

HIGH DESERT

x mans grave

SECTION.

CAMEL TRACK

2

TROLLEY LINE.

NILE VALLEY

Zigga Gat

1.

HIGH DESERT

low desert

Our House