

## WHERE LIFE IS EARNED

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[Assignment: Describe either a scene, an inanimate object, or a person. Try to maintain an objective distance from your subject.]

(1) Our antelope hunting campsite in central Wyoming has become for me a symbol of barren desolation. The area is simply described as "uplands and mountains" on many climatic and topographic maps, but this labeling is grossly inadequate to actually represent this area. We camped at the same site for three years, and during those days spent living at the mercy of a very unforgiving land, I developed a deep sense of respect for a place that was hostile to the very essence of life itself.

(2) Our overnight camp was near the center of an extensive plain. The plain went on in all directions to the limits of one's visual capabilities and eventually blended somewhere near the horizon with some distant blue snow-capped peaks in the west. There were no animals to be found here, and our guide was quick to calm our concerns by stating that our actual hunting site was still two days away. Even the plant life was pretty sparse on this plain. Little clumps of weather-beaten sage managed somehow to earn the right to stay rooted in this gravelly earth. Their dried branches speckled with tiny olive-green leaves varied in occurrence according to the generosity of the earth. One hill would be completely masked in the tangled growth while a neighboring rise would have the white, sterile earth to show for its worth. This land yielded nothing to humans. There were no roads here, nor fences or power lines that could mar the solemn solitude of this land.

(3) Even the thin dry air in our camp yielded no secrets as to how life exists in this climate. The air never acted against the land in attempts to change or mold it in any way. Instead both air and land would combine their powers into surging storms of sand and silt that would penetrate everything. Particles would seemingly bore into the flesh through every opening that they could find, with the mouth, nose, ears, and eyes being especially susceptible. Even when able to catch an unmolested breath, one still has to work hard to get it. The air at this great elevation is very thin, and lungs full of air have to be earned from the atmosphere, not taken for granted.

(4) When the winds subsided, the site still attacked our sanity subversively. With the fading of the wind, all sense of life too seemed to fade away. The silence was overpowering. Just as soon as the listeners straining for sound became fully conscious of the complete absence of sound, their ears were flooded by a maddening ringing sensation. At this point, listeners will do anything to drive away the death-like grip this complete lack of

motion has placed on the land and their minds. They will kick at the dry, gravelly earth, whistle, or even begin to discuss this phenomenon with themselves--all desperate actions for trying to fabricate life in a land where life exists only because the land wills it.