

The cold moon woke me at midnight,
or maybe it was the loud owl like a boy crying to sheep,
or because my bed was thistles
The stars beginning to pale, we packed away our camp,
the air sweet with vines and chestnuts, a hedge of pomegranates
covered with scarlet flowers behind my tent.
A gorgeous storm marched across our path
we rode through a world darkened by it.
Lightning surrounded us in a ring of fire, but
did not touch us. And we rode further
immense plagues of water on the horizon,
always the horizon, the further we rode the further it went.
Here all is sand and white stretches of salt and sand again, and
dust clouds whirling about it like the white skeleton of a town,
sand and sky – to the infinity of time and the infinity of space,
then at five we just pitched down anywhere, my first night in the desert.
Not far from here a wonderful bath, not of water, but of wind, *mashallah!*
like a hammam, and I feel as if here, so far away, I have come home.
For the first time in my life I forgot it was my birthday.
Shall I tell you my chief impression? - the silence.
It is like the silence of mountaintops, but more intense, for there you have the sound of wind
and far away water and falling ice and stones; there is a sort of echo of sound.
But here, nothing.

Mary Mulholland

Home is the sound of silence

*found poem from the letters and diaries of Gertrude
Bell, Newcastle University Archives.*

OPPOSITE: France, Saint-Laurent-de-Cerdans, February 26 2023. Primal soul: when donning the bear suit, the men forgo their human consciousness and embody the beast that has always lived within. In this photograph, the bear of Saint-Laurent-de-Cerdans catches his breath. Photograph by Pierre Banoori / Hans Lucas.